The FFHL Welcomes its New Chairman and Custos of the Holy Land

With a grateful and humble heart, Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm accepts his newly appointed position as the Custos of the Holy Land and Chairman of the Board of Trustees for the FFHL.

Just minutes after being appointed his new position, 52-year-old Fr. Patton spoke to his fellow Franciscans, "I come with humility and with much love for this land. Accept me as a brother."

The Custos not only leads the way of life for over 250 Franciscan friars living in the Holy Land, but he also coordinates and directs pilgrims who journey to the Holy Shrines and leads the Franciscans in their efforts to safeguard the presence of Christians throughout the Holy Land.

Another mission of the Custos is to coordinate information about the Holy Land and instill in Christians around the world a “loving care” for these holy sites: archaeological excavations at the holy places, publication of ancient pilgrimages and above all, the study of the Bible through geography and history of these same sites where the events took place.

In the Holy Land, the Custos is looked upon as one of the main Christian religious authorities. Together with the Greek Orthodox Patriarch and the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, he is responsible for the status quo, the code that regulates life at the Holy Sepulchre in the Nativity Church in Bethlehem.

The Custos of the Holy Land is not an elected position, but instead is directly appointed by the Holy See after a consultation with the friars living in the Holy Land and with the Franciscan Order in Rome.

Fr. Patton was born in Vigo Meano in the diocese of Trent, Italy on December 23, 1963. He belongs to the Franciscan Province of St. Anthony in Italy. He is fluent in English and Spanish, as well as his native Italian.

He made his first religious profession on September 7, 1983 and his solemn profession on October 4, 1986; and was ordained a priest on May 26, 1989. In 1993 he obtained a licentiate in Communication Sciences from the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome.

He has served in various capacities in his province and also within the Order. Some of his leadership roles include:

- Secretary General of the General Chapters
- Visitor General
- Minister Provincial of St. Vigilium (Trent, Italy)
- President of the Conference of Provincial Ministers of Italy and Albania (COMPI)

Fr. Patton succeeds Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, who led the Custody for the last twelve years. When Fr. Patton was asked how he is spiritually

(Cont’d on Page 3)
Letter from the Custos

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As the new “Custos” of the Holy Land, I am looking forward to working with the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. The mission of this foundation is to serve the people in the land where Christ was born, died and raised again, in the Spirit of St. Francis. We are here to witness to God’s endless love and mercy for all. In this Jubilee Year of Mercy, this takes on an even more significant role for us.

As we prepare for the Feast of the Transfiguration, up on Mt. Tabor, we will keep each of you in prayer. (Mt 17.1-8; Lk 9.28-36; Pet 1.16-18)

Let Our Lord, Jesus Christ take you to the top of the mountain. And together with Moses and Elijah, speak with Jesus each day. With great hope that someday He may be transfigured for us and our families. Please continue to pray for the friars in the Holy Land. Know that we and the people of this Holy Land are grateful for your support.

My blessing and prayer are with you and your families,

Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm
Chairman, FFHL
Custos of the Holy Land

Where Are They Now?

Tarek Nasrawi was born and raised with his parents and three sisters in Jerusalem. He had always dreamed of serving and helping his community. This was a desire based on the values and principles his parents instilled in him at a young age.

As Tarek grew older and studied in school, he developed a desire to be a physician. Like many other individuals in the Holy Land, he had a desire and a goal but did not have the resources to make it happen. The FFHL saw the desire in Tarek and was able to make his dream come true with a scholarship from a donor that paid for his education. He studied and received his Doctorate Degree from Jordan University of Science and Technology.

As a new physician, Tarek tells us about his journey, what inspires him and how he hopes to give back to his community in the Holy Land and in the world.

What is it like living as a Christian in the Holy Land?

I feel honored to be in this Holy Land. When I go in the streets and I go to visit the church and I see tourists filling the churches, crossing oceans just to visit this holy place, I feel it was a gift to me that I was born here. It’s very special, it’s very unique for our religion. Our roots started from here. It makes this place very unique and I hope the Christian community will continue to grow.

