



# FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION

## FOR THE HOLY LAND

*We beseech you to help save the Holy Land.*

## New Name for the Foundation

In our MARCH 2002 NEWSLETTER we addressed the need to change the name of our Foundation. Due to a misuse of names of two distinctly different organizations a complicated confusion was created. "The Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development" which is based in Richardson, Texas, has absolutely nothing to do with the Franciscan mission of our Catholic organization. It is an Islamic organization, which is under profound scrutiny by the US government. Unfortunately when referring to that organization both US media and government representatives incorrectly abbreviated the name to "Holy Land Foundation" thereby making a totally incorrect and inappropriate association to our organization's name and reputation.

During the last three months we were compelled to address this serious situation with media, legal and international advisors, as well as our own church leaders in the USA and the Holy Land. Additionally, we discussed the matter with a random selection of our faithful supporters to directly have your opinions. This combined research and assessment was presented as recommendations for review by our Foundation's Board of Trustees during its May meeting in Atlanta.

### NEW NAME AND LOGO

To avoid any possible confusion hereafter and to distinctly confirm for all parties the historic identity and character of our Franciscan mission, it was officially decided and approved to legally change the name of the foundation. Therefore, while we remain the exact same organization we have been since our founding in 1994 our new legal name is **FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND**. To underscore the unique identity of our work, our logo will highlight the fivefold cross, dating back to the Middle Ages, but also referred to as the

Jerusalem Cross, and sometimes, the Franciscan Cross when used in relation to the Custody of the Holy Land. Both the name and the cross will be the dominant image on all our printed materials.

This unexpected "crisis" of public identity actually served to accomplish some important things for our Foundation. Old friends and new ones quickly came to our assistance to insure as little negative impact as possible. We were challenged to reflect together on the absolute first priority of our mission - to sustain the Christian presence in the Holy Land, to safeguard and sustain the sanctity of the living community today through hopeful support and faith-based witnessing.

### IRS AND TAX EXEMPTION STATUS

Our attorneys have told us that the name change will NOT affect the tax status of the Foundation. Accordingly, any and all future contributions may be made payable to the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land. These contributions will continue to be tax deductible under the Internal Revenue Code.

### CONCLUSION

Needles to say, the Franciscans, with your continued help and assistance, will continue to help stem the Christian exodus in the Holy Land and we hope that this needed decision to 'clear the air' once and for all with our new name, which many of you have asked to be done, will continue to bring hope for those less fortunate in the Holy Land. Once again, the **FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND** is a tax exempt non-profit organization pursuant to section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. All gifts to the Foundation are tax deductible.

### OUR MISSION

THE FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND IS A WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION FOUNDED IN 1994 UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE FRANCISCAN CUSTODY OF THE HOLY LAND. THE FOUNDATION WAS CREATED TO SAFEGUARD THE BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS AND CONTINUED PRESENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN MINORITY LIVING IN THE HOLY LAND BY PROVIDING ACADEMIC SCHOLARSHIPS, SUBSIDIZED HOUSING, EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, WHILE PRESERVING, PROTECTING, AND RESTORING THE HOLY SITES OF CHRISTIANITY. FOR THESE CHRISTIANS TRAPPED IN A HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT OF ETHNIC DISTRUST, THE FRANCISCAN FOUNDATION FOR THE HOLY LAND HAS BECOME THEIR PRIMARY ORGANIZED VOICE.

## LETTER FROM THE CUSTOS

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"Fear not, I am with you;  
be not dismayed; I am  
your God. I will  
strengthen you, and help  
you, and uphold you  
with My right hand of  
justice" (Isaiah 41 vs.  
10)



Fr. Giovanni Battistelli, OFM

These are difficult words to hear at this time; a test of ones faith here in Jerusalem and throughout the land of Israel. Yet we are a Resurrected people of hope and called to love as Christ loved- the Jews, the Muslims, the Christians - all peoples. We live in a land of sorrow, anger and hurt. Yet we are called to love, forgive and be merciful, a tall order for such little people as we are. And yet through the grace of Jesus, He can dwell within us and become a beacon of light in this land of darkness.

