

## Chronicle IV of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem

By Martin Hoegger

*Jerusalem 24 January 2023.*

### Easter together 2025

Father **Frans Bouwen**, from the "White Fathers" community, has a lot of experience with the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem, as he has been part of the preparation group since its foundation. We already visited him in 2017 during our first trip.

See: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/97-jerusalem-en1.html>



Our conversation focuses on an issue that is very close to his heart: the unification of the date of Easter between the Orthodox Churches and the Catholic and Protestant Churches. In the year 2023, there is one week between the two dates, but in 2024 it will be 36 days.

*Fr. Frans Bouwen, reading a text during a celebration of this Week*

*of Prayer*

For the interconfessional families in Jerusalem, for example, these differences are a problem if the Orthodox side respects the practice of fasting during the Lenten season.

Briefly, these differences stem from the fact that the Orthodox and Eastern Churches refused to adopt the new calendar, following its reform by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582.

Father Frans participated with me in a meeting on the island of Crete on this issue, entitled "*Pasqua Together 2025*", last December. Why the year 2025? It will be a special year for the churches, because the date of Easter will be common to all of them and the 1700 years of the Council of Nicaea will be commemorated. It was this Council that affirmed faith in Jesus Christ, his resurrection and divinity, and unified the date of Easter.

Father Frans is convinced of the power of a common celebration of Easter for the unity of the Church and its witness in the world, that is why the centrality of the resurrection of Christ in the people of God must be revived. The year 2025 will

provide an opportunity to do so and to revisit the question of the unification of the date of Easter, a very sensitive issue in the Orthodox Church, especially in Jerusalem.

The initiative "*Pasqua together 2025*", in which JC2033 is also participating, wants precisely to underline the importance of this year. See:

<https://jc2033.org/en/news/blog/653-pasqua-together-2025.html>

For us, it is obvious that this year 2025 will be an important step in the pilgrimage towards 2033. Moreover, the dates will be common again in 2028 and 2031.

### **An "Ecumenical Pilgrimage to 2033"**

As we leave the large White Fathers' house in the grounds of St Anne's Church and the Pool of Bethesda, we walk a short distance - and in the same area - to the office of the World Council of Churches in Jerusalem, where its coordinator, **Yusef Daher**, welcomes us with great cordiality.



I have known Yusef for several years and we met again a few months ago at the WCC general Assembly in Karlsruhe last

September. He immediately liked the idea of an "ecumenical pilgrimage to 2033" in Jerusalem. He gave us several names of people and movements to contact. His concern is that the local Christian people should participate.

He imagines an annual ecumenical meeting during the Lenten season rather than during the Easter season when the Christians in Jerusalem are very busy. This time prepares us for Easter, to meet the risen Christ more deeply and people will like to be together for this preparation.

### **"The Stairs of Unity"**

After these two intense encounters we cross the old city through the souks to the Church of St. Peter in Gallicantu, where we find the "Stairs of Unity". These are the famous stairs from Roman times, where Jesus descended from the Cenacle where he had his last meal with his disciples to the Garden of Gethsemane.



According to one tradition, Jesus said his prayer for unity in this place. So you can understand why this is my favorite place and why I like to return there every time I come to Jerusalem!

While Daniel recollects himself in the Church, I sit at the foot of the stairs and reread several times this page from the Gospel of John: "*May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe that you have sent me*" (17:21). And I entrust in

prayer all the encounters we have had in recent days.

At 5 p.m. we enter the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer for the celebration where the Provost of the German-speaking community, **Joachim Lenz**, meditates on the theme of the week of unity from the passage of the prophet Micah who calls to "*walk humbly with God*", doing justice and loving mercy (6,6-8). Unity is the fruit of humility, he says; a humble person is another gift. Perhaps we are among those humble people who love justice and mercy?

### **Involving the grassroots**

After the celebration in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, we share a meal in



a restaurant in the Christian quarter of the Old City with **Dominik Berberich** and **Claudio Maina**, two members of the Focolare community in Jerusalem. This is not the first time we have met them and talked to them about JC2033, as we spent an evening with them and about ten other members of this broad-based movement

during our first visit to Jerusalem in 2017.

*Meeting with the Focolare community in Jerusalem, during our 2017 visit*

See: <https://jc2033.world/en/news/blog/96-jerusalem-en2.html>

On the idea of marking the beginning of the decade of the resurrection, Dominik warns us that in Jerusalem there is a need for both caution and perseverance. On the other hand, it is important to be aware that the idea of praying together is problematic for some churches and perhaps it would be better to find other ways to celebrate our common faith in the Resurrection of Christ

For Claudio, the challenge is to involve local Christians at the grassroots level, not just church leaders. This requires time and taking the right steps with the right people. For him, Easter 2023 is premature. We have to think about 2025, for the same reasons that Frans Bouwen gave us, namely the fact that in that year the date of Easter is common to all the churches. The year 2024 is not suitable because there is more than a month's difference between the Western and Orthodox Easter.

However, he thinks that organizing a meeting during Easter week is almost impossible. Each church has a very dense program of celebrations. As Yusef Daher, whom we met in the morning, he also thinks that the Lenten season would be the most suitable.