Vatican Embassy Gala
Franciscans Honor Select Group of Christians

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) organized a gala hosted at the Vatican Embassy in Washington D.C. to honor clergy and laity who have made significant sacrifices to help the Holy Land. The Keynote Speaker, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, is the Custos of the Holy Land and Chairman of FFHL. Also present was Denise Scalzo, Vice President and Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM, President.

Recipients of various prestigious awards gathered at the Vatican Embassy in Washington, D.C. for the biennial Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) Embassy Gala on October 10, 2015. Guests were joined by the head of the Franciscans in the Holy Land, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, OFM, who traveled from Jerusalem to be present for the gala. Pizzaballa, himself, would later receive an award as well.

After dinner and a music program by violinists from Catholic University of America, an award presentation, the highlight of the gala program, honored numerous individuals who have made significant sacrifices to help Holy Land Franciscans safeguard the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

FFHL President, Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, explained that the highest honor, the “Guardian of the Holy Land Award” is made “in recognition of an individual who has not only been spiritually united in guarding Christianity in the Holy Land, but whose actions, vision, and service have

(Cont’d on Page 3)

Our Mission
The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is a worldwide organization founded in 1994 under the auspices of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. The foundation was created to safeguard the basic human rights and continued presence of the Christian Palestinian minority living in the Holy Land by providing academic scholarships, subsidized housing, and employment opportunities.
Letter from the Custos

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone” (Is. 9,1).

We are living at a difficult time when the recurring events of tragedies and violence fill us with fear. The description of the end of times seems to be a foreshadowing of what is now happening, and which makes it more difficult to celebrate this New Year with sentiments of joy, in a festive atmosphere and in a celebration of this road we call “life.”

My wishes this year are that we can walk with trust along this road, which opens in the desert of our many lives and leads to a good future, a future with a unique Face: The Face of the Mercy of the Father, who waits for us always and with faithfulness, even today.

I hope you find within these pages a reason to hope and a reason to deepen your faith and love of one another.

My blessings and prayers are with you and your families in this year of Mercy!

Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm
Chairman, FFHL
 Custos of the Holy Land

Where Are They Now?

Mary Saeed is one of the first scholarship recipients, receiving her scholarship in 1999 and graduating with a BA in Business Administration in 2005. She then worked in accounting for the Anglican Church in Jerusalem for eight years. She met and married a man from Bethlehem and moved to the United States with him. Their plan was to reside in the U.S. for five years and return to Jerusalem. Mary tells us that leaving her beloved Jerusalem was never a right decision. After only one month they returned to their beloved homeland.

As Mary is from Jerusalem and her husband from Bethlehem, they needed to apply for a family reuniﬁcation in order to live together with their children. This whole process took eight years. After having two children and renting a small house in Beit Safafa, Mary’s husband secured a position at Casa Nova. Mary decided to pursue a graduate degree.

Once again, the Franciscan Foundation awarded her a scholarship. She received her Master’s Degree in Cooperation and Development from Bethlehem University in 2011, in spite of the challenges faced at home with a husband and two children.

“The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land helped me to cover my tuition fees during my educational journey from the bachelor degree to the master’s degree. Their assistance to me has been invaluable and without their help I wouldn’t have become the person I am today.

“Finally, I would like to encourage the Palestinian Christians to remain in the Holy Land, as we are considered the descendants of the ﬁrst believers and apostles who followed Jesus.” Mary continues, “We are those who experienced the empowerment of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost 2000 years ago, and since that time there has always been a worshipping Christian community in the Holy Land. The Palestinian Christians are the Living Stones of the Holy Land.”

Our Number Has Changed!

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FRANCiscan Foundation FOR THE HOLY LAND
brought about a new hope for the people of that land.

He continued, “This individual has borne witness to the light and love of Jesus Christ through an act of community with them, as well as for all of God’s people.”

The recipients were the Most Reverend Frank J. Dewane, Bishop of Venice, Florida and Fr. Pizzaballa, ofm, who has served as the Custos of the Holy Land since 2004, an unusual length of time over which he has guided the Franciscans and Christian community of the Holy Land through some trying times.

Other dignitaries included Msgr. Walter Erbì, Counselor of the Apostolic Nunciature to the United States, Fr. Larry Dunham, ofm, Guardian of the Franciscan Monastery in Washington, D.C., Ms. Denise Scalzo, ofs, Vice President of the FFHL, priests and religious from the Archdiocese of Washington D.C, and more than 100 guests.

The biennial event was initiated by the late Archbishop Pietro Sambi when he was Papal Nuncio for the United States. Sambi considered the FFHL a vital resource for stemming the exodus of Christians from the Holy Land, “a land he always loved.” He died in 2011 at age 73.

The fundraising gala supports the Franciscan educational programs in the Holy Land and was underwritten this year by Dr. and Mrs. Carl J. Culicchia, Mr. Selim Ayoub and Mr. Nicholas Degel.

Holy Land Custos Addresses FFHL Vatican Embassy Gala Risks and Opportunities in Middle East Today

Your Excellencies, Dear Fathers, Friends,

I am honored to be here with you for this lovely evening of solidarity with the Church in the Middle East, and in particular in the Holy Land.

We have followed from afar with attention the journey of Pope Francis in the USA. I imagine that for you this has been an experience which has made you feel more involved. The memories of the visit are still alive.

