



WISCONSIN  
CONFERENCE  
UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST

## Bethlehem Partnership

To clergy, congregations, and moderators in the Wisconsin Conference:

In 2004, the Southwest Association of the Wisconsin Conference UCC voted to establish a partnership with Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. Over the past ten years, several delegations of clergy and lay people have traveled to the Holy Land not only to see the places where Jesus walked but also to listen to the voices of the people who live in the land of his birth. We have hosted Palestinian and Israeli speakers—and a dance troupe from the Diyar Academy (an outreach project of Christmas Lutheran Church)—who have helped us grow in our understanding and relationship with our sisters and brothers in Palestine. Some of our churches have used resources—local speakers, books, films, study guides—to learn more about the faith and life of Palestinians and Israelis; some of our churches have raised money to support the work of the Bethlehem Church and Diyar Consortium, its institutional arm. In 2010, Rev Mitri Raheb was the Thursday Workshop Speaker and one of the preachers at the Annual Meeting of the Wisconsin Conference. Our partnership has nourished our faith and increased our understanding. Our minds and hearts have been changed.

After ten years in partnership with Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, the Southwest Association Partnership Committee, with the blessing of the Conference Board of Directors, established a Working Group with representatives from each of the Associations to explore ways to engage the rest of the Conference in the mission of the partnership. To that end, we invite your church to learn about the partnership and the people of Bethlehem whose faith and witness have captured our hearts.

Here are some opportunities for you and your congregation:

- [Invite us](#) to talk to your congregation, mission committee, or women's group. We can bring a PowerPoint presentation to augment our stories.
- Sign up for the Saturday workshop at the Annual Meeting\* to learn about the Kairos Palestine document and how you might use it as a study tool in your congregation. In 2009, Palestinian Christians wrote this document—subtitled “A moment of truth: A word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering”—to tell the world about what is happening in their ancestral land and

calling on their Christian brothers and sisters to stand with them in their struggle for peace and justice.

- Engage in a study about the issues faced by Christians, Muslims, and Jews. We have a comprehensive list of books as well as movies, videos, or study guides you could use.
- Sign up for our [Bethlehem Partnership Facebook page](#) and keep up with events, articles, and issues.
- Have your congregations use the Advent devotional developed by Bright Stars of Bethlehem and written by church folk who have spent time in Bethlehem with the people of Christmas Lutheran Church.
- Join us on a trip to Bethlehem and the Holy Land. Our next trip will be in 2015. Contact [Bonnie Van Overbeke](#) for more information or sign up at the Bethlehem Partnership display at Association or Conference Annual Meetings.

In Greek, the word *kairos* refers to a special season or time of discernment, a time distinct from ordinary time (*chronos*). Perhaps this is our time as a Conference to prayerfully and thoughtfully study this issue and to answer the call from our Palestinian sisters and brothers to stand with them and work together for a just and lasting peace in the land of the one who was called the Prince of Peace.

Your sisters and brothers in Christ,

The Bethlehem Partnership Working Group

[Bonnie Van Overbeke](#), chair; Nancy Baumgardner; Phil Haslanger; Ted Peterson; Bob Mutton; Winton Boyd; Doug Pierce; Karla Schmidt; Deb Burich; Emma Ledbetter; and Kathleen Rinear

*\*Annual Meeting registration will be available in April 2014.*