



YUSEF **DAHER**

## My New Gate

In 2007, I was appointed by the World Council of Churches as executive secretary of the Jerusalem Inter-Church Center. My office is located near New Gate, and working there has allowed me to reclaim the area as family heritage. In the Habasch family printing press nearby – the first of its kind in Jerusalem! – my grandfather was among the first employees. Next door, the Collège des Frères is the school attended first by my father, then by me, and then by my daughter Muna after me.

New Gate is the last of the eight gates opened in Jerusalem's wall, allowing automobiles to enter the Old City. In 1967, it experienced fierce fighting when Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Golan Heights during the Six-Day War. For local Christians today it is a symbol of dignity, and our youth are trying their best to preserve as Christian heritage both the gate and the adjoining street. Very recently, groups of Christian youth have begun to launch activities that commemorate faith-based events in the area. For about seven years, a Christmas tree has been lighted above the old printing press next to the Frères school. An increasing number of events and parades take place in the area between the Franciscan St. Savior Convent and the Latin Patriarchate. For the past ten years, on the annual occasion of the victorious entry of the Holy Light to Jerusalem on Holy Fire Saturday – a religious tradition that dates back eight centuries – clashes have taken place due to the harsh Israeli security arrangements that limit access to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

Once, I had my own victorious entry. On March 21, 2010, I was stopped at the gate by 20 policemen and women as they refused entry to the city for security reasons. I stood silently in front of them for two-and-a-half hours, insisting – through eye contact – that they let me go to my workplace. Eventually, they gave up and let me in. I considered this experience a good lesson in nonviolence. In truth, my action was prompted by my love for “my” children and for this place as an icon for family and nation.