Even for us living in the Holy Land, in spite of the fact that a year and some months have passed, we still cherish the vivid memories of the visit of the Holy Father, who with his passing among us has profoundly marked our internal relations, particularly those between the various Christian Churches. With the prayer vigil in the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre (and especially during the time of its preparation), together with the Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew, relations between Christians have progressed in an evident and hopefully irreversible manner.

It is not my intention in these few minutes to resolve the problems of the Middle East nor to present a chronicle of what is happening. I would like, instead, to present to you, during this meeting, our reflections, our
We see every day what is happening. It is dramatic and shocking to see how the barbarism executed by ISIS and its associates and imitators, veiled with religious values, can kill and trample the most basic rights of people, of entire populations, of different faiths, in short of any difference in general: that is, anything different from itself.

As I have had occasions to say in other circumstances, that the terrible power struggle going on in the Middle East is changing its structure in political and religious terms but, above all, it is running the risk of destroying forever a unique heritage of traditions, relationships and cultural intricacies that for centuries have characterized this part of the world. It is the duty of all to stop this tragedy, because we are all involved.

The fate of peoples and nations, of faiths and cultures, are now in fact threatened by this tragic war, which we have to pay attention to. This interest should not be born only from the so-called “globalization”; because of the media and social networks, as well as the displacement and migration of millions of people worldwide, all countries in fact have become more intricately linked to each other culturally, economically and socially.

In the face of so much violence, the reactions are naturally very disparate. It is my intention in this prestigious venue, to point out some risks but especially the major opportunities that this dramatic moment is highlighting.

The risks

The first risk is indifference. After an initial reaction, one easily becomes a little accustomed to everything - and it is easy to become used to the tensions in the Middle East – by limiting our participation through economic contributions, in the best of cases.

The second risk is diametrically opposed; the call to arms and the clash of civilizations. This position denies the fact, or otherwise ignores for various reasons, the subtleties and varied range of co-existence, movements and presences of the Middle-Eastern World, hence identifying it purely and simply as fanatic and contrary to the West. In my opinion it is not a realistic position.

The third risk is to have a truly interested and involved but partial approach. A partial approach is one that believes it has a clear idea about the situation and in a sense rejects a critical analysis of the complexities of the Middle East. This is especially typical in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where everyone has his own clear opinion: the Palestinians are victims and the Israelis the executioners, or vice versa, depending on the opinions. Reading the events is processed through the filter of one’s own ideas already assumed. There is no room for other assessments: when there is a conflict, there is no room for maneuvering; the position is fixed and that’s it.

It is imperative therefore to intervene. It is important to have a common and united understanding in the East and West, to stop the barbarism being perpetrated mainly in Syria and Iraq. If necessary, as already stated in the past by other more authoritative people, it must use force. However, if it is not placed in a context of a political perspective of reconstructing at all levels those populations and those countries, without a clear plan for the future, it will remain yet another partial approach to the problem and will not constitute a stable solution. In addition to stopping the aggressor, it must be clear as to how to (re)build the lives of these peoples, free from any form of exploitation.

Without an integrated vision, we will leave space to the fundamentalists.

The opportunities

This dramatic situation, however, can also become an incredible opportunity. The tensions, war and tragedies that affect us, force us (religious persons of different faiths, political views and intellectual fields) to take a common position and respond together in a new way.

Inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is needed now more than ever. Not only should we not clamor at the clash of civilizations, but rather we should raise our voices to the different civilizations of the East and West at a common position against the barbarism of ISIS and the like. Fundamentalists, in fact, threaten all civilizations and not just ours. The initiatives of encounter, of understanding, of overcoming mutual distrusts are as necessary as the air we breathe.

We are not engaged in a religious conflict and we must not yield to the temptation of those who want to return to the days of religious wars. On the contrary, today it is more necessary than ever, precisely because of the threat of these fundamentalists, to strengthen and deepen the dialogue between believers of different faiths. This dialogue can have an important influence on politics, especially in the Middle East. Politics in fact, when it is serious, operates the synthesis of social and religious dynamics, and translates them into concrete actions in their territory. Even a non-believer must take note that it is necessary today - and not only in the East - to understand the complex religious phenomenon, in order to find concrete solutions and shared dialogue and encounter.

A serious inter-religious dialogue is one that starts from reality that does not deny the problems and mutual fears, not even if they are overwhelming; it rejects all forms of violence; it tries at all costs to understand the other, without necessarily sharing the same opinion; it does not seek to convince or convert, but to respect and be respected.

Conclusion

Today all this may seem utopian and unrealistic. I realize this. The path to a peaceful and serene relationship between the different religions of the East, and between East and West is still far off. We cannot, however, restrict ourselves to accusing extremism, but we need to talk to that part of the population and those movements, who despite everything, remain open to discussion and dialogue. This perspective has no alternative.

And in this tragic time, it is an incredible and unique opportunity for the coordination and coming closer between all parties, religious and lay people, who otherwise would not move nor meet. Christian and Muslim
leaders who together act against ISIS; Christians, Jews and Muslims who meet together to pray and demonstrate against the war are exactly the images that the fundamentalists want to destroy, and that is precisely why it is now more necessary.

The testimony of Pope Francis, in this context, is exemplary: from the trip to the Holy Land, to the Day of Prayer for Peace in Rome, to the numerous appeals for reconciliation, he is reminding us believers not to give in to the temptation of conflict but to continue to believe and pray for dialogue, encounter and reconciliation between peoples, cultures and religions.

