

Pilgrims of Ibillin

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Book Sermon on the Mount Coming Soon!

You may be wondering whatever happened to Father Chacour's book, *The Sermon on the Mount*, that we raised funds to translate 3 years ago.

I'm happy to share with you that the manuscript is in the hands of the publisher and we are in the midst of finalizing details.

Scan the QR code to sign up for our emailed newsletter so that you'll be notified as soon as the new book becomes available to purchase.

Also in the newsletter, we will notify you when we have a series of monthly Study Sessions with Fr. Chacour to include in depth discussions of each chapter of the newly published book



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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 \$152,500 for Scholarships for hundreds of students receiving full or partial tuition assistance, \$24,000 for electrical infrastructure for kindergarten, \$27,500 for utilities expenses, and \$40,000 toward Safe Room construction.



thank you

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

Pilgrims of Ibillin

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Christmas Message from Father Chacour

Dear friends,

We are still living in a kind of miracles survival amidst the ongoing brutal war. We are all deeply affected with almost a daily course of rockets and of similar war machines against the neighboring countries. Meanwhile, we are trying our utmost to keep calm, and as much as possible to keep living in peace. We are experiencing the fact of keeping the hope alive and the peace overwhelming. Our students have been at home for two months, while the campus looks like a desert. We learn once more to appreciate the presence of our beloved students.

We start feeling *the winds of Christmas*. It's our pleasure and honor to wish you a very special celebration of Christmas. We would like to join the angles and urge you to come see the salvation of God, that the angles brought to the Shepherds. This kind of peace counteracts the way of war and overcomes the defiling sound of the rockets.

Our students are back to school, it is such a joy to see them around. In my name and in the name of all our students as well of our staff and maintenance team, *we wish you a real Happy Christmas and we thank you for your friendship and for your assistance directly to us, or through the good care of Pilgrims of Ibillin.*

I wish to remind you that the presents of the Shepherds were not less important than the presents of the Magi. The Shepherds

were delighted and overwhelmed with the message that they received from heaven: **"Be not afraid, today a savior is born for you"**. This is the message we want to convey to everyone among you, we don't forget the importance and the very much needed gifts of the Magi who came with **Frankincense, with Gold and with Myrrh**. Although it was not needed by the child, we dare place ourselves in His place, these gifts are also much needed and appreciated as do the gifts help us to survive and we are determined to continue spreading the good news: **"Be not afraid, a savior is born for you"**.

May I end our wishes with a dream that I want to see implemented that all of you would have the opportunity very soon, as soon as the war is ended and the weapons are calmed and peace becomes prevailing, and you dear friends come to visit us and be our distinguished guests.

We love to welcome you and invite you to see what we are doing and to share our dream of being **"ambassadors for reconciliation"** since this is the message of our school, **have courage, God is good, he is in control.**

Yours with deep friendly relations and daily prayers for all of you,



Yours Fraternally,
Abuna Elias Chacour
Archbishop em. of Galilee

Message from Executive Director

Dear Friend,

I wish as we near the holiday season that we could breathe a sigh of relief that the violence that erupted over a year ago had subsided and the healing could begin. As you are likely aware, this is not the case and your prayers are still needed desperately, for as we hear from our colleagues at **Mar Elias, in Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Gaza** - their lives have been made more and more challenging with each passing month.

Our supporters have responded with incredible generosity — making

contributions so that our partners dedicated to peace and justice can do their important work in their communities. It's not easy, but they have no other choice — and I am so grateful that with your continued support we can make an impact on young lives.

Please join me in sending prayers that peace and justice reign supreme for all in the Holy Land,

Many blessings,
Essrea Cherin,
Executive Director



Abuna Visit 2024

Gratitude from Abuna

Indeed, I don't find the proper words to express my gratitude and my very deep appreciation for the role you played during my last visit with you. I found far more than what I expected. I want to convey my deep gratitude for all those whom we encountered. One thing **Nawar** keeps saying to me, we need to learn from the hospitality and the smile of friendship that we received from everybody who we encountered during the two past weeks we spent with you.

