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FOR THE HOLY LAND

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HAPPY 25TH ANNIVERSARY TO FFHL



Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

Founded in 1994, FFHL is dedicated to preserving Christianity in the Holy Land. Over the past five decades, the Christian population has diminished steadily.

Bethlehem was 86 percent Christian in 1950, today the Christian community makes up only 12 percent of the population. Sadly, without our efforts, we will continue to see a decline in the number of Christians in this area.

The importance of preserving Christians in the Holy Land is undeniable. It is the place where Jesus died sacrificially for our sins and rose on the third day. It is the embodiment

of the birth of our religion, the place every Christian can call home.

But as those living in the Holy Land continue to face political strife and economic despair, many Christians flee for a more stable life and are leaving the Holy Land in droves.

From our humble beginnings, we asked ourselves, "How can this exodus be stopped?" and thus FFHL was formed under the auspices of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land.

We know that if we can provide the same opportunities and quality of life sought elsewhere, Christians will choose gladly to stay and thrive in the Holy Land.

FFHL provides critical programs and projects that serve as motivation for Christians to remain.

With these incentives and safeguards, Christians can plant strong roots and build the foundation for their families to live a Christ-centered life in the place Jesus called home. From the beginning, FFHL has focused on educating young Christians from early schooling to upper graduate degrees.

Since 1997, FFHL has awarded scholarships to deserving Christian students that are economically marginalized, but have strong academic talent.

Thanks to the generosity of our donors, these scholarships

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OUR MISSION

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,*



Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM

Our family, health, and faith are some of the many blessings we have to be grateful for during this time when we are celebrating Thanksgiving.

Let us remember that these gifts would not be possible without His sacrifice and that we should also emulate His love through giving.

Your gifts spread love throughout His Kingdom and make a difference in the lives of your brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

Because of your generosity, FFHL is able to influence positive change in the lives of Holy Land Christians. As a non-profit organization, our programs are only possible through the support of our donors. The board is forever thankful for those who have chosen to support and continue to bless our mission with their generosity.

Please offer up your prayers for the Living Stones of the Holy Land so we may serve each one with the love of Christ.

**I remain a servant of God and yours,
in the Spirit of St. Francis,**

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

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Hello, my name is Zaki Sahlia, a past recipient of FFHL scholarships and current attorney. Growing up, I was raised in a Christian home in Jaffa/Tel-Aviv with my four siblings.

We regularly attended the Franciscan Parish of St. Anthony's in Jaffa, and I attended the Terra Santa School there as well.

When I was 13 years old, my whole life changed. My father had a stroke and was unable to work anymore. This tragic event affected my whole family. My mother had to go to work in order to try and pay for all five children's school tuition, our family's food and clothing and our basic necessities.

It was a very difficult time for my family, the change really impacted our lives. Luckily, Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land came to our assistance financially and helped pay for our school tuition, something that I will never forget. After attending school at Terra Santa, I was able to attend Hebrew University in 2008, thanks to an FFHL scholarship. There I secured a BS.C in Chemistry. After graduation I continued my education earning an LLB law degree in 2012 and an LLM degree in 2014. Again, FFHL assisted me financially in earning my degrees and gave me an irreplaceable opportunity.

After graduation I was able to work as a teacher in Terra Santa Schools. I was also fortunate enough to do my law internship at one of the biggest Israeli firms in the country, as well as work as a legal clerk for a District Court Judge in Tel Aviv. Unfortunately, securing employment as a Christian in the Holy Land has its challenges.

As a Christian living in Jerusalem there are so many positive aspects of my life. I grew up in the land where Jesus lived, I have walked its streets and worshipped at the Holy Sites. It truly feels like a piece of heaven when you visit the places Jesus visited, where he turned water into wine and where he died and rose on the third day. However, Christians are a minority people living in a land surrounded by dire political turmoil that affects every aspect of our lives. Christians are used to the suffering and like it was said in the Gospel, they "turn the other cheek."

Yet in spite of all the political issues swirling around them, the indigenous Christians of



the Holy Land have become even more embedded in their faith, since this is what gives them hope in maintaining their existence in this land. Most motivated, young Christian students who are able to obtain degrees have a good chance at finding a job after university graduation.

