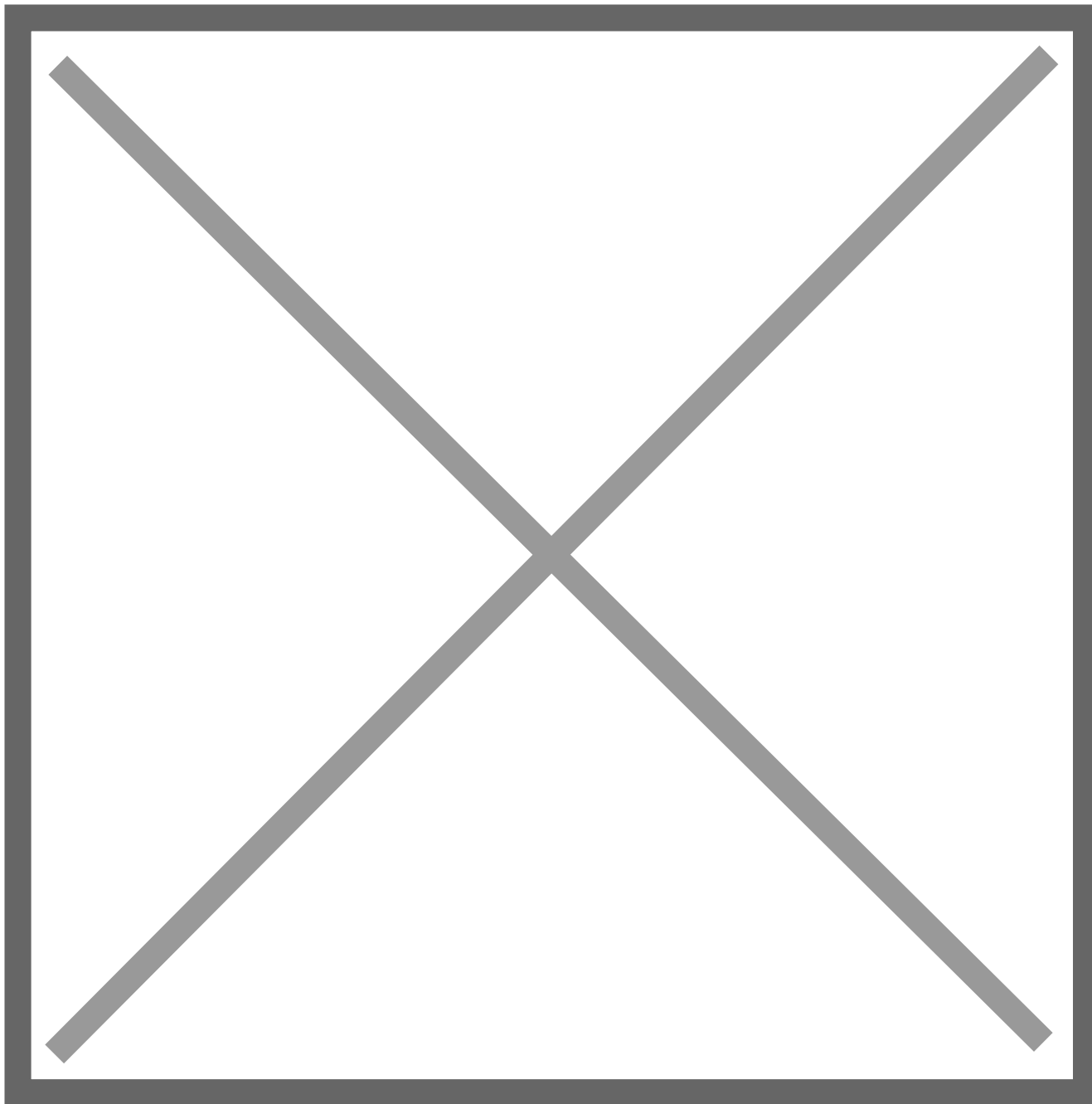


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Fr. Piotr Zelazko, a Polish priest who serves as the patriarchal vicar for the St. James Vicariate for the Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel, is seen marching in the interfaith peace march of the Forum for Human Rights in Jerusalem May 18, 2026, with those of other faiths. Religious sisters, priests, and rabbis gathered on the grounds of the YMCA alongside young people with piercings, families and ultra-Orthodox Jews for the opening ceremony, which included a prayer asking for God's mercy sung in Aramaic by Jerusalem Christian resident Nadeen Fanous. (OSV