What was it that you were taught as a child and in medical school that shapes you now?

Let’s appreciate the importance of medicine until I experienced it—until I saw patients improving. Sometimes a little word will give that terminally ill or cancer patient hope. I feel achieved when I am able to help someone or improve their quality of life.

One of my professors used to tell me, “When you want to see your success, see it by your patients. How much, how many of your patients are satisfied, that

Tarek Nasrawi

Fr. Francesco Patton, ofm
preparing for this appointed role he responded, “It is an appointment that I welcome with great trepidation. I know it will be a challenging task, and very delicate; before expressing any real impressions I need time.”

His first trip to the Holy Land was in 1997. Since then, he has remained close to the friars and has “learned what passion for the Holy Land is.”

Fr. Patton speaks about his first trip to the Holy Land, “I remember I was fortunate to be able to stop and pray calmly at length in the Holy Places and for this it was a very beautiful experience. The charm of three places in particular has remained with me. First - of course - the empty Tomb, which is important for our faith precisely because it is empty. Then the Upper Room, the place of Pentecost from which the Church was born. And finally the Tabor, the site of the Transfiguration. Today my thoughts went immediately to these beloved places.”

Fr. Patton knows he has a journey ahead of him as his jurisdiction is over the territories of Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Cyprus and Rhodes. Today, many of these places are war-stricken and have seen devastation for Christians. During these times of war and unrest, protecting both the sacred places and Christians living in the Holy Land is one of the major roles of the Custos.

Shortly after he was appointed, Fr. Patton said, “Just as Pope Francis always does, I ask people above all to pray for the Holy Land. Without prayer it is very difficult to bring any change within a situation that is so difficult in our day. And then I ask everyone to keep the Holy Land in their hearts, to the extent of their own responsibility: from the simple but important gesture of those who go on pilgrimage, to those who take care of its cultural institutions, and all the way to those with public responsibilities in peace-building. Each of us can play our part.”

The FFHL welcomes Fr. Patton to the Holy Land. Let us remember to pray for Fr. Patton as we pray for all of the Franciscans and individuals that work to safeguard Christians in the Holy Land.

**(Cont’d from Page 1)**

is how much you are successful.” And that’s what I hope I will be doing. I will be measuring my success by how much my patients are satisfied. I hope by helping my Christian community, I will be helping the whole world. I will be helping the whole communities in this Holy Land and in the whole world.

**Do you have a focus or a specific medical interest?**

I am interested mainly in the orthopedic medical field. And I also have other interests in surgery but this is the main specialization I am really considering. One has to think about what it is he or she likes in order to excel in that field. It also depends on the opportunities presented.

**What would life look like for you without having received this scholarship?**

My parents sacrificed a lot, but without this scholarship, through the Franciscan Foundation, I don’t think I could have made it financially, I could not afford medical school. So, I encourage each family to give that hope to other students. In this country, there are a lot of young students who have the potential to do great things and to secure good employment and contribute to the community.

**Why is education so vital for Christians in the Holy Land?**

I would invest in the education of a young Christian because I believe it opens a lot of opportunities for them in life. You give them education, you give them dignity, you give them self-respect and self-confidence, so they can go out there with a field and a profession in their hand and they can work and overcome the obstacles and challenges they will face in this Holy Land.

**Any closing comments?**

I would like to thank my donors. The Dominque family, a wife and a husband, also happen to be medical physicians. I am very thankful to them. I am very thankful for what they did. They have changed my life.

Every year, the FFHL awards scholarships to students in the Holy Land seeking university, masters or doctorate degrees. This scholarship program is not only changing the lives of the scholarships recipients but it is also changing the communities where the recipients start their careers after graduation.

**(Cont’d from Page 2)**
Hope Can Be Found in Vocational Training

The mission of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) is to safeguard the basic human rights and the presence of Christians living in the Holy Land. The FFHL sponsors students every school year at vocational schools in the Holy Land. Students in the vocational programs learn skills that vary from hotel management, cuisine cooking, catering, hair dressing, auto mechanics, metal work, plumbing, and craft work. The FFHL is enrolling students at the Lutheran Federation Vocational Technical School as well as the Notre Dame School of Hotel Management. Each of these schools offers a one or two year program. Upon completing the program, a student will receive a diploma certifying his or her skills and expertise in a specific field.

