



Canadian International
Development Organization

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Founded in 1998
www.CIDO.ca

AN HISTORIC FIRST: Shawky Fahel's Visit to Palestine, February 9 to 18, 2026

On September 21, 2025, Canada's Prime Minister, the Right Honourable Mark Carney, officially recognized the State of Palestine. In February 2026, Shawky Fahel, Founder and Chair of the Canadian International Development Organization (CIDO) travelled to Palestine to strengthen Canada-Palestine cultural ties and to recognize the charitable works of CIDO in supporting Palestinian families facing cancer.

Palestinian-Canadian Cultural Agreement Bethlehem, February 2026

On February 11, 2026, a momentous chapter in Palestinian-Canadian relations was written in the ancient city of Bethlehem. **Mayor Maher Canawati** officially signed a ground-breaking Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with **Shawky Fahel**, the Founder and Chair of CIDO and **Timothy Schmalz**, marking the first formal cultural agreement between Canada and Palestine since Canada's recognition of Palestinian statehood in September 2025.



The First Official Meeting (February 10, 2026)

The day before the official signing ceremony, Mayor Canawati hosted the Canadian delegation in Bethlehem's municipal chambers. The meeting took place against the backdrop of Bethlehem's iconic skyline, with the Basilica of the Nativity visible through the windows—a powerful reminder of the city's profound historical and spiritual significance.

The delegation also met with religious leadership, including the Latin Patriarchate, underscoring the deep spiritual dimensions of bringing sacred art to the birthplace of Christianity.

The Signing Ceremony

On February 11, 2026, the formal signing ceremony took place in Bethlehem, at the Peace Centre in Nativity Square. The signing was witnessed by **Mr. Graham Dattels**, the Canadian Representative to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah. Mr. Dattels and his staff played a major role in sponsoring and coordinating the signing event. The ceremony was also attended by local community leaders and officials from both nations.

The event was held beneath banners proclaiming the '*Palestinian-Canadian Cultural Encounter*' with text in both Arabic and English emphasizing '*Art, Heritage, and Shared Human Values*'.



The MOU was signed by Timothy Schmalz (Artist), Mayor Maher Canawati (Mayor of Bethlehem), and Shawky Fahel (Project Lead and Founder of CIDO), formalizing a commitment to cultural exchange, artistic collaboration, and the installation of monumental sculpture works in Bethlehem.

A New Chapter: Cultural Significance and Artistic Vision

This MOU arrives at a pivotal moment in bilateral relations. Since Canada's official recognition of Palestine in September 2025, both nations have sought meaningful ways to deepen their relationship beyond diplomatic formalities. The cultural sphere—with its power to inspire, unite, and transcend political complexities—has emerged as the ideal foundation for this partnership.



The centerpiece of this partnership is a monumental nativity sculpture created by internationally renowned Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz. Created in bronze and depicting the birth of Christ with extraordinary detail and reverence, this work represents a convergence of Canadian artistic excellence with Palestinian cultural heritage and Christian tradition.

For Bethlehem—the birthplace of Jesus Christ and a city of profound religious significance to millions worldwide—the installation of this sculpture holds special meaning. It marks the first time in many years that major sculptural works will be installed in the city, revitalizing its role as not only a site of pilgrimage but also as a living center of contemporary sacred art.

The Palestinian-Canadian Cultural Agreement emphasizes three pillars: art, heritage, and shared human values. Canada contributes its tradition of artistic innovation and multicultural expression, while Palestine offers its ancient heritage, resilience, and deep spiritual roots.

The involvement of CIDO further underscores Canada's commitment to supporting Palestinian cultural and economic development.

Project Timeline

The project is expected to be completed by the end of 2026 with an official ceremony close to Christmas. The first two sculptures will be arriving in May-June 2026. This ambitious timeline reflects the preparedness and commitment of all parties involved. The governance structure established by the MOU ensures regular communication and coordination through virtual meetings facilitated by the Project Lead Shawky Fahel, balancing creative vision with practical execution.

Looking Forward

“I would like to thank our Prime Minister Mark Carney for laying the ground for such a bilateral agreement. His leadership and vision have made this historic partnership possible”, said Shawky Fahel. “The Palestinian-Canadian Cultural Agreement, signed in Bethlehem, represents more than a single project—it is a model for how nations can engage through culture, art, and shared humanity”, added Fahel. “In a world often divided by politics, this agreement reminds us that beauty, creativity, and heritage have the power to unite”.



