



Final Message and Mandate

5th International Congress of the Commissaries of the Holy Land

“Ambassadors of Peace. Listening to, Proclaiming, and Supporting the Holy Land”

Jerusalem – 25 November 2025

1. Introduction and Acknowledgments

Dear Commissaries of the Holy Land, friends and supporters,

Gathered in the Holy City, at the living and beating heart of our faith, where the Lord died and rose again, and at the conclusion of these days of intense fraternity and shared discernment, we raise first of all a heartfelt and grateful thanksgiving.

Our affectionate thoughts go to Fr. Silvio De La Fuente, who first initiated the path toward this Congress. Illness has prevented him from being among us, yet his dedication, vision, and love for the Custody and the Commissaries remain alive in our memory and in our hearts. To him we offer our fraternal closeness and prayer.

We express deep gratitude to all who, with passion, competence, and a spirit of service, made this Congress possible despite the very short preparation time: Fr. Matteo Brena, Mr. Vincenzo Bellomo, Fr. Rodrigo Machado, Fr. Lorenzo Pagani, Fr. Mervyn Gomez, together with the supervisors and numerous collaborators who worked with dedication and professionalism.

We thank the Christian Media Center, the Communications Office of the Custody, and in particular Francesco Guaraldi, for their careful work of documentation and communication.

We are grateful to the Convent of Saint Saviour, the Casa Nova of Jerusalem, the shrines that welcomed us, the witnesses who addressed us, and the communities that opened their doors and hearts to us.

And finally, a heartfelt thank you to each of you, dear Commissaries, for your presence despite the short organization time and logistical challenges: your participation has made these days a true gift of communion and grace.

2. The Vocation and Mission of the Commissary

In the light of the Vademecum of the Commissaries, the Order’s tradition, and more than eight centuries of Franciscan presence in the Holy Land, we reaffirm that the

mission of the Commissary is not merely administrative or organizational: it is an ecclesial vocation.

The Commissary of the Holy Land is:

- an Ambassador of the Holy Land in the local Churches;
- an interpreter and proclaimer of the mission of the Holy Places;
- a spiritual companion of pilgrims;
- a living bridge between the Custody and their territory;
- a supporter of the Living Stones, the Christian communities who still bear witness to the faith in the place of Redemption.

This mission requires competence, fraternity, listening, balance, perseverance, and a heart firmly rooted in the Gospel.

During the Congress, in the workshops and group discussions, several key themes emerged. We now present them as shared guidelines and a mandate for the future.

3. DIALOGUE AND SHARING

“Instruments of peace in a wounded world”

Dialogue is an essential dimension of the Order and of the Custody of the Holy Land. For centuries the friars have lived a daily dialogue with Christians of various denominations, with the Jewish people, with Muslim communities, with pilgrims, and with all cultural and social realities of this land.

It is a dialogue rooted in listening, humility, respect, and presence – not in strategy, but in gentle presence; not in words, but in closeness.

The Commissaries are called to embody this same style:

- in relations with local Churches and the Provinces of the Order;
- in their encounter with pilgrims and the faithful;
- in collaboration with civil and cultural institutions.

Dialogue leads to sharing, and sharing becomes concrete fraternity. The Holy Land is not merely a geography to be visited, but a communion to be lived and safeguarded.

Mandate

- **Make time to come and spend time in the Holy Land:** visit the Custody, stay with the friars, meet the local communities.

- The Custody will offer **formation and updating courses** for spiritual guides and pilgrimage leaders in various languages.

4. WITNESSING AND PROCLAIMING

“So that no one returns from the Holy Land unchanged”

Pilgrimage is not religious tourism: it is a spiritual and ecclesial journey that touches mind, heart, and spirit. To witness means to make the joy of the Gospel visible. To proclaim means to find new and creative languages capable of reaching wounded hearts.

The Commissary is both witness and herald:

1. In their own territory, keeping alive the memory of the Holy Places;
2. During pilgrimage, helping the faithful encounter Christ living in His Church.

A pilgrim should be able to say: “I have not only seen places; I have encountered the living Christ.”

Mandate

- After the recent conflict, we must acknowledge that **the Holy Land has changed, we have changed, and the pilgrims have changed.**
- We must help the faithful **avoid taking sides**, avoid simplistic judgments, avoid demonizing anyone. This is central to our ministry: **never present enemies, but offer an evangelical gaze capable of understanding and compassion.**

5. RESILIENCE AND SOLIDARITY

“Bringing hope where the Gospel was born”

Christian communities in the Holy Land face severe challenges: war, economic crisis, emigration, and increasing fragility. The Commissaries are called to be witnesses to their resilience and supporters of the Custody’s social, educational, and pastoral works.

Solidarity is not optional: it is an ongoing dimension of the mission and a bridge between the universal Church and the Church of the Holy Land.

Mandate

- Give special attention to the **Good Friday Collection**, promoting it and ensuring precise accountability.

- The Custody will provide **updated materials** well in advance.
- Commissaries **must not support private projects** presented by individual friars; only projects approved by the Custos may be promoted. This ensures transparency, communion, and fraternity.

6. MISSION AND COMMUNION

“Safeguarding the living memory of the Gospel”

The mission of the Commissary begins with listening: to the Living Stones – families, youth, workers, wounded communities; and to the long history the Custody safeguards.

The Commissary must:

- be the voice of the Holy Land in his Church;
- value the testimony of the friars who have served for centuries;
- promote collaboration between Churches and institutions;
- bear witness to hope through initiatives of formation, solidarity, and pastoral care.

Mandate

- Promote deeper communion and collaboration among the Commissariats of the same region.
- Together with Fr. Silvio De La Fuente, we hope to organize **regional congresses** in the coming years—beginning in East Asia, then Africa, and subsequently in other parts of the world—to support and strengthen the Commissaries.

Conclusion

“Ambassadors of peace: listening to, proclaiming, supporting the Holy Land”

At the conclusion of this Congress, and in the light of the mission entrusted to us by the Church and by the Order, we renew our commitment to be:

- Ambassadors of peace,
- Servants of communion,
- Custodians of hope,



- Heralds of the Gospel of the Resurrection.

We depart from Jerusalem strengthened by the certainty that our mission does not rely on our own strength: the Risen Christ walks before us, calls us, sends us, and accompanies us.

Let us continue to listen to, proclaim, and support the Holy Land, so that what was born here—the Gospel of life—may continue to illuminate every people and nation.

Thank you all.


Fr. Francesco IELPO, OFM
Custode di Terra Santa