

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND



SUMMARY REPORT

HOLY PLACES

2019/2020

CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND
Order of Friars Minor

Summary Report 2019/2020

For many centuries the Custody of the Holy Land has been committed to the conservation and revitalisation of the Holy Places of Christianity in the Land of Jesus and in the entire Middle East. Among the various objectives of the Franciscan mission, one should keep in mind the support and development of the Christian minority that lives in these places, the conservation and enhancement of archaeological sites and sanctuaries, the interventions in the case of emergency, the liturgy in the places of cult, the apostolic works and assistance to pilgrims. Besides, for the biennium 2019/2020, the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land has been manifested through the planning, programming and execution of the following projects and works:

- I. Works addressed to pilgrims.
- II. Works in favour of the local community.
- III. Other works – Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and RhodesKos.
- IV. Ordinary stipends of the Custody.

The underlined works have been realised thanks to various kinds of economic contributions, among which the Good Friday Collection comes first, followed by the activities of fund raising of the *Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land* (FFHL) and the *Associazione pro Terra Sancta* (ATS), as well as by other private and institutional donors, besides the entries coming from activities that have been carried out.

At the moment of writing this report (January 2021), here in Jerusalem, as in the rest of the world, Covid-19 is afflicting ever larger sections of the population, with grave repercussions on the health and economy systems, and also on society at large and on the life of the Church. At this point in time we have been without pilgrims from the end of February 2020. This means grave economic difficulties for the local Christian communities, for the families of our Christian faithful and also for the Custody itself. The collection *pro Terra Sancta 2020* was postponed to 13 September, upon request by the same Congregation and thanks to the benevolence of the Holy Father. This means that we are still not able of quantifying the result of the collection or of knowing when the resources will be made available. In the meantime, we are trying to continue the mission that has been entrusted to us, knowing that Divine Providence which has willed us to be here will continue to take care of us. Many of the works listed here have therefore had a slow progress and result “in a phase of planning”, while priority has been given to those interventions that have had a social scope and effect.

WORKS ADDRESSED TO PILGRIMS

Ain Karem: Sanctuary of the Birth of Saint John

- Conclusion of the renewal of the roofing work of the church of Saint John the Baptist, which include the consolidation of the stone vaults.
- Work in progress on the restoration of the sacristy and the adjacent environments, which suffer from serious problems of humidity.
- Planning phase of the renewal of the roofing of the friary.
- Planning phase of the works of restoration of the church where archaeological excavations are foreseen.
- Planning phase of the security of the electrical system of the entire building, which includes friary, church, seminary and pilgrims' hospice.

Ain Karem: Sanctuary of Saint John in the Desert

- Planning of the intervention for regimentation of rain water in the area surrounding the friary.

Beit Sahour: Shepherds Field

- Completion of the works on a new entrance to the friary, independent from that of the sanctuary.
- Completion of a boundary wall that collapsed as a result of the rains of the winter of 2019-2020.
- Planning of the interventions for the conservation and development of the site, an extensive intervention that will include new external chapels for celebrations, the redevelopment of the cave, new bathrooms and infrastructure.
- In phase of completion the executive planning for the realisation of new bathrooms with some accessory environments that would include a small souvenir shop, a refreshment area and a multifunctional hall for conferences for small groups.

Bethany: Sanctuary of the House of Martha, Mary and Lazarus

- In phase of completion the restoration and enhancement of the byzantine and mediaeval remains of the friary of Bethany, through: the recovery of deteriorated areas; formation and work of 10 Palestinian young people on the project of restoration; support of the entrepreneurial activity of the local feminine association; a didactic project with the primary schools for the knowledge of the local archaeological and religious sites (supported by ATS).

Bethlehem: Basilica of the Nativity

- Collaboration with the other ecclesial communities present and with the Palestinian National Authority for the restoration of the Basilica of the Nativity, by now in the phase of completion.
- Completion of the work on new sitting benches for the presbyterium of Santa Caterina.
- Completion of the reconstruction of the façade of the friary.

Bethlehem: Convent of the sisters

- Study phase of the finding of a solution for the problems of humidity affecting the convent of the sisters, which stands above ancient cisterns for the storage of rain water, which are no longer accessible.

Capernaum: Sanctuary of the Eucharistic Promise

- Concluding phase of the planning of new explanatory signboards and signposting of the sanctuary.