I thank each one of you for your prayers and financial support of our Christian Community here in Israel. You have made sacrifices for us and we are so grateful to you. Please, I implore you to continue to join us in prayers for Peace - Let justice and mercy become one!

May Jesus Christ guide and protect you and your family always and in all ways.

In the Spirit of St. Francis...

I remain a servant of God and yours,

Fr. Giovanni Battistelli, O.F.M.

Custos, Franciscan Superior for the Holy Land

Chairman, Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land

## Devoted Pilgrims Volunteer as Foundation Ambassadors



Mr. Michael Hirsch, Regional Representative, Indianapolis, IN



Deacon Gerald Martinez, Regional Representative, New Orleans, LA

The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land has had the honor of receiving two new regional representatives, namely Mike Hirsch of Indianapolis and Deacon Gerald Martinez of the diocese of New Orleans. Both Mike Hirsch and Deacon Martinez have had the opportunity to be in the Holy Land as pilgrims and as servants eager to find the face of Christ. Seeing first hand the depths and urgency of the situation and gaining deeper understanding, they have stepped forward to do their part to help relieve some of the suffering they witnessed and bring peace to a land so ravaged by anger and intolerance.

Mr. Hirsch readily accepted his new position with a prayerful and sincere heart saying, "Each one of us has the opportunity to make a difference for Christians in the Holy Land. For me, seeing first hand the huge need for our involvement was all I needed. Being a representative for the foundation is an honor. Let us all pray for God's mercy on our efforts and allow Him to touch the hearts of all concerned Christians."

In the same spirit of Christian service, Deacon Martinez also eagerly accepted the position of regional representative. "I have made many pilgrimages to the Holy Land to walk where Jesus walked," the Deacon remarked. "I have been very inspired. I also learned the truth about the social, political and economic situation of the

people who live there, especially Christians. I hope that as a representative of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land I can play a part to bring that truth to the people and public officials of the United States. I pray for a time when all of God's children in the Holy Land, Jewish, Christian and Muslim, Israeli and Palestinian, love their God with their whole heart, mind, soul and strength; and love their neighbor as themselves. That is the Law of Moses. That is the command of Jesus. I am confident that is what God wants for His people."

Both men will be an asset as regional representatives because of their desire to further the cause of the foundation and serve their Church. They are sincerely convicted of the plight of the Christians in the Holy Land and wish to give of their time to support the Franciscans and increase awareness of the foundation and its mission in their respective areas. The Board of Trustees gratefully welcomes Mr. Hirsch and Deacon Martinez and looks forward to watching these two new regions develop under their guidance.

### Board of Trustees

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### To contact the Foundation:

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E-mail: [info@ffhl.org](mailto:info@ffhl.org)

Website: [www.ffhl.org](http://www.ffhl.org)

# New Incentives to Remain Offered to Palestinian Christians

Another housing project called St. Francis Village is underway by the Franciscan Custody and the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land to provide fresh incentives for local Christians to remain in the Holy Land. For the last several months, construction companies have been leveling part of a 12 acre piece of property owned by the Franciscans to build some 70 housing units located on the back of the Mount of Olives in the venerated village of Bethpage. The construction crews began laying the foundation for the first of two new apartment complexes. The two complexes will be divided with parking areas for residents and walkways connecting their street to the apartment units. These units will consist of two and three bedrooms, each having a living room, dining room, kitchen and bath. A recreational park for the residents will also be developed on the northern section of the complex. Apartments will be offered to



*(Above) New construction of the housing project over the last several months.*

Christians in the surrounding areas including Jerusalem. To build a home for a Christian family at St. Francis Village will require \$120,000. Thus the total cost of the project will exceed \$8 million.

Although construction is underway and hundreds of applications have already been received, the Franciscans are still far from reaching the \$8 million necessary to complete this project of hope for Christians in the Holy Land. Your financial help is greatly needed to finish construction on this much needed project. It provides motivation and incentives to remain in their land even in the midst of uncertainty.

