

Easter Letter from Abuna Chacour

Father Chacour has sent a letter to us in the United States that he had wished to visit this spring but due to health issues, was forced to postpone the trip. Here is a brief excerpt, but you can see the letter in full here:

pilgrimsofibilin.org/abunas-easter-2023/

"We learn to respect the differences among us and we thank God for our diversity and for our determination to create a unity remembering that we are all born babies in the Image and Likeness of Almighty God. This is the main mission of Mar Elias Educational Institutions....This is where your friendship is given and we need that friendship so much to include you in the beautiful rainbow of our human diversity."

— Abuna Elias Chacour

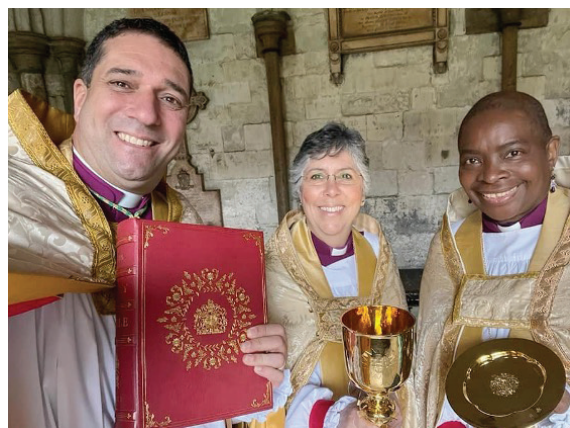


Emeritus Archbishop Elias Chacour

MEEI Alumni Archbishop Naoum

His Grace Archbishop Hosam Naoum, Anglican Archbishop in Jerusalem, the Head of the Church for the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, and Mar Elias Educational Institutions Alumni, participated in HM King Charles III Coronation Ceremony as King of the United Kingdom, at Westminster Abbey on Saturday, May 6th, 2023.

His Grace Archbishop Naoum processed into the service holding the Holy Bible, and before the Coronation he presented the Holy Oil to Archbishop Welby to anoint the King during the prayers of consecration and blessings. The anointing with the Holy Oil is the most sacred part of the Coronation Ceremony



Archbishop Hosam Naoum (L) at HM King Charles II coronation ceremony as King of the United Kingdom. (Below) Preparing the anointing oil.



The Oil was previously consecrated by Patriarch Theophilos III, the Patriarch of the Holy City, and Archbishop Hosam Naoum in the Holy Sepulchre, and was prepared from olive oil from the fields of the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, from the Monastery of Ascension and the Monastery of Saint Mary Magdalene, which has a special connection with the Royal Family, where King Charles III's paternal grandmother, Princess Alice of Greece, is buried. The Oil was perfumed with rose, jasmine, cinnamon, sesame, orange blossom, cloves, and amber. This recipe is based on the one used to bless the late Queen Elizabeth II, as well as Kings and Queens of Britain for hundreds of years.

Notes from ED

Greetings dear friend,

If you have been keeping up with news out of Palestine and Israel you may feel some concern for our brothers and sisters there, as do I. When it did not seem possible that things could get worse, indeed they have, for all the people of the Holy Land. The challenges that threaten a just and peaceful coexistence serve to remind me of the critically important nature of Father Chacour's ministry and the peace-building curriculum at Mar Elias. I feel most hopeful knowing that MEEI is raising tomorrow's leaders, instilling in them skills and tools that can bring about a better tomorrow.

Mar Elias Educational Institutions benefit significantly from your support — enabling an exceptional educational opportunity in the Galilee, a region that would otherwise leave ambitious students falling short of their potential. Thanks to the support of so many across the globe, these students can reach for the stars.

Now that travel has resumed, we have returned to bringing two groups per year to visit Mar Elias, other peace partners, and Christian holy sites — giving participants the opportunity to meet with many individuals dedicating their lives to a just peace for all in the Holy Land.

The Spring trip was quite successful, life-changing, and eye-opening from all reports. This is the value of meeting the 'Living Stones' in person (Living Stones is another way of referring to the people of the Holy Land). Not only meeting, but hearing their stories, and witnessing their unique experiences.

I hope you'll consider joining us this fall, October 21 - November 2, when I and board member Rev. Gail Doering will lead our next trip. Learn more in this newsletter on the back page.

Mar Elias and Hope School students are on the precipice of graduating and we wish for them a chance to fulfill the dreams for their future that rest in their heart. Alif Mabrook wa Mwafa2een!a (1000 congratulations and wishing you much success!)



Warmly,

Essrea Cherin

Executive Director
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Why it is important to support Mar Elias student scholarships

Archbishop Elias Chacour explains why it matters that donors continue supporting Mar Elias students within Israel, when raw humanitarian needs are so great for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, and getting worse. His answer seems important: he identifies supporting the mental and physical health for Israeli Palestinians as one of the greatest benefits of a Mar Elias education.

Indeed, Palestinian citizens of Israel are being increasingly marginalized – officially, by laws that privilege Jews, and unofficially by racist actions of Jewish extremists who create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation, especially in the Galilee region where most of Mar Elias' students live. This has been even more true in 2015 and into 2016 than ever before.

