



FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND NEWSLETTER

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Photo Source: On the Election of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV - U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Italy

POPE LEO XIV, ONE OF US

A REFLECTION BY FR. JOHN PUODZIUNAS, O.F.M.
ON THE ELECTION OF POPE LEO XIV

From that first announcement, *habemus papam*, Americans in particular, have been trying to identify their connection with Pope Leo XIV, the unexpected choice of the Cardinals ... confirming that we want to feel closer than the six degrees of separation that connect each of us. My connection? We did our theological studies at the same theology school in Chicago, the Catholic Theological Union in Hyde Park. Pope Leo XIV completed his studies as I began my studies. We walked the same corridors, sat in the same classrooms, prayed in the same chapel, pondered academic works in the same library and were inspired by the same teachers. That seems close enough to claim a connection.

My initial impression is that Pope Leo XIV is a man who first reflects in actions and appearance what he believes, namely that as successor of Peter, he is called to serve and lead Catholics of all cultures to embrace the person of Jesus Christ as redeemer, and that the church in this embrace of the message, in a living and recognizable tradition, through integrity of its words, actions and deeds transforms the world. Then we know God's love. Then we realize peace. While many people are looking for a political ideology in Pope Leo, he proclaims first and foremost, the Gospel. From the Gospel, the message transcends personal opinion, academic ideas and political ideologies.

What does this mean for the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land and its mission of safeguarding the Christian presence in the Holy Land? In addressing pilgrims for the Jubilee of Oriental Churches, Pope Leo called for an immediate end to conflicts raging around the world, including in the Holy Land, and he encouraged Christians in the Holy Land to remain firm in their faith and to remain in their homeland. The Foundation and the Holy Father speak a common message, rooted in Jesus Christ, we serve the vulnerable, we safeguard their presence in their homeland...we have a persuasive partner.

We wish Pope Leo well, we wish him God's blessing as he embarks on this new journey as Bishop of Rome, Vicar of Christ, Successor of St. Peter...as Pope Leo XIV.



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.



NEW CUSTOS OF THE HOLY LAND

FR. FRANCESCO IELPO, O.F.M.

It is with great joy and profound hope that we announce that on June 24, on this Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist, our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV has confirmed the election of our Brother, Fr. Francesco Ielpo, O.F.M. as Custos of the Holy Land and Guardian of Mount Zion.

ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE VATICAN

Br. Francesco Ielpo, an Italian national, was born in Lauria (PZ) on May 18, 1970. He professed his solemn vows in 1998 and was ordained to the priesthood in 2000. From 1994 to 2010, he served as a religious education teacher and, since 2000, as Rector of the Franciscanum Luzzago Institute in Brescia. Between 2006 and 2010, he was a member of the National Council of FIDAE (Federation of Educational Activity Institutes), and from 2007 to 2010, served as Provincial Definitor of the Lombard Province. From 2010 to 2013, he ministered as parish priest of the Franciscan Parish of Saint Anthony of Padua in Varese. In September 2013, he was appointed Commissioner of the Holy Land for Lombardy, with his mandate extended in 2016 to include the entire Province of Northern Italy. Since 2014, he has served on the Board of Directors of the Pro Terra Sancta Association. Since 2022, he has also held the role of President of the Holy Land Foundation, while simultaneously serving as Delegate of the Custos of the Holy Land for Italy.

We look forward to welcoming Fr. Francesco as Chairman of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land and for our sharing in the common mission of safeguarding the Christian presence in the Holy Land. Let us pray for Fr. Francesco as he takes on this new position.

In a statement to the Vatican media, Fr. Ielpo emphasised how "the service that the Order and the Church have asked of me immediately made me realize the enormous disproportion between my humble self and the duty required of me, particularly at this moment in history. So, as on the day of my religious profession, I entrust myself to God, to the Church, to my Order and to my brothers!"

GRATITUDE FOR JIM CORNELIUS

AS HE RETIRES FROM THE FFHL BOARD

Jim Cornelius recently retired from the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land Board after a decade of faithful service. On behalf of the entire organization and leadership, we are grateful for Jim's extraordinary contributions to our mission and his support of preserving the Christian presence in the Holy Land.



