

## A Reflection on my pilgrimage to the Holy Land

The Rt. Rev. Laura J. Ahrens, Bishop Suffragan, Episcopal Church in Connecticut  
Lent, 2017

As I reflected on my pilgrimage to our Holy Land in 2014, I found myself remembering a multitude of stories about times when I felt like my journey echoed my Lord's journey. His presence was palpable during my pre-dawn walk to the Church of the Holy Nativity and as I walked the sacred journey of Holy Week.

But the story which I hold closest in my heart is about running.

I love to run.

When I was studying at St. George's College in East Jerusalem, I would often run on the treadmill at the YMCA across the street.

One day a young woman dressed in sweat pants, a blue windbreaker and a hijab climbed onto the treadmill next to me.

She was a faster runner than I am so I gradually increased my speed, excited that I had a running companion! As her pace picked up, I followed suit. I felt as though I was being called to be better, to grow, to push myself to new opportunities and to explore new places.

I wish I could tell you at the end of the run we nodded and expressed a smile. But instead she gathered up her things, collected her children from the child-care room next-door and off she went.

Of all the people I remember in our Holy Land, I pray for her and her children first.

When I hear of violence in the Holy Land, I pray for her and her children. What does she teach her children about peace and reconciliation? How does she face the day-to-day struggles lived in our Holy Land by everyone there?

In sharing one of my favorite things, running, I feel like I have a new friend. I feel like I met someone not as a tourist or a spectator, but as a companion on the journey. Someone like me, seeking to stay healthy amidst the confusing messages and ideas about how to move forward into the 21st century.

The incarnation is about God becoming flesh and dwelling among us. Let us seek to dwell fully with those with whom we share the journey. We are not spectators, but full participants. Make connections, share what you love, invite others to share their passions with you. When we do, we grow, we expand our horizons and we break down old barriers. In engaging with strangers along the way, I believe we echo the journey of our Lord.