



## The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem

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**E-mail Newsletter from  
BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jerusalem (ELCJ).  
The ELCJ serving in  
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.  
September 6, 2002**

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

**GIVE HOPE IN A HOPELESS SITUATION** is a recurring theme for the Church in Palestine in these difficult days. It is now September and our children are returning to school. Other years we have felt more positive and certain about our schools than we do in 2002, but we know we have a great privilege and a huge task in educating our children, giving them hope in a hopeless situation.

### **The Challenges of a New School Year**

Did you know there are five Lutheran schools and a Lutheran home for boys in Palestine?

A. One school is a kindergarten in the Augusta Victoria Hospital compound on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem.

B. In Ramallah is the Lutheran School of Hope (K-12)

C. In Bethlehem is Dar al-Kalima Lutheran School (K-10)

D. In Beit Jala is Talitha Kumi Lutheran School (K-12)

E. In Beit Sahour is the Lutheran School of Beit Sahour (K-12)

F. The Lutheran Home for Boys is located in Beit Jala with the Lutheran Church of the Reformation. It can provide housing, food and a family atmosphere for forty-seven boys who go to various schools in the community, including the Lutheran school, Talitha Kumi.

In the school year of 2001-2002 there were over 2000 students in the ELCJ school system.

Now in the autumn of 2002 we face two major problems in regard to the schools:

A. The continued situation of Israeli military occupation with the constant possibility of closures and curfews in Ramallah, Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. When a complete lockdown (curfew) is imposed, the children and the faculty must stay at home. Every morning people listen for information about the status of the curfew. On some days the curfew is lifted from 7 am to 7 pm. Other days it may be a shorter time, or the lockdown may be reimposed with little warning during the middle of the day and

everyone must return home, including school children and teachers. The lockdowns alone are very disruptive, but the military occupation itself is the basic cause of the suffering and uncertainty everyone feels all the time. Once again we emphasize that the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip must end.

B. The plummeting economic situation for Palestinians, particularly in the towns which are militarily occupied. Even when the curfews are lifted, the people are prisoners in their particular towns, with Israeli soldiers and tanks surrounding the towns and coming in at any time. Sporadic Israeli gunfire and lobbing of tear gas canisters are commonly experienced even on days when the curfews are lifted. We give these descriptions in order to make the point that Palestinian families and the society itself are being economically decimated. People either cannot get to work or have lost their jobs altogether. One of the immediate consequences is that families have no money to pay for school tuition at the Lutheran schools; many families barely have enough money to buy food. The Lutheran schools do not deny children their education if they are already enrolled in the schools, but the ELCJ simply cannot make the tuition payments for all the children from needy families. It is for this reason that the ELCJ is searching for scholarship help and for the support of individual students at the ELCJ schools. The schools are one of the very few places where the children can feel safe and receive the gift of hope and a future. It is vital for the children, our society and our future as Palestinians that schools remain open.

In the US it is possible to work through David Lerseth of the Division for Global Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to provide support for the ELCJ schools and for the students. His E-mail is [dlerseth@elca.org](mailto:dlerseth@elca.org). This program is also found in other COCOP partner churches.

**Local Universities:** It is important to note that Palestinian students also need financial help for tuition and books in order to attend local universities. High school graduates often leave Palestine to go to college or to find work. Anything we can do to encourage young people to stay in their land and with their people is a way of giving hope in a hopeless situation, a way of building a Palestinian state and a civil, democratic, pluralistic society that aims to further the culture of peace.

## **2. Dr. Charlie Haddad Begins Work as Director of the ELCJ Schools**

Dr. Haddad officially began his work as Director of the ELCJ schools on September 1, 2002. Working together with the bishop, the school board, the ELCJ church council, and the faculties of the schools, Dr. Haddad faces a large and very important task, particularly with the political and societal problems described above. Dr. Charlie Haddad brings a large experience of education leadership to his new position. In the last few years he was the principal of Dar Al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem, and previously he was the director of the Lutheran World Federation Vocational School in Beit Hanina. Be watching for a special article that will feature an in-depth interview with Dr. Haddad.

We want to extend a special thank you to Ms Violette Raheb, former school director, for returning to Palestine during the month of August (following her marriage) to help with the transition of leadership to Dr. Haddad. We also want to thank Violette for her work in our

ELCJ schools for the last seven years and pray that God may bestow blessings on her and her husband Marwan in the future.

### **3. Jewish-Christian Dialogue in Jerusalem**

Twelve years ago Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan was instrumental in beginning meaningful dialogue between Jewish and Christian religious leaders. The “Jonah Group” has met frequently over the years, discussing important questions relating to faith and life in this land. In a recent meeting the group discussed the issue of a “just war,” asking whether a just war was only self-defensive.

