


[Home](#) [News](#) [Columns](#) [Faith](#) [YSN](#) [Education](#) [Arts](#) [Features](#)
[Subscribe](#) [Donate](#) [CR Books](#) [Contact](#) [Ads](#) [Login](#)

On the hills of the West Bank, building the good life for Palestinians

Written by Judith Sudilovsky, Catholic News Service

Thursday, 30 May 2013 11:11



RAWABI, West Bank – About 20 minutes from the Palestinian economic hub of Ramallah, the new city of Rawabi is sprouting on a rocky hillside.

Visitors sense pride as young professionals work on the first Palestinian city built with a master plan and the first new Palestinian city to rise up among the scattered Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

"When people come here they are astonished," said Ghadeer Khoury, 28, a young Catholic civil engineer from Ramallah who has been working as part of the Rawabi team since its inception in 2008. "It is something (different). They are not used to seeing something like this ... for us. We know there is a good life, but we don't know that it can be for us also, with everything organized and in the right place. But we can still have something good like this, despite the (Israeli) occupation."

Many of her young Christian contemporaries are coming to buy apartments here, said Khoury, who is in the process of choosing an apartment for herself.

Co-worker Jack Nasser, 28, a Catholic who lives in Ramallah and works as office manager on the project, has already bought an apartment here and convinced his brother and one sister to buy here as well.

What was envisioned as a neighborhood has transformed into an entire planned city.

Rawabi will have an upscale city center with shops, offices, restaurants and apartments surrounding a central plaza. Developers hope to attract internationally known brands as well as high-tech companies to provide employment for residents.

The West Bank cities of Ramallah, Nablus and Jenin are all overcrowded and Rawabi, which means "hills" in Arabic, can provide an answer to companies looking for space or to expand, said Khoury.

The city's 20,000-seat outdoor amphitheater is nearing completion. It will have an 800-seat indoor theater, a convention center, three cinemas, a soccer pitch, three schools -- one for boys, one for girls and a co-ed school -- in the initial phases, with five more schools planned for the future.

Rawabi was the brain child of Palestinian businessman Bashar Masri, who was educated in the United States and Egypt.

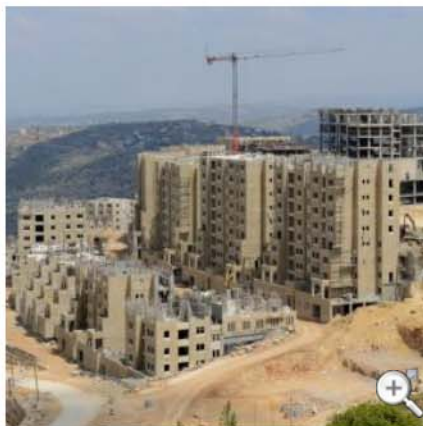
"I never had a doubt in my mind from day one that this was right and that one day it would be a great success. Today, the project is much bigger than I ever imagined, and it is getting bigger," Masri said.

The Rawabi showroom includes a museum-quality mock "walkthrough" model of the city at its entrance and a 3-D introductory movie of the project scripted by an international company. It also has computerized models of the various buildings and apartment styles so prospective buyers can check out the availability of different options using iPads programmed with special software by a Palestinian company in Nablus.

Masri said he tries to use as much Palestinian labor as he can.


"I came up with the idea, but there are hundreds of Palestinians working on this, and they are proud of themselves," he said. "And they are doing it at a level of sophistication, perhaps not at the level of London or New York, but it is a sophisticated level adjusted to the local tastes."

Qatar is footing almost two-thirds of the budget through the Bayti Real Estate Investment Co.



An overview of apartment buildings and a commercial center under construction in Rawabi, the first planned Palestinian city in the West Bank, April 23. Rawabi will provide some 6,000 contemporary housing units with different floor plans, spread across 23 neighborhoods.

- CNS photo/Debbie Hill



PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Undergraduate Programs:

- Summer Institute in Pastoral Liturgy
- Summer Institute in Religious Education

Graduate Programs

- Master of Pastoral Theology
- Master of Religious Education*
- Doctor of Ministry*

Discover our distance learning courses

ustpaul.ca

UNIVERSITÉ SAINT-PAUL UNIVERSITY

Network Access Message: The page cannot be displayed

Explanation: There is a problem with the page you are trying to access and it cannot be displayed.

