

Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI)

MEEI top school in Israel

In 2022 Mar Elias High School was selected as one of the top schools out of 351 high schools in Israel.

The Ministry of Education published the list of high schools that excelled in values, social and academic fields in the past school year. Schools were selected according to the degree of success and improvement rates, including matriculation eligibility rate, dropout prevention, and admission of special education students.

Mar Elias was named at the highest-ranking level – AGAIN

Congratulations to students, faculty, and staff for this accomplishment!

Funds to MEEI

Pilgrims of Ibillin is so very blessed to have generous support from individuals and churches across the country.

With the help of so many, we were able to address many needs for MEEI in 2022. We helped nearly 1,000 students attend MEEI with tuition assistance that allows families to close the gap between what they can afford and the annual tuition.

We also helped replace ancient air conditioning units that use considerable electricity compared to the modern technology that is available today. With electricity rates increasing by 20% in the coming year, we made it a priority to provide 65 new A/C units.

Lastly, we sent funds to purchase 42 new computers for the elementary school computer lab, replacing units that were over 10 years old and unable to handle today's computing demands.



We so very much appreciate the many supporters who helped make these generous gifts in 2022 — and particularly those who stretched their giving to new levels.

Essrea visits MEEI students using new computers.

Notes from ED

Greetings,

I have recently returned from a month in the Holy Land after almost 4 years of absence. Being able to experience Mar Elias (MEEI) and Pilgrims of Ibillin's Peace Partners in person was so much more rewarding than I expected.

I learned on a far deeper level about what makes MEEI so unique and why the alumni tend to excel in society. MEEI draws students, faculty and administrators who are inspired by

the vision of a shared society built on love and respect for all. This results in a unique community that so many described to me as 'family'. The level of care for each other and for thriving is palpable. MEEI is a school like no other.

Visiting each of Pilgrims' peace partners similarly increased my appreciation for the incredible work each one does in their respective communities. Wi'am serves women, youth, and provides conflict resolution for some of the most challenging disagreements in Bethlehem. Hope School provides so much more than an education for the neediest students in Bethlehem by also tending to their social and emotional well-being and offer scholarships to families who cannot afford school tuition. Seraj provides much needed spaces for study, stories, and cultural offerings in communities that experience some of the greatest deprivations due to the Occupation. Father Firas in Zababdeh provides scholarships so children in the village can gain an exceptional education and have a chance to better their standing in life.

I am privileged to be connected to these amazing people and places in Palestine and Israel and am grateful for your help to support their good work in a land that can only benefit from more peace building efforts such as these.

Thank you for your dedication and commitment to a just peace for all through education with your prayers, gifts and traveling with us on our pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

Blessings to you and your family in the holiday season,

Essrea Cherin

Executive Director

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Abuna Chacour's Christmas Letter

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.

We deplore the ongoing spread of violence on both sides. We are sure that all the time our 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 and cannot belong to

the Jews, neither can it belong to the Palestinians, 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, the land will vomit us out.

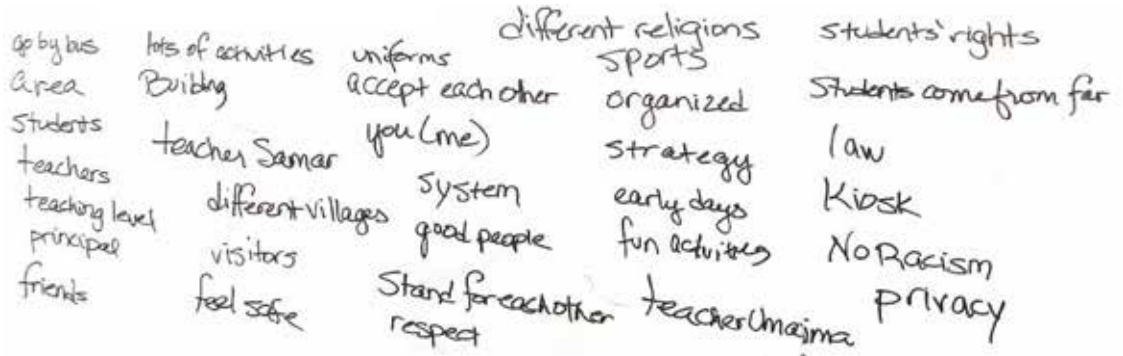
I wish you, your family, and your friends a real celebration of the Birth of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Yours,

Abuna Elias Chacou
Archbishop Emeritus of Galilee

(Read full letter online: pilgrimsofibilin.org.)

