

THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

A May To Remember

Dan Koski, Tantur Staff



The wait is over; we have a new rector!

While Jerusalem and Bethlehem are busy preparing themselves for this month's visit of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, we're busy preparing for our own very special arrival of Fr. Russell "Russ" McDougall as the next rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute.

Fr. Russell's appointment was made public earlier this month. After a months-long process of posting the position and accepting applications from across the world, Fr. Russell was selected from a pool of highly qualified candidates.

On page 2 of this edition of our newsletter, Fr. Russell gives some insight into his journey to Tantur through his years of spiritual development and vocational work. With all these developments happening, we're also taking time to pause and reflect on the journey of Tantur from an idea that began with a centuries-overdue embrace between Pope and Patriarch in 1964, to what it is today. As we move into a new era of Tantur under the leadership of Fr. Russell, and towards our own 50-year anniversary of existence in 2022, we thank all of you that have been a part of this embrace of Christian ecumenism; past, present and future.

Tantur at a Glance

Easter Encounter in the Galilee



No Tantur program is complete without a journey to the Galilee, and what better way to wind down from the excitement of Jerusalem during Holy Week than "a trip to the north," as it is called in our part of the country. This is precisely what our Easter Encounter program did the day after Bright Monday, crisscrossing the region for a four day excursion.



The Galilee experience is designed to offer an immersive study of the region at a comfortable pace, with plenty of time to enjoy the pleasant climate of this part of the Holy Land. Our favorite part, however, is hearing how glad our program participants are to get back "home" – to Tantur!

Reflections from Fr. Russell McDougall

No stranger to Jerusalem or Tantur, Fr. Russell McDougall brings a wealth of interdenominational and interfaith sojourning to our institute.

In St. Luke's account of the early church's growth from Jerusalem, the heart of the Jewish people, to Rome, the heart of the empire, the apostle Peter testified before the "rulers, elders and scribes" assembled in the holy city that "there is no other name under heaven" but the name of Jesus, the Christ, "by which we must be saved" (Acts 4.5-12). Any Christian whose life has been enriched through the friendship of one who doesn't share his or her faith has experienced the tension between Peter's confession and Jesus' own observation that "no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit" (Lk 6.43; cf. Mt 12.33).

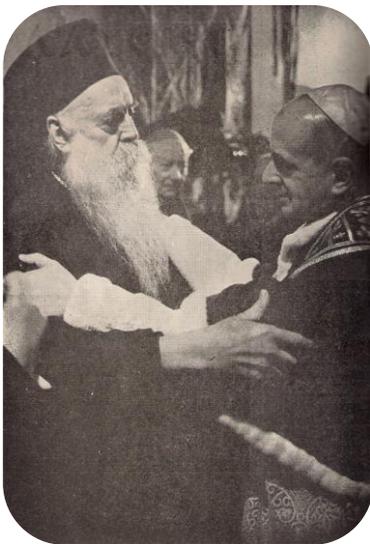
From my youth and through almost twenty-three years of ministry as a Roman Catholic priest, I've been blessed with many friendships that have crossed confessional lines. Because friends have invited me to "come and see" how they experience their own faith traditions as life-giving, I've experienced the beauty of Anglican, Orthodox, and Greek Catholic liturgy, as well as the strong bonds of fellowship

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Fr. Russell McDougall, CSC

Incoming Tantur Ecumenical
Institute Rector



Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras embrace in Jerusalem, 1964. Image courtesy of the archives of Dr. John Tleel.

1964: When Pope and Patriarch Met

"To say 'Good Morning' to my beloved brother the Pope, You must remember that it has been five hundred years since we have spoken to each other!"