"The unemployment rate is very high, especially among young people ages 18 to 24 it is nearly 40%," said Yousef Shalian, Director of the Lutheran World Federation. "There is a high demand in the market for labor skills in different professions."

The FFHL, with the generosity from its donors, has been able to provide hundreds of students with vocational scholarships. The FFHL scholarship recipients have gone on to work in the catering industry, telecommunications, auto mechanics and some have even started their own businesses in the Holy Land. This is not only good for the vocational students, but it also benefits the local economy in the Holy Land. When jobs are created, people have a connection and a reason to establish themselves and stay in the Holy Land.

"The percentage of Christians in the Holy Land is decreasing. They need additional support to be here. The small community of Christians face many challenges to be here," said Shalian. "Education and vocational training will help them to find jobs, to have skills and to find hope. Otherwise they will immigrate and we will not find any more Christians living here."

"After years of following them, we can see that many of them are working or have even started their own businesses. They are supporting themselves and their own families. So that is a sustainable effect – impact that will continue for years," Shalian added.

When a student attends a university or a vocational school they do not just learn the classroom or industry material. They also learn how to work with other cultural and religious groups. The vocational programs as well as the University Scholarship Programs of the FFHL are obviously open to only Christians since it is attempting to provide motivation and incentive for them to stay; but in the mean time, we are building bonds together.

Many of the students that receive scholarships would not be able to attend any type of schooling on their own. "We believe that the support from America and other countries is very important. The need is increasing – but the effect and impact is also very obvious. We can see that with nearly 90% of our graduates working."

It is the mission of the FFHL to protect and provide for Christians living in the Holy Land. Empowering young people in vocational programs does not just provide them with an education and a skill-set. It also gives them the interaction and a better connection to their community and a heightened level of understanding for their fellow brothers and sisters living in the Holy Land.
Peace can be Found in the Holy Land

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land recently sat down with Fr. Marwan, diDes, ofm, Director of the Bethlehem Boys Home, to discuss peace and unity among religious groups in the Holy Land. Fr. Marwan explained many of the problems with the current misconceptions and confusion about religious groups living together in the Holy Land.

What is the relationship between Muslims and Christians in the Holy Land and what are the issues that are faced everyday?

The issue about the Muslim presence in the Middle East - is not an issue. First of all, because it’s a presence, just like the presence of Muslims or non-Muslims in any other part of the world.

Why do the Franciscans work with all people in the Holy Land and not just Christians?

If we are working for the Holy Land, if we are doing something for the Holy Land, we have to know that in a direct or indirect way, we are working for everybody. And this is what we call the vocation of the Catholic Church. It’s universal. So how would it be universal by only working for Christians? If you want to work for the Holy Land, you have to know that it’s a mixture of cultures and religions.

Muslims and Christians seem to be at odds in so many ways. Many people think they should be separated. What do you think about that?

A person is a person, whether he is Christian or Muslim. Even us, as Christians, we don’t only take the values and the teaching of the church to make our own identity. We have our own ideas and experiences. We have our own wishes and ways to mature. The same for Muslims. They don’t only take the fact of their religion to form themselves. They also take their own experiences and their own ways of seeing things. But if one wants to work for everybody, if one wants to be a good Christian, one has to be in the universal church.

How do we best communicate and tell each other about our values as Christians and Muslims?

I think it’s important to tell everybody about our faith, about who we are. I know I can’t live my vocation without wearing a habit and without praying, without going to the church, without asking the blessings of the Virgin Mary or St. Francis. I can’t do that. It’s impossible. As if you are a father and you’re not there for your kids to educate them, so you are not a father. You are only a biological father; you are not the real father. So you have to be there for your faith, you have to show it, and you have to show who you are.

I can’t understand how you can make peace with others without showing the others who you really are. It’s your identity. If you don’t accept me as a Christian with the cross, with the faith of Jesus Christ, with the faith of the Virgin Mary, with the faith in the saints, with all these things, how would you make peace with me?

