

The Jerusalem Center at Thirty

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A First Presidency Project

I first “met” James E. Faust in June 1989, when, a month after the Jerusalem Center was dedicated, he called my home. BYU president Jeffrey R. Holland had appointed me an associate academic vice president in late February, with a portfolio that included the university’s international and undergraduate programs, but this assignment was set aside when he was called to the Seventy in April and Rex Lee was named president of BYU. In June, Rex invited me to stay on in that same role with the portfolio President Holland had given me, which on the international side included administrative oversight of the university’s new Jerusalem Center.

Elder Faust introduced himself, asked me a bit about myself, and then asked when I planned to go to Jerusalem. “Probably at Christmas,” I responded. He replied, “Well, if I had administrative oversight for a First Presidency project, I think I would want to see it as soon as I could.” I can take a hint: I was on a plane for Jerusalem in early August 1989 for the first of more than ninety trips in the next thirty years. I returned to Provo, started teaching and learning about my administrative assignments. A couple of weeks after I returned from Jerusalem, I got another call from Elder Faust. He asked about my trip and, within a minute or so, it became very clear that I had been sent but had not returned and reported, and that this was a mistake. Having gently delivered that message, he invited me to join him in the office of Howard W. Hunter, then President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, later that week. So



The library at the Jerusalem Center. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

began wonderful relationships with, to a lesser degree, President Hunter and, to a much greater degree, Elder Faust that lasted until each passed away—relationships that have extended, in a sense, beyond their deaths with Elder Holland’s gentle reminders on occasion of their keen interest in the Center and his thoughtful counsel and concern for its success.

At the conclusion of this first meeting with President Hunter and Elder Faust in early September 1989, Elder Faust walked me to the door of President Hunter’s office and, facing me, with a gesture something like thumping on someone’s chest, said, “Remember, Jim, this is a First Presidency project.” For the next five or six years, he repeated this *literally* every time I met with him, which was every three or four months. At the end of our meetings, he would walk around his desk, accompany me to the door, turn to me (often with the thumping-on-the-chest gesture), and say, “Remember, Jim, this is a First Presidency project.” After five years or so, it became a bit more intermittent, but to the end of his life he would on occasion figuratively and sometimes literally (in good humor) gently thump on my chest while saying, “Remember, Jim, this is a First Presidency project.” This is a lesson I’m unlikely to forget but one that was dramatically emphasized when I accompanied Elder Faust to Jerusalem in 1994. While walking arm-in-arm with him toward

the Center from the traffic circle outside the front gate to the Center's grounds, he looked at the exterior wall where "The Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, Brigham Young University" appears in large blue letters and said, sotto voce, "It's sad and it's wrong," referring, clearly, to the fact that the Church's name did not appear at the entrance to the Center's grounds or anywhere in the building itself for that matter.

For President Hunter and Elder Faust, the construction of the Center may have been an assignment from the First Presidency, but it was also a labor of love and devotion. Their view of the Center as a First Presidency project didn't originate with them. President Harold B. Lee, in his 1972 visit to the Holy Land, had indicated he hoped a building could be constructed that would be a Church presence in Jerusalem and that would also house BYU's study abroad programs. In 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball, during a visit to Jerusalem on the occasion of the dedication of the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden, expressed the same priorities—the construction of a building to be a Church presence in Jerusalem but to also house BYU's study abroad programs.

Given BYU's day-to-day use of the Center for its study abroad programs, it's easy for almost everyone to think only about BYU's presence. But I know full well that the Center is not BYU's building—we are merely custodians for the First Presidency. I expect to meet President Faust again one day; I'm confident he will ask that I account for my stewardship of "the First Presidency's project." So, while the university had to step forward and the Church had to step back in order to preserve the Center's ownership in the difficult days described in this morning's first session, I have tried to find ways to honor the First Presidency's keen interest in having a Church presence in Jerusalem. While this necessarily means that the Center has to represent the Church mostly through its BYU student programs, I have also looked for other ways for the Center to have a broader, if indirect, Church presence. I hasten to say, however, that opportunities to do so have come mostly by luck, not planning, and, in truth, my efforts have been modest at best.

As one example, we now have a Sunday evening concert series with forty-four concerts a year in four eleven-week programs, with concerts featuring jazz, ethnic, and lighter music eight times a year on Thursday evenings. We have loyal patrons who fill the auditorium for each concert and many who come on standby hoping to get a ticket. We also have a waiting list of terrific musicians who would like to perform at the Center. It's widely recognized among Israelis as one of the best concert series (and concert venues) in the Holy Land.

It's not that there was some grand plan to do this, however. Rather, the concerts came about in the following way. As background, you need to know that in addition to the nonproselytizing agreements, the land lease established a government "public activities" oversight committee. For the first ten years of the lease, we were not permitted to invite outsiders into the building without the approval of this committee.