To all the other friends we raise our prayers to God to multiply citizens in America like those we met, as I told you there, *you represent the beautiful face of America*. It's stronger than any financial [support] and very specially than any destructive weapons. The friendship we received is far more important than the funds we raised for the survival of the school.

Yours sincerely,
Archbishop Em. Elias Chacour

Gratitude from Nawar

Dearest Friends at Pilgrims of Ibillin,

Upon my return to Ibillin, I am compelled to express my heartfelt gratitude for the exceptional hospitality you showed me during my visit to the USA. Your warm welcome made my stay not only comfortable but profoundly memorable.

From day one, I was moved by the generosity and kindness each of you demonstrated. The effort you put into making every moment perfect is something I hold dear. The delightful hospitality, enriching conversations, and the chance to forge meaningful connections with so many among you are things which will always remain in my heart.

Thank you once again for everything you do for the extended family of **MEEI**. We eagerly look forward to hosting as many of you as possible in **Ibillin**.

With deepest appreciation,
Nawar Mussallam



Exceptional Alumni

My name is **Bader Abu Hagool**, and I'm originally from **Shefa-Amr**, a small town in the Lower Galilee. I graduated from the Mar Elias Educational Institutions (**MEEI**) in 2017, where I majored in physics and chemistry. My twin sister, Rana, and I both attended Mar Elias, sharing many of the same unique experiences. Rana studied in the biotechnology class. Those years at Mar Elias were a time of growth and discovery for both of us. *The values of tolerance and respect have truly stayed with us ever since.*

I am currently in my final semester as an aerospace engineering student at the Technion Institute of Technology. Throughout my academic journey, the education I received at Mar Elias school played a significant role in shaping my path.

Growing up in a diverse community where I had the privilege of learning from Arab and Jewish teachers and studying alongside classmates from various religious and cultural backgrounds, I was fortunate to develop an understanding of the value of respect for others early on. These lessons have stayed with me throughout my time at college.

During my time at **MEEI**, I also had the incredible opportunity to participate in several exchange programs, traveling to places like Canada, Northern Ireland, and the USA. These experiences — made possible through the connections of **Father Elias Chacour** and the facilitation of **Dr. Emil Halloun** — broadened my horizons and reinforced the importance of engaging with different perspectives.

In Canada, I visited Westgate Mennonite Collegiate, where I was introduced to the unique and peaceful Mennonite

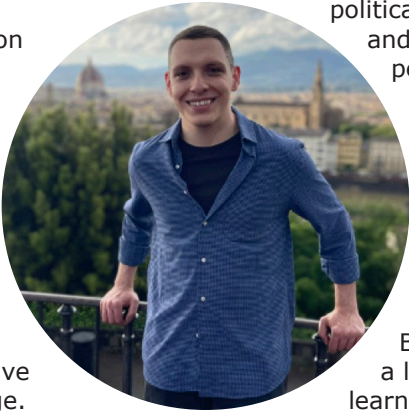
culture. During my stay, *I learned how their values of humility and community service shaped their way of life.* The people I met were open and welcoming, and I had the privilege of engaging in discussions about their faith and history. This experience has deeply impacted my understanding of how faith and culture can drive positive change in society, it is something that we aim to achieve at various levels in Galilee.

In Northern Ireland, I stayed in Derry where I encountered a community still grappling with the long history of political and religious division between the British and the Irish. My host family and the local people I met were generous in sharing their personal stories of living through "**The Troubles**," a period of violent conflict involving the Irish Republican Army (**IRA**), the British Army, and loyalist groups. I visited key landmarks, including the Peace Bridge and the Derry Walls, which symbolized the ongoing efforts for reconciliation.

Both of these exchange programs left a lasting impression on me. In Canada, I learned how peaceful values can be lived out in a community dedicated to service, while in Northern Ireland, I witnessed the challenges and importance of reconciliation in divided societies. These experiences not only broadened my worldview but also shaped my personality, reinforcing the values of tolerance and above all a true empathy.

I'm excited to see where this journey will take me next. Thank you for reading.

