

**E-mail Newsletter from  
BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ).**

**The ELCJ is serving in  
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.  
July 3, 2002**

*Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, the city of Christ's death and resurrection.*

**Much of the West Bank Is Re-occupied by Israeli Military Forces**

Each day we learn of more Israeli troops and armaments entering Palestinian towns and cities in retaliation for the recent bombings in Jerusalem. At the moment, all major Palestinian towns except Jericho have been re-occupied.

The ELCJ and Bishop Dr. Munib Younan condemn the bombings in the strongest terms, as we always have. Violence only begets violence, as we know so well. Our road to peace is through political dialogue and personal reconciliation, gifts that the Christian church has to offer.

The re-occupation began with cities in the north: Jenin, Nablus, Kalilya, Tulkarm. On Thursday, June 20, Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour were re-occupied, the population put under curfew. Early Monday, June 24, Ramallah was once again completely re-occupied and under curfew. Hebron and the Gaza Strip have suffered the same re-occupation, and there have been many injuries and deaths just in the past week.

We hear many different stories, threats and promises. We hear that this re-occupation will last a long time. We hear that "if" particular things happen, the troops will leave. The one thing we know for certain is that this re-occupation has to do with Israeli military power and presence, not the resumption of responsibility for social services, as was true before the Palestinian Authority (PA) took over that responsibility following the Oslo agreements. In other words, the PA remains responsible for medical care, hospitals, education, and city management, including garbage pickup and repair of extensive damage to streets and buildings, although the PA has essentially been struck down and destroyed. This increases the difficulties the Palestinian are facing.

We are hearing that the Israeli government is debating what to do with the families of Palestinian people who bring violence against Israel. Perhaps the decision will result in expulsion for the whole family; perhaps it will result in house demolitions. The Israeli government is undecided as yet. What we know for certain is that illegal collective punishment is taking place at this moment, as nearly two million Palestinian people are held as prisoners for the acts of a few.

On a positive note and an example of taking strong, positive action, on June 19 a group of 55 Palestinian intellectuals, including Ms Hanan Ashrawi, urged Palestinian militants to halt attacks on civilians inside Israel, saying they hindered Palestinian aspirations for independence. The message, which urged those behind the military attacks on civilians to reconsider their positions and to stop pushing the youth to carry out the attacks, was published in a full-page advertisement

in al-Quds, an Arabic daily newspaper. At least 155 more Palestinians have added their names to the advertisement since it was published.

## **2. The Lutheran Schools**

We are in communication with all the Lutheran schools, knowing they are at the end of the school year with many exams for undergraduates and with the comprehensive Tawjihi exams for the seniors. In some ways the Tawjihi exams may be compared to the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in the U.S. or matriculation in Europe, but the Tawjihi exams are much more extensive. A legacy from the Jordanian system of education, to sit for the Tawjihi exams means taking eleven separate tests. The Tawjihi began being administered on June 17 and continues until July 4. These comprehensive tests are extremely important for the graduating students because without passing them the students cannot enter any Middle Eastern college or university. Therefore, when the Tawjihi exams are interrupted and not completed, as in the case of the Palestinians living under curfew or prevented from going to their schools, the students are effectively prevented from going on with their higher education, thus adversely affecting their whole future and the society as a whole. The Tawjihi may be repeated, but the students need to wait a whole year before the tests are once again given, and in the current Palestinian situation there is no guarantee the following year will bring any better results.

**Beit Sahour Lutheran School** – Headmaster Hani Odeh reports that the curfew has made it impossible for the younger students to take their final exams, so the school is issuing certificates of completion based upon the students’ work and tests during the school year. The Tawjihi students have begun taking their exams during the hours the curfew is lifted, and the hope is that the tests can be completed in this way.

**Dar al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem** – Principal Dr. Charlie Haddad is also trying to use the times when the curfew is lifted to bring the ninth and tenth grade students to school for their final exams in the basic courses. The Tawjihi tests are not a factor because this school is new and the eleventh and twelfth grades have not yet been developed. Mr. Haddad is attempting to give the balance of the ninth and tenth grade tests (nine in all), but if that is not possible, certificates of completion will have to be given instead. “It is a very disappointing way to end the school year,” Dr. Haddad said. “Just before the curfew was imposed we had the school secretary take her computer home so the students’ grades could be computed and entered. Despite the curfew, she is able to communicate with the teachers, so we have saved much work and avoided much delay with this plan.” Hard as it is to look ahead at this point, Dr. Haddad stated that Dar al-Kalima plans to begin an eleventh grade in 2003 and a twelfth grade in 2004.

**Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah** – Headmaster Michael Abu Ghazaleh states that all the exams for the students are completed, but that the Tawjihi students are waiting to complete their tests.

**Talitha Kumi Lutheran School in Beit Jala** -- Headmaster Wilhem Gollar at Talitha Kumi informs us that the senior students are taking their Tawjihi exams whenever the curfew is lifted in Beit Jala, Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. Certificates of completion have been given based on work done during the school year in place of final examinations for the children in other grades.

