



**E-mail Newsletter from
BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ).
The ELCJ has its headquarters in Jerusalem and is working in
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.
May 2, 2002**

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

We continue to watch and experience the suffering of the Palestinian people as the Israeli military re-occupation continues in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. The Christmas Lutheran Church and Dar al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem as well as the Lutheran churches in Beit Jala and Beit Sahour and the Lutheran schools are closed and continue under curfew. The city of Hebron is subjected to repeated incursions. Other cities like Ramallah, Nablus, Kalkilya and Jenin are currently encircled with Israeli tanks and soldiers, ready to move into the cities at a moment's notice.

1. The City and Refugee Camp of Jenin

The people living in the Palestinian city of Jenin are continuing to mourn their great losses as a result of the Israeli military incursion, which included the bulldozing of many homes in a refugee camp. The people of Jenin claim there has been a massacre and they continue to search for and find more bodies in the rubble that used to be homes and businesses.

While it would be good for the world community to know the truth from the United Nations and it certainly would verify the word of Palestinian people in Jenin if a massacre were found to have happened, the fact is that it does not really matter very much to Palestinian people what the findings of any investigative group might be. In the minds of Palestinian people the event in Jenin was a massacre and it will remain so in their remembrance, just as the massacres in Deir Yassin and Kufr Kassim are forever imprinted in their minds.

Many local Christian groups and organizations have helped to bring food, medicine and other supplies to Jenin. The very presence of the people accompanying the convoys is important to the people of Jenin and other Palestinian cities because the people can tell their stories of suffering, injury and death to others who will listen. Members and friends of the ELCJ have helped with this effort, as well as Lutheran World Federation.

2. The Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah

On Monday, April 29, Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan visited the Lutheran school in Ramallah, the first time he had been able to make the trip since the Israeli military left portions of the city on Sunday, April 21.

"The people of the city have been hard at work to clean and repair the damage inflicted by the Israeli incursion," the bishop said. "In some ways it is hard to believe there has been such a terrible attack. At the Lutheran school, for instance, students,

parents and school staff worked hard for two days to clean and repair the damage done by invading soldiers on all four floors of the building. They were ready to open the school again on Wednesday, April 24.” Visitors from the New England Synod of the ELCA accompanied by Rev. Mary Jensen felt the same way when they visited on Saturday, April 27. There is still much repair work to be done, including broken doors and windows, but children are going to school and the teachers are there to teach. The damage to the school was extensive. No monetary estimate has yet been made.

“An army can damage buildings in our cities,” the bishop said, “but no one can damage peace education. It is imperative that we as the church continue our policy of giving hope so that we can build a state and society in which we can live in peace. Furthermore, the Israeli incursion did not kill the spirit of the people. Instead, it revived our hopes and desires for security, a just peace and our own state of Palestine.”

The bishop highly commended the pastor, principal, members and students of the Lutheran church and school, and all the people of Ramallah and the other recovering cities for the voluntary work of the citizens who are pouring out their energy and efforts to build and re-build their society. “If we keep that spirit in our society,” the bishop said, “we have great hope for the future.”

3. The Stockholm International Forum, April 21-27, 2002

The Third Annual Stockholm International Forum was held in Stockholm, Sweden, with the theme *Truth, Justice and Reconciliation*. In 2000 the theme was the *Holocaust* and in 2001 *Democratization of Society*.

Upon the strong recommendation of the Church of Sweden, Bishop Younan was invited by Prime Minister Persson to participate in the Forum as the only Palestinian representative of the civil Palestinian society. There were forty-four country representatives present, accompanied by a justice minister or other dignitary from their respective countries.

Before the Forum began, Bishop Younan was privileged to meet with the Swedish Council of Churches, including Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant members. The Council gave Bishop Younan its full support for a continuing friendship and for the mission of the ELCJ.