Back to the story: In the two years between when the students first moved into the building and when I came to have administrative oversight, a student choir had begun to sing for our workers and faculty and their families one evening during the Christmas season. The word got out, and a number of friends in the city wanted to attend the student choral evening. In November 1989, George Horton and I met with the public activities committee (which President Hunter always referred to as the "muzzle-the-Mormons committee") to seek permission to invite these outside guests to the concert. George shared the program, which, no surprise, was all Christmas music. The chair of the committee, Haim Klugman (the director general of the Ministry of Justice), said, "You can invite a few guests, but you cannot sing Christian-oriented Christmas songs." I was annoyed. A few days later, Mr. Klugman called George and asked for syllabi and other curricular materials because "the committee would like to review the Center's curriculum." I was really annoyed and determined to push back against the committee's clear overreach.

Upon my return to the States I met with President Hunter and Elder Faust, and we agreed that we needed to establish the principle that this was our building, that what we did within the building was our business and not subject to oversight by anyone. The committee could, if it wished, forbid us to invite outside guests, but that was the extent of its powers. So we might sing or perform to an empty hall, but we would sing and perform what we wanted. And, of course, our curriculum was, emphatically, none of the government's business. To establish these principles, I proposed to the two of them and Rex that we send performers from BYU's music department for a concert once each quarter, which would mean that the committee would have to meet with us four times a year and be forced to decide whether we could invite outside guests.

Our first concert was in April 1990 by Rick Elliot. Our second, by the Drinkall-Baker Duo, was in June 1990. On both occasions, the committee somewhat reluctantly agreed that we could invite guests. Then something very strange happened. The immigration of Russians to Israel reached its peak about this time, and there were talented Russian musicians playing on street corners for spare change. Mr. Klugman,



Mosaic above a stairwell in the Jerusalem Center. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

who six months earlier had resisted our desire to share Christmas music with invited friends and neighbors and who had begrudgingly approved limited outside attendance at the two concerts we held, called and said, essentially, “The public activities oversight committee doesn’t understand why you’re so closed to visitors—we urge you to open up your concerts to local musicians and audiences and make the Center more accessible.” From that flowed the now well-known and well-regarded Center concert series wherein, even in the darkest days of the Second Intifada when no Israeli would put a foot in East Jerusalem, we had full houses of mostly Israelis sitting in an auditorium in East Jerusalem.

Despite this eventual success, the concerts were not an immediate success. Even with a surplus of talented Russian emigrés, we struggled to consistently attract the best musicians. So, to understate it, our concerts were of uneven quality. In 1995, we hired a remarkable woman, Neomi Weinstein, to help with hosting. In 2001, again by luck and no great foresight, we asked her to take up the challenge of creating a first-rate concert series. She succeeded beyond anyone’s expectations, and we now feature the finest musicians in the Holy Land in one of the best-known music performance series in Jerusalem.

About ten years ago, we looked for ways to entertain the audience while they were waiting for concerts to begin (especially those with

standby tickets who might be sent away if all of the actual ticket holders showed up) and asked Neomi to start curating art exhibits in a lovely public space down the hall from the auditorium (called then, and now, the LRC). We now feature both Palestinian and Israeli visual artists in six-month rotating exhibits. As Eran notes in his presentation, this led to the Center becoming, in a sense, part of the broader art community in Jerusalem when a couple of years ago we were asked to be the principal host for a citywide contemporary visual arts festival.

At about the same time that the concerts took root, because of the controversy over its construction, its prominent site in East Jerusalem, and several architectural awards it had won, we had people knocking on the door and asking if they could tour the building. While we hadn't planned on a tour program, we took advantage of this interest in visiting the building and quickly moved to a tour format that has lasted to the present. We show a short video that connects the Center to BYU and to its sponsoring church; provide a short recital that showcases the tonal range and color of the Center's organ; provide a tour of the public spaces of the building; share the spectacular view of the Old City from the plaza outside of the seventh level, where there are four models of Jerusalem at various points in its history; then end with a stroll through the Center's gardens, which feature ancient olive presses, an olive crushing apparatus that dates from around the time of Christ, and a water feature, essentially a small creek that runs alongside the pathway that returns our visitors to the street exit from the Center's grounds.

Along the tour route, there are mosaics on permanent loan from the Israel Antiquities Authority. They are mounted in the building because the Antiquities Authority, which warehouses hundreds of mosaics from buildings around the Holy Land, decided that it wanted some of them displayed in "important public buildings" around the city. They approached us, asking whether we'd be interested in joining a handful of sites they had selected, including the new airport terminal and Supreme Court building, where they would mount mosaics. We agreed.

Here is another example of a fortuitous opportunity to boost the Church's presence: In preparation for the year 2000, which Jerusalem decided to celebrate as its three thousandth "birthday," Jerusalem mayor Teddy Kollek approached the First Presidency about joining a city-wide project to light the façades of the most important buildings in the city. In East Jerusalem, the structures selected were the Church of All Nations, the Center, and the towers at Augusta Victoria and the Church of the Ascension. Between 1987 and 2000, the only lights at the Center



Mosaics along a stairway. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

visible from the Old City at night were interior lights that happened to be turned on in various rooms. But now, as a result of the work of a French specialist in exterior architectural lighting, the Center's façade and gardens are a literal light upon a hill—a visible presence, one that in the evenings connects the Center to the fabric of Jerusalem.