We Franciscans will certainly not resolve the grave problems of the Middle East. But we are living in the Holy Land for this reason.

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is an instrument through which the Custody of the Holy Land realizes all these projects with modern systems of assistance. To give witness to Christ is not an abstract expression. It means that we have to provide work and dignity for so many families who are homeless, it means that we must give them the possibility to study by offering them scholarships, it means that we must sustain the emergencies like that in Syria at this very moment, by sending all kinds of emergency aid, it means that we must support the ordinary life of the brothers who offer their lives for the few Christians who have remained in their parishes, in order to instill in them their trust.

We will continue to provide a contribution of life and hope to the hundreds of families whom we can reach out to with our work of solidarity, also supported by all of you here present.

This is our mission, and it’s supported thanks to your help.

Thank you for your solidarity and thanks for whatever you can accomplish for the Christians in the Holy Land, and particularly those living in Syria.

May the Lord bless you all!

Columbus Catholics Continue Their Strong Support of Holy Land Christians

The recent surge of refugees from Syria into Europe has turned the attention of the world to the plight of those who are suffering from the ongoing and escalating animosity, conflict, and violence in the Holy Land. One group that is especially endangered in this tragedy are the Christians who have called this land home ever since their ancestors answered the call to become the first disciples of Christ. At the heart of this region, in Israel and Palestine, Christians once comprised more than 20 percent of the population. While they have not thus far faced the violent attacks currently taking place in Iraq and Syria, they have for many years been under severe economic and political pressure from the dominant Jewish and Muslim populations in that area. Many have been forced to emigrate to Europe and the United States because they no longer could make a life for themselves in places like Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Jerusalem. Today there are barely 150,000 Christians remaining in the place where Our Lord walked, taught, died, and was resurrected to create our Church and ensure our salvation.

Ten years ago a group of Catholics from this diocese made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and resolved to be “doers of the word and not hearers only” by taking action to support Holy Land Christians in their effort to stay and build a life for their children in the land that is their heritage.

The group is known as Cradling Christianity. Since 2006, it has raised more than three-quarters of a million dollars in Columbus to provide housing, job opportunities, and education that enable Christians to remain in the Holy Land.

Its 10th anniversary event, consisting of a Mass and dinner, took place Thursday, Sept. 10, at Columbus St. Charles Preparatory School. Father Peter Vasko, ofm, president of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land in Jerusalem, presided at the Mass, which was concelebrated by nine priests from the Diocese of Columbus. More than 300 people attended the dinner in the Walter Commons and heard author, radio commentator, and Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid speak about the importance of Catholics living their faith through action such as the support of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

The event also included the presentation of a special award by Father Vasko. Gene and Judy Alfonso were honored with the “Guardian of the Holy Land” award for their outstanding leadership and support of the work of the Franciscans in the Holy Land over many years.

(Catholic Times)
Fares Albabish resides in Bethlehem, with his parents and two siblings. He is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. His sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. James Sherry of Longwood, Fla.

George Hazeen resides in Bethlehem, with his parents, and two siblings. He is planning to attend Birzeit University and majoring in Architecture. His sponsor is the FFHL.

Hiba Babish resides in Bethlehem, with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in English Literature. Her sponsor is Cradling Christianity of Columbus, Ohio.

Ibrahim Sleibi resides in Bethlehem, with his parents and two siblings. He is planning to attend Birzeit University and majoring in Engineering. His sponsor is FFHL.

Ibrahim Nemeh resides in Bethlehem, with his parents and sister. He is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. His sponsor is FFHL.

Kassandra Tafesh resides in Bethlehem, with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. William Pierson of Dallas, Texas.

Majd Abu Sa’da resides in Beit Sahour, with his mother. He is planning to attend Birzeit University and majoring in Electrical Engineering. His sponsor is FFHL.

Mounir Giacaman resides in Bethlehem, with his parents and two siblings. He is planning to attend Al Quds University and majoring in Medicine. His sponsor is St. Dominic’s Catholic Church, Panama City, Florida.

Narmean Giacaman resides in Bethlehem, with her parents and four siblings. She is planning to attend Al Quds University and majoring in Medicine. Her sponsor is Col. Jacqueline Hale of Leesburg, Florida.

Pauline Zoughbi resides in Bethlehem, with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Al Quds University and majoring in Medical Laboratory Research. Her sponsor is Mrs. Lindamarie Richardson of Greenville, S.C.

Rawan Abu Saada resides in Beit Sahour, with her parents and brother. She is planning to attend Al Quds University and majoring in Pharmacy. Her sponsor is Dr. Ann Marie D’Heureux-Jones of Heathrow, Florida.

Reem Ghattas resides in Bethlehem, with her mother and three siblings. She is planning to attend Al Quds University and majoring in Dentistry. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Moon of Longwood, Florida.

Taline Bandak resides in Bethlehem, with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Yacoub Yacoub resides in Bethlehem, with his parents and four siblings. He is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. His sponsor is Cradling Christianity of Columbus, Ohio.

Mariana Antar resides in Jerusalem with her three siblings. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Languages. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Selim Ayoub of Longwood, Florida.

FFHL Gives Forty Six University Scholarships for 2015-2016
Scholarships for 2015-2016

Francis Dakwar resides in Haifa with his parents and three siblings. He is planning to attend Ruppin Academic Center and majoring in Psychology. His sponsor is FFHL.

