



Fostering a just peace in Israel and Palestine through education

# Pilgrims of Ibillin

**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2022**

# Pilgrims of Ibillin ANNUAL REPORT 2022

Fostering a just peace in Israel and Palestine through education

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## Executive Director Message

### 2022 Return to Palestine and Israel



In 2022 we finally resumed travel to the Holy Land. How wonderful it was to connect and reconnect with the many people and organizations with whom we partner to support our mission to foster a just peace for all in Palestine and Israel through education.

I had the opportunity to visit with Abuna Chacour and the schools that comprise Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI). I met so many wonderful teachers, students, administrators, and board members (General Assembly).

My heart was warmed by the breadth and depth of passionate, dedicated, and committed people at every level. Clearly Mar Elias is in a category all its own. I asked everyone I met what they loved about MEEI. Without exception I heard repeatedly that MEEI feels not only like a school but like a family where each member truly cares about the well-being of the others — and appreciates the differences — as students and teachers arrive at the school from near and far.

I didn't truly grasp what makes MEEI so special until this visit — most schools in Palestinian villages are not mixed (including students and teachers from different religions and villages) the way MEEI is and the students choose MEEI for that reason — they desire expanding beyond the confines of their villages, not to mention that MEEI also has such a strong reputation across the country for preparing students to succeed post High School.

I was continually moved by stories from teachers who go above and beyond (some driving nearly 3 hours per day to work at MEEI) because being a part of MEEI is so rewarding.

I also had the opportunity to visit other Peace Partners in Palestine: Wi'am, Hope School, Seraj, Dar al Kalima (Diyar football for girls) and Father Firas in Zababdeh. All of which moved me deeply by the incredible contributions they offer to their communities. I am very honored to play even a small role in their ability to do critically important work in service to improving the lives of Palestinians and fostering a just peace.

Your donations and support over several decades have made an indelible impact upon a thriving and unique Mar Elias and much needed help for so many in Palestine via our Peace Partners; I offer a deep bow to you.

**Blessings and gratitude,**

**Essrea Cherin, Executive Director**

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## Mar Elias Educational Institutions



MEEI students meet with Pilgrims' ED Esrea Cherin in October 2022.

### Gifts in 2022

Huge gratitude to the generous support of donors whose combined gifts resulted in our granting \$177,600 to Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI) this year

These funds allowed MEEI to purchase 42 new computers for the elementary school computer lab, new energy efficient A/C units, and many scholarships for those families who cannot afford an exceptional education for their high achieving children but thanks to your generosity, are able to provide an opportunity for a better future for their children.



**Thank you for your generous support!**

## MEEI Named Top School in Israel

The entire family of MEEI was so thrilled to learn that Mar Elias High School was chosen as one of the top schools, out of 351 high schools, in Israel.

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

Mar Elias was named at the highest ranking level, again.

Congratulations to the students, faculty, and staff for earning this well deserved recognition.

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# MEEI Top School in Israel



MEEI students on their first day of the 2022-23 school year.

## Biggest Needs at MEEI

Because the Ministry of Education funds Palestinian schools at a considerably lower rate than the Jewish counterparts, there's never any shortage of needs to keep MEEI an exceptional educational institution. This list captures some of the more pressing needs felt by administrators, faculty and students alike:

- Scholarship support for upwards of 65% of students is essential as families continue to struggle post-pandemic.
- Counseling room in the Elementary School that would offer support in a space that is calm and peaceful allowing students to share about the everyday stress they face.
- Academic Learning 'Pods' in the Elementary School where students can both build upon lessons in the classroom in fun and engaging ways to support their learning and challenge them further. This is especially important in the ongoing pandemic education reality where many students have missed consistent in-person learning.
- Alumni Relations staff position to work with MEEI alumni throughout the world to build a network and community of the thousands who have walked through the doors of MEEI.
- Indoor/outdoor sporting space for all weather conditions - currently the play areas are sub-par and do not encourage student engagement due to the harsh weather conditions either in the summer or winter months.
- Green spaces, shaded areas, and areas for connection and conversation on the MEEI main campus. It is important for the well-being of all students to have these accommodations that grow and sustain communities. An initial \$20,000 investment for installation of gardens and shaded areas due to the sweltering summer temperatures, with an ongoing maintenance budget of \$20,000 each year would be most beneficial.
- Building maintenance to repair retaining walls and upgrade doors, floors, and walls in aging school buildings.