In addition, more than half the Palestinian children of Israel live below the poverty line. And education is segregated in Israel: Palestinian schools run by the government are demonstrably weaker than Jewish schools, with poorer facilities, larger class sizes, less-qualified teachers, and much higher drop-out rates. A school like Mar Elias gives Palestinian children an opportunity for an excellent education, infused with Christian values.

Indeed the Christian Schools of Israel themselves have been under attack by right-wing forces within Israel's government, starving them of the tax support they are rightfully owed, on an equal basis with Jewish private schools that receive 100% of their funding needs from the government while Christian schools have been reduced to receive

Exceptional Students

MEEI Student Munira Yasseen, 16 years old, is the Israeli National Champion Mountain Biker in her age category.

This QR code will take you to an inspiring video of Munira - an ambitious young woman who has her sights set on big accomplishments!



ing only 29% or less of their needs from the same source. Mar Elias Educational Institutions are just one of Israel's 48 Christian schools, but they educate the brightest and best of the Galilee's Muslim and Christian Arab students.

Abuna Chacour emphasizes that without the kind of international assistance that comes through Pilgrims of Ibillin to MEEI, the schools would be in danger of failing. He asks, "Why should we ask the Palestinians of Israel to lose even more before they are worthy of help? Why not keep their institutions as strong as possible so that schools like MEEI can continue creating leaders with a heart for others and opening doors to a better life?"

Scholarship Funds from international friends help meet basic needs by opening the door to an excellent education for low-income Israeli Arabs who would otherwise have to settle for a lesser education in an inferior government-run school. For Palestinians within Israel, a better education is KEY to better mental and physical health and to better jobs that lead to better access to food, clothing, and shelter.

Your generosity has allowed Pilgrims of Ibillin to provide tuition assistance to more than 30% of students attending MEEI - for that we are profoundly grateful!

Mubarak! MEEI Milestone



Pilgrims of Ibillin congratulate all our colleagues at **Mar Elias Educational Institutions** for reaching this notable milestone of turning 40, having achieved so much in that short span, against not a few challenges and obstacles upon the path.

We are gratified to have played a role in your success, and hope to continue doing so for the next 40! **Mubarak!**

A reply envelope is enclosed for your gift.
Thank you

I'billin Mural

I recently received an explanation of the incredible mural that resides in the Niwano Peace Auditorium in I'billin. You may remember it from a past visit, or perhaps you'll be able to see it in person on your next Holy Land visit.

"...Esau ran to meet him, took him in his arms and they wept..."

**Reconciliation:
A space where mercy
and forgiveness meet**

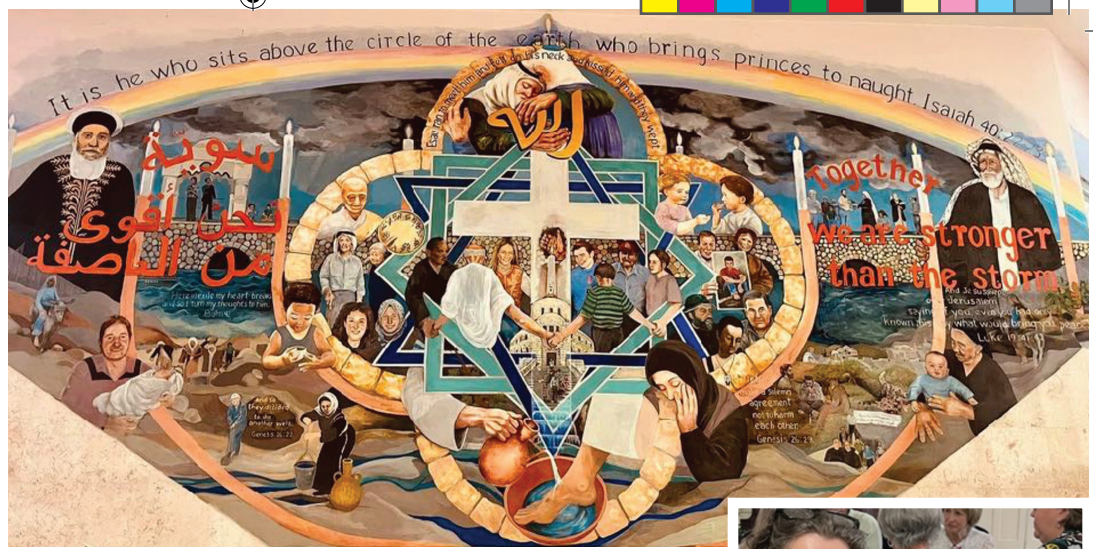
**Notes on the Mural of Forgiveness,
by the Artist, Dianne Roe**

In the summer of 2000 I visited Ibillin and saw the opportunity to paint a unique story of mercy and forgiveness on the wall of the yet to be constructed Niwano Peace Auditorium.

On October 2, 2000 at home in New York I was stunned to hear of killing of Asel Asleh, an MEEI student and 13 others in Galilee. When I rejoined my Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) colleagues in Hebron one week later I found myself in a war zone. The second Intifada had erupted.

