

كنيسة الميلاد الإنجيلية اللوثرية

The Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church



May 26th, 2020

Dear sisters and brothers, partners and friends of Christmas Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church,
Greetings from Bethlehem!

Yesterday the Palestinian government announced that the lockdown that was imposed beginning of March 5th because of Covid-19 has come to an end. This all started in March 5, 2020 when six cases of Covid-19 virus were discovered among the staff of a hotel in Beit Jala, and it is likely that they caught it from a tourist group that stayed there.

The Palestinian government took this seriously, especially since we do not have enough resources or hospitals to control a spread of a pandemic. It imposed strict social distancing measures; schools and University and houses of worship and all other forms of gathering were closed. We stayed home mostly. For twelve Sundays, we broadcasted the church to the houses of our congregants through the internet. The spread of the virus has been controlled, and Bethlehem has been without any new cases for almost two weeks – praise God! Next Sunday will be our first in 12 weeks when we all gather. It will be Pentecost Sunday; a time of celebration and thanksgiving.

It is hard to underestimate the effects of this pandemic on Bethlehem and the Palestinian people. Bethlehem depends a lot economically on tourism. Many lost their only source of income; and those who suffered the most are those depending on daily wages – the most vulnerable. Moreover, many who go for labor in the Israeli side had to stay in Bethlehem. Christian organizations and schools whose source of income included tourism and/or school fees also suffered heavily and some were forced to decrease their monthly salaries – some by 50%. It is going to take years before we recover.

To add to an already difficult situation, the Israeli government announced that it would move forward with its annexation plan, which will have sever consequences of the chances of peace and a viable Palestinian state (Read my [Open-Ed](#) about this here).

Our church has responded to this crisis from the beginning. We supported many families from within the congregation and from the community – those who lost their income because of the closure.

P.O. Box 162 - Paul VI St
Bethlehem
Tel: +972-2-2742312

Pastor: Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac
الراعي: القس الدكتور منذر إسحق
Email: muntherisaac@gmail.com

ص.ب. 162 شارع بولص السادس
بيت لحم
+972-2-2742312:تلفون:

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While some church members were affected, others have given generously to our small and humble relief efforts. We established a small fund to stand with families affected by the crisis, as we anticipate that the months ahead do not look promising.

Our budget in the church has taken a hit as well, as we did not have services or visitors for three months. Our Sunday offering generally make 45% of our annual income, and we anticipate that it will be reduced by at least a half. I am confident that some members will give generously during the service on Sunday and the coming months, but at the same time I know for a fact that many will not be able to do so because of the above mentioned challenges.

Things do not look promising. And if any land knows about the miracle of life from the dead, it is this land. Because of this, we continue to hope!

I am writing this letter to appeal for you to support our church and recovery efforts. We are hoping to raise no less than \$15,000 by the end of the year to sustain our work in the church and enable us to continue to support and stand by affected families.

I am making this appeal while fully realizing that this is a global crisis that we are going through. During these last three months, I was reminded of the powerful words in Gen. 4:9: "Am I my brother/sister's keeper?" Covid-19 reminded our world – we can only hope – that we are all in the same boat together. We have to stand by one another; and we need one another, and to coordinate our efforts, in order to survive. We are indeed one another' keepers!

Thank you for your support and prayers!

In peace,

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac

Pastor, the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church Bethlehem

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