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## Students Visit Ireland

Thirty-four students (ages 14-16) from Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI) visited Derry in Northern Ireland in August 2022.

This visit's objective is twofold: First, to expose students to the region's history, including the conflict and ways to resolve it. In addition, the students study classes of English at North West Academy in Derry.



## Videos from 2022

The **Pilgrims of Ibillin YouTube channel** collects videos from MEEI students as well as our other Peace Partners.

You can always check it out (and follow) for the latest content from MEEI and peace partners.



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## Exceptional Students

### MEEI is Israeli HS Football National Champion

The Mar Elias High School girls team won the Israeli championship in football. Kiryat Hayim Stadium hosted the final match as the Mar Elias team played the Reali School in Haifa on June 15, 2022.



The game started enthusiastically with the hall filled with fans from both schools. The Mar Elias girls quickly dominated the course of the game and ended with an overwhelming victory with a score of 4 - 0.

On the Mar Elias team, Alissar Salman scored three goals, and Sarah Daas finished the game with a stunning fourth goal.

**We send our hearty congratulations to the girl's team!**

### Mar Elias Junior: Outstanding Mountain Biker

From a Haaretz article: In Shfar'am, a revolution is taking place in the field of riding. Much thanks to an ambitious 16-year-old **Munira Yassin** started mountain biking only a year and a half ago, but has already achieved a lot of things. Her success is the vision that stood before the eyes of Mohammed Subuh, founder of the Shfaram Sports Association: "I want to see more riders like her"



On the face of it, it seems that the agenda of Munira Yassin from Shfar'am is no different from that of any girl her age: she wakes up every morning around 6:00 A.M., tries to get organized quickly, and goes to the Mar Elias High School in the village of I'billin.

The day before yesterday, she finished 10th grade in the school's gifted class, and these days she is still debating what will be the subjects she will choose to deepen her studies in ("On the one hand, I am very interested in psychology, but biotechnology and the environment also attract me. I'm a little nervous because I have to decide soon"). In the afternoons, she meets up with friends and talks to her mother ("my best friend"), and spends the rest of her free time reading ("I really like reading history books. I don't know why, it excites me").