The images that burned themselves into my heart as I divided my time between Galilee, Hebron and the serene Finger Lakes region of New York became the figures in my first sketches. The last three years have been times of immense and terrible turmoil. The storm still rages but many people of Israel and Palestine as well as from countries world-wide are transcending the fury and creating beautiful new realities.

Many will remain unsung and unseen, but all are represented by the faces you see before you in the mural. The scene has been greatly shaped by my experience of living in Hebron and traveling back and forth across the country to Galilee. I wanted



to carry the friendship and faces from Hebron to Galilee and from Galilee to Hebron. I want you the people of Hebron to know that the children of Galilee know you and care about you. It is my privilege to know all of you.

Thank you Abuna for trusting me to paint as I feel. I thank my CPT friends for listening to my dream and allowing me to paint them. They are a constant inspiration. I have prayed that this work will be a faithful witness of the vision of future peace. Blessings to all of you and know that I will return to see the vision unfolding and to hear many more of your stories.

Dianne Roe – March, 2004

Read Dianne Roe's full explanation of the people and symbols in the Mural of Forgiveness online:
pilgrimsofibilin.org/mural-of-forgiveness/



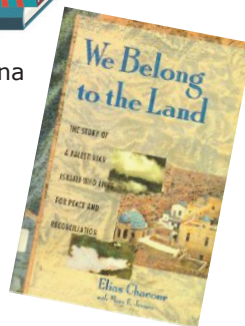
BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

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.

Because this book is so impactful, we wish to offer it to you, free of charge - as many copies as you'd like to host a book discussion group in your community, using this book. We have created a discussion guide (on this webpage) and will ship as many books to you as you'd like to one address, we only ask that you cover the cost of postage. (We leave it to you to distribute the books however you wish).

Go online (use the QR code below): pilgrimsofibilin.org/we-belong/ and complete the form to request your copies of **We Belong to the Land**. The form allows 10 copies, but request the number you need in the comments.

We are grateful for a donation from Middle East Books in Washington DC of over 1,000 copies of Father Elias Chacour's influential book, **We Belong to the Land**.



President's Message

Dear Colleagues of Pilgrims of I'billin,

I am glad to be writing to you as the new president of the board. And I address you as colleagues, because, indeed, the work and witness of Abuna Chacour's vision for peace among all who live in the Holy Land belongs to all of us. When we work on the board, travel as a pilgrim or contribute funds, we become colleagues in the work of just peace. And this is very good. Please accept my thanks as those who work so hard in Galilee to bring an education that is of the most excellent quality and grounded in the foundation stones of relationship, peace and love, really need our collegiality.

I have recently returned from a visit to Israel and Palestine; I met not only with our international liaison for MEEI, but also with leaders of several other schools and programs that PoI supports. In every case, I heard the same refrain, "We must continue to educate our children in the ways of peace. We must continue to provide programs where our students interact and play with one another across our ethnic and religious spectrum. This is the best hope for peace in this land."

The other refrain I heard was, "Thank you. Thank you for visiting, for supporting us financially and for telling our stories." PoI has helped make thousands of new hopeful stories in the Holy Land possible. From providing clean drinking water to a school in Gaza, to scholarships at MEEI, to mini-bus rides to girls' soccer practice in Bethlehem, we are making a difference one life at a time. Working together as colleagues, we can help to write even more stories of peace.

**Peace to you,
Rev. Anne Weirich**





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Join us on a trip of a lifetime!

You won't want to miss out on this Fall's pilgrimage to the Holy Land! And you've got about one month remaining before the price goes up by \$500 — don't delay and be sure to get your trip deposit in by July 15!

The **October 21-November 2 Living Stones Pilgrimage** will focus on deepening our understanding of education and youth services primarily in the Palestinian Christian community, both in Israel and Palestine.

We will also take in sites of Biblical significance and better understand how Palestinian Christians fare in today's land of Christ. You'll meet many

exceptional individuals working hard for peace and justice for all the people of this land, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

We will visit entities that are 'off the beaten track' of many Holy Land tours: heartwarming and inspirational places such as a Bedouin camp and school, Hope Flowers in East Jerusalem, a Seraj Library Community Center, and Hope School in Beit Jala.

What contributes to a Living Stones Pilgrimage's often most meaningful moments are those chances to connect with the people of the Holy Land — and we will have many of these, to hear their stories and to deepen our understanding of a fraught land

We invite and welcome you!

Submit your deposit before July 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!

Trip coordinators: Pilgrims of Ibillin Board of Directors Rev. Gail Doering and Executive Director Essrea Cherin.



Read about May Pilgrimage:
www.livingstonespilgrimage.org
The May trip was a resounding and life-changing success!

Last month, 12 pilgrims traveled to the Holy Land with Pilgrims of Ibillin board member Brenda Mehos and Dr. Celene Lillie to experience many treasures in a special land. A remarkable time was had by all and you can read about their journey here:

www.livingstonespilgrimage.org



Rev. Gail Doering



Essrea Cherin

Interested in learning more? Call Essrea TODAY: 303-928-0923

Early Bird Deadline: July 15 - Save \$500