

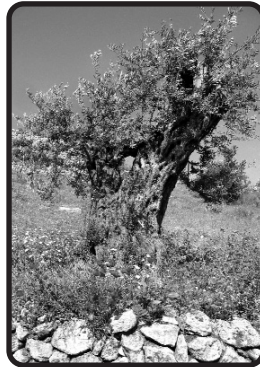
*“Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us”*

PSALM 67:6

## Keeping Alive the Harvest

**T**his is the time of harvest in Palestine. I remember as a child when we harvested the olives. My father hired daily workers to help with the picking, and we went to our land before sunrise. The workers carried long ladders and lay them against the trees, picking the olives with their hands. These trees were members of the larger creation, and deserving of care and respect.

Women sitting at the foot of each tree laid bed covers on the earth so that the olives could fall down on smooth and clean sheets. The best olives were put aside for pickling, while the rest went to the press to make pure and extra virgin olive oil. Like the ancient Canaanites, Oriental Christians still bring the first bottles of this olive oil to the church to light the altar candles.



The olive harvest was unforgettable. You could see dozens of ladders pointing to heaven. One daily worker would start singing a harvest song, and then the neighboring workers joined in. The singing would continue on the following Sunday at Christmas Lutheran Church, where the sanctuary was decorated with the best fruits: grapes, pomegranates, and olives, as a sign of thanksgiving to God for the countless blessings we received.

Today, 40 years of occupation destroys this culture. The building of walls, confiscation of lands, violation of water rights, and restrictions on freedom of movement make the harvest difficult. I'm glad that our artisans have picked the symbol of the olive leaf as a reminder of our identity and spirituality. It is our mission to make sure that this spirit remains alive in Palestine – that nothing can steal from us our feast, our song and our culture.

Reverend Mitri Rahbe is the pastor of the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, a partner with Global Ministries.

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The prayers and help you provide through your local congregations make possible the work and witness of GLOBAL MINISTRIES, which is supported by Disciples Mission Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) of the United Church of Christ.

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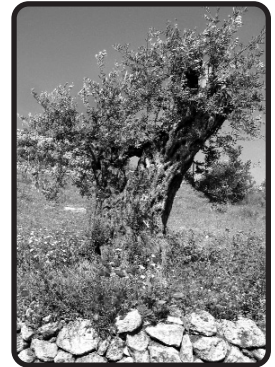
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