The journey from Bethlehem to Jerusalem is approximately 7 miles; yet it holds the full story of our faith: from the promise of a Savior fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, to his work of atonement on the cross, to his glorious resurrection and ascension, to the birth of the Church that gathers in peoples of every tongue and race. It is here we are living; and while living here, full drama is unfolding around us every week and every day - both in the liturgical celebrations and in the lives of our Palestinian Christian sisters and brothers! The past year or so has been filled with learning, adjusting, renewing friendships and new relationship building, networking, as well as accomplishing. My (Victor) assignment as regional consultant has kept me amply busy with the preparation and execution of a number of significant region-wide consultations, conferences and leadership training workshops that have addressed critical issues exacerbated by the so-called “Arab Spring.” The central questions for these ongoing events (encompassing 4 countries) are: “How much religion should be interposed in the affairs of the state, and how much state should interfere with religion?” and, “How can a shared vision be formulated and crystalized for a new future for the Arab Middle East whereby full citizenship for everyone would be assured, human dignity could be preserved, and a decent quality of life could be accorded to all?” The methodology adopted examines different models where different states have dealt with these questions and have found a healthy and meaningful symbiosis between religion and state, and then come up with an authentic Middle Eastern vision for the future of this region…

Life in this part of the world is intense, especially in Israel/Palestine; it is even more so on the West Bank. Daily life of the people here is full of challenges, possibilities, hopes, worries, disappointments and fears. One can read these emotions on their faces in the crowded marketplace: in their drawn looks, in street demonstrations, in the way many defy rules and authority, in the way many seem burdened and bent down.

But life is also full of joys and potentialities; you can see it in their bright eyes; their laughter and cheerful smiles; in children’s innocent play; and among youth, in their defiant confidence in a better future.

O God, we pray for calm, for reason, for good will to prevail, and for your spirit of counsel to guide leaders and those in authority into the paths of peace. We are deeply grateful for the prayers and support of church members and friends as we seek to live out our overriding commitment to the principle of “critical presence” by being an authentic witness to the love and the grace of God.

Victor and Sara Makari serve with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with the Diyar Consortium of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Victor serves as Regional Consultant for the Religion and State in the Middle East Program. Sara serves as editor of publications of Diyar.

You make the difference...

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