

THE TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

Rest Under This Tree

Dan Koski, Tantar Staff



Recently, as I was searching for a passage from the Bible, I came across Genesis 18:4, which reads, *“Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash and rest under this tree.”*

Keeping an eye on our lovely trees is one of my self-appointed tasks at Tantar. Our trees have always been one of my favorite parts of the Tantar landscape, probably because it takes so much work to nurture and care for them in the harsh terrain of the region.

In recent years, we’ve lost a few of our older trees around campus due to disease and winter storms, but most worrisome for me has been the declining health of many of Mediterranean cypress trees that line the entrance of our courtyard.

These cypress trees are, by far, some of our oldest flora at Tantar, having been planted by the caretakers of the Order of Malta Hospital that once stood where our institute does now. The loss of any tree in the Holy Land is an egregious blow, but what a disaster it would be to lose our colonnade of cypresses!

Never fear: Our gardeners know what they are doing. This spring, several new cypress saplings were planted along our path. It will take quite a few years before people can live the words of Genesis; but, just as the good friars who once looked over both the hospital and our trees, we who look over Tantar Institute are happy to provide the same care and consideration for this generation of trees – and people – and for those that will come after us as well.

Tantar at a Glance

Six Week and Easter Encounter Programs



Our first two annual programs of Tantar were treated to an abnormally cold and stormy winter, making us think twice about using our boast that our participants often come in sweaters and leave in summer shorts. Nonetheless, the Six-Week Program, comprised of 16 participants from five nations and five denominations, persevered through rain, sleet and snow, while our Easter Encounter participants, 23 from 8 nations and 2 denominations, enjoyed an abnormally cool Easter season in April. Many from both programs continued on to further destinations, including Padua, Assisi, Rome, Camino de Santiago, Zambia and Ecuador.



Top photo: A Six Week program participant in the Sinai. Lower photo: Our Easter Encounter program participants celebrate Easter in Jerusalem.

Reflection on Tantur's Six Week Program

Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM

Easter 2015 marked one year since my extended visit in the Holy Land, and my participation in the six-week program at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute. It's a good time to reflect back on that experience.

In the fall of 2014, I received an assignment from my Franciscan superiors allowing me to become part of the staff of the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land, in Washington, DC. My job includes editing a quarterly – The Holy Land Review – on the work of the Franciscans in the Holy Land, promoting our mission on social media, and greeting the hundreds of pilgrims who visit at the Monastery each week.

In this assignment, I find myself drawing extensively on my time at Tantur. When I completed the program last year, I wrote an article for my friends and confreres, in which I listed the key “learnings” that I brought home.

- We deepened our knowledge of Scripture, archaeology, and geography.
- We encountered the variety of cultures that make up the land.
- We wrestled with the Israeli-Palestinian situation.

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“Tantur has become for me a place of virtual pilgrimage in my spiritual life, and remains part of my prayer and reflection on Scripture and the story of the Holy Land. “

Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM, at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre during Easter 2014. Fr. Greg Photo ctsy. Marie Armelle.

A Visit from Fr. Tim and Presbyter Lisa Lowe

At Tantur, we often note how we are a community of permanent transition; meaning that while both our residents and international staff often stay for long periods of time, goodbyes are an inevitable part of our existence. However, visits from past community members are a delightfully frequent part of our social calendar; and this April, we were blessed to greet Fr. Tim and Presbyter Lisa Lowe, respectively the rector and house matron from the summer of 2010 through the autumn of 2013. Fr. Tim and Lisa, visiting with a pilgrimage group, stayed at Tantur for several days, and were happy to re-acquaint themselves with old friends. Both send greetings to all, as can be seen on a [Youtube video found on our official account](#). Until next time, Fr. Tim and Lisa!



Presbyter Lisa Lowe and Fr. Tim Lowe in our courtyard garden, near our icon of Jerusalem. The tree to the left of the photo was planted by the Lowes before leaving in November 2013, the commemorative marker denotes Tantur's appreciation for their years of service.



Surprise, Surprise

A veteran pilgrim to the Holy Land reflects on expectations, actualities, and everything else that comes with a stay at Tantur.

Alice Camille, M.Div.

After a whirlwind tour of Israel this past January, our band of pilgrims was nearing Ben Gurion airport when we received word: no planes were flying to the U.S. Not that night. Not the next night. The East Coast was locked down in anticipation of an epic blizzard.

What to do? Our tour company rebooked us in our hotel and we returned there weary, perplexed – but not entirely disappointed. How can you regret an extra two days in Jerusalem? I knew just what I wanted to do with some of those unexpected hours. I wanted to see Tantur again.

I'd taken my first study tour to Israel, not unlike the one I'd just co-led, back in 1986. As extraordinary as that first contact with the Bible lands always is – touching walls, kissing stones, standing on streets in towns really named Bethlehem and Nazareth and Jerusalem – I'd held onto the conviction that there was more to this land than some rushed visits to churches and archeological digs could reveal.

It took twenty-five years to test this hunch, and I owe that decision to my Paulist friend and former pastor, Fr. Michael McGarry. During the years he was rector at Tantur, Fr. Michael kept urging me to come across the ocean again and REALLY see Israel from a mature and in-depth perspective. Knowing my friend was there made the offer irresistible. Finally I scraped money and two more friends together, and we committed to the June 2010 session. By the time we arrived, however, Fr. Michael had been appointed elsewhere, and Fr. Tim Lowe had just taken over Tantur.

