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Building Hope in the Holy Land

Fall 2022

## Introducing Eileen Spencer

*Spencer will become AFEDJ's new executive director in December*

*After a thorough, thoughtful national search, Eileen Spencer joined AFEDJ as its Executive Director-Elect on September 6. She will work alongside John Lent, the current Executive Director, who will retire at the end of this year. Spencer will officially become Executive Director on December 1.*

*Eileen, a proven nonprofit leader with extensive experience in international philanthropy, comes to AFEDJ from Hope for New York where she was Vice President for Mobilization and Generosity. She previously held senior positions with a foundation focused on economic development in Haiti and with World Vision. Her work has focused on raising awareness and resources for critical needs among some of the world's most vulnerable people across the globe.*



**Eileen Spencer arrives in Amman, Jordan, with AFEDJ trustees to tour diocesan schools and hospitals. From left, Cotty Peabody, Eileen Spencer, Suhail Qumri, and Lisa Sams.**

*AFEDJ's Communication Director Heidi Shott recently interviewed Spencer about her first impressions and what excites her about the future.*

**Q: When you first heard about this opportunity, what captured your attention?**

A: A priest friend heard about the Executive Director position and said, 'I think this sounds like something you would love. Maybe it's something you should look into.' I found that there were several things about this work that resonated with me. First is the connection with the Episcopal Church. For me, as a long-time active Episcopalian, this was like coming home. I've always known of the important work that the Episcopal Church does globally so this felt like a really good fit.

When I started to learn more about the actual work – that we were working on behalf of struggling and vulnerable children and families - that was a turning point for me. Then learning about the organization, that it's small but poised for growth. I'm always drawn back to a smaller organization to lend value in helping it grow. Finally, when I met some of the key players - staff and trust

ees - who are so passionate about the mission. I find it so refreshing to be around board members who want to be active and really get their hands on the work and be engaged.

**Q: With so many ways to be involved in the nonprofit sphere, what has drawn you to international work that focuses on the welfare of children and families?**

A: I started as the director of a Ronald McDonald house – which was local, right? – but it was focused on serving critically ill children and their families. Ever since, throughout my career, children have always had a special place in my heart, and my faith is really what fuels that passion. And we know from the Gospels that Jesus had a great love for children and the poor. I believe that each of us is obligated to use the gifts God has given us to serve those in need.

The very first trip I led for my church was to take a group of dentists and doctors to serve in a clinic in Honduras. As we drove up to the clinic, we passed a huge garbage dump. Everyone in the

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# Bearing Witness to launch in early 2023

**After many pandemic-related delays, AFEDJ's video-based study program provides a window into the remarkable witness of Christians in the Holy Land**

AFEDJ's education program, *Bearing Witness: A Journey with Holy Land Christians*, is one the Episcopal Church has been calling for at regular intervals over the past 30 years.

"*Bearing Witness* is an invitation to learn firsthand from Christians, Muslims, Jews in the Holy Land. We get to listen to them on their own terms and allow that listening and learning to transform us," said the Rev. Canon Nicholas Porter, an AFEDJ trustee and executive director of Jerusalem Peacebuilders. He added, "This program will help us recalibrate who we are as a church and as Christians and how we express that in our own ministries."

With help from individual supporters and a grant from the Constable Fund in partnership with the Standing Commission on World Mission, AFEDJ interviewed more than two dozen people in Palestine, Israel, and the US to capture a rich picture of the remarkable humanitarian ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem and the political, social and economic realities and challenges that make the diocesan institutions vital to their communities.

*Bearing Witness* is designed for small groups meeting either in-person or online under the guidance of a trained facilitator. Each of the five sessions focus on an aspect Jesus's ministry - Belonging, Healing, Teaching, Breaking Barriers, and Building Hope.



**With the expertise of our partners at Five Pebbles Productions, the talent of local Palestinian film crews, and the wonder and convenience of Zoom, interviews were conducted in Jerusalem, Nazareth, Ramallah, and - pictured here - Gaza. Clockwise from top left: Suhaila Tarazi, the director of Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City; Anne Kaplan of Five Pebbles Productions; John Lent, AFEDJ Executive Director; and Heidi Shott, AFEDJ Communications Director.**

The Most Rev. Hosam Naoum, Anglican Archbishop of Jerusalem, is featured in the first session that covers belonging and the many ways that religious, national and ethnic identities intersect in this complicated part of the world and the impact the Christian community has in the region. He said, "I am an Arab and Palestinian, and I am Christian at the same time. And that tells us a little bit about the complexity of identity within the area in which we live. Also, I am an

Israeli, but not Jewish. And I am an Arab, but not Muslim. I am a Palestinian, but not a terrorist as some people would imagine." He continued, "We, as Christians in this part of the world have a tradition of keeping the Christian faith that goes back to the day of Pentecost. Through *Bearing Witness* I invite you to come and see. With this wonderful program we are bringing the Holy Land to you through our stories, through our many ministries."



## Interested in learning more about Bearing Witness?

After a pilot program with a small number of churches in early 2023, AFEDJ will offer *Bearing Witness* to any church group that wishes to take part. We will provide facilitator training and support, videos, participant and facilitator guides, and background materials and resources – all available on our website at no charge and without a complicated registration process.

Please visit [www.afedj.org/bearingwitness](http://www.afedj.org/bearingwitness) to sign up for launch updates and sneak peeks of video clips.