Loreen Ibrahim resides in Haifa with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend University of Haifa and majoring in Statistics. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Lina Zaher resides in Nazareth with her parents and four siblings. She is planning to attend Technion University and majoring in Medicine. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. John Carden of Point Clear, Alabama.

Mira Zaher resides in Nazareth with her parents three siblings. She is planning to attend Technion University and majoring in Medicine. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Joseph Sha’er resides in Nazareth with his parents and two siblings. He is planning to attend Technion University and majoring in Electrical Engineering. His sponsor is FFHL.

Andrawes Alkalak resides in Ramleh with his parents and four siblings. He is planning to attend Shankar College-Tel Aviv and majoring in Languages. His sponsor is FFHL.

Gloria Mangasco resides in Ramleh with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend Seminar Hakibbutzim and majoring in Early Childhood Education. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Samira Habash resides in Ramleh with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv and majoring in Languages. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Herbert of Lafayette, Louisiana.

Jessica Shamshoom resides in Ramleh with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Medicine. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Margaret Rantisi resides in Ramleh with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend Tel Aviv University and majoring in Languages. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. John Fitzgerald of Atlanta, Georgia.

Apkar Nalbandian resides in Jerusalem with his parents and four siblings. He is planning to attend Hadassa College and majoring in Computer Science. His sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Thomas O’Reilly of Naples, Florida.

Basil Siriani resides in Jerusalem with his parents and one brother. He is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business. His sponsor is FFHL.

Dina Ajrab resides in Jerusalem with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Science. Her sponsor is Cradling Christianity of Columbus, Ohio.

Jessica Sai’id resides in Jerusalem with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Humanities. Her sponsors are Virginia Holy Land Pilgrims.

Jina Zanbil resides in Jerusalem with her parents and one brother. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Business Administration. Her sponsors are Friends of FFHL, Lake Greenwood, S.C.
Leila Kort: resides in Jerusalem with her parents and three sisters. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Accounting. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Micheal Farhoud: resides in Jerusalem with his parents and two brothers. He is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Nursing. His sponsor is FFHL.

Mousa Nimatallah: resides in Jerusalem with his parents and one sister. He is planning to attend Azzraeli College of Engineering and majoring in Engineering. His sponsor is FFHL.

Reem Rabadi: resides in Jerusalem with her parents and one brother. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Humanities. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Rojer Sleiman: resides in Jerusalem with his mother and two siblings. He is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Veterinary Medicine. His sponsor is FFHL.

Sarah Nakhleh: resides in Jerusalem with her parents and two brothers. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and majoring in Medicine. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. N. Stevens of Keller, Texas.

Haneen Assi: resides in Jerusalem with her parents and three siblings. She is planning to attend Bethlehem University and majoring in Nursing. Her sponsor is Cradling Christianity of Columbus, Ohio.

Mira Martha: resides in Ramallah, with her parents and two siblings. She is planning to attend Birzeit University and majoring in Marketing/Press Media. Her sponsors are Mr. and Mrs. Walter MacGinnitie of Atlanta, Georgia.

Johny Majrouh: resides in Jericho with his parents and three siblings. He is planning to attend Al-Quds University and majoring in Computer Science. His sponsor is FFHL.

M.A. Students:

Dima Khoury: resides in Jerusalem with her husband and three kids. She is planning to attend Birzeit University and do her M.A. in Social Work. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Sandra Lahdo: resides in Jerusalem with her family. She is planning to attend Birzeit University and do her M.A. in Finance and Banking. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Nivin Habash: resides in Jerusalem with her husband and three kids. She is planning to attend Birzeit University and do her M.A. in Education. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Lara Rafidi: resides in Jerusalem with her family. She is planning to attend Open Hebrew University and do her M.A. in Accounting. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Jenny Sayegh: resides in Jerusalem with her family. She is planning to attend Hebrew University and do her M.A. in Environmental Studies. Her sponsor is FFHL.

Haneen Kirreh: resides in Jerusalem with her two brothers and is planning to attend Hadassa College and do her M.A. in Speech Therapy. Her sponsor is FFHL.
Mass of Thanksgiving for FFHL Scholarship Benefactors

On Sunday, October 10, a Mass of Thanksgiving was held at St. James Catholic Church in Beit-Hanina, a suburb of Jerusalem, for all the benefactors who have pledged financial support in helping to put our young Christian students through college here in the Holy Land.

Fr. Ibrahim Faltas, ofm, Comptroller for the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land, said “The Custody of the Holy Land has always had a strong commitment to providing education for our people. It is part of our mission. In fact, it has been through the generosity of Catholics worldwide, that financial assistance has been given to many students who would otherwise not have been able to attend college due to the economic difficulties facing them.

Fr. Haitham Zhenno, ofm is a parochial vicar for the parish of St. James and for him “educational scholarships are like a bridge which connects the students to the Franciscan Custody.”

The Custody of the Holy Land gives away 500 scholarships per year to those meritorious students. “These scholarships” stated Fr. Ibrahim “are divided among the Custody of the Holy Land and the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land.”

For many students this is a God-sent. For example, Fadi Yadi, a student at Abu Dis University in Jerusalem says “I received a scholarship from the Franciscans. It is a subsidy that helps Christian students attend local universities as opposed to going to school in foreign countries, which is a cause of concern because the majority of these students never return back to the Holy Land. Attending a local university provides and encourages young Christians to remain at home.”

