

2019 Year-End Review

Letter from our Executive Director

Dear Pilgrims Family,

As we reach the end of this year, and this decade, it seems an apt time to reflect on where we have been and



consider where we might go. In the time-line that's a part of this year-end note, you can see clearly where we've been. What you can't see, but many of you have been lucky enough to experience, is the deep joy of the hospitality at the Mar Elias Guest house through the incredible grace of hosts Samar and Badea.

You can't see the determination of the students studying furiously for their national exams, with the help of board members / long-time volunteers Ted and Jane Settle and tireless teachers. You can't see the warmth of the Wi'am Conflict Transformation Center as they welcome in visitors and explain the need for peace building within the community of Bethlehem. You might not know the bliss of eating a feast in Jerusalem, splashing in the waters of the Sea of Galilee, or

hearing Abuna tell of his memories of growing up in Biram. You might not have had these experiences... yet.

But with your help, we can continue to invite others (and hopefully you can join us!) to come and better know the people and stories of Palestine and Israel. You can help us build peace on desktops, and ensure that the story continues for generations to come.

On behalf of the board, our volunteers, the staff, and my newest Pilgrim (Sonora Nancy Lyter Bright, born August 23, 2019!), thank you for your prayers, support, and encouragement. May this be a season of peace for you and yours!

With joy,

Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright



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Letter from our Board President

Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

My prayer for the Middle East is for peace between people of all ages, nationalities and religions. This is why I give to and help lead Pilgrims of Ibillin: I want to build peace on desktops and in the hearts of students at Mar Elias. Every day I take my children to a safe school in which they will be valued and from which they will graduate to make a difference in the world. The same is true for Mar Elias and the stakes are

even higher for those students and that region. And I know firsthand that my giving to Pilgrims changes lives through Mar Elias and our peace partners.

This last May, through the efforts of Pilgrims, I was reunited with my friend Emil Haloun, a teacher at Mar Elias. His reports of student progress and growth reinforced my conviction that giving to support Mar Elias makes a difference. He told me that because of relationships formed at Mar Elias, children and youth of all ages are changing their families and transforming neighborhoods. I invite you once again to give generously to

support Pilgrims.

We can't change the world on a mass scale, but we can change the lives of thousands of students and their families. If you would like to be more directly involved in facilitating the work of Pilgrims by serving on our board of directors, please contact me in order to pursue that possibility.

Thank you for your support of Mar Elias and Pilgrims of Ibillin.



Rev. Dr. Peter Henry

Upper left: Visitors enjoying the waters of the Dead Sea.
Left: Engaged students at Mar Elias.
PHOTOS BY REV. JOAN DEMING



Milestones and Living Stones

1939: Abuna Chacour is born in Biram, in Upper Galilee.

1965: Abuna Chacour is ordained and appointed priest of St. George Melkite Catholic Church in Ibillin.

1960'S: Abuna and Rev. Bruce Rigdon (Presbyterian Church, USA) meet at a Middle East conference and a lifelong friendship is born.

1982: The original Mar Elias high school is built!

1984: *Blood Brothers* is published (updated in 2002 and 2013). It has been published in more than twenty different languages.

1986: Abuna's first nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize (an honor repeated in 1989 and 1994)

1990: *We Belong to the Land* is published.

1990'S: Abuna Chacour visits Rev. Rigdon's congregation at Grosse Pointe Memorial Presbyterian Church in Grosse Pointe, Michigan and serves as the ecumenical scholar in residence. The community at Grosse Pointe is invited to come and meet the "Living Stones," to understand the possibilities of building peace in Israel and Palestine.

1994: Abuna receives the World Methodist Peace Prize.

1995: Grosse Pointe Memorial Church creates a new church group, and Pilgrims of Ibillin is born. Work groups of adults and youth alike travel to Ibillin to support the building of the MEEI schools.

1997: Abuna and the MEEI team launch the Miriam Bawardi Elementary school.

80-Year Time-line

1982: Abuna is awarded the Niwano Peace Prize, and honorary doctorates from Emory University and The University of Indianapolis. In this same year, Pilgrims of Ibillin moved from an all-volunteer organization to the hiring of an executive director, Rev. Don Griggs.

2003-2004: Pilgrims of Ibillin board member Bob Connolly guided Pilgrims of Ibillin in its first capital campaign, raising \$450,000 to build a new elementary school on the campus, and the Church of the Sermon on the Mount, the largest Melkite church in Israel and Palestine.

2006: Archbishop Chacour retires from service as the Archbishop of the Melkite Church for Akko, Haifa, Nazareth, and Gallilee.

2007: Rev. Dr. Bob Sawyer and Rev. Joan Deming are hired as executive director and development director for Pilgrims of Ibillin, and Pilgrims of Ibillin becomes a stand-alone 501 c3 non-profit organization. In the years to come, Bob and Joan would be responsible for crafting the Living Stones pilgrimages, inviting groups of students to the U.S. as ambassadors from Ibillin, and garnering continued support for the continued success of MEEI.

2008: Pilgrims of Ibillin begins the process of engaging our Peace Partners, in particular Wi'am Conflict Transformation Center. These partners dramatically enhance the unique Living Stones Pilgrimage experiences, and further the mission of Pilgrims of Ibillin to invest in creative, interfaith peace-building educational opportunities in Israel and Palestine.

2008-2008: The support of generous donors and grants from the FISH Foundation enables the building of a new high school building with additional classrooms, elevator accessibility, and improved science and computer labs.

