



FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND NEWSLETTER

FALL 58

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HONORING FR. VASKO'S 30 YEARS OF SERVICE

Fr. Peter F. Vasko's life story is a testament to faith and dedication. Leaving behind a successful corporate career, he became a Franciscan priest in the Holy Land, inspiring many to seek deeper purpose and a closer relationship with the Lord.

Fr. Vasko's path to priesthood began in the world of business and public relations, where he achieved considerable success and financial stability. Despite this, he felt a spiritual void and sought a more meaningful life. He left the comforts of his home in the U.S. to serve as a Franciscan priest in the Holy Land, starting a journey that has since impacted many lives.

In 1994, Fr. Vasko founded the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) to support marginalized Christian youth through education and scholarships. His leadership over the years has helped preserve Christian heritage and empowered young Christians to build better futures.



"My work with FFHL has been about giving back, finding daily opportunities to make a difference in the lives of those who need it most."

FR. PETER F. VASKO, OFM

One of his enduring legacies was in the countless pilgrimages that he led through the Holy Land, deepening the pilgrims' spiritual journey by following the footsteps of our Lord and Savior. Throughout his 30 years as president of FFHL, his desire to support the Living Stones in the Holy Land has been led by hope, love, and faith.

Reflecting on his journey, Fr. Vasko says, "I left behind success and comfort to follow my true calling. Becoming a Franciscan priest in the Holy Land has allowed me to find profound purpose and serve others in ways I never thought possible."

As we recognize Fr. Vasko's remarkable life's work, we honor his devotion and selflessness. His commitment to preserving Christian heritage in the Holy Land will inspire future generations to live and remain in their homeland.

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OUR MISSION

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is dedicated to supporting and preserving the Christian community and heritage in the Holy Land. Our mission is to provide essential resources and opportunities to families, empowering them to thrive in their ancestral homeland. Through our unwavering commitment to preserving holy Christian sites and supporting basic human rights, we aim to be a vital resource for the community. Our donor-based humanitarian programs and independent projects are designed to help Christian families not just survive, but flourish.

A LETTER FROM THE CUSTOS

Rev. Francesco Patton, OFM

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

May the peace and blessings of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and your loved ones. As we approach this season of

Thanksgiving, I want to express my deepest gratitude for your support of the Holy Land and the mission of FFHL.

Your generous contributions and prayers have made a significant impact on the lives of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land, especially during these times of great uncertainty. Through your compassion, we continue to provide vital resources to those in need, preserving the Christian presence in the land where our Lord was born, lived, died and rose again.

Your selflessness and devotion inspires us all. As we gather in gratitude, let us also gather in prayer, asking God to multiply His blessings upon you. May you be abundantly provided for, equipped to bless others, and may the peace of Christ dwell within you always.

Thank you for shining love and compassion in a world that greatly needs it. Please remember to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, whose lives have been affected by the ongoing conflict in the Holy Land.

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



Rev. Francesco Patton, OFM

Chairman of FFHL
Custos of the Holy Land

To preserve his legacy with the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, FFHL created The Peter F. Vasko Endowment Fund for Clergy Pilgrimages — a permanent endowment, established to honor Fr. Peter’s legacy and leadership, to provide financial support for religious pilgrimages for parish clergy. These funds will be invested to sponsor parish clergy to attend a pilgrimage with their church community. Pledges of support for the endowment may be made over 5 years or through testamentary gifts.

We thank Fr. Vasko for his 30 years of outstanding service and leadership. His legacy motivates us to find purpose and serve others. May his work continue to inspire people worldwide to make a positive impact on our Christian brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

If you are interested in making a gift to the Peter F. Vasko Endowment Fund for Clergy Pilgrimages, please call Denise Scalzo at (858) 775-1333 or email DScazlo@FFHL.org.

WELCOME FFHL’S NEW PRESIDENT, FR. JOHN PUODZIUNAS, OFM

Please join us in welcoming Rev. John E. Puodziunas, OFM, as incoming President of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, effective September 2024. With his wealth of experience and strong commitment to Franciscan principles, Fr. John is well-prepared to carry on the legacy of leadership and service established by Fr. Peter F. Vasko.



Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM, President of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land

As we begin a new chapter under Fr. John’s guidance, let us extend our wholehearted support and prayers to him as he assumes the role of leadership, ready to continue building upon the foundation laid by Fr. Peter. We are confident that he will lead FFHL with wisdom, humility and a firm faith to continue our mission of preserving the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

We would also like to express our sincerest gratitude to Fr. Peter F. Vasko for his 30 years of faithful service and leadership.

Fr. John was born May 28, 1960 to John and Angela Puodziunas in Philadelphia where he was raised and attended Catholic grade school and high school, and a few years of Lithuanian School at St. Andrew Parish. After completing high school, he began studies in Actuarial Sciences but at age 20 responded to a call to become a Franciscan Friar. Fr. John made his solemn profession on August 9, 1986 in the Franciscan Friars, Assumption BVM Province in Wisconsin, and was ordained to the priesthood on May 23, 1987 in Burlington, Wisconsin.

Fr. John graduated from Marquette University, Milwaukee in 1982 with a B.S. degree in Computational Mathematics and a minor in Philosophy; from Catholic Theological Union, Chicago in 1987 with a Master’s in Divinity; and from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, Chicago in 1991 with a Masters in Management (MBA).

He has ministered as associate pastor and pastor in parishes in the Chicago area, Wisconsin, St. Martha Parish in Philadelphia, and at various parishes as a visiting priest including St. Andrew and St. Casimir in Philadelphia.

