

Israel and Hamas. Father Faltas: “Peace begins in schools. Mindless adults are depriving children of their future”

The first day of school for the approximately 12,000 students enrolled in the 18 schools of the Custody of the Holy Land was “clouded by fear and uncertainty caused by the war that is spreading from the south to the north” of Israel. “Classes have resumed after the summer break. Preparations for welcoming children and young people have been completed in recent weeks, beginning with

didactic programming by teachers increasingly committed to proposing and initiating new projects.”

, Custodial Vicar of the Custody of the Holy Land, is the director of the 18 schools of the Custody, located in Jordan, Cyprus and Buenos Aires, with the main schools in Jerusalem (5 schools), Bethlehem (2 schools), Jericho (2 schools), Nazareth, Haifa, Jaffa and Ramleh. Together, these schools regularly serve some 12,000 students, equally divided between Christians and Muslims.

Education at a standstill. “The war that broke out in the Gaza Strip following the terrorist attack by Hamas against Israel on 7 October,” the Franciscan prelate said, “has had a series of repercussions in Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank, with escalating violence and death, casualties, arrests and destruction. The belligerent situation in the Galilee has escalated because of the mutual attacks between Israel and Hezbollah, which is launching rockets from Lebanon.” In this dramatic scenario, the mission of the schools of the Custody of the Holy Land, “the oldest in the Middle East”, said Fr. Faltas, “is all the more important because our classrooms have traditionally welcomed children of all religions.”



[Our mission is to teach the culture of peace to all our students, who are called to be men and women committed to peaceful coexistence among peoples.” “Unfortunately,” continued the Vicar, “children in the Holy Land have had to bear all the consequences of eleven months of war. In Gaza, the children and young people who survived suddenly stopped going to school on 7 October: on that day their educational life came to a halt, and at the same time they were left without a place where they could grow up in peace, develop their skills, find a safe haven. This is what school is all about: the walls of a classroom and leisure in the courtyard, a place to meet and grow up, a space for dialogue and mutual respect”.](#)



[The tragic events of 7 October 2023 are still vivid in the memory of Father Faltas. “On that day, in the school of Jerusalem, all the lessons were preceded, as they are every day in all the schools of the Custody, by the Simple Prayer of St Francis: 'Lord, make me an instrument of your peace’” – he recalled. “Together with the teachers, I suddenly found myself protecting and comforting children who were frightened and shocked by the first rockets of a new war. Classes resumed after two weeks, a school year that did not see peace until last June.” “During these months of war,” says the friar, “we did our best to continue with the school programme, to keep to the timetable, but we felt a strong need for the children to be together and to share their fears and their hopes. Through writing, poems, drawings and songs, the children and young people were given ample opportunity to express](#)

their desire for peace. In this way we were able to complete the educational programme and at the same time deepen what for us is not so much a school subject as a constant daily practice."

"Peace education is a subject that has no specific school timetable, no marks in the grade book and is remembered for life."



The vital role of the schools. As General Director of the Custody's 18 schools, Father Faltas is well aware of the difficulties and concerns involved in carrying out this mission for the Holy Land. He is grateful to "the principals of the Custody's schools for the effort and dedication they have shown in carrying out their delicate task during these particularly difficult years. I am proud to highlight the success of the school of the Custody of the Holy Land in Acre, which was ranked first in academic achievement among 88 schools in Israel, and the achievement of a student from the school in Bethlehem, Bishara Marzouqa, who was ranked first in the governorate of Bethlehem and second in Palestine in his final year exams." "It's difficult to meet everyone's needs," said the Franciscan Father. It's not easy to explain the motives and needs for peace when the world is moving in the opposite direction. The strength of the children, their commitment to peace, must inspire and encourage us as we face a school year that begins with an intensified and approaching war. Calls for a ceasefire, a medical ceasefire, to give the children of Gaza the chance to be vaccinated are essential at this time. After 25 years, polio and other infectious diseases have re-emerged in a devastated and polluted territory."

"Mindless adults without vision are stripping children - the future and hope of humanity - of all their rights and source of protection."

"Hope is the expectation of good: I pray to God the Father to give our children the strength of love and forgiveness. Despite this time of war," Father Faltas said, "let us spread the essential values of peaceful coexistence, fighting hatred and violence without resorting to arms. This is a primary role for schools."

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