

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

Ever since I remember myself I was surrounded by people from different backgrounds, religions and ethnicities. I was only a month old when I moved with my parents, Kamil and Agnes, to the compound of the half-demolished Church which my father committed to renovate. To me, it seemed all normal. Only later, when I grew up a little that I realized that my home was special, so were the people living with my biological family.

Forty years later, I am the director of House of Grace, a place where every person is perceived as the living image of God regardless of their race, gender or religion.

At present, even with all the challenges and forced bureaucracy of governmental offices, House of Grace focuses on three main

projects: Rehabilitation of Prisoners, Help for Needy Families, and Youth at Risk.

In 2022, House of Grace has succeeded in developing further its network for collaboration and partnerships. We also witness a recovery from COVID-19 which had cut-off all visitations from abroad; and we had the honor of having hundreds of visitors: friends, religious clerics, politicians, governmental officials, the Mayor of Haifa, police commanders and officers, NGO members, pilgrims, students, schools ...

Nonetheless, the effect of COVID-19, war in Ukraine, and inflation is very evident and we see many normative families turn to House of Grace to receive aid. Moreover, the more challenging the economic situation, the more risk youth are exposed to at home and outside, and so is the cycle of crime stronger and wider.





all, family, staff and volunteers, doing our best to continue the ministry that my parents started.

In this special occasion, I would like to thank you all, our friends, partners and supporters who have continuously supported the mission of House of Grace and hope that together we will continue our mission together for many more years.

Merry Christmas and Happy Blessed New Year 2023.

Jamal Shehade
Director

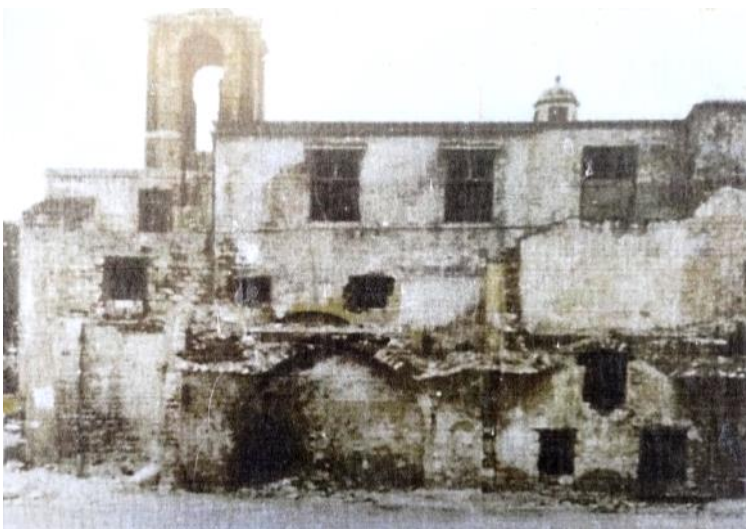
That said, this year we celebrate our Ruby Jubilee, 40 years of charity that changed the lives of hundreds of families and individuals. Despite all challenges, we, as a family, have witnessed many miracles before in impossible situations, we are eager more than ever to continue our mission. I am very proud of the professional staff of House of Grace we are



CELEBRATING 40 YEARS TO OUR MISSION

The idea to open a half-way house for released prisoners grew slowly in the head and heart of Kamil. Through a friend, who was condemned to a life sentence, Kamil learned about the situation inside prisons and also the devastating challenges facing prisoners when released. Prisoners had little help, often no place to stay, and no-one would agree to give them a job making their return to prison almost evident. Kamil felt a vocation to create a **home** for released prisoners, not an institution. However, as a newly-wed couple we were short in money and a very small rented apartment which was barely enough for us.

Kamil came up with the idea of using the former Cathedral of Haifa which was abandoned since 1948 and asked the Bishop to get the permission to use it. Tentative,



Archbishop Maximos Salloum of the Greek Melkite Church of Haifa, gave Kamil the keys of the abandoned Madonna Church in order to renovate it and open a home for released prisoners. With the help of volunteers we renovated the main building of the church and moved in with our new-born and three prisoners.