## Why Pilgrims 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.

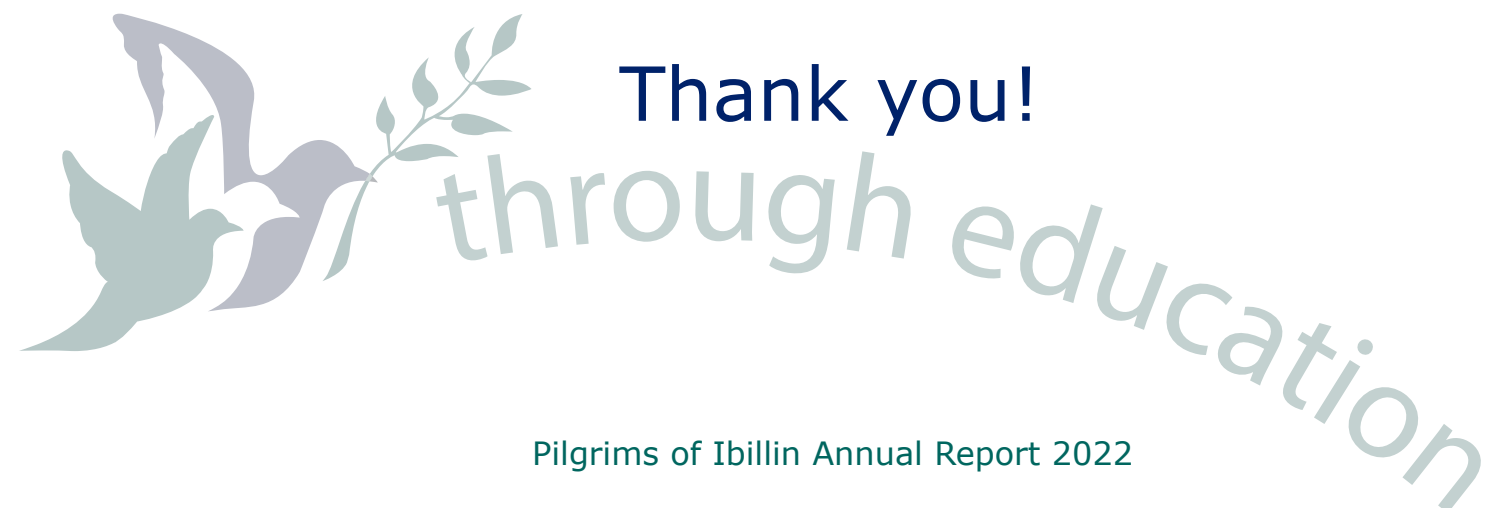
While MEEI does receive funding from the Israeli government, because education is federally funded rather than locally funded in Israel, the money they get is limited to paying for teacher salaries, at a minimum wage and a limited number of hours per week.



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

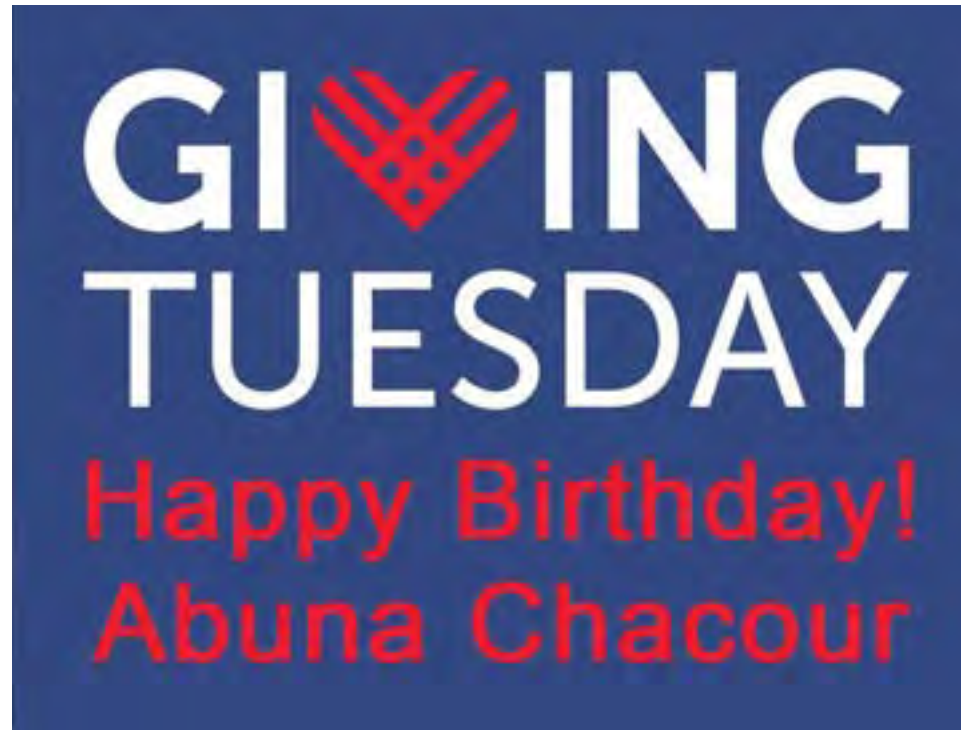
Further, Mar Elias gets no tax money to help pay for buildings, maintenance, curriculum, or educational equipment and technology. (Jewish schools, on the other hand, do get funding for these sorts of expenses.) That's why support from Pilgrims of Ibillin has been so critically important over many years. 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.