Misleen Hathweh is another student who is attending Bethlehem University. She stated that the “Christians of Jerusalem face many economic difficulties that can become an obstacle in continuing our studies, yet I would like to thank the Franciscans, as well as FFHL, for overcoming these obstacles for us by providing the needed financial assistance to go to college.”

Another student, Rafi Ghattas, who is attending the University of Birzeit stated that “My thankfulness to the Franciscan Foundation can never be expressed in mere words. They continue to carry out their commitment to the young Christians here in the Holy Land and because of this, they have helped maintain our presence here at home and especially in Jerusalem.”

Meet Our Newest Board of Trustees Member

Jim Cornelius is the recently retired Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer of Bristol-Myers Squibb, the specialty biopharmaceutical company headquartered in New York City. Jim still serves as Board Chairman of Mead Johnson Nutrition, a global leader in infant and children’s nutritional products headquartered in Chicago. He previously had a productive 28 year career with Eli Lilly and Company in Indianapolis, retiring from the Board of Directors and as CFO in 1995.

Born in Kalamazoo, Michigan, he attended Michigan State University earning both a BA in accounting (Magna cum Laude) and MBA degree. He served on active duty as a Lieutenant in the US Army Finance Corps, where he met his wife, Kathy, who is an award winning Indiana artist. They are long-time residents of Zionsville, Indiana with two adult children, Andrew in NYC and Lindsay, who lives nearby in Zionsville.

Mr. Cornelius has received honorary Doctorate degrees to recognize his civic and philanthropic activities from Michigan State University, the University of Indianapolis and Marian University. He received the Anti-Defamation League’s 2003 Man of Achievement Award, the 2005 Hoosier Heritage Lifetime Achievement Award, the Boys & Girls Club 2007 Outstanding CEO Award, and was honored as New Alternative’s for Children, Man of the Year, in October 2014. The family conducts its philanthropic activities through the Cornelius Family Foundation (Indianapolis).

Jim stays active with investments in several local life science start-ups and mentoring of younger management talent.
Supporting the Church in the Holy Land: A “Question of Love”

The recent unrest in Israel served as an unfortunate but timely backdrop for the Oct. 3 fundraising dinner for the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL), highlighting the importance of the organization’s mission to safeguard the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

Keynote speaker Christian Brother Peter Bray, vice chancellor of Bethlehem University in Bethlehem in the West Bank, addressed the 230 attendees at the JW Marriott in Indianapolis.

He described the hardships the university’s students endure. For example, he said, just to get to the school each day, students confront metal gates; a 25-foot wall built by the Israeli government surrounding Bethlehem; checkpoints; barricades and road blocks. In all, he said, there are 630 checkpoints where Palestinians must show their identification.

Archbishop Joseph W. Tobin attended the event. His ministry has taken him to more than 70 countries, but this past February he made his first visit to the Holy Land during an archdiocesan pilgrimage.

In a video interview with the Archbishop he commented on the attitude of Christians in the region:

“One thing that affected me [on the pilgrimage] … was our contact with other Christians … [They had a] sense of self-irony in describing their situation. They weren’t out to demonize anybody. They rather said, ‘This is just the way we live. We want to live here, and we accept that this is the way it is, even though it’s not just or not right. We love this land. We’ve been here for centuries, and we’ve welcomed people like you [pilgrims] for centuries, and we’ll continue to do it.’

“I was surprised and grateful for that welcome. You could say they were imitating Jesus. Jesus wouldn’t pass the evil on. He died rather than pass the evil on that was done to him.”

But restrictive laws and lack of jobs are making it more difficult for Christians to stay in the Holy Land.

According to the FFHL website, “steady Christian exodus from the land where Christianity began suggests that within the next 50 years, the Christian community will cease to exist unless something is done.”

Msgr. Joseph Schaedel, pastor of St. Luke the Evangelist Parish in Indianapolis and who served as master of ceremonies, stated in his opening comments that Catholics need to stand “in solidarity in the land where Jesus walked.”

One way members of central and southern Indiana can stand in solidarity with Christians in the Holy Land and ensure a continued Christian presence there is by supporting the FFHL’s university scholarship program.

Those in attendance at the event included Zaki Sahlia, a recent graduate of Hebrew University who received a scholarship from the Foundation.

When Sahlia was young, his father had a stroke and was unable to work. Sahlia described his circumstance as so difficult that if it had not been for his sponsor from the Foundation, he wasn’t sure where he would be now.

Sahlia received an undergraduate degree in chemistry and a graduate degree in law. He is now employed at a law firm in Tel Aviv.

“I am so glad I received this generous scholarship. It has changed my life,” he said. “It’s not a question of money—it’s a question of love.”

His heartfelt speech touched people at the dinner, especially when he spoke about his homeland.

“It’s such a country! It’s so holy! It’s so important to be there as a Christian. To keep us there, we need you!”

As the night progressed, several generous donors came forward pledging support to students in the Holy Land through sponsorships and university scholarships.

In his concluding remarks, Archbishop Tobin noted, “We are leaving behind the generous choices we made.” (Excerpts from The Criterion)
The Holy Land is Hoping for More Pilgrim Visits Than Ever

“No, havoc is not being wreaked in the Holy Land! You can come on pilgrimage safely” says senior pilgrimage guide Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM.