For Canada, this partnership affirms its role as a champion of cultural exchange and international development. For Palestine, it brings international recognition, artistic enrichment, and a renewed sense of cultural vitality to one of its most sacred cities. For Bethlehem, it promises a renaissance of public art and a strengthened identity as a global destination for spiritual and artistic pilgrimage.

The signing of this agreement is creating hope and peace in this area of the world. As the first sculptures are prepared for installation, the eyes of the world will turn to Bethlehem—not only as the birthplace of Christ but as the birthplace of a new era in Palestinian-Canadian friendship.

The seeds planted on February 11, 2026, will grow into a legacy of art, understanding, and shared hope for generations to come.

Official Visit to Ramallah (February 12, 2026)

On February 12th, 2026, Shawky Fahel with **Mr. Issa Qassasieh**, the Mayor of Ramallah. Together they discussed several potential art and cultural opportunities. Shawky presented the Mayor with a photo of Mahmoud Darwish, who is considered to be Palestine’s national poet.

Timothy Schmalz agreed to create a sculpture in honour of Shireen Abu Akeh, a Palestinian-American journalist who was fatally shot by Israeli military forces while reporting for Al Jazeera at the Jenin Refugee Camp, in the West Bank in 2022.



Shawky hosted a luncheon in Ramallah in honour of Canada. The event was attended by Graham Dattels, Canada's Representative to the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah, Mayor Qassasieh, city officials, Palestinian businesspeople, and representatives of Humanity & Inclusion (HI) Canada.

CIDO's Continuing Investment in the Mariam Foundation Ramallah and Nazareth February 2026

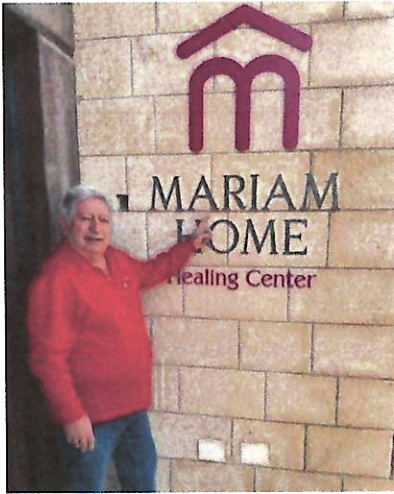
"There are journeys you take, and journeys that take you", said Shawky Fahel. "My seven days with **Mohammad Hamed**, CEO, and the Mariam Foundation staff belong firmly in the second category", he added.

The Mariam Foundation Story

In 2004, a little girl, Mariam Hamed, from Palestine passed away at the age of 8 in Mayo Clinic, Minnesota, following a three-year determined battle of treatment against cancer in Rambam Hospital in Haifa. As a Palestinian cancer patient's family, the Hamed family endured many obstacles and hardships due to lack of resources available within the Palestinian community, let alone the distorted image the community has regarding cancer and cancer patients. Mariam's eldest brother, Mohammad, who was always by her side and was only 15 when she died, decided that something must be changed.

In 2012, the Mariam Foundation was officially established by Mohammad, making it the first Arab non-profit for fighting cancer. Since then, the Mariam Foundation has been offering its services to every human being regardless of their ethnicity or background. The Foundation offers cancer patients and their families 360-degree support and care of their well-being during cancer treatment. It has become the second home for cancer patients, offering numerous services including an array of both financial and emotional support, daily companionship for children with cancer in hospitals; and much more. (<https://friendsofmariam.org/>)

February 2026 Official Visit



The Mariam Foundation Center in Nazareth proudly welcomed its Mariam Ambassador from Canada, Shawky Fahel during his distinguished visit that highlighted the depth of international partnership and continued global support for Foundation’s humanitarian mission. Fahel was received by Mariam Foundation department directors, project managers, volunteers, and doctors, in an atmosphere of pride and appreciation reflecting the spirit of unity and collaboration. Discussions focused on launching a major strategic collaboration aimed at strengthening Mariam Foundation’s humanitarian and medical projects and expanding its impact both locally and internationally.

Ramallah (West Bank) and Nazareth (Israel): Compassion in Action

Walking into the Mariam Foundation facilities in Ramallah, Fahel was struck by the quiet intensity of purpose in every room. The doctors and nurses are delivering world-class pediatric cancer care in one of the most challenging environments on earth — for children who have nowhere else to turn. Fahel addressed the staff and volunteers directly, and told them, “You are not healthcare workers. You are lifelines”.

