

THE “BACKPACK PROGRAM”

Up to this point projects for Zarka South and Zarka North were based upon projects unique to each school, from this point forward we will describe programs for both schools and parishes being conducted simultaneously. Let’s do a brief “flashback” to September 2003 and the Investment Ceremonies of the Western USA Lieutenancy in which Ede and I became members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem (EOHSJ). While attending the ceremonies we had an opportunity to discuss affairs in the Holy Land with Lieutenant Mr. Patrick Power and he described a project he had in mind to help students in the Holy Land, the concept was to provide an ample supply of school supplies for students. As noted previously, initial educational programs for the schools in Zarka, Jordan began earlier and involved major programs like Computer Laboratories, Science Laboratories and a host of other beneficial programs. In early 2007 with direction and support of Lieutenant Pat Powers a committee composed of Bill Davidson, Carlos Cuellar and Chuck Radloff was formed to spearhead the program. Due to well established relationships with the schools in Zarka it was determined to launch the program with Zarka schools and the program began with Zarka North as they administratively were better staffed to take on the task of coordinating the Zarka side of the program.

In May 2007, after receiving the endorsement of the program from Father Issam and Father Ala Alamat, Pastors and Chief Administrative Managers at the Zarka Schools, and the blessings of Father (Now Bishop) Hanna Kildani, Director General of Patriarchal Schools in Jordan the program became official. Amal Haddad, Principal of Zarka North was the designated contact person for the schools in Zarka.

With the assistance of Zarka School Administrative personnel, it was possible to establish the details and logistics of the program.

- A. Target date: Commencement of academic year- September 2007-2008
- B. Number of Students: Zarka North-620, Zarka South-295; total 915
- C. Backpacks: 915
- D. Schools Supplies specified by Principal Amal: 13 items in each backpack including pads of paper, pencils, pens, pencil boxes, notebooks etc.
- E. Zarka North Secondary School: 60 students; English dictionaries, pocket calculators and Arabic Bibles.
- F. Acknowledgement card from Western USA Lieutenancy to students
- G. Total Cost Backpacks and school supplies: \$ 7,748.00; \$ 8.47 per student, consistent with prior estimates.

With assistance from the Rotary Club in Amman and Zarka school administrators a local supplier in Jordan was recommended to provide backpacks and school supplies. To provide a “personal touch” and encouragement for students to value the opportunity to pursue higher education it was decided to include an Acknowledgement Card in each backpack. The Latin Patriarchate Printing Office in Beit Jala, Palestine graciously agreed to provide the following card, including Arabic and English translation, as a gift.

Dear Students,
The Lieutenancy of the Western United States
of America of the Equestrian Order of the Holy
Sepulchre of Jerusalem welcomes the opportunity
to provide this Back-Pack and school
supplies to assist you in your scholastic
efforts, and encourage you, with the
help of your family and school staff,
to continue to make the pursuit of a
high quality education a priority in your life.
Please accept the best wishes of our members for a
good school year. Western Lieutenancy, USA
August, 2007



During the school summer holiday, and with fine cooperation of the school staff all segments of the program progressed in a good manner. School supplies and backpacks arrived on schedule on August 15 and were duly examined and everything was exactly as ordered. The huge task to sort and package the variety of school supplies into 915 backpacks began to be prepared for the big day of distribution to students.

The morning of September 3, 2007, began with Mass of the Holy Spirit providing guidance for the students from the Holy Spirit in recognition of the spiritual significance of the beginning of the academic school year. When mass was over the long-anticipated distribution of the Backpacks and school supplies began, students and their parents, school staff and teachers were excited! It was a wonderful event, and the students eagerly examined their backpacks, and the bright new supply of school supplies. This was a special day in the school year and through the good efforts of Father Kildani the event involved local civic personnel and government Muslem officials like Mr. Larrar, the General Director of Education of the Zarka who was present and participated in the important event.

Shortly after the “Backpack” event was over Amal Haddad, Principal at Zarka-North sent the following message to members of the Western USA Lieutenancy. *“We would like to express our gratitude for your interest and support to the “Backpack” program which aims to encourage communications among pupils in different countries and provide help to the students who are in need of assistance. Therefore, the items included in the “Backpack” program are a great benefit to our pupils especially those whose families have very low income.*

The 2007 event served as a “trial run” of the Backpack Program and fulfilled its purpose as well as being a learning process. For example: From our experience we learned students were not all the same physical size; some are bigger and some smaller than others. Another example, parents of students were unaware of the program, and some had previously purchased backpacks for their children. On the positive side ALL students had backpacks, even those whose parents may not have been able to afford a backpack for their children.

Members of the Western USA Lieutenancy were well informed of the success of the program at the schools in Zarka and paved the way for a repeat of the program in the next academic year. ***NOTE: You have struggled through the initial event and the preparation for the school year 2008-2009 was a repeat of 2007.***

Based upon experience in the 2007-2008 school year the 2008-2009 backpacks will have small Backpacks, (grades K- 4th grade), regular size (grades 5-10) and will be distributed in May 2008 well in advance of the school year. Another major difference in the 2008-2009 event is that several members of the Lieutenancy would be present at the Zarka schools for the distribution of backpacks and school supplies. Members of the Lieutenancy planned their pilgrimage to the Holy Land to coincide with the distribution of school supplies and backpacks at Zarka school, and a highlight of the arrangement was that the hearty pilgrims were led by Abbott Eugene Hayes, O.Praem, St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California and will help distribute Backpacks and school supplies to the students.

On Saturday May 17th the event began with Mass of the Holy Spirit followed by members of the Lieutenancy meeting students, teachers, parishioners, school staff, nuns and the parish priests and the festivities began! Members of the Western USA Lieutenancy on pilgrimage arrived well in advance of the ceremonies and afforded them a unique opportunity to meet school staff, teachers and tour the school facilities so within a short period of time they were well versed and acquainted with Zarka schools and Parishes.

THEN THE FUN BEGAN-DISTRIBUTION OF BACKPACKS AND SCHOOL SUPPLIES TO THE STUDENTS LED BY ABBOTT EUGENE HAYES AND MEMBERS OF THE WESTERN LIEUTENANCY





Happy Students proudly showing off their new backpacks; the result of good people working together for a good, common cause.

The “Backpack Program” became an annual affair under the careful guidance of Carlos and Patty Cicuellar of the Western USA Lieutenantcy, and expanded to include providing winter jackets and sweaters for students at Zarka Schools.