

***"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness...If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." -Romans 12:3-8, 18***



### In this newsletter:

- News and a special introduction
- A L'Arche community in Palestine: Ma'an lil Hayat
- Interpreting the Trump administration's Israel-Palestine policies
- Check out a new blog
- Visit Palestine in 2017

# Introducing...





Nathan and I are so thrilled to introduce you to our daughter, Rosalie, born on December 8! We have spent the past two and a half months loving getting to know her, watching her grow and learn, and enjoying her company. She made the big move from Atlanta to Jerusalem on January 31, and she has already had the pleasure of meeting groups of Presbyterians visiting the Holy Land. We are speechless at the amount of love, support, gifts and prayers we received from you. You have made this journey even more memorable and joyful, and we will always be grateful.

In other news, some of you may have heard that my call to this ministry comes to an end April 30, 2017. Nathan's work with the Carter Center continues for now, but we both feel pulled back to the States to be closer to family and to engage in the current social and political climate there. I hope that I can continue to be a resource to all of you regarding Israel-Palestine and our mission partners here until that time. World Mission is committed to this vital ministry, with your support, and intends to fill the position as soon as possible. Please be in prayer for their discernment, and for ours



as we explore the next steps for our family. If this position might be something God is calling you to, you can check out the job description and apply [here](#).

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## **"We are all friends here"**

### **Ma'an lil Hayat: Together for Life**



Ma'an's core members and assistants join for their morning gathering to share news, pray, sing, and plan their work day.

"We all want friendship. This is one of life's most basic needs, and people find it here," Anna Johnson tells me. Anna volunteers three days a week at Ma'an lil Hayat, a L'Arche community in Bethlehem. The first L'Arche community was founded in a small village in France by Jean Vanier with the intention of bringing people of varying ability to live together and share life in community. Through the years, the community grew,

with members deciding to start similar groups in their own countries. Today there are 149 communities in 37 countries, including Palestine. Local culture dictates that Ma'an lil Hayat is not residential, but members share life together five days a week. Indeed, the meaning of their name is "Together for Life."

Ma'an has 29 core members with various disabilities, ranging in age from 16 to 46, attending in two different sites- one in central Bethlehem and one in a village just outside the city. They arrive every day by 8:30 a.m., when they gather for announcements, share news, pray together, and sing songs, along with the "assistants," the program's term for members who are staff. The day I visited, news and announcements included one core member modelling her new sneakers and another smiling shyly when an assistant shared that she had attended a party the day before. Everyone clapped and celebrated these joyful events. They closed their sharing time by singing, Muslims and Christians together, with a Taize song adapted to Arabic, "Nothing can trouble, nothing can frighten, God alone fills us." After a moment of silence, there was a flurry of activity as everyone prepared to receive their assignments and begin their work day.



At Ma'an, members spend one month at a time working in one of four different work stations creating felt decorations and household items. Each station crafts a different item. They purchase local sheep's wool which is washed and prepared. An assistant delicately fits the wool

into a mold. The core members then use soap and water and press the wool in the molds, like in the picture to the left, transforming the wool into felt. It is then put out to dry on their balcony (photo below) before being dyed or decorated. The organisation is well-known for their felt interpretations of the nativity scene, but they have also branched out to countless other items, from ornaments to potholders to Easter chicks.

The work day is interrupted first for breakfast, followed by announcements and a dance party (and apparently, "You haven't seen a dance party until you've seen a Ma'an dance party," or so Anna tells me). The next break is an afternoon lunch shared together before members work



again until five, with a mid-afternoon snack break. All tasks, from the work itself to preparing meals, are shared equally between the members and the assistants. I spoke with Rania, the program's administrative assistant, who told me, "Everything is unique here. Our core members were used to being pitied and not having any expectations placed on them. Here, they are respected and valued. They are human and must be treated like any other human. This includes high expectations about their behaviour and work."

The need for such a community in Palestine is strong, where there is still a lot of stigma around disabilities. Families feel shame and keep their children at home. There are few resources for education and empowerment. The programs that do exist are only for children, leaving those who age out of such programs without structure or purpose. The staff at Ma'an hope that the community provides both to their members, as well as a means for empowerment. Members earn a stipend each week, dependent on the hours they work. They are treated as equals to the staff, with the same expectations placed on them. Rania told me, "Their stipend teaches them that their work is valuable and gives them the opportunity to choose how to spend it. It is empowering for them to not have to ask their parents for everything." She tells me stories of core members' transformation. For example, Rami, who sat next to me during the morning gathering smiling and showing off his notebook, was completely withdrawn when he first started coming. He refused to participate in any gatherings or work, even refusing to use the bathroom at the centre. He just stood by the door waiting for his father to pick him up. Now, a year later, he has blossomed. Rami is joining in everything, staying full days at the centre, and obviously enjoying himself.