The new reality of an abandoned Church being renovated and used by released prisoners was not well received by the



community, official offices or the municipality. On the one hand it was socially hard to accept or understand, risky and too-bold for governmental officials on the other hand to accept. But the deep faith of Kamil and his vision helped to overcome all. He believed that every person is created equal and on the image of God and as such we must help them. And so, having more space in the Church allowed us to receive orphan young men, homeless people, elderly and anyone who was rejected by their family or the community and had no place to stay.

I remember how hard were the first ten years. At times we had barely enough food to feed everyone, not to mention the imposed challenges by the authorities and people in key positions. There were moments where it seemed the journey is over, impossible situations and dire challenges threatening the mission, but lo and behold miracles kept us going and solutions, friends, and resources always arrived.

All are welcome at House of Grace, no matter who they are or of their race, color or faith. Addicts were received by our family and rehabilitated, so were criminals and thieves. We created a large family, eating together, watching television and playing games together, everyone was involved in taking care of the house and of each other. Our five children were taken care of by the residents whenever we were away.

At one occasion, giving a presentation in the



university about House of Grace, Kamil was asked if he was not afraid to leave his children and wife with criminals; he noted that God protects all the faithful, and when given dignity people will act in the same way they were treated. Kamil had only accomplished 9th grade education, and there he was standing giving presentations at the university.

After some time, as things got more settled, House of Grace became a member of Prisons Fellowship in 1994, we also developed more programs; counseling for needy families to help them deal with their daily challenges but

also receive their rights from authorities, as well as second-hand cloth shop. Kamil visited prisons more often, and more volunteers came to help us around the House. At one point we even had a shelter for women. Also, our staff grew, and with the kind help and donation from abroad we were able to afford professional social workers and criminologist. Along with immediate help Kamil provided, he advocated for the rights of groups such as prisoners and battered women, and demanded that the authorities would take responsibility.

In 1998 Kamil was diagnosed with cancer and a hard fight started. Our employees and friends supported us a lot and despite the sickness the house continued to function. A beautiful thing happened in spring 2000. Our parish priest agreed to reopen the church for services after it had been closed for more than 50 years. Unfortunately, one month after Kamil lost the fight to his illness and left us. It was a catastrophe not only for the family but for many people. The support we got at his funeral showed us how much he was loved.



We were facing one hard question, can we continue the mission without its soul and heart?

Family, friends and staff sat together decided to continue with the mission Kamil built with sweat, blood and sometimes tears. We deposit our will to the grace of our Lord who gave Kamil strength and sent us friends who helped us so the house could go on existing.

At present, Hosue of Grace focuses its mission with three domains: rehabilitating prisoners, supporting needy families, and helping youth at risk. After finishing their studies three of my sons started to working in House of Grace. In 2011 we became the official "hostel for released, Arab prisoners". A governmental committee decides which prisoners get admittance to our place. This project has developed since then and today we have space for 17 men, are well recognized by the prison authorities, social affairs, courts and national insurance.

Since 2017, Jamal our eldest son, is responsible for House of Grace and its 14 professional staff many volunteers work in House of Grace.

Today the church is the place for many activities; Holy services, concerts and religious lectures. Every week several groups, domestic and foreign, visit the Church of Our Lady and are introduced to its rich history and the work



of House of Grace.

Looking back at the long journey we took, I still believe that the existence of House of Grace is a miracle. In spite of all the obstacles, hardship and wariness we faced, our vocation goes on. This year we celebrate 40 years or miracles, joy, trust, but most of all the amazing, tremendous love and protection of God.

Agnes Bieger-Shehade



ELIAS' STORY

Elias comes from a family with a low-socioeconomic status. His parents struggle to put food on the table and the general atmosphere at home is very stressful, especially with Elias' dad. At school the situation for Elias is even more complicated. Not having the old cloths, the tiered face and low-self-esteem lead to mockery and severe bullying. The 16 year old teenager suffered from severe frustration and loneliness. Elias tried to protect himself by isolating himself from the group at school and beyond, as well as a temper and behavioral issues.

One of Elias's class mates realized the level of distress Elias is suffering. He had been in that place before, and knew that Elias needs help. Elias' classmate tried very hard to convince Elias to join the basketball team at House of Grace, the same team that helped him before to overcome his own challenges.