Emmaus Qubeibeh: Sanctuary of Saints Simon and Cleopas

- Working progress on the interventions of extraordinary maintenance for the conservation of the structures of the friary and of the ex-seminary.

Jericho: Sanctuary of the Good Shepherd

- Enlarging of a classroom of the school.

Jerusalem: Basilica of Gethsemane

- Concluded the archaeological excavations that have uncovered a ritual bath of the I century, a small byzantine church of the V century with a stone inscription, the perimeter walls of the mediaeval monastery-hospice and various finds of stone remains.
- Concluding phase of the tunnel and lifts for groups of pilgrims, in order to link the area of the basilica with the Kidron Valley by means of a pedestrian path.
- Ongoing works for the building of a centre for the service of pilgrims in the Kidron Valley.
- Planning of a new flood-lighting system for the basilica, promoted by the Municipality of Jerusalem.
- Ongoing planning of 3 external chapels for celebrations in the garden of the friary of the Agony.

Jerusalem: Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre of Our Lord

- Completed the works of structural consolidation of the grotto of the Finding of the Holy Cross as a result of instrumental investigations and in-depth analysis.
- Completed the substitution of the lift of the friary.
- Planning phase of the restoration of the floor of the Basilica and the relative infrastructure, in agreement with the Greeks and Armenians and in collaboration with the Università La Sapienza (Rome) and the Centro Restauri di Veneria (TO).
- Planning phase of the complete renovation of the second floor of the friary with the building of an upper floor, in order to increase the number of friars present in the community and to improve the conditions of life of the friars, by making the environment healthier and in line with contemporary standards of lighting and ventilation, and more hygienic.

Jerusalem: Parish centre

- Completion of the interventions of extraordinary maintenance for the arrangement of spaces of the parish centre.

Jerusalem: Christian Information Center

- Continuation of the work on five didactic multimedia halls for pilgrims, dedicated to their knowledge of the Holy Sepulchre.

Jerusalem: Christian Media Center

- Completion of the renewal of the offices of the editors.
- Planning phase of the renewal of the offices of journalists.

Jerusalem: Convent of Saint Saviour

Infirmary

- Replacement of the lift/stretchers for the sick brothers.
- Planning phase of a new system of air-conditioning and sanitary hot water.

Offices

- Completion of the renovation of environments for the transfer of the Souvenir Shop in view of the realisation of the new museum.

Convent

- Completion of the renewal of the kitchens of the friary.
- Concluding phase of the interventions of extraordinary maintenance of the roofs.
- Completion of the renewal of the ground floor of the sisters' convent.
- Completion of the renewal of closed-circuit video surveillance system.

Jerusalem: Friary of Terra Sancta College

- Phase of restoration of the chapel regarding safety, as a result of structural decay by water infiltration from the roof.
- Ongoing assessment of the state of static and seismic security of the entire edifice.
- Completion of a new IT communications office at Terra Sancta College.

Jerusalem: Maria Bambina, house of welcome for pilgrims

- Completion of the works of security of the electrical system.
- Ongoing extraordinary maintenance of a section of the building with 6 rooms.

Jerusalem: Sanctuary of Dominus Flevit

- Ongoing realisation of a master plan of interventions for the improvement of the way in which pilgrims and visitors to the sanctuary can be welcomed.
- Ongoing works of restoration of a small building adjacent to the friary, which will be used as a sacristy and external chapel, to be concluded soon.

Jerusalem: Terra Santa Museum

- Completion phase of the interventions of structural consolidation of the environments that will complete the museum area in the sanctuary of the Flagellation.
- Completion phase for the realisation of a modern museum centre for the enhancement of the Franciscan artistic, archaeological and cultural patrimony. Within the area of circa 2500 m² will be included:
 - Archaeological Museum: The Places of the Bible in Palestine (Flagellation Convent) (Third phase);
 - Historical Museum: The Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land (Convent of Saint Saviour).

Mount Nebo (Jordan): Memorial of Saint Moses

- Repairing of some roofs that suffer from water infiltration.
- Realisation of a cemetery area for the burial of Jordanian friars who died of Covid-19.

Mount Tabor: Basilica of the Transfiguration

- Completion of the total renovation of an external chapel for pilgrims.
- Planning phase of general interventions for the conservation of the site, with the creation of an internal parking lot for the friary, works on the road linking the external to the internal parking lot, with pavements and walkways for disabled persons and with services for pilgrims.
- Final works on the intervention of structural consolidation and restoration of the bell towers.