The small hamlet of Bethpage is bereft of Christians but holds an important role for the Christians in the outlining villages. The Sanctuary of Bethpage is where Jesus began his journey to the walled city of Jerusalem where he triumphantly entered on a donkey. Thousands gather every year to prayerfully walk in the Palm Sunday Procession. On this great feast of the Church, the Body of Christ is brought together in unity and worship. The Franciscan friars have been organizing and participating in this special event since 1480.

The Franciscans and the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land hope to continue helping Christians to be present in these sacred places of our faith. St. Francis Village is an important milestone in stemming the Christian exodus. This project would not be possible without the sincere generosity of the benefactors of our Foundation. Your past support is greatly appreciated and your continued support is a blessing for God's people.



*(Above) Palm Sunday Procession from Bethpage (Photo courtesy of Garo Nalbandian)*



# Christ's Birthplace . . . Always a Refuge

*Excerpts from a Franciscan reflection on the situation in Bethlehem between Fr. Peter Vasko and Fr. Amjad Sabarra once the siege was ended*



*Fr. Amjad Sabarra, OFM, Pastor of St. Catherine's Church and Fr. Johannes Simon, OFM, Guardian of the convent of Bethlehem*

Fr. Amjad Sabarra is a Palestinian from Jerusalem and a member of the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. He was ordained to the priesthood in June 1992. He is pastor of St. Catherine's parish, Bethlehem, located at Manger Square where the 4<sup>th</sup> century Basilica of the Nativity of Our Lord stands. He, along with some thirty other friars and nuns, were caught by surprise during the siege of the church and its compounds in Bethlehem for 39 days. This is the first detailed, exclusive interview given by Fr. Amjad.

**Fr. Amjad, as pastor of St. Catherine's, would you give our readers some statistics and sense of the population in Bethlehem?**

If one is speaking about the indigenous Bethlehemites, there are 28,000. Out of that figure, there are 10,000 Christians, of which 5,000 are of the Roman Catholic Rite. The remaining 18,000 are of the Muslim faith. If one includes the population in the refugee camps in Bethlehem, the total population would then be 150,000. Some thirty-five years ago, the Christian population in Bethlehem was 80%, today it is under 6%.

The majority of Christians in Bethlehem have worked in the hospitality industry as well as in the souvenir business. Before the Al-Aqsa Intifada, which began in September 2000, 70% of the Christians were employed. Today, because of the political turmoil, hotels and travel agencies have closed. Many stores carrying local products such as, handmade olive wood manger sets, local jewelry and other olive wood artifacts, have closed their doors due to lack of pilgrims and tourists. Hence,

income has been reduced to almost nil. Families are either emigrating or seeking help from international aid agencies and the local Church.

**What took place on that fateful day of April 2, 2002 and the days following the siege?**

In the morning of April 2, ten armed Palestinian men wandered into the Church. I, along with Fr. Ibrahim Faltas, approached them and explained that we do not allow arms into the church and that they would have to leave. They did so, quietly and politely. We then bolted the door of the church. At around 3:00 p.m., we heard a lot of gunfire and yelling in and around the Church. We quickly entered the nave of the church to find several hundred Palestinians running into the nave with several dozen carrying guns and semi-automatics. Apparently they had broken the front door of the church and there was absolutely no way that we could have stopped them or persuaded them to leave. The Israeli military were outside shooting and these people were inside. We had no choice but to give them sanctuary and protection.

The number of Palestinians who entered was around 208 persons. This number was comprised of roughly one-third police, one-third security officers and one-third civilians. On April 4, the Israeli military cut off the electricity to the Basilica and the monasteries. Luckily, we had a back-up generator, which gave the friars some additional electricity, but when the pumps failed two days later, we then used candles during the evenings in the church and the monastery. On April 8, the Israeli military shot some firebombs into the parish offices, causing a great deal of destruction. On April 10, all water to the entire compound was cut off. Fortunately, we have a well within the monastery and were able to provide water to the Palestinians inside, as well as to the Orthodox communities who live in the monasteries within the Basilica compound. On April 19, the Israelis severed the telephone lines. On May 2, eleven foreign relief workers courageously ran into the Basilica with food and supplies, risking their lives to do so. They were from Denmark, the United States

and Switzerland. On May 11, the siege of the Basilica of the Nativity ended.

