



# *Sacred Heart Parish*

*Vicariate of Amman*

*(English-Language)*

**A Ministry of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits)**

**ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019**

**January – December**

Welcome to the Annual Report for 2019.

Sacred Heart is a personal parish, rather than a territorial parish, which means that with the exception of the Francis Xavier Chapel at the Jesuit Center where we celebrate a morning Mass 6 days a week, we do not have a permanent structure of our own. Thanks to St. Mary of Nazareth Church, Sweifieh and St. Jean Baptiste de LaSalle Church in Jabal Hussein, we are able to celebrate the Sunday Mass on Saturday and Sunday evening.

But a parish is not a building – a parish is people, and Sacred Heart, albeit a most unusual parish, is filled with wonderful people with extraordinary backgrounds, great generosity and varied interests

While this report makes no claim to cover every activity of the past year, it does give a taste of what we have done – and what we have failed to do. There is both a print and an electronic/online version of this report. The latter has a number of pictures which simply do not reproduce well.

*Fr. John R. Sheehan, SJ – Pastor*

**MASS ATTENDANCE FOR 2019**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Sweifieh</b>	<b>Jes. Ctr</b>	<b>Freres</b>	<b>Notes</b>
January	755	449	188	
<i>Average</i>	<i>189</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>47</i>	
February	746	354	180	
<i>Average</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>45</i>	
March	986	509	193	
<i>Average</i>	<i>197</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>40</i>	
April	833	444	379	*Freres includes Holy Thur/Good Fri.
<i>Average</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>75</i>	
May	788	362	179	*Sweifieh Includes 1st Communion
<i>Average</i>	<i>197</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>45</i>	
June	647	553	229	
<i>Average</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>49</i>	
July	833	444	378	
<i>Average</i>	<i>208</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>75</i>	
August	788	362	179	
<i>Average</i>	<i>197</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>45</i>	
September	647	553	229	
<i>Average</i>	<i>129</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>49</i>	
October	770	371	213	
<i>Average</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>42</i>	
November	722	322	170	
<i>Average</i>	<i>193</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>43</i>	
December	937	353	169	
<i>Average</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>34</i>	
<b>ANNUAL</b>				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8,563</b>	<b>4,723</b>	<b>2,515</b>	
<i>Average</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>15</i>	<i>46</i>	

**NEW JESUITS IN AMMAN**

2019 saw the arrival of two new Jesuits joining the community: Father Hicham Chemaly from Lebanon, who will be working outreach with the Arabic Christian communities and parishes, and Father Marc-Stephan Giese from Germany who is studying Arabic, helping with the parish and who has created the Jesuit Center Community Choir.

**SACRAMENTS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE****DAILY REFLECTIONS**

As in the past we have offered a daily reflection each day during Lent and Advent, and this year we added a daily reflection during the Mission Month of October. Individuals have to ask to be placed on the mailing list, so we don't "flood" people with too much mail. But the response has been very positive, and even the Bishop has commented on how effective it is.

## CONFESSIONS

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, “Confession,” is one of the most important sources of grace in our Church, and we try to provide opportunities for people to receive that sacrament as often as possible. We try to have confession available before the weekend Masses but it is often difficult, especially as the celebrant has to set up, and often we do not have access to the Church enough in advance to make that possible. During Lent Fr. Linden was a great resources, hearing confessions before Mass started, up the end of the Liturgy of the Word. Fr. Marc-Stephan has been performing the same service during Advent and it is a great help. During Lent, when the chapel was open for prayer, confessions were also available, and any of the Jesuit priests may be approached at any time for confession.

## CONFIRMATION

In February we were privileged to administer the sacrament of Confirmation at the Saturday evening Mass to the son of the Polish Ambassador. We also blessed candles for the Feast of the Presentation and we blessed throats in anticipation of the Feast of St. Blaise. Later in the year we also had a private ceremony at the Jesuit Chapel, where a new Catholic was baptized, received the Sacrament of Confirmation and received his first Holy Communion.

