

Interview conducted by Fr. Lucas Chuffart, A.A.

St.Peter in Gallicantu

A former military officer, Pierre had been stationed as a military observer in Lebanon, and then in a similar position in Jerusalem for the U.N. So it was that the Duchon family lived in Jerusalem some 20 years ago; the parents wanted to return because St. Peter's had become a second family to them.

Encouraged by their children, Véronique and Pierre were ready to leave again. They had already been involved in some intense Church experiences — Véronique, for example, had been a hospital chaplain for 11 years and both of them had gone to Haiti for 4 months to help out in a Catholic relief center.

They received me in their small but comfortable den; on the wall there hung a collage of photos of their 5 children and their 5 grand-children and children's colored drawings thumb-nailed on a large board.

INTERVIEW

- How does one become an Assumption Volunteer?

- Pierre. A bishop once told me, « Have a couple of plans in hand in order to find out where the Church needs you the most». So we looked for a couple of options. Luckily, we met Fr. Jean-François Petit, an Assumptionist who put us in touch with Brothers Didier Remiot and Philippe Berrached via the Internet (www.volontaires-assomption). That's how we got to

Jerusalem on mission.

- Véronique. Because we wanted to take a step back from our ordinary lives, Jerusalem seemed like the perfect place to go as a couple with the Assumption Volunteer program. They also suggested that we go to Vietnam, but that seemed a bit far! (lots of laughs)

- What have you discovered during this mission?

- Véronique. We wanted to work together, to bring together the qualities we both have to do something in common.
- Pierre. We're happy to be learning all this day by day with two religious communities, the Assumptionists and the Oblates of the Assumption. We are deeply aware that we have enjoyed a special grace as a couple as a result of the sacrament of marriage.



- Your situation is a little peculiar…

Véronique. That's true. In effect, we are a married man and woman living in a community of celibate and consecrated men and women. We provide a kind of link between the two communities, even if we are under the responsibility of the Assumptionists who, since 1920, have supervised the shrine, one of the most important of the holy sites in the land where Jesus lived.

- **What are some of your activities?**

- Pierre. They're quite different: we are heavily involved in helping the religious with the various aspects of welcoming pilgrims and with the daily tasks in the house.

- Véronique. Our living and working conditions are quite good; we maintain excellent relations with the 10 Palestinians who work at the site of St. Peter-in-Gallicantu, five men and five women.

- How is your life organized?

- Pierre. We partake of the prayer life of the communities, and, as a matter of fact, that's one of the essential conditions of our stay as Assumption volunteers. We also have our own private life, with Sunday as our day off, to get some fresh air, to continue to visit Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

- What have you learned about the Assumption?

- Véronique. We're getting to know better the larger Assumption Family spread throughout the world; the Assumptionists and the Oblates of the Assumption here are made up of five different nationalities.

Sometimes we can see that it's difficult to build community here in the very complex political and ecclesial context of Jerusalem.

- How has your family reacted?

- Pierre. Our children are proud of our involvement. In Brittany we're involved in an association of equine therapy, that is to say, healing through horse-back riding for various sicknesses; we'll take that work back up when we return to France.

- Véronique. Our children have come or were planning to come to see us; they'll make their own pilgrimages.

One of our daughters is getting ready to be married and we're able to stay in touch with everyone in the family via Internet. This keeps us going when times get tough, when we ask ourselves, «What are we doing here?"»

- After being here for four months, how do you feel?

- Pierre. We count our lucky stars: in Jerusalem, we rub shoulders with the whole world, with pilgrims, tourists, and residents from the four corners of the world.

- Véronique. We see this year in Jerusalem like a gift we have received, a real dose of consolation, which has helped us see how rich a Church mission can be. We've also tried to contribute our share of what brings people together, of light-heartedness, and of humor in the workings of a complex mix of services and spiritual animation. It's a challenge every day!

- Will someone take your place?

- Véronique. We were happy to learn that another couple has volunteered to come next year.

For we, too, have asked ourselves the question: “How do you recruit others as Assumption volunteers?”

- Do you have a final word for us?

- Pierre. In Jerusalem, to be sure, it is important to know how to express yourself in English and in French. But, above all, just as in the time when Fr. d’Alzon founded his two congregations, one must be filled «with a spirit of initiative and apostolic zeal»!

Thank you, Véronique and Pierre, and continue to enjoy your stay in Jerusalem!