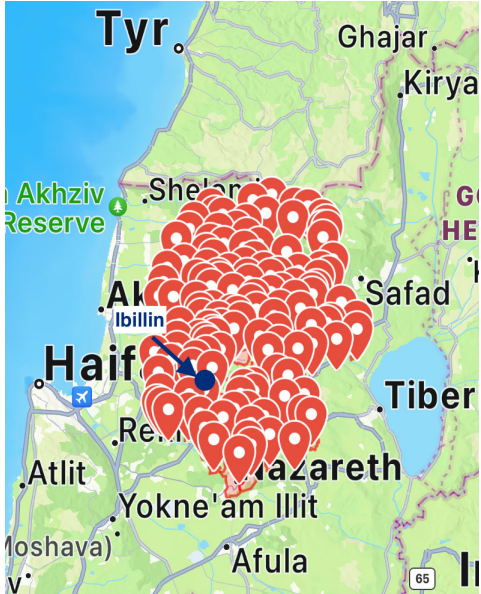
Bader



Mar Elias Update: Upholding Christian Values in Education Amidst Conflict and Crisis

At the heart of Mar Elias Educational Institutions (**MEEI**) is the blending of faith and education. This philosophy goes beyond just academic success to help form our students' character and spirit, anchoring them in values of love, compassion, and hope during times of unprecedented violence in **Galilee**. *With the ongoing conflict, it is more crucial than ever that we continue to uphold our Christian values, even digitally.*

Our digital classrooms have become vital



spaces for connection, where we strive to maintain the essential human-to-human interaction that is a cornerstone of our educational approach. Our educators do more than teach; they are mentors, spiritual guides, and stable figures for our students during these unstable times. The importance of our mission only grows as the conflict intensifies.

When sirens warn of danger and the sounds of bombs and rockets become too close (*you can see in the map the areas targeted by missiles surrounding I'billin*), our teachers quickly take on roles that go beyond traditional teaching. They become sources of calm and reassurance. Upon hearing sirens, **MEEI** teachers calmly direct students to mute their microphones and, if comfortable, turn on their cameras for visual support, helping maintain a sense of connection in the class.

This not only helps manage the immediate crisis but also fosters long-term resilience and trust between teachers and students.

What sets **MEEI** apart is not just the implementation of innovative educational methods, but the unique composition of its staff and the community it fosters.

In particular, *MEEI employs Jewish teachers who fully embrace their Arab students, treating them as their own.* This approach is a rare find in today's educational landscape in our region, as it transcends typical cultural and national boundaries, forming a microcosm of unity and mutual understanding. This aspect of **MEEI** is not just a policy but a testament to its deep commitment to integration and peace-building.

The presence of teachers from different ethnic backgrounds working harmoniously together exemplifies the institution's broader mission: to educate and unify diverse groups.

Submitted by Dr. Emil Haloun, International Relations Director



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President's Message

Dear Friends of Pilgrims of I'billin,

In one of the early chapters of his new book on the Sermon on the Mount that will be coming out soon, **Bishop Chacour writes**,

"My Christian faith teaches me to use my life, even in a small way, to improve the lives of others, and I do so in a dangerous world, The expression of love is the hallmark of the Christian, and each of us has ways of expressing love and concern for those who suffer. Yet, we may not have adequate resources to manage the demands of contemporary life. I do feel called to understand better the Sermon on the Mount as a foundational document that teaches us how we might invest time and energy in reducing human suffering and to give ourselves to the creation of a more just and humane world"

This is a powerful expression that we are all called to in these days.

In our context, we think of our peace partners at **MEEI** and in the **West Bank** and **Gaza**. We also know that beyond our context lies a world of other places where there are peacemakers working in equally difficult circumstances. Closer to home, in our personal contexts, there are also places for us to express love and gather resources to respond to the sufferings of those in our homes and hometowns.

The Board of POI is so grateful to have the collective expressions of love and concern shown through your attention, prayers, actions and financial gifts. As we each use our lives in small ways, we gather together in a big way to bring peace to humanity.

Your generosity and love allow us to make the world a bit less dangerous through education and provision for peacemakers in **Galilee**, **Bethlehem**, **Ramallah**, **Gaza** and the **Nablus**

region. Thank you so much for an extraordinary year of support that gives us hope that, together, POI can accomplish even more in the year to come.

May the holidays, however you celebrate them, be filled with blessings and love.

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