## BAPTISMS

In addition to three Baptisms at the Jesuit Chapel, Fr. John was privileged to be able to baptize 2 other young people at the Baptismal Site at the River Jordan and we had one adult who was formally received back into the Church.

## FIRST COMMUNION

In 2019 we had 15 children who made their First Holy Communion, and one from the class who actually received his First Communion at his home church in Poland. The class for 2020 has 14 children, including two who were baptized in the Orthodox Church (and so received Communion at their Baptism) but whose parents wanted them to know more about the faith.



### **SPIRITUAL DIRECTION AND COUNSELING**

All of the priests at the Jesuit Center are available for spiritual direction, counseling or just conversation, if there is something that is troubling you. The 3 C's – Confession, Counseling or Conversation. (Someone once suggested a 4<sup>th</sup> "C" – Cocktails. That, of course, would depend on the priest.)

### **EASTER TRIDUUM**

Once again Easter provided the opportunity for special celebrations. On Holy Thursday (attendance 75), the Washing of the feet and the Mass of the Last Supper took place at Jean Baptiste de LaSalle Church, followed by a procession through the streets carrying the Blessed sacrament to the Altar of repose at the Jesuit Center, where people stayed and prayed until almost 11 PM. On Good Friday (attendance 95) the Sacred Liturgy was again celebrated at Jean Baptiste.

There was an abbreviated Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night at 5 PM at Sweifieh (attendance 235 and a warning from the Pastor not to let the service go more than 1 hour), and the full Easter Vigil (attendance 40) at the Jesuit Center. Easter Sunday morning Mass (attendance 67) was also celebrated at the Center, with the large room turned into a church.

### **FEAST OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA – July 31**

There was a special Mass and a reception in the morning on July 31<sup>st</sup>, celebrating the founder of the Society of Jesus. In the afternoon, the Center hosted a "Texas Barbecue" with the assistance of many people from the parish. Over 200 people were served barbecue and assorted side dishes, and at the end of the evening, the Theatre Arts Program had a special performance in the Garden Theatre.

### **THE FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER – December 3**

The Chapel at the Jesuit Center is dedicated to St. Francis Xavier, and so on his feast day on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, there was a special Mass and a reception in the morning, and in the evening, there was a larger celebration with the Mass in Arabic and a wide cross-section of the community invited to come and celebrate. The large room was again turned into a Church, with almost 100 people present.

### **CHILDREN'S LITURGY OF THE WORD**

One of the popular innovations has been the creation of the "Children's Liturgy of the Word," where the younger set are invited to adjourn to the soundproof room in the Church and have the message of the Gospel presented to them in a way they can understand and enjoy. The children return at the time of the Offertory, so parents have a chance to concentrate on the Liturgy of the Word, and the children have their own time and place.

### **FATHER JOHN MEETS FATHER CHRISTMAS**

Father John sang his second concert in Amman in November. Originally scheduled for October, the date had to be moved because of construction work in the theatre. Although the attendance was smaller than the 2018 concert, the audience response was positive and just over 1,200 JOD was raised for the Care for the Poor program.



### **BIBLE STUDY / ADULT CATECHISM / CHILDREN'S CATECHISM**

One of the most frequently-asked questions is about catechism and faith education, both for children and for adults. For children, there are classes in preparation for First Communion and Confirmation, and the Children's Liturgy of the Word at the Saturday evening Mass. Catechism

classes for children have proved difficult to arrange, because available space is hard to find, school schedules are different so not all children have the same “weekends” and schedules of the children tend to be filled with extracurricular activities so that even on Friday, there are conflicts. Without a concrete time and place, we’ve been unable to announce a class to determine how many might be interested, and if we could get teachers.

