



**HB Patriarch Fouad Twal,  
Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem**

### **Christmas Message**

**Dear friends, dear people of the Holy Land, dear migrants,  
I wish you and all your loved ones a blessed Christmas.**

Dear journalists, in greeting you this morning, I thank you for your work and it is my hope that you will always carry it out with wisdom and in truth. Recent events have shaken us – I am thinking of Gaza – and most of you have shown courage. You have earned our admiration and respect.

At the end of the year, I must admit to you that 2012 has brought us mixed outcomes. There have been positive events and others, less positive.

#### **Interreligious Dialogue**

1. The 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council is an opportunity to make an examination of conscience in our dialogue with Judaism and Islam. The conference in April that brought together the Pontifical Council for Social Communications and the Council of Catholic Patriarchs of the East, recalled that the media, which played a significant role in the Arab revolutions, should be for Christian citizens, a way to assume their historic role in their respective countries, with their values of non-violence, and call for dialogue with believers of other religions. We are a minority but we are more than just a number.
2. There have been many interreligious initiatives and I thank all those who participated in them. But these meetings did not prevent an increase in a certain religious radicalism. In mid-November, the Council of Religious Leaders of Israel met in Haifa, in the presence of the President of the State of Israel, who reminded us that religious leaders can indeed help engender peace if they work together. A final communiqué stressed the importance of respect for the Holy places of every religion.
3. Interreligious dialogue can only bear fruits in acts of mutual respect. I reiterate my dismay at the desecration of churches, convents, synagogues and cemeteries that offends everyone. We must take out the evil at its root by educating our youth in all schools.



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#### **Ecumenism**

At the end of this year, let us reflect on that which unites us, Christians:

1. We remember very positively the visit to the Holy Land of the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill of Moscow in early November. It was an occasion for encouraging closer ties among Christians and highlighting the Christian presence in Jerusalem and in the Holy Land.
2. Another reason for celebration is the date of Easter. The Assembly of Ordinaries this year decided that Catholic Easter is celebrated according to the Julian calendar on May 5, 2013, except in Jerusalem and in Bethlehem because of the Status Quo and the influx of pilgrims. A decree is to be approved by the Holy See to permanently establish this change as soon as 2014.
3. A number of Christian, Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant delegations were present at the enthronement of Pope Tawadros II in Cairo, demonstrating a spirit of ecumenism and expressing support for the newly elected Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of the See of St. Mark, who assumes his post at a most critical moment in history.

#### **Local historical and political outlook**

1. The situation in the Middle East leaves us perplexed. We are confronted by so many concerns and issues. We desire for more stability and democracy. The joy of Christmas is overshadowed by the staggering violence in Syria. We are full of compassion for the victims and our Church actively participates in receiving 250,000 Syrian refugees in Jordan. We also pray for Jordan to maintain its stability and common sense that it always had.
2. The decision of the General Assembly of the United Nations, by which Palestine has become an observer State, is a step towards peace and stability in the region. Israel can now negotiate on equal state-to-state terms for the good of all. There is an urgent need to find a “just and peaceful solution to the Palestinian issue,” which is considered by the Patriarchs and the Catholic Bishops in the Middle East who met in Lebanon in early December, as the cause of all conflicts in the region. The second and last mandate of President Obama must push him to immediate action in working for the two-State solution.
3. I went to Gaza on December 16. I denounce the severe restrictions that dehumanizes the daily lives of 1.6 million people that generates feelings of hatred and hostility towards Israel.



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### **Our Church and migrants**

1. Overall, Christian emigration appears to be slowing. The Church seeks to provide housing, to help young people to develop and train them to find jobs more easily, and above all, to disseminate a culture and a pastoral sense of deep-rootedness, and recognize that to be a citizen of the Holy Land is a vocation that involves sacrifices and challenges.
2. In terms of immigration, our Diocese welcomes many immigrants. The majority of these are Christians. The Church feels very close to these faithful and does not hesitate to raise their voices when these communities feel attacked, as was the case at Sinai and in Tel Aviv this year. There is an urgent need for coordination between the Church, the State and the NGOs.

### **Projects**

The Church plays a key role in interreligious dialogue and education. This is why we put much effort into our American University of Madaba. The inauguration of the new school in Rameh with Cardinal Edwin O'Brien, Grand Master of the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Church of Stella Maris in Aqaba are some notable achievements.

### **Conclusion**

I encourage all our faithful to live this Year of Faith in earnest, putting into practice the teachings of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "Ecclesia in Medio Oriente," and the program initiated by the Patriarchate. The first community of Jerusalem can serve as a model for renewal of the existing Christian community: we must return to our roots, to return to Jerusalem.

### **Some significant dates for 2013:**

- At the end of April, an international conference will be held in Jerusalem on Pope John XXIII, who is the originator of the document *Nostra Aetate*. Some of our Rabbi-friends and eminent professors will participate.
- Our youth will joyfully travel to Rio de Janeiro this summer for the World Youth Days.

Christmas is a great opportunity to share our joy and express our gratitude. I am thinking particularly of all our religious brothers and sisters who, through their chrism, vocation and prayers help us fulfill the mission that our Lord entrusted to us.

**I thank you and I wish you all a Merry Christmas.**