We have also opened the Center to select community groups for conferences and workshops, as detailed by Eran. In addition to these, the Center has also hosted events where the Church was more directly involved, including a celebration of the 175th anniversary of Orson Hyde's visit to the Holy Land with representatives of American Jewish communities, a couple of visits to the Holy Land by the governor of Utah, and a recent conference of American Jewish and Latter-day Saint scholars. In addition, during the December holiday season, we add Christmas lights to the Center's façade and, on the main plaza that overlooks the Old City, a very large lighted artificial tree that can be seen from across the city. The lights are turned on at an event to which we invite neighbors and friends. Lastly, we've provided logistical support for the last two Papal visits to the Holy Land, including providing a place to stay for some of the members in the Pope's entourage (that is, cardinals). The Pope himself stays next door at the Papal Nuncio residence.

Now a final example. Beginning in the mid-1990s, we partnered with LDS Charities to support humanitarian work in the Holy Land. We continue that partnership today, but in addition to the funding LDS Charities provides for major projects (which have included neonatal resuscitation training and the donation of medicines, medical and dental equipment, and wheelchairs, among other things), the Center spends close to half a million dollars each year from earnings on its own endowment on projects that involve students in assembling and distributing school and hygiene kits and on small grants to local NGOs in support of families, kids, and education. Some of our other activities in these areas are highlighted by Eran.

I think President Hunter and President Faust as well as, I hope, President Lee and President Kimball would agree that there is a Church presence in Jerusalem, albeit not quite what any of them may have expected.

The Building

Even though the Center was dedicated in May 1989, there were fairly large unfinished spaces scattered about the building, and construction wasn't actually completed until 1994. The Center, as lovely as it was and is, wasn't designed particularly well for academic programs and students. There were too few offices for faculty, too little study space for students (the library, for example, accommodates only thirty-two students), no room except for a small gym for student activities and nonacademic student gatherings, no space for exercise equipment, and so forth.

Some, but not all, of these challenges were remedied by completing the unfinished spaces. Between 1989 and 1994, we completed the Domed Theater; a large reception and multipurpose area called, for curious historical reasons, the LRC; and a four-office suite in what was an unfinished space to the east of the library. All are on the eighth level. We roughed out a student commons in a large unfinished area in the middle of the building (which was expanded and nicely finished in 2003) and added an exercise equipment room in what was an unfinished space to the north of the gym, both on the sixth level. We added three dorm rooms that could house up to eleven additional students in unfinished space on the first level. Eli Rahat, the construction engineer who built the Center, and I also figured out that there was sufficient room between the hallway along the north wall of the west wing of the fifth level and the hillside under the building to its north to permit expanding this part of the fifth level, thereby modestly enlarging the Center by building toward the hillside. In this additional space, we

added four rooms that we use for offices, game and computer rooms for faculty's children, and a second laundry for families living in the building and for our in-residence visitors.

When the Center's student programs were suspended in 2001, we began renovating and refurbishing the interiors and exterior, starting with the student rooms. Between 2001 and 2006, we also completed major projects to enhance safety and security, including, for example, installing a building-wide fire suppression system, smoke detectors, and additional interior and exterior cameras. We started substantial renovations of the administrative offices on level 7 and the gymnasium on level 6 in September 2020. Renovations of the student commons on level 6 will begin in January 2021. When these projects are completed, we will have completely renovated, over the last fifteen years, the interior of the building and the Center's gardens. We have also replaced nearly all of the Center's technical infrastructure (air-conditioning, hot water system, piping, communications wiring, and security systems). All of the restrooms, public as well as those in housing area, and all of the apartment kitchens have been redesigned and renovated. Because current faculty families are younger and larger, a couple of years ago we replaced the three student apartments on the first level with a single, large faculty apartment, added an outside playground for kids, and made some interior changes connecting faculty apartments on the fifth level so that we can reconfigure four original apartments into two, three, or four apartments depending upon the size of faculty families. By the end of spring 2020, we will have converted eight student apartments on the fifth level to rooms more suitable for the many Church and university guests who stay at the Center.

The interior changes are most easily seen in the kitchen and serving areas, which were completely redesigned to meet modern health code requirements when we reopened in 2007. Changes are also obvious in the ceilings throughout public spaces and the fifth-floor housing area, where almost all of the original white egg-crate aluminum ceilings in the hallways and LRC have been replaced with handsome, warm, wood-lattice ceilings. We replaced the fountain at the center of the building, which now provides the soothing sounds of gently trickling water that reaches to all of the open areas of the building. We have also created five student study areas scattered about the sixth level and a very nice student commons with a student-run snack bar and computer lab. We recently converted one classroom into a second exercise room with larger cardio exercise equipment (treadmills, stair steppers, and elliptical trainers). Except for more mature landscaping and a redesign of the



New workout space. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

gardens to the west of the building, which now include a lovely creek with running water from top to bottom, there are no obvious changes to the exterior. However, all of the white fencing (of which there's nearly a mile stretched along the gardens from level 7 to level 2) is new, supposedly lower maintenance. We've also replaced most of the exterior teak wood with aluminum, including sleek new patio pergolas for each room that hang from the building rather than being supported by posts on the patios themselves. The teak exterior of the glass wall in the eighth-floor gallery and, with the completion of the project in April 2020, all of the exterior teak lattices that have provided dappled shade to the Center's south-facing glass façade have also been replaced with aluminum, extruded in profiles and coloring that look like the original teak. In everything, we've tried to honor the vision of the original architects, although we've not replaced like with like. The building looks fresh—you would never guess that it's over thirty years old—but it also looks a bit different in some areas than it originally did.