An adult Bible study group has been meeting regularly for a number of years, and each week on Tuesday morning, between 15 and 20 gather. Although the title is “Bible Study,” the sessions include a wide range of faith topics. The group meets between 11 and 12:30, and since they start promptly, most arrive before the beginning time. Newcomers are most welcome. This past year, an evening group has started, meeting on Tuesday evening at 7 PM. As a new group it is smaller, but the sessions have been stimulating and again, newcomers are welcome.

A third adult group started meeting in September, primarily parents of First Communion candidates, who expressed an interest in knowing “at least as much as my children,” as one mother put it. They meet at the same time as the First Communion class, from 3:30 until 4:30 on Saturday afternoon, and anyone is welcome to participate.

### **ASK FATHER JOHN**

A different form of “education,” Ask Father John is a casual evening gathering where any question is permitted. An open forum, topics have been theological, historical, biblical, current events and even personal questions (“Why do you wear a beard?”). Hosted by different families in the parish, it is scheduled occasionally and announced in the Newsletter.



in

### **VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES**

We are often told – and how true it is – that a parish is first of all and primarily the people. Since we do not have a “building” of our own, our focus is perhaps more on the people than in some other places. We do not control the space, and so flexibility has become a watchword. Here are some of the ways our people make our Parish not just “work” but be a place of spiritual joy and refreshment.

**COORDINATORS** - In most organizations there is usually a core of people who are the soul of the place, the ones with the greatest dedication and experience. In our parish, the coordinators organize the other volunteer ministries, coordinate the Masses and on the occasions when we have a reception after Mass or some other special event, they find and organize the volunteers.

**LECTORS** – Proclaiming the Word of God is one of the ministries assigned to the laity after the Second Vatican Council. Since perhaps 80% of our congregation does not have English as their original language, the ability to proclaim clearly and correctly is even more important. A Lector goes through a training workshop and is formally installed according to the rites of the Church. It is a ministry available to men and women.



**ALTAR SERVERS** – Assisting the priest at the altar is long-standing ministry in our Church and at Sacred Heart Parish, it is open to boys and girls and men and women. At the moment, the number of servers is smaller than it should be and hopefully a new year will bring new volunteers for this important work. Potential servers observe, and go through one training session with the Pastor.

**EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS OF HOLY COMMUNION** – EMHC volunteers go through two training sessions, to prepare them for the sacred duty of helping the priest distribute Holy Communion, and in some cases to bring the Eucharist to the homebound or those who are in hospital. It is reserved to men only in this Vicariate.

**MUSIC MINISTRY** – At Sweifieh we have a dedicated leader of song, a woman who leads the Responsorial Psalm, and a congregation that sings like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Past attempts to form a regular separate singing group have not been successful. A transient population, people with jobs that frequently take them out of town, busy schedules and heavy traffic in Amman all contribute to making this a difficult ideal to realize. At Freres, a much smaller congregation sings but also enjoy moments of silent reflection. In 2019 we had a temporary leader of song for a while, but he left the country shortly after volunteering.

### **CARE FOR THE POOR**

This group tries to help individuals and families in need, in the name of the parish, and listed below are some of the activities that have taken place in 2019.

**ADVENT BASKET** – Instead of collecting items, this year we offered Advent Basket cans, into which money could be put during the Advent season. The cans were collected at Christmas and afterwards and the money added to the funds for use by Care for the Poor projects.



**HEATING POTS, BLANKETS AND FOOD** – At the beginning of the year, using the money from the Advent Basket drive, we provided double-weight double blankets and boxes of food to families in need. We also distributed 50 heating units, consisting of clay pots, tea candles, and bricks which were used to form a small oven-like enclosure on which the pots would sit upside down. 4 candles, burning for 4 hours, could raise the temperature of an average room by around ten degrees, and we gave two sets to each family, and 200 candles. They are inexpensive, candles are easy to replace and they are safe.