That was the response of Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople, when asked what the purpose of his meeting with Pope Paul VI would be in Jerusalem, 1964. While a heart-warming anecdote, the meeting on the Mount of Olives between the two Christian leaders began a process of renewal of dialogue between the Pope of Rome and Patriarch of Constantinople that had been seemingly irrevocably broken by the Great Schism of 1054. The outcome of this single embrace of the two Christian leaders was profound; centuries-old mutual excommunications were lifted, clearing the way for inter-denominational dialogue and cooperation that had been unthinkable at the start of the 20th century. It is also from this meeting that the concept of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute was derived. This month, Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew will meet to renew this embrace at the Mount of Olives, in what we hope will be a continuation of the ecumenical spirit and vision that is the purpose and dream of Tantur.



Tantur 1989

A Recollection by Ivor Rees

Ivor Rees was a Tantur program participant during the spring and early summer of 1989, a period of conflict and political turmoil across Israel and Palestine. 25 years later, Ivor recalls some of the highlights of his Tantur experience and the subsequent impact that it has had in his life.

When it was suggested that I write something about my experience as a member of the Tantur class of 1989, a kaleidoscope of snapshots shot through my mind. Tantur itself, buildings and gardens and especially the views – from my balcony of Har Homa with its forest and the mountains of Moab beyond it; and going on the roof each night to look at the lights of Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Then there was the wonderful Tantur community and the conversations and interchange of ideas. Our own class included people from Belgium, Canada, USA, Switzerland and the UK; Catholic, Anglican, Reformed and two United Churches; together with scholars from North America, Europe and Africa.

We were privileged to listen to Tantur Rector Fr. Tom Stransky lecture on Ecumenism, Kenneth Bailey introducing us to the Parables in their Semitic background, Fr. Stephen Doyle OFM, director of our course and guide around the Holy Land, Fr. Benedict Vivano of Jerusalem's Ecole Biblique taking us through “Romans”, and Dr. Ian Fleming introducing his Biblical Geography lecture along with site visits. It was always a joy to attend evening prayers and the noonday Mass and to be welcome at Communion. There were special guest lecturers as well as visits to Jerusalem and Bethlehem, with worship at their churches, to the Negev and Abu Ghosh, where we shared in a convent service where an Australian sister took her final vows, and our week in Galilee. I can still hear the beautiful singing of the congregation of the Church of the Annunciation.

The First Intifada cast a cloud over our time at Tantur, but it gave an opportunity to go a little under the surface of the conflict. Some of us were invited to stand on the roof of a Bethlehem house to observe the first day of mourning for a Christian boy of 10 shot outside his church. Whilst the crowds shouted slogans, the helmets of soldiers glinted in the trees up the hill. Another time, I was able to visit a school in East Jerusalem and saw something of the difficulties under which Palestinian children were being taught.

Then there were the impromptu events. At the last minute, the Jerusalem tourist office arranged for us to celebrate Passover with Jewish families. Another time, during a period of fighting in the West Bank, five of us hired a taxi to take us up country to Shechem and Samaria where the priest at Jacob's Well was amazed to have visitors. On yet another trip, some of us went by bus to Eilat and then by jeep to Sinai, where our climb of 3250 steps to the summit began at 3.00 a.m. I had looked forward to a silent dawn before visiting St. Catherine's monastery, but a group of charismatic Korean

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Tantur 1989 (Continued from Page 3)

pastors wanted to celebrate loudly and they were answered regularly by some Port Said Moslems, who sounded equally charismatic.

My church wanted an overseas project and I was introduced to a clinic at Al Khader, run by the Beit Jala Hospital. My relationship with them has continued ever since.

My story has a sequel. Later that year, my wife Delyth and I visited the US for a wedding. During our time there we were able to meet up with two of our class members as well as other "Tantur people" we had met. Then in 2000, we spent a week in Switzerland as the guests of another participant and his family. I appreciate very much the fact that five of our class from 1989 have kept in touch.

I was able to pay a brief visit in 1994 when, at the invitation of Tom Stransky, I sat in on the first meeting of Jerusalem church leaders for a thousand years. I was privileged to renew acquaintance with Tantur at its 25th Anniversary. All of this has been a life-changing experience for which I am grateful.