I wasn't expecting Tim Lowe and his wife Lisa. But any remorse I felt about not renewing the acquaintance with Michael was quickly replaced by the deep pleasure of making these two wonderful new friends. Everything about Tantur, in fact, was better than advertised: I loved the food, facility, classes, professors, fellow participants, the pace of the schedule, the frequent road trips, the variety of perspectives, the thoughtful discussions with people of both sincere faith and intelligence. It was a month of realized eschatology! I was in heaven.

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Surprise, Surprise

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Even now, five years later, I can't imagine a life experience that might ever exceed the decision to invest in that month at Tantur. So during these surprise extra days in Jerusalem this January, I dearly wanted to introduce my little band of pilgrims to this marvelous possibility for their future. After all, they'd just completed the run-where-Jesus-walked tour, as Fr. Tim Lowe terms it. They were eligible for something more substantial next time.

I called Tantur, and the staff was glad to host us for a visit, to roam those halls that felt like home to me, to talk with us intimately about the political and personal realities of an Israel that is, to every person of faith, our longed-for, beloved, maddening, and precious homeland.

I say it to every sincere person of faith. Invest in your spirit. Spend the money. Make the time. Do Tantur.

Alice Camille, M.Div., is a freelance writer and author of [God's Word Is Alive](#). She can be reached at www.alicecamille.com

Reflections

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- We connected the Scriptural Story with the Land.

Those insights continue to enrich my life and my ministry here in Washington, as well as in other areas of my Franciscan mission.

For example, our six-week-group's trek through Wadi Qelt became the basis for an article in the Review, along with the photographs I took on that desert hike. I reflected in the article on the "desert" as a key metaphor for the annual Lenten journey of the Christian.

Again and again, I've shared with pilgrims here at the shrine, with parishioners on parish mission and recollection-day experiences, and in my homilies, the "hands-on" knowledge of the Land and its people gained at Tantur. The community with whom I journeyed also continues to be a part of my life, primarily through our Facebook contacts.

Tantur has become for me a place of virtual pilgrimage in my spiritual life, and remains part of my prayer and reflection on Scripture and the story of the Holy Land.

Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM, is attached to the Franciscan community of the Shrine of St. Anthony in Washington DC. He is the author of [Advent With the Saints](#) and director of the film [Assisi Pilgrimage: In the Footsteps of Francis](#).

Staff Shot

Introducing Jeff VonWald,
New Program Coordinator
for Tantur



Another new staff member has arrived at Tantur! In January of 2015, Jeff VonWald, M.Div., became our Program Coordinator, a new position created to meet the increasing workload of our programs office.

As Program Coordinator, Jeff works with Tantur's Continuing Education program, and with the University of Notre Dame's Jerusalem Global Gateway at Tantur.

While from the United States, Jeff is no stranger either to the Holy Land or his current responsibilities, having lived in Jerusalem since 2011, and bringing over 15 years of experience in nonprofits and campus ministry to his new position. An ordained pastor in the United Church of Christ, he recently worked as Associate Coordinator for a Lutheran young adult volunteer program serving in the Jerusalem area.

Jeff lives in Jerusalem with his wife Julie Rossate, who is also working with Christian institutions in Jerusalem.

Welcome Jeff!



TANTUR OBSERVES CANONIZATION OF ARMENIAN MARTYRS OF 1915

Events held in Jerusalem during late April part of global commemorative efforts.

From April 23rd to April 24th, the global community of the Armenian Apostolic Church canonized the Armenian Martyrs of the genocide of 1915-1923, in which over one million ethnic Armenians are said to have perished. The canonization was the first in over 400 years of the Armenian Church, and was also believed to be one of the largest canonization celebrations in church history.

In the Holy Land, commemorative events and services were held in the Holy Sepulchre and Jerusalem, where Fr. Russ McDougall, CSC, represented Tantur.

While the Armenian presence in

Jerusalem extends back to at least the 4th century AD, the current Armenian community of Jerusalem - approximately 2,500 strong - is heavily comprised of the descendants of refugees who fled their ancestral homes in modern-day Turkey and resettled in Jerusalem during the first years of the British Mandate. Another small community exists in neighbouring Bethlehem.

The day of commemoration for the Holy Martyrs of Armenian will be observed on April 24th. To read Tantur's statement on the canonization of the martyrs, visit [the Rector's Corner of our website](#).



Procession from the Old City of Jerusalem as part of the commemorative events for the canonization of the Armenian Martyrs of 1915.

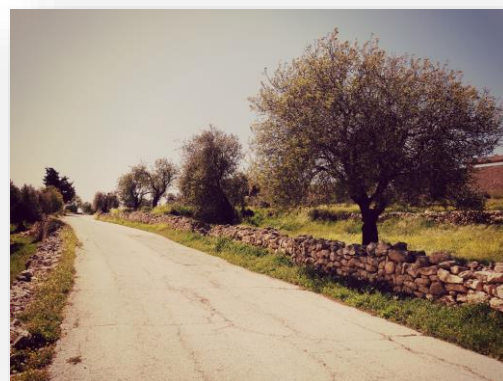
Tantur is an institute for ecumenical and theological studies, situated on a beautiful hill in Jerusalem near Bethlehem. It serves as a welcoming place in The Holy Land for visitors who come from all over the world seeking an oasis of learning, community, and hospitality.

TANTUR ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Effective August 1st, 2015, Tantur's former general contact email tantur@netvision.net.il will be closed. Please use tantur@tantur.org or a specific staff member's email address for all correspondence.

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