In Nazareth, Fahel found an equally powerful dimension of the Foundation's work — a community of healing rooted in faith and trust. Together, Ramallah and Nazareth showed what Mariam truly is: a living network of compassion, unified by love for children.

Mariam Home: The Heart of the Foundation

The most profound moment of the entire visit was standing inside Mariam Home — the first dedicated rehabilitation centre for Palestinian children with cancer from Gaza and the West Bank. This is not a modest clinic. It is a purpose-built, four-storey building with twelve separate rooms, each designed for a different dimension of healing — physical, emotional, and therapeutic.

As Mariam Ambassador from Canada, Fahel said, “Seeing Mariam Home with my own eyes was transformative. This is what our partnership looks like in concrete form: infrastructure of compassion, where women and children who have endured the unimaginable are given not just treatment, but dignity and the space to truly heal. Every Canadian who has supported this cause should know — this is where their generosity lives.”

The Mariam Joy Project: No Child Walks Alone

The Mariam Joy Project was deeply moving. Every single day, trained university students accompany children with cancer to their hospital treatments and clinic appointments. They sit beside these children. They walk with them. They ensure no child ever faces that journey alone. This is empathy and compassion as a vocation, and it is one of the most powerful things that can be encountered in international development work.

A Sculpture for Mariam Foundation: Timothy Schmalz

Shawky Fahel was honoured to have Timothy Schmalz - one of Canada's most celebrated religious sculptors, known worldwide for "Homeless Jesus" - accompany him. Moved by what he saw, Timothy is now designing an original sculpture for the Mariam Foundation: a permanent work of sacred art that will stand as a symbol of hope and healing for these children. Fahel said, "I could not be prouder that this grew from our shared mission".

CIDO and the Mariam Foundation: A Partnership Built on Trust

"As Mariam's Ambassador from Canada, I am proud to confirm that, to date, CIDO has raised \$100,000 for the Foundation," said Fahel. "Our contributions are designated directly for the treatment and care of women and children with cancer in Gaza and the West Bank".



This is a strong and meaningful beginning. The CIDO-Mariam Foundation partnership is built on transparency, accountability, and commitment to directing every dollar where it matters most. The next chapter is already underway.

What was witnessed in Ramallah and Nazareth has strengthened CIDO's commitment to this partnership is beyond measure.

Enhance the Existing Humanity & Inclusion (HI) Prosthetic and Rehabilitation Work in Palestine

The **Honourable Lloyd Axworthy**, a former Canadian Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Shawky Fahel have often discussed the perils of conflicts and the consequences of lost limbs because of landmines.

Mr. Axworthy is the Founder and Honourary Chair of the Waterloo Landmine Foundation, now located on the campus of the Wilfrid Laurier University. With his encouragement and support, as the Chair of CIDO, Fahel undertook discussions with **Anna Delmore**, the Director General of HI Canada. Their objective is to create a partnership that will strengthen the Canadian presence, established by HI, for rehabilitation and prosthetics in Palestine. (<https://www.hi-canada.org/en>)

While in Palestine, Fahel had the opportunity to meet HI staff, volunteers and clients. He saw the facilities and services provided by HI as well as heard testimonials for Palestinians who have benefitted from HI's projects.

Computers for a School in Nazareth

Shawky Fahel has been a member of the Kitchener Rotary Club for 40+ years. The Kitchener Rotary Club has partnered with the Rotary Club of Nazareth on a very important project.

The **Holy Family School in Nazareth** has a program to assist 170 students with disabilities -many with cerebral palsy. The Rotary project aims to provide 30 iPads equipped with educational and communication applications that empower children with speech, motor or developmental challenges to communicate, learn, and participate more fully in school and society.

During this visit Fahel had the opportunity to meet with the members of the Rotary Club of Nazareth and further advance this important project.

For more information:

Shawky Fahel, MSM
Founder and Chair, CIDO
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Canada

Program of the
Palestinian-Canadian Cultural Encounter:
Art, Heritage, and Shared Human Values