## Giving Tuesday 2022

This year our Giving Tuesday campaign aligned with Abuna Elias Chacour's birthday which gave us the opportunity to invite donors to honor his profound legacy of teaching thousands upon thousands of students over four decades the value of peacemaking upon their desktops. The generosity of so many contributed to the considerable gift of \$19,347.58 from 45 donors for tuition assistance, that we were able to transfer this year.



## Peace Partner Gifts 2022

In 2022 we were able to give generously to our peace partners as follows: The need for support for each of our peace partners' programs is significant; each one provides for the needs of Palestinian society in unique ways.

Without your gifts we could not continue giving to maintain their valuable and critically needed contributions, each of which helps youth, families, and communities in Palestine to thrive.

In 2022 we gave generously to our peace partners as follows:

Peace Partner	2022 Grant
Seraj Libraries	2,055
Wi'am	9,000
Zababdeh Job Creation & Scholarships	9,000
Hope School Beit Jala	9,000
<b>Total Peace Partners</b>	<b>\$ 29,055</b>

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## Peace Partner Updates

### Wi'am — The Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center

Wi'am seeks to address the whole family as a unit, emphasizing work with women, youth, and children, in order to bring about more holistic and sustainable change. Both our youth and women's groups are meeting throughout the summer.

Recently our women's group went on trips to Abu Ghosh, Latrun, and the beach in Jaffa. It is important not only to visit other places and learn more about the country, but also to spend time in nature and to have experiences that allow people to release stress and other pent-up emotions.

#### Summer Camp

With a similar goal, Wi'am held an annual summer camp including about 60 kids to play games, make art, swim, and practice some Dabke. Campers develop valuable social skills and unleash their creative potential as they participate in group and individual activities.



#### English Classes

Separate from the camp, Wi'am also hosts English classes for a number of students, learning grammar and vocabulary through lessons and interactive review games.



Wi'am also facilitates many mediations, as conflicts in the community arise. Over the past season, staff attended several conferences, workshops, speaking events, and panels, networking with women and human rights organizations in order to expand our networks and to become better equipped to serve the community.

Wi'am also continues to host visiting groups of all sizes, to encourage others through our work and to talk about the sociopolitical and economic situation in Palestine, and the conditions Palestinians face every day. Some of our groups come to discuss over coffee, while others we have taken on trips to Hebron, the Tent of Nations just outside of Bethlehem, other beautiful natural spaces, or the refugee camp. We greatly enjoy getting to share with these groups, and seeing people from all around the world who are trying to pursue justice and peace.

This is just a brief sample of what Wi'am has been up to in 2022. We are very active this year, and would love for you to join us. Please come visit sometime!



## Seraj Libraries and Cultural Centers

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Communities are using the libraries as Seraj has always hoped and dreamed they would. As safe and beautiful spaces for all members of society to use to access information, knowledge and dream of ways to improve both their lives and their communities.

*New library and storytelling center in Kufor Aqab*

In 2022, Seraj, opened a new library and storytelling center in the historic old village in the Jerusalem-area community of Kufor Aqab! We send our congratulations as we know this vision has been many years in the making.

The idea of establishing a Palestinian national storytelling center arose from the need in preserving and retelling community stories and folklore.



This has been a journey of several years, which included searching for the right space, rehabilitating that space, delaying work due to covid, facing security concerns, designing an inspirational center and creating simple but meaningful and effective programs.

The space is charming and welcoming, well-lit and full of delightful little nooks and crannies. Each stone seems to hold untold stories of the generations that have come before. The Seraj library and storytelling center is a place to gather, dream and flourish. A spark of light and hope in the middle of settlements, checkpoints and overcrowded and underfunded schools and apartment buildings.