Personnel

As I understand the matter, the original plan was that in addition to the local staff, the Center would have some permanent expatriate and some rotating expat faculty and administrators. Since 1989, we have moved entirely to one- or two-year rotating expats and have repatriated the full-time positions set aside for the permanent expats to the Jerusalem Center's Provo Office. Because the university doesn't need many full-time employees devoted to Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) history, but



The student-run Shekel Shack. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

the Center does, most of these repatriated FTEs have been used to hire additional ANE history faculty. What has evolved is a system whereby a host BYU department gets the use of a Center faculty member when he or she is on campus, but individuals in these faculty slots must teach at the Center for either one or two years every fourth or fifth year.

The original plan was also to have several specialized programs, including intensive Arabic and Hebrew programs. Dil Parkinson, professor of Asian and Near Eastern languages who handled the immersive Arabic language programs, and I agreed some time ago that it made better sense to have immersive Arabic programs in either Egypt or Jordan. So that program, which is still supported by Jerusalem Center FTE, is now in Amman, Jordan, each fall, with a two-week program of study in the Holy Land each December. Despite repeated tries, the Hebrew program has never really gotten off the ground, although there is a proposal now in the works for another try. For many years, we hosted a nursing program from Ricks/BYU–I each fall. Regrettably, changing supervision requirements and insurance costs put an end to that program. But we now support a small number of BYU students in field archaeology programs each May and June.

The original plan was to use two service couples in administrative support positions (such as accountants, office managers, and secretaries). We have since expanded to four service couples, none of whom is in an admin support position, where we've hired locals instead. So, consistent with the "Church presence" described earlier, one couple handles the

hosting of visitors and humanitarian outreach; a second couple works with the music and art programs (including providing the short organ recitals for each visiting group described earlier); a third couple provides support for the Jerusalem District and its branches; and a fourth couple is involved in student support and provides medical assistance, manages the Center's housing, and helps manage the Center's cafeteria.

The original plan was to contract with the MOR company for local workers. This created tax problems, and in 1989 all of our local workers became Center employees, and we contracted with the MOR company for, essentially, HR services (hiring, training, firing) and management of the Center's maintenance. Eli Rahat, who, in addition to building the Center, was also the founder of MOR, had one onsite MOR manager. MOR developed other clients, and Eli started rotating onsite managers between MOR clients every couple of years. The third MOR employee rotated into this building-management position at the Center was a young Israeli, Eran Hayet. Eran was unusually able along lots of dimensions, and when it came time for Eli to rotate a new person in and rotate Eran out to another MOR-managed facility, I said "no," and Eran remained at the Center. With regard to the Center, this is the most consequential decision I've made in the past thirty years. Later, when we pulled the expat admin team out in the middle of the Second Intifada, I persuaded the First Presidency and BYU to turn to Eran to manage the Center, and he became a Center/BYU employee. As I describe below, in 2006 when we reestablished the student program, I proposed to the First Presidency and BYU that we turn to permanent local administrators in lieu of rotating expat administrators. (From 1989 to 2002, we had four expat administrators in residence—a director, an associate director, an assistant to the director for the field trip program, and an assistant to the director for finances.) They agreed, and Eran became the Center's executive director, with Tawfic Alawi, a Palestinian, as one associate director and an expat BYU employee as a second associate director. This started as an experiment. President Faust told me that while the First Presidency agreed to let me move forward with what I had proposed, if it failed, I had to unwind the arrangement—that is, I would have to fire Eran. But it succeeded. So well, in fact, that were BYU, Elder Holland, or the First Presidency to decide to reduce the FTEs devoted to administering the Center, I am certain that Jim Kearl would be out of a job and Eran Hayet wouldn't.

The importance of this change for the Center, our programs, and the Church's presence really cannot be overestimated. First, financial support of expats is very costly. Second, with rotating expat administrators,

there's no "within the Center" institutional memory, and as a consequence, there was a steep learning curve every two years with the rotation of expat administrators. Third, local contacts and knowledge are essential in the current security environment. In short, the current administrative arrangement allows us to reduce the demand on Church financial resources, preserve institutional memory (which has been extraordinarily important in the long-term management of the Center), and substantially enhance security for our students. Having Eran as the executive director has also substantially reduced the costs of renovating and refurbishing the Center. (I really have no idea how I could have contracted for and managed the dozens and dozens of refurbishing projects, some in the millions of dollars, without Eran and Tawfic.)

