

# Pilgrims of Ibillin

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## Pilgrims Organizing Trips to the Holy Land 2025

Pilgrims of Ibillin now offers custom designed Living Stones Pilgrimages for your church or faith group. The focus of our Pilgrimages are primarily on deepening our understanding of education and youth services in the

Palestinian Christian community, both in Israel and Palestine.

We will also always weave in sites of Biblical significance to further our understanding of how Palestinian Christians fare in the land of Christ.

On every trip you'll meet an array of exceptional individuals working hard for peace and justice for all the people of this land, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

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.

Currently we are planning trips for 2025 and later — anticipating that the current violence will subside well before then so as not to disrupt our travel. Please contact Pilgrims of Ibillin's Executive Director, Essrea Cherin, at 303.928.0923 to discuss possibilities, itineraries, and costs for your group.



## Pilgrims of Ibillin Annual Report

If you'd like to read a summary of our and peace partners' activities from 2023, you can see our annual report when you visit this page: <https://pilgrimsofibilin.org/brochure-annual-report/> and click on the link to read the report of last year's successes and a summary of notable activities from Mar Elias Educational Institutions and our Peace Partners.



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

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June 2024 • editor: [essrea@pilgrimsofibilin.org](mailto:essrea@pilgrimsofibilin.org) • [pilgrimsofibilin.org](http://pilgrimsofibilin.org)

## Emergency Appeal from Abuna

### Dear Beloved friends,

I wonder if I am allowed to make an appeal which is more like an S.O.S.; I am not used to issue such appeals.

The Mar Elias Educational Institutions is overwhelmed with the financial situation, resulting from the sudden drastic cuts of the small subsidies which we used to receive from the Ministry of Education.

The reason is financing the ongoing war in Gaza. We used to receive 70% of what the governmental schools enjoy every month. With the new drastic cuts our subsidies became 35%, which handicaps us. It's a problem of paying the salaries of our 200 staff members.

The association "Amuta" took drastic measures of imposing on the parents 300 NIS more per year. Likewise, they limited to the minimum

the important daily expenses, were able to reduce the deficit with about 30%, but still there is a deficit from September 2023 to May 2024, amounting to over **Three Million Shekels**.

We are contemplating to take a bank loan, but for the association it's legally impossible. That would impose on us the interest on the loan. We hesitate seriously in taking this step, since we need to insure paying the loan back to the bank plus the interest.

**I call on you since you were always our refuge and our supporters.** Indeed, I am embarrassed to ask you for such help, but we need to overcome our shyness.

We hope that soon the war would end and peace would come back in order to be reestablished. The situation has been aggravated with the closer of the country, no tourism, no visits



from abroad which bring very little if any additional income to cover the deficit.

I dare leave all that to your care, to your possibilities and to your generosity. Any contribution would be highly appreciated

Yours Fraternally,

Abuna Elias Chacour

Archbishop em. of Galilee

## Message from Executive Director

### Dear Friend,

In April of this year I spent three weeks in Palestine and Israel, primarily visiting with our partners to convey a message of support and serve as a reminder that not only are they not alone, but profound care and concern is held by so many across the United States.

My time there feels like a dream now, but I prepared a report (you can find it here: <https://bit.ly/Pilgrim-sEDTrip> or scan the QR code) about my visits with each Peace Partner (excepting the Gaza Water Project, for obvious reasons). You'll find an in-depth summary of each peace partner and reflections following my visit.



Scan to Read Report

### Mar Elias Budget Crisis

In my report you'll read about the financial challenges facing Mar Elias — this entire school year has been met with

a **55% reduction** of fees from the Ministry of Education from previous years' payments. As a result, there is enormous pressure on the Amuta, the governing body for the school, to address the shortfall so that they can continue to provide an exceptional education to bright, motivated, and ambitious Palestinian Israeli youth. There are no other options for these young people in the entire country.



For this reason, we are asking your support - at whatever level you are able is very much appreciated. You will also read in this newsletter an appeal from our dear Father Chacour along these lines.

### Abuna Visit to US - October 2024

I also wanted to share with you that a board committee is meeting weekly to plan for Father Chacour to visit the United States in October this year (**Ft Wayne, IN October 9 and 10, Detroit, MI October 13 - 16, and Sarnia, ON Canada October 18**). On these dates will be several open-to-the-public events and you are most welcome to attend. I hope to meet you in person in one of these locations!

Scan for Father Chacour's Schedule Details

We will post all the details as they become finalized on this webpage: <https://pilgrimsofibilin.org/father-chacour-us-2024/>

We will also offer live-stream links so that you can watch from afar. All the details will become available on that webpage or in our monthly emailed newsletter. You may sign up here: <https://pilgrimsofibilin.org/newsletter/>

Thank you as always for your support and your desire to help out in this time of great need.

