

# Tantur Ecumenical Institute

## Newsletter

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Jerry McKenna (Sculptor) and his wife Gail



### **Ted Hesburgh and Tantur** by *Rev. Timothy Lowe (Current Rector of Tantur)*

One of the first things I wanted to do when visiting Notre Dame after being appointed rector of Tantur was to meet Fr. Ted Hesburgh. In the mid 1960's when Pope Paul VI decided in collaboration with Protestant and Orthodox scholars to establish an ecumenical institute of theological learning in Jerusalem, he turned to the then president of the International Federation of Catholic Universities, Ted Hesburgh, to lead the project. Tantur officially opened in 1972, four years later than anticipated. The 1960s was an extraordinary time of social turmoil and struggle. Vatican II was happening. In 1963, Pope Paul wrote a hand written letter to Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople. It was the first time in 400 years that there had been any **formal contact** between the two churches. On January 5, 1964, the two would meet on the Mt. of Olives and embrace each other in brotherly affection. The Patriarch, when asked by the media why he was coming to Jerusalem, is reported to have remarked: "To say 'good morning' to my beloved brother the Pope. You must remember that it is 500 years since we have spoken to each other!" Later, on December 7, 1965, the bans of excommunication dating back to 1054 between the two churches would be mutually overturned in the most single act of reconciliation between Christian East and West to date. Tantur was founded by this legacy of reconciliation and hope. Tantur was eventually entrusted to the leadership of Fr. Ted with many others assisting him in making Tantur a living reality. Notre Dame University was given the responsibility of oversight and support through the office of the President. It began as a work of faith and a labor of love. Now no one could have envisioned the subsequent 40 years of political, religious and social struggle in Jerusalem and the Middle East. Because of its location, Tantur was often in the eye of the storm. What was supposed to be a laboratory of advanced theological study and prayer for all Christians in a quiet beautiful setting between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, often became a haven and oasis for those embroiled in the turmoil. A place which was safe. A place of honest dialogue and encounter. No one knows the future of this complicated part of the world. The legacy of Pope Paul, Patriarch Athenagoras, Oscar Cullman, Ted Hesburgh and others who gave birth to the idea of Tantur and its incarnation is still desperately needed. It can only succeed as a daily work of faith and a labor of love. This past year, an alumnus of Notre Dame and a good friend of Fr. Ted, was visiting the Holy Land. Fr. Ted told him he had to visit Tantur. Jerry McKenna and his wife Gail met with me. Jerry, a sculptor, asked if he could donate a bronze sculpture of Fr. Ted in thanksgiving for Fr. Ted's influence in his life and the life of so many others. We thank Jerry and Gail for their generosity, which now adorns Tantur's entrance. May God continue to keep them in good health for many years!

From the surreal beauty of the Sea of Galilee.....



**I close my eyes and picture.....**

*by*

***Sr. Bridget Tighe***

**(Vice-Rector, 2006 – 2011)**

So goes the Irish ballad recounting an emigrant's thoughts of home. It is now four months since I left Tantur and I close my eyes and picture: staff, storekeepers, the fascinatingly varied, experienced and interesting people on renewal programmes, scholars, families, guests and occasional visitors who make Tantur a unique "home from home", an oasis of peace, scholarship and prayer in a holy and troubled land. But for this reflection I picture two memorable field trips.

First, a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai. We walk or ride camels as far as Elijah's garden, a plateau before the final climb of 750 steps to the summit. Here we wait to see the sunrise over the jagged peaks of the Sinai range where Moses received the Ten Commandments and God's Revelation "I am who I am". Some wait outside, others celebrate Mass in the back of a Bedouin tent while fellow pilgrims stop for rest and refreshments at the entrance. Mass ends and we go outside to an unforgettable experience of sunrise over Mount Sinai. We watch in silence, no words are adequate to express the beauty and awe of the moment, then return to the shelter of the tent for a simple sack breakfast. Most of our group now climb the final 750 steps while the rest return to St Catherine's Monastery. Later that morning we visit the Monastery, see the Burning Bush (not quite what we expected!) gaze on some of the oldest icons and sacred manuscripts in the world and visit the 6<sup>th</sup> century Church where monks pray in a language and ritual almost unchanged in fifteen hundred years.

To the beauty of the Surrey countryside.....



