

Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI) Needs Emergency Shelter

Can you help?

We need your help for a vital and urgent project at MEEI

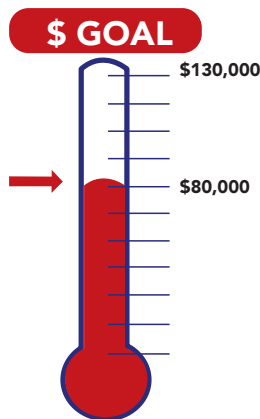
Administrators are deeply committed to ensuring the students and staff's safety and well-being. Still, unfortunately, they have realized recently that the safe spaces at school do not meet the requirements of the Security Dept at the Ministry of Education.



MEEI is in the light blue areas and are required to have safe areas for students.

The existing student shelters at all MEEI schools require substantial structural improvement and renovation to better fulfill their crucial role during emergencies.

This ambitious project requires significant financial support to the tune of \$130,000 to become a reality. With a \$40,000 matching grant, your gift can be doubled!



We certainly have no wish to keep students at home, they have suffered enough during the pandemic and now face one more round of anxieties and social distancing. Please help us get these spaces renovated as soon as possible.

Donate Now to Renovate Student Security Shelters!



Exec. Director Notes

Dear friend,

As I write this the entirety of the Holy Land is rocked with unimaginable violence and devastation. Ever since October 7, I've been glued to horrific images and stories. My heart aches daily for a miracle to bless these people and this land. To help them all out of whatever delusion is hardening hearts, interfering in their ability to see the brother or sister in the *Other*.

Our faith is challenged, how can this happen? How can people treat each other with such savagery? Where are the peacemakers?

I feel ever more dedicated to supporting Mar Elias Educational Institutions (MEEI), knowing that the youth upon graduation are well-steeped in ways of dignity, respect, and acceptance of and for all. MEEI instills in children the readiness to discover in the other a brother, and never to look for the enemy in their neighbors.

It's so important to continue to support this much-needed education, to return the Holy Land to its historical condition, where people of all faiths may flourish, living harmoniously together.

I am very grateful to our many supporters who have helped provide an education to youth wishing to make a difference in the world.

Sending prayers to the heavens for justice and peace to prevail in this dark time,

Blessings to you and yours,

Essrea Cherin

essrea@pilgrimsofbillin.org
303-928-0923

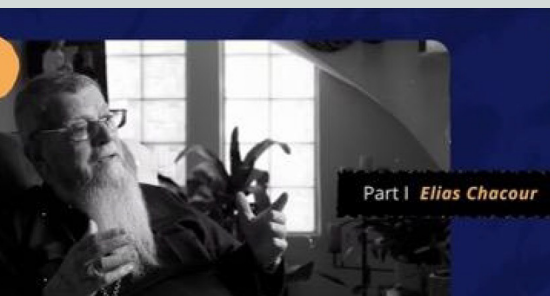


Abuna's Story — See Humanity in Your Enemy

Our colleagues at The Telos Group released a film about Abuna Elias Chacour's life, **Undaunted: Stories to Set Us Free**. This film is a helpful tool to help spark conversation and action in your community.

You may watch the 30-minute film at this website:

www.telosgroup.org/what-we-do/immerse/undaunted-stories/





Exceptional Student – Dr. Swar Hassan Asla *Together we change the world?...*

We are excited to learn of the news that MEEI alum, **Dr. Swar Hassan Asla** from Araba, was recently hired as Assistant Professor at the University of California - Santa Cruz!

Dr. Swar Hassan Asla, is the daughter of a struggling family, humble and supportive of science.

After graduating from secondary education at Mar Elias College in Ibillin, she studied at Haifa University and she received her PhD from the University of Groningen, Netherlands. Her doctoral thesis is titled **"Together**

we change the world? The societal motives and psychological barriers to protest action among marginalized groups."

She further studied at Stanford University, CA and has now been appointed as an Assistant Professor in Social Psychology at UC - Santa Cruz starting Summer 2024.

Dr. Swar's scientific field is centered on the psychological research of protest movements, and the relationship of minorities with the majority.

We are proud of you Dr. Swar and wish you continued success and excellence globally.

MEEI Teaches Love for All

MEEI kindergarten teacher since 2010, **Hannan Azzam**, holding dolls that the youngsters play with while at school.

From a very young age, Mar Elias embodies Christian values to love all regardless of skin color, religion, and ethnicity.



BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP



We have shipped 100s of copies of Abuna Chacour's book, ***We Belong to the Land***, across the country. We still have more to share so that you and those folks in your community, whether it be a church

group or even a group of friends, will be inspired by Archbishop Chacour's story of working for peace and reconciliation among Israeli Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

We are hearing from folks who have held book discussions that the readings and discussions are very helpful to make sense out of current events. Here is one discussion leader's comments:

"The first [book group] went VERY well. Nearly every participant expressed a surprising new awareness of the problematic history ...[now] folks are off and reading other sources of information. Blessings, Virgil Nelson"

This is exactly our hope. Please consider taking advantage of this incredible opportunity to share what you know about Palestine with those in your wider community. We still have 100s of copies and I would love to get them into your hands, as many as you'd like, we only ask that you cover the cost of postage. (We leave it to you to distribute the books however you wish).

Go to: pilgrimsofibilin.org/we-belong/



Abuna to Visit in 2024

We were eagerly looking forward to welcoming Father Elias Chacour to the United States this past April, with planned events in Charlotte, NC, Grosse Pointe, MI and elsewhere. Due to unforeseen circumstances, we were forced to postpone.

