

International Family Centre in Nazareth: Sign of Encouragement for Families Around the World



Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, and Dr. Salvatore Martinez, national president of Renewal in the Holy Spirit, presented the Vatican Foundation “International Family Centre in Nazareth”, which will be erected on the outskirts of that city above the hill that dominates the city centre and the Basilica of the Annunciation. The press conference also included Bishop Giacinto-Boulos Marcuzzo, auxiliary of Jerusalem of the Latins and patriarchal vicar for Israel in Nazareth.

Archbishop Paglia briefly outlined the history of the Centre's creation, noting that it was John Paul II, who wanted to be remembered as “the Pope of the family”, who, as a result of the World Encounter of Families in Rio de Janeiro in 1997, announced the idea of an International Centre for the Family in Nazareth. On the way to the Jubilee Year 2000, Pope John Paul II considered the construction of this centre as a sign of encouragement for families around the world.” However, realization of the idea was delayed until 2009, shortly before Pope Benedict XVI's pastoral visit of the Holy Land, when “the Secretary of State and Cardinal Ennio Antonelli, president of the Pontifical Council for the Family at the time, decided to recover the initiative and checked if the ecclesial movement Renewal in the Holy Spirit was available to undertake the project.”

After long negotiations with the ecclesiastical, civil, and political authorities in Israel an executive plan was approved. In 2012, during the World Encounter of Families in Milan, the “International Family Centre in Nazareth” was presented as a “working sign” of the Pontifical Council for the Family. In October of that same year, Benedict XVI gave “proper legal form to the project, ordering the erection of the Vatican Foundation “International Family Centre in Nazareth” with public and civil Vatican juridical personality, as well as the the 'ad experimentum' approval of its Statute.” The Foundation was officially established this past 18 January, and is based at the Pontifical Council for the Family and presided over by Dr. Salvatore Martinez, national president of Renewal in the Holy Spirit.

Referring to the project's deep feeling, Archbishop Paglia noted Benedict XVI's words during the blessing of the Centre's first stone on Mount Precipice in Nazareth in 2009: “We pray that this will promote strong family life in this region, will offer support and assistance to families everywhere, and encourage them in their irreplaceable mission to society.”

He continued, outlining the tasks that the International Centre will perform. “It will be a centre for spirituality of the family, for formation in parental and familiar life, of pastoral care for workers, of preparation for the new evangelization, and activities founded in the ecclesial and social subjectivity of the family. It will be a permanent observatory of study on family ministry in the world, especially in the Holy Land and the Middle East. ... And it will be a material support to families in need, especially in the Holy Land, through international fund raising projects.”

“There are places,” the archbishop concluded, “endowed with an extraordinary evocative and symbolic strength. Nazareth is one of those. It is the place where Jesus grew up, where his house was, ... his family. ... It is a land—today even more than at his time—full of tension and pain. But perhaps precisely because of this, it is a land that more than any other claims the right to peace and universal brotherhood. ... Christian families can become co-authors of this dream.”

For his part, Dr. Martinez expressed the desire that it “become a privileged place for spreading the 'Gospel of the Family', a 'showcase' of all the beautiful, the good, the true, and the just that the family offers and witnesses to in the world.” He also noted that the Centre, built upon property held by the Holy See as neighbouring property, will be divided into two buildings on a one hectare area. Once fully operational it will consist of a 500 seat auditorium, a diocesan pastoral centre, meeting and study rooms, a 500 seat church, lodging for a residential community, a 100 room hotel with restaurant designed to accommodate families, a play area and outdoor children's entertainment areas, and exterior passages, car parks, and leisure areas. The total cost of the work will be approximately 12 million euro and the property will always belong to the Holy See.

Dr. Martinez announced the launch of the “Portal of the Family”. “It is a unique proposition in the international scene. It was created with the aim of ensuring all families, under a 'horizontal subsidiarity' and in the name of a 'gift economy', with a wide range of free services to support the choices and needs that grandparents, parents, and children encounter everyday in their life journeys. ... The portal, initially only online in Italian, is intended to have analogous realisations in the world's other countries and languages ... In it, doctors, psychologists, economists, lawyers, educators, and priests will interact with families.”

V.I.S.