**What did the Franciscan Friars do in the church during this time?**

We provided them with makeshift mattresses, blankets and pillows, as well as food and water. We were very blessed with having a Franciscan nun who was also a nurse and provided the much needed medical care to the wounded. When the Palestinians entered, seven of them were wounded. During the siege, an additional seventeen people were wounded. In addition, some eight other Palestinians were killed during the skirmishes.

We were very unsure what was going to happen. We didn't know how badly the Israeli



*Fr. Amjad receiving friars after 39 day siege is lifted.*

forces wanted the Palestinians inside the church. After the second week, hearing news reports of the pressure that was being put on the Israeli government from many parts of the world, we felt that they would honor and respect the sanctity of one of the holiest sites in Christendom.

**This holy compound is where we live our daily lives as religious. There was absolutely no force or coercion towards us on the part of the Palestinians inside the church. We had complete freedom to move to and fro, and the Palestinians were very thankful to us for providing basic humanitarian needs.**

For the most part we did our daily chores, but



(Above) Panoramic view of Bethlehem (Photo courtesy of Garo Nalbandian)

because of all the loud noise during the middle of many nights of the siege due to shootings, flares and tank movement, we were allowed to sleep during the morning hours and had community Mass and liturgy in the afternoons. Needless to say, our food was being rationed and classes for the student friars were cancelled.

The Israeli military did bomb some of our parish offices as well as destroying several rooms in the Greek Orthodox sections. They also damaged part of the facade of our hospice, Casa Nova. The statue of the Virgin Mary above our monastery cloister was damaged by rifle fire as well as some 6<sup>th</sup> century mosaics in the Armenian Orthodox section of the Basilica.

**Now, in many ways we see how fragile peace can be here in the Holy Land. Peace can only come when there is security for both sides and I would encourage all parties to continue to dialogue, to continue with negotiations, no matter how dismal it may seem. Are we not all brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, all creatures of God, all trying to live our lives in peace?** No one can really win this "war." There will never be any winners in this conflict, only losers. Violence begets violence and he who lives by the sword will die by the sword. Perhaps, this standoff took place where it did, at the birthplace of Jesus Christ, as a sign of divine

protection for all concerned and perhaps saving us from a greater disaster.

**In retrospect, I think that if this event happened again, we would act in the very**



Fr. Custos leads Fr. Bini and Fr. Ibrahim into ancient Church of Nativity after crisis

**same way that we did. We did what Christians are supposed to do – to love.** These people could have been Israeli and we would have embraced them and sheltered them just as we did for the Palestinians. Fr. Giacomo Bini, OFM, the Minister General of the worldwide Franciscan Order, stated during the early part of the siege, that our friars are bound by charity and love and just as we protected thousands of Jews in our monasteries and convents throughout Europe from the insidious Nazi regime, so we become a sanctuary and shield for all those who are in need.

The fact that we willingly and freely remained at our post, at our sanctuary, with the exception of several infirm friars, simply reflects our commitment as the faithful Custodians of the Holy Places. Ultimately, our Franciscan vocation calls us to love, to pardon, to give hope, to have faith and to exult. This is what our founder, St. Francis of Assisi, always admonished his friars and we were simply trying to put that into practice as God's poor instruments in Bethlehem.

## **Bethlehem Mass Celebrated**

Mass was to be celebrated on July 4 in the Grotto of the Nativity in thanksgiving for all the benefactors of the Foundation, especially for the response to the June appeal, "Safeguarding the Gift of Life in the Holy Land". In many ways, Fr. Peter's trek to Bethlehem and the mass he celebrated was miraculous since the Israeli military had just lifted the closure of Bethlehem when he arrived at the checkpoint. Fr. Peter had only five hours to enter Bethlehem, offer mass, visit the poor and depart. For him it was like 'God was opening the door' so that this special mass could be said for all of our donors as planned.

...

