

# THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

## Journeys

Dan Koski, Tantur Staff



*"Life is a journey. When we stop, things don't go right."*

That's a quote attributed to Pope Francis that I ran across while searching for something meaningful to write to a colleague of mine who was preparing to leave the Holy Land. The quote didn't work well for what I wanted to write, but it stuck with me as an apt way to both end the year and send Nativity greetings from Tantur.

We often refer to Tantur as an oasis in both an abstract and literal sense. Intersecting with this thought, the concept of journeys comes to mind when I think of Tantur as a location, as an institute, and as an experience.

Tantur is indeed an oasis along many journeys, and was perhaps one for the Holy Family when the Nativity of Christ occurred. An oasis may be a "stop" in the modern sense of the word for the traveler or pilgrim, but it is in a more accurate term, a place for resting, for collecting needed resources, of encounter, and perhaps a moment's reflection before continuing on. If the Holy Family did indeed pass through Tantur, perhaps it is their blessing that enables us to welcome – and bid farewell – to so many scholars, students, clergy, laity, pilgrims and residents throughout the year, whether they stay for a day, a month, a year, or a lifetime.

This December, as the Tantur community prepares for the celebration of Christmas, the Feast of the Nativity, we wish all of our friends and colleagues blessed journeys of any and all kinds, and we look forward to continuing our own journey of faith, study and fellowship in the coming year.

## Tantur at a Glance

2017 Three Month Continuing Education Program includes new weeklong open enrollment courses.



For many years, Tantur's Continuing Education Programs have become one of the most well-known aspects of the work of our Institute. With five regular courses throughout the year, our programs have been increasing in both group size and diversity of its participants, making for an even more fulfilling experience.

This year, our Three Month Sabbatical Program launched a new initiative to include Educational Enrichment Weeks as four distinct weeklong course modules within the Program. The weeklong courses focused on Biblical Studies, Islam, Judaism and Ecumenism, with an option for open enrollment into one, several or all four of the courses for those not participating in other parts of the Sabbatical Program.

The Educational Enrichment Weeks will continue to be offered in the 2018 Three Month Sabbatical. For more information, please contact [tanturpo@tantur.org](mailto:tanturpo@tantur.org).

*Above photo: Tantur's 2017 Three Month Continuing Education Program explores the Negev just after completing their four one-week Educational Enrichment Weeks.*

## From Pilgrim to Pilgrim Leader

Fr. Elias Lopez

**In 2013 I had the chance to take part in the summer program at Tantur Ecumenical Institute.** It was a remarkable opportunity to learn more about the Holy Land, the conflict, the different religions and the people who live there today. Hearing lectures about the three major religions and the importance of the Holy Land to each faith gave me a better understanding of how sacred and special the Holy Land is to each of them. During that summer I made numerous friends with the other participants who came from around the world to share the experience of Tantur. What I enjoyed most was getting to know people of different faiths, especially those who offered to share a meal in their homes. For example, we visited a town in the northern part of Israel near the Syrian border where the Druze live. We had lunch with a Druze family and learned about their way of life. Prior to visiting the Holy Land, I had never heard of the Druze. There were many other visits like this one that gave me a better perspective of the Holy Land and the world in general. One of the things we were encouraged to do was to go back home and share with our family, friends and faith communities what we learned. As future ministers in the church we were also encouraged to



Fr. Elias Lopez with his April 2017 pilgrimage group from St. Cecilia parish of Houston, Texas, on his first return to Tantur since participating in a one-month Continuing Education Program in 2013.

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## Bruderhof Community Transitions at Tantur

John and Tessie Menz, Dana and Maureen Wisner say farewell.

Earlier this decade, the Bruderhof Community, an international Christian fellowship whose members live, pray and serve one another together across the world, were invited to return to Tantur to restart a trial residency program which had been attempted several years before.

In the winter of 2015/2016 Bruderhof community members John and Tessie Menz joined Tantur, and quickly became well-adjusted components of our community life, volunteering across our facility with different tasks and joining in many of our events and activities. In the summer of 2017, John and Tessie transitioned out of the position and were replaced by Dana and Maureen Wisner. John and Tessie have since joined a Bruderhof community in the United Kingdom, but remain in contact and retain happy memories of their time with us.

