THE GENERAL ABBOT OF THE FRANCISCANS VISITS THE PATRIARCHATE

On Friday afternoon, 9/22 October 2021, the recently elected General Abbot of the Franciscans, Reverend Father Massimo Fusarelli Ofm, that is, the Abbot of the Order of the Franciscans all over the world visited the Patriarchate.

The Reverend Abbot was accompanied by the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr Francesco Patton, Fr Dobromiro, Fr Luke, Fr Sinesa and Fr Athanasios Makora, Fr Mark, Fr Faltas, as well as other Franciscans. They were received by His Beatitude, along with their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, Geronda Secretary-General Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantina and other Hagiotaphite Fathers.

His Beatitude addressed all present as follows:

"Dear Father Massimo,

Dear Father Osauro,

Your Paternity, Father Francesco,

Beloved Members of our Brotherhoods,

Dear Fathers,

As you make your pilgrimage to the Holy Land, we welcome you, dear Father Massimo, and your brothers, to our Patriarchate. Your pilgrimage to the Holy Land comes at a crucial time for the Christian communities of our region.

As we greet you today, we recall the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, that where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them (Matthew 18:20). We give thanks to our Lord,

because here in the Holy Land we have built a full and harmonious co-operation of the Sacred Edicule. With this first phase successfully completed, we are continuing with the second phase of the work, encouraged and strengthened by our relationship.

The restoration of the Sacred Edicule is a historic event of the utmost importance, precisely because it has been accomplished by the three Communities to whom the *diakonia* of the Holy Places has been entrusted by Divine Providence. But in this partnership, the relationship between our two Brotherhoods has grown, and now we anticipate the restoration of the Grotto of the Church of the Nativity.

However, our united front in restoring the Sacred Edicule has an even deeper significance than this. For we have also established an important partnership in facing the unprecedented challenges before the Christian communities due to the complicated political situation here. Our united front is all the more crucial because new difficulties are constantly arising.

In addition to our common task of maintaining the Christian character of the Holy City of Jerusalem and the Holy Land, we have a shared interest and commitment in accommodating the many pilgrims who come from around the world. We also have a shared interest and commitment in sustaining the Holy Places as places of worship and keeping them accessible to pilgrims without distinction. And we have a shared interest and moral and pastoral commitment to do everything that we can to support and sustain the Christian population so that Christians remain in the Holy Land. This is of obvious consequence, for a Holy Land devoid of its Christian presence would lose its integrity.

We pray that in our cooperation, mutual respect, and deeper understanding, we are advancing the cause of the unity of the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, who prayed that His disciples might be one, even as he and the Father are one (John, 17:22).

We wish to express our appreciation to you, Father Massimo, for all that you do to support Father Francesco and the work of the Custody in the Holy Land. MAY God bless you in your pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and MAY God bless you and your brethren as you begin your new ministry in service to the Order of the Friars Minor.

Thank you."

Referring also to the very good cooperation of the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood with the Order of the Franciscans in Jerusalem, His Beatitude stressed the recently renovated Sacred Edicule and the protection of the rights of the Shrines in the Holy Land.

Thanking for the welcoming reception, Reverend Fr Massimo Fusarelli Ofm expressed his satisfaction for the cooperation of the Franciscans with the Hagiotaphite Brotherhood and wished for its continuation for a good Christian witness and protection of the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

From Secretariat-General

Photos by: Heba Hrimat.