Is it really possible for Muslims and Christians to live together and accept each other?

We accept everybody and we hope to be accepted by others according our identity. So this is why they really accept us, because we are open, and we are truthful. We say what we believe in and we live by it. And it’s important and they can see that. And this can give them a change, not in their religion as faith, but in their attitude for the life. And I think this is very important. It’s really important. The attitude for the life, for everyday life, is as important as religion. Because there you have the real formation and education.

Religion is something truly personal. Attitude is something personal that reflects in the community. So if you have a good attitude, an open-minded attitude, you can accept others. You can live with the others despite religion. It’s the attitude.

What is one way you see the two religions working together to build up the society in the Holy Land?

In the Terra Sancta schools, we don’t make any difference between Christians and Muslims. Actually we accept everybody. The curriculum is the curriculum for everybody.

For the religion, it is an obligation from the curriculum and we have to teach Christians, Christian religion, and for the Muslims, Muslim religion. So, yes, we separate them. We separate them only for the period of religion and we have a specialized teacher for every class. For Christians we have a specialized Christian teacher and for the Muslims we have a specialized Muslim teacher.

We have so many requests from Muslim parents that want to send their children to our school. The school is a place where students are formed and educated together. As the Custody of the Holy Land we have always accepted non-Christians. No, we respect everybody. The school is open for everybody and we do respect everybody.
Imagine children joining together without fear and prejudice to one another.

Imagine a generation of children working together, playing together, living side-by-side without separation of religion or nationality.

Imagine how a generation of young people working together can change the world.

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land has made this dream a reality for over a thousand children living in the Holy Land. Children Without Borders is a youth soccer program that gives children the opportunity to practice and play competitively with other children their age. Both Christian and Muslim children are welcomed into the program.

“When we started sponsoring this program, we had no idea the impact it would make in so many young lives,” Fr. Peter Vasko, ofm, President of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. “It is the future. It’s the future everyone would like to see for their children here in the Holy Land.”

The program was created with the vision of giving children a safe and welcoming environment to enjoy a sport and also foster relationships that transcend religion and nationality.

“Children Without Borders is a very interesting and very important project for children. We are targeting children from the age 5 to 15 to provide them – to give them the opportunity to practice, to discover their talents and develop them,” said Mr. Suheil Dibes, Director of Children Without Borders.

“In the beginning we wanted to provide our children with the opportunity to spend their free time in a constructive way and to take them away from all of the bad things in life. Football [soccer] was – still is – the most popular game here. So we decided football is the main tool to stimulate our children.”

Children Without Borders gives young children the opportunity to practice twice a week on a soccer team coached by an individual whose mission is to help the children achieve not only personal goals, but achieve goals as a team. This experience gives each of the children the opportunity to grow and develop in a safe and healthy environment.

Since the program started, the teams have competed in many tournaments throughout the Holy Land.

In a recent interview, Mr. Dibes further explained the origins of the program and the impact it not only makes in the lives of the children but also in their families.

“Children Without Borders is a very important tool for parents as well. I am a father and a school director. We know the problems the parents are facing with their children. With Children Without Borders parents have a tool in order to stimulate their children. It is a very important tool in order to keep children around and to help the society.”

Children Without Borders seeks to ensure a mental, moral and physical empowerment of children living in the different cities of the Holy Land. Its main mission is to send children out into the world equipped with a wide vision, firm will, and strong faith.

The program is open to all children, Muslim and Christian. This collaboration at a young age reinforces in the children that living together and living in peace is possible.

“We are in the cities of Palestine, and these cities are mixed cities – Christians, Muslims. One of our goals is to teach our children to live together, to respect each other. We have Christians and Muslims in all of our branches of the program. We are open to everyone because we decided to provide our children with these morals: to live together, to respect the other.”

Children without Borders operates under the FFHL. It would not be possible to run the program without the help from supporters and dedicated individuals in the Holy Land that value each child and strive for peace.