What 8th Grade Students LOVE About MEEI



Why Pilgrims of Ibillin is Critical to the Success of Mar Elias

MEEI is a special school whereby students from different religious backgrounds study together on campus to change their reality and society at-large. Unlike many schools for Palestinian students in Israel, the vast majority of MEEI graduates go on to higher education. By test scores they rank among the ten best high schools in Israel, compared to ALL other schools — Jewish or Arab.

While MEEI does receive funding from the Israeli government, because education is federally funded rather than locally funded in Israel, the money they get is limited to paying for teacher salaries, at a minimum wage and a limited number of hours per week.

Like all schools for Palestinian children within the Israeli school system, they do not receive scholarship funds.

Further, Mar Elias gets no tax money to help pay for buildings, maintenance, curriculum, or educational equipment and technology. (Jewish schools, on the other hand, do get funding for these sorts of expenses.)

That's why support from Pilgrims of Ibillin has been so critically important over many years. An exceptional education for Palestinian youth on a beautiful campus are provided thanks to the friendship and generosity of caring people, like yourself, who donate through Pilgrims of Ibillin and a small number of other supporting groups.

There are absolutely students at Mar Elias who would not attend a decent high school, if not for scholarships given through Pilgrims of Ibillin, so thank you!

Bequest

We are ever grateful to the many supporters over the years who have included Pilgrims of Ibillin as a benefactor in their wills.



If you would like to include Pilgrims of Ibillin in your estate plans, please contact **Essrea Cherin, Executive Director, essrea@pilgrimsofibilin.org or 303-928-0923**, for tax ID information, and she will add your name to the Legacy Society. Your gift may remain anonymous.

New Development Admin



Paige Webley

Paige Webley was hired as Operations Administrator to support our operations and fundraising efforts. Paige is honored to support and advance Pilgrims' work. Her life was significantly influenced after living in the West Bank, where she experienced first-hand the atrocities and injustices Palestinians face on a daily basis. She has dedicated

her life to working for a just peace in Palestine & Israel and supporting organizations that are working to solve injustices throughout the world as a grant writer at developmentgrantwriter.com. She has an intermediate speaking level and understanding of Arabic.

1

12 Levels of Giving

MEEI is always in need of your support. In 2023 we'd like to help out with as much as we can. We invite you to consider at what level you'd like to support MEEI, and of course, if you have the means to fund an entire item on the wish list, we welcome and encourage your doing so.

2

1. Cover **Materials** fees for notebooks, pens and pencils for one school year — \$25 (we seek 50 donors at this level)

3

2. Provide a school **Uniform** for one student — \$40 (we seek 50 donors)

4

3. **Transportation:** Fund the cost of transporting a student from their village to Mar Elias

4. Help needy families with a year of **Field Trip** fees including the transportation — \$200 (we seek 25 donors to assist all students)

5

5. **Tuition Assistance Mar Elias High School Student** — \$450 gift (we seek 50 donors at this level)

6

6. **Tuition Assistance Mariam Bawardi Elementary and Junior High School Student** — \$650 gift (we seek 50 donors)

7

7. **Alumni Relations staff position** to work with MEEI alumni — \$750 (we seek 20 donors at this level)

8

8. Beautify the Campus with **Green Spaces** for MEEI — \$1,000 (we seek 15 donors)

9. Make Outdoor Play Possible with Covering **Shade for the Play Area** — \$2,500 Gift (we seek 15 donors at this level)

9

10. **Support building an indoor/outdoor sporting space** for all weather — \$5,000 (we seek 10 donors at this level)