2013: Rev. Dr. Sawyer retired and Rev. Joan Deming began her tenure as executive director. During this time, the board focused efforts on securing grant funding to allow continued access to the MEEI schools for all students through scholarships and support of building a new Learning Center for additional learning opportunities.

2017-present: After Rev. Deming's retirement, Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright and administrator Angela Cummins became the new leadership for Pilgrims of Ibillin. With an enthusiastic board, we created a new documentary to tell the story of MEEI and our peace partners, welcomed groups of students to criss-cross the U.S. and share their own experiences, and celebrated Abuna Chacour's 80th birthday with a "Milestones and Living Stones" speaking tour in the summer of 2019.

Over the years, thousands of individuals and faith communities have experienced the determination and optimism that is Archbishop Chacour, the students and teachers of Mar Elias, the people of Ibillin, and the "Living Stones" throughout Israel and Palestine. With your help, we look forward to the decades ahead as we continue to deepen relationships, grow in our support, and create peace on desktops!

Happy 80th Birthday, Abuna!

Letter from our Board Secretary Sarah Morgan

For the last few months, I have been collecting video birthday messages for Fr. Elias Chacour from long-time friends of Pilgrims of Ibillin. As I compiled the clips, the hardest part was deciding how to edit this outpouring down to a manageable length. Each message was so full of heart. Some are short and simple ("Happy Birthday, Abuna!") Some are fondly remembered stories of a first meeting ("That was my first visit to Ibillin...the first of thirteen visits.") In each case, a few words tell a much longer story.

Bob Sawyer, former executive director of Pilgrims of Ibillin said in his



Sarah Morgan

video, "As I sit here by Old Hickory Lake in Tennessee, I think of many wonderful moments by another lake - that one in the hills of Galilee. When I look at that lake in the mount of Beatitudes, I think of the man from Galilee...and I think of another man from Galilee. You and your Galilee compatriots, both from the first and the 21st centuries challenge and inspire us to get up from the peaceful beauty of the lakeside, and to stand up for justice."

Abuna's 80 years have been filled with transformational encounters, warmth, and good humor. Wherever he has traveled and worked, he has left behind him people who feel an enduring connection to the story of Mar Elias Educational Institutions and to the town of Ibillin.

In October, the group of travelers on the Living Stones Pilgrimage was able to deliver the birthday greetings to Abuna in person. They set



Glass blower in Hebron.

PHOTO REV. JOAN DEMING.

up a projector, and played for him a parade of faces from the past.

Joan Deming, who led the trip, wrote to me, "He smiled a lot, laughed, exclaimed at each new person, and once I thought he wiped away a tear." How satisfying to offer a small thank you to a person who has made such a big impact on his community and far beyond!

See the full birthday video at www.pilgrimsofibilin.org/

Letter from Abuna Elias Chacour

Read Abuna's full letter online:

Dear Pilgrims,

You know that the Lord and yourself have called me to care for the young generation which is in desperate need of education, caring and love. Through the long years, we have collaborated together to give our best for planting the seed of hope, and the respect of life in the hearts of the next generation.

You have been partners in this enterprise. I am grateful and proud of you. After all, the Lord has done for us great things. We have the gift to translate our respect of others, through providing them with our care, with our prayers and with our financial help.

I urge you to continue, keep the faith alive. We are continuing to develop the awareness of thousands of young people to go in depth and discover the many positive sides of our human life.

I want first to wish you all a very happy Advent, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

We hope that many among you would take or be given the opportunity to visit us in the Holy Land and be our distinguished guests.

Yours with deep appreciation and prayerful thoughts,

Abuna Elias Chacour
Archbishop emeritus of Galilee



Abuna Elias Chacour

Save the Dates - May 2021 Encountering Women Peacemakers of the Holy Land

Save the dates for this unique Pilgrims of Ibillin pilgrimage and study tour in May 2021 focusing on the essential contributions of women in the Bible and today. Our theme is "Encountering Women Peacemakers of the Holy Land." All are welcome and encouraged to come join us.

Pilgrims of Ibillin Executive Director Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright and Dr. Monte Luker will co-teach this cross-cultural immersion experience through the auspices of the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies.

Students are welcome too, and professors might consider making this a May Term course for credit through your academic institution.

Reserve your spot on an upcoming pilgrimage:

Pilgrims of Ibillin - Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright
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Pilgrims of Ibillin

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

STAFF

Executive Director: Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright
Operations Administrator: Angela Cummins
Pilgrimage Director: Rev. Joan Deming

Pilgrims By the Numbers



194 and counting: number of pilgrims who have visited Israel and Palestine with Pilgrims of Ibillin since our inception



41 States across the U.S. are home to individuals involved with Pilgrims of Ibillin



37 years ago the original Mar Elias High School was built, educating **1000's of Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Druze children** since



1st Century AD - the first recorded use of the **Sulha**, a community conflict resolution still put to great use today by the **Wi'am Conflict Transformation Center** in Bethlehem
Learn more: www.alaslah.org/



3 major components to the **Seraj Library Project** new initiative, the first ever **Palestinian Storytelling Center**. 1) Collecting and archiving traditional stories and personal histories; 2) producing artistic pieces and performances based on the stories; and 3) training others on the collection, preservation, and performance of stories. Find more information: www.serajlibraries.org



Pilgrims of Ibillin

*Fostering Peace & Justice in
Israel and Palestine Through Education*

Celebrating Peace & Justice in the Holy Land

Thank you for your gifts and prayers.

Envelope inserted for your gifts or donate online:

www.pilgrimsofibilin.org/donate-now/