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**Improving Vatican - Israeli Relations**

During a recent meeting with Father David Jaeger, head of the Franciscan Custody in Israel and chief representative of the Holy See in the finalization of diplomatic relations with the State of Israel, we were able to focus on current deficits with the relationship of Israel and the Holy See. We have also been able to identify shrines and property which the Vatican would like to repatriate in furthering the cordial relationship of the Holy See and the State of Israel. We have pledged the support and action of Pave the Way to further normalize this relationship, which will result in a major cooperative relationship in the broad mutual cultural exchanges of artifacts from both entities.



**Father David Jaeger legal representative to the Holy See in Israel**



**Israeli Ambassador to the Holy See Oded Ben-Hur**

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We have been able to identify some areas in which we may be of assistance in resolving issues, which remain open from the original negotiations and agreement from the 1993 accords. The following are the areas we will be trying to help in resolving some of these open items.

Meeting with Fr. David Jaeger, custodian of the Franciscans in Israel, revealed the following extremely important facts.

1. When diplomatic relations was started with Israel on Dec 30, 1993, two important issues were never settled and remain outstanding today.
  - a. Tax exempt status of the properties of the Catholic Church and all of its holdings. The was to be resolved by 1996 and remains unresolved today.
    - i. The Church is not paying taxes now and has no intention of doing so; consequently this gesture will not have a net fiscal effect on Israel.
    - ii. Some municipalities have even tried to seize Church assets in paying of these taxes
  - b. The repatriation of three specific properties:
    - i. The Shrine of the Upper Room in Jerusalem (This is the site of the Last Supper)
    - ii. The Chapel-Shrine of Cesarea Maritime
    - iii. St. Anthony's Convent, which has been occupied by the Hebrew University since 1948 as an accommodation originally, and admits it does not need the space now. It simply refuses to vacate the premises.
  - c. The Churches access to Israeli courts.
2. There has been a promise of the "opening of flood gates" for cultural and intellectual exchanges between the two Entities.
3. When the properties are repatriated, the Church will be greatly enhancing tourism now, when it is so sorely needed.
4. It is the position that Pave the Way Foundation will do everything possible to encourage completion of these negotiations to a mutually acceptable agreement.

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## Benefits To Israel

Improved relations, with the Holy See, have enormous benefits to Israel both economically and politically.

### Economic Benefits

- Three percent of the Israeli economy is derived from tourism with. Catholic tourism is the largest percentage of the total visitors to Israel annually.
- The Holy See encourages Pilgrims to visit Holy sites and Shrines worldwide. In Italy, Saint Padre Pio was canonized June 13, 2002, the Padre Pio pilgrimage center, as an example attracts 8 million people a year.
- Allowing the repatriation of the Cenacle Shrine and the construction of the new Chapel in Caesarea will result in a new resurgence of Christian pilgrims to Israel. The Cenacle is considered the third most important shrine in Christianity.
- Additional tourists benefit both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Any relief of the economic malaise that has existed over the past 4 years can only bring the possibility of diminished violence to reality.

### Political Benefits

- These gestures of thanks to the Pope, for his remarkable movement of reconciliation with Israel and the Jewish people, will have an enormous positive impact on the way many people view Israel, internationally.
- These gestures would give the friends of Israel and the Jewish people at the Vatican, evidence of the benefits to the Church. This is an essential element in encouraging and justifying this relationship to continue into the next Papacy.
- Religious leaders of the Catholic Church have been among the only public defenders against Anti-Semitism. This should be considered when rewarding this position, and in dealing with other Christian Churches.
- Improved relations will have a benevolent political impact on 1.1 billion Roman Catholics worldwide in 47 Catholic countries.

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