Try the following:

- **Refresh page:** Search for the page again by clicking the Refresh button. The timeout may have occurred due to Internet congestion.
- **Check spelling:** Check that you typed the Web address correctly. The address may have been mistyped.
- **Access from a link:** If there is a link to the page you are trying to access, click on that link.

Stay Connected

☐ [FACEBOOK](#) ☐ [TWITTER](#) ☒ [E-NEWSLETTER](#) ☐ [RSS](#)



100 years of service to the missions



[Most Popular](#) [Latest News](#) [Latest Columns](#)



Vatican organizing worldwide, simultaneous eucharistic adoration June 2

Written on Wednesday, May 29

Masri lives in Ramallah with his American-born wife -- both daughters are at universities in the United States -- and he said he has no plans to move to Rawabi. But his company has sold between one and nine apartments a day since opening up sales in mid-May, he said.

The initial budget for the project was \$500 million. Today the project stands at a budget of more than \$1 billion and will eventually include 23 neighborhoods with some 6,000 housing units for 30,000 residents.

The first 600 apartments are scheduled to be completed early next year. Future stages of the project will include some higher-end single-family homes as well as one-bedroom apartments for young couples and students, Nasser said.

A mosque is being constructed, and in February a cornerstone-laying ceremony was held with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III for the future Greek Orthodox church to be built. A spot has been reserved for a Catholic church.

Father Humam Khzouz, general administrator of Jerusalem's Latin Patriarchate, said the patriarchate is interested in building a church and school in the new city and is in the process of reviewing several options.

"Nothing has been concretized yet but we are interested," he said in a phone interview. "We are interested in being there in order to serve the young couples who will be living there."

In addition to conveying a message that Palestinians are capable of creating something bigger than what they have had, even with the Israeli occupation, Masri said he wants to convey the importance of creating the reflection of a tolerant Palestinian society in Rawabi.

Palestinians want a secular democratic state, he said, and he believes that a tolerant Rawabi will be another step in that direction.

"We are in the process of state-building, in this case city-building, and it must be a secular city," he said. "There must be tolerance and respect of people's religious beliefs. To emphasize this secular message we put in the cornerstone of the first Christian church. We made a big deal of it in order to emphasize (Rawabi) as a city of tolerance."

The same was not done with the mosque, he noted. Christians make up less than 2 percent of the predominantly Muslim West Bank.

Rawabi prices are affordable compared to Ramallah, where property is at a premium, said Nasser.

"Instead of immigrating for a better quality of life, they can have it here. They can have a better quality of life and still be in Palestine," said Nasser, who noted that when his sister came back from the United States with her family, the first thing she did was purchase an apartment in Rawabi.

Readers Speak Out

Write to The Editor:

Catholic Register, 1155 Yonge St., Toronto, Ontario M4T 1W2
FAX: (416) 934-3409
E-mail: editor@catholicregister.org

Letters should be brief and must include full name, address and phone number (street and phone number will not be published). Letters may be edited for length.

Also, speak to us digitally via Facebook ([facebook.com/TheCatholicRegister](https://www.facebook.com/TheCatholicRegister)) or Twitter (twitter.com/CatholicRegister)

 Tweet 0

Leave a comment

We request that all commenters become registered users of the site. If you have not already done so, [click here to register](#) and/or [login](#). You can view rules for commenting on catholicregister.org [here](#).

Message *



Being priest was 'everything' to man ordained two days before he died

Written on Monday, May 27



Tanzanian bishops' head warns of growing threat from militant Islamists

Written on Monday, May 27



CCCB offers condolences to Morgentaler family

Written on Thursday, May 30



On the hills of the West Bank, building the good life for Palestinians

Written on Thursday, May 30

Two New Releases from Catholic Register Books



Are We There Yet?

By Fr. Frank Freitas \$14.99

Discover Your Divine Investment

By Fr. Stan Chu Ilo \$14.99



CATHOLIC REGISTER BOOKS 

"PERSPECTIVES" DAILY VIDEO



Courtesy of Salt and Light Television