Reflections from Fr. Russell (Continued from Page 2)

that Methodist, Baptist, Mennonite and Church of Christ congregations nurture among their members. Through sitting with Zen Buddhist monks and nuns, welcoming Shabbat and dancing with the Torah, breaking the Ramadan fast and hearing the Qur'an chanted in the homes of neighbors in Uganda, I've been better placed to understand the source of the goodness I see. The apostle John expresses it well: "Everyone who loves is born of G-d and knows G-d" (1 Jn 4.7).

Tantur's mission has been to cultivate precisely these kinds of experiences, particularly among members of the Abrahamic faiths, so that each of us might come to a deeper recognition of the ways in which the Eternal is at work in faith communities beyond our own. Amid concerns about "relativism," such receptivity to the goodness we see in others is an acknowledgement that G-d is One and at work in all that G-d has made.

I'm excited to be returning to Jerusalem to take part in this mission, and look forward to working with Tantur's many ecumenical and interfaith friends.

Russ McDougall, CSC

Staff Shot

Issa Daboub



Since 1986, Issa Daboub has been an integral part of the work and life of Tantur. A Bethlehemite by birth and upbringing, Issa joined our staff after completing his Master's Degree in Education and Human Development at Boston College in the United States. This past winter, Issa became our House Manager, overseeing the day-to-day management of Tantur's facilities staff, as well as taking on other important Administrative tasks; all while still helping manage the front desk as needed. When we asked Issa's thoughts about his new position, he had this to say: "It is thrilling, very interesting," Issa states. "Before I listened to what was going on at Tantur. Now I am taking more of a full part in it."

While Issa has always been valued by our rectors and staff alike, the verdict is in that he has truly found his stride as an essential link between facilities and administrative staff. As one of the most senior Tantur employees, we have no doubt that this wealth of knowledge and experience will continue to benefit all of us in the years to come.

Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai to Arrive in Holy Land During Papal-Patriarchal Visit

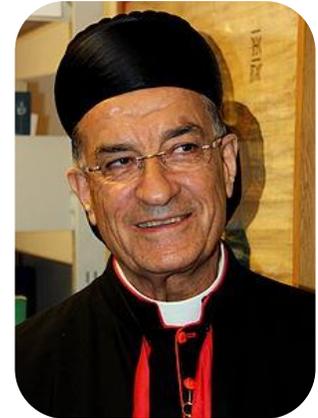
The leader of Lebanon's largest Christian community will be the first Maronite Patriarch to journey to the Holy Land since the founding of the state of Israel.

There's a religious folk-saying in Russia: "God loves a trinity." With the unexpected news that Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai of Lebanon will also be visiting the Holy Land to coincide with the arrival of Pope Francis and Patriarch Bartholomew, we can hardly find another expression that would better fit!

The Maronite Patriarch holds a unique role as both leader of one of the largest autonomous Christian communities of the Middle East that recognizes the Pope as its spiritual leader, but is also a Cardinal representing his flock at the Vatican. As leader of this uniquely Lebanese expression of Christianity, of whom

its adherents number in the millions both in Lebanon and across the world, he is also the spiritual head of the 10,000-strong Maronite community of the Holy Land.

This visit is not without controversy. As Lebanon is still technically in a state of war with Israel, Patriarch Bechara has come under criticism for travelling to Jerusalem by many political and sectarian factions within Lebanon. The Patriarch has continued with his plans to visit, with Maronite Archbishop of Jerusalem Mussa al-Hajj being quoted by the Associated Foreign Press as one of the purposes of the visit being "to surpass borders." May it be so!



Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai is the 77th Maronite Patriarch of Antioch, and spiritual leader of Lebanese Maronite Christians through the Middle East and the diaspora. (Wikipedia file photo)

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.

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Best wishes to all as we head towards summer!



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