In an interview with the San Francisco online magazine, the Custos answered the question: “What do you recommend to pilgrims willing to go to Jerusalem?”

“Pilgrims can leave (their home countries) with peace of mind because they belong to no groups between which, at this historic moment, there are tensions. Compared to recent months, this time period has had an increase in pilgrimages, which were organized prior to the recent events, and we hope that as a result of the current situation, there will be no cancellations for the upcoming fall/winter season, which is historically rich in pilgrimages.”

According to Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm, President of FFHL, “The recent spate of isolated incidents against Israeli soldiers has not affected the on-going arrival of thousands of pilgrims coming over to the Holy Land. In fact, life goes on...children are going to school, shops and banks are open and local people are travelling to their jobs unencumbered.” He goes on to say that “the international press looks upon these isolated attacks as if there is constant fighting in the streets of Jerusalem! The reality is just the opposite. It’s interesting to note that not one Christian pilgrim or pilgrimage group have been affected by these attacks. They are coming and going to the Holy Sites of Christianity with ease and with total safety...something that the media does not report! Life is going on in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Bethlehem and around the country. Criminal acts are criminal acts and they exist in every country whether it be in Israel or the United States, but life goes on, doesn’t it?”

“Coming on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land is indeed a special spiritual journey according to Fr. Vasko, ofm, “because a pilgrimage is a place where one leaves one’s family, friends, and activities to seek the Divine.” He goes on to say that, “it is a unique opportunity not only to ‘walk in the footsteps of Jesus’ but to deepen one’s faith at the Holy Sites of Christianity whether it be the place of His birth, the place where He died for our sins or the place where He rose from the dead. Jesus calls us to open our minds and hearts to Him with faith and total trust in His Divine Providence over us rather than succumbing to irrational fear.”

Holy Land Bishops Announce More Confessors at Sacred Shrines for Holy Year of Mercy Pilgrims

The pilgrims who come to Holy Land during the upcoming Year of the Holy Mercy will have better access to the sacrament of confession in churches and shrines scattered in the land where Jesus lived. This is the most significant measure announced by the heads of the Catholic Churches of the Holy Land. The intent was explicitly announced by the Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, who met in assembly at the headquarters of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem from November 3 to 5. “To live better this year of mercy”, says the final communiqué of the assembly, sent to Fides, “it is recommended that the celebration of the sacrament of penance is incorporated in the programs for pilgrims. Our Committee for pilgrimages will make the sacrament of confession more accessible in the various shrines”.

At the conclusion of the assembly, the Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land also renewed the appeal to all those who want to follow Christ’s footsteps not be intimidated by the chaos which also shakes the Middle East: “The people of this land need your witness”. During the works, the Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land also analyzed the valuable work done by Caritas Jerusalem in favor of those who live different forms of social and humanitarian emergency, with particular attention given to projects implemented in the Gaza Strip. In this regard, the Catholic Bishops also asked to establish “a local committee to take charge of the poor” in every parish, in coordination with Caritas Jerusalem.

(vatican.va)
Pontifical College Josephinum Pilgrimage

Over twenty deacons and seminarians studying theology at the Pontifical College Josephinum in Columbus, Ohio recently made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land headed up by Fr. Louis Iasiello, ofm (R) who teaches at the college. Fr. Peter was invited to give an update on the crisis facing the Holy Land at the Notre Dame Hotel in Jerusalem and later a check was presented to him for the mission of the Franciscan Foundation from the group. Fr. David Wathen, ofm (L) was their guide.

Visit with Bishop John Noonan, DD
Diocese of Orlando, Florida

During the Fall Visit to Florida, some of the members of the FFHL Orlando Chapter met with Bishop Noonan to discuss the mission and the work of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land as well as to give an update of what the Orlando Chapter is doing to help the foundation. (Left to right) Diane Moon of Longwood, Fla; Faith Libbe of Casselberry, Fla; Bishop Noonan, DD; and Manijeh Bahraminejad of Altamonte Springs, Fla.

Reception at the D’Heureux-Jones Residence

A reception was held at the residence of Dr. Ann Marie D’Heureux-Jones located in Heathrow, Fla for the Franciscan Foundation. Dr. D’Heureux-Jones who recently came back from a pilgrimage led by Fr. Peter, made some introductory remarks, followed by Faith Libbe, Regional Representative of FFHL. Fr. Peter then showed a DVD on the work of the Foundation. Some thirty guests, mostly physicians, were present at the presentation. Photo (l to r) Faith Libbe, Regional Representative for FFHL; Fr. Peter; Dr. Ann Marie D’Heureux-Jones and her husband, Ernest who hosted the event.

Holy Land Pilgrim Visits With His Sponsored Students

While on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Mr. William Kiefer had an opportunity to visit with two students that he is sponsoring for college. They are Doad Ghareeb and Melvina Khoury.
FFHL Celebrates in Bethlehem with Christian Families

Christmas at Franciscan Boys Home

Every year, Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm Chairman of FFHL and Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm, President, visit the Boys Home in Bethlehem and hold a Mass for them. Later on, Christmas gifts were exchanged and a Christmas dinner was served. At present there are 33 boys along with their Director, Fr. Mawran Dides, ofm, who runs the home. It is always a festive occasion with lots of smiles.