Seraj has begun developing a curriculum to train people in the collection, preservation and telling of stories.

**Watch a 2022 Video Showing the Opening of the Kufor Aqab Cultural Center**



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## Zababdeh's Scholarship and Job Creation Program

### A message from Father Firas of Zababdeh

Thank you for your love for my Living Stones (the people of Palestine).

I want to share with you some pictures of the students in the Catholic School. You can see the hope and joy in their eyes - for a better future.

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*Fostering a just peace*



In spite of the darkness there is light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you for your help to build peace on the desks of these students.

We provide activities for the children at our church to give them hope and help them have a childhood.



For the job creation program, I bought olive oil to make soap but Khader who cooks and makes the olive oil soap was called to his father's side as he was very sick from corona. I pray for his health to get up from his bed, and Khader to be able to return to olive oil soap and incense making.

Keep hope alive for my ministry for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land.

Your brother,

**Abouna Firas**

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## Hope School

### Message from Director Khader Saba

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To be part of Hope School, means to be part of a Global Christian family. It is the decisive truth I realized since the first day I moved to Hope school. The Ministry gives you the privilege to help the most vulnerable children and restore hope to those who, for one reason or another, were lost, upset, and frustrated.

Despite the increasing challenges, we managed to deepen the roots of our ministry, keep its mission alive, and improve its performance among children and its influence in the local community.

Over the past six years we managed to triple the number of beneficiaries, renovate the infrastructure, improve the educational sphere, and develop the staff's skills.

The secret behind all these remarkable changes was the moral and financial support of our friends, locally and internationally who showered us with their support, love, and faithfulness.

We have nothing to say but thank you... Many thanks to all those who faithfully support our ministry. Many thanks to those who hold a special place for our children in their minds, hearts, and concerns. Thanks be to God who never forsake his children. Please do hold our children in your prayers and keep them alive in your hearts.

## Taghyeer: Program offered at Hope School

Taghyeer is a local-based organization that leads an Alternative to Violence Project (AVP) in the local community. Taghyeer means change; they believe in changing society through pumping positive values among young people, the fact that complies with our school's mission.



*A child birthday celebration*

*Nour hands our logo to next generation*

*Love is the basic value in our life*

In partnership with Hope School, Taghyeer conducted an eight-day capacity-building training course targeting social leaders, teachers, and mentors to enhance their leadership skills in addressing violent incidents.

Three of our staff along with 17 youth leaders from Bethlehem and Hebron areas participated in the workshop. Tula, the school deputy, confirmed that the workshop represented an added value in introducing up-to-date awareness and techniques in mediation, conflict resolution and enhancing peaceful values among children.

"It was great to get to know new concepts, idioms, and techniques on how to absorb the anger of our children" she quoted.

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## Diyar Women's Soccer Team

Congratulations to the Diyar Women's Soccer Team for winning the Palestinian National Championship again in 2022! We're so proud of the diligence and hope displayed through the young women in Palestine!



Pilgrims of Ibillin annual program grant supports the girls' soccer program by paying fees for trainers who work with the program's coaches every summer. Such support contributes to empowering Palestinian young women.

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## Maia Water Project in Gaza

There is a growing water crisis in Palestine. In Gaza, 97% of water is unfit for human consumption. Numerous military attacks on the Gaza Strip have devastated Gaza's water infrastructure and the siege of Gaza has created a shortage of pipes, building materials, fuel and electricity. The water in Gaza is polluted with untreated sewage, agricultural chemicals, and it is brackish from seawater. Gaza's water crisis poses grave health risks to children.

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In September 2009, the Middle East Children's Alliance (MECA) responded to this crisis by launching the Maia Project (Arabic for "water") to provide Palestinian children with clean, safe drinking water by installing water purification and desalination units in schools throughout the Gaza Strip.

Pilgrims of Ibillin is proud to be part of the effort that has successfully provided over 90,000 children with safe and clean drinking water in Gaza.

