

VISIT IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Stand up and go with me to Near East!

This land of the world which has witnessed God's work in the history and humanity of mankind.

This part of the world where Jewish, Muslims and Christians try to get to know each other", to live together, adopting courses, that sometimes are not easy at all, inhabited by violence, conflicts and pains.

It's in these countries, Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon ...that Christian Catholics are called by the universal Church to stop for a moment, a Synod for the Middle East. A moment when Christians are invited to think about the meaning of their attendance and to show the life of communion with other Churches and other religions.

Children from these countries are the first concerned by this synod. They prepare their present and their future? What would IMAC's children say to the adults? To their mates?

*"Let's go beyond separations, withdrawal, fears of the other, and differences!
Come and see how we play together, Christians and Muslims, we live happy to be loved!"*

These "IMAC's", great love masters are leaders of openmindness towards the other. We have witnessed it during our visit to the movements of the regions, our members of the international office. We have been touched by the wholly spirit's presence, fruitful in our hearts and the smiles of IMAC' children.

As we have been "called out by chaplains and accompanying guides having faith in IMAC's action, which in difficult realities at political, social and humanitarian level gives birth to hope".

IMAC's children bear witness to life !

By Claire Saïd, vice-chairman of IMAC



First stop: « Lebanon, It is not a country but a message » John-Paul II

Two days after arriving in Lebanon, during the visit of Maghdouché, Jean-Claude found out a line written on a pillar stele. Discovering these words, he was wondering why John-Paul II had said that in Lebanon. During the days that followed this questioning, what he saw and heard gave meaning to this line little by little. A love power was appearing throughout human and religious realities despite the scars left by the Lebanese war. His meeting with the "IMAC's" happened in two episodes, at the beginning and at the end of his travel in Middle-East. Thanks to IMAC supervisors' and Claire, coordinator of the region, he could live from the inside Paschal Triduum celebrated by the Greek Melkite Catholics. He entered another religious universe by the fact that the Melkite Church celebrates in Byzantine ritual. Every day enabled him to discover the face of Eastern Church and he was going from surprises to surprises compared to the Roman Catholic Church. Led with Camélia Haddad, assistant supervisor of IMAC Lebanon and Vivian Fahed in charge of IMAC-Kesrouane, he visited his sister Najat Hanna daughter of the Charity and founder of the movement in Syria. He was told how from 1972 the movement was born in Syria.

Meeting the accompanying guides from Beirut.

In the company of Chadi Mouchantaf, national supervisor and of Claire, we meet 11 accompanying persons from different parishes. Through what they share we realize the attention given to children and particularly in a parish of children coming from the street.

The children explain to Jean-Claude how they live their topic of the year « **The heart of the group** »



"The heart: it's him that gives life. Jesus is in our heart. He is also in the heart of the Bible. We must live like Jesus, with ourselves, with each others, with the group, with our family, with the friends and the school girlfriends or from the district area. We do activities to collect a little bit of money for the poorest families" Maya shares with us.

Meeting the accompanying persons from the South

After visiting Saida (Sidon) and sharing the meal with the national chaplain Cardinal Elie Haddad, we gather with the accompanying guides of this southern Lebanese part. They are 11 accompanying adults 350 children from 4 to 13 years. Each one explains how he develops the topic within his group.

"Living the heart of the group, it's living peace, solidarity, it's defending our rights and the rights of those who do not come to IMAC" says this girl who raises her finger towards Jean-Claude.



Meeting the group of Children from Kfachima:

On Saturday morning led by Camélia Haddad, assistant supervisor MIDADE-Lebanon, we went to visit Kfarchima's group. We arrive to a place where we are welcomed by about fifty children with their chaplain the Father P Jean Kadi. It's a party, from the smallest to the tallest, through dances; we are invited to enter the joy of Easter.

If the Muslim children go to the Lebanese movement:

If Muslim children go to the same schools a Christian children, their accompanying guides notice that there are few Muslim children in IMAC's groups. It is often the children that come from mixed marriages. The welcome and the activities with the Muslim children are the same for everyone. Chadi national supervisor is preparing a project to work with Muslim children in the camps of Palestinian refugees.

2nd stop: Damascus

Meeting the International Office

After introducing the eleven attending children, these ones share what they live. They explain some actions in favour of migrant children that came from Iraq and the actions of so

lidity towards the most needy for Christmas and Easter. A new door is opening for the movement through a presence of the movement in the poor areas of Damascus and 124 miles away from the capital. If such an action plan has been put into place by accompanying guides for two months to restart the expansion of the movement, it also implies that being active in these areas, is a challenge for IMAC Syrian, in front of this new reality.



Another one says: "We at IMAC say that children build God's kingdom by organising, acting and defending their rights, which Muslims do not say"

Meeting with Cardinal Joseph Absi

Meeting Cardinal Joseph Absi enables us to take stock on IMAC Syria.

The bishop admits that he doesn't support the movement enough and commits to support it a little bit more.

Then, we tackle the issue of the Muslim accompanying guides in the movement. If the bishop does not show any resistance at the level of Muslim children in the movement, he raises a few issues concerning the accompanying guides.

Then he mentions the difficulties between the two communities, the danger of proselytism in one side like the other but particularly insists on our own identities.

3rd stop: JORDAN

In a first time, we met with the fathers Moudy Handileh, Ghaleb, Bawab in the presence of Miss Leyla Kabine and Miss Ghaida Haddad. We have thought together on the strong spot and difficulties faced by the movement in Jordan. The historic course seems to us like a hope signal on which we could build something "new". So is the emergency to bear witness to Jesus' love in this Holy Land we believe that Jordanian children have an evangelization mission in their environment and their Church in the Synod movement for the Near East. We are called to promote it. We want to work out an action plan to revive IMAC.

4th stop: Egypt

In High Egypt, despite high poverty, we have found out a present and active IMAC. The different groups, which Brother Guy made us, find out, looked like real gold nuggets, whose brightness was flooding us. They were tenderness, joy, hope, in this part of Egypt where the wealths of tourism have fled the shores of the Nile where they live.

A suitable teaching method :

No long speeches for children to become actors of their life where they live.

Three concrete actions **affect children's daily life.**

1. **Action towards bakers to improve bread preparation**
2. **Street tarring**
3. **Street lighting**



In Cairo, we have met the accompanying guides. There are six groups of children divided in three categories: working children, children of the area, schoolchildren.