

Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarchate

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Jerusalem on the 15th of October 2021

Ten-Year Anniversary of Jerusalem Students Scholarship Program (2011-2021)

In communion with our Patriarch, His Beatitude Joseph Absi, and dear Archbishop Yaser ElAyyash, who was elected by the Holy Synod to succeed me as Patriarchal Vicar in the Patriarchate of Jerusalem (upon my retirement a few years ago), I praise Our Lord and God for His marvelous deeds through the Knights of Columbus in Ontario Canada and all over the world.

Ten years have already gone by since the Jerusalem Students Scholarship Program was launched in 2011. This program was formed to help students who are in need of financial help (to cover some of the school tuition) at our Melkite Catholic Patriarchate School in Beit Sahour (Shepherds Fields) near Bethlehem.

In 2009, I travelled to Canada to visit my dear family (two brothers and three sisters) who had emigrated from Egypt to Canada many years ago. As I had just been appointed Patriarchal Vicar of Jerusalem in June 2008, I was invited to speak about our Diocese of Jerusalem in the Melkite Catholic Church of Toronto "Jesus the King".

In my speech, I talked about all the parishes served by the Diocese of Jerusalem, including (Bethanina), Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Betjala, Ramalla, Taybé, Naplouse (Rafidia), Jaffa. I spoke about our parishes in these cities and their schools. I also discussed the challenges faced by our Patriarchal

school in Beit Sahour, and the struggles our Melkite Catholic Patriarchate was having to maintain this school, in spite of its financial difficulties.

At the time, I didn't expect that my words (with the Holy Spirit's help) would inspire an enthusiastic and zealous parishioner, Hikmat Dandan, a man full of faith and love for his church. Following my speech, he told me with confidence "I will start a project in the Knights of Columbus to help the needy students and the school". I smiled politely, blessed his intention and forgot all about it. A year or so later, I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email from Hikmat announcing "It is done! That he, as the Grand Knight of Jesus The King Council of the Knights of Columbus, had founded the project to help the school in Beit Sahour". That's when the "Jerusalem Students" program took flight.

In the beginning, 5 students were sponsored. Each year the number has grown and today, 80 students are being sponsored with already 36 students having graduated while being sponsored and gone on to higher learning. An anonymous donor with a great and generous heart, has also been donating the amount of \$10,000 over the past few years, to help cover the general deficit of the school. Toronto Council has also been a major sponsor. Blessings to these special donors!

Sir Knight Hikmat, as founder of this project, has also been encouraging families to continue the education sponsorship of a student following the death of the original sponsor as a LEGACY SPONSOR, for example, the Farahat family. In memory of late Sir Knight George Farahat, his beloved family is continuing to sponsor a student. Sir Knight George's name is spiritually engraved in the walls of the school, may he rest in eternal peace!

Today, after 10 years, my heart is filled with love and gratitude for the abundant help. I praise and glorify the Holy Name of God, His great Mercy, for His generosity through the councils of the Knights of Columbus, their members and the parishioners. Our Lord and God was extremely generous to everybody, to the students and their parents, to the school, as well as to the sponsors themselves who received His help and graces one hundredfold.

During these years, serving as Archbishop Patriarchal Vicar at our Melkite Catholic Patriarchate of Jerusalem, I prayed every day for our school, for our students, for all the sponsors. As I have reached 80 years of age this year and, in communion with my very dear Archbishop Yaser, in our very beautiful Cathedral "Our lady of the Assumption" in Jerusalem, I continue to pray each day for all the Knights of Columbus members, our dear sponsors and their families.

Prayer

O Father, our mighty God who created all the universe, in your great love for all humanity, You sent Your only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who took flesh from our beloved Virgin Mary Mother of God. He taught us that you are "Our Father in Heaven". He accomplished many miracles, was arrested in Jerusalem, flogged, forced to carry a cross, crucified, died on the cross, put in a tomb, and rose from the dead. He gave His Holy Spirit to all who believe in Him, who are baptized, and who obey His commandments.

O Lord, Almighty Father:

Bless all the Knights of Columbus, especially the councils in Ontario Canada, the Christian Refugee Relief Director, Sir Knight Hikmat Dandan, all the Knights, all the sponsors and all the donors! May Our Lord protect them and their families from harm, giving them good health and all the graces that they need.

With my Apostolic blessing,



Archbishop + Joseph Jules Zerey

Patriarchal Vicar Emeritus

Jerusalem