With regret, Dana and Maureen had to cut their time at Tantur short, but leave behind many friends who wish them well as they too begin the next chapter of their service to the Bruderhof community in the United States.

The Bruderhof community remains committed to sending community members to Tantur, and new families will hopefully be joining us in 2018.



Tantur rector Fr. Russ McDougall with John and Tessie Menz (r) and Dana and Maureen Wisner (l). John and Tessie arrived at Tantur in the winter of 2015-2016, while Dana and Maureen arrived in the summer of 2017. For more information on the Bruderhof community, visit [www.bruderhof.com](http://www.bruderhof.com).



## Holy Moments

Rev. Dale Burkhardt

In the summer of 2016, I found myself heavily engaged in the people and places of the land we call "The Holy Land." Tantor Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem served as my home and learning centre for four of the weeks. What follows are some of the "Holy" moments of my stay in the Holy Land. Upon landing in Israel I spent two days on my own walking around in Tel Aviv. On the second day I decided to hike the Mediterranean coast to the old Biblical town of Joppa or present day Jaffa. While still at home, all Tantor program registrants were informed that they were expected to lead at least one worship service at Tantor. I came to Israel with three sermon/service possibilities. While roaming the streets of Jaffa I came upon the house of Simon the Tanner where Peter had his vision of unclean animals and being told to "kill and eat" (Acts 10). Through this vision Peter was informed he was to reach out to Gentiles whom he had grown up believing were "unclean" and he had been taught not to associate with them. Acts 10 was one of the biblical passages I came prepared to speak on and being the first biblical site I encountered in Israel, and so I felt that is what I should use for my Tantor service.

Tantor students were encouraged to attend different local churches on Sundays. On my first Sunday in Jerusalem an Anglican priest from the U.S and I attended St. George's Anglican Cathedral. The service was a mixture of Arabic and English. Near the front of the sanctuary, a young man was earnestly praying which moved me deeply.

While touring the Basilica of the Annunciation [to Mary] in Nazareth we watched and listened as people participated in communion at the front of the sanctuary while singing in Spanish the powerful words of "Jesus, You Have Come to the Lakeshore" (Voices United #563). Once again I was deeply moved. At the gift shop at the church in Jerusalem where Jesus was imprisoned, a large beautiful crèche made in France moved me to tears, for it was indeed a work of art. At the top of Mount Tabor while standing and praying in the Church of The Transfiguration I opened my eyes, and I was looking directly at the face of Jesus on the wall high above me. I took a picture of what I saw.

The grounds of the Muslim Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem had a holy feel to it. I could sense that a lot of prayers had gone up from the place. Thinking it was just me who was feeling this way, Jill, one of Tantor's American staff members took me by surprise when she unexpectedly said to me, it was a favorite place of hers in Jerusalem as it indeed felt holy.

Father Awwad in Aboud, Palestine spoke to us passionately of the miracles that had taken place in his little church in his time. Parts of his church building date back to the 300s when St. Helena, mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, built four churches in the Holy Land.

Father Khoury, an ecumenical activist and bridge-builder in Zababdeh, Palestine (living and ministering amongst a large majority of Muslims) gave us a walking tour of his community. He was intent on making things better for all and coveted the prayers of people of other lands. His teenage sons, 16 and 14, stayed by his side the entire tour. Were they protecting him? His eldest son is a member of the Palestinian police.

On another Sunday, we attended a French Mass in a Crusader church built in the 1100s. It was not hard to be moved by the setting. This site may possibly be Emmaus, where Jesus dined with two of his followers following his resurrection. Following

### Holy Moments (Continued from Page 3)

the Mass the priest gave us a presentation and tour of the grounds. Tantur was graced for a week by the presence of an Irish Catholic sister who headed up a social service agency in the Gaza Strip, a wreck of a place. Her days were composed of being picked up for work, working, being driven back to her apartment, never going out again until being picked up the next day for work. Every six months she would come out of the Gaza Strip to Tantur for a for a one week sabbatical. I purposely ate two meals with her wanting to know this incredible individual better.

A good-looking young priest from France (and an incredible swimmer), Cedric, was ordained a short time before coming to Tantur. He touched me when he shared how his pursuing the priesthood has caused his father to become more religious. Another younger Tantur participant from Spain, Helena, ministering in the Reform Church [Protestant] in France, reminded me one day that small groups should not be written off for they too can have a big impact. Something I needed to be reminded of again.