We are now looking to the coming year, 2024, to revive our plan and hopefully, inshah'allah, we will welcome Father Chacour back to the US after many years away.

If you wish to receive notice of the planned events, please sign up for our newsletter by going to our website:

www.pilgrimsofibilin.org/

and about mid-way down you'll see a place to enter your email address. You'll get the details as soon as we have a schedule.

Funds to MEEI

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

This past year we gave significant support to Mar Elias Educational Institutions with \$40,000 for Scholarships, \$20,000 for A/C units in the Mariam Bawardi Elementary School, and \$40,000 toward renovating the Library with new furniture and equipment.



**A reply envelope is enclosed for your gift.
Thank you**

A Message for Peace from Father Chacour



Dear All our friends at Pilgrims of Ibillin,

In this confusing situation, where we live now unnerved every day with alarming sirens, and with the news about increasing numbers of Children of God terminated in an act of revenge for the numbers of other Children of God.

All this are worrying us and corner us to live in a precarious situation. Are we doomed to receive one of those criminal rockets or by an exaggerated reprisal? And all these inhuman reactions make, us cry twice whenever a Jew killed as well as when a Palestinian home in Gaza is reduced to rubble on the heads of its inhabitants.

Both 'terrorisms' are acted in the name of the same God. I imagine that God is twice sad for the massacre of his own Children. I imagine God says, "What for are your prayers, your supplications don't

reach my heart. You are killing each other and doing so, you crucify my son twice, once when any Jew is massacred and twice when any Palestinian is also massacred." God wants us to be his messengers, God doesn't kill, God gives life to all of us even to those who act with violence as if they take the place of God to kill and to demolish without pity and without Compassion.

We are torn between two evils. No one is winning. Both are losing and so causing God's sadness. Not to say more... You please who are on neither side, in the name of God, I urge you to pray for all the victims of this criminal war. Please don't forget to pray for those who have the power of decision making, so that God changes their hearts of stone and replaces them with hearts of flesh.

This is the message I gave this morning to our junior students gathered some with fear, others with rage and others with anger. This is the time for us to become ambassadors of reconciliation and this what we want you to be, or to become.

We will keep you posted on future developments. God is in control.

Yours Sincerely,

Abuna Elias Chacour

Archbishop Emeritus of Galilee

President's Message

Dear Colleagues of Pilgrims of I'billin,

In the introduction to Bishop Chacour's book Blood Brothers, one of our statesmen, Secretary of State James Baker writes some words that I think are good for us to hear again in as a war rages in Israel and Palestine.

In my many years of public service, I have heard more stories of strife and woe than I can remember, most of them based grievances that are, to one degree or another, legitimate. As I listened, I always waited for the therefore. Therefore, our side is 100 percent right and our enemies are 100 percent wrong, therefore, we are justified in resorting to violence...

Baker goes on to say that as Abuna traces how these "therefores" have impacted him and his people, often displacing and destroying lives. But, Abuna concludes by giving us a different kind of legitimacy. For Bishop Chacour, conflict among us leads to reconciliation and love.

...Therefore, we must remember the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must love and forgive our enemies. Therefore, we must reconcile ourselves with them and live together in peace.

Abuna's life and way of being in the world are staked on these things. He says it by quoting from the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers." Remarkably, every Christian I know, from the Melkites in Galilee to Presbyterians in Bethlehem share this Palestinian Liberation Theology.

Bishop Chacour says that the work of peace is done "one heart at a time." The Board considers that we are all Pilgrims of I'billin, helping to support Abuna's peace work through education, community engagement and hospitality. One of our new board members said to me that the rise of violence means that this work is more important than ever.

Therefore, we continue and strengthen our commitments of time and treasure to join hearts and hands with our Palestinian friends at Mar Elias and throughout Palestine and Israel and wage some peace!

Thank you so much for being a Pilgrim.

Peace to you,

Rev. Anne Weirich





Pilgrims of Ibillin

c/o Davidson College Presbyterian Church
P.O. Box 337
100 North Main Street
Davidson, NC 28036
www.pilgrimsofbillin.org

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Study Tour to Israel & Palestine April 2024 ***Envisioning a future of a Just Peace***

The events that began on October 7, and continue to the day this newsletter went to print, forced Pilgrims of Ibillin to cancel the Fall 2023 Living Stones Pilgrimage.

We remain hopeful that the tension, the violence, the horrors of the past months subside to the degree that we are able to bring a group, as scheduled, to the Holy Land in April 2024.

Obviously, it is quite difficult to promote a trip with the stream of violent images across our screens, day in and day out. Just know that if the circumstances are such that we have to cancel the April Study Tour, we will refund your payments in full, with no penalty whatsoever.

Providing that the ability to travel safely to Israel and Palestine resumes, we will lead the pilgrimage. When you



sign up to join us, you are signaling your optimism for peace to reign over the land that has been divided for many decades now.

So, as hard as it may be to imagine returning at this moment, I encourage you to envision the future that will allow this trip to go forward, and consider joining us!

If you are curious, enjoy learning about culture, history, politics, human and environmental rights, and want to meet and engage with the people who live where you travel – this trip is for you!

Submit your deposit before December 15 you not only receive a \$500 discount off the pilgrimage fee (or a total of \$3,000 rather than \$3,500), you also hold your spot on what promises to be a trip of a lifetime!

For a detailed itinerary, more information, and to indicate your interest, contact me at essrea@pilgrimsofbillin.org or +1.303.928.0923 or use this QR code



Interested in learning more? Visit: pilgrimsofbillin.org/pilgrimages/