News/Courtesy of Jacob Lazarus)



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Jerusalem — May 20, 2026

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Holding placards calling for "justice," "trust" and "peace," religious leaders led hundreds of peace activists, Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze in a march in Jerusalem May 18, days after thousands of Israeli ultra-nationalists chanting racists slogan clashed with Palestinian residents in the Old City during the annual Jerusalem Day's Flag Parade.

In its fourth year, the interfaith march of the Forum for Human Rights is organized by religious organizations as an alternative to the nationalist Flag March, which has become increasingly violent with mainly young settlers marching through the Muslim Quarter under heavy police presence and physically and verbally harassing the few Palestinian residents who have not locked their shops or remained at home.

They also attack journalists and Israeli-left wing activists who come to protect and accompany Palestinian residents.

Jerusalem Day commemorates the reunification of Jerusalem during the 1967 war, bringing Jordanian-held East Jerusalem under Israeli control together with West Jerusalem.

"We march this evening out of a deep commitment to the sanctity of life. To the sanctity of every human life. To the ability to see an entire world within every woman, man and child," said Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, co-chair of the Board of Rabbis for Human Rights, one of the march organizers, at the opening of the march in the courtyard of the historic YMCA building just outside the Old City.

"Precisely in these days when it is so easy to become accustomed to pain, to fear and to the language that divides us, we seek to remind ourselves and those around us that life precedes every conflict, and that preserving our humanity is a spiritual, moral and courageous act."

Women religious, priests and rabbis gathered on the grounds of the YMCA alongside young people with piercings, families and ultra-Orthodox Jews during the opening ceremony, which included a prayer asking for God's mercy sung in Aramaic by Jerusalem Christian resident Nadeen Fanous.

"It is hard to hear the discussions that keep us apart," Fanous told OSV News after her performance. "Being here as part of the movement of love and friendship we leave behind the hate, injustice and division. If we don't see each other, we can't work for the vision each of us has. We must build a common vision."

Sr. Monica Dullmann, a German Sister of St. Joseph of the Apparition, who has lived in Jerusalem for decades said she was happy to see so many people marching for "peace, friendship and trust."

"I believe in peace and justice, and it is nice to be together with others who feel the same way and together we will be stronger," she said. "I have always believed peace is possible and I still believe it."

To see the Flag Parade May 14 was "sad and racist," said Lilach Friedland, 37, from Jerusalem as she sat on the lawn of the YMCA, where she was seeing "buds of peace" and a "big light and hope," she said.

Avraham, 33, and Shlomit Kelman, 33, who are Orthodox Jews, said they brought their two young sons to participate in the march as a way of showing them how a

shared life in Jerusalem and Israel is possible.

"We are all upset about what is happening in the country and all the violence that is happening, so we are here in solidarity with other people of different religions and nationalities. It is exciting to be in a place where we can publicly march together and show our solidarity," said Avraham. "It is the contradiction of Jerusalem. There is so much love and hatred (at the same time), but it shows there can be another way that can bring people together and celebrate our differences."

Nadia Attallah, 62, a Druze activist from northern Israel said she came to Jerusalem for the interfaith march because she believes in peace between religions and wanted to bring attention also to the massacres of Syrian Druze by Bedouin militia, which took place in 2025 in Suwayda.

"Peace is the only way," she said.

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Curious Israeli shopkeepers who had come out of their shops to ask about the march congratulated them for the initiative, and a few cars honked their horns in support as the group made its way from the YMCA to the Old City's Jaffa Gate.