# Care offered close to home relieves the burden for families with children with disabilities

Children with disabilities in Palestine already face enormous barriers to education, inclusion, and acceptance. A \$290,000 grant from Islamic Relief USA to Jerusalem Princess Basma Center (JPBC) will expand outreach services to six outlying West Bank communities, and families will be able to receive needed services much closer to home.

For families who live in East Jerusalem, the Princess Basma Center has offered rehabilitation services and early intervention since its founding in 1965. Some West Bank families are able to obtain travel permits to take part in JPBC's residential Mother Empowerment Program. But for most Palestinian families of children with disabilities, their options for treatment are few.

JPBC Director Violette Mubarak recently talked about the value of offering outreach services to families, "In Palestine we have a high percentage of children

with disabilities. They face discrimination and many challenges in their environment. For example, a child with a disability in the villages and camps in Palestine, does not have access for an education. They do not have access for health centers or rehabilitative treatment. Our mission is to reach out to children where they live."

The stigma of having a child with a disability also affects the wider family. Mubarak said, "The stigma, the shame is big for families who have children with disabilities. They feel all the shame and that the community blames them because they have a child with a disability. Families are afraid to come for treatment for their children to Jerusalem because it may become known in the community.



**JPBC Medical Director Dr. Waddah Malhees checks in with Razi whose son Ahmad takes part in a therapy session**

The outreach program offers families local evaluation and treatment and, if a referral is necessary for additional treatment, relationships with the outreach team are established and make it easier for families to seek treatment at JPBC.

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van was complaining about how they were going to have to walk up a hill to the clinic in the rain. They were going to get soaking wet. They were hungry. No one else noticed the little girl I saw standing on top of garbage dump collecting rainwater spilling off the piles of trash and drinking it. The imbalance in that moment seemed wrong to me. It seemed like something we could address. That was a turning point for me. That was probably 30 years ago, and I remember it like it was yesterday.

**Q: The core of AFEDJ's mission is to raise funds to support schools and hospitals. We don't offer direct services or develop programs or provide technical assistance. We raise awareness about need and then work to raise funds to meet that need. What is your theology of fundraising?**

A: I've thought about that question a lot! No matter where I think I'm headed, I always end up back in fundraising. I don't

"...it's important to go to some of the hardest places in the world, places where hope is sometimes in short supply. Jesus is already there. We just need to show up and do the work, do whatever we can do to bring hope and healing."

say this lightly: Fundraising is a ministry in itself. It's about marrying supporters with those in need, but it's also for making space for transformation for both the beneficiaries and the donors. I've seen that transformation in donors again and again.

When you can connect someone's passion to a project that makes a difference in people's lives and it sets them on fire. That's exciting! That's one of the things I love about the work of AFEDJ. With this work, we don't have to dig around to see the impact. It's right there.

**Q: Now that you've been on board for a month, what do you find most exciting about the future of American Friends?**

A: There are a lot of things that excite me about this work. First, I'm excited to grow the organization by raising more money to support this work and being laser focused on the needs of the Diocese. Second, I think it's important to go to some of the hardest places in the world, places where hope is sometimes in short supply. Jesus is already there. We just need to show up and do the work, do whatever we can do to bring hope and healing. I still have so much to learn but I'm thrilled about our October trip to the diocese with our trustees. The opportunity to visit 11 institutions and meet their leaders and to gather our trustees, staff, and Archbishop Hosam Naoum just one month into my tenure is perfect. I'm already excited about this work, but what a great opportunity to deepen attachments because, ultimately, American Friends is about building relationships.



**Building Hope in the Holy Land**

25 Old King's Highway North, Suite 13  
Darien, Connecticut 06820

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## Questions about AFEDJ or our work?

**Please be in touch!**

John Lent, Executive Director  
jlent@afedj.org | 914.841.5175

Eileen Spencer, Executive Director-Elect  
espencer@afedj.org | 914.924.9704

Heidi Shott, Communications Director  
hshott@afedj.org | 207.592.7353

## Our online Advent Calendar returns Engage with ministry in the Holy Land every day in Advent

Join us again this Advent season as we explore the themes of hope, love, peace, and joy with people from the schools and hospitals in the Diocese of Jerusalem. Each day offers a window into lives and ministries of today's Holy Land Christians in the land where Jesus was born through brief videos and interviews, photos, and prayers.



Sign up now for a daily alert for each day's window  
throughout the Advent season at [www.afedj.org/advent](http://www.afedj.org/advent)

Join friends across the U.S. in learning about the ministries of the Diocese of Jerusalem and remembering them in your prayers.

Last year nearly 300 people signed up to receive an email alert each morning with a link to that day's daily dose of joy and hope. If you subscribed in 2021, please subscribe again at [www.afedj.org/advent](http://www.afedj.org/advent). If you didn't, please consider signing up before December 1. Once a window is open, it stays open throughout Advent until Epiphany so you can visit the calendar at anytime.

## Close to home... *continued from page 3*

"Donors who give to 'Where the need is greatest' support AFEDJ's work with institutions like Princess Basma Center on grants such as the Islamic Relief grant," said AFEDJ's John Lent. "This grant will have a huge impact on thousands of families within the next 24 months and, because of the increased capacity and expertise developed at the local clinics, thousands more families in the years to come."