



*Light looked down and saw the darkness. "I will go there," said light.
Peace looked down and saw war. "I will go there," said peace.
Love looked down and saw hatred. "I will go there," said love.
So he, the Lord of Light, the Prince of Peace, the King of Love,
came down and crept in beside us.*

John Bell

Christmas 2015

Dear Friends,

This incredible God of ours has indeed "crept in beside us" amidst the darkness, the violence, and the fear that is just as present here in Bethlehem as in so many other places in our world. And Ma'an lil-Hayat has been especially privileged to be able to witness to and welcome the Light, Peace, and Love that have entered our lives in a multitude of ways during the past year.

The biggest of big news is that we have moved into our own place – a five-minute walk from the Church of the Nativity – thanks to the generosity of a number of organizations and individuals who recognize and support our desire to create and nurture a community where each person – regardless of differences in age, education, ability, faith tradition, or gender – is precious, is important, has something beautiful to offer to each other and to the society in which we live. Yes, each one of us is precious!



The inauguration of our new building took place in June, when old and new friends joined us in a joyful celebration of gratitude, not only for the gift of today's reality but also for the 30-year history of L'Arche in Palestine. A skit performed by the community illustrated the highlights of this rich and very fruitful journey – the moments of joy as well as the challenges. We were privileged to share this time of celebration with the members of the International Stewardship Board as well as the International Leadership Team, who happened to be meeting here.





Just before the inauguration, the entire community went on holiday – a FIRST for us! – in Tabgha, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, the traditional site of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. After much effort on the part of a number of our friends, in particular, Johannes (thanks again!), everyone was granted the extremely-hard-to-get permits that are issued by the Israeli military to allow Palestinians to leave Bethlehem and enter Jerusalem or Galilee. Johannes joined us for the holiday and brought with him seven volunteers from Germany. A highlight of the holiday was the boat ride on the Sea of Galilee. Along with some of the members of the International Stewardship Board and the International Leadership Team, we were about 60 people who spent most of the time dancing.



As if that weren't enough to celebrate, we received yet another gift, this time at the beginning of December: Jean Vanier came for a brief visit – a real blessing for all of us. Jean spent time in one of the work groups making sheep and joined us for our community night to decorate our Christmas tree. The tradition at Ma'an lil-Hayat is to come together before the Christmas holiday for an evening of gratitude, where each person, as he or she hangs an ornament on the tree, shares something for which he/she gives thanks, and offers a prayer for the coming year. It's a gentle evening that ends with a beautifully decorated tree and hearts full of joy and much gratitude.



Jean also visited the malja (the institution for people with intellectual disabilities in Bethany where a little non-traditional community of L'Arche exists which is made up of friends who have been part of L'Arche in one way or another over the past 30 years). A team of two assistants and two core members from Ma'an lil-Hayat usually spend one day per week at the malja. When Jean visited, he took time to speak with our friends there. We were about 25 people in all. Most of our friends are wheelchair users; many have very severe disabilities. Jean's message was simple: "I've come to tell you that each of you is precious, each of you is important...." And immediately, Ahmad spoke up: "Even me?" he asked. Yes, Ahmad, even you.



This was the good news that Jean came to share. And he had yet another opportunity to share it with even more people. On the last night of his visit, Jean gave a public talk in Bethlehem. The seasoned actors from Ma'an lil-Hayat offered another performance of their skit from the inauguration. And the evening was an explosion of joy.



Other highlights from 2015

- ❖ Jasmine, Hilmi, Yousef, Haytham, Sara, and Maram are becoming experts in public relations and community outreach. They've been invited to speak with university students, journalists, filmmakers, and local and international groups about their experience at Ma'an lil-Hayat.
- ❖ Our new building offers much more space than we had before and ultimately will allow us to welcome approximately 15 to 20 new people. Since April, we've welcomed Fadi, Khader, Salem, Hassan, and Jane.
- ❖ Our community leader, Mahera, has traveled to Egypt a couple of times as part of a formation team to share L'Arche experience and expertise with the community of Al-Fulk in Minya, and the new project in Alexandria.
- ❖ There is a steady stream of students from universities in the Bethlehem area who come to Ma'an lil-Hayat to do their practicum training. We are near the top of the list for best practicum experiences.
- ❖ Yousef, one of the assistants at Ma'an, joined two assistants from L'Arche in Damascus, Syria, to participate in a L'Arche formation session on communication methods that was held in Belgium in November.
- ❖ Haytham and Kathy went to Beirut in September to take part in the ongoing work of the reflection group on L'Arche and Islam.
- ❖ One of our biggest challenges is keeping up with all the orders from around the world for our handmade felt products, especially since we've added a number of new items to our collection. (New catalogue to be available soon!) During 2015, product sales covered a bit more than 50 percent of our operating costs. We sold a record-breaking 15,000 individual sheep!

*With much gratitude for our friends and benefactors,
we send Christmas greetings and best wishes
for a happy and blessed New Year from all of us at
Ma'an lil-Hayat/L'Arche Bethlehem!*