Many blessings,  
Essrea Cherin,  
Executive Director





# MEEI Highlight

Maryam Bawardi Elementary School participated in the summit for the world of computing "Journey to the Future".

The school was selected among the few schools in the Northern District to participate in this event.

Our students, Laurence Azzam, Qasim Abub, Lur Khaled, and Tony Rashid, distinguished themselves in presenting their project to devel-



op a robotic medication station for the visually impaired, under the supervision and guidance of the school's computing coordinator, Mr. Camille Elias.

Attendees praised the students' high level of thinking and the excellence of the work.

We are proud of our creative students, the school team overseeing the project, and the pioneering administration.



## Peace Partner Update: Hope School

Since eruption on **October 7th, 2023**, Hope School was extremely affected and closed its doors and premises because all the roads that lead to the school were blocked. We converted to online learning where children attended classes from home, however, part of the children found difficulties to do so, due to lack of devices. The school was able to provide devices with the help of God and friends (Pilgrims of Ibillin was

one) who did not hesitate to extend a hand of help to address the problem."

And from the school's director, Khader Saba "I am so grateful for Pilgrims of Ibillin for your highly appreciated support which helped us to solve part of the problem. We are the only school that were able to provide such gift for our needy children."

## MEEI Exceptional Leaders

Dr Mouna Maron, a member of the MEEI Amuta (Governing Body) is the first Arab rector of an Israeli university. Professor Maron is a world-renowned researcher in the field of neuroscience and post-trauma.

Maron has been a trailblazer for the integration and advancement of women in the sciences, particularly within the Arab community. She was the first Arab woman from her village to earn a doctoral degree and Israel's first Arab professor of neuroscience.



## MEEI Safe Rooms



Safe Room Improvements

**We reached our goal!**  
**Thank you for your generous support!!!**

**We successfully raised over \$150,000 to close out last year. With your help and that of many others, the Emergency Shelters at Mar Elias have been renovated and the students returned to in-person learning!**

# Peace Partner Update: GAZA Water Project

Our friends at MECA are doing everything that they can to support the people of Gaza, which as you can imagine is no easy task.

Here is just one update we have received from MECA from **Wafaa El-Derawi**, **MECA** Aid Coordinator in Gaza:

**"Yes, it is a scary time, like every day in the past 9 months. I have no idea how I survived the last 9 months. Death is getting very close. There is no way to prepare yourself for what is coming. The sound of bombing is getting close..."**

**"I have prepared my luggage twice, unsure whether to leave our house or not. The bombing has become very close—you can hear it from the sky, the tanks, the military ships. I am petrified, like everyone else. It's hard to predict what will happen.**


**"Walking in the streets in the middle area, in the refugee camps and towns, is very hard because every spot is crowded with tents and people. It is very hot and incredibly smelly; you cannot escape the smell. People look at each other and then continue to walk quickly because all you hear is constant bombing, both near and far. Sometimes, you look at the streets and try to imprint this brief moment into your memory. You know there may not be a next time; you may never walk here again. The street, the buildings, the neighborhood could be gone, or perhaps you will not be here.**



**"Wherever [Israel] strike[s], people will die. As usual, everyone says the same thing: surviving only depends on luck."**

Our prayers do not cease for an end to the nightmare that has engulfed all the people of Gaza.

You may make a donation to help close the funding gap by returning the enclosed envelope with a check, or you may go to this webpage: <https://pilgrimsofibilin.org/donate-now/> or scan this code:



Scan to Donate

## President's Message

**Dear Friends of Pilgrims of I'billin,**

I can think of no better way to send you a note of encouragement and hope than to quote from a recent letter sent to me just after a recent speech to 800 students and staff at Mar Elias.

**Abuna wrote,**

**"I urged the students never to forget that they deserve freedom, their freedom is connected to the freedom of their neighbor. Freedom is strongly related to "Love yourself as you love your neighbor" or rather "Love your neighbor as you love yourself". Freedom means for us to be true human beings who are normally born in a society, we can't enjoy freedom as a liberation from all boundaries, our freedom is a quality 'In-relation.'"**

The generosity of your recent and ongoing gifts tell me that you already understand how our freedom is intricately tied to the freedom of others. And nothing frees the mind, body, heart and spirit of a human being like education forged in faith, hope and love. Please know how grateful the Board and staff of Pilgrims of I'billin are for all that you do. Your gifts free us from worry. Your gifts free many to study. Thanks so much.

**Peace to you,**  
**Rev. Anne Weirich**  
**President, Pilgrims of I'billin**