### **PLANTING TREES AND MEETING CHILDREN IN ANJARA**

The idea was to provide not just assistance but an ongoing aid to poor families in the north, and so in May ten trees were purchased and arrangements made to visit and actually plant lemon and fig trees at local homes. We also visited the orphanage and provided food for a celebration dinner with the children there.



**IFTAR DINNER** – For the second year, Sacred Heart Parish hosted an Iftar Dinner in the garden at the Jesuit Center. We served around 128 people. At the end of the evening the Theatre Arts Program provided a show in the Garden Theatre.



**SOS CHILDREN’S ART PICNIC** – On October 18, approximately 20 orphans from the SOS Children’s Village were bused to the Jesuits Center for an art session and a picnic in our outdoor garden area. The whole event was staffed with volunteers, and art supplies, easels, papers and paint had been loaned or donated for the day. Several professional artists and teachers were present to help guide and motivate, and others just were companions for the day. Some children for the parish also participated, and the feeling was friendly and fun. The picnic was as great a success as the painting, and although unanticipated, the generosity of others left us with a slight profit on the day.



**TOYS AND TREES AND FREE CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS** - We sometimes get offers of items, often clothing, and through our work with Jesuit Refugee Services, programs at the Jesuit Center, and other supporting agencies, we are usually successful in placing these gifts where there is the greatest need. This year a business gave us two large Christmas trees (which we sold) and a small truckload of loads, which made their way to families in the area, and a large load of Christmas ornaments. The logistics of trying to organize and sell the ornaments was too time-consuming, so at a time of the year when everyone seemed to be selling things, Sacred Heart Parish gave away over a thousand ornaments. They were certainly popular at the weekend Masses but also with refugees who were coming to the Center and individuals who then were able to give them to families and individuals.

**INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY SUPPORT** - Although we are not – and really do not want to be – an agency that provides direct support, on occasion circumstances are made known to individuals, and more often to the Pastor, about truly needy cases. At his discretion, sometimes consulting with the Jesuit Superior, he has made individual gifts or arranged for services which have been paid for through the Care for the Poor program. We do not publicize this, for obvious reasons, and probably turn down more requests than we support.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### **PARISH WEB PAGE**

In 2019 we had 17, 917 visitors who over the course of the year made 161,942 visits. The largest number came from the United States or computers registered in the U.S. Jordan accounted for about half the number from the U.S. but we had visits from 132 different countries, and 856 individual visits from computers that were blocked or disguised and so were registered on our system as “Unknown.”

### **PARISH CALENDAR**

The third edition of the Parish Calendar came out in early December, and at this writing almost 85% of the cost of the calendar has been met by sales and advertising. Once the calendar has paid for itself, the price is reduced and we are fairly liberal at giving away additional copies. It is good “advertising” for the parish and the work that we do.

**FACEBOOK**

The Facebook page continues to be one of the alternatives for distributing information. Daily reflections are sent by email to those who ask to be on the list, but are also available on the page, as are the weekly copies of HEARTBEAT. It is also a place where other items of interest to the parish can be posted, for those who do not visit the website, or for items too large for the newsletter.

**HEARTBEAT**

The weekly newsletter goes to over 180 email addresses, and we print around 60 hard copies each week. It is the primary form of communication with members of the parish.

**DIFFICULTIES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS**

There is much to celebrate about our Parish and accomplishments to rejoice in, and this End of Year report does not pretend to have included everything. Yet to be honest and fair, it is also good to note moments in our parish life that have been disappointing, efforts that proved unsuccessful, areas perhaps where we should be paying more attendance.

**Volunteer Ministries** – We have very generous people in our parish and their enthusiasm is responsible for a lot of great activity. But overall the response from the congregation is often disappointing. We have one Extraordinary Minister of Holy Communion, 5 Altar servers, we need more Lectors and the idea for a serious Music Ministry has never taken off. We need more people for the Children’s Liturgy of the Word, and although the problems with simply getting the hall for receptions has pre-empted the need, we do need one or more volunteers to coordinate the receptions.