Near the end of our time at Tantur, Dan, an American married to a Palestinian and one of the administrators at Tantur, led us on a morning hike and tour in the vicinity of Jericho. We had to get up at 4:30 in the morning so we could be at the hiking location before it got really hot. The only problem is that when we arrived the gate was locked until 6 a.m. Rather than wait we drove to the other end of the trail but now instead of walking downhill it was all uphill. Dan reminded us on the bus that pilgrimages are meant to challenge, stretch us, make us uncomfortable for that is how real learning takes place. Amen.

### Pilgrim Leader (Continued from Page 2)

bring others on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Walking in the footsteps of Christ and learning about the history and complexity of the Holy Land helps one to live the gospels in a deeper way.

This past April I had the opportunity to lead my first pilgrimage to the Holy Land. When I began planning the pilgrimage in the fall, I knew I had to include Tantur on the itinerary. My experience at Tantur was amazing and I wanted to give my pilgrims a sample of what I learned that summer. The group included eighteen Spanish speaking parishioners from my parish, St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Houston, TX. We visited Tantur on a Monday afternoon after spending the day in Bethlehem. We witnessed the separation wall and a Tantur staff member was able to give us an excellent explanation of the hardships and struggles the wall has inflicted on the Christians living in Palestine. During the tour of the campus, we climbed to a rooftop where we were able to see Bethlehem and Jerusalem. My pilgrims were appreciative of the tour and explanations that were shared. In future pilgrimages I will again include Tantur on my itinerary. Thank you, Tantur for the ministry you are providing in the Holy Land. God bless you!



## Tantur Community

Brother Emile of Taizé



This autumn, Brother Emile of Taizé community joined Tantur for an exploration of ways to deepen our prayer and liturgical life. From Canada, Brother Emile has been with Taizé community since 1976, and has travelled extensively throughout the world as well as numerous prior pilgrimages to the Holy Land. Recently, his ministry has taken him to St. Louis, Missouri in in the United States with a specific mission to encourage healing between communities following the unrest in Ferguson. During Br. Emile's visit, Tantur was pleased to host multiple Taizé prayers open to the public, as well as to have him host one of our *Tuesdays at Tantur* events.

Br. Emile will be returning to Tantur in the first months of 2018 as we continue to explore ways to incorporate Taizé prayer and spirituality into our community life.

For more information about Taizé, please visit [www.Taizé.fr/en](http://www.Taizé.fr/en).

## “HAKIMAH” PROGRAM LAUNCH IN JANUARY 2019

A new Tantur Continuing Education Program will explore the experiences and narratives of women in Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Holy Land.

Tantur Ecumenical Institute is proud to offer a new Continuing Education Program called “Hakimah”. Hakimah will explore the role of women in Jewish, Christian, and Muslim texts and tradition. Participants will discover how women in the Holy Land continue to contribute to the cultural, political, and spiritual realities in which they live.

**Hakimah** is open to any and all who wish to deeply engage with women’s realities in the Holy Land regardless of gender or religious affiliation. The program will be a mixture of two weeks’ text study, excursions, encounters with local women, and group discussion, animated by the expertise of the Hakimah leadership team, comprised of local women representing the three respective Abrahamic traditions. **Hakimah** will launch in January 2019.

To pre-register, or for more information, please contact [tanturpo@tantur.org](mailto:tanturpo@tantur.org).



Are you an alumni of a Tantur Continuing Education Program or Anniversary Conference? Are you a tour leader who has brought programs to Tantur in the past? Contact [tanturpo@tantur.org](mailto:tanturpo@tantur.org) to see if you are eligible for a reduction to join the Hakimah program!

*Tantur is an institute for ecumenical and theological studies, situated on a beautiful hill in Jerusalem near Bethlehem. It serves as a welcoming place in the Holy Land for visitors who come from all over the world seeking an oasis of learning, community, and hospitality.*

## TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Tantur has begun the process of transitioning its e-list for events and the newsletter to an automated email system. Our local event announcements will now be distributed through the e-service “My Emma,” with the possibility of the newsletter list also being delivered as such in the near future.

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Ethiopian Coptic Rendering of the Nativity of Christ, written by the late Sister Abraham Stoffregren Pedersen.

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