

# STORIES OF FAITH IN ACTION

## Living the Difference in Palestine

A normal day for Chelsea Mathis—helping to promote travel through the Peace Not Walls campaign of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) followed by a bit of bassoon playing in the afternoon—sounds fairly typical.



Ordinary accompanies the extraordinary in Palestine. “Palestinians are adept at celebrating life’s joys and making do with what they have. I feel as at home here as I do in my home state of Michigan,” Chelsea says.

A trip as a teenager to Palestine with her ELCA Southeast Michigan Synod inspired Chelsea to participate in ELCA’s Young Adults in Global Mission program. An area plagued by troubles has left its mark, good and bad. “The worst part has been realizing how helpless I am in regards to changing the future of the political situation for Palestinians,” she says. “The best part is that I have changed the future through my presence, support and simple acts of kindness.”

Chelsea admits her faith has been challenged. “What does it mean that a land called holy is torn with violence, hatred and fear?”

The solution lies in seeing each other’s humanness, Chelsea believes. “Our commonality as people trumps all differences—religion, race, gender, political party. Israelis and Palestinians must see the human in each other’s eyes to begin to erase the hatred and fear.”

Chelsea understands how intimidating a year-long stint in a foreign country can seem. Pack your faith, leave your fear behind and “go for it,” she advises. “Getting up the nerve to leave everything you know behind can be extremely hard. But you will grow and be fulfilled in ways you’d never imagine.”

With her Palestinian journey nearing its end, Chelsea looks to her future. “Whatever I do,” she says, “I know I’ll make time for advocating for peace and justice in the Holy Land. I learned from my first trip to Palestine that once you’ve been there, it’s always on your heart and mind.”

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Do you have a story to share? E-mail us at [stories@elca.org](mailto:stories@elca.org).



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