Second, a boat trip on the Sea of Galilee. The boat is for our group only. In the middle of the lake we switch off the engine. Somebody reads Luke 8:22-25, the calming of the storm, and out of the reflective silence that follows people share their faith journey, changes in ministries, stories of personal storms and healings. This is a privileged and sacred moment for me as I too am facing an enormous change in my life and ministry from being Vice Rector of Tantur to Regional Leader of my religious community in the UK. I say something like "We will soon go our separate ways and whether or not we ever return to this beautiful place this experience will remain with us and be part of us. The peace and beauty of this place will remain in our hearts forever."

And so it is. I open my eyes to the different beauty of the Surrey countryside and of serving my congregation and my sisters. Still, in moments of quiet I close my eyes and picture.....

**“From the Holy Land to the Promised”  
Land**

*by*  
**Revd. Michael McGarry**  
**(Rector, 1999 -2010)**

Is there life after Tantur? Is there life in the Promised Land?  
I am delighted to have this opportunity to share some reflections on my life in Tantur from the perspective of a year and five thousand miles later. I now live in New York City with leadership responsibilities for my own religious congregation, the Paulist Fathers (coincidentally the same congregation to which Tantur rector Tom Stransky [1988-99] belongs. Tom lives at our seminary in Washington, DC, working on a book about *Nostra Aetate* and the Second Vatican Council). Of course, my thoughts frequently fly across the time and miles to my eleven years in Tantur. And my thoughts land on three areas – at least for this reflection: the wonderful people of Tantur, the beautiful land, and the peoples of the land. Probably my most cherished memories of Tantur center around its people: on the administrative level, I was privileged to work with incredibly faith-filled, dedicated people: Bengt and Solweig Holmberg, Knud and Ida Jeppesen, Vivi Siniora, Sr. Maria Nora, **Error! Reference source not found.**, and Bridget Tighe. And then there was the wonderful staff of Tantur: Palestinian Christians and Muslims whose faces grace the new YouTube video.. And then there were the brilliant guests of Tantur: the apartment dwellers, the scholars, continuing education folks, and the incredibly interesting groups who used Tantur for their seminars. Secondly, my thoughts frequently wander to the beauty of the Land. Tantur’s vista of the Jordan Valley and the Moab Mountains beckoned me out of my office just to gaze to the East, often as the sun rose over them to hit the Judean hills where Tantur is situated. And thirdly the peoples of the land. When the Notre Dame of Jerusalem’s German rector Fr. Richard Mathes left the Holy Land around 2000, he reflected on his time in Jerusalem: “When first I came to Jerusalem, I was sympathetic to the Jewish people and angry at the Palestinians. The longer I was there, as I came to see what was really happening, I became angry with the Israeli side and more sympathetic to Palestinian side. Now my heart breaks for both of them.” I resonate with that feeling as, most of you know, I continue to work for positive relations between Christians and Jews. Yet I feel that the concern for Israel’s security has been hijacked by a narrow, often quite ignorant group of people who, ironically, stand to jeopardize Israel more than help it. So here in the United States, I try in small ways to offer a wider, more balanced view of life “on the ground” in the Holy Land, especially for the sake of Arab Christians. During my recent visit to Tantur (April 2011), on a given day, I had lunch with Jewish friends in West Jerusalem and then dinner with Palestinian friends in Bethlehem. I recognize that my experience at Tantur allowed me to have good friends and easy access on both sides. But my experience also urges me to raise uncomfortable truths when I am working for rapprochement here in the United States. So Tantur is a constant companion for me: both as very warm, happy memories, and as a reminder that my heart aches for both sides. *“And I miss the delicious food!”*

One of the many green spaces located at Tantur



Beautiful Tantur as seen through the trees



**A Reflection by Dr. Knud Jeppesen (Vice Rector, 1999 – 2004)**

When my wife, Ida, and I in 2004 returned to peaceful Denmark from Tantur in the danger zone between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, we realized that we needed time to relax after five years of tension. We liked to tell people in Denmark about our experiences, but soon we learned that for our compatriots, what is happening in the Holy Land is neither black or white; most of them think that the Jews are always suffering and the Muslims are always terrorists, and Christianity is not involved in the situation. And now, in the year 2011, we have got our own terrorist in Scandinavia. A man with a Scandinavian name, has killed some 75 Norwegians within a few hours. He claims to defend Christianity and Scandinavian culture, and like many others he does not want Muslims to become an integrated part of his country. We should learn from this terrible event that terrorism does not equal Islam, but can grow from ideas, we are familiar with – and that is frightening! But I am afraid that we have not learned that lesson yet.

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