Naim: Sanctuary of the resurrection of the widow's son

- Planning phase of the interventions for the re-opening and development of the site.

Nazareth: Basilica of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin Mary

- Works of restoration and maintenance for the conservation of the Holy Grotto.
- Planning phase of the renovation of an internal floor of the friary with the adjustment of the electrical system, central heating and sanitary hot water, in order to make use of modern systems that consume less power.

NB: In the realisation of these works, in spite of the fact that they become more complicated because of the need to request permits and because of various lockdowns, we have given first preference to employ workers coming from the West Bank, in order to give work to Christians coming from a territory that cannot benefit from welfare or social security.

WORKS IN FAVOUR OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Works in favour of young people

- Bethlehem: Boys' Home; House for 27 male children, of whom 10 are boarders in social difficulties.

Scholarships and subsidies

- Financing of 490 university scholarships (227 from the Custody + 336 from the FFHL) for the length of 4 years, distributed in the various universities (Bethlehem, Hebrew University, Bir Zeit, Amman).

Support for artisan initiatives

- Financial help in order to secure the work of 10 small artisan activities.

Activities for supporting families

- In Bethlehem the projects for supporting a parish family counselling centre continue; the project is directed to more than 20 children (ages 6-12), coming from families in difficulty; medical assistance for families in serious economic difficulties (ATS); renovation of houses belonging to families which are most in need (supported by FFHL) .
- On many occasions supplementary economic aids have been sent to Bethlehem in order to meet the health expenses of families and the expenses for basic foodstuffs.

Works in favour of parish communities

Schools:

Amman:

- Creation of a platform **Terra Sancta School**, for Online Distance Learning.
- Modernisation of a computer Lab for classes 1-3 elementary level.
- 370 new compact disks for pupils of classes 1-4 elementary level.
- Covering of play grounds of the school with turf field and synthetic material.
- Covering of the roofs of the friary and of the gym with isolating membrane from atmospheric agents.
- Covering of the parking lot for school buses with asphalt.
- Conclusion of the works of renovation of the *Peace building* of 1976.
- Ongoing works of renovation of the small seminary, namely Saint Francis' house, adjacent to the college.

Bethlehem:

- Ongoing works of accommodation of the multipurpose *Millennium* hall.

Cana:

- Ongoing work for the construction of a new school (the structural works have been terminated). The complex will also include a parish centre and a covered parking lot covering an area of 5.000m².

Jericho:

- Conclusion of the installation of overhead projectors in the classrooms.

Jerusalem - Saint Joseph School (Jaffa Gate):

- Conclusion of the extraordinary maintenance of some of the classrooms.

Jerusalem - Terra Sancta School(Damascus Gate):

- Ongoing work of new premises for sport structures underneath the large courtyard of the school, which will include a swimming pool, a gym and playgrounds on the roof of the building. These premises will also be used by young people of the Old City.
- Completion of the renovation of the school premises.

Jerusalem - Hellen Keller School – Beth Hanina:

- Nearing completion the renovation of the elementary school after the opening of the kindergarten two years ago (80 pupils).

Jerusalem - Hellen Keller School (school for students with visual impairment):

- Completion phase of the renovation of the school after its recent acquisition.

Jaffa:

- Planning phase of the interventions of structural consolidation and seismic adjustment of a portion of the edifice which will include 6 classrooms of the elementary school.

Apartments for needy and young couples

Jerusalem:

- Old City. Continuation of the work of renovation of the houses of the Old City with the aim of improving the living conditions of the residents: complete renovation of 5 houses; partial renovation of 4 houses; renovation of external structures (façades, roofs, etc.) of 6 houses.
- *Dar al Consul renovation project*. Since 2013 this project includes the renovation of the residential complex of the Old City, with 42 apartments and a ground floor which was not being used. The area of the project covers circa 2.500m²:
 - Class A renovation with the major interventions for 16 dwellings (ongoing, with 7 completed);
 - Class B renovation with medium interventions for 10 dwellings (ongoing, with 10 completed);
 - Class C renovation with minor interventions for 10 dwellings (ongoing, with 10 completed);
 - External renovation of 6 buildings (ongoing, with 4 completed).
- *Dar el Kbire*: ongoing procedure for acquiring permits for enlarging the building of 300-400m² and planning of improvement intervention on 19 existent dwellings and external structures (façades, roofs, etc.). The total area included in the project covers circa 2500m².
- *Tumian Palace*: ongoing planning and procedure for obtaining permits for enlarging the edifice with the building of 3 extra floors and 800m² for residential and religious use.
- *Abu Geries*: ongoing planning and procedure for obtaining permits for enlarging the building with the building of 750m² destined to become offices, restaurants and shops.
- *Pisgat Zeev housing project*: ongoing planning and procedure for obtaining permits for building a new residential complex with 70-80 housing units and 300m² for commercial use.

