



## The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem

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**E-mail Newsletter from  
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of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ).  
The ELCJ serving in  
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.  
August 13, 2002**

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

We write to you from the Holy Land which is shocked and numbed by the violence in recent days. There seems to be no end to this spiraling escalation of injury and death. In this newsletter Bishop Dr. Munib Younan will share his thoughts and perspectives on the continuing violence; we will report on Bishop Munib and Suad Younan's recent journey to Great Britain and the US to speak with people about the Palestinian/Israeli conflict; we will share reports on the developing human tragedy of hunger and illness in the Israeli occupied areas which have been under curfew for many weeks; we will give you news and information about the ELCJ schools; and we will offer concrete ways in which you can help the ELCJ and its schools in ministry and service and also help the Palestinian and Israeli people end the violence which convulses this land.

### **1. Perspectives on the Violence from Bishop Younan**

Since the middle of June 2002 Palestinian cities have been gradually re-occupied in the West Bank by Israeli military forces with curfews in force. Seven of the eight major urban centers in the West Bank are continuing under curfew yet today and the Gaza Strip is further isolated and has also been militarily attacked by Israel by the dropping of a one ton bomb in a heavily populated area.

Bishop Younan: *"I find myself so frustrated as I witness more violence and counter-violence, retaliation and counter-retaliation. I ask, 'What is heroic in violence? What is heroic in counter-violence? Does the world really think that violence will solve the problem?'"*

*"Sometimes I feel I am really lost in this world. There seems to be such a change in values. My upbringing in Lutheran schools, the Lutheran church and the Lutheran faith taught me that it is only by dialogue and by seeing God in the other that we can acknowledge our differences and the things we have in common. It is in this way that we find solutions. What has happened to our world? What has happened to dialogue and political solutions? Is our voice as the local Christian church proclaiming a just peace, reconciliation and co-existence only a voice in the wilderness? Is it a voice in the past that has no bearing in this mad world?"*

*“Perhaps I sound critical but I find I must express my frustration and despair when I see and hear the language of power, re-occupation, heavy curfews, people unable to work or even come to church worship services, people hungry and sick and when I see innocent blood flowing cheaply in our land. As a responsible Christian I sometimes ask, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?’*

*“But then I remind myself of God’s love to us in Christ, of how God came to this earth, to this very place, to become a human being like us and to suffer with us the pains of our humanity. I remember Christ’s death and resurrection right here in the neighborhood of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. I realize that it is not God who has abandoned us but rather we have forsaken God. We believe in power, might, violence, lobbying, retribution and defaming the other in order to score political points and further political agendas.”*

The time has come for suffering people to live in dignity. The time has come for people of good conscience to act on behalf of powerless people. If the politicians have failed to bring a just peace, then other leaders in the world must rise up.

Bishop Younan, an executive committee member of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), recently accompanied Rev. Jesse Jackson of the US during his visit to the Palestinian people. The bishop agreed with Rev. Jackson when he stated that the Church and religious people should be the third power in the Middle East. The political establishment is the first power; the mass media is the second; the religious people need to be the third. The living Church knows the root cause of the problem. The compassionate Church knows the solution and the remedy. There must be proactive measures taken that will lead to a political dialogue. The dialogue in turn will allow Palestinians and Israelis to live side by side, to implement the international legitimacy, and to end the violence.

In the fifth section of this newsletter you will find several practical ways in which you, your congregation and community can be making a positive contribution to the action and dialogue which Bishop Younan describes in his statement.

## **2. Bishop Munib and Suad Younan Speak Out in Great Britain and the US**

The bishop was invited by the Diocese of Oxford in Britain to attend their “unconventional convention.” He felt honored to be invited to speak to the convention about the role of religion in building peace and reconciliation. He continued to insist that the conflict in Palestine and Israel is political, not religious. However, religion can seek to build up positive values in schools, churches, families and institutions to be sure we are building a world of justice.

