



*Notre Dame de Sion*

## “SAINT JOHN IN MONTANA”

*Congregational Novitiate Jerusalem*

### **First vows of six novices**

The 20th of January was a day filled with gratitude; at Ein Karem. There was excitement in the air when our 6 Novices pronounced their first vows in the congregation, each in her own language. We heard Arabic, Spanish, Portuguese, Tagalog, Besaja as well as Kitchan an indigenous language of Guatemala. The whole Jerusalem Community of Sisters, Brothers Associates and Friends of Sion gathered for a beautiful Eucharistic Celebration with Fr. Carlos NDS as the celebrant and with Luciano as deacon.

The new sisters all left a few days later to return to their countries for some holidays before each begins her first mission in the congregation, whether in Egypt, the Philippines, Brazil, Costa Rica or Nicaragua. On the way home Alejandra took a special route, traveling via the United States, in order to visit her brothers whom she has not seen for 15 years or more. We could only imagine what happy reunions the return of the new sisters would bring; we prayed and continue to pray that their family visits may be filled with joy and richly blessed.

### **Orientation time of the new novitiate**

The new novices, Nancy and Andrea from Costa Rica, Lucia from Brazil arrived and moved into the Novitiate house by the 25th of January, the feast day of the conversion of St. Paul.

Maria, our Indonesian novice, was able to join us two weeks later. How good it is to begin together our journey for the next two years in deepening the call to Religious Life in the congregation of Notre Dame de Sion here in Jerusalem.

We begin with the question: what does it mean to be in the Holy Land for your initial formation program? Answers to that are likely to reflect the spirituality of NDS in the Holy Land, which we experience in visiting holy places and walking where Jesus walked. We begin to understand why Jerusalem is so important for the congregation of Notre Dame de Sion. And we realize this not only with our heads, but with our hearts, and even with our feet as we walk the land that Jesus walked and pause in places where according to the tradition he stood too.

The explanation of the daily and weekly schedule did not seem to hold any surprises for the new novices. All the different activities and tasks that will form part of their daily life from now on, were received in a spirit of eagerness to learn by living them. For the moment we are beginning our life together in the novitiate setting. We have morning meditation at 6.30, before going as a community to the Eucharist celebration, which is followed by breakfast, and then the reading of a daily Bible portion. At 10:00 we have presentations given by Juliana on the constitution of the congregation and on religious life. Sr. Anne Catherine is giving us an introduction to Judaism and to the Jewish Feasts. Her first presentation was on Circumcision as well as the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, the feast celebrated on the 2nd of February.

The Hebrew alphabet and the responses for the Mass in Hebrew, as well as the Our Father in Hebrew is being taught by Br. Tiago with some little refrains in Hebrew. Human development taught by Sr. Maureen has also found its place in our weekly schedule during our Orientation time.

### **Lent retreat with other religious people**

Participating in the Lent Retreat, with the English Section of the Union of Religious, on the First Sunday of Lent, launched us into the spirit of Jesus' desert experience. Walking through Wadi Quelt to the Monastery of Temptation in Jericho showed us the desert in bloom, with its flowers and green pastures for the sheep and goats of the Bedouins who live in this area.

We are in the midst of our Orientation time and our schedule is filled with new experiences, along with work of keeping our house clean, looking after our health and in keeping our garden blooming.

Sr. Juliana Baldinger NDS  
“St. John in Montana” Community  
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