

A Marathon for Peace

✖ Attaining peace through sports is the goal of an upcoming weeklong sports pilgrimage, which includes a 10-kilometer, noncompetitive race that passes Israel's security wall.

Pilgrims of Peace or JPPI Games 2010, will take place in the Holy Land April 21-28, and is the seventh marathon-pilgrimage named after John Paul II, who himself promoted sports as a means to peace.

[Photo courtesy of]

"In the Holy Land, pilgrims walk in the very locations where Jesus lived and at the same time they also 'cross through' the suffering of a non-peaceful situation bearing a message of joy," the organizer said. "They also provide help and generate work for the local population."

The peace run begins at Manger Square, outside the Church of the Nativity, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, where Palestinians from the Bethlehem area join an Italian delegation. Due to Israeli law barring Israelis from entering the Palestinian territories, the Israeli runners wait on the other side of the checkpoint for their Palestinian counterparts. The runners then continue together in Jerusalem.

Opera Romana Pellegrinaggi and Centro Sportivo Italiano, the Italian Sports Association, brings star athletes and pilgrims from Italy to participate in these athletic events with both Palestinians and Israelis. Last year's tour was fueled by retired AC Milan soccer star Demetrio Albertini and Italian volleyball world champion Andrea Zorzi.

This year, the JPPI Games will include swimming, water polo, basketball and cycling with competitors representing Italy, Israel and Palestine.

Another highlight of the trip will be a bicycle tour of The Gospel Trail, the Christian locations that are found along the Sea of Galilee.

“In the Holy Land it is likewise hoped that sports, which by their very nature are a vehicle of peace and use a universal language, represent an opportunity for people who normally live with different rhythms and customs to meet and embrace,” the sponsoring organization said.

In a homily, Pope John Paul II once said: “Sports have spread to every corner of the world, transcending differences between cultures and nations. Because of the global dimensions this activity has assumed, those involved in sports throughout the world have a great responsibility. They are called to make sports an opportunity for meeting and dialogue, over and above every barrier of language, race or culture. Sports, in fact, can make an effective contribution to peaceful understanding between peoples and to establishing the new civilization of love.”

Nicole Jansezian writes for , a Christian social network focused on travel to the Holy Land.