## Living Stones Pilgrimages



Father Justin at Jacob's Well in Nablus

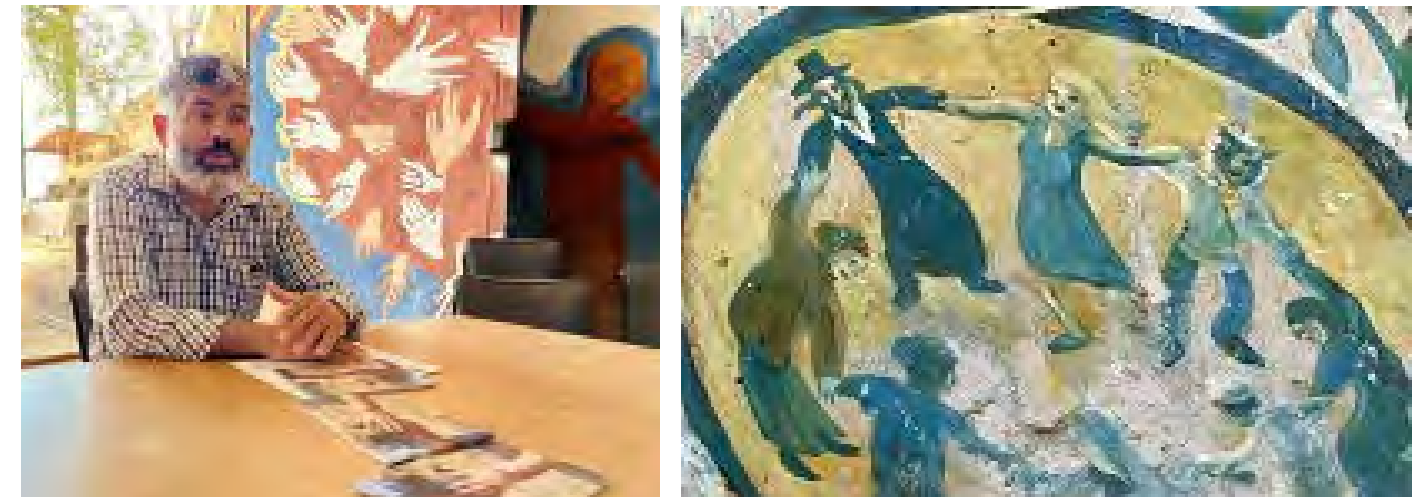
This year we held our first Living Stones Pilgrimage to the Holy Land in over 3 years! How wonderful it was to return and spend time with so many old friends while making new connections too.

Pilgrims shared their impressions each day in the **Living Stones Pilgrimage blog**.

**Here's a sample:**

**From Brenda Mehos, Pilgrimage Coordinator**

We started off today visiting a farm called the Tent of Nations near Bethlehem. The Nassars recently celebrated 105 years on their land. Their 100 acres in the West Bank is now surrounded by 5 illegal settlements (by International Law) and in fact their farm is the only hilltop in the area without a settlement on it.



They have olive and fruit trees, grapes, and they have chickens and goats as well. They have met incredible challenges to hold onto their land. They have unfortunately had physical attacks, destroyed roads, and destroyed olive and fruit trees, but they've persevered by inviting people to visit and volunteer for planting and harvesting.

The dry climate makes it incredibly challenging to replace lost trees and they are denied water and electricity, but they've thrived in spite of it by employing sustainable practices to preserve the environment. Daoud Nassar told us they refuse to hate, they refuse to be enemies, and they are challenged daily. He believes in standing up for what is unjust and their Christian faith is their center.

**Two 2023 Living Stones Pilgrimages**  
**May 16-27 and October 21-November 2**

If you'd like information about these trips, please go to <https://pilgrimsofibilin.org/pilgrimages/>. When you complete the form on that page, we'll get in touch to give you more specific details or you are also welcome to call Executive Director Esrea Cherin at 303-928-0923 anytime.



