



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

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Caring for migrants' children in Israel

The testimony of Donata Krethlow-Benziger, Chancellor of the Swiss Lieutenancy of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, about their commitment to the Holy Land and the “Babywarehouse” project in Tel Aviv.



The Chancellor Donata Krethlow-Benziger accompanied by Msgr. Pier Giacomo Grampa, Grand Prior of the Swiss Lieutenancy for the Order of the Holy Sepulchre.

“What it is unique in our Order – says the Chancellor of the Swiss Lieutenancy Donata Krethlow-Benziger – is the total equality of Knights and Dames”. Equal rights for men and women as experienced within the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem are an example for the laity of the Catholic Church organizations. Donata Krethlow-Benziger was the first woman in Switzerland to assume the post of Chancellor in 2010.

“My membership in the Equestrian Order is a family tradition,” continues the 45 year old historian. After her first pilgrimage to the Holy Land with the Order, about ten years ago, her outlook completely changed: **the theory of the Order’s social commitment was tangible in the Holy Land**. The proximity of the Christians and visits to the many projects supported by the Equestrian Order fostered a desire in her to take a more active part. She was impressed and encouraged by the way people live their faith in the Holy Land, and how different this seemed when compared to Europe.

With around half a million Swiss francs a year, the members of the Order of this country are important supporters of the humanitarian projects of the Christians in the Holy Land, said the Chancellor. Her next visit will be devoted to the “**Babywarehouses**,” revealed Donata Krethlow-Benziger, who now wants to mobilize the Swiss to make more donations to improve these facilities.

According to the report of the authorities in the Holy Land, there are more than a hundred unlicensed nurseries structures in Tel Aviv, many taking in children of illegal immigrants, especially Africans, Filipinos and Indians (it is estimated that there are about 2,600 infants and young children). These “Baby camps” or “Children’s garage” are called “Babywarehouses”, and are located at the train station in Tel Aviv and surrounding areas which are inhabited by a majority of Christian refugees from Eritrea.

Given the great demand for childcare facilities, it is the refugee families themselves who organize these structures. They built these camps as an emergency solution for Eritrean mothers who have to work and have little money to help their children. Some of these “Babywarehouses” welcome between sixty and one hundred children in one room. The support staff is unskilled and often inadequate. Up to 100 children can be taken under the care of a single person. In these conditions, infants suffer, get sick and some die.

The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, under the direction of Jesuit Father David Neuhaus, Patriarchal Vicar for Hebrewspeaking Catholics, has taken up the challenge of creating a structure for these nurseries: properties have been leased and trained nurses contracted to educate the rest of the staff. The current project involves the construction of **over 400 care centers and should allow for refugees and migrants to have a legal and healthy structure for the custody of their children.**

This project, which is particularly dear to Donata Krethlow-Benziger, has already received funds from Austria and Germany. This year, Switzerland has given its contribution in the hope that the “professionalization” of Babywarehouses can improve the situation on the ground. In August 2016, Chancellor Krethlow-Benziger, will visit the Babywarehouses in Tel Aviv with Father David Neuhaus.

Interview by Nina Oezelt

(August 2, 2016)