



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

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

## 130 YEARS OF WOMEN'S PRESENCE IN THE ORDER

**“Membership in the Order is a gift to look after, maintain and finally hand on to others”**

Janet Gardner, DCHS, from the Lieutenancy for Western Australia shares her experience in the Order: how she came to know and decided to join it and what changed in her life since then.



**On August 3, 1888, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre received the good news of the Brief “Venerabilis Frater” by Pope Leo XIII in which he allowed the Patriarch of Jerusalem to concede the cross of the Order in three classes to Dames who had served the Church with particular merit. During these 130 years, Dames have proved to be a very active part of the life of our Pontifical Institution - which is mainly composed by lay people - and today they represent one third of the Order’s entire membership. The women’s presence, as well as the experience of married couples within the Order helped us offer a wider and more complete picture of the people of God willing to serve the Church in the Holy Land in particular.**

**To celebrate this anniversary we asked Janet Gardner, DCHS, from the Lieutenancy for Western Australia, to share her experience:**

"As a young Christian adult from an Anglican family, I was searching for my place in the world and found I was drawn to people with faith. Where was God in my life? I was impressed with my Catholic friends and how committed they were to their faith and their catholic community which I found very welcoming, alive and vibrant. This influenced my thinking and after meeting my future husband Jack, I became a Catholic. We were married in the Catholic Church in 1970. We have two married daughters and 8 grandchildren. My search for God in my life continues to this day.

Over the years, I have worked in and always been interested in care and welfare areas. Both in the church and broader community. My work and volunteering has included childcare groups, handicapped groups, aged care, the sick and the lonely - much of this was with Catholic organisations.

I was invited to join the Order in 2007 and didn't think I was interested enough to consider it at first because of my existing community and parish activities. I thought it was too formal and too far beyond my parish life. I thought the Order was a bit of a mystery to most people. I also wondered about the wearing of the Regalia and its significance. However, since my husband had been a member since 1992, and was showing more interest in the Order as he approached retirement, I began to think perhaps I could share the experience with my husband and this might involve us in a wider community and also might enrich our faith.

It was after my first pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the Order, an overwhelming experience for me, that I started thinking more about the purpose of The Order. I was learning more about the Holy Land and its history, politics, the plight of the people. In 2014, my husband (Jack Gardner) became Lieutenant for Western Australia and that opened up a different and wider experience for both of us.

Since then, the bigger picture of the Catholic Church has revealed itself. Certainly something way beyond my comfortable little corner of the world encompassing family, friends, and parish life in Perth, Western Australia. I am now experiencing the church in action through the Order and appreciate that we can be part of the action to support the Christian people of The Holy Land. Apart from that, as members of the Order we are playing a part to maintain the historical link, however small we might think that is.

We witness our faith in various ways of course but also by wearing Regalia for special celebrations and for historical reasons. Membership has been given to us like a gift to look after, maintain and finally hand on to others!

My husband and I have enjoyed meeting people from all walks of life through the Order and also through the other Lieutenancies in Australia and New Zealand. We have travelled within Australia and overseas especially to the Holy Land and Malaysia. Our pilgrimages have been significant highlights in our lives and have drawn us closer to our members, friends and our Chaplains: a wonderful opportunity."

*(August 3, 2018)*

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