I was extremely fortunate in that FFHL gave me the opportunity to pursue my dreams and earn an education in the place I call home. I have recently opened up my own private law firm in Jerusalem, specializing in real estate and property management. This would not have been possible without the support of FFHL.

In my experience interacting with the Franciscan Friars, they are always working on developing their ministry. The Friars help people in need, encourage students to get educated, invest in competent people and employ Christians in their ministry and work on their skills. The Franciscans have always provided new hope for the future Christians of the Holy Land. I am grateful to the Franciscan Friars and the support I have received from FFHL. Americans supporting and providing our young Christians a college education is the most helpful and generous gift they can give. So many Christians here experience dire economic difficulties that they cannot afford the tuition, but they have the necessary academic acumen. When they do go to college, a high majority of those who graduate secure professional employment in the Holy Land, and that is how we can grow our faith in the home of Christ.

I would like to take this opportunity to again thank FFHL and its donors for providing me the support I needed to stay in the Holy Land and lead a life centered on Christ.

Forever Grateful,
Zaki Sahlia

have allowed 473 students to attend university and pursue dreams of higher education leading to better careers and more fulfilling lives.

In addition, scholarships have allowed 279 students to pursue vocational or technical careers with the generosity of donors.

It is with tremendous gratitude that we can announce 752 total higher education scholarships have been awarded to Christian students since FFHL was founded.

To help in our mission, we also started leading pilgrimages of faith to the Holy Land. These pilgrimages give Christians in the U.S. the opportunity to experience the connection with Christ first hand and renew their relationship with God.

It also provides unique insight into the life of Christians in the Holy Land, by immersing pilgrims into their culture and surroundings.

When pilgrims return to their communities, they become a voice and advocate for our Holy Land Christian brothers and sisters so they are not forgotten.

In an effort to ensure the light of Christ is not extinguished, FFHL facilitates humanitarian programs in the Holy Land. One of our annual events is the Children's Christmas Program, a night where over 900 Christian children and their families in the Bethlehem area come to feel the love of Christ.

Presents are distributed and the community worships with prayer and song. FFHL is deeply appreciative of our volunteers and donors that make this program possible, bringing joy to so many children whose lives have been impacted by economic difficulties.

Now, FFHL facilitates annual pilgrimages and has thirteen humanitarian and educational programs running.

Over the last 25 years, we have awarded scholarships, created children's programs, built housing, offered job placement, and worked to restore the relics of Christianity. As a non-profit organization, none of this would have been possible without the generous



FFHL Photo Archive 2004: Father Amjad, OFM with Holy Land children

support of our donors and tireless efforts of volunteers. We thank all those who have contributed their time, money, and prayers to preserving the Living Stones of the Holy Land.

May God bless you all and grant us the wisdom and compassion to continue making a difference with our mission. ■



FFHL Archives: Father Marwin, OFM driving FFHL transport van with children from the Franciscan Boys Home

FATHER PETER'S SPRING CAMPAIGN

Earlier this year during the Spring months, Father Peter, OFM, President of FFHL, traveled throughout the United States. During his travels, Fr. Peter visited regional volunteers, past pilgrims and supporters of preserving Christianity in the Holy Land.

Fr. Peter's trips allow United States based Christians to learn more about the Holy Land and how their efforts

work to preserve the Living Stones. We invite you to keep reading to learn more about Fr. Peter's U.S. visit and his recent activities in the Holy Land in pictures and captions.

As always, we thank our volunteers and FFHL family who helped organize these events and are continuously grateful for your contributions. ■

CHRIS PAUL GATHERING

Father Peter attended a dinner at the home of Christopher Paul, a supporter of FFHL.



Pictured above from left to right: (front row) VADM Joe Tofolo, USN (ret); Suzanne Tofolo; Father Peter, OFM; Cynthia Fox; RADM Chris Paul USN (ret); and Shannon Paul; (back row) David O'Brien and Jane O'Brien.

ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Father Peter visited Orlando, Florida to speak with committed volunteers in the area.