- 9:30 - 10:00 Reception & Registration
-
- 10:00 - 10:05 Canadian and Palestinian National Anthems
-
- 10:05 - 10:40
- Mr. Maher Nicola Canawati, Mayor of Bethlehem
 - Mr. Graham Dattles, Representative of Canada to the Palestinian Authority
 - Mr. Shawky Fahel, Founder and Chairman of the Canadian International Development Organization – CIDO
 - Mr. Hani Al-Hayek - Minister of Tourism and Antiquities
-
- 10:45 Signing the Memorandum of Understanding for Bethlehem Sculpture Installation Project
-
- 11:00 - 11:20 Artist Talk – Timothy Schmalz
Theme: Public Art, Faith, and Human Dignity
-
- 11:30 - 12:15
- Bethlehem Artisans Panel
 - Stone Carving: Sculptor Akram Anastas
 - Olive Wood: Artisan Atallah Zakharia
 - Mother of Pearl: UN Senior expert, and composer and cultural expert, Dr. Saleem Zoughbi
-
- 12:15 - 12:30 Open Discussion & Audience Engagement
-
- 12:30 Closing Remarks
-
- 12:30 - 13:30 Reception
-
- 13:30 - 14:00 Small Exhibition at Turquoise Mountain Foundation
-
- 14:00 - 14:30 Visit to Raja'i Zakharia Workshop
-
- 14:45 - 16:00 Visit to Piccirillo Handcraft Center, Bethlehem
-





Canada

برنامج اللقاء الثقافي الفلسطيني - الكندي
الفن والتراث والقيم الإنسانية المشتركة



الاستقبال والتسجيل	10:00 - 9:30
النشيد الوطني الكندي والفلسطيني	10:05 - 10:00
كلمات افتتاحية:	10:40 - 10:05
- أ.ماهر نيقولا قنواتي، رئيس بلدية بيت لحم	
- السيد غراهام داتلس، ممثل كندا لدى السلطة الفلسطينية	
- السيد شوقي فحل، مؤسس ورئيس منظمة التنمية الدولية الكندية (CIDO)	
- السيد هاني الحايك، وزير السياحة والآثار	
توقيع مذكرة التفاهم لمشروع تركيب المنحوتات في بيت لحم	10:45
حديث الفنان - تيموثي شملز	11:20 - 11:00
الموضوع: الفن العام، الإيمان وكرامة الإنسان	
حلقة نقاش مع حرفيي بيت لحم	12:15 - 11:30
- النحت على الحجر: النحات أكرم انسطاس	
- خشب الزيتون: الحرفي عطالله زخريا	
- الصدف: خبير أول في الأمم المتحدة، ومؤلف موسيقي وخبير ثقافي، د. سليم الزغبى	
نقاش مفتوح ومشاركة الجمهور	12:30 - 12:15
الختام	12:30
حفل استقبال	13:30 - 12:30
معرض مصغر في مؤسسة الجبل الفيروزي	14:00 - 13:30
زيارة إلى مشغل رجائي زخريا	14:30 - 14:00
زيارة إلى مركز بيتشيريلو للحرف اليدوية، بيت لحم	16:00 - 14:45





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Timothy Schmalz Inc.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

Bethlehem Sculpture Installation Project

This Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] is entered into by the following participating parties:

Maher Nicola Canawati, Mayor, Bethlehem, State of Palestine

Timothy Schmalz, Sculpture artist, St. Jacobs, Ontario, Canada

Shawky Fahel, Chair, Canadian International Development Organization (CIDO), Waterloo, Ontario, Canada

Purpose: The Parties to this MOU will work together to install several interactive pieces of art (sculptures) in locations across Bethlehem that are frequented by pilgrims and tourists. The exact number of sculpture pieces and exact locations will be mutually agreed upon.

Background/Context:

Bethlehem is a living city with a rich artistic and cultural tradition, shaped by generations of craftsmanship, storytelling, and creative expression. It holds a distinguished place on the global stage as the first site in the State of Palestine to be inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Centered on the Birthplace of Jesus: the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route, the designation recognizes not only the site's profound spiritual significance to billions but also its architectural evolution since the 4th century. As a protected international treasure, Bethlehem stands as a testament to the enduring cultural legacy and sovereign heritage of the Palestinian people.

Timothy Schmalz is a Canadian sculptor from St. Jacobs, Ontario, Canada. Cast editions of his life-sized sculptures have been installed in major cities in front of some of the most historically significant Christian sites in the world, including Capernaum, the Vatican, Fatima and the El Camino Trail.

For several years, **Shawky Fahel**, a Palestinian-Canadian, has had a vision to have some of Schmalz's artwork displayed in the Holy Land. Fahel, the Founder and Chair of CIDO, has strong relationships with Palestinians and Palestinian organizations. He has spearheaded several health, educational and humanitarian projects over the last 30 years.



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Timothy Schmalz Inc.

Now is the opportunity to fulfil this vision and advance a sense of compassion, understanding and peace.

Scope of the MOU:

This MOU expresses the shared desire of the signatories, to undertake actions to advance the project. Included in the MOU are the first actions needed. As the project advances, further agreements, as deemed necessary, will be added as supplements to this MOU or as new agreements.