"I was afraid to come to House of Grace and meet new people. Boys never pick me up to join their team," said Elias, "but I was surprised that I was asked by other boys to join their team, and Mr. Bisharas' (project coordinator) welcome; it was as if we were friends." He continued.



Like all the boys and girls who arrive to the Youth Center at House of Grace, Elias received personal consultation from our social worker. The true social and academic situation of Elias was revealed and unfortunately was more complicated than first thought. It seems that even the school professional level did not really realize the situation that Elias has been living for the past several years and his suffering.

House of Grace, in coordination with the professional school staff and social welfare had built a professional intervention program to nurture Elias' development on the personal, social and academic levels.

Elias has been part of House of Grace's program for the past 18 months. Soon he will graduate from school and from our center as a motivated young individual with a dream, "I want to become a basketball coach, sports and team playing changed me, and it's what I want to do in my adult life."

At House of Grace we hope that we will be able to help Elias. We know that he will have to work very hard to achieve his dream. Hence, we are looking for sponsors to help Elias with the professional training admission and hope he will grow personally and professionally to create positive change in the lives of others.



RIMA

Life had never been easy for Rima. Even from her early childhood, she had experienced the sting of domestic violence and had been treated with cold indifference by her own family. As if that wasn't enough, she was forced to marry at the tender age of eighteen and to her dismay, she found that her husband was a drug addict. The little peace of mind she had was shattered as her husband's addiction spilled into their home and wreaked havoc on her and her two small children.

Rima knew she had to escape from her husband and her life of misery. With her two little infants in tow, she set off for a shelter for battered women. On their journey, she could only hope that she and her children would find safety and freedom from the abuse they had endured.

At last, after a long and perilous journey, Rima and her children arrived at the shelter. She found comfort and solace in the support she received from the other women and her children began to slowly heal.

However, all was not easy. Rima found that her husband, frustrated at being abandoned, was determined to make her life even harder by hunting them down and taking them back to his home. Despite all odds, Rima held her ground and managed to keep her family safe from her husband's menacing advances and got divorced.

After leaving the shelter Rima felt like her life was spiraling out of control and she had no control over it. The constant berating from her abusive father followed her and only made matters worse and before she knew it, she was resorting to medication for anxiety. But with time, it was no longer enough and she soon found herself in addiction to drugs. Sooner than she knew it the welfare were trying to take away her children. That's when Rima knew what she had to do; she had to take control of her life before it was too late.

The only way to make ends meet was to take on a job cleaning houses. One day, while at work, she stumbled across a volunteer at the House of Grace who heard her story and connected her with the social worker at the



organization.

Safaa, House of Grace's social worker, had to build trust with Rima who dreaded any professional help. Safaa took Rima personally to doctors to receive proper medication and helped her to become fully rehabilitated from the abuse of drugs. Furthermore, a special intervention form the welfare department was requested through which Rima had started receiving the governmental aid she is entitled for without the threat of losing her children.

In her words Rima says: "You (Safaa) and House of Grace are my guardian angel, the only people who stood by my side when it seemed that I was about to lose everything, when I was helpless and had terrible thoughts. Now, every time I feel weak I remember you and get immediately inspired to get over my problems. I know that you will be there for me, you are the only family I ever had."



Thank you!

On this occasion, we would like to extend our gratitude to all our partners and friends who support our mission and work with prisoners, needy families and youth at risk.

Finally, we want to wish you all a blessed New Year 2023

House of Grace would like to save trees, if you would like to receive our newsletter by email please send us and email to: office@house-grace.org

Contact Us

Feel free to contact us with any question or request at:

Email: office@house-grace.org

Post: House of Grace, P.O.Box 1055,
Haifa 3309513, Israel

Phone: +972 4 8666235

Fax: +972 4 8662116

Also visit our website: <http://www.house-grace.org>

Support Us

Bank: Bank Leumi

Name of Branch: Haneviim

Branch No. 702

City Name: Haifa

Address: 15a Pal-yam St. Haifa , 3309519 Israel

Beneficiary Name: Amotat Hachesed

IBAN: IL37 0107 0200 0000 4694 278

Swift Address: LUMIILITXXX

Clearinghouse code: IL010702