In Mr. Dibes words, “Without the sponsorship from the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land the program would not be what it is today, we wouldn’t have achieved anything. I would like to thank every donor, everyone who supports us through Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. Believe me, everyone who supports us is actually helping in building a new future in this area of Palestine.

“Our slogan is – ‘We shape the future.’ We are talking about a city that will be built with those children in the future.

“It is a mission. It is not only playing football. It is far more than playing football. It’s the future. It’s the future everyone would like to see for their children here in the Holy Land.”

In a world that appears to be filled with mayhem and division, Children Without Borders is a glimpse of hope that rests in the generations to come. This program empowers young children and gives them the physical, mental and emotional skills they need to contribute and promote peace in all parts of the world.

The full interview with Mr. Suheil Dibes can be found on the FFHL YouTube Channel, www.youtube.com/user/ffhlvideo.
FFHL Regional Groups Prepare for a Season of Giving

Over the years, the FFHL Regional Groups have been a vital part of fundraising and awareness for the work of the FFHL in the Holy Land. As we look to the Fall, the FFHL Regional groups have been busy planning for the 2016 Fundraising Dinners. This September, three of the regions are inviting you to join them as they help to support the work of the FFHL and the programs it supports for Christians in the Holy Land.

The Regional Dinners help to support the FFHL programs such as, scholarships for students seeking an education both at universities and vocational schools, housing programs, family centers and job placement programs. The regions work not only to financially support the FFHL, but to also raise awareness of the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

Dallas, TX:

The Dallas Region has been active since 1994 and has worked over the years to organize pilgrimages to the Holy Land that create awareness of the work the FFHL does for the Christians living there. In addition to the pilgrimages, the Dallas Region organizes and hosts fundraising dinners and luncheons.

Not only do these dinners and luncheons raise money for the FFHL but they also serve to raise awareness of the programs and work of the FFHL in the Holy Land.

The Dallas Region of the FFHL is proud to announce that it will hold its 2016 Regional Dinner on Saturday, September 17, 2016, at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Dallas, Texas. The Keynote Speaker will be Raymond Arroyo, News Director of EWTN's The “World Over,” who will be speaking on “Preserving the Franciscan Presence in the Holy Land.”

For more information about the Regional Benefit Dinner contact Susan Stanzel at (214) 521-8779.

Orlando, FL:

The Orlando Region of the FFHL has been active since 2004 and has hosted many events, dinners and social gatherings to raise funds and awareness for the work of the FFHL.

One specific FFHL program the Orlando Region supports is the Bethlehem Christmas Program. Every year, the region raises funds to help the FFHL provide young people living, in times of economic strife, with the joy of a special gift during the Christmas season. It is this simple gift that brings joy back to the faces of many children living in the Holy Land.

The Orlando Region will hold its Regional Benefit Dinner at the Westin Lake Mary, Orlando North, on Saturday, September 10, 2016. The Keynote Speaker will be Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, President of the FFHL.

For more information about the Regional Benefit Dinner contact Faith Libbe at (407) 699-7161.

Cradling Christianity in Columbus, OH:

A group of Catholic pilgrims from Columbus, Ohio who went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, formed Cradling Christianity. Upon their return, they desired to assist the FFHL provide education, housing and employment for Christians in the Holy Land.

Cradling Christianity hosts benefit dinners not only to raise funds for the FFHL, but to also bring awareness to the issues the Christians in the Holy Land face everyday. It works to promote education in the Holy Land by sponsoring student scholarships.

A Mass and benefit dinner hosted by Cradling Christianity will be held in Columbus, Ohio on Tuesday, September 6, 2016 at St. Agatha Parish and Banquet Hall. The Keynote Speaker will be Raymond Arroyo.

For more information about the Regional Benefit Dinner contact Chuck Mers at (614) 679-6446.

It is the countless hours and hard work of all of the FFHL Regional Groups that help to make the work of Franciscans in the Holy Land possible. In addition to these three regions, groups from Indianapolis, IN, Lincoln, NE and Washington, D.C. also work to promote and support the FFHL.

