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Paving the Way: Gary Krupp Unites Vatican and State of Israel

"We tend to hate each other because of the differences and the intensity of our faiths. We have to understand that we are responsible for the well being of our fellow human beings. We must live honest lives respecting the rights of others. We must learn to embrace our similarities and savor the differences." - Gary Krupp, founder of the Pave the Way Foundation

In September 2000, Gary Krupp of Long Beach, NY became only the seventh Jew ever to receive the papal honor of Knight Commander in the Order of St. Gregory the Great. This recognition came as a result of his success recruiting medical equipment companies to donate \$15 million dollars worth of equipment for the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza Hospital in Italy.

As opposed to encouraging his career in medical facility development, this fortuitous honor from the Pope led Krupp in a totally new direction. He realized that as a Jew who had been honored by the Pope he had an amazing opportunity to help improve relations between the two religions. In 2003, he founded the Pave the Way Foundation.

"I could not believe this honor was given to me," explains Krupp in an interview with Rabbi Jack Bemporad. "I decided, at that time, that since there were only two other Jewish men alive who were so honored and that they were both working in the area of reconciliation between the religions it was my responsibility to do the same. I had to do something with this position within the Papal household to benefit the Jewish People and the State of Israel.

The foundation spreads its philosophy, "Embrace the Similarities - Savor the Differences," through cultural exchanges; arranging Israeli speakers at Catholic Churches, encouraging Catholic pilgrimages to Israel, and organizing Catholic-Jewish youth projects.

In addition, one of Pave the Ways' main goals is fostering a strong partnership between the Vatican and the State of Israel. Krupp has lobbied the Israeli government to address the concerns of the Vatican regarding the legal status of Catholic entities in Israel, visa issues for Church employees, and access of pilgrims to major shrines.

Most notably, Krupp has campaigned for the return of the Cenacle, the site of the Last Supper, to Catholic control and has successfully arranged a loan of the Vatican's Maimonides manuscripts to the Israeli Museum. These projects are great examples of his emphasis on concrete goals in the quest for

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reconciliation.

"We want to convince people that inter-religious action, not just dialogue, is needed," says Krupp. "In the future, Pave the Way is planning on producing a documentary that will give voice to the majority of good people in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim world who condemn killing in Gods name. We also hope to expand the goals of the Maimonides project by trying to arrange the repatriation of some of these documents to the Jewish people.

Krupp's work has not gone unnoticed by the Vatican or the state of Israel.

"Gary is a committed individual with a kind heart," says Ambassador Alon Pinkas of the Israeli Consulate in New York. "He utilizes his unique position within the Catholic Church and commitment to his own heritage as a springboard for dialogue between the two faiths."

Recently, Krupp's role in relations between Israel and the Vatican became even more important. Last year tensions arose between the Catholic Church and Israel as a result of an inability to finalize legislation relating to the Fundamental Agreement of 1993. The Israeli delegation even withdrew from negotiations at one point.

Krupp realized the gravity of the situation and took on the role of lead mediator between the two sides. Pave the Way reached out to Israeli diplomats, Jewish philanthropic organizations, Jewish congress-members, and influential Jewish leaders, asking them to contact the Prime Minister's office and emphasize the importance of cementing this relationship. With the help of Krupp's mobilization, Israel came back to the table.

"When the government of Israel withdrew from negotiations last August it was a crisis of unprecedented seriousness with possible dire consequences for both sides," tells Reverend Dr. David-Maria Jaeger, the official spokesman of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. "For some of us, it was a time of tremendous anxiety, and even despondency, but Gary held fast to the hopes we all share, refused to give up, moved heaven and earth, as the saying goes, to help bring about the healing of the relationship."

Perhaps that is what is most notable about Krupp -- his spirit of optimism even in these dark times.

"Absolutely, no problem created by man cannot be solved by man," he says. "If we can give a voice to the silent majority of good people in the world we can fight those who have used religion for their own personal, financial or political gain. My message is simple: we must try to hear the message of God rather than concerning ourselves with the customs and methods through which that message is delivered."

For more information on the Pave the Way Foundation, visit www.pavethewayfoundation.org.

Interview:

CIU: *What made you make the leap from developing medical facilities to*

facilitating Jewish-Catholic relations?

Krupp: On July 29, 2000, I received a call from the Vatican from H. Em Cardinal Renato Martino. He left a message on my answering machine and I still have the recording. He called to congratulate the Knights Commander of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great. The Pope had personally approved me to be invested into a Pontifical Order of Knighthood, which is the highest honor bestowed by the Catholic Church to a Layperson. I was told that I was the seventh Jewish man in history to receive this honor.