Bishop Munib accompanied his wife, Suad Younan, to the US as they attended and spoke to ELCA Global Mission Events (GME) in Hickory, North Carolina, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Suad spoke about the situation for Palestinian people and was joined in her message by Dr. Marc Ellis, a Jewish theologian and a professor at Baylor

University in Texas. Dr. Ellis is working on Jewish liberation theology. It was a time for Suad and Marc to speak of Palestinian and Israeli pain and of the future which must be prepared together, a future without pain and suffering.

Bishop Younan found it remarkable to see how much the American people identify with suffering people. He found ELCA members ready to do their utmost to end the suffering in the world. He said, *"I felt proud to be a partner with the ELCA. It was a privilege to see how the church is structured, with ways to equip people in the grassroots to accompany local ELCA congregations in education and service, and to help rejuvenate the spirit of mission. This spirit then creates a responsibility and Christian witness in order to empower the local churches to be a living witness in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Latin America and all over the world"*.

Bishop Younan and Dr. Ellis also held five workshops about Middle East issues at both GMEs. The bishop was surprised and pleased that all the workshops were packed with people who wanted to learn more and also wanted to know what they could do to help. He spoke to the workshops about the opportunities people in the US churches have to enable the Palestinian Lutheran witness to continue to be heard in this land. For two thousand years Palestinian Christians have witnessed for our Lord and Savior, in good times and in bad, in times of colonialism and of military occupation. *"Our witness should not end but rather it should be strengthened and empowered in this difficult situation. I believe it is the responsibility of the global church to help the Palestinian Lutheran church as part and parcel of the Church of God to be stronger so that we may continue our witness for Christ. We are the church of martyrria, a church that works to forward the Kingdom of God in the midst of injustice, suffering and pain. It is a church that is called to proclaim God's sacrificial love on the cross, a love that includes every human being. We only understand the true meaning of love when we live in a heavy atmosphere of hatred, bitterness and revenge."*

### **3. Reports on the Developing Human Tragedy of Hunger and Illness**

We encourage you to see and evaluate for yourself the US Aid report released on August 5, 2002, regarding the conditions of malnutrition and anemia among children ages 6 months to 5 years in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The web site is [www.usaid.gov](http://www.usaid.gov). The report is entitled *"The Preliminary Finding of the Nutritional Assessment and Sentinel Surveillance System for the West Bank and Gaza."* It was prepared by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, and Al Quds University in Jerusalem.

Following is a brief summary of the findings among children ages 6 months to 5 years:

In regard to ACUTE moderate and severe malnutrition among the children, the WBGS (and especially the Gaza Strip) face a distinct humanitarian emergency. The rate of 9.3% is considered an emergency by most humanitarian and public health officials. It is the most severe in the Gaza Strip (13.2%) where the rates are three times that of the West Bank (4.3%). In a normally nourished population, only 2.28% would be in this acute category.

In regard to CHRONIC malnutrition, the rate among the children is 13.2% overall. In the West Bank 3.4%; Gaza Strip 17.5%.

In regard to ANEMIA, nearly 1/5 (19.7%) of the children are moderately and/or severely anemic, with little difference in percentages between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Anemia causes many health problems, including slowed physical and mental growth in children, and slowed learning. (Among pregnant women anemia can result in low birth weights for the babies and also premature births.)

In regard to FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD AVAILABILITY IN THE MARKET: The study found that market disruptions from curfews, military incursions, border closures and check points affected key high protein foods, especially meat, poultry, dairy products, and in particular, infant formula and powdered milk. A significant portion of people cannot afford to buy high protein foods. Nearly 1/3 has difficulty affording basic inexpensive staples, such as bread and rice. Poverty continues to cause food insecurity. Households are stressed financially as evidenced by the need to borrow money and sell assets for food. These same coping mechanisms were evident over one year ago. These sources will eventually run dry.