Pictured are dedicated supporters with Father Peter.

Front row left to right:
Norman Stachura, Sonia Canlas, Huguette Ayoub, Faith Libbe, OFS, Selim Ayoub.

Second row left to right:
Manijeh Bahrami and Diana Moon.

Third row left to right:
Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, and Fr. Robert Markunas.

VENICE, FLORIDA

Father Peter visited Venice, Florida to visit with supporters and volunteers at an FFHL fundraising dinner.



Pictured above are Committee Members from left to right: Steve and Janin Marrone, John and Kathleen Yaglenski, Bishop Dewane, Fr. Peter, Maureen and John Lengyel.



Fr. Peter presents the Pope Leo XIII Gold Cross of Honor to Bishop Dewane.

MONROE, LOUISIANA



From left to right Georgie Porter, Martha Amman, Carol Hanks, Beverly Graham, John Morris, Buff Harvey, Ronda Herlevic, Marty Herlevic and Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM.



Host Jim Barry, Beverly Graham, Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, John Morris and hostess Amanda Barry.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION IN JERUSALEM



A great celebration took place on July 4th, in honor of Independence Day, in Jerusalem at the U.S. Embassy organized by the United States diplomatic mission.

Pictured on the left is Fr. Peter Vasko, OFM, USMC(H) who is the Chaplain for the Marine Security Guard in the area. In the center are the U.S. Ambassador to Israel, Mr. Freedman and the Prime Minister of Israel, Mr. Netanyahu and their spouses.

FFHL LAUNCHES THE GOOD SHEPHERD SOCIETY

Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is able to help preserve Christianity at the birthplace of the religion because of the continued generosity from our donors.

Thanks to the caring contributions made by our supporters, we are able to nurture deserving Christian students and families and help them succeed in establishing stable homes in the Holy Land. To help further our mission and preserve the Living Stones, FFHL is launching the Good Shepherd Society.

The Good Shepherd Society was created for donors who desire to keep contributing to FFHL's mission after they

have passed and God has welcomed them into the Kingdom of Heaven. Individuals who wish to leave a donation to FFHL in their estate will be welcomed to the Good Shepherd Society and their impact will live on through the organization. The names listed below represent all those we are aware of to date, who have made a provision for FFHL in their estate plans.

They are charter members of the Good Shepherd Society. If you have already made arrangements for a planned gift to FFHL, we would like to express our gratitude and welcome you to charter membership in the Good Shepherd Society.

Please visit FFHLlegacy.org or email us at info@ffhl.org to let us know of your intentions. If you would like to learn more about the Good Shepherd Society and making a planned gift, we are happy to answer any questions or address any concerns.

Contact us via email at info@ffhl.org or visit our new Good Shepherd Society website at FFHLlegacy.org. As always we are truly grateful for the support of our FFHL family. We ask that you continue to think of your Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land during this season of giving and in the new year. ■

God Bless

CHARTER MEMBERS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD SOCIETY

Dr. Joyce K.S. Babiak
Wanda Bears*
Helen Mary Bernard*
Carl Bieniewski*
Kaximierz Blachut*
Stanley Borowski*
Rev. Michael J. Chonko*
The Doyle* Family Estate
John C. Druding*
Michael J. Eivers*
Palma Farr*
Raphael Hellmann*
Marvin & Esther Jacobs Charitable Remainder Trust
Community Foundation

Anna J. Kunke*
Margaret McElroy*
Edmund Morelle*
Richard J. Noel*
Rosemary L. Phelps*
Denise Marie Scalzo
Clotilda Smith*
Marguerite B. Stein*
The Carmel J. Vitale* Living Trust
Charles P. Weber*
Mary Ryan* and John H. Wilson II*
Karinne Pevarnik Wolf*
Theresa R. Zawislak*

**Deceased*

PILGRIMS SPONSOR CHRISTIAN STUDENTS IN THE HOLY LAND

One of the avenues that Father Peter Vasko uses to raise awareness about the plight of the Christians in the Holy Land is by holding "Dialogue Evenings."

