

# Discovery in the dirt

**A**lmost immediately after returning from the archaeological trip to Israel sponsored by Concordia Lutheran Seminary in the summer of 2008, I found myself repeatedly wondering, “Did I really just do that?” It’s a question that has kept coming up since then, too. The trip both met and exceeded the expectations I had and was an experience I will never forget.

Many people have asked about my favourite part of the trip. I have to pause whenever they ask and think for a moment. Even after having ample opportunity to think, I can honestly say I cannot choose only one favourite part. I loved digging. I loved touring. I loved the people. I loved the learning. I loved staying at the kibbutz. I loved it all! There were many different facets to the trip and each was incomparable to the others.

## Dirty discoveries

Although I cannot choose a favourite, each aspect of the trip had special highlights. The largest portion of our trip was devoted to the dig and nothing can describe its thrill. Those first hours of uncertainty quickly give way to confidence as you “schlep” buckets and toss rocks bigger than anything you have ever lifted before, each one bringing the team closer to that “something” it hopes to find. Of course, the biggest thrill is finding that “something.”

For me, this came when I discovered two pieces of cleanly cut marble and two pieces of an oil lamp with Christian designs pressed into it. It was especially exciting to know the oil lamp could be dated and it might be a little more useful than the average piece of pottery found in our square. Finding these more significant things was the



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highlight of my dig time.

## A tourist

These discoveries are in a different category from tour highlights. Touring was a highlight itself. While no particular attraction stands out as better than another, a few things will always be notable to me. One is the first-century domestic housing complex at Capernaum. I read about it in an article before the trip and enjoyed seeing the ruins up close. I wish we could have walked through it to gain a deeper understanding of how all the rooms and walls fit together.

Another highlight was the collection of “rocking” columns at Jerash, Jordan. Too often the ancient world is understood as being backward and yet these columns are one piece of evidence that it was advanced in many ways.

A third site that stands out for me is visiting the Church of St. Anne in Jerusalem. I loved the acoustics and could have sung there for hours. A lack of tourists while we were visiting made it seem more peaceful than some of the other sites. I appreciated the time we

## Challenges

had to sit there in silence and contemplate where we were. All these, combined with the other sites we saw on this trip helped make it an incredible experience.

Although filled with highlights, the trip was not without its challenges. The first was simply adjusting to being there. Jet lag contributed to fatigue but also added to the natural disorientation of being somewhere new. It took a few days before I could really grasp where I was and what I was doing.

Then, there was the physical challenge of walking up the mountain, wielding a pick-axe and hoe, and hoisting heavy buckets and rocks. Due to my personal physical limitations, I often felt frustrated not being able to help my team more especially when it came to heavy lifting.

Along with the physical challenges came emotional and spiritual ones. My biggest emotional challenge was absorption. I absorb and comprehend things best when I am alert, unhurried and can take time out for contemplation and thought. I saw and did so much in such a short time that this was nearly impossible. It was a barrier which made it difficult to gain as much spiritual insight into things as I would have liked.

Even after returning to the kibbutz each day there was limited time for deeper reflection. During our free time I tried to stay on top of laundry, my blog and cataloguing pictures so I would not forget their significance. Also, being an introvert, I needed to find enough solo time, away from the rest of the group, to recharge so I would be ready for the next day. All this plus making it to bed at a decent hour left little time for reflection. Knowing myself as I do, some of these challenges were not unexpected, although others found me slightly unprepared. Thankfully none was significant enough to ruin my trip.

### Go for it!

For anyone thinking about participating in this kind of trip in 2010, I offer plenty of encouragement. It is an experience unlike any other. Having said this, you should remember that the trip is not primarily for touring, but part of an ongoing archaeological dig; those not prepared for this should stay home. Participants must also be flexible and ready for anything. There are always struggles on this kind of trip, but as the Bible promises, "I can do everything through Him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). The experience is worth the struggle.

## You can dig it in 2010

Concordia Lutheran Seminary, Edmonton extends an invitation to all LCC church workers and church-members to take part in the 2010 Hippos Excavation. The group leaves Canada Thursday July 1 and returns Saturday, July 17. Two weeks (10 days) of digging at the North-East Church will be interspersed with tours of the Sea of Galilee region, Jerusalem, and other sites of Biblical and archaeological importance. The estimated cost per person is \$4,100 CAD. This includes return airfare (Edmonton-Tel Aviv), ground transportation, all accommodations, most meals, and most admission fees. Participants from other parts of Canada are welcome to meet the Edmonton group at Pearson Airport in Toronto. For further information and an application form, follow the "Hippos" link on the seminary's website: [www.concordiasem.ab.ca](http://www.concordiasem.ab.ca). The application deadline is March 15, 2010, but earlier applications are encouraged.

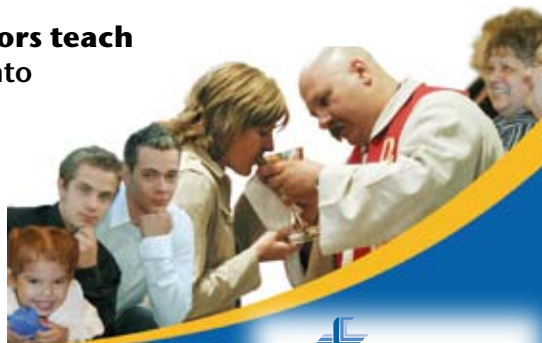
After all, what other work offers such a spectacular view of the Sea of Galilee or the opportunity to connect in such a concrete way with the ancient roots of our faith? Can a book teach you this kind of archaeology? Is there another vacation that would allow participants to visit the same location years later and say, "I found that wall in this fifth-century church?"

While the trip demands much, it gives back more. It was well worth the effort it required of us who travelled and worked there two years ago. It is my prayer that many others will take advantage of this experience in 2010.

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## As God's people in Lutheran Church—Canada

- Let's **study God's Word** in our churches making His words a part of who we are as His children
- We need to revive and practice the discipline of substantial and **daily Bible reading**
- After investing solid time in God's Word, **pastors teach and preach** in ways that bring God's words into the lives of His people
- Responding to God's love in Jesus Christ, our churches can be **nurturing places** where we enter into each other's lives, growing as a family.



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