I ask Rania and Anna, left, what they hope Ma'an provides for its members, and this is when Anna tells me: "Belonging. Friendship. We all want friendship. This is one of life's most basic needs, and people find it here. They might not find it anywhere else, as so often they are not even taken out of the house. When you come, you can

see we are all friends here. People also need to feel productive, to feel they are creating something beautiful and worthwhile. Here we all contribute to work that makes beautiful things, things we can be proud of."

You can purchase these beautiful products to enjoy yourself or to sell in your congregation or community. The money goes back to Ma'an lil Hayat, to purchase wool, pay stipends, and keep the program going, giving their members joy and community every day.

To order, email Rania at [arche.bethlehem@gmail.com](mailto:arche.bethlehem@gmail.com). You can find a catalogue on their Facebook page under "Files" [here](#).





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**Many of you have been asking me about how the rhetoric and policies**

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**of the new presidential administration will affect Israel-Palestine and our mission partners and what they think of them. Find out more below:**

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## **Q&A: What do Trump's policies mean for Israel-Palestine?**

**Q. What is the significance of moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem?**

A. Jerusalem is the home of holy sites for Jews, Muslims, and Christians. It holds cultural, political, historical, and economic significance for both Israelis and Palestinians. Both peoples name it as their capital, the centre of their national identity.

After the war that founded Israel in 1948, the new country held the western part of Jerusalem, with the east side held by Jordan. Israel then occupied the rest of Jerusalem in 1967 and unilaterally annexed it in 1980, against international law. This move is not recognised by the international community, and countries around the world reject Israeli sovereignty over the city with none holding embassies in Jerusalem. Rather, Jerusalem's significance to both sides has kept it a final status issue, to be decided upon by both Israelis and Palestinians in the context of a resolution to the conflict.

If the United States moves its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, it would not only violate international law as well as the international consensus on Jerusalem it led and maintained, but in effect declare its agreement that Israel has complete and final sovereignty over Jerusalem as its

capital, excluding any Palestinian claim to the city. The consequences cannot be stated too strongly. The U.S. would essentially be declaring an end to the pursuit of a two-state solution, in which a sovereign Palestine lays at least partial claim to its capital, and an end to its role as a self-proclaimed "honest broker" in the conflict.

Further, such a move would be seen as an attack on and rejection of the Arab and Muslim attachment to Jerusalem and to Palestine itself and as a free pass to Israel to claim more Palestinian land. This would no doubt ignite violent reactions, not just from Palestinians but from Arabs around the region for whom Jerusalem also holds great spiritual and political significance. Israel might benefit symbolically from the move, but it would pay for it in an increase in violence and unrest on the ground, as well as damage to the diplomatic gains Israel has made with its neighbours.

**Q. What is the significance of naming David Friedman as ambassador to Israel?**

A. David Friedman, a lawyer who counselled Trump in past bankruptcy proceedings, has a history of extreme statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which are out of line with the bipartisan consensus of U.S. foreign policy and international law. He supports aggressive pro-settlement activity; he is the head of the American Friends of Bet El Institutions, which has raised tens of millions of dollars for the illegal settlement of Bet El, located to the north of Jerusalem. He categorically opposes a two-state solution without articulating what should replace it. Friedman has also made statements claiming Israel's sole sovereignty over Jerusalem, problematic for the reasons outlined above. Appointing Friedman as ambassador to Israel could signal a shift to the extreme right in U.S. policy on Israel-Palestine. However, during his confirmation hearing, Friedman articulated regret over some of his inflammatory statements, and asserted that he would uphold the president's policies regardless of his own opinions. He also admitted that settlement expansion is not conducive to a peace deal. During the hearing, he said he was in support of a two-state solution, with conditions. Ultimately, whatever his true views, Friedman's position does not grant him enough power to substantively change the U.S. approach to Israel unless it comes from the administration itself.

**Q. What happened at Trump's recent meeting with Netanyahu and what is the significance of his statements on a two-state solution?**

A. Trump and Netanyahu met in Washington, D.C. on February 15 and held a joint press conference. Trump's language regarding his take on a final resolution of the conflict wasn't clear: "I'm looking at two states and one state, and I like the one both parties like... I can live with either one." Some have proclaimed this the end of the United States' support of the two-state solution. Some have seen it as signalling Trump's openness to a one-state solution. Still others say it simply reinforces the policy that Israelis and Palestinians must negotiate the terms of their resolution, without terms being imposed upon them.

Given the history of the two-state formula- in particular the firmness, even inflexibility, with which the U.S. has held onto it- it does seem significant that Trump named a one-state solution as a possibility. However, one state can be implemented in radically different ways: a state for all its citizens, each given equal rights, or a state defined by one ethnic-religious identity which preferences, in rights and freedoms, one category over all others. It is unclear which vision of a one-state solution Trump had in mind.