Those taking part in a pilgrimage get to hear young Christians speak about their situation in the Holy Land. Most Americans who go on a pilgrimage of faith are touched spiritually by the many Holy Sites, but never have the opportunity to meet or sit down with local Christians.

Most of the young Christian students that FFHL pilgrims meet have recently graduated and are now professionally employed. This is an educational opportunity that FFHL gives to any Christian student who is economically marginalized, yet has the required grades necessary to attend a college

or university. Once the pilgrims learn about the plight that these young Christians endure on a daily basis, many of them decide to assist monetarily by sponsoring a student for four years.

This can be done individually, or as a group as the Morris Pilgrims from Monroe, Louisiana did in September 2018, and the STA 2019 Pilgrims from Dallas did in January this year. We are grateful for the donations of these groups and the impact Christian students had on their lives.

If any of our readers are interested in sponsoring an economically marginalized Christian student to attend a local university for four years at \$6,000 per year, please contact us at info@ffhl.org or call toll-free 855-500-FFHL (3345). ■



Pictured above are the Morris Pilgrims from Monroe, Louisiana who visited the Holy Land in September 2018. After their trip, the group decided to sponsor one Christian student's university scholarship.



Above the STA 2019 Pilgrims from Dallas, Texas are pictured. After taking an FFHL pilgrimage of faith in January 2019, the group elected to sponsor two deserving Christian students for academic scholarship.

HOLY LAND PILGRIMS ARE AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST



Pictured above FFHL pilgrims and Orlando Regional committee members gather at Saint Paul Catholic Community in Leesburg, Florida, for a pilgrim reunion.

Going on a pilgrimage of faith will change one's life. As Father Peter, OFM, President of FFHL, tells pilgrims as they arrive to the Holy Land, "If you have your heart open to the Holy Spirit on your pilgrimage, God will do one, two, or three of the following. One, heal you of something. Two, touch your heart in a special way or Three, give you guidance in something." Pilgrims become ambassadors for Christ, having walked in His land as present day followers. "Reading the scripture at the sites where the events actually took place is a gift that keeps on giving," says Faith Libbe, FFHL's Orlando Regional Co-Chair. "Readings have a new richness and meaning to them for the rest of life."

Earlier this year on February 26th, a group of pilgrims traveled to Israel to experience the Holy Land. Faith Libbe, a thirteen-time pilgrim of the Holy Land, organized the pilgrimage. She describes the experience as an important opportunity to walk in the footsteps of Christ and to share the love of Jesus with the struggling Christian community. While there, pilgrims visit the Holy Sites, attend mass in the places Jesus taught, meet with Fr. Peter, and hear from Christians who have benefited from FFHL's dedicated efforts.

After returning from the journey, Faith Libbe organized a pilgrim reunion at Saint Paul Catholic Community in Leesburg, Florida. Twenty-two pilgrims were able to attend the event on March 31st. The powerful experience of a pilgrimage evokes strong feelings, and there is a lot to reflect on upon returning to the United States. The reunion offered pilgrims the opportunity to share with others and listen to those who have had the same experience.

Upon arriving at the reunion, pilgrims greeted each other and mingled until it was time for lunch. Father Mark Librizzi said a prayer over the food, and the pilgrims shared a meal together. A slideshow played during the reunion featuring photos from the Holy Land pilgrimage just a few weeks before. Pilgrims reflected on the fond memories as they experienced being at the Holy Sites again through photographs.

After lunch, Faith Libbe welcomed the pilgrims together and asked them to reflect on their experience and share what was in their hearts.

Herla Barthelemy said when she came back from the Holy Land she could barely speak about her experience without crying, "The Holy Spirit was so strong it was like I was in a cloud all the time, it was like I was in a dream. The Bible came so

alive, it is unbelievable. Now when I hear the Gospel, it makes more sense to me. My faith is stronger and I am ready to go back."

Pilgrims Joyce McCloskey and Jane Furnier both said the highlight of the trip in their eyes was mass at the Holy Sepulchre. The place of Jesus' crucifixion and tomb, the Holy Sepulchre, is a staple of the Holy Land pilgrimage.

