

HEADS OF THE CHURCHES IN JERUSALEM EXCHANGE CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

For the occasion of Christmas, new year and Epiphany, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem gathered via Zoom yesterday morning, 11 January, to greet and wish well for each other, as His Beatitude Patriarch Theophilos III shared his hopes for a global relief from the current pandemic.

The gathering which normally takes place at the headquarters of the Patriarchate, was an initiative from His Beatitude who started this custom few years ago. His firm desire to hold on to this tradition, even if it had to be carried out virtually due to the restrictions forced by the widespread of the COVID-19 virus nationwide, was received with appreciative acceptance by the rest of the Church leaders to keep the beautiful spirit of unity and communication between the different Churches in the Holy Land.

His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa, the Latin Patriarch in Jerusalem was not able to attend, and Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo attended on his behalf, alongside His Paternity Francesco Patton, Custos of the Holy Land, their Graces Archbishop Suheil Dawani and Bishop Hosam Naoum from the Episcopal Church, Bishop Ibrahim Azar from the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Bishop Yaser Al-Ayyash from the Greek Melkite Catholic Patriarchate, and Bishop Antony from the Coptic Church.

“Our mission as Churches and Christian Communities is not for ourselves and our local communities only, it is for the whole world. At this season we are all the more aware of the supreme importance of guarding and serving Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and all the holy places as the witness of the Divine-human

encounter, of the union of earth and the heaven in Jesus Christ,” Patriarch Theophilos said as he started the gathering.

“The ongoing COVID pandemic is an invitation to all of us for soul-searching and recollection. The pandemic has forced us to remember those things that are of ultimate importance, and it is a reminder to us, of how urgent our unity of resolve must be... We welcome the new vaccine, and we look forward in this New Year to the time when our local communities may have their regular life restored to them, and pilgrims may return to us.”

On his part, Father Francesco Patton welcomed the vaccine as a “human-made cure” and the hope it is bringing to the world, but he affirmed that “the vaccine can only prevent this virus, but it is not salvation, our only salvation is Christ, and through Him we can only heal truly,” he remarked.

Lastly, His Beatitude encouraged his fellow brothers to use the current means of communication and technologies, such as Zoom, to further raise awareness for people in the Holy Land and abroad, that the local Churches are doing their best in running institutions from schools to hospitals despite the financial crisis and tough restrictions. Patriarch Theophilos also called to widen the circle of telecommunications so that it could welcome major Church leaders around the world like His Holiness Pope Francis of Rome and the Most Reverend Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury for similar future gatherings.