In the press conference, Trump also suggested Israel might "hold back a bit" on settlement expansion, using language less forceful than his predecessor's though not a *carte blanche*. Netanyahu said he was willing to discuss the possibility.

Netanyahu himself suggested a break with decades of U.S. policy by asking for recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, territory Israel occupied in 1967 at the same time it occupied east Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza, and the Sinai. Israel's occupation of the Golan, like that of the other territories, is considered illegal under international law.

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## From a mission partner:

From Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land:

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**An Open Letter to President Donald Trump  
From a Bishop of Jerusalem  
1 February 2017**

Jesus said: "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." (Matt 25:35)

*The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500*

Dear Mr. President,

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I write to you from the Holy City of Jerusalem in a spirit of prayer. I pray that your presidency will be a fruitful one. I pray that under your leadership, the United States of America will continue to uphold and promote its time-honored values of diversity, equality, pursuit of happiness, and of liberty and justice for all.

I pray that as President, you will uphold and promote these values, not only for the citizens of your country, but also for your neighbors. May your commitment to the foundational values of your country extend also to those living in areas of conflict and suffering. I offer this prayer from my office in Jerusalem, where we are still praying and working for a peaceful, just solution for the two peoples and three religions of this land. We long to realize the liberty, justice, and equality in diversity that your country exemplifies for the world.

I have heard about the recent executive decisions you have taken regarding immigrants and refugees, and I am worried.

I am worried, because for nearly 250 years, the world has looked to your country as an example of how diverse races and nationalities can possess one American identity. Your country has led the way in promoting civil rights, always hearkening back to the principle of equal citizenship, with liberty and justice for all. This is the reason so many refugees and immigrants have looked to the United States as a beacon of hope.

I am worried, not only for those who can no longer enter your country, but for the safety of my neighbors in this region. I am afraid that the decision to deny entry for citizens of seven Muslim-majority countries while suggesting preferential treatment for Christians from those same countries will be harmful to many smaller communities in the region. This approach will be especially harmful to Arab Christians. In the Arab world, Christians have a long history of living side by side with our Muslim neighbors. We reject any move to divide Arab society along religious lines, and continue to see ourselves as deserving equal citizenship with equal rights and equal responsibilities.

I am worried, because I myself am a refugee, and know firsthand the struggles refugee families face. At the same time, as a Lutheran bishop, I know that turning away refugees of any religion contradicts the message of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself was also a refugee, who sought refuge and safety with his family in Egypt. Throughout his life, through his teaching and his actions, Jesus showed concern for the stranger and the outcast. In her [pastoral letter](#) of 30 January, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of our partner church, the ELCA, has said:

“Our Lord not only commanded us to welcome the stranger, Jesus made it clear that when we welcome the stranger into our homes and our hearts – we welcome him.” (Matt 25:35)

For this reason, welcoming the stranger is not optional for Christians. It is one of our foundational values.

In November 2013, a group of diverse religious leaders from around the world gathered in Vienna to sign [“Welcoming the Stranger: Affirmations for Faith Leaders.”](#) This historic document pledges support for refugees, internally displaced and stateless persons, and to work against xenophobia. More than 600 delegates from the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim faiths attended the event, a powerful witness to the fact that concern for refugees is not exclusive to one religion, but is at the heart of every religious tradition.

As the Lutheran Bishop in Jerusalem, as a refugee, and as a global citizen, my plea is that you will reconsider your recent decisions regarding refugees and immigrants. I urge you to reflect upon the foundational values of the United States and of Jesus, and to seek a different path toward the twin goals of security and opportunity in the land of the free.

Most respectfully,

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan  
Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

## New Blog Highlights

## Unique Stories from Palestine

Check out Bright  
Stars of  
Bethlehem's new  
blog ([here](#))! You  
will find stories  
from PC(USA)

## Visit Israel- Palestine in 2017!

Explore these  
opportunities  
(email me with any  
questions!):

### Interfaith Peacebuilders

DATES: [May 13 - 26,](#)  
[2017](#)

THEME: Incarceration,  
Detention, and Political  
Prisoners  
CO-

SPONSORS: *Defense*  
*for Children*  
*International -*  
*Palestine & CODEPINK*  
*- Women for Peace*

mission partner  
the Diyar  
Consortium,  
interviews with  
Palestinian  
innovators, and  
insights into  
Palestine's  
unique cultural  
heritage.



OR

[October 28 -  
November 10](#), 2017,  
Olive Harvest  
delegation

**Christian  
Peacemaker  
Teams**

[10-24 May, 15-29  
August, 10-24  
October, 20 November  
- 3 December](#)

**YMCA Olive  
Picking  
Program**

[October 14-23](#)

If you are planning a  
trip that is open to  
more participants, I'm  
happy to advertise it in  
my next newsletter!