Debbie Ellis - who was unable to make the reunion, but wrote to Faith Libbe - said, "Going on the pilgrimage was an experience that I will never forget." She noted that the pilgrimage helped her relate to the Gospels she hears every Sunday morning during mass. According to Debbie, she has traveled a lot in the past, but considers the pilgrimage to the Holy Land the most fulfilling trip she has ever had recalling, "Prior to the trip I was anxious all the time. I feel differently now."

After sharing their individual experiences, the pilgrims recognized together that they all had something in common - they walk literally and figuratively in the footsteps of our Lord. They were all eyewitnesses to the place where Jesus was born, where He lived and ministered, and where He died on the cross and ascended to be with the Father. Sharing the experience of a pilgrimage is sacred, forming a community of faithful individuals whose bond transcends the days that they are physically in the Holy Land. Many pilgrims continue to keep in touch individually or as groups to continue their work for Christ and reignite His Spirit within as a collective family.

Faith Libbe says a pilgrimage is like no other experience, "For this is the only place on earth where God walked among His creations in the flesh. His presence is still palpable to this day. To sit on the Sea of Galilee and experience the sunrise,

sunset and stars, one can realize this is the same vantage point our Lord had when He sat at the water's edge. The same place He prayed, we can pray. The same water He walked on, we can touch."

First traveling to the Holy Land in 1997, Faith Libbe has felt the call to return. To walk again and again in the footsteps of Jesus and be one with our Christian brothers and sisters. She says, "I know how deeply and profoundly it changed my life and want to offer this to others. I am so grateful to our Lord for these blessings."

FFHL offers multiple opportunities each year to attend a pilgrimage of faith to the Holy Land led by Father Peter Vasko, OFM, FFHL President. To learn more about FFHL pilgrimages and the opportunity to journey to the Holy Land next year, visit www.ffhl.org/holy-land-pilgrimages, email us at info@ffhl.org or call 855.500.FFHL(3345). ■



Pilgrims on the Sea of Galilee gathering pebbles and little shells from the very water that Jesus walked on.

"Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

-John 14:6



GIVING TUESDAY

Giving Tuesday was started to encourage an international movement of giving at the beginning of the Christmas season. Falling on December 3rd this year, Giving Tuesday is an extension of the grateful feelings of Thanksgiving and promotes kindness.

This year FFHL asks that you consider including us in your Giving Tuesday charitable contributions. As always, we are humbled and grateful when we receive donations. Know that your dollars make a difference in the lives of your Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR GENEROSITY AND CARRY YOU IN OUR PRAYERS

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SPOTLIGHT:

COLORADO PRIEST DONATES \$1 MILLION TO FURTHER EDUCATION

Don Willette is a retired Catholic priest and a Vietnam veteran living in Colorado. He was highly successful in real estate investment during his early career, working day and night to live the "American Dream" until one day a near-death experience changed everything. In 1983, he lost control of his car, and as it went careening over a cliff he thought his life was over. Through the grace of God, he walked away without a scratch. After his close brush with almost certain death, Willette decided to dedicate the rest of his life to serving Christ by becoming a

priest. He served as a Catholic priest in Colorado before recently retiring at Saint John XXIII Catholic Church in Fort Collins.

Now 77 years old, Willette is working to finalize an endowment for Colorado State University. This endowed faculty position will be responsible for teaching theology of Christianity and its traditions. To start the endowment, Willette sold some of his real estate holdings and donated the first \$1 million to CSU. His dream is that this faculty position will encourage students to have thoughtful

introspection and discussion regarding their spiritual beliefs and Christianity. Although another \$500,000 is needed to secure the position, Willette is confident the school will raise the money and that this valuable role will transform the spiritual lives of many students to come. In regards to the faculty position and course the money will support, Willette says, "It's about the basic question, who are you and what does it take to be a person?" ■

THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF SAINT FRANCIS' MEETING WITH THE SULTAN

*"Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love."*

- Saint Francis of Assisi

This year marks the 800th anniversary of Saint Francis of Assisi meeting with the Sultan of Egypt. Saint Francis decided to journey to Egypt with what seemed like an impossible, fatal task. Traveling during the Fifth Crusade, Francis sought a meeting with the Sultan of Egypt, Malek al-Kamil. Crossing enemy lines, Francis' fate was sure to be that of a martyr, but he proceeded on his mission nonetheless to do what he felt was his calling from God.