Consider attending one of the three dinners to help benefit the FFHL and the programs it supports in the Holy Land.
A WORK OF LOVE UNITES CHRISTIANS

Renovating the Holy Sepulchre

The tomb, that was the resting place of Jesus, after his crucifixion, was originally prepared by Joseph of Arimathea for his own eventual entombment. A friend and devout Jewish disciple of Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea, who, according to all four Gospels, pleaded with Pilate for the body of Jesus, offered the tomb for Jesus burial. We know Jesus was only there for three days before being resurrected and spending his final days on earth in communion with his disciples.

Known as the Holy Sepulchre and revered as one of the holiest sites on earth, the tomb's 2000-year history is rich and ongoing. This tomb is an important destination for pilgrims, just as it was when the Emperor Constantine built the first basilica over its location in 335 AD. 2000 years of well-documented historical events, natural disasters, including fires and earthquakes, and the ever-present deteriorating effects of human interaction, culminated the 1959 decision, by three main Christian denominations in the Holy Land (Greek Orthodox, Latin and Armenian), that it was time for a major restoration.

The restoration that began more than five decades ago is currently in its final phase.

After years of surveys, assessments, meetings, and other restorations inside the Holy Sepulchre, the heads of the Churches of Jerusalem approved a plan to restore the edicule or shrine above the tomb.

"In all likelihood, we will start work by the end of the week," stated Antonia Maropoulou, a chemical engineer, professor of the National Technical University of Athens and scientific coordinator of the work in an interview on May 26, 2016. "We cannot estimate how long restoration will take yet, Ms. Maropoulou admits, "but we have organized things so pilgrims are always guaranteed access to the Holy Sepulchre."

The restoration team has organized its work so that throughout the restoration, workers will be able to continue 24 hours a day. The bulk of the interior work is scheduled at night when the site is closed. Access to the Holy Sepulchre will still be available to pilgrims during regular daytime hours.

As for the work itself, the three churches have agreed that it should be a "conservative restoration." The shrine itself will be carefully dismantled and rebuilt to its identical design. Parts of the shrine that are too fragile or broken will be completely replaced using original materials. The marble that can be preserved will be cleaned thoroughly and made to look like new, and the structure that supports it will be consolidated and reinforced.

The team of workers, about 70 in all, will include administrative as well as technical functions. Many of these workers are artisans including marble chiselers and workers from the Acropolis of Athens. In addition there are skilled masons, restorers from Greece, local workers and a work group of about 27 from the National Technical University of Athens.

In the end, the Holy Sepulchre will not be any more sacred than it was 2000 years ago. It will not represent the love and sacrifice of Christ any more than it did when Joseph of Arimathea placed Him in the tomb. However, this restoration will allow pilgrims to experience this holy space, this place for thousands of years to come.
A New Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate

The FFHL congratulates Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa as the new Apostolic Administrator

“I have been asked to ‘return to Jerusalem’ (cf. Lk 24), like the Apostles after ‘the events in Jerusalem’ and the encounter with the Risen One. Through the Pope, the Lord has asked me to return to the Holy City after my experience as Custos of the Holy Land,” wrote Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa in a letter to the Diocese of Jerusalem. “I return to Jerusalem, primarily with the desire to serve the local clergy and the whole community, asking all of you for understanding, friendship and collaboration.”

In June, Pope Francis accepted the resignation of the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal and appointed in his place an apostolic administrator.

An apostolic administrator is a title given by Pope Francis for the position in authority after the departure of a bishop. This position will administer with full power to the diocese. The apostolic administrator may be for a specific period of time but it can also be without a concluding date. Pope Francis appointed Fr. Pizzaballa who recently completed twelve years as Custos of the Holy Land and Chairman of the FFHL Board of Trustees to serve as Apostolic Administrator of the Latin Patriarchate until he appoints a new Latin Patriarch.

With this role as Apostolic Administrator, Fr. Pizzaballa will be elevated to the Archbishop of the diocese in Jerusalem. He will be ordained in September and take over his new position at that time.