**Coming on Time and Leaving Early** – There are traffic problems in Amman, we know that. But there have been days when between 30 and 40 people have arrived at Mass in Sweifieh after it started, and some arriving after the homily. There are also a number who leave early; it isn’t as though they are catching a train, because if we finish a 5:50 or 6:10, they are still lining up to be the first ones out the door. Although the numbers are smaller at Freres, the dynamic is the same. We have had nights when 50-60% of the congregation arrived after we started and there are always some who leave early, again, no matter what time we finish.

**Access to Facilities** – As a personal parish we have control only over the chapel at the Jesuit Center. Our weekend Masses are in places where we do not control the physical plant or the other facilities.

At Sweifieh we have been able to use the Church Hall for a reception only once since September this year, and earlier in the year we were moved twice into the basement. We have regularly been faced with events in the Church that go beyond 4:30, making it difficult to prepare for Mass to begin on time. One Mass was constantly disturbed with hammering and pounding and the sounds of construction, to the point where I had to use a microphone to be heard – and I NEVER use a microphone. Members of the Arabic community regularly enter the church before our Mass is finished, walking down the aisle and acting as though nothing of importance is going on. And the Pastor regularly reminds us, for major events, to finish on time, because he warns us that “his people” will enter and take the seats of our congregation who have gone up for Communion.

At Freres we have similar difficulties. When our Mass is first, the congregation that comes after us used to enter very early, again with great disrespect to the Mass going on. Brother Albert has stepped in and he waits in the vestibule to help keep them back. We have even had signs made to put up on the doors in Arabic and English, asking them to wait. When our Mass comes after the other community (they switch with Daylight Savings Time) we are seldom able to get in the Church in a meaningful way. (I must note that in 2020, the first group has started their Mass 30 minutes earlier, and that has been a great help to us.)

**First Collection Accountability** – Parishioners deserve an accounting of their generosity, and one of the reasons for the End of the Year Report, and for the quarterly reports to the Parish Advisory Council, is to let the parish know what their financial contributions were and where the money they have given goes. Unfortunately, I have no way of knowing how much our parishioners contributed in the First Collection each week to our host parishes – and my feeling is we should have those numbers to share with the parishioners.

**Masses in Jabal Hussein** - When I first came, I was told clearly that people don't like to come to Jabal Hussein. I was shocked at the attendance for the Easter Vigil at Freres Church that year, so the next year I offered to provide buses, so people could park in Sweifieh and we would transport them to a from the Vigil Service. There was not enough response to warrant a van. The third year when we had our Easter Vigil at the Jesuit Center attendance was better – but the numbers for Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter morning tell the same story. A “Vigil Mass” that takes place while it is still daylight is contrary to all the liturgical norms, especially the Easter Vigil – and to have even that strange liturgy limited to one hour is contrary to the whole spirit of the celebration. Perhaps if the Holy Saturday vigil at Sweifieh were simply cancelled it would motivate more people to participate in the great celebrations at they should be presented.

**Projects** – There were several projects or events proposed that never came to fruition. The Parish Council proposed a pilgrimage to Malta, but because of timing, slow response from firms in Malta, perhaps a bad time of the year, there was not enough response to justify the trip. A progressive dinner had been proposed but again there was not enough response from people willing to help organize and run the event to make a further effort feasible. For two years the Mass and reception for Jesuit Alumni and Friends had been a great event, and each year had received good coverage in international journals. This year we were unable to get the hall and so while the Mass was nice, it did not generate the interest or publicity that previous years had done. (And as a footnote – on the day, there was nothing in the hall that afternoon, or any sign of preparation for any event as late as 7:30 in the evening.)

