Beckoning pilgrims to the place of Jesus’ Baptism
An MIF loan helps build a church at the sacred site
Christians gather to dedicate a new church building on the banks of the Jordan River

In 2006, Jordan’s King Abdullah II ibn al-Hussein learned that the site of Jesus’ Baptism had been found and verified. He understood the magnitude of this find for Christians the world over, and he granted this holy land to seven Christian churches. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) was one of the fortunate recipients of a parcel of land on the banks of the Jordan River.

Immediately, the ELCJHL began plans to build a church and pilgrimage and retreat center. The Mission Investment Fund was honored to provide a loan for this special project. This is an opportunity for MIF and the ELCA both to support its sister church in the Holy Land, and to help provide all church members a sacred place to make a pilgrimage.

“This holy site is very important for Lutherans,” says the Rt. Rev. Munib Younan, bishop of the ELCJHL. “By making this gift of land to us, King Abdullah II is reaching out to Christians in the Middle East. He wants to encourage and strengthen our presence here in Jordan.”

The focal point of the ELCJHL’s Baptismal Site project is the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan with a capacity for 200 worshipers. The church will host worship for Lutherans and others and offer a welcoming destination for pilgrims from all nations.

“We hope to make this a center of pilgrimage for people from the United States and from around the world. All people are welcome to experience the love of God at the Baptismal Site,” Bishop Younan says. “The ELCJHL is also deeply grateful to MIF and the ELCA for assistance in building at this sacred site. Without funding from MIF, this project would not have happened.”

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More than 200 clergy, royalty and guests from around the world attended the dedication of the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Bethany–Beyond–the–Jordan, conducted under the patronage of King Abdullah II of Jordan. Prince Raed bin Zeid of Jordan attended the service as the king’s representative.
The Mission Investment Fund’s mission is to help churches grow and expand, and it is especially inspirational to support such important work in the Holy Land.” —MIF President Eva M. Roby

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The much anticipated dedication of the site fittingly took place on the feast of the Epiphany, January 6, 2014. The event was attended by clergy, royalty, friends and supporters from around the globe.

MIF President and CEO Eva M. Roby attended the dedication. “The Mission Investment Fund is humbled to be able to participate in a building project at such a sacred site,” she says. “Our mission is to help churches grow and expand, and it is especially inspirational to support such important work in the Holy Land. We know this Pilgrimage and Retreat Center at the Baptismal Site will beckon the faithful for generations to come.”

Newly appointed pastor, the Rev. Rolf Pearson, a pastor from the Church of Sweden who has worked around the world, is excited about the opportunities the Baptismal Site brings. “Baptism is such an important part in the life of the church,” he says. “A pilgrimage center here for local Christians as well as for people from all nations will be compelling.” Pastor Pearson’s wife, Kerstin, will be instrumental in starting up the retreat center.

Other churches receiving Jordan River land are: the Roman Catholic Church, Maronite Church, Armenian Church, Coptic Church, Syrian Orthodox Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church. All of the churches’ properties are within several hundred feet of the original site of Jesus’ Baptism.
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These are the elements of youth ministry at every congregation—and key components of the ELCA Youth Gathering designed for high school age students. The next Youth Gathering is only a year and a half away—July 15-19, 2015, in Detroit, Michigan.

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The Mission Investment Fund offers a special Demand Investment Youth Ministry account. This account earns you interest on your fundraising dollars—along with the flexibility and convenience of writing checks as expenses occur.

Your congregation can open an MIF Demand Investment Youth Ministry account for as little as $100, and your funds will be available to you when you need them. Take advantage of your first set of free checks, 24/7 online access to the account, and a convenient, on-site service center at the Youth Gathering.

July 2015 is closer than you think. Visit mif.elca.org for more information and to download a Demand Investment Youth Ministry application.
Every day, the Mission Investment Fund’s Regional Manager LuAnn Ferguson touts the benefits of MIF’s investment products as she meets with customers in her territory—the congregations, ministries and synods of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

It’s no surprise, then, that she has an MIF4KIDZ account in place for her 10-year-old son Connor—and that she makes sure to communicate the importance of investing in MIF.

“I told Connor: Before, your savings were in the bank. Then I asked him: Do you know where your money is now?”

MIF’s regional manager mom answered her own question: “With your MIF4KIDZ account, you’re helping more people know more...”
about Jesus. Your money is helping to build the church.”

The MIF4KIDZ account is designed as a savings tool for youth from birth to age 16. Additions can be made up to maturity, and the investments mature on the youth’s 18th birthday—just in time for college or the purchase of big-ticket expenses like travel or a car.

Connor responded positively. He asked his mom to tell him more about the churches and ministries that MIF helps grow. He wanted to hear the stories of MIF loans at work in congregations—and how those loans build sanctuaries, classrooms for Bible study, soup kitchens, food pantries and more. “Mom, that is so cool,” he responded. “It’s so cool that more people know about Jesus because of my savings and your work.”

It wasn’t long before Connor had the opportunity to experience one of the churches that is expanding with the help of an MIF loan. Ferguson brought her son along for a visit to First Lutheran Church in Little Falls, Minnesota, where an MIF loan helped the church create an updated, brighter sanctuary. Connor’s eyes widened and a smile spread across his face as he entered the revitalized space. “Now I can see my money in action,” he said. “This is a great thing!”

Ferguson is delighted that she was able to play a role in her son’s epiphany. “Christ was clearly working in me as a mom to teach my son to be a wise steward of his finances,” she says. “Now Connor has a stronger connection to his church and a greater appreciation for sharing the good news of Jesus with others. It’s wonderful to have the ability to help nurture the seed in a child. It is our responsibility to help teach the next generation.

“It’s so important for kids to connect with the church.”

And while Connor still has many years before his MIF4KIDZ account matures, being the thoughtful 10-year-old that he is, he’s thinking ahead. How might he apply those funds? “I’ll use my MIF4KIDZ account savings to help with college tuition,” he says. Connor is slated for a “good college,” he says confidently, “like MIT.”

Connor Ferguson and the Rev. David Sperstad, pastor of First Lutheran Church in Little Falls, Minnesota, where Connor saw first-hand how his MIF4KIDZ investment provided funds for the church’s MIF loan.

“It’s so cool that more people know about Jesus because of my savings and my mom’s work.”

—MIF investor Connor Ferguson