Student Demand and Curriculum

In 1989, the Center offered two six-month programs. The expense and, frankly, slacking interest in six-month study-abroad programs in general meant that by 1990 we had changed to two semester-long programs and, initially, a single short program in the summer. If we were lucky, we would get 140 applicants for each of the three programs. Since this relatively low level of interest had budget implications, I once "complained" to President Faust that the building was too large. He told me that one day I would wish that the building were much larger. He was right, and almost immediately so. At the time, we took applications for the next program starting on a specified Monday at 8 a.m. As noted, we did so without any challenges, in that we had more housing for students than we had applicants. On a Monday morning in 1992, soon after the First Gulf War ended, my administrative assistant, Cheryl Hall, called me in a panic around 8:05 a.m. to say that when she arrived at the office there was a line of students and parents outside the entrance of BYU's Harman Building and up the sidewalk. By 8:30, she had received more applications than we had beds at the Center, and mail-in applications had not yet been opened. This wasn't a fluke: between 1992 and 2000, we had around three thousand applications each year. We quickly completed the first-floor student housing rooms I noted earlier, which increased the housing capacity from around 160 to around 170 students. We also moved to two semester-long programs (fall and winter) plus two term-length programs (spring and summer). Even so, President Faust had my arm twisted to the crown of my head to figure out ways to accommodate more students. In response, between 1996 and 2000 we had two slightly smaller summer-term programs of around 156 students each (we had to turn some student



A student apartment. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy BYU Jerusalem Center.

housing into faculty housing) by doubling the expat faculty and housing half the students in the Galilee and half the students at the Center, each for half of the summer term (they switched places halfway through the program). At this point, we had five programs and enrolled around 830 students each year.

We solved the problem of queues and sleeping out overnight on the sidewalk in front of the Harman Building by selecting students via a random draw. All applications received in a two-week window had, and have today, the same chance of drawing out a placement. Despite pressures from donors, development officers, parents, stake presidents, and, on occasion, an administrator from the university, we have never put a finger on the scale to advantage a particular student. A story: I got a call from President Faust one day in which he said that I had made his wife, Ruth, very happy. “How so?” I asked. He responded, “Our granddaughter finally drew out for a Jerusalem Center position on her fourth try.” He’d never said a word to me, even though his granddaughter had been deeply disappointed on three previous applications. Each time someone tries to pressure me or claim that if their son or daughter were the grandchild of a General Authority or big donor our admissions decision would be different, I tell them the story of President Faust’s granddaughter. The always somewhat testy phone conversation ends with silence on the other end, and they don’t call again.

The Aftermath of the Start of the Second Intifada

The biggest changes in the Center's student programs began with the start of the Second Intifada in 2000 and continue to affect our programs to this day. Substantial unrest began in late September 2000. We brought 170 fall-program students home in November, about a month before the scheduled end of the semester, and cancelled the winter 2001 program, assuming that things would cool down and that, as with the First Gulf War, this would be a one-semester hiatus. When it became clear that the violence was going to last a while, we brought the expat faculty home, and then, a year later, the expat admin team. And in what was the single most difficult thing I've done in the past thirty years, in 2002 I flew to Jerusalem, and we laid off 60 percent of our local staff. These were loyal and devoted employees who had very little chance of finding jobs because of the collapse of tourism during the Second Intifada, but we had no students or student programs, no revenues, and with the uncertainty about when we would be able to resume student programs, we had to reduce our costs. We turned to Eran to manage the smaller workforce and the Center's activities and shifted service-couple assignments to focus on expanded community outreach and humanitarian efforts, which included continuing the concert series.

It took a long time for the security circumstances to change sufficiently that we felt we could approach the First Presidency about restarting the student program. President Faust was gently pushing for it, however, and in 2006 Presidency Hinckley agreed to discuss the matter, and Elder Holland, President Samuelson, and I met with him and his counselors. In anticipation of the meeting, President Hinckley had asked that I accompany two people from the Church's security department to the Holy Land to review the security situation so he was well briefed on the security challenges. The outcome of a fairly lengthy discussion was that we could resume student programs at the Center but with some restrictions. First, President Hinckley limited the program to a single bus group, with permission to increase to two bus groups at our discretion. However, we were not authorized to go beyond two bus groups without further discussion with the First Presidency. So we started with forty-two students in the winter semester 2007 program, moved to eighty-four the next semester and, because buses are slightly larger today, increased enrollment to eighty-eight students in each program starting in January 2020. Second, President Hinckley approved my recommendation that we appoint Eran Hayet as the Center's executive director. Third, President Hinckley imposed what we now call the

Hinckley Rule: no travel to sites on the West Bank except in-and-out field trips to Bethlehem and Jericho. Lastly, President Hinckley indicated that any program for students from BYU, BYU–I, BYU–H, or other CES institutions had to be administered by the Center. Recognizing that restricting the number of students to two bus groups might create problems with managing demand, President Hinckley also limited potential applicants to students enrolled at BYU, BYU–I and BYU–H, whom we, in turn, agreed to admit and provide grants to from our endowment on an institution-blind basis.