In the large Forum itself the Middle East was not on the formal agenda. Featured were South Africa, Rwanda, Cambodia and Polish/German relations. It was on the second day of the Forum that Bishop Younan participated with Israeli Minister without Portfolio Zippi Livni in a group presentation and discussion. Minister Livni spoke for seven minutes about Israeli fears stemming from the Holocaust. When it was his turn to speak for seven minutes, Bishop Younan stated that he had come to Stockholm carrying the pain and suffering of his people in his own body, and also carrying an olive branch. Enough of war and hatred, he stated – enough of demonization, racism and stigmatization. It is time to build peace and reconciliation. The bishop spoke of himself as a Palestinian Christian, a refugee, and challenged the media to hear new voices, voices of peace and reconciliation. He emphasized how important it is to find a just, peaceful solution for the Palestinian and Israeli people.

The Swedish Prime Minister commented, “*We have to invest in the local Church of God and work to build peace, justice and reconciliation.*”

4. The Visits of the New England Synod (ELCA) and the National Council of Churches (USA)

After one postponed journey to visit the ELCJ, representatives of the ELCA New England Synod arrived on April 25, ready to learn about the Palestinian situation and to stand in solidarity with the ELCJ pastors, congregations and the bishop and staff. It was important to this group to be in Palestine and Jordan at this time “to get

more information about the truth.” Associate Bishop Hans Arnesen, Maureen Andrews and Pam Engberg represented the New England Synod, and Rev. Sig Arnesen, Hans’ father, also joined the group. The ELCJ planned the program for these friends from the United States.

Dr. Robert Edgar, director of the National Council of Churches, brought a group of about sixteen church leaders from the USA to visit Istanbul, Damascus, Beirut, Amman and finally Jerusalem. Rev. Mark Brown of the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs helped to organize the study trip. Rev. Jim Wetekam, Media Program Director for Churches for Middle East Peace was a member of the group. The International Christian Committee, Middle East Council of Churches, planned the NCC program. In addition to hearing from many political leaders, the NCC group also accompanied convoys bringing food and medicine to Jenin and Bethlehem.

The ELCJ has been delighted to welcome these visitors and hopes that other groups will also come *“to get more information about the truth”* and stand in solidarity with the Palestinian Christians.

5. Archbishop Desmond Tutu Speaks about Apartheid in the Holy Land

In a recent interview by the Guardian newspaper (United Kingdom), Archbishop Tutu of South Africa made the following comments:

“In our struggle against apartheid, the great supporters were Jewish people. They almost instinctively had to be on the side of the disenfranchised, of the voiceless ones, fighting injustice, oppression and evil. I have continued to feel strongly with the Jews. I am a patron of a Holocaust Center in South Africa. I believe Israel has a right to secure borders.

“What is not so understandable, not justified, is what it did to another people to guarantee its existence. I’ve been very deeply distressed in my visit to the Holy Land; it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa. I have seen the humiliation of the Palestinians at checkpoints and roadblocks, suffering like us when young white police officers prevented us from moving about. My heart aches. I say, Why are our memories so short? Have our Jewish sisters and brothers forgotten their humiliation? Have they forgotten the collective punishment, the home demolitions in their own history so soon? Have they turned their backs on their profound and noble religious traditions? Have they forgotten that God cares deeply about the downtrodden?

“Israel will never get true security and safety through oppressing another people. A true peace can ultimately be built only on justice. We condemn the violence of suicide bombers, and we condemn the corruption of young minds taught hatred; but we also condemn the violence of military incursions in the occupied lands, and the inhumanity that won’t let ambulances reach the injured. We in South Africa had a relatively peaceful transition. If our madness could end as it did, it must be possible to do the same everywhere else in the world. If peace could come to South Africa, surely it can come to the Holy Land. People are scared (in the U.S.) to say wrong is wrong because the Jewish lobby is powerful – very powerful. Well, so what? For goodness sake, this is God’s world! We live in a moral universe. The apartheid government was very powerful, but today it no longer exists. Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Pinochet, Milosevic and Idi Amin were all powerful, but in the end they bit the dust.”

Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen,
Communications Assistant to the ELCJ and Bishop Younan