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Ibillin, 24 November, 2022

Dear Beloved friends of Pilgrims of Ibillin,

Once more we are given the privilege of waiting and expecting with strong faith, the birthday of Christ. I am tempted to invite you to join us to visit Bethlehem and revive all the memories of what happened two thousand years ago. We don't feel the need to revive memories as much as to practice what the angels announced to the shepherd "Be not afraid, we bring you good tidings, a savior is born for you". This is what we want to repeat to your attention, a savior is born for us. Every Christmas is an excellent opportunity to revive in our mind and in our life the message of the Prince of peace, Jesus from Nazareth.

It's a privileged time to give you the news about MEEI, I wouldn't take much of your time. This scholastic year started with the assurance of our determination to continue the journey with our kids. The number of Children has come back to what it was before Covid-19. We were nicely surprised in late September that the High school was chosen by the Ministry of Education of Israel to be one among the first ten schools in the country. Our teachers, 85 received a bonus from the Ministry of Education amounted 8,900 NIS. You imagine the positive reaction of all the teachers and the pride of all the students.

This year we decided that Abuna Elias Chacour would go every Monday morning at eight o'clock greet the teachers and speak to all the students gathered in front of the school, while the majority of the teachers are among the students. Maybe the event is more impressive to Abuna Elias than to the students. It's a reviving of the past when every morning he would speak to all of the students to start the day. The meetings with the principles and the teachers together with the board of direction of the association is very frequent.

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One sad incident happened two weeks ago, one of our students 17 years old went home after school and tried to have a nap in the afternoon, when his mother tried to wake him up two hours later, he didn't respond, with a heart attack he was gone. It was a shock for all of us, it was also an occasion to feel the common pain, the next day all the 1,000 students and the 85 teachers came back to school dressed in black, a sign of deep mourning. I think it was the first time that the students would be completely silent. We all went by groups, one after the other to visit the family and present our condolences.

For this situation we felt the deep solidarity above everything that might divide us, we were all united in front of the possible death of any one among us. We tried our utmost to help the students overcome this incredible shock. A team of social workers psychologist and other specialist came that day to present their services to ease the grief of the Children.

This shocking departure of one among our students was a good opportunity for us to help everybody feel the pain and the desolation, whenever we read or watch on the news the violence spreading around all over the country, always some young people, some young adults are killed on both sides, the Jewish side and the Palestinian as well. It's the direct result of the occupation and of the belief that "might is right". We feel as if we were an isolated oasis, we try to share with others the pain of their loss. We deplore the on going spread of violence on both sides. We are sure that all the time the Jewish brothers and sisters claim that the land belongs to them, and the Palestinians claim the same belief, the land belongs to them. We at Mar Elias spread the reality which says **the land can't belong to the Jewish, neither can it belong to the Palestinian, the land belongs to God**. Unless we accept humbly and with determination to share our lives on the land with dignity to both and mutual respect. Unless we do that, the land would vomit us out.


We urge you dear friends' brothers and sisters to pray for us that we don't go into temptation, and wish to possess the land.

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Christ was born the poorest among the poor although he was the wealthiest among the wealthy ones. He didn't have a "stone" to lay his head on. The one through whom everything exist accepted to become a refugee in Egypt. He is the one who encouraged us human beings to avoid putting our hope in earthly treasures.

This is our message to you dear brothers and sisters. Our dream is to see you, if not all, at least some of you, come and visit us, and see for yourself how the school is masterly developing, despite the meager financial possibilities. We are ready to come and see you friends, although the body is weak, the spirit remains strong. I wish you, your family and your friends a real celebration of the Birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Yours,

  
Abuna Elias Chacour  
Archbishop em. Of Galilee