**Your Excellency, Reverend fathers, Brother Knights, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

***Welcome to everyone here today*** to celebrate the achievements of the Jerusalem Students project. On behalf of the students who have benefited so greatly from your generosity, I wish to **Thank YOU,** the sponsors!

I understand that of the 71, there are approximately 25 sponsors in attendance with us today, who will receive their student files. 70% of sponsors are Knights, Councils and Assemblies, and I applaud you for taking on such an important role, that, being to help educate our brother Christian families in Jerusalem.

It is difficult for us here in our Country Canada to truly understand the reality of living in a land that is populated by a dominate religion which ignores and at moments, openly discriminates against us simply because we believe in another faith.

The media has shone light on the truth of the social situation in the Holy Land, and the need for our immediate assistance.

Have you heard the term, “The Power of One” ?

It only takes one person with one passionate idea to make one significant difference !

That person is Past Grand Knight Brother Hikmat Dandan from ‘Jesus the King Arab Christian Council’ who, as you are aware, founded ‘The Jerusalem Students’ project to respond in a tangible way to that *very real need* of our fellow Christians in Jerusalem.

With his ardent desire to ‘make a difference’ to even ONE student in the Holy Land, Brother Hikmat promoted this situation in ‘Jesus The King Melkite Catholic’ Parish through a power point presentation that his daughter and another Knight helped him put together. From this humble beginning, starting with just a handful of students being sponsored, this program has gained momentum and attention. Our social media through Brother Hikmat’s website, has aided in spreading awareness to local Councils, acquiring more sponsors each year.

Our Supreme Council conferred the “International Youth Service Award” in 2013 to ‘Jesus the King’ Council 15045, at the Supreme Convention held in Texas that year. This resulted in the website of ‘Jerusalem Students’ expanding from 20 students to 100 students and the Program has been growing ever since.

In 2015, the Archbishop of Jerusalem was invited to the Annual Mass where he blessed you, the sponsors, and gave you the file of your student.

This event was documented in the Knights of Columbus magazine resulting in Knights from all over North America learning about the situation, and sponsoring more students.

Already 11 students have graduated, and they were sponsored throughout their education until their graduation. I understand that there are now around 71 sponsors, with the Gold Sponsor being the ‘Toronto Council 1388’ who support 6 students.

These sponsorships are vital to the life of Christians in Jerusalem if our presence is to remain, and our Christian roots to survive. These young graduates will go on to work, raise families and continue our faith. In this way, we live out the Gospel value “to love one another as I have loved you.”

As Pope Francis says, ‘We cannot be part of ‘complicit silence’. You are doing your part by supporting this movement to encourage and nurture our Jerusalem Students.

Today, we gather in celebration to recognize and applaud your generosity, your commitment, and dedication to the Greek Catholic School in the town where Jesus’ birth was announced to the shepherds in the fields.

The ‘Power of One’ can truly make a difference.

As Brother Hikmat says, ‘every member from Day one can make a difference by taking initiative and developing his ideas to serve charity.’

I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Brother Hikmat Dandan and his Council 15045 of the Knights of Columbus, who took that initiative and developed the ‘Jerusalem Students’ project. Your enthusiastic perseverance has in the past, and will continue to be an invaluable contribution to Christian students in the Holy Land.

Vivat Jesus