# 2022 Pilgrims of Ibillin Financial Report

## Pilgrims of Ibillin Profit and Loss January - December 2022

	<u>Total</u>
<b>Income</b>	
4000 Revenue from Direct Contributions	
4010 Individual Contributions	231,918.21
4030 Corporate Contributions	31.93
4040 Nonprofit Contributions	30,999.99
Total 4000 Revenue from Direct Contributions	\$ 262,950.13
4100 Donated Goods & Services Revenue	
4110 Donated Professional Services	256.45
4140 Gifts in Kind - Goods	1,866.25
Total 4100 Donated Goods & Services Revenue	\$ 2,122.70
Total Contributed Revenue	\$ 265,072.83
Earned Revenue	
4600 Special Project Income	
4610 Pilgrimage Trip	20,551.62
Total 4600 Special Project Income	\$ 20,551.62
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$ 285,624.45</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Administrative Expenses	
7290 Workers Comp	486.56
7515 Accounting Fees	13,852.90
7535 Charitable Registration Service Fee	20.00
7555 Website work	505.20
8500 Other Expenses	
8520 Insurance - Non-Employee Related	870.00
8550 Bank Fees	502.52
8560 Merchant Processing Fees	2,087.79
8580 State Filing Fees	2,121.00
8590 Other Expenses	141.50
Total 8500 Other Expenses	\$ 5,722.81
Total Administrative Expenses	\$ 20,587.47
Fundraising Expenses	
7510 Donor/Contact Management	8,879.26

8410 End of Year Mailing	2,234.78
8570 Advertising/Donor Relations	1,219.62
Total Fundraising Expenses	\$ 12,333.66
PayPal Fees	10.53
Program Expenses	
7000 Grants, Contracts, & Direct Assistance	
7020 Grants & Assistance to Organizations	204,121.94
Total 7000 Grants, Contracts, & Direct Assistance	\$ 204,121.94
7200 Salaries & Related Expenses	
7220 Salaries & Wages	
7225 Executive Director Compensation	36,500.16
7226 Administrative Assistant Compensation	2,990.01
7227 Operations Administrator	17,333.40
Total 7220 Salaries & Wages	\$ 56,823.57
7240 Payroll Taxes	7,853.79
7250 Payroll Service Fees	964.00
Total 7200 Salaries & Related Expenses	\$ 65,641.36
7500 Contract Service Expenses	
7550 Marketing Expenses	588.00
Total 7500 Contract Service Expenses	\$ 588.00
8000 Program Events & Outreach	8.95
8030 Pilgrimages	96.50
8050 Webinars	480.00
Total 8000 Program Events & Outreach	\$ 585.45
8100 Nonpersonnel Expenses	
8110 Supplies	30.48
8130 Telephone & Telecommunications	362.08
8140 Postage & Shipping	3,037.56
8160 Computer Software & Hardware	1,364.37
8170 Printing & Copying	1,698.33
8190 Internet/Web/Hosting Fees	731.60
Total 8100 Nonpersonnel Expenses	7,224.42
8300 Travel & Meetings Expenses	398.21
8310 Transportation	1,085.54
8320 Meals	294.29
8330 Lodging	555.70
8340 Airfare	437.13
8360 Board Travel GIK	2,375.46
8370 Board Lodging and Meals	2,253.80
Total 8300 Travel & Meetings Expenses	\$ 7,400.13
8420 Pilgrimage Trip Costs	26,424.73
Total Program Expenses	\$ 311,986.03
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$ 344,917.69</b>
<b>Net Operating Income</b>	<b>\$ (59,293.24)</b>

## Board Leadership 2022

Many of our Board Members are drawn from churches with long-time ties to Mar Elias Educational Institutions and Pilgrims of Ibillin while others are individuals who have traveled with our Living Stones Pilgrimages. A few came to us through friendship with Abuna Elias Chacour, the founder of the Mar Elias Educational Institutions, or years of commitment to education for a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