Passing thousands of dead, wounded and sick, Francis saw the true impact of the crusades along the way. With

Christians and Muslims at war, the meeting between Saint Francis and the Sultan was incredibly unique. Thought to be the first meeting between two such important men in their respective religions, Francis sought a dialogue of peace and understanding.

During their meeting, Francis spoke about the salvation of our Father and His love for His people. Francis appealed to Malek al-Kamil in the name of the Lord to declare peace among the land, to stop the killing of Christians and to condemn the strife between their two religions. According to

the law at that time, the punishment for Saint Francis preaching Christian values should have been death. However, Malek al-Kamil did not sentence him so, instead after spending a week as the Sultan's guest, St. Francis walked out of the encounter alive and well.

Despite their different faiths, the meeting marked the start of peaceful interactions and the presence of Franciscans in the Holy Land. The interaction changed Francis' perception of Muslims and he reexamined what he thought was important to God. Francis stood for peace and tolerance during a period of conflict. He sought to have a discussion of interfaith, without condemning the Muslim religion. This outlook was neither popular nor supported, but Francis persevered in the face of adversity.

Although this encounter took place in 1219, we can still apply St. Francis' approach to conflict today. Sadly, strife exists in the Holy Land. Christians are the victims of an unstable political and economic environment that has resulted in their exodus. Recently, Father Michael A. Perry, the minister general of the Franciscans said we should, "open ourselves anew to the transformation the Saint of Assisi experienced, and to walk together with Muslims and people of all faiths as fellow travelers, as builders of civility, and most fundamentally, as sisters and brothers, children of Abraham, our father in faith."

On the 800th anniversary of the founder of our Franciscan Order and the first Franciscan missionary for the Holy Land, Saint Francis of Assisi meeting with the Sultan, we must remember his message. Let us continue to live a life modeled after his, dedicated to the Lord and encouraging peace. We must remember the bravery of Saint Francis and his faith in the Gospel so that we too can have a positive, peaceful impact on the Holy Land and our world. ■



▲ Saint Francis of Assisi meeting with the Sultan of Egypt.

AN INTERVIEW WITH FATHER PETER VASKO

Father Peter was interviewed by FFHL board member Raymond Arroyo of The World Over at EWTN Catholic network in Washington, D.C, earlier this year. The interview revolved around various issues in the Holy Land. They discussed the plight of Holy Land Christians and FFHL's mission to ensure Christianity remains strong in the area. Fr. Peter televised interviews began with "Mother Angelica Live" many years ago and he has been a guest on EWTN periodically.

As a resident of Jerusalem for the last three decades, Father Peter brings a unique perspective to the issues of the Holy Land. The biggest impact Fr. Peter has seen is through education. FFHL has awarded 473 college scholarships to Christian students in the Holy Land over

the past 25 years. By allowing young Christians to receive a higher education, they can find dependable jobs, provide for themselves, and settle down and start families in the Holy Land. FFHL also offers vocational scholarships for two-year programs, which have been awarded to 279 individuals. Arroyo and Fr. Peter also discussed the safety of traveling in the Holy Land, the restoration of Holy Sites, and the pending tax laws that could negatively impact Christians even more. Arroyo hosts The World Over, which airs Thursdays at 8pm, Fridays at 1am and 9pm, and Mondays at 10pm ET. View this recent interview on FFHL's website at <https://www.ffhl.org/an-interview-with-fr-peter-vasko/>



FFHL RECOGNIZED FOR ITS SUPPORT OF HOSPITALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING CENTER

Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is always looking to provide educational opportunities for young Christians of the Holy Land. Whether it is funding college scholarship grants, musical grants, or vocational or trade grants, providing education opportunities is a crucial part of FFHL's mission. FFHL has been assisting students as they pursue various fields of study in vocational and trade schools since 2010. One of the students who was awarded an FFHL vocational scholarship entered the field of hotel management and cuisine cooking an area that is administered by the Pontifical Institute at the Notre Dame Jerusalem Center. The center trains students in a variety of trades including: hotel management, cuisine cooking, hospitality, and tourism, pastry, and baking.

