



WORKING TOGETHER:
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, D.C. - July 7, 2026

Religious Leader Overcomes Personal Setbacks to Complete IRONMAN Competitions in Support of Peace in the Middle East

Persistence is an Essential Quality for Peace

July 7, 2026, Washington D.C.- When the Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon first conceived of competing in an IRONMAN Triathlon to support freedom, justice, and peace in the Middle East, she never could have imagined the physical and emotional toll that her fundraising endeavor would bring. As Executive Director of Churches for Middle East Peace for the past decade, Cannon undertook a deeply personal and transformative journey, aiming to raise \$140,600 to complete the 140.6 miles of a full IRONMAN competition: 2.4 miles swimming, 112 miles cycling, 26.2 miles of marathon running. Holding to one of the mottos of the IRONMAN, “Anything is possible!” Cannon participated in several smaller races, every stroke, pedal, and step bringing her closer not only to her personal finish line, but to the vision of a better tomorrow for those who need it most. Her original goal was the completion of an IRONMAN on September 20, 2025, in Cambridge, Maryland. But that goal became a dream deferred because of health challenges she could not have anticipated.

The pursuit of the IRONMAN directly correlated to Cannon’s work at Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) after the horrors of the Hamas attacks on Israel, October 7, 2023, and in the subsequent months of nearly daily bombardment, devastation, and attacks on the nearly two million people living in the Gaza Strip. Peace between Israelis and Palestinians, especially after the devastation of the past few years, seems impossible. Every mile, every hour of training, every moment of persistence amid the challenges of training for the IRONMAN remind Mae and the CMEP team that peace is worth fighting for and that an end to violence is possible. Mae reflects, “Every mile, I carry in my heart and body the people of Gaza and the tens of thousands who have lost loved ones throughout the Middle East these past several years.” CMEP’s motto is “peace is possible, justice will prevail.”

However, as Cannon neared the date of competition, she was passing out in training. She was then diagnosed with a chronic condition that takes what was already seemingly impossible and made it all the more challenging. After consulting with doctors who prescribed

her medicine and other remedies, Cannon was able to resume training, aiming initially to compete in the May 2026 half IRONMAN in Victoria, British Columbia. Again, health issues made that date impossible. But persistence is an essential quality for peace! On June 20, 2026, Cannon finished third among women in the Three Lakes Triathlon on an Olympic-distance course in Friday Harbor, Washington.

Her goal continues. Cannon will compete in a half IRONMAN in Ohio on Sunday, July 19, 2026, in preparation for her competition in the IRONMAN Cambridge, Maryland on September 19, 2026. As Cannon stated, "This journey of persistence and perseverance has taught me that together, we can race toward a world where justice and peace are within reach. Your support will help me cross the finish line and, more importantly, empower those who are working tirelessly for a brighter future." All funds will support the work of Churches for Middle East Peace, which for over 40 years has advocated, educated, and elevated voices in the Middle East, with the steadfast belief that peace is possible, and justice will prevail when we work together. "Personally, I've faced significant health setbacks that make this ambition feel daunting. Yet, I remain hopeful that, together, we can bring lasting change and create a peaceful future. Join me on this journey."

[Donations to support CMEP's work toward Middle East Peace and Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon's IronMan journey can be made here. Learn more about Rev. Dr. Mae Elise Cannon's journey here!](#)

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Formed in 1984, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is a coalition of more than 30 national church communions and organizations, including Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant, and Evangelical traditions that works to encourage US policies that actively promote a comprehensive resolution to conflicts in the Middle East with a focus on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. CMEP works to mobilize US Christians to embrace a holistic perspective and to be advocates of equality, human rights, security, and justice for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of the Middle East.

Recent CMEP Statements and Press Releases:

Jun 18, 2026: [CMEP Welcomes U.S.-Iran Memorandum of Understanding and Calls for Comprehensive Regional Peace](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) welcomes the recently announced Memorandum of Understanding between the United States and Iran as a possible first step toward a broader and more durable peace in the Middle East. For far too long, the peoples of the region have borne the devastating consequences of war, military escalation, displacement, and political instability. This agreement must mark the beginning of a comprehensive diplomatic process that will halt violence across the region and create the conditions necessary for a just and lasting peace.

Jun 15, 2026: Churches for Middle East Peace Elevates the Statement of the Lutheran Church and Expresses Concern Over the Arrest of Four Palestinian University Students

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins Bishop Dr. Imad Haddad and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) in expressing deep concern over the arbitrary arrest of four Palestinian female university students in the occupied West Bank, including Joulan Abu Awwad, Sama Safi, Laila Khalil, and ELCJHL youth Natalie Abu Diya.

June 5, 2026: CMEP is deeply alarmed by the recent arrest and detention of four Palestinian university students by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) is deeply alarmed by the recent arrest and detention of four Palestinian university students by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, including Birzeit University student Natalie Abu Diya, a Palestinian Christian and member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala.

April 27, 2026: Joint Freedom Day Statement Calls for Global Solidarity, Truth-Telling, Unity, and Justice Across Continents

On Freedom Day in South Africa, commemorating the end of apartheid and the birth of a democratic nation, a coalition of Christian leaders and institutions issued a joint statement linking the legacy of South Africa's liberation struggle to urgent global calls for justice Palestine and Israel. The statement was released by the Reformed Church in America (RCA), Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) and the South African Council of Churches (SACC), together with our ecumenical partners, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA) and the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC).

Apr 24, 2026: CMEP Statement on the 111th Anniversary of the Armenian Genocide

On this solemn 111th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) joins with communities around the world in remembrance of the 1.5 million Armenians who were systematically killed and displaced beginning in 1915. We honor the memory of those who perished, stand with their descendants, and reaffirm our commitment to truth, justice, and the dignity of all people.

Contact Us

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)

110 Maryland Ave NE, Suite 505

Washington, District of Columbia 20002

(202) 543-1222 info@cmepeg.org

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