I could not believe this honor was given to me. I decided, at that time that since there were only three Jewish men still alive who were so honored (Sir Sigmund Sternberg of Great Britain, Sir Gilbert Levine of the Vatican Orchestra Maestro and Myself) and Sir Siggy and Maestro Levine both work in the area of reconciliation between the religions, it was my responsibility to do the same. I had to do something with this position within the Papal household to benefit the Jewish People and the State of Israel. My wife Meredith and I started the Pave the Way Foundation.

CIU: *Why is the Maimonides Project such an important symbolic gesture on the part of the Vatican?*

Krupp: Maimonides was a medieval Rabbi, philosopher and physician whose writings are revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims. This past year was the commemoration of his death 800 years ago.

I saw potential to use this man's universal appeal as a guide or common denominator of mutual respect between the faiths. I wanted to use my position as a member of the Papal Household to request that the original writings of Maimonides, held in the Vatican Museum for hundreds of years, be seen by all.

We began the project by bringing a group of Jewish Scholars to the Vatican Library in September 2002 to view the manuscripts. Now we have received tentative approval to bring some of these manuscripts to the Israeli Museum for the first time in history for their 40th anniversary celebration exhibit in spring 2005. We hope to invite prominent Christian and Muslim leaders to Israel for this exhibit, helping foster feelings of good will between the faiths. And with the continued growth of the relationship between the Holy See and Israel, we hope to possibly repatriate some of these writings to the Jewish people worldwide.

CIU: *What is the most rewarding achievement of your career? Why?*

Krupp: I cannot answer this question in terms of "most rewarding" but I must say there are three events of which I am most proud.

First, in December 1992, I opened the first kidney Dialysis Center in Sullivan County New York. This was important because no one else would build a facility like this. Although local residents were dying because they had to travel so far to receive hemodialysis treatment, the project was not considered economically sound. This essential medical project has saved hundred of lives

The second accomplishment was my work for Casa Sollievo Della Sofferenza,

the hospital of Saint Padre Pio in San Giovanni Rotundo, Italy. For 15 years we have worked with medical equipment manufacturers to make Casa Sollievo a Beta site in Italy and consequently it is the best equipped Hospital in Europe. We were able to save 15 million dollars in equipment acquisition costs. We did this without any personal financial benefit. This has resulted in improved medical treatment for tens of thousands people in Italy.

The third accomplishment has been Pave the Way's work to remove the obstacles in the relationship between the State of Israel and the Holy See. While never considered to be an important or popular position, Meredith and I have worked directly with Father David Jaeger, legal representative for the Holy See in Israel. We have worked with Jewish Philanthropic organizations, prominent Jewish American businessmen, politicians and individual citizen leaders, encouraging them to write to the Israeli government officials emphasizing the importance of finalizing the fundamental agreements, which have been languishing in a bureaucratic maze of the last 10 years.

I have seen, from my unique position within the Papal household, the deterioration of the relationship between the Holy See and Israel. I use this rare perspective when I work with the staff of the Israel Prime Ministers office, Ambassador Alon Pinkas, the Israeli Consul General in New York, and Oded Ben-Hur, the Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See. I think the Israeli government has come to realize the importance of finalizing a relationship with the Holy See. We have helped move the Israeli government to restart and finalize the Bi-lateral commission talks with the intention of finalizing the fundamental agreements by the end of this year.


The Worldwide Catholic Church, with 1.1 billion people in 47 Catholic Countries, has been the only outspoken continuous voice to condemn Anti-Semitism and longs for a cordial, culturally benevolent relationship with Israel. This accomplishment will benefit millions of Jewish, Catholic, Israeli and Palestinians lives.

CIU: *What are your future goals for Pave the Way?*

Krupp: We hope to continue our efforts to improve the relationship between the Judeo Christian faiths, promoting gestures of good will to solidify these relationships. We want to convince people that inter-religious action, not just dialogue, is needed. Pave the Way is also planning on producing a documentary, which hopes to give a voice to the majority of good people in the Christian, Jewish and Muslim world who condemn killing in Gods name. We all need to follow the blue print of the Alexandria Declaration for peace in the Holy Land

CIU: *With the world the way it is today, do you still have hope in peace? What is your message to others?*

Krupp: Absolutely, no problem created by man cannot be solved by man. If we can give a voice to the silent majority of good people in the world we can fight those who have used religion for their own personal, financial or political gain. My message is simple: we must try to hear the message of God rather than concerning ourselves with the customs and methods through which that message is delivered. We tend to hate each other because of the differences and intensity of our faiths. We are responsible for the well being of our fellow



human beings. We must love and respect one another and we must live honest lives while respecting the rights of others. We must learn to embrace our similarities and savor the differences, the slogan of Pave the Way Foundation.