This year on July 18, the Pontifical Institute at the Notre Dame Jerusalem Center held a 28th Commencement event for the various graduating classes in their respective fields. There were over 150 students who were graduating. The welcoming speech was given by Fr. John Solana, Director of Notre Dame Hotel,



while Brother Peter Bray, Chancellor of Bethlehem University, congratulated the graduates. Appreciation awards were handed out for the few organizations who have consistently supported the educational endeavors for the school.

FFHL was one of those organizations and Father Peter graciously accepted the award given by His Excellency Leopoldo Girelli, Apostolic Nuncio to Israel and Father Juan Solana, on behalf of the foundation. ■

FRANCISCAN FRIAR WINS BEST TEACHER AWARD

Brother Peter Tabichi, OFM, was awarded the Global Teacher Prize this year that comes with an incredible \$1 million prize. A Franciscan Friar from Nairobi, Kenya, Brother Tabichi teaches science and math to school children in a remote village. He was selected from 10,000 applicants as the winner of the award established by the Varkey Foundation, an organization that seeks to elevate the standards of education in developing communities.

His village is not only remote, but it is saddled with misfortunes such as drought and violence. Many children who live there are orphaned and school is their only sense of home. Keriko Mixed Day Secondary School is in need of equipment and resources, but that does not stop Tabichi from educating his students at the highest standard possible.

Brother Tabichi walks up to four miles to visit the nearest cyber cafe in order to

access the internet for resources for his students. He also donates 80 percent of his salary back to the school to provide assistance to the less fortunate children. Because of Brother Tabichi, the school's students have been successful competing in international science competitions and pursuing higher education. Tabichi plans on using his \$1 million prize money to help the school. ■

BETHLEHEM CELEBRATES ADVENT WITH SACRED TRADITIONS



end of the Old Testament: in exile, waiting and hoping in prayerful expectation for the coming of the Messiah.

Israel looked back to God's past gracious actions on their behalf in leading them out of Egypt in the Exodus, and on this basis, they called for God once again to act for them.

The Church, during Advent, looks back upon Christ's coming in celebration, while at the same time looking forward in eager anticipation of His return.

In this light, the Advent hymn "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" perfectly represents the Church's cry during the Advent season: In Bethlehem, the place of Jesus' birth, Advent is celebrated as a time of joyful hope. Each year, the Holy Land prepares for the birth of Our Saviour with traditions starting on the Saturday before the first Sunday of Advent.

This year on November 30th, the Custos of the Holy Land will start the tradition with a journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, following the same path Mary and Joseph took as they fled from danger to protect the Son of God.

When the Custos arrives in Bethlehem, he is met with crowds of Christians. They welcome the Custos into Manger Square where the First Vespers,

or evening prayers, are said. From there, a solemn procession leads to the grotto, the site of Christ's birth and one of the most sacred places on earth.

To mark the beginning of Advent, the first purple candle of the Advent wreath is lit, symbolizing hope.

After returning to Manger Square, the crowd listens to a blessing of the tree and gifts by the Custos and participates in singing Arabic carols culminating in the lighting of the tree and fireworks lighting up the night sky.

This traditional celebration has been called the true spirit of Christmas by those who witness it, and is a reminder of the night that changed the world.

As you prepare for Christmas, remember the true meaning behind this sacred day and the gift God gave to all of us through His son Christ Jesus.

May He bless you and your loved ones during this glorious season and throughout the New Year. ■

Today, the season of Advent is celebrated during the four weeks leading up to Christmas. At that time, the new Christian year begins with a twelve-day celebration from Christmas Eve until Epiphany on January 6th.

Advent symbolizes the present situation of the Church in these "last days" (Acts 2:17 , Hebrews 1:2), as God's people wait for the return of Christ. The Church is in a similar situation to Israel at the

*O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appears.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*



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