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In Jim's 10 years of service on the Board of Trustees, bringing his expertise to the Finance and Investment Committees, serving as Chairperson of the Investment Committee, and his generous financial support, he has been an invaluable partner to FFHL in safeguarding the Christian presence in the Holy Land. We are forever thankful.

FR. JOHN PUODZIUNAS, O.F.M.
President, FFHL

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Jim Cornelius brought great leadership and vision to the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land Board. Words cannot express the gratitude for his vision, participation and financial support. I know Our Lord will reward him and the Cornelius family in ways we could not imagine. Thank you so much, Jim.

DENISE MARIE SCALZO, O.F.S.
Vice President & Founding Member, FFHL

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I personally would like to thank Jim Cornelius not only for his great dedication to the mission of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land as a member of the Board of Trustees over these many years but for his generous philanthropic endeavors especially in being one of five individuals who gave substantial funding to restore the Tomb of Christ at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre here in Jerusalem for all Christendom. He is truly a dedicated Catholic person. We will miss him.

FR. PETER F. VASKO, O.F.M.
Founding President, FFHL

SUPPORT GOES A LONG WAY

AN EVENT HOSTED FOR FFHL IN MONROE, LA

We are thankful for the ongoing support from individuals across the U.S. who are helping raise awareness for our Christian brothers and sisters. Most recently, Dr. Chris and Szu-Wei "Susie" Domingue organized an event for FFHL in Monroe, LA; it was hosted at the home of Lori and Eric Thitbodeaux. Special guests in attendance included Fr. John Puodziunas, President of FFHL; Fr. Peter F. Vasko, Founding President; Denize Marie Scalzo, Vice President; Mike LeCuyer, National Director of Regions; and Fr. Peter Mangum of Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish in Monroe.

Fr. John and Fr. Peter spoke about the conflict in Israel and its direct impact on the Christian community, emphasizing the role Holy Land Christians have to the foundation of the Catholic Church and the need to protect their presence in the region.

The goal of the foundation is to raise awareness about the crisis in the Holy Land and the threat to Christianity's roots in the region. Events like this one help grow local understanding of what Holy Land Christians face each day. Over the years, FFHL has expanded its network of supporters through similar events in cities across the country, and there are even more being planned.

We thank Dr. Chris and Susie Domingue and Lori and Eric Thitbodeaux for their work organizing and hosting the evening.



(L-R) Susie Domingue, Dr. Chris Domingue, Lori Thitbodeaux, Eric Thitbodeaux, Fr. John Puodziunas

CHARLES AND LINDA NEUBECKER

INVEST IN FAITH AND EDUCATION



Charles (Chuck) Neubecker

What inspires someone to sponsor the education of students thousands of miles away? For Charles (Chuck) and Linda Neubecker, the answer is simple: gratitude, faith and a deep desire to give back.

Although they had supported FFHL for many years, they first began sponsoring individual students three years ago. "The first student we sponsored completed a two-year program, and now we support Celina Giacaman, a third-year nursing student at Bethlehem University."

Faith has always been central to the couple's motivation. "Our faith is integral to our support of FFHL and the other causes we support. It's important to us to invest in the next generation of Christian leaders, particularly in the Holy Land." Although they have not met Celina in person, their connection is heartfelt and sincere. "We've received messages from her, and her family even sent us a beautiful nativity set last Christmas from their shop near the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. It's the most beautiful nativity set we've ever seen."

When asked what he would say to someone considering sponsorship, Chuck's response is clear: "Many great students need help. Sponsoring a student in the Holy Land is relatively inexpensive compared to the U.S. We need to maintain a Christian presence there. The most meaningful part is knowing we're helping deserving students who might not otherwise have the chance to attend university — equipping them for adult life and careers in the Holy Land."

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It's important for people not only to take care of their families, but also to share their resources – monetary and otherwise – with those in need, especially in places facing deep hardship. As the saying goes, 'No man is an island.'