Participating with his parishioners for the fourth year, Fr. Piotr Zelazko, a Polish priest who serves as the patriarchal vicar for the St. James Vicariate for the Hebrew-speaking Catholics in Israel, said the march was a part of who he is. He led his choir in song, greeting the march with "We Shall Overcome" as they arrived at Jaffa Gate.

"If we stop praying for peace ... there will be no peace," he said. "When religions walk together, peace will walk with them. Some people say Middle East religions cause the problems. I would rather seek the solution in loving God, in loving each other. When you get to know other people, when you see the other, you are no longer strangers."

Truthfully, he said, though called the City of Peace, Jerusalem has always been a place of conflict, with constant threats and tensions.

"We want to end this. This initiative is a little step to finish the conflict," he said.

The march came just days after a Palestinian teenager was killed by Israeli fire May 13 after settlers reportedly stormed through three West Bank villages, according to Israeli human rights activists.

According to a release by the Jordan Valley Activists group, which provides protective presence for Palestinian shepherding communities in the Jordan Valley, Yousef Ali Yousef Ka'abna, 16, was shot by Israeli soldiers during a settler rampage in the West Bank villages of Ramon, Sinjil and Jiljilya north of Ramallah.

In a Hebrew-language statement posted on X, the IDF spokesman said the Israeli soldiers and border police officers had been dispatched to the area of Jiljilya following a report of "several Israeli civilians" entering the village in search of a livestock herd they claimed had been stolen from them by the Palestinians.

"Upon arriving at the scene, the IDF and Border Police forces acted to remove all Israeli civilians from the village, prevent friction in the area, and recover the livestock. Several suspects in the livestock theft were arrested by the forces and transferred to the Judea and Samaria District Police for further handling," the post said.

The IDF said it was aware of "claims that several suspects were wounded and one person was killed by the forces' gunfire" and the incident was under investigation.

In a statement, the Jordan Valley Activists, or JVA, said the recent attack was "a continuing escalation in Israeli terrorism in the West Bank." Several other Palestinians had been injured as well, the group said.

Human rights and activist groups and Palestinians have reported a sharp increase in both the number and severity of settler attacks against Palestinians since Oct. 7, 2023, after the Hamas attack on southern Israel communities, which left 1,200 people dead and 250 kidnapped.

Settler attacks have also increased in intensity in the Christian West Bank village of Taybeh, Christ the Redeemer's parish priest, Fr. Bashar Fawadleh, told OSV News — particularly following the establishment of a new settlement outpost on village land.

"This has been accompanied by repeated attacks against Palestinian workers in the stone crusher and cement factory area, including forcibly expelling them and preventing access to their workplaces, in clear violation of the residents' right to

work and move safely," he said.

Residents are also facing ongoing restrictions through the repeated closure of roads and the eastern military barrier of Taybeh, severely impacting freedom of movement and disrupting daily life, he added.

Attacks have also extended to the Ein Samia area, which serves as the only water source for the eastern region, Fawadleh said, and threaten residents' access to water and essential services. These actions "further deepen the humanitarian and economic pressures faced by the local population," he said, and in the absence of effective protection or accountability residents are increasingly feeling insecure in their own village, threatening their ability to remain safe on their land.

JVA said that at least some of the Palestinian families in the recent attack had already been displaced from their homes following the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza on Oct. 7, 2023.

In its coverage of the events, CNN noted that Ka'abna was the 14th Palestinian killed in settler violence since the start of 2026, and broadcasted videos showing a settler with a gun running toward Palestinians and injured people being placed into a Palestinian ambulance.

In a May 8 report, the United Nations said at least nine Palestinians have been killed by Israeli settlers later identified as reservists in 2026.

Settlers from illegal outposts in the Jordan Valley accompanied by soldiers have also prevented Palestinian shepherds from grazing their herds on their privately owned land and two Bedouin shepherds who have been living on Latin Patriarchate land have been issued demolition orders for their small concrete-block and tarp homes.