Nazareth:

- *Karm el Sacheb housing Project*: ongoing planning and procedure for obtaining permits for the building of a residential complex (church, premises for social purposes, 80 apartments for young families).

Other cultural works:

- *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*. Every year the Custody of the Holy Land supports economically the Faculty of Biblical Sciences and Archaeology of the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* of Jerusalem. It offers circa 30 scholarships to students coming from various poor dioceses, for the entire period of their studies.
- *Christian Media Center*. The services offered include: Website, completely renewed, simplified in use and now mobile friendly; *Terra Santa News*, a weekly news bulletin which features faith, history and current events in the Holy Land; it is transmitted by circa 35 broadcasting houses in the world in 8 languages (from this year also in Chinese); documentaries on social and religious themes, in various languages; direct transmission of liturgical celebrations and events.
- The *Magnificat* Institute of Music. Affiliated with the Vicenza Conservatory the *Magnificat* promotes activities of research and cultural manifestations on the local and international level. It welcomes more than 250 Christian, Muslim and Hebrew students, led by 30 professors who are also Hebrew, Christian or Muslims.
- Formation of 54 students in biblical sciences at the *Studium Biblicum Franciscanum* coming from various parts of the world, to whom the Custody guarantees food and lodging. They will be destined to become lecturers of Sacred Scripture in various countries of the world.

Custody of the Holy Land – Works accomplished – 2019/2020

- The International Franciscan Seminary of Saint Saviour in Jerusalem and the Seminary of Ain Karem, and theological formation at the *Studium Theologicum Jerosolymitanum* for more than 30 young brothers coming from various Provinces of the Order of Friars Minor.
- Formation of 83 young religious in the Custody (from aspirant candidates to those on specialised studies).

OTHER WORKS

In Syria, Jordan and Lebanon the work to help the Syrian and Iraqi Christian and non-Christian population is ongoing. These initiatives are geared to help those who are living in a situation of extreme need, through the presence of the Friars of the Custody of the Holy Land and with the collaboration especially of the ATS for fundraising.

In Lebanon

- Welcome and temporary support for 14 Iraqi families at Deir Mimas and more than 47 other families in the area of Harissa and Jounieh.
- School support for 28 Iraqi children and young people at Deir Mimas, besides other 35 in the area of Harissa and nearly 65 in Jounieh. Help for 40 Syrian young people in Jounieh and Beirut.
- Following the explosion of 4 August in Beirut:
 - 731 families have been helped with food packs and hygienic material. 68 of them live in Tripoli and all the others in Beirut. An average of 145 families receive help every month;
 - 14 houses have been renovated;
 - circa 20 families are helped to pay rent or to buy furniture;
 - 50 families receive help to acquire medicines;
 - 20 students are helped to pay their university fees.

In Syria: Aleppo

Help through the parishes of Aleppo, Damascus, Knayeh, Yakoubieh and Latakieh.

- Centre of emergency of Aleppo in the parish premises:
 - distribution (monthly-every two months) of food packs for Latin families (€50 each);
 - emergency health assistance (for a monthly cost of €30 thousand), for medical visits, medical exams, medicines, surgery, in favour of the parishioners.
- As a result of COVID during this year we have carried out interventions of complete assistance for all necessities, among which: medical visits, blood tests, radiography and PCR tests, medicines for sick persons, vitamins for all the family members with exams and medical visits, service of transport of oxygen tanks to houses, payment for hospitalisation, payment for service of intensive care whenever necessary:
 - contribution to the expenses of surgery of Christians coming from all Christian communities, in collaboration with their own Churches;
 - medical assistance for pregnancy, labour, post-natal assistance for both mother and child;
 - care of cases of sterility for new Christian families of all the Churches;
 - care for children and for their growth under all aspects:
 - primary needs for milk and diapers for the children of the parish, with a monthly subsidy for each child;
 - centre for post-traumatic cure from the effects of war for Christian and Muslim children;
 - distribution of clothes, twice a year, to more than 1000 children;
 - financial help for centres of catechism and summer camps in the poorest parishes;
 - summer camps for more than 800 children; material, logistical and content adoption for 6 summer camps of five parishes;
 - project for “after school” in favour of 50 children with learning difficulties;
 - course of English and French at various levels in the city for 65 children, who are promising in study;
 - economic support for children with particular gifts for music, singing and playing the piano-forte,

