

Chronicle I of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in Jerusalem

By Martin Hoegger

During the week of 20-30 January 2023, **Martin Hoegger** and **Daniel Fatzer** participated in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Each evening they participated in the prayer of a church in the old town, which opens its doors for a prayer for unity. They also visited several leaders and families. Here are the few chronicles of this unique and intense experience!

Jerusalem 20 January 2023.

Arriving in the afternoon, we take our first steps in a mild, almost spring-like Jerusalem. We are in the Holy City wearing two hats: "Montées de Jérusalem" ("Jerusalem Ascents")¹ and JC2033². But the main purpose is to make contacts in the framework of the week of prayer for Christian Unity, to reflect with them on a "pilgrimage to 2033" in Jerusalem.

Seeds of better life

Our first appointment is with **Gabi Abu Rakabah**, a young guide and member of the ecumenical youth group of the old city: "Seeds of better life". He meets us at the Notre Dame Center, not far from the "White Sisters", where we are staying.



While waiting for him we meet our compatriot and friend, catholic bishop **Mgr Pierre Bürcher** with whom we make an appointment for a common meal. Gabi leads us to the center of the youth group in the empty streets of the Old City and introduces us to **Georges Halis**, a young man who wants to become a Franciscan brother. He is one of the leaders of this group, which brings together some of young Christians in the Old City of Jerusalem.

We share with them the idea of marking the beginning of the "decade of the Resurrection" at Easter this year (2023-2033). They are very interested in collaborating with us and feel that it is up to us to invite other movements, since we are connected with many churches and organizations. We agree to meet with other movements at the end of next week to think about this project.

22 January. An important step at Christ Church

The next day, this Shabbat, is a very special day for the Messianic community to worship. Two pastors and a deacon are installed in their new ministry.

¹ The "Jerusalem Ascents" are an ecumenical movement born out of the Charismatic Renewal in 1984 which seeks to recognize the "Church born of the circumcision". The aim is to visit them and the "historic" churches in the Old City of Jerusalem and in the Holy Land (<https://www.montees-jerusalem.org>)

² JC2033 invites the Churches to an ecumenical pilgrimage towards 2033 - the 2000th anniversary of the resurrection - in order to witness together to the risen Christ and to celebrate him. <https://jc2033.world>

The commentary on today's parashah (pericope) takes some passages from the book of Exodus (chapters 4-7). When God chooses someone, he knows what he is doing and gives him the strength at the right moment to accomplish his task. This is to make us understand that it is he who acts and not us. The stories of Moses' vocation and his multiple resistances due to his difficulty to express himself illustrate this point wonderfully.



Pastor **Ruben and Benjamin Berger** are looking forward to the next step after 35 years of service in Christ Church: the installation of pastors **Yacov and Eli**, and deacon **Eyal**. They will serve in a new congregation called "*Yeshua, King of the City of Shalem*", which will meet every Wednesday evening from first February at Christ Church. The emphasis will be on a wider Eucharistic liturgy.

Inhabited by the Word and the Spirit, our long-time friends Ruben and Benjamin pray from the heart in a truly inspired way for these three young ministers. They particularly emphasize that ministry means serving Christ with a great heart, meeting him in our brothers and sisters and giving our lives for the flock like Jesus.



Benjamin Berger then gives a lengthy sermon of almost an hour on the theme of the 'house of God'. He shows that through his incarnation, Jesus has 'pitched his tent among us' and made our bodies the 'temple of the Holy Spirit'. He has established one Church which is the house of God. Even though the communities were diverse in apostolic times, there was only one church.

He also shares his conviction that the key to the restoration of the Church begins in Jerusalem, which has permanent significance because

God has placed his name there (cf. Jer 23).

"We live in a time when God has restored the firstborn, Israel. And in restoring him, he is restoring his house. It is crucial to understand what God's house, the Church, really is. It includes Israel and all the nations that believe in the Messiah Jesus," he says.

At the end of the long celebration of more than three hours, Ruben offers Daniel and myself a long moment of exchange, then we get acquainted with the pastor Eli who is happy to meet us. We agree to meet again during the week.

To mark this important milestone in the life of this first messianic community in Jerusalem, a large cake was shared in the gardens adjacent to the church.

Visit to a great friend

Jean Smeir, an Arab of Catholic faith, is a long-time friend of the "Montées de Jérusalem". We visit him at the French Hospital, opposite the New Door, where he is in the palliative care section. When he saw us, he started to cry. We listen to his complaint for a long time. His feeling of abandonment touches us. We have the impression of meeting Jesus in his forsakenness!

At the end of the meeting, we offer him a prayer and ask the Lord to respond to his desire to be picked up. "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" was our prayer for (and with) him!

Please pray for our friend Jean too! If you check out his Facebook page, you will discover that he has great faith. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=642241637>



On Golgotha

The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity begins with the Orthodox Church celebrating Vespers on Golgotha, in the Anastasis, the Basilica of the Resurrection where the Holy Sepulcher is located. We climb the steep staircase and sit down on the side. Little by little, this place that keeps the memory of the crucifixion of Jesus fills up.



For two years, this week has not been held, due to health circumstances. Tonight is a new beginning, beginning with Psalm 104 (or 103), that magnificent praise of the Creator, sung at every vespers: "All my life I will sing to the Lord, the rest of my days I will play for my God". The prayer is led by many officiants, including three priests and five young singers. I am grateful to begin this week in this place where Jesus was raised from earth to draw all humanity to himself!

At the end of the celebration we meet Dominik Berberich, from the Focolare Movement, and Father Frans Bouwen, from the White Fathers' community, and we make an appointment for a visit.

Augusta Victoria

Augusta Victoria is the name of the last empress of Germany, who died in 1921. It is also the name of the hospital on the Mount of Olives, built by her husband. There is also a large Lutheran church with a massive bell tower. We end this rich day there by participating in a prayer in the tradition of this church. Obviously, the contrast with what we have just experienced is great!

After the Hebrew songs in the morning at Christ Church and the Byzantine melodies in the afternoon at Golgotha, we sing Lutheran chorales and listen to Bach's Toccata!

What diversity in the Church of Jesus Christ! We wonder if there are others like us who have bridged these diverse traditions to-day.



Reception in the "Emperor's Hall",

next to the church

The prayer is led by the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, Estonian pastor **Anne Burghardt**, with whom I had the opportunity to speak afterwards. The "Probst" (provost) of the German-speaking community, Pastor **Joachim Lenz**, gives a meditation on Psalm 126: "When the Lord restored Zion, our mouths were full of joy". He asks how to understand the "restoration of Zion". Is it not to establish justice in the Holy Land today?

I have the opportunity to talk to **Martin Junge**, the former general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation, as well as to its former president Bishop **Mouneeb Younan**. I had visited them to present the JC2033 initiative.

"In fact, it is a family meeting," says **Erhart Hermansen**, the secretary of the Norwegian Council of Churches, whom I am pleased to see again after visiting his Council with Olivier Fleury in order to present JC2033, just "before the Flood", i.e. the Coronavirus crisis.

Why this meeting with a hundred Lutheran leaders? The next day, **Sally Azar** will be ordained to the pastoral ministry. She will be the first indigenous woman pastor in the Holy Land...and the international Lutheran family wanted to surround her.