### Board Officers

**Rev. Dr. Peter Henry, President**

*Pastor, Davidson College Presbyterian Church*

**Kip Nickel, Treasurer**

*Strategy Consultant, Horizon Partners, Inc.*

**Rev. Don Brown, Vice President**

*Designated Transitional Minister,  
Jerusalem Western Salisbury Church*

**Sarah Morgan, Secretary**

*Leader of software quality assurance team, Epic Systems*



## Board of Directors



**Rev. Anne Weirich**

*Retired Presbyterian Clergy*

**Branwen Cale**

*Development and Fundraising Expert*

**Emily Seger**

*Office Assistant, Children's Meeting House Montessori*

**Rev. Gail Doering**

*Presbyterian Clergy*

**Haifa Bautista, Ed.D**

*Early Childhood Education Consultant*

**Rev. John Ryan**

*Associate Pastor for Faith Formation  
Davidson College Presbyterian Church*

**Judy Masserang**

*Retired Communications Professional, Rotarian*

**Dr. Mary Mobley**

*Retired research scientist*

**Rev. Dr. Mary Sue Dreier**

*Lutheran (ELCA) Clergy, Professor*

**Rev. Sarah Ago**

*Clergy, Evangelical Covenant Church; President SEARCH*

**Steve Tengler**

*Engineer and NGO Executive*

**Wren Shealy**

*ESL Instructor, EF English First*

## THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 DONORS!

21 FAITH BASED INSTITUTIONS  
GAVE \$35,154.79

Charlemont Federated Church  
First Congregational Church of Houston  
First Presbyterian Church of Ann Arbor  
First Presbyterian Church of Everett  
First Congregational Church of Houston  
First United Methodist Church of Boulder  
Grace Presbyterian Church - Walnut Creek  
Grace United Methodist Church - Questors Class  
Grosse Pointe Memorial Presbyterian Church  
Holy Cross Melkite Catholic Church  
La Verne Heights Presbyterian Church  
Mt Horeb Clergy Association  
Mt. Hermon Presbyterian Church  
Mt. Zion United Methodist Church  
Nassau Presbyterian Church  
St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church - Santa Barbara  
St. Monica Catholic Church  
The Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi  
Tree of Life Education Fund  
Valley Presbyterian Church - Portola Valley  
Westside Christian Community  
White Memorial Presbyterian Church

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## 386 INDIVIDUAL DONORS GAVE \$286,025.43

\$5,000 and Above

Anonymous Donor  
Christa and Clay Midkiff  
Gail and David Doering  
Jesseman Pryor  
John and Ann Collier  
John E. Stewart  
Phil Myers  
Suzanne and Thad King



\$1,000 - \$4,999

Alan and Vicki George	Jeanne Hoek
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Anne Weirich	John and Elaine McClintic
Barbara Byars	Joyce and Hank Landau
Barbara Heys	J.R. and Mary McAliley
Becky Ballard and John Means	Julia and Edward McCutcheon
Beverly G. Henkel	Karen L. Trocke-Kandah
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Bonnie and Jim Barr	Lawrence and Linda Davis
Carleen Layman and Evan Wenger	Lawrence P. Mulligan
C. Spears & Joyce Alexander	Mark & Linda Nygard
Darrell & Bonnie Cates	Marvin & Bernadine Cooper
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Elmer Arthur Schindel	Mary T. Mobley
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Fran Eldredge	Roberta Amy Woodward
Gloria and Gary Graber	Ronald and Jane Caldwell
Jacob and Geri Muhvic	Steve Tengler
Jacob and Norlene Hess	Steven and Hallie Richards
James William and Mary Thomson	Susan Moskwa
Jane Dizer Holland	William Sacherek and Liselotte Lamerdin
Jarod and Brooke Sickler	

BELOW \$1,000

342 Individuals and households gave a total of \$115,133



# Pilgrims of Ibillin

c/o Davidson College Presbyterian Church  
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Davidson, NC 28036

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