**Lutheran Home for Boys in Beit Jala** – The Head Educator at the home, Mr. Khader Musallam, states that most of the boys have returned to their homes for the summer, but seven remain at the Lutheran home. Three are from Ramallah and cannot return home because of the distance and the curfew. Four seniors are taking their Tawjihi exams as they are able due to the curfew. There are also three educators remaining at the home along with Mr. Musallam himself.

**Youth Gathering** – We are waiting to see if a planned and much-awaited Youth Gathering for Palestinian Lutheran young people can be held in August in Amman, Jordan. There is increased difficulty in crossing the border to Jordan.

### **3. New Director Appointed for the ELCJ Schools**

Bishop Younan is pleased to announce that Dr. Charlie Haddad has been appointed by the ELCJ as the new Director of the Lutheran Schools and his work will begin September 1. Ms Viola Raheb, the former director, was married on June 29 in Amman and will be living out of the country. We give our best wishes to her and her husband Marwan, and thank Viola for all her contributions to the ELCJ school system.

Dr. Haddad has most recently been the principal of the Dar al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem, and previously was the director of the LWF Vocational Training School in Beit Hanina.

We ask your prayers for Dr. Haddad, his family and the whole ELCJ school system as this transition takes place.

### **4. Recent Correspondence Brings Hope and Strength**

The pastor and chairperson of the church council of Lyngby Baptist Church in Lyngby, Denmark, have written words of encouragement to the ELCJ. Following is an excerpt of their letter:

*“We feel deeply concerned at the present situation in your country. We wish to express our sympathetic understanding, although we also feel powerless. By writing this letter, on behalf of Lyngby Baptist Church, we wish to express our thoughts and prayers for you in the hope that peace and reconciliation may prevail in Palestine/Israel. We are currently trying to have the churches in Lyngby organize a joint worship of prayer.”*

The Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland recently sent a letter to the Governments of the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom. Here are excerpts from the letter written by Edmund T.I. Mawhinney, Secretary of the Methodist Conference:

*“. . .the Conference noted with deep regret and disquiet the continuing violence in Palestine and Israel which has caused suffering and injustice to many ordinary people on both sides of the conflict.*

*“In the opinion of the Conference, peace and security for the whole region can only be achieved when the recognized norms of international law and judgment (with particular reference to the UN Security Council resolutions) are observed. . .*

*“The Conference expressed its solidarity with and its support of the churches throughout the whole region and also its appreciation of the tireless efforts being made by the relief organizations involved in the area.”*

We also greatly appreciate the Middle East statement made on June 27, 2002, by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Presiding Bishop, the Rev. Mark S. Hanson. He concludes the statement by saying, *“Our prayers are focused on the people of the Middle East who suffer in the midst of political, economic and social uncertainty and destruction. We pray also that the leaders of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and the United States may be bold, courageous and wise in taking immediate, specific steps and finding equitable solutions for all people in this deeply troubled region.”* On July 3 an excellent summary of Bishop Hanson’s article appeared in a major Arabic newspaper in Jerusalem, and undoubtedly will be carried in many others. See Part 5 to note why an American Christian statement calling for an end to the occupation and for a two-state solution is so significant in this land.

### **5. The Difficulties Caused by Right Wing Christians**

Bishop Younan is becoming very concerned about the voice and the influence of what is sometimes called the “Christian Right” or “Christian Zionism” because it is steadily growing in Israel and Palestine, and in the USA and Europe. We hear local radio programs and read articles, for example, by Christians in support of the right wing policies of the present government of Israel who claim to speak for all Christians in their beliefs and opinions. While we know this is not true, we are very alarmed by the ideas which are being sown and about the reactions we are hearing from some of our Muslim friends: *“We know you Palestinian Christians are good, but now we are understanding that all Western Christians are against us and in complete support of Israel.”*

It is extremely important that the mainline Christian churches in the USA and Europe speak out strongly and commit themselves to the pro-peace and pro-justice cause of the Palestinian people. Helena Cobban in a May 2002 article entitled “American Churches and the Middle East” has written that while she believes a strong pro-peace coalition of mainline American Christian denominations is possible, she also believes that until now these American Christian churches have lacked two main things: *“1) The confidence to speak up publicly and in a sustained way against the (unjust) policies of the Israeli governments,”* and *“2) The degree of commitment to the pro-peace cause that would have seen them invest real financial and human resources into building an effective nationwide, grassroots organization.”*

Ms Cobban points to several efforts being made by mainline American pro-peace Christian groups and wants to encourage them. We would add that we believe both American and European churches can be of enormous help in bringing peace to the Middle East if they will have the courage to join together and speak fearlessly about the need for a just peace in Israel and Palestine, and then actively work for that peace.

Thank you so much for your prayers and your support. Your concern and your willingness to speak out boldly for a just peace are so important.

**Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen**

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