Roles and Responsibilities:

The Mayor of Bethlehem, Maher Nicola Canawati: In its session No. 239, held on January 21, 2026, the Bethlehem City Council approved the proposed agreement and resolved to authorize the Mayor to determine the locations where the sculptures will be installed. The Mayor shall select the potential sculpture locations and present them to the MOU signatories for further consideration and approval, and shall act as the local spokesperson for this project or assign this role to a council representative.

The Sculpture artist, Timothy Schmalz: provide creative and sculpture options to the MOU signatories for discussion and approval. Be the creative lead for the project and act as the spokesperson for creative matters.

The Chair of CIDO, Shawky Fahel: oversee the project; government liaison (Canada, Bethlehem, Ramallah), lead in securing necessary funds, act as the Canadian spokesperson for this project.

NOTE: *accompanying this MOU is a document showing seven (7) of Schmalz's sculptures that he could make available for this project.*

Resources and Contributions:

- Artwork: to be designed and created by Schmalz.
- Funding for artwork will be the responsibility of Schmalz and Fahel. (Funding will be provided by Art Patrons and from other sources).
- Shipping and shipping cost will be the responsibility of Fahel and Schmalz.
- Costs related to site selection options are the responsibility of the city of Bethlehem.
- Schmalz and Fahel will include at least one trip to Bethlehem to visit potential sculpture locations. On such visits they can meet with local people who support the project.



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Timothy Schmalz Inc.

Governance and Communication: The signatories to this MOU will meet (virtually) using ZOOM or TEAMS as necessary. Such meetings will be called, and an agenda, provided by Fahel. The mayor's staff will assist with meeting logistics.

All communications: press releases, briefing notes, presentation material, reports will be shared among the signatories before being released.

In cases of disagreement or dispute, all efforts will be made to resolve issues among the signatories. If all efforts fail, final decisions are the responsibility of Fahel (project) and Schmalz (art and creativity).

Confidentiality: The signatories to this agreement agree to hold sensitive and proprietary information as confidential. The exception is when sensitive or proprietary information is required by law.

Term and Termination: It is expected that this project will take sixteen (16) to eighteen (months) to complete. The first sculptures could be installed within four (4) months after the signing of the MOU.

This MOU will remain in effect until the project is complete. The duration of the MOU can be amended with the agreement of all the signatories.

This MOU may be terminated by any of the signatories with thirty (30) days' notice in writing or by email.

This MOU is effective on the date of the last signatory.

Non-Binding Statement: This MOU is undertaken in good faith and is not a legally binding contract.

Signed in Bethlehem, on February 11th, 2026.

Signatures:

Timothy Schmalz
Artist

Maher Nicola Canawati
Mayor of Bethlehem

Shawky Fahel
Project Lead

Palestinian - Canadian Cultural Encounter -February 11, 2026

On February 11, 2026, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Bethlehem's Mayor, Nicola Canawati, Canadian sculpture, Timothy Schmalz, and Shawky Fahel. This MOU marks the first formal cultural agreement between Canada and Palestine since Canada's recognition of Palestinian statehood in September 2025.

These are the Schmalz sculptures that will be installed in Bethlehem.

Angels Unawares

A bronze sculpture by Timothy Schmalz installed in St. Peter's Square in the Vatican on September 29, 2019.

This statue was inaugurated by Pope Francis in 2019 for the 105th World Day of Migrants and Refugees. At its inauguration Pope Francis said he wanted the sculpture "to remind everyone of the evangelical challenge of hospitality".

The six-meter-long sculpture depicts a group of migrants and refugees on a boat wearing clothes that show they originate from diverse cultures and historical moments. For example, there are a Jew fleeing Nazi Germany, a Syrian departing the Syrian civil war, and a Pole escaping the communist regime. Schmalz said that he "wanted to show the different moods and emotions involved in a migrant's journey". The work includes angel wings, through which Schmalz suggests that a migrant is secretly an angel in our midst. His inspiration was Hebrews 13:2: "*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares*". It was the first time in 400 years, (since Bernini), that a new sculpture was installed in St Peter's Square.



Be Welcoming

A bronze sculpture by Canadian artist Timothy Schmalz. It was created in 2022, inspired by the same scripture text that is at the center of Schmalz's "Angels Unawares" monument in St. Peter's Square, Hebrews 13:2 "*Be welcoming to strangers, many have entertained angels unawares*".