Since many of our field trips in the 1980s and 1990s had been in the West Bank, the Hinckley rule necessitated a quite different array of field trips, as did the challenging security situation in the Sinai, and Arnie Green, a BYU history professor in a Center slot, agreed to return to Jerusalem to design a new field trip program and supporting manuals. Except for a few tweaks, the field trip program hasn't changed to this day. One of the tweaks was to add a "fun trip": Most of the student groups organized their own trip to Eilat to snorkel in the Red Sea, but often a handful of students couldn't afford to join the others on this trip. So, we decided to bring the trip inside the Center's field trip program so that we could provide better support and so no one was left out. We mildly discourage faculty and service couple participation so that the students can just go off on their own as a group for the day.

We started with four programs in a 4-month–4-month–2-month–2-month format (fall, winter, spring, summer), but in a difficult decision trading off carrying capacity (that is, the number of students we can take each year) against quality, in 2009 we killed the two short programs and moved to three essentially identical semester-long programs: fall, winter and spring/summer (a 4-4-4 format). We also decided at the outset to expand to two out-of-country trips. In the 1990s, we had offered a trip to Egypt as an add-on after the semester ended. This created some problems, and since almost all of the students chose the add-on trip, we decided to incorporate Egypt along with Jordan as integral parts of the Center's field trip program. Because of health challenges in the heat, however, Egypt has always posed a problem in the summer. Unrest in Egypt has also created periodic challenges. So fairly soon after we moved to the 4-4-4 format, we substituted Turkey for the Egypt trips. But Turkey is cold in the winter, so when things settled down in Egypt, we decided to go to Turkey in the summer, to Egypt in the winter, and to choose one or the other in the fall. When security problems developed in Turkey and during times of unrest in Cairo, we have substituted

Greece for Turkey and Egypt. I'm reminded occasionally by faculty colleagues that Greece isn't in the Middle East. But it turns out that it has become a fabulous field trip, where students study the relevant parts of Acts and the Pauline letters to the Philippians, Thessalonians, and Corinthians. We also get to focus some on Jews in Europe and the effects of the Holocaust since Thessaloniki had a vibrant and large Jewish community until it was destroyed by deportations in WWII. In addition, students get an introduction to Orthodox Christianity with a visit to the monasteries in Meteora. And they get to visit the locations of ancient Macedonia, Delphi, Mycenae, and Athens. Turkey was great. Egypt is great. But so is Greece.

Adding a week-long out-of-country trip had to displace something, and we reduced the time in the Galilee from two-and-a-half weeks to ten days, which actually worked well because the agricultural kibbutzim where students worked during their stay in the Galilee in the 1980s and 1990s were no longer interested in volunteers.

Semester-long programs have become expensive, especially for ones like ours that include two out-of-country trips and an extended stay in the Galilee. But as I noted when I indicated that we had made a quality-versus-quantity choice in 2009, we want to maintain the quality that we believe is best done with semester-long programs. Generous donors have allowed us to offset some of the costs to students. Every student in each of the three programs now receives a \$1,500 grant, regardless of need, something we call a "universal grant." In addition, need-based grants are made to around 40 percent of the students in each program, all from specially donated money, not tithe funds.

Early on there were disagreements about the curriculum, particularly with regard to the Ancient Near Eastern history course. Was it just the "historical" Old and New Testament? Or was it something broader and different? We also had a very hard time finding a text for the course—nothing quite worked: available texts were either too much or too little. With some gentle prodding, the ANE history class emerged as a class consistent with its title, but one that gives more attention to the Holy Land than do traditional ANE history courses that start with the Mesopotamian civilization and move chronologically to the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman civilizations. The text problem was finally solved four years ago when Kent Jackson proposed to me that the Center publish a collectively written book. It has thirty-three chapters written by seventeen authors, most of whom are or were BYU faculty. It starts with the Mesopotamian civilization and ends with Palestine and the Crusaders. Kent was the editor.

Another problematic course was the Modern Near East (MNE), taught in 1989 and 1990 by both a Palestinian and an Israeli, but for almost a decade only by a Palestinian. It became abundantly clear that in a conflict, it wasn't possible to get a dispassionate, fair-to-both-sides perspective from a single local instructor. In 1998, we split the three-credit-hour course into two 1.5 credit-hour courses, hired an Israeli, and asked him and our Palestinian faculty member to develop courses that provided a modern historical narrative from their particular community's perspective. In 2007, we renewed this model and hired a Palestinian and an Israeli, one of whom teaches the "Palestinian narrative" and the other the "Israeli narrative" in separate two-hour MNE courses. Students then have to synthesize these two sometimes competing narratives. This is a challenge, but I'm confident that our students are up to it.

Having only two bus groups reduces our carrying capacity, but there is one very nice advantage: while each of the two OT/NT instructors manages a field trip bus, the ANE teacher goes on one bus and the associate director for academics goes with the second bus. On-site instruction is done by both faculty members in a team-teaching format that brings OT/NT and ANE history together. The smaller number of students has also permitted us to add field trips in the MNE area directed by our local faculty.

