

Make the  Most of Your  
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Magazine

# How to Use *Horizons* Magazine

by Joyce MacKichan Walker

## Christians in the Middle East

Sometimes it seems conflict in the Middle East will always be with us. Wars begin and end, borders change, governments come and go; but peace, even stability, seems to elude the Middle East. It's easy to detach from a situation that is continuous and seemingly unending, but when Jesus said, "For you always have the poor with you . . ." (*Matthew 26:11a*), he did not intend for us to conclude that, therefore, we could ignore them! The constant challenge of the presence of the poor requires constant vigilance and constant action and advocacy on their behalf. Similarly, the situation in the Middle East demands our consistent attention. Thankfully, it is receiving it from the denomination. In the words of Victor Makari, "Clearly, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is committed to continued participation in God's mission in the company of Middle East Christians, and to speak and incarnate a word of peace, a word of justice, a word of compassion, a word of truth in love, and a word of reconciliation among all the peoples of the region" (*Joining In God's Mission In the Middle East*, by Victor Makari, page 30, column 3).

This issue of *Horizons* highlights the continuing challenges and hardships of living in the Middle East. "Make the Most" will point out evidence of these in the articles, and challenge us to find ways to empathize with the people engaged in the struggles.

### *Faith Walk* by Nancy Copeland-Payton, page 35

Copeland-Payton makes a connection between the first century Middle East into which Jesus was born and the Middle East of today. Her words are, "complex and filled with strife." Sometimes the peace and joy of the nativity stories and our re-creations of them lull us into forgetting that Palestine was under Roman rule. Mary and Joseph had to "emigrate" for a couple of years to keep their son safe, and the ruler, for fear of losing power to another, committed an unthinkable atrocity—the killing of *all* infant boys.

- What might it feel like to have to leave your homeland because you fear for the safety of your children? What would be hardest to leave behind? What might you most long for at your destination?

Copeland-Payton focuses on the importance, in situations of conflict, of the ability (and choice) ". . . to live out of [one's] discerning listening" (bottom of column one).

- What do you think she means?
- Why is "discerning listening" so important in situations where major cultural and religious differences are present?

- What might people hope to “discern” or “hear” that would instill hope?  
“The Spirit continually breathes new life into seemingly impossible situations. Our following the Spirit’s compassionate nudging can guide our feet along God’s paths” (column 3).
- Why might despair threaten to overtake efforts at discernment?  
“The posture of discernment is not easy at first. It involves listening and acting from a deep, God-centered place where hatred is not met with hatred, and evil is not met with evil. It requires courage, compassion and surrender to what God, who creates all people, might desire in any given situation” (Column 3).
- What might make such listening and acting possible for people in the Middle East?
- What is your prayer for them? For you?



***Joining in God’s Mission in the Middle East*, by Victor Makari, pages 27–30**

Makari is quoting another when he says, “It is not that the church has a mission, but that God’s mission has a church” (page 27, paragraph 1).

- What definition of mission is Makari inviting us to embrace?
- What new thoughts about mission does his first paragraph suggest to you?
- What differences do you imagine exist between being God’s church in mission in the Middle East where Jesus lived and his first followers worshiped and served, and being God’s church in mission in other regions of the world?
- What challenges does Makari highlight for those who live in multi-faith cultures? As Christian Palestinians living in Israel? What challenges do Americans face as they attempt to advocate for peace in the Middle East?
- Is the time ripe in your congregation to ask for an opportunity to study the 2010 General Assembly report, “Breaking Down the Walls” and/or “Kairos Palestine: A Moment of Truth”? (See page 30). A Christian Education Committee or Mission Committee might be the place to take such a request.

A number of articles in this issue of Horizons point to the growing trend, and the sad implications, of emigration of Christians from the Middle East. You might try reading these articles in this order:

1. Read *To Stay and Struggle, or Leave and Long For? The Dilemma for Christians in Israel/Palestine*, by Rhona Bowles Kamar, pages 14–17, for first-hand accounts.
2. Get all the facts about population and emigration in *Christians in the Middle East1: Map and Facts*, by Amgad Beblawi and Yvonne Hileman, pages 9–10.
3. Examine a case made for Christian presence in the Middle East by a Muslim man and a Jewish woman in *The Importance of a Christian Presence in the Holy Land*, by Mohammad al-Sammak and Debbie Weissman, pages 11–13.
4. Hear from a pastor in Bethlehem, whose presentation of the historical context of the evolution and development of Christianity in the Middle East carries a passionate plea for the presence of Christians in the Middle East. Read *Christianity in the Middle East: A Pluralistic Phenomenon*, by Mitri Raheb, pages 4–6.

- What picture of the issue of emigration do you get from these articles?
- What are the major reasons Christians emigrate?
- What are the major reasons Christians choose to remain in the Middle East or feel compelled to do so?

Often what most inspires us are stories of work being carried out now. These stories give us hope and ideas, connection and visions for what is possible—what is and what can be. If this is what engages you in an issue, read the articles listed below, watching for:

- The difference one person can make
- Those who model the change made possible by the empowerment of others
- God’s call experienced in the voice of people who respond to it
- The power of dialogue and listening
- What some do from outside the Middle East
- The power of cooperation
- The joy of seeing the Middle East for yourself
- Models of programs and actions that matter

1. *The Ordination of Women in Egypt*, by Anne Zaki, pages 22–23.
2. *The Near East School of Theology and Christian Presence in the Middle East*, by Mary Mikhael, pages 24–26.
3. *Pal Craftid*, by Elizabeth (Liz) B. Knott, page 31.
4. *Supporting a Christian Presence in the Middle East*, by Nuhad Tome, page 33.
5. *A Mountaintop Experience—Reaching out to Armenian Christians in Syria*, by Ani Cholakian, page 34.

Finally, turn to the front cover. This mosaic floor of the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and the Fishes in Tabgha in Galilee, Israel, was probably created in the fifth century CE.

- Take a couple of minutes to enjoy the patterns, the variety of subtle colors, the many sizes and shapes of the mosaic pieces.
- Read the story in *Matthew 14:14–21* or *John 6:1–14*.
- In light of all you have learned from this issue of *Horizons* on *Christians in the Middle East*, ponder the power of the symbols of bread and wine. What is the Middle East starving for? What does Jesus have to offer the people who live in his homeland today? What do we as Christians have to offer our sisters and brothers in the Middle East? What do you have to give, and how will you give it?