“Accepting the invitation of Pope Francis, I would like to share from Jerusalem, from this holy and wounded city for us and for the whole Church: the ability to meet and greet one another, build roads and bridges, and not walls between us and the Lord, between Bishops and Priests, Priests and Laity, between us and the other Churches, between us and our Jewish and Muslim brothers and friends, between us and the poor, between ourselves and those in need of mercy and hope. Only in this way can we fully respond to the special universal vocation of the Church of Jerusalem, the Church of the Holy Places.

“Beginning from Jerusalem’ (Lk 24:47), I will be with you and for you, as the one who opens paths, who promotes the culture of encounter and shares with each and every one the challenge and enthusiasm of following Jesus for the good of the Church and the world.

I am confident I can count on your support, with the prayers from the contemplative oases of the Diocese and of the entire people of God, that I particularly need. May the Lord accompany us in this our new journey together.”

The FFHL Receives Highest Charity Rating

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land has been awarded Charity Navigator’s 4-star evaluation for the third consecutive year.

This 4-star evaluation is awarded for sound fiscal management and commitment to accountability and transparency. “Only 14% of the charities we rate have received at least 3 consecutive 4-star evaluations, indicating that the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land outperforms most other charities in America,” said Ken Berger, president and CEO of Charity Navigator.

Charity Navigator evaluates charities based on 17 metrics. The “Accountability & Transparency” metrics, which account for 50 percent of a charity’s overall rating, reveal which charities have "best practices” that minimize the chance of unethical activities and whether they freely share basic information about their organization with their donors and other stakeholders.

“We are pleased to be awarded the 4-star Charity Navigator rating as we strive to be good stewards of the monetary gifts we receive from our donors,” said Fr. Vasko, ofm. “The contributions from each of our donors is valued and used in good conscience to serve our fellow Christians in the Holy Land.”

Based on information provided in IRS form 990, Charity Navigator analyzed FFHL’s performance in 7 financial metrics: program expenses, administrative expenses, fundraising expenses, fundraising efficiency, primary revenue growth, program expenses growth, and working capital ratio. Based on the 17 metrics used for the evaluation, the FFHL had an overall rating of 95.44 on a scale of 0-100.

“It’s important our donors trust we are using our funding wisely to help preserve the Christian presence in the Holy Land,” said Fr. Vasko, ofm. “Our 4-star Charity Navigator rating demonstrates to our supporters we take our fiduciary and governance responsibilities seriously and they can trust our investments in the Holy Land.”
Our Syrian Brothers and Sisters are in Need

“In the face of the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing death in war or hunger, and who are on the road to hope of life, the Gospel calls us, asks us to be near, the littlest and the abandoned.” – Pope Francis

It goes without saying that Syrians are facing a challenging time in history. As the violence and harsh conditions increase, many Christians are facing unsafe and chaotic conditions. Most are being forced to leave their homes and communities to seek safety for their families. There has been an influx of refugees leaving war-stricken Syria and finding safety and hope in surrounding countries and in parts of the Holy Land.

Since the start of the Syrian Civil War in 2011, over four million refugees, mostly women and children, have fled from Syria. Many factors such as an international embargo, city-wide power outages, lack of basic necessities and the constant threat of violence from Syrian rebels and security forces have contributed to the mass Syrian exodus. According to the United Nations, over 13 million Syrians have been in need of humanitarian services just in the past six months.

In this same period, the Franciscans have seen a growing influx of refugees leaving war-stricken Syria and finding safety and hope in surrounding countries and in parts of the Holy Land. The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land believes it is our duty as Christians to help our fellow brothers and sisters in this time of extraordinary need.

The FFHL has set up a special fund to provide aid for these Syrian Christians fleeing their homeland. In addition to helping them with the basic necessities of food, shelter and clothing, the FFHL is helping to support health clinics and a hospital in Aleppo, operated by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. The FFHL is also assisting the Custody with four reception centers to receive refugees and provide them with love and other basic necessities. It is dedicated to providing them with the essential resources they need right now!

Just as Pope Francis invites all of us not to forget the men and women seeking a better future, please prayerfully consider supporting the FFHL in its efforts to provide Syrian refugees with basic necessities, love and hospitality. These are our Christian brothers and sisters and they need our help!