Lastly, we have faced a challenge in providing students a prearrival orientation to the Middle East. Since 1989, we've tried lots of different approaches, but none has worked very well. Our latest effort is to provide students with short, focused readings on Islam, Judaism, and the history of Jerusalem that they are to have read before they leave for Jerusalem. It's difficult to find materials that cover what we want covered at a level appropriate for our students. Kent Jackson again bailed me out and offered to write a book on Islam that was published by the Jerusalem Center earlier this year. I'd like to publish a comparable book on Judaism and, perhaps, a very short "only the highlights" history of Jerusalem.

The field trip program continues to be the "crown jewel" of the student program. In addition to out-of-country field trips to Jordan and either Egypt or Greece, a ten-night stay in the Galilee, and a fun trip to Eilat, students visit important biblical, archaeological, cultural, and historical sites from the Syrian and Lebanese borders on the north to Be'er Sheva on the south, and from the Mediterranean on the west to the Jordan River valley on the east. And, of course, students get to explore the Old City in depth over the entire semester.

This concludes my “short history” of the Center since 1989. I’m happy to take a few questions.

Q: What happens at the end of the lease?

A: We’re thirty-three years into a forty-nine-year lease. This initial lease is renewable once; it will automatically roll over for another forty-nine years unless we behave badly between now and the rollover date. Clearly, I have no reason to worry about any of this since we don’t have to face a postlease issue for another sixty-five years!

Q: What is the current ratio of applicants to acceptance?

A: We typically have around 150 applicants for 88 positions. So, its roughly 60 percent, with placements based, as noted earlier, on a random draw. [Note: Because of COVID-19, the Center’s student programs were suspended in May 2020 until at least May 2021, so as of the publication date of this volume, there are no students at the Center.]

Q: What’s the female-to-male ratio?

A: Two to one if we’re lucky. Our programs typically have around 28 or fewer men and 60 or more women.

Q: How can those of us who have gone help the Center now?

A: To quote Psalm 122, “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.” One of the reasons we have two rather than four bus groups (that is, 88 rather than 160 students) is because the risks, the environment and triggers that create risks, and the security challenges have changed substantially since the 1980s and 1990s. To be clear, the risks aren’t extraordinary (or we wouldn’t have student programs). We manage them well, but they are harder to manage in many ways than they once were. While there are scale economies in using the building with 160 students per program, there are substantial diseconomies in managing 160 students in terms of how you get them out of the country if needed or what you do with them if there are problems and you decide not to evacuate them. So, in a sense, the changing risks have limited our carrying capacity.

In this regard, the Middle East is no better today and in many ways more tense than it was twenty or thirty years ago. When I started going to Jerusalem thirty years ago, for example, you could go to cafés and find mixed audiences of Palestinians and Israelis. You seldom see Palestinians and Israelis in the same restaurants these days—the two

communities have moved further apart in the last thirty years; they haven't moved toward one another. This greater division between Palestinians and Israelis also creates security issues for us today that we didn't face earlier. So pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

I'll share one more story that involves President Faust. President Faust and I were walking arm in arm in gardens outside of the Garden Tomb, and at a fork in the path, there was the plea from Psalm 122, "pray for the peace of Jerusalem," chiseled into a stone. He said, barely audible, "We do, we do." I encourage all of us to do that.

Second, you can pay it forward. We've been enormously blessed by the generosity of people who donated money to the Center. Almost all of these donations were made in the late 1980s and early 1990s. These original donations have grown with the stock market over the past thirty years and now provide financial flexibility that is a great blessing to students. As I noted earlier, of the earnings on the endowment these donors created we're now spending about a half million dollars each year on humanitarian efforts that involve our students. We are spending in excess of a half million dollars each year on need-based student grants. And because of the generosity of donors, we also now provide every student, regardless of need, a grant of \$1,500 to help offset increased program costs. I encourage these students to pay it back when they can. At the orientation the day before they leave for Jerusalem, I remind them of the pioneer Perpetual Emigrating Fund and suggest that they might want to think about a perpetual education fund: to the degree that they can when they become financially able, they can help the next generation of students go to the Center. So, and let me be low-key about this because the purpose for this symposium wasn't to try to raise money, but for the former students in the room in particular, but also for nonstudents who care about the Center and its influence for good on students and in Jerusalem, I encourage you to think about contributing to support the next generation of Jerusalem Center students. The costs of doing business in Israel, as it has become a modern vibrant economy over the past fifteen or twenty years, have increased substantially—by far more than the rate of inflation. Contributions that aid students directly through grants and indirectly by funding some of the Center's activities that aren't funded by budgeted funds from Salt Lake City will—both immediately and particularly in the long run—make a substantial difference for the next generation of students.

Q: Any thoughts on a permanent building in the Galilee region?

