



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

The duty of rekindling hope

An interview with Rifat Bader on how the Church is supporting migrants in Jordan



The Catholic Church in the Holy Land is at the forefront in welcoming refugees from the Middle East, above all in the organization of schooling for children and young people. The Order greatly contributed to these actions in 2015 through a generous donation to Caritas Jordan.

Father Rifat Bader is the director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media in Jordan and the pastor of the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Naour. The Catholic Church in Jordan is an integral part of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, together with that of Israel, Palestine and Cyprus. In this interview, Fr. Bader speaks to us about the Catholic Church's commitment to supporting many migrants who are fleeing Syria and Iraq.

How is the Catholic Church in Jordan coping with the great number of refugees arriving from the Middle East? What are the different initiatives carried out to help them by both Catholic and non Catholic organizations?

Over the past years the Catholic Church has been doing its best to provide all the necessary services to Christians who were forced to leave Syria and Iraq. The Church, through its social-arm, Caritas, managed to provide them with housing at the various churches and Christian centers in Amman and other cities in Jordan. The Church also provided free education to their children in all Catholic schools, due to the help of the Italian Bishops Conference. These families have also been offered the opportunity of working at Catholic-affiliated institutions in Jordan in order to help them support themselves.

Caritas Jordan has been providing free medical care to Iraqis. With the launching of the “Restaurant of Mercy” in Amman, which provides free meals on a daily basis to the poor and needy, several displaced Iraqis have also benefited from this free service.

In addition to Caritas, we are also counting on the Pontifical Mission office in Jordan and the Missionaries of peace Spanish association, as the main catholic institutions for support.

Local charity organizations including public schools have assumed the responsibility of supporting the displaced in the field of education. Some other non Catholic institutions, such as the Holy Bible Association and the Council of Churches in the Middle East, have worked in providing some specific aid.

Through the Catholic center for Studies and Media, affiliated with the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, we have been able to spread through social media networks – mainly through the website www.abouna.org in English and Arabic – news and pictures of the support given to poor and needy people, without any discrimination.

There are many children arriving and a school for young migrants has been established near your parish. Can you tell us more about it?

A total of 290 Syrian students have enrolled in the school located near my parish of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Naour - Jordan. Students age from 4 to 15 years old. They attend classes on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 4 PM to 7 PM. Among them are 120 students who attend public schools and have academic weaknesses. They take “remedial classes” on Saturdays from 3 PM to 8 PM. This school opened its doors to these students on January 19, 2016. This is one of the schools for Syrian children, and we have 10 schools organized by Caritas in many different cities and villages.

What is the reason pushing you to work so hard in welcoming refugees?

Jordan is a safe haven for peace in the region. Our duty as citizens and as Christians is to alleviate the suffering of people from all walks of life. I have realized that these people have lost everything in life. They lost their homes, jobs, properties and businesses. They even lost all glimmers of hope to ever enjoy a life free from problems. They lost their future. It is our duty to bring them hope in accordance with our means. This is the message we have learned from the Gospel.

How can the positive experience between Christians and Muslims in Jordan be an example for interreligious relationships in the Middle East?

We are doing our best to create “brotherly” relations between Christians and Muslims in Jordan. We have been doing this through holding seminars and conferences that call for dialogue, tolerance and cordial relations. We have also started a plan urging major changes to the school curricula, designed to highlight the Christian role in the region and to disseminate equality and fraternal relations between followers of the two religions. Total success in this endeavour will take some time, yet I believe that we will be successful in the end as the Jordanian society is known to be peaceful and harmonious.

How do you deal with intercultural and interreligious issues with migrants? How might differences become a source of mutual enrichment?

There are no major intercultural problems, since Jordanians, Iraqis and Syrians mostly share the same culture. Yet, the interreligious issues are easily surmounted through presenting equal treatment and care, without discrimination, for both Christians and Muslims. In other words, religious differences never serve as a stumbling block, because the love we demonstrate concretely towards Muslims does bridge all gaps and creates an atmosphere of love as well as an acceptance of the other.

Over the past centuries, our Christian schools in Jordan have contributed to improving the educational standards of Muslim students who currently occupy key positions in the country and have a positive view towards Christians.

How do you see the next future for Jordan? What are the possible scenarios for your country?

I believe that Jordan will definitely remain a stable country, despite the recent setback in security and the presence of terrorists on its territory affiliated with militants groups in neighboring countries. Jordan has always played a key role of moderation. It serves as a bulwark against extremism and terrorism. In brief: Jordan is a safe house in the midst of a burning avenue... our task is twofold: to keep our home safe and to help the citizens of the avenue to put out the fire.

Interview by Elena Dini

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