Christmas Celebrations for the Children

For the last 8 years, FFHL has had a Christmas party for the marginalized children of Bethlehem. This year, through the generosity of our supporters in the U.S., a good number of these children received Santa Claus outfits along with gifts and a Christmas musical play. One can see the joy on their faces. Mrs. Faith Libbe, our Regional Representative in Florida, raises funds to partially support this Christmas program every year.
Pope Francis Continues to Encourage Support of Holy Land Christians

Pope Francis says courage must be shown to end rising violence between Palestinians and Israelis.

“There is a need for great courage and strength in order to reject hatred and to carry out acts of peace in the Holy Land,” Pope Francis said.

Before reciting the Angelus on Sunday, the Pope expressed his concern for the increase in violence between Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The clashes between the two sides have left at least seven Israelis and 44 Palestinians dead since the beginning of October.

“I am following with great concern the situation of high tension and violence that afflicts the Holy Land,” the Pope said.

“For this we pray, so that God strengthens in all — political leaders and citizens, the courage to oppose violence and to take concrete steps towards easing tensions.”

The Pope also stressed that peace in the Holy Land is crucial “now more than ever”.

“God and the good of humanity asks this of us,” the Pope said.

The Israeli government has called a string of stabbings by Palestinians against the Jewish people acts of terrorism, resulting in the erection of new checkpoints throughout the West Bank.

However, the Palestinian Ministry of Health called attacks by undercover Israeli special forces a “clear violation of the international law and international human rights conventions and laws.”

At the same time, the Pope emphasized the need to help Middle East Christians however possible.

Elise Harris of CNA/EWTN News reported the following:

“While the international community can’t seem to find solutions to the current crisis ravaging the Middle East, thanks to the media it’s caught the world’s attention and can’t be ignored,” Pope Francis said.

He referred to the “overwhelming human tragedies” taking place in Iraq and Syria as a result of ongoing conflicts, which have caused millions to flee their homes.

The Pope’s words were addressed to participants in a Sept. 17 meeting sponsored by the Pontifical Council Cor Unum to address the current humanitarian crisis in Iraq and Syria.

He said that “Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey are bearing the brunt of the weight, having received millions of refugees.” He noted, “They have been generous in welcoming those seeking to escape violence.

Faced with such a situation and conflicts that are expanding and disturbing in an alarming way the internal and regional equilibrium, the international community seems unable to find adequate solutions while the arms dealers continue to achieve their interests.”

However, unlike in the past, the terrible atrocities and human rights violations which characterize the conflicts “are transmitted live by the media. Therefore, they captured the attention of the whole world.”

“No one can pretend not to know!” Francis said, adding that in his view, “it’s obvious to see that those most affected by the wars are the poor. A non-violent solution is needed, because violence only creates new wounds,” he said.

Pope Francis urged attendees not to miss their “vital commitment” in caring for both

(Cont’d on Page 15)
One of the Founding Members of the FFHL Dies at 77

Bishop Giuseppe Nazzaro, ofm, 77, former Custos of the Holy Land, and one of the founding members of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, who had also served as Latin-rite bishop in Aleppo, died Monday, October 26, 2015 in the hospital of San Giovanni Moscati in Avelino, Italy. Bishop Nazzaro was born Dec. 22, 1937, in San Potito Ultra (Avelino) and entered the minor seminary of the Custody of the Holy Land in Rome in 1950.

He received the Franciscan habit in 1956 and made his solemn profession in the 1960s. His first assignment was to go to Aleppo in 1966, a year after his ordination. Ministry followed in Rome (1968), in Alexandria, Egypt (1971) and Cairo (1977).

During the Custodial Chapter of 1986 he was appointed secretary of the Custody. In 1992, he was appointed as Custos of the Holy Land. Following his term in 1998, he was transferred to Italy. But in 2001 he was again sent to Syria. One year later he was chosen as apostolic vicar of Aleppo by Pope St. John Paul II, and ordained a bishop on Jan. 6, 2003 by the Pope himself at the Basilica of St. Peter.

Bishop Nazzaro left office in 2013, at the age of 75 years, by which time Syria had already been embroiled for two years in unrest and street protests against the central government. Nazzaro spent the last years of his life traveling, giving talks and interviews to raise public awareness among the media and politicians about the tragedy of the Syrian people.

The funeral was held October 27, 2015, in Italy. Your prayers are appreciated.

(Cont’d from Page 14)

the spiritual and material needs of the weakest and most defenseless, particularly families, children and the elderly.

In Iraq and Syria, he said, evil doesn’t just destroy buildings and infrastructure, but also and especially “the conscience of man.”

“In the name of Jesus, who came into the world to heal the wounds of humanity, the Church feels called to respond to evil with good by promoting an integral human development,” the Pope said, and encouraged Catholics to strengthen intra-ecclesial ties and collaborative efforts.

“Please: do not abandon the victims of this crisis, even if the world’s attention were to lessen.”

Priorities for the future were identified as education, psychological support for children and families, healthcare, food aid, livelihoods, rent and shelter.

In comments made to CNA/EWTN News, Sept. 17, Msgr. Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, said that the Pope’s words on putting a stop to the arms trade hit on the essence of what needs to change if the current conflicts are to come to an end.

“I think it’s at a critical point to stop the flow of weapons to the Middle East,” he said, and cautioned that after years of war, “hate is growing in the hearts of people.”

