



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN  
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF  
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Captivated by the Order during a pilgrimage

The story of Jean-Paul Sonnen and his entry into the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre



One of the members in the Canada - Vancouver Lieutenancy invested on 9 October was John Paul Sonnen. He was delighted and honored to be invested a member and he explained his journey into the Order in a unique way, "You might say it was an act of Providence which began in the Holy Land and ended in Rome".

John Paul was living in Rome for eight years as a graduate student, tour operator and history docent in Rome and the Vatican. **It was while on a journey to the Holy Land for Christmas 2006** that he first came into contact with the Order **at Midnight Mass in Bethlehem**. "Before that, my only experience with the Order had been at La Veranda in Rome [a restaurant located in the Magisterial Palazzo della Rovere]", he said with a smile.

"But it was at Midnight Mass at the Church of Saint Catherine in Bethlehem that I first saw members of the Order in prayer. I had no idea who they were, but I was very impressed". John Paul's pilgrimage to the Holy Land was with Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi and included the presence of a chaplain as well as visits to the Holy Sepulchre and even a first-hand experience with a special visit to a Christian school in Palestine. John Paul recalls, "Meeting the nuns and seeing the school children was a very powerful experience. We heard their stories and saw the value of their presence. I was very impressed with the work of the Order in helping to preserve this fragile community".

It was during his time in Rome that John Paul **came into contact with Professor Tom McKiernan, President of the Holy Land Commission**, who is frequently in Rome on business. They met for lunch at the Borgo Pio and a friendship was born with shared interests in the Church in the Holy Land. When John Paul moved to Vancouver in 2012, he became good friends with **Dame Constance Roche**, long-time member of the Vancouver Lieutenancy.

**“Being a member is indeed an honor, but it also comes with a sacred trust and great responsibility.** This role in the Church must be fulfilled with enthusiasm”. Of John Paul’s memories of his Christmas journey to the Holy Land, he adds the memory of a walk he took three miles east of Bethlehem, in the village of Beit Sahour (the Shepherds Field). This is where the Angel appeared to the shepherds announcing the birth of Jesus: “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:10-11).

There John Paul made a visit to the Greek Orthodox Church built over a cave as well as the Latin Church built for the Franciscans in 1950. He was inspired by the words from Scripture written on the terracotta plaque attached to the cave: Gloria in excelsis Deo et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis. The Vancouver Lieutenancy supports a school in the same area, in the parish of Our Lady of Fatima in Beit Sahour.

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