For more information or to make a donation, visit the FFHL website. www.ffhl.org

Where Are They Now?

Doreen Ajrab

Doreen Ajrab was born and raised in Jerusalem. She was one of five children in her family. Like many other young girls, Doreen grew up in the Old City in Jerusalem and went to the Terra Sancta – St. Joseph School for Girls and other Terra Sancta schools.

When Doreen graduated from the St. Joseph School in 1998, she was grateful to hear that she had been awarded a University Scholarship from the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. “When they told me about the scholarship I was very happy because I am one of 5 children and my parents could not help me with university schooling.”

Doreen went on to spend four years studying Education and English at Hebrew University. She had to learn Hebrew in order to attend the University. Before she had even graduated, she was teaching Hebrew in a Terra Sancta school in Jerusalem. For the next seven years, she taught Hebrew in the schools where she was once a student. She thought learning Hebrew would give Christians more career opportunities and more reason to stay in the Holy Land.

“I knew the situation of those kids in that school (Terra Santa), especially the Christians in the Old City, because I was one of them. I wanted to help those kids,” said Doreen. “I chose Terra Sancta schools. I chose my school and I chose to stay with those kids. I want those kids to experience what I experienced.”

Her experience of growing up in the Old City and once attending the school where she was teaching sparked a desire in her to make a difference in the lives of the young people. Doreen saw a need and she decided to go back to school to get a Master’s Degree in School Administration. Her hope was to be able to help guide the schools (Cont’d on Page 11)
Cradling Christianity gives Hope

Educating Christians in the Holy Land is a gift to many

Over the years, members of the group have sponsored students and have helped them to achieve a bachelor’s or master’s degrees from universities in the Holy Land. When these students attend schools in the Holy Land and establish relationships through apprenticeships and internships, they are giving back to the community and deepening their desire to live and work in their communities in the Holy Land.

One of these students is 19-year-old Hani Tourjman. Cradling Christianity sponsors Hani’s education at Bethlehem University where he is studying accounting. He is one of three children in his family and would not be able to attend Bethlehem University at this time without the help of the FFHL University Scholarship Program.

“If I didn’t get this scholarship I would take, for example, a one-year gap to work to get some money and then I would go to the university to study,” Hani stated. “But you really made my life easier when I got this scholarship.”

This is the case for many Christians in the Holy Land. Many times, students must take time away from school to work to pay for their education. Once students step away from the classroom to find work to fund their education, it is difficult for them to return to the universities to finish their education.

Hani is like many individuals. He has great dreams and ambitions to build his life in the Holy Land. “I will stay here after I get my M.A. so I can help more Christians to stay here to prove that Christianity is important in this country,” said Hani. “My dream is to open a small family business and maybe we will hire more Christians to help us. It will be an important company in this country and we will also support the Christians in this country.”

Christians are slowly leaving the Holy Land to find work and educational opportunities for their families. It is feared that over time the Holy Land will lose its living stones of Christianity.

“In Palestine the Christians are the minority. We need support from the Christians outside (the Holy Land) to help us stay here to prove that Christians can succeed. They are strong, they can study, they are good people and they can have a high ranking in society. We can then help other people,” Hani said when asked about supporting education for Christians in the Holy Land.

“I want to thank Cradling Christianity for their support and motivation. They paid the fees. I can’t express the feeling of how grateful I am for them. I want to promise them that I will maintain my GPA, I will have higher marks and I will be an ‘A’ student. I will also help other people. I will do my best to give back to my community. If I can help Cradling Christianity with anything, I will. I am very grateful.”

(Cont’d from Page 10)

Today, Doreen takes great pride in her accomplishments and is a School Administrator in a Terra Sancta school in the Old City of Jerusalem where she grew-up and received her education. Daily she works alongside her colleagues to provide the kids in the school with opportunities and experiences similar to what she had as a student. “I am hoping to stay in this school to make it better and to help the kids stay in school.”

For more information about scholarships and ways you can help Christians in the Holy Land visit the FFHL website. www.ffhl.org
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