Custody of the Holy Land – Works accomplished – 2019/2020

- scholastic support (monthly allowance) for students of schools and universities, for Latin students.
- Repairing / reconstruction of houses that have been damaged (with three levels of damage): this is an on-going project since 2016 with 2000 houses that have been rebuilt until today in favour of all Christians of all Churches.
- Helping to launch new enterprises and working activities (1700 persons), in favour of all Christians of all Churches.
- Project to welcome 200 Christian soldiers who have been discharged after 10 years of obligatory military service: helping them by creating an opportunity for work for each one.
- Contribution in the payment of compensation for exemption of young people of all Churches who escaped from their Country in order to avoid obligatory military service.
- Project of wedding gift, in favour of Christian couples of all Churches, which includes: payment of the rent of the house for one year, and/or buying of domestic appliances, and/or furnishing of one or two rooms, and/or repairing of the house.
- Project of rents, with symbolic prices, of houses (15 have been rented on a total of 22), acquired or donated, during these years of war, to newly-wed couples and to poor families.
- Project of support for families of priests and of their poor relatives, for all Catholic and Oriental Churches.
- Project of support for Armenian-Orthodox priests, with a monthly salary and health care in case of need.

Syria: Damascus (Bab Touma, House of Ananias, Tabbalehand Salhieh)

- Help for young poor families.
- Medicines and medical interventions.
- Newly-born children and helping students in their study needs.
- Renovation of the internal spaces of the parish of Bab Touma, for youth activities.
- Renovation of environment that can be adapted to become a library for the benefit of the parish and of students.
- Help for welcoming and supporting sick persons.
- Education, and helping nursery for children in Tabbaleh.
- Centre for post-traumatic treatment for children and adolescents who experienced the war.

Syria: Lattakieh

- Monthly distribution of food packs to circa 300 families.
- Centre for post-traumatic treatment for children and adolescents who experienced the war.
- Help for refugees in the 3 villages of **Knayeh, Jacoubieh and Sjdeideh**.

Rhodes - Kos

- Help with foodstuffs and first aid for refugees who transit through the centre of temporary welcome in Rhodes and in Kos.
- Rhodes: weekly distribution of 500 food and health packs for poor Greeks and refugees.
- Beginning to repair the pastoral centre of Kos after the earthquake.
- As a result of the economic crisis in Greece since 2008, the Custody:
 - helps in the psychological support of cancer patients;
 - offers free lessons of English and Italian for the local population;
 - offers scholarships for the young people of the parish.

**ORDINARY STIPENDS
OF THE CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND**

- Monthly wages of circa 1.020 employees in Israel and Palestine, divided between 15 schools (60 % of the total number of employees), 4 Case Nove for pilgrims (20 % of the employees), 80 sanctuaries, 25 parishes and many other activities.
- During the COVID pandemic the employees with residence in Israel could benefit from a kind of layoff (*halat*) that the State pays for them and which corresponds to 70 % of their wages. In various moments of the year the Government has requested to reduce the personnel up to 30 %, but thanks to this form of welfare the residents in Israel have been able to continue living without too many problems. The workers from the State of Palestine, on the other hand, were totally deprived of any welfare. For this reason, the Custody has chosen to continue to pay half the wages of the employees in the Palestinian territories, who have had to remain at home, and obviously 100 % of the wages of those who could come to work. The Custody has tried to employ in the convents and in the works of restoration especially the Palestinian Christians in order to guarantee a support for their families. This choice is obviously an onus on the economy of the Custody in a moment when there are no entries from sanctuaries as a result of the total absence of pilgrims ever since the end of February 2020.

Jerusalem, 15January 2021