A: Well, let me tell you a story. Soon after I came to this position, President Faust took me aside. President Faust was just wonderful. He was a mentor unlike any I will ever have in my life except for my father. And he had this interesting gesture I described earlier in which he would figuratively thump on my chest to emphasize a point. One day, early on, he said to me, “I’m going to tell you how much the Jerusalem Center cost to build because you have to insure it. There are six people in the Church who know how much it cost. You’re the seventh. There’s not to be an eighth,” (figuratively) thump, thump, thump. President Hinckley was well known for being very careful with money. He was frugal, and apparently he used to needle Elder Faust over the cost of building and then operating the Jerusalem Center. In fact, when I first started doing Center budgets, before the budget went to the university and then to the Church, Elder Faust would invite me to his office in Salt Lake City so that he could review the budget before President Hinckley saw it and be prepared for whatever discussion was going to occur. The other thing you need to know to understand this story is that the San Diego temple was, in a sense, a Gordon B. Hinckley building. To resume the story:

My wife and I were in Jerusalem with Elder and Sister Faust and Elder and Sister Holland shortly after the San Diego temple was dedicated. We were in the upper auditorium for a devotional. It was full of students. There was a Travel Study parent group in-country, so there were also lots of parents and other LDS tourists present. And, of course, there were local members at the meeting. Elder Faust got up and began his remarks by saying, “President Hunter and I were never so happy as on the day the San Diego temple was dedicated because then this became the second most expensive building the Church had ever built.”

Given this, I don’t think there’s a snowball’s chance in the proverbial place of the Church funding another building for student programs in the Holy Land. The Church has a presence in the Holy Land—the Jerusalem Center. It doesn’t need a presence elsewhere in the country. If you’ve been in the Center, it was built to a standard that is well above BYU’s standards for its buildings. It is a spectacular building. And as I said in my formal remarks, I view myself as custodian for the First Presidency in maintaining the Center to the standards to which they built it. It’s really not BYU’s building. It is somebody else’s building. And as Elder Holland made clear earlier today, it may have other purposes at

some point (which made Eran and me really nervous as we listened to him). So I'm quite certain that funding a building in the Galilee would have to be solely at BYU's initiative, if the Church permitted that.

In addition to the construction costs, however, it is really expensive to operate physical facilities abroad. Taxes, complying with local labor laws, finding and training local employees, and other legal issues (which seem never to end) are daunting challenges. The issues, particularly the costs of local employees, are compounded when a facility is used for only some, but not all, of the days of the year, as would be true for a facility in the Galilee. When I was a vice president, the university sold off study abroad buildings it owned in Europe. There was a long discussion about whether to sell off the building in London. Simply put, universities can't afford to have buildings abroad. The Center is a very expensive project, not just to build but to run. And I'm not giving anything away to tell you if you looked at the fraction of cost subsidized by tithe money, the Jerusalem Center is undoubtedly at the top of the list. It exceeds BYU, BYU-Hawaii, BYU-Idaho. So, for example, consider the personnel costs. In order to manage and maintain the Center, we have fifty-five local employees. So, if you think about the possibilities of a building in the Galilee, you need to consider construction costs, operating and maintenance costs, and permanent personnel costs that would, of course, benefit only a tiny fraction of students who enroll at BYU, BYU-I, or BYU-H. This is a long answer. The short answer is: There's no interest in building a permanent facility in the Galilee in Salt Lake City or Provo. By the way, given other program demands, we're only in the Galilee ten nights and eleven days each program, and Ein Gev, where we have stayed for years, is a wonderful place to stay. So why would we want to go a place other than Ein Gev? It is terrific.

Q: What does one term cost now?

A: It's currently just over \$13,000—so, netting out the universal grant of \$1,500 that we're currently providing, it's around \$11,500.

Q: Do you know why they closed the church building in Galilee?

A: I wasn't part of any discussion about that decision, but it is my understanding that virtually all the members moved away or passed away or found it increasingly difficult to travel from Nazareth and places further afield like Haifa to Tiberius on Saturday. It may interest you to know that as in the days before there was a Church facility in Tiberius, the Center has been authorized by the Jerusalem District president to have

sacrament meetings on the Saturday we're at Ein Gev. On that Saturday, we have sacrament meeting at Ein Gev but then spend part of the day at the Mount of Beatitudes.

Q: What is the future of the Center's music program?

A: I assume that this question is in reference to Neomi Weinstein's health. For everyone in the room, Neomi is a part-time Center employee who organizes the Sunday evening performance series. She went through a bout of cancer. She has bounced back. She is, if you know her, back to her usual self. She's doing great. She's now seventy-four years old, however, and one of the challenges that Eran has—that's an inside joke—that Eran and I have is to find her replacement. It will be very difficult. There aren't many irreplaceable people in the world, but Neomi may be one if we want to continue to have a Sunday evening concert series of the current quality and reputation. The concert series has such a splendid reputation and, as I said, represents in so many ways a Church presence that we can't lose it, but I don't know how to move to the next generation, frankly. [Note: Because of COVID-19, concerts at the Center were suspended in March 2020. In May, we were approached by former patrons and musicians about broadcasting live performances from the empty (except for the musicians and audio/visual technicians) upper auditorium. We agreed, and since mid-May, the Sunday evening concerts have been streamed live at 8:00 p.m. Jerusalem time over Facebook, Vimeo, and YouTube and are available from any one of those services after the live performance is concluded. There is now a modest, but loyal, world-wide audience for these performances originating from the Center.]

Thank you so much for coming. This has been a wonderful day.

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