An interactive sculpture. The sculpture at first glance depicts a hooded figure, appearing to be a stranger, a homeless person or a pilgrim. However, as the viewer walks around the sculpture and changes perspective, the figure is shown to be an angel with an outstretched hand motioning as if to invite the viewer to sit beside them. The full sculpture includes the life-sized stranger-angel sculpture with a bronze bench large enough for an adult to sit upon.

On April 15, 2025, *Be Welcoming* was installed near the Showers for the Poor and the Mother of Mercy Clinic in the colonnade of St. Peter's Square. *Be Welcoming* is the third Schmalz installation located in the vicinity of St. Peter's Basilica.

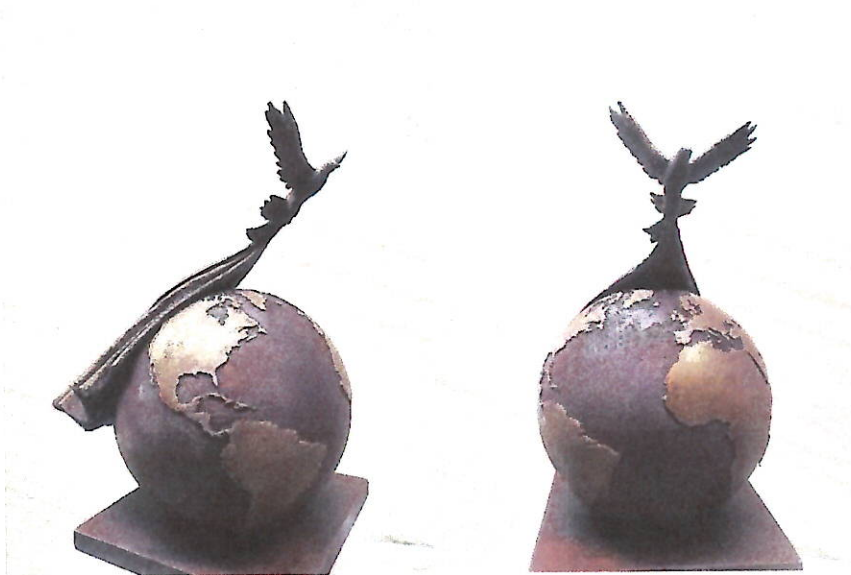


Peace Be with You

A new sculpture created for the Augustinians to present to Pope Leo.

It is a symbol of world peace. The sculpture shows the dove of peace sheltering and covering the world with the symbolic cloth of peace. Inspired by St. Augustine's famous quote "*My heart is restless till it rests in you*". The original model was presented to Pope Leo in 2025.

The large version of Pope Leo's sculpture will be the original created for Bethlehem.



Life Monument

The Life Monument was created as a representation of a pregnant Mary.

It is a visual celebration of new Human Life. The sculpture shows Mary with a halo shaped womb with the baby Jesus visible in the center.

The sculpture is installed inside the Church of San Marcello al Corso by Msgr. Vincenzo Paglia, the president of the Vatican Academy Form Life.



Mathew 25 Sculptures Series (5 pieces)

All these sculptures show a life-size figure. The identity of the figure being Jesus is revealed only by the wounds of being on the cross.

The sculptures are inspired by the scripture found in the book of Mathew. *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’*

1. When I was Hungry and Thirsty

A sculpture of a figure with a cup and plate suggesting hunger and thirst. The original sculpture is installed in front of Santo Spirito Hospital. This is the oldest hospital in Europe on Vatican hill.



2. When I Was Sick, You Visited Me

The sculpture represents a figure obviously sick with a twisted torso and one arm covering his face while the other is becoming the pedestrian to come and visit him.

This work is also installed in front of Santo Spirito Hospital in the center of Rome.



3. When I was Naked, You Clothed Me

This figure is represented naked, sheltering himself with a piece of cardboard.

The Original bronze is installed at the entrance of St. Peter in Chains Basilica, Rome.



4. When I was a Stranger, You Let Me In

This sculpture shows a weary traveler with all his possessions in a bag he is carrying.

The sculpture includes bronze seats that form a circle allowing the viewer to join the stranger.

The original bronze (without the bronze seats) is installed at the front arcade of San Lorenzo in Lucina Basilica, Rome.



5. When I was in Prison, You Visited Me

This sculpture shows hands coming out from prison bars. Only when one sees the wounds in the hands is it revealed that it is Jesus in prison.

The first cast of this sculpture is installed at the gate of St. Paul's Basilica in Rome.