CHARLES (CHUCK) NEUBECKER



Linda Neubecker

DAY OF SHRINES & WINES PILGRIMAGE

A GREAT WAY TO LEARN ABOUT FFHL

On June 5, 2025, 54 pilgrims set off on the *Day of Shrines & Wines Pilgrimage*, sponsored by the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land (FFHL) and Columbus' Cradling Christianity (CC). This one-day event of prayer, reflection, touring and wine tasting was the idea of a CC committee member during a brainstorming session. While CC will still host its annual event on September 4, 2025, the chance to share FFHL's mission with over 50 people through a spiritually-rich day – with a touch of fun – was too good to pass up.

The day began with a rosary led by Msgr. Stephan Moloney, Pastor of Columbus St. Andrew Church, on the motor coach, followed by a presentation titled *Relics: 6 Degrees of Separation* by Fr. John Puodziunas, President of FFHL. Upon arriving at the Shrine of Maria Stein in Maria Stein, OH, Fr. John and Msgr. Moloney celebrated Mass in the chapel. The group then enjoyed guided tours of the reliquary – home to over 1,200 relics – and the museum.

A beautiful lunch followed in the Shrine's "Upper Room," with time afterward to stroll the grounds or visit the gift shop. Later, Msgr. Moloney led the group in praying the Stations of the Cross in the outdoor gardens of the Shrine.

The group reconvened in a transformed "Upper Room," now styled as a wine tasting room, for an fun and educational presentation of four selected wines by Columbus wine expert Dan Tarp. Paired with charcuterie plates and lively discussion, the tasting closed out the visit, followed by a quiet coach ride back to Columbus.

It was a spiritual, educational and enjoyable day for all – deepening their connection to Cradling Christianity, FFHL, its mission and Fr. John.



Photo: Pilgrimage group standing in front of the altar inside the Maria Stein Shrine; Fr. John Puodziunas in the front center-left, Msgr. Stephan Moloney in the front center-right.

UPCOMING EVENTS

SEP 04	Holy Land Connection Reception with Fr. John COLUMBUS, OH
SEP 04	Cradling Christianity Fundraising Dinner COLUMBUS, OH
OCT 02	To the Holy Sepulcher – Frick Collection Exhibition Frick.org/Exhibitions/Holy_Sepulcher NEW YORK, NY
OCT 02	Good Shepherd Society Luncheon WASHINGTON, D.C.
OCT 04	Vatican Embassy Dinner WASHINGTON, D.C.
NOV 30	2025 Jubilee Pilgrimage with FFHL WASHINGTON, D.C. ITALY

WANT TO BE PART OF SOMETHING SPECIAL THIS

Holiday Season?

Share your email with us, and you'll receive a personal Christmas greeting video and card from FFHL. Don't miss out – join us in spreading hope and joy this Christmas.

To get your email added to our mailing list, visit [FFHL.org/Contact-Us](https://ffhl.org/Contact-Us) and fill out the short form today!





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JOIN US ON OUR 2025 JUBILEE PILGRIMAGE

Washington, D.C. | Rome | Assisi



NOVEMBER 30 –
DECEMBER 11, 2025
11 Nights | 12 Days

To request more information or to reserve your spot, please email Info@FFHL.org.

FFHL invites you to join us on this rare pilgrimage opportunity during the 2025 Jubilee, a special year of renewal and prayer.

Explore sacred and meaningful sites in Washington, D.C., Rome and Assisi, stay connected to FFHL's mission and grow in your faith.

Join the papal audience in Vatican City, where you will have the opportunity to be blessed by the Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV.

FR. JOHN PUODZIUNAS, OFM

President of FFHL, devout Franciscan and experienced guide, will lead this pilgrimage.

SPACE IS LIMITED

HELP US STAY CONNECTED – YOUR WAY

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/FFHL-Tax-Comms to let us know how you'd prefer to receive your gift receipts – by email or by mail.



This quick survey takes less than a minute and helps us move toward more efficient, eco-friendly communication. *Thank you for your continued support.*

WE WANT
TO HEAR
FROM YOU

Have ideas or topics you'd like us to cover in a future newsletter? Interested in upcoming an pilgrimage? Have any feedback or questions?

EMAIL US AT Info@FFHL.org,
WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is a tax-exempt non-profit organization pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All contributions to the Foundation are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.

Donations will go to unrestricted unless otherwise noted; see our website for program information. Please remember us in your will.