

The Holy Land Coordination

John L. Allen Jr. | Jan. 15, 2010 All Things Catholic

Every January for the last 10 years, a group of bishops from Europe, the United States and Canada visit the Middle East as part of a Vatican initiative known as the "Holy Land Coordination." The aim of exercise is to sensitize the prelates to the issues of the region so that once home, the bishops can lead their churches and societies in doing something about them. The visits also provide a form of moral support for the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land, launched in 1992 as the bishops' conference of the region -- in effect, a way of underscoring that the Catholic world hasn't forgotten about them.



This week the Holy Land Coordination visited Israel and the Palestinian

Territories, with a special focus this time on East Jerusalem. In a concluding statement issued Jan. 14, the bishops from Europe and North America warned of "a growing distance between Israelis and Palestinians -- a lack of human contact that undermines trust and dialogue." They called on Christians back home "to learn about the situation, and to come on pilgrimage to witness the vibrant faith of the 'living stones' of the local church -- the 'Fifth Gospel.' "

The American representative for the visit this year was Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson, currently vice-president of the U.S. bishops' conference. Kicanas also spent three days in Lebanon, the birth place of his grandparents.

I spoke with Kicanas by phone from Jerusalem on Wednesday. My full report is here: [A downward spiral, but 'Christians will remain'](#) [1]

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