Sunday, May 12, 2002

***The universal message of Bethlehem is love, justice, reconciliation and peace. On these foundations a future respectful of the rights of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples can be built in mutual confidence.***

Pope John Paul II



# Coming Together in Atlanta

The weekend of April 26, 2002 members and representatives of the foundation gathered in Atlanta, Georgia for a weekend of reflections, mass, meetings and updates. The successful weekend was concluded by a wonderful fundraising dinner which brought together old and new friends in support of the work of the foundation. The event took place at the Renaissance Hotel where guests gathered to learn more about the Franciscan community and the problems facing the Christians in the Holy Land.

Before introducing the speaker for the evening, Fr. Peter Vasko, President of the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land, gave an update on the recent siege of the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem which was in its 16<sup>th</sup> day. He stated that "the besieged inside the compound were in need of food, water, medical assistance and the removal of two decaying cadavers of Palestinians killed by the Israeli military. We do not see any immediate solution to the problem since both sides regrettably remain adamant in regards to their conditions and how this siege should end." It was pointed out that both the Israelis and the Palestinians are locked in a peace/security conundrum which cannot be solved until the Palestinians have achieved some control over their own land. In many ways, Palestinians do not pose an existential threat to Israel. They can demoralize the country but they cannot conquer it. Conversely, the Israelis do not have the power to silence the Palestinians."

The guest speaker for the event was Mr. Joseph Cornelius Donnelly, International Delegate to the United Nations/NY for Caritas Internationalis. A trustee of the foundation, Mr. Donnelly has been extensively involved with the Holy Land since 1987, living in Jerusalem for seven of those years. His remarks, entitled "To Be Instruments of Peace," offered first hand accounts of the living communities caught up in the struggles today, amidst the sacredness of the land and the unique difficulties of the local Christians. He went on to say that "the Holy Land is congested



Archbishop Donoghue presents a check to Br. Callistus Welch, OFM, Treasurer of the Foundation

with human traffic, a quagmire of what cannot be, never was, but is still hoped for."

The Franciscan Order has been present in the Holy Land for almost 800 years. "They listen," he said. "They are always listening . . . in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and always attempting to plant seeds of peace."

Donnelly, quoting the famous statement of Pope Paul VI, said, "If you want peace, work for justice." He added, "Justice makes its demands upon us in two ways: we work to meet the immediate need, and we work to peacefully address the injustice. Many risk their lives not to be indifferent. The Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land is one such instrument of peace seeking justice."

Archbishop Donoghue of Atlanta then presented a very generous gift to the foundation on behalf of the Archdiocese of Atlanta which will be collected every year and given for scholarships, housing and employment for the Christians in the Holy Land. He said that the **"work of the Franciscan Custody in the Holy Land and, more specifically, their Foundation needed to be supported so that dignity could be given back to the Christians as well as to the other people in the land conflict."** Fr. Peter thanked the Archbishop and his Archdiocese for such a generous gift in helping the beleaguered Christians of the Holy Land. On behalf of the Custos of the Holy Land, Fr. Giovanni Battistelli, OFM, Fr. Peter presented Archbishop Donoghue with the Pope Leo XIII Gold Cross of Honor, a papal decoration. Fr. Peter then called upon Karen Carroll, regional representative of Atlanta for the foundation and the newest member on the



Our guest speaker, Joseph Cornelius Donnelly, left Atlanta for Jerusalem, seen here distributing food parcels in the Holy Land.



Young Palestinian boy receiving food at the Franciscan Church in Emmaus



(l. to r.) John Gillin, Denise Scalzo, Marty Gillin, Julia Wegener and Karen Carroll, Co-chairpersons of the event, with Fr. Peter

national board of trustees, to receive the same papal decoration and award, in appreciation for her great love of the Holy Land and on-going support of our brothers and sisters in the Holy Land.

Later on in the evening, board member Bishop John J. Nevins of Venice, Florida quoted St. Paul saying, "make sure you take care of the household of faith," referring to the Christians of the Holy Land. "They are under difficult circumstances right now and are looking to us for help," he said.

