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Jewish Knight of St. Gregory encourages cooperation

By Pete Sheehan

Rockville Centre — When Gary and Meredith Krupp of Long Beach visited the Cenacle or “Upper Room,” the traditional site of the Last Supper in Jerusalem, they were disheartened by what they saw.

“There it was, one of the most important sites for Christianity, sitting there. It’s where Jesus first broke the matzo that Christians remember at each Mass.

“The building wasn’t well maintained.

It had Muslim writing on the stained-glass windows,” Mr. Krupp, who is Jewish, commented.

The building, under Muslim control for centuries, came under the jurisdiction of the State of Israel when it was founded in 1948.

So over the past year, Mr. Krupp and his wife have been working to convince the Israeli government to transfer the famous building to Franciscan control.

“The Catholic Church has owned it since the 11th century. They have a bill of sale,” Mr. Krupp noted. For centuries, however, when Jerusalem was under the jurisdiction of the Ottoman Empire, the Church’s claim to the site meant little.

“It only makes sense now that it goes back to Catholic jurisdiction,” Mr. Krupp said. The Franciscans traditionally have held custody of many of the shrines and pilgrimage sites in the Middle East.



Gary and Meredith Krupp meet Pope John Paul II in 1990 accompanied by Msgr. Edward Melton, former administrator of St. Agnes Cathedral, Rockville Centre.

Mr. and Mrs. Krupp created the Pave the Way Foundation to improve relations among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. The return of the Upper Room is only one of the goals that the foundation is pursuing, Mr. Krupp explained.

'Self-interest'

The foundation has been lobbying the Israeli government to address numerous complaints of the Holy See regarding the legal status of Catholic entities in Israel itself, the issues of visas for Church personnel working and living in Israel and its occupied territories, property rights, and access for pilgrims to some of the major shrines there.

“As a Jew, I feel a certain self-interest here,” Mr. Krupp explained. “The Pope and many of the cardinals are the biggest opponents of anti-Semitism in the world today.

“We who are Jewish need to thank the Catholic Church, in particular Pope John Paul II, for all that he has done to foster good relations between Catholics and Jews, and especially for Israel.” Most notably, Mr. Krupp said, Pope John Paul established full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Holy See in 1993.

“And that came about on the initiative of the Vatican itself, not Israel,” he noted.

Mr. Krupp’s involvement with the Catholic Church is nothing new. “It started out with my friendship with Msgr. Edward Melton,” long-time administrator of St. Agnes Cathedral here, who died in 1994.

Four years ago, Mr. Krupp became one of only seven Jewish people to receive the papal honor of knight commander in the Order of St. Gregory the Great since its institution in 1831. “And only three of us are living.”

Cardinal Angelo Sodano, Holy See secretary of state, conferred the honor in September of 2000 at St. Paul the Apostle Church, Brookville. The cardinal cited Mr. Krupp for recruiting medical equipment companies to donate \$15 million worth of equipment for the Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza, a hospital started by Padre Pio in Italy.

Mr. Krupp, who had made his living developing such medical facilities as diagnostic imaging centers and a kidney dialysis center, became interested in doing more to foster good relations among Jews and Christians. “As a Jewish person who has been honored by the Pope, I was in a unique position.”

So he founded Pave the Way Foundation, involving Christians, Jews, and Muslims from different traditions.

“Our slogan,” Mrs. Krupp said, “is ‘Embrace the Similarities — Savor the Differences.’”

“We all believe in the same God,” Mr. Krupp emphasized. The foundation sets up cultural exchanges, such as Israeli and Jewish speakers at Catholic organizations, encouraging Catholic pilgrimages to Israel, and projects with Catholic and Israeli youth.

Most significantly, he said, the foundation helped arrange a loan from the Vatican Library to the Israel Museum of the Vatican’s collection of the writings of Maimonides, the 12th century Jewish philosopher and theologian.

“This will be a tremendous event, both culturally and for what it will mean for the Jewish people and for Catholic-Jewish relations,” Mr. Krupp said. The exhibition is scheduled for next year during the Israel Museum’s 40th anniversary.

“Beyond the cultural is the personal,” Mrs. Krupp said. “We saw Jewish people who had never been in a church before meeting with high Church officials. You saw a rabbi embracing a cardinal. This is building relationships.”

Issues with Israel

Mr. Krupp’s current focus is helping persuade the Israeli government to follow through on agreements that have been worked at since Israel and the Holy See signed a fundamental agreement for full diplomatic relations.

Since then, the Holy See and Israeli officials have been trying to resolve the issues of tax exemption for Church institutions, the Church’s right to have recourse to Israeli courts, and the return of holy sites to Church jurisdiction. Negotiations were stopped by the Israeli government last year and have not resumed.

Archbishop Celestino Migliore, who heads the Holy See’s permanent observer mission to the United Nations (U.N.), addressed these issues in a March 28 talk at Immaculate Conception Seminary (see *The Long Island Catholic* 03/31/04)

“A lot of the problem is that Israeli officials are preoccupied with the conflict” with the Palestinians, Mr. Krupp said. “These (Vatican-Israeli) issues are not of great concern to the Israeli people, many of whom are barely aware that their government has relations with the Vatican.”

For U.S. Jews, however, the issues are important. “We are the ones who were so concerned for many years that the Vatican have full relations with Israel,” he said. He also noted that further agreement is important for ensuring future good relations between Israel and the Holy See.

“Once these issues between the Vatican and Israel are resolved,” Mr. Krupp said, “my dream is that Christians, Jewish, and Muslim people will be able to come together to work for peace in the Middle East.”