Fr. John taught and served as chaplain at University of San Diego High School and Cathedral Catholic High School in San Diego, and served as chaplain at University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, Green Bay, and in Whitewater, Wisconsin.

Fr. John has been part of the television ministry Heart of the Nation, since its inception, and has preached at retreats and given talks around the world on Fraternal (Franciscan) Economics. He has served in the leadership of the Franciscans as Provincial Treasurer (1990-2000), Provincial Vicar (2005-2011), and Provincial Minister (2011-2015). Prior to joining FFHL as president, Fr. John has been serving as the General Economo (C.F.O.) for the Franciscan Order in Rome and as General Delegate to the Franciscan Friars of St. Casimir Province in Lithuania since 2015.



CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF IMPACT

FFHL celebrated 30 successful years of operations in July 2024. Thank you to each one of you, our loyal contributors, for being such an important part of this journey and allowing us to continue moving our mission and vision forward — providing critical resources to Christians in the Holy Land so they may live and remain in their homeland.

In case you missed it, please watch our highlight video featuring some of our top accomplishments over the last thirty years.



Scan the QR Code or Visit bit.ly/ffhl30years

CRADLING CHRISTIANITY BENEFIT DINNER

The annual Cradling Christianity Benefit Dinner, “Preserving Christianity in the Holy Land through Education,” was held at Our Lady of Victory Church & Hall (OLV) in Columbus, Ohio on September 12. The organization was founded in 2006 by a small group of Catholics in Columbus, raising more than \$1 million since its inception to support FFHL’s University Scholarship Program.



From Left: Kris Pellissier, Dee Pellissier, Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM

Keynote speaker, Christophe Cardinal Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States

From Left: Denise Scalzo, OFS, Bishop Earl K. Fernandes, Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM

The evening’s keynote speaker, Christophe Cardinal Pierre, spoke about the plight of Christians and others in Israel and Gaza. He quoted scripture from St. Paul and citings from a Papal Encyclical about the existence of war and how we, as Christians, should believe and feel about war. Event Chairpersons Dee and Kris Pellissier and Bishop Earl K. Fernandes received awards for their work and support of Cradling Christianity. *Event proceeds directly benefit FFHL.*



New Good Shepherd Society members Ardith and Chuck Mers pose with Fr. Peter F. Vasko

DALLAS BENEFIT DINNER

The annual Dallas Benefit Dinner was held on September 7 at the Dallas Country Club. The Most Reverend Anthony F. Lackland, Pastor of Christ the King Catholic Church, served as Master of Ceremonies. FFHL honored Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM, Custos of the Holy Land, and Mr. Raymond Arroyo of EWTN, The World Over, an internationally known, award-winning journalist, with the prestigious ‘Guardian of the Holy Land Award’. The award recognizes individuals who demonstrate an outstanding love of God and allow their gifts and energies to be used for those in need. During the dinner program, His Eminence, Pierbattista Cardinal Pizzaballa provided the keynote speech and spoke about the current challenges in the Holy Land.

“It is not enough to talk about peace, we need to build peace with concrete gestures. And thanks to you, we do this by investing in people, giving them confidence, opening their horizons and giving them concrete hope. In my past, I have personally experienced how the faithful of Texas have always been close to the Holy Land, with pilgrimages, financial support and the promotion of various other initiatives. Thank you on behalf of the entire Church of the Holy Land.”

HIS EMINENCE, PIERBATTISTA CARDINAL PIZZABALLA

Dinner co-chairs were Dr. Britt Talley and Patty Daniel and Nick and Julie Summerville. Honorary chairs were Burk and Elise Murchison. A highlight of the event was honoring the transition of Fr. Peter F. Vasko’s leadership to incoming president of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land Rev. John E. Puodziunas. *All proceeds from this event support FFHL’s mission.*



From Left: Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM, Denise Scalzo, OFS, Raymond Arroyo, recipient of the Guardian of the Holy Land award, Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM

From Left: Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM, Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM, Nick and Julie Summerville, Dr. Britt Talley and Patty Daniel, Cardinal Pizzaballa, Bishop Dewane, Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM

From left: Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM, Denise Scalzo, OFS, Fr. Francesco Patton, OFM, Fr. John Puodziunas, OFM

GOOD SHEPHERD SOCIETY LUNCHEON

The Good Shepherd Society Luncheon was held on September 11 at the Marriott Columbus Northwest in Dublin, Ohio. The Good Shepherd Society was formed in 2022 to honor those who have included FFHL in their estate plans. Fr. Peter F. Vasko, OFM, shared an update about the important work happening in the Holy Land. The update was followed by a pinning ceremony for recent members of the Good Shepherd Society.





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Bringing Hope to the Holy Land

This GivingTuesday, join the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land in bringing hope and essential support to families affected by the ongoing crisis. **Our goal is to raise \$15,000** to provide food, water, medication, and other critical resources to those in dire need.

Together, we can make a difference.

To learn more about how GivingTuesday helps Christians in the Holy Land, visit ffhl.org.

MARK YOUR
CALENDAR

**DECEMBER 3,
2024**



**GIVING
TUESDAY**



Newsletter Update

Going forward, we will now be sharing our bi-annual FFHL newsletters in February and September.

If you haven't yet, visit ffhl.org/contact-us/#e-newsletter to sign up and receive our latest news directly to your inbox.

We Want to Hear from You!

Your input is invaluable in helping us bring you the news you want! If you have stories you'd like to share in an upcoming issue, please contact Sarah Martini at smartini@ffhl.org.

For exciting news and upcoming events, visit ffhl.org/regions.