In an upcoming meeting the topic will be “What does peace mean? Where are we going?” Bishop Younan, in reflecting on the topic, has pointed out that ultimately there will be a political agreement signed to end the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. But he wonders about the shape this agreement will take. Will Israelis be able to come to Palestinian areas? Will Palestinians be able to go to Israel? After such a long period of hatred, pain and separation, will people be able to come together? At the moment Israel is building walls and digging trenches to separate itself from Palestinians, seeing this as important for self-defense. Bishop Younan and other peacemakers know that a just peace does not lie in walls or barriers or checkpoints, and that the ones who build the walls will take them down. But there are other barriers than the physical ones, Bishop Younan states. *“Eventually the physical walls will come down, as did the Berlin wall, for instance. Unfortunately the walls of hatred, revenge and bitterness are becoming higher and higher. Our work as the Church and as religious leaders in all religions is to take down those walls. It is a task that must be done right now, without waiting for the political peace to come. This is why the Jonah Group is important – we are refusing to let barriers of anger, fear, hatred and revenge keep us from talking together about important issues like the future of our children. As the Jewish New Year approaches, this is a particularly good time to give hope in a hopeless situation, searching for new ways to take down walls and to dialogue with each other. But the New Year means a new beginning and a dawn. I am wondering if that will be the case in our country that calls us to work for justice and only justice.”*

### **4. A New Pastoral Arrangement in the English-speaking Congregation**

Rev. Michael and Rev. Susan Thomas have served the English-speaking congregation in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Old City Jerusalem for the past four years. This international congregation is a close partner with the ELCJ. The Thomases have recently announced a new arrangement of pastoral leadership. Beginning December 1, 2002, Rev. Susan Thomas will begin serving Our Savior Lutheran Church and Student Center in Hanover, New Hampshire, USA, while Rev. Michael Thomas will continue serving the English-speaking congregation in Jerusalem through June 2003, when he will join Susan as co-pastor in the New Hampshire congregation. We thank the Thomases for their ministry in our midst, and for the continued ministry of Rev. Michael Thomas. Please pray for them, their sons, and the English-speaking congregation as it begins this new pastoral arrangement and looks to the future.

### **5. Significant Visits During a Journey to Finland**

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan recently visited Finland with his wife Suad. Together they met with several Finnish government and religious leaders and discussed issues related to the ELCJ and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

- A. Finnish President Tarja Halonen expressed her appreciation for the role that Palestinian Christians are playing. “The issue of Palestinian Christians being refugees is becoming well-known in Finland. Understanding this makes many of us want to work for a just peace.” Bishop Younan encouraged President Halonen to take an active role as the Finnish president, as a woman and as a mediator who is respected by both sides in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Her efforts could bring people to the negotiating table in order to stop the bloodshed and the Israeli military occupation. The Younans also visited with the Finnish Foreign Minister.
- B. Mr. Martti Ahtisaari, the previous president of Finland, is also in a position to be a broker for a just peace in the Middle East. With his international crisis group, Mr. Ahtisaari is preparing an initiative for the endgame in the Middle East. Bishop Younan urges people to listen to this experienced statesman who played a significant peacemaking role in Namibia and Kosovo.
- C. The Bishop of Helsinki Eero Huovinen, and his wife hosted the Younans and made many arrangements for their visit. The Lutheran church in Finland is a strong partner with the ELCJ and Bishop Younan found it very encouraging that the archbishop, the bishops, pastors and church members are offering their full support for a just peace and reconciliation to end the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

Suad Younan also had the opportunity to speak with pastor’s spouses about the importance of implanting love in the hearts and minds of our children and our congregations.

## **6. Giving Hope in a Hopeless Situation**

As we continue to face killings, closures and a hopeless human and political situation in September 2002, we give thanks to God for pouring hope, love and encouragement into our hearts so we can share it with others. In large part God gives us this hope, love and encouragement through you, our friends and supporters, our brothers and sisters in Christ. It seems to us that the suffering under which we live is in itself a witness, both for us and for the whole world. We remember the words of St. Paul in Romans 8: “. . . *that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor power – nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” Bishop Younan reminds us that the Church in Palestine will continue to be the witnessing Church in martyrdom: “*Sometimes I think we are living the mystery of salvation in the so-called Holy Land. The suffering we experience is – as Dr. Martin Luther says – a sanctuary to give us opportunity to grow in the spirit.*”

Following is a prayer offered by Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan on September 6, 2002:  
Heavenly Father, we glorify you and give you thanks and love, for you are our refuge and protection. We praise you for sending your Son to die on the cross in order to save and liberate us all from sin, destruction and death.

O my Lord, there are some questions that keep troubling my mind:  
When I follow in the footsteps of your prophets and speak about injustice, the world tells me: *“You are a politician.”*

When I give voice to the pain of my people, the world tells me: *“You are biased and one-sided.”*

When I speak about the damages and destruction, the world tells me:  
*“You are unbalanced.”*

But, my Lord Jesus, didn't you call your people to stand up for the victims of injustice, occupation, violence and hopelessness wherever they are – also in your land of Incarnation? My Lord, when I see the many victims of injustice, I know I am seeing you in them.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, for calling your Church to give witness to you by standing up against injustice and violence, as well as working tirelessly for forgiveness, love, tolerance, coexistence, just peace and reconciliation.

For this I am ever grateful to you, my Creator, Liberator and Sanctifier, and come before you again and again, trusting that you will draw me closer to you and renew my strength and my spirit.

Yes, my Lord, here I am. Send me.  
Amen.

*Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen  
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