Finally, as quoted in the Palestine Monitor on August 5, 2002, *“Palestinians are unable to work and so cannot buy food. Military blockades and checkpoints isolate one Palestinian area from the next so goods cannot travel. The problem here is ACCESS to employment and to food. It is not unavoidable, and it is not a ‘natural’ situation nor an ‘act of God.’ It must not be treated that way by the international community. The cause of this crisis is not a lack of food or a famine or a drought. Only one factor is responsible for the crisis and that is the Israeli-imposed military occupation, siege and closures to which Palestinians are subjected.”*

Bishop Younan states, *“We are facing a human tragedy which affects all our children in many ways. It will also affect our Lutheran school system. The children will not be able to pay tuition fees because their parents are unemployed but we have a policy that no child in our system will be dismissed for inability to pay. We believe God will provide the means by which we can keep the schools open for the children. For the sake of our children who have their God-given human rights to be fed and healthy and educated – we urge the people of good conscience to alleviate the suffering of the people by demanding that the occupation and curfews end now.”*

#### **4. News from the Lutheran Schools in Palestine**

During a two-hour period of time in the afternoon of August 7 in Ramallah, forty-one students graduated from the Lutheran School of Hope. They gathered together to celebrate their accomplishments, to sing, to honor their classmates and to receive their diplomas. The ceremony had been postponed many times due to closures and curfews. But on August 7 the young people hurried to the Lutheran church hall, wearing their graduation gowns. Family and friends with cameras and with gifts and flowers filled the

hall, cheering for their children, grandchildren and friends. Bishop Dr. Munib Younan, patron of the Lutheran schools, gave a challenging message to the students, encouraging them to continue their education, but also encouraging them to plan their future in this land of Palestine, to be strong, productive citizens of the new state of Palestine. The graduation ceremony was a joy to behold – happy, smiling, laughing people celebrating a very special day in the midst of military occupation and a curfew that had been lifted for the better part of the day. Shortly after the graduation was over, shooting and the release of tear gas by Israeli soldiers in the downtown area of Ramallah made people move toward home a little quicker, but with a very special memory of the beautiful, joyful graduation ceremony for the Lutheran School of Hope .

Bishop Younan: *“As the ELCJ schools prepare to open on August 26, there are feelings of uncertainty and discomfort. This is highly unusual because the opening of school each fall has always been a time of joy. Why is there uncertainty now? It is because the ELCJ schools cannot be sure if the West Bank children will even be able to start the school year due to the continuing Israeli curfews. When school does begin, there is great uncertainty in regard to a regular school schedule, again due to closures and curfews. It has always been the ELCJ policy to open schools and educate children. Such education gives hope to children and families. THE ELCJ SCHOOLS WILL OPEN AND WE INSIST THE CHILDREN MUST BE ALLOWED TO ATTEND. In the 2001-2002 school year the schools were open 140 out of 172 days. As long as the schools can be open they provide a therapeutic way to overcome the persistent traumas the children experience while living under military occupation and curfews. I implore the global church to work to lift the curfews and to end this military occupation so that the Palestinian children may have their basic human rights to education. The ELCJ cares deeply about the children and the schools, as well as the Palestinian universities where the young adults can receive their hope and training for the future.”*

## **5. What Can People Around the World Do to Help?**

What can be done by people who care deeply but feel the frustration of not knowing how to help?

For one thing, it is extremely important to speak and write to leaders in governmental positions, saying, “Enough of working only for political gains! It is time to work for justice, and in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict that means two things:

End the Israeli military occupation, and

Establish two states, Palestine and Israel, side by side, to live equitably in justice and peace.”

Tell other people what you know and are continuing to learn about the Palestinian Christians and all Palestinians caught in the occupation and curfews, and the resulting hunger and illness. Ask them to speak and write to governmental leaders, too.

Another very positive thing to be done is to sponsor a child in a Lutheran Palestinian school for 50-70 US dollars per month. And to take it a step further, find ten people who would be willing to do the same thing. Please contact us at the ELCJ to learn how to do this.

Continue to pray for the ELCJ, for its schools and other community ministries, for the people who are caught in the spiraling violence and are suffering hunger, illness and hopelessness, and for a just peace and reconciliation in this land for both Palestinians and Israelis.

Thank you so much for your expressions of concern, for your prayers and for your desire to help. We cherish your support. It helps and encourages us through the very difficult times. May God bless all of us in our areas of ministry in this world.

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

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