10

11. Enhance Education with **Learning Centers** in the Elementary School — \$7,500 each (we seek 8 donors at this level)

11

12. Create a **Counseling Room** for support that is calm and peaceful — \$10,000 (we seek 6 donors at this level)

12

Let us know in the memo line of your check or, if paying with credit card, use the QR code below to access the donation form online (or click the **Donate** button on the PilgrimsofIbillin.org website) and select the level to which you wish to donate. The envelope inserted in this newsletter provides a **12 Levels of Giving** selection for you to indicate your preference if you choose to pay by check.

We are grateful for your generous support this year!



pilgrimgrimsofbillin.org/12-Levels

President's Message

Dear Fellow Pilgrims,

Thank you for your support of a just peace in Israel and Palestine! Your support of Pilgrims of Ibillin is integral to the peace-building work of all of our peace partners and especially Mar Elias. Please know that supporting MEEI and our partners is more important than ever. We need voices for peace so much right now as so many forces are working in the opposite direction.

I am now rotating off the board of Pilgrims, but I will continue to be supportive and active because I know Pilgrims is making a difference. Moreover, because of you, what I am giving and doing goes further and does more because it works hand-in-hand with your gifts and actions. So thank you! Thank you for all the ways you support Pilgrims and by doing so, Mar Elias and our peace partners. May the blessing of peace be yours in the new year.

Warmly,

Rev. Dr. Peter Henry, Board President



We Would Like Your Feedback



We have created a brief survey that we invite you to complete. Responses to the survey will guide the Pilgrims of Ibillin Board of Directors in discerning our future direction in terms of activities we engage in and Peace Partners we support. Please take a brief minute to let us know what you think by going to the QR code above or to: bit.ly/POISurvey

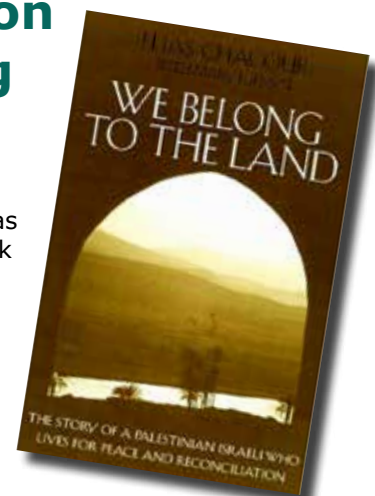
Thank you!

Book Discussion Group in a Bag

We Belong to the Land by Archbishop Emeritus Elias Chacour. We'd love to offer you or your church as many books as you would like along with a book discussion guide — everything you'll need to host a book discussion group about Father Chacour's impactful story.

We only ask that you cover the cost of postage and we'll get a box of books out to you as soon as we are able.

If you wish to partake of this offer, use the QR code or go to: pilgrimsofbillin.org/We-Belong





Pilgrims of Ibillin

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ELECTRONIC SERVICE REQUESTED

Travel with us on a 2023 Living Stones Pilgrimage

Father Chacour says, "We invite visitors to see the ruins of holy sites but also engage with the "living stones" — the people who make their homes there."

With this as inspiration, since 1995 Pilgrims of Ibillin has taken nearly 350 individuals on two-week pilgrimages to Israel and Palestine. Led by Pilgrims staff, board members, and local partners in the West Bank and the Galilee, we visit Christians, Muslims, and Jews who are working creatively to plant and nourish the seeds of a just peace. Our tours include visits to various holy sites and conversations which connect our experiences with our faith.

We would love to have you on our next trip!

For prices, dates, itinerary, and to indicate your interest, contact **Essrea Cherin**, essrea@pilgrimsofibilin.org or **303-928-0923**



A reply envelope is enclosed for your gift

Thank you



Pilgrims of Ibillin

pilgrimsofibilin.org

"I travel around the world in a way that tries to open my mind and give me empathy and inspire me to come home and make this world a better place." — Rick Steves