In a parish like ours where a large portion of the community is transient, the opportunity to have a social gathering once a month or so where people can mix and mingle and get to know each other is always a valuable dimension to parish life. The situation at Sweifieh this year was a real drawback. We asked to reserve the hall and were told it was booked. We asked to reserve it in advance and were told we had to wait. When we tried again, we were told it was booked. We offered to pay the fee they charge for the use of the hall, 200 JOD – it was that important to us – and we were told, Oh no that's not necessary. But the hall was never available. We had one reception at the beginning of the new year in September there was no other time until the end of 2019 when the facility was available - or at least, available to us. It was a real disappointment and a number of parishioners commented on it.

## A BRIEF CALENDAR OF THE PAST YEAR

### January

- 1 – Morning Mass at the Jesuit Center
- 11 – Pilgrimage to the Baptismal Site  
Advent Basket Cans opening and money counting
- 17 – Snow holiday, everything closed
- 18 – House blessing
- 20-22 Visit of Father Provincial
- 25 – Car blessing

### FEBRUARY

- 2 - Blessing of candles and throats and Confirmation
- 11 – Visit from the Ambassador from Panama
- 13 – Collected donation of Christmas trees, ornaments and toys
- 16 – Renewal of Marriage vows, reception in the basement
- 18 – Ask Father John

### MARCH

- 9 Children’s Mass with bubbles
- 12 Meeting of the Parish Advisory Council
- 13 ASH WEDNESDAY  
Daily reflections for Lent begins
- 17 Special Mass for St. Patrick’s Day
- 21 Special Mass for Mother’s Day
- 23 First Confession - late start with scheduling conflict  
Sacrament of the sick administered

### APRIL

- 6 Zeena Francis died
- 12 Memorial Mass for Zeena at the Jesuit chapel
- 13 Parish reception moved to the basement
- 23 Baptism at the Jordan River
- 25 Holy Thursday – HUGE traffic problems around Amman  
Procession through the streets with the Blessed Sacrament
- 27 Holy Saturday – Early Vigil at Sweifieh, Full Vigil at the Jesuit Center
- 28 Easter Sunday – Morning Mass at the Jesuit Center

### MAY

- 7/8 Retreat at the Baptismal site
- 14 128 people for Iftar dinner in the garden and a performance in the Garden Theatre
- 18 First Communion Mass and celebration
- 24 Tree planting project in Anjara
- 26 Fr. John to US until July 4

### JULY

- 5 Feast of the Sacred Heart – Special Mass & Reception
- 31 Solemnity of St Ignatius Loyola  
Texas Barbecue for over 200 guests and a show in the Garden Theatre

### SEPTEMBER

- 2 Fr Hicham arrives to join the community

- 5 Fr Marc-Stephan arrives to join the community
- 6 Baptism of refugees about to emigrate
- 7 Narrated Mass – Part 1
- 10 1<sup>st</sup> evening session of the Bible study group
- 14 Classes for First Communion begin  
Reception after Mass – the only one for 2019
- 18 October concert cancelled, replaced with “Father John Meets Father Christmas”
- 19-23 Visit of the Provincial of the Near East Province
- 21 Narrated Mass (Part 2)  
1<sup>st</sup> Saturday catechism class for adults.  
1<sup>st</sup> class for Confirmation preparation
- 22 New leader of song for Mass at Freres Church
- 24 Lector workshop
- 28 Children’s Mass with bubbles

#### OCTOBER

- 1 Daily reflection for the Mission Month begin
- 5 Mass in Latin
- 12 Installation of Lectors
- 17 Farewell reception for Sr Ursula  
SOS Children’s Art Picnic
- 19 Jesuit Friends and Alumni Mass – no reception this year
- 25 Baptism, Confirmation and First Communion in the chapel
- 30 Fr. John on retreat until November 9

#### NOVEMBER

- 18 Fr. John Meets Fr. Christmas – for the benefit of the Care for the Poor program
- 23/24 Christ the King – Advent Basket program starts

#### DECEMBER

- 1 Daily reflections for Advent begin
- 14 Mass for Children
- 24 Christmas Eve Vigil Mass
- 25 Morning Mass at the Jesuit Center