



GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN  
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF  
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

*At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land*

## Support critical thinking and debate: the Bethlehem Debate Club

An initiative funded by the USA Western Lieutenancy



Sometimes **words** just seem to be a set of sounds one after another and yet convey meanings and are our way to get in touch with each other, to describe the world and to express what we believe in and that we carry in our hearts.

The gift of speech and the ability to express ourselves and to argue our thinking is at the heart of an initiative promoted by **the Debate Club** of the De la Salle Brothers College in Bethlehem. This school was founded by the brothers of the Order in 1893 and since then has pursued its mission of providing high quality and cutting edge education to local youths. To date about a thousand students are enrolled.

In December 2014, the school principal, George Naber, decided to introduce a program into the school that gives an opportunity for students to compete with their peers from around the world putting to the test **their critical thinking and analytical skills, the knowledge of important facts about the world and society, their ability to argue logically** and carefully and to wisely articulate a debate through the format proposed by the World School's Debate.

Since then, thanks to the cooperation with international guests, like Professor Alfred Snider of the University of Vermont, a process that aims to create a healthy culture of debate in the Lasallian school and, hopefully, throughout Palestine has begun. Already in just two years dozens of academies have emerged and five other schools have participated. In 2015, the best students were selected to take part in the **World School's Debate Championship** in Singapore and the World School's Debate Academy Slovenia. In 2016 there was the first local championship in Palestine and two international events in Slovenia and Germany.

The **USA Western Lieutenancy of the Order** has willingly supported this project allowing the students selected to live these important experiences of discussion and formation abroad. In the letter of thanks received by the school, the headmaster George Naber and the coordinator of the Debate Club Muna Kattan, write: "While we brought forward the debates, while we were preparing, forming and coordinating, we always had in mind that we had to make you proud of the support that you have given us."

The Debate Club of the De la Salle brothers' school in Bethlehem has its own facebook page where you can keep in touch with the students and follow their updates:

[www.facebook.com/freresbethlehemdebate](http://www.facebook.com/freresbethlehemdebate)

*(February 23, 2017)*

*"After three years of being a part of the Debate Club I no longer take things for granted. I have begun to discuss many more issues with my friends because debating has developed my critical thinking. I also learned how to present my ideas and my thoughts in an appropriate manner so that people can understand me. This has improved my interpersonal skills. I was a shy girl who never felt at ease in speaking in front of other people, but now I have grown more sure of myself and am a person who can discuss, debate and argue her point.*

*Debating has taught me to be an objective person. Through debate you learn to listen to those who think differently and to understand their points of view and this helps to get a clearer idea of the general situation."*

### **Dana Ewaiwi**

*"People ask me: 'What does debating mean for you?' I have a lot of answers to this question but perhaps the most important one is that debating has become a friend who helps me. Debating has enabled me to think quickly and deeply about each topic and to arrive at a solution to problems. It has given me strength and logic in negotiating with my family and my friends. In addition, it has provided me with the speed and clarity necessary to draw up a convincing answer to any question I may be asked. If I look at how I was a year ago and how I am today, I would say that there is a huge difference.*

*I had great fun at the World School's Debate Championship and Slovenia. I have had many experiences and made new friends with great people: my life has changed."*

### **Vanessa Abu Kova**