“People, they don’t trust each other. There is too much hate,” the nuncio continued, adding that “everybody sees this happening.”

“I think the international community must multiply the efforts in order to convince or to oblige the conflicting parties to see that they are able to reach some compromises.”

Stephen O’Brien, Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator of the United Nations, told journalists during the conference that working with Catholic charities has been crucial in getting aid to those in need, thanks to the vast network they have.

Speaking to CNA/EWTN News, he said that the Catholic Church “has got a vast network, and it’s that network of people deep in their communities who have been there for generations who really know what is going on locally.”

He stressed the need to listen “very carefully to the expertise, the knowledge, the experience” of those who have been on the ground locally for generations as well as the charities that offer support from abroad.

“So it’s been a very, very important discussion to look at intensifying our partnership with such a strong network, as clearly the Catholic Church and the Catholic charities represent.”

(Catholic Herald)
Pilgrimages to Benefit the Work of the Franciscan Foundation

Join Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm, on a pilgrimage of faith:

- June 6 – 16, 2016,
  FFHL Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
  with Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm

- Nov. 29 – Dec. 9, 2016,
  FFHL Pilgrimage to the Holy Land
  with Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm

These pilgrimages exploring the Holy Land will provide an opportunity to open a new chapter in your own faith journey and your own response to God’s generous grace. **Now is the time to reach out in support of our Palestinian Christians. Your presence can make a difference.**

For information or to receive a brochure call toll free (855) 372-0580.
The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is one of the most imposing churches in Jerusalem. It is one of the sights that visitors to the Holy City cannot miss because it is a magnetic center where many religious orders and sects congregate.

Steps lead to an altar over the spot where the Cross of Christ was placed. Kneeling, one can put a hand through a hole under the altar and touch the cold, hard surface beneath. Several years ago, while doing some repair work, laborers uncovered the iron rings used to steady a crucifix.

A structure still revered as the Tomb of Christ stands on the main level of the church. The original tomb was preserved on the site until the 11th century when a Muslim dignitary destroyed nearly 90% of it. Authorities have said the inside back wall is authentic.

Today the Site of the Holy Sepulchre of Jesus lies amidst the buildings of the Old City of Jerusalem. Surrounded by markets, souvenir shops and minarets it invites pilgrims to meditate about the Mystery of Redemption that unfolded at this spot.

For the Franciscans of the Holy Land this is a shrine for which they have dedicated energy and life. Today at the Holy Sepulchre the Franciscans celebrate daily the Roman Catholic liturgy and assist the pilgrims that journey to this site. Among the daily liturgical celebrations at this most Holy Christian site the Franciscans perform a daily procession visiting and incensing all altars and chapels while praying and singing hymns. They also celebrate the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hour.

The place of the Crucifixion of Christ is taken today by two chapels, separated by the Altar of the Stabat Mater, which recalls the grief of Mary at the moment of Christ’s Deposition from the Cross. The first chapel, which is Roman Catholic, houses the Altar of the Nails of the Holy Cross. There is a mosaic representing Jesus being Stripped of His Raiment (10th station) and Jesus being Nailed to the Cross (11th station). The second chapel, which is Greek Orthodox, is adorned with admirable life-size icons representing Christ, the Virgin, and St. John. Below the image of the crucified Christ, hanging inert from the Cross, a rock can be seen where a silver ring marks the place where the Cross was fixed (12th station).

In the entrance lies the long slab of polished pink limestone, marking the place of the Oratory of the Anointing, the place where Jesus’ body was anointed after being taken down from the cross, the place where his Mother Mary wept over Him. It is now the place of the 13th station on the Via Dolorosa.

The 14th station is placed in the middle of the rotunda of Anastasis, which is the result of the transformation over centuries of an ancient Jewish tomb. The entrance leads into a first, larger chamber, known as the Chapel of the Angel. A fragment of rock marks the exact spot where the angel is supposed to have sat as he announced the Resurrection to the women.

A marble slab protects the rock of the tomb. Over the tomb can be seen a great number of silver lamps, which belong to four different Christian Churches. The three over the slab represents the Resurrection according to the three Churches which maintain this Holy Site; the Greek, Latin and Armenian Catholics.

Easter Sunday morning brings a special feeling to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre because representatives of many churches from all over the Holy Land come to receive the Holy Fire and carry it back in small lanterns to their particular churches for the Midnight Resurrection Service. The past few years have made this tradition very difficult because Palestinians are not allowed to enter Jerusalem without a special permit. This year many Christian Palestinians went to the extra trouble of getting permits in order to partake in this centuries old celebration that reflects the Christian heritage and its deep roots in Palestine.

It is on this Great and Holy Saturday that the Holy Fire comes down from Heaven and is received by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch as it has been done every year, on the same day, in the same manner, at the same time, at the same holy place of Christ’s Life Giving Tomb.

“It is one of the most magnificent celebrations in the Holy Land,” says Maria Khoury, author and resident Christian, “that has been overshadowed and forgotten during the reoccupation of the Palestinian Territories. For the last three years the boy scouts have not carried on our regular tradition of receiving the Holy Fire to the beat of the drums due to the bloodshed and violence. However, living the cycle of death every day, it was refreshing for the Christian community to rejoice in receiving the Holy Fire and celebrate that for us all. Hope lies in Christ our Savior. Four years of killing, back and forth, surely we have been living in the darkness of all evil.” “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” (John 1:5)