Right Reverend Monsignor Edward Dillon, Pastor of Holy Spirit Church in Atlanta and Master of Ceremonies closed the evening with benediction. The out of town guests and dignitaries who

were attending Saturday's event were generously entertained at the residence of Marty and John Gillin, long time residents of Atlanta and supporters of the foundation. The success of this event lies solely with the two co-chairpersons and their committees. Special thanks to Julia Wegener and Karen Carroll who served as chairpersons for the event together with Carol and George Albright, Claudia and Michele Aquino, Ave Bransford, Diane and Greg Dean, Mary and John Gillin, Anne and Fred Hardage, Tina and Dan Harlin, Margee and Mike Kane, Nancy and Don McMahon, Jennifer and Michael Rollaurer, and Susanne Waring.

## Come to the Holy Land with Fr. Peter Vasko

Despite the current difficulties, we invite you to come on pilgrimage from January 10th – 20th, 2003. Fr. Peter will be our guide. Your participation will benefit the work of the Foundation. Come and walk in the footsteps of Our Lord and see the Holy Sites that surrounded His life. As a pilgrim, you will visit local Christian families and see first hand the Foundation's housing projects.

**Now is the time to reach out in support of our  
Palestinian Christians, who are in such great need.  
Your presence can make a difference.**

For information, please call toll-free (866) 905-3787

## PLEDGE

**Yes, I wish to help maintain and preserve our Christian presence in the Holy Land  
and support the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land with a gift of:**

☐ \$1000    ☐ \$500    ☐ \$100    ☐ \$50    ☐ \$25    ☐ Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

☐ I wish to donate by credit card    ☐ Visa    ☐ Master Card    ☐ American Express

Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Your contribution will be used to create scholarships and jobs, provide subsidized housing, and help restore the Tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. **"Your plenty at the present time should supply their needs so that their surplus may one day supply your needs, with equality as the result."** (II Corinthians, Chapter 8, Verse 14)

Please fill in the information and enclose your check made payable to the:

**Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land.**

Thank you & God bless you.

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- ☐ I would like to receive the Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land Newsletter  
☐ I am interested in making a gift in my will or estate. Please send me information.  
 Double your gift! Ask your employer about a matching gift program.

A Christian exodus, unlike any in our history, is presently occurring in the Holy Land.

In the middle of this century, 25 percent of the population of the Holy Land was Christian. Today, it is less than three percent. Specifically, out of more than six million people, there are only 150,000 Christians now living in the Holy Land. This is a crucial situation, demanding that we join together and take action before Christianity ceases in the land where Christ founded His Church.

We need your help now! We hope and pray the Lord will touch your hearts and that you will be able to play a role in helping to preserve and maintain our Christian presence, religious roots and heritage in the Holy Land.

**Please send your donations to:**  
 Franciscan Foundation for the Holy Land  
 1400 Quincy Street, NE  
 Washington, DC 20017

8/02

# Communities Across the Nation Work to Bring Awareness



**Cincinnati (at left):** (l. to r.) Bro. Callistus, OFM Treasurer of FFHL, William R. Burleigh, Co-host, Fr. Peter, Dr. William Kitzmiller, Co-host and Regional Representative for FFHL



**New Orleans (at left):** Judge Adrian Duplanpier, Fr. Peter, Clark Brennan of Brennan's Restaurant, and Deacon Gerald Martinez.



**New Orleans (at left):** Retired Archbishop of New Orleans, Most Reverend Phillip M. Hannan, Fr. Peter, and MaryLou Mc Call, co-anchor on "Focus".



**Birmingham (above):** Fr. Peter, Elizabeth Elliott, Rev. Ruth LaMonte, Lois Conwell, Nancy Dinsmore, Very Rev. Richard Donohoe, Moderator of the Curia, Ken Simon, and William Conwell



**Colorado (above):** Legatus Speaking Engagement. (l. to r.) Fr. Peter, John Saeman, CEO Medallion Enterprises, Carolyn Saeman, His Eminence, Francis Cardinal Arinze, Director of Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, Marty Moore, President of Denver Chapter of Legatus, Sam and Rebecca Perry.



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