



Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ)

June #2 Newsletter
By BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ).
The ELCJ is serving in
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.
June 26, 2003

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

We are living in a heightened awareness of the possibilities of peace and security, knowing that the world community is now focused on the Roadmap to Peace in the Middle East. We are hopeful and yet somewhat hesitant because of other lost opportunities for a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We pray, with so many of you praying with us, that the Roadmap will at last bring the peace for which we long.

In this newsletter Bishop Younan offers his viewpoints about the Roadmap and the continuing violence. There are also short articles about a Lutheran World Federation Youth Pilgrimage to Palestine and Israel; a meeting of the Heads of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East; a visit from the Federal Republic of Germany President, His Excellency Johannes Rau; a farewell to Pastor Michael and Pastor Susan Thomas of the English-speaking congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer; and a special event in Ramallah for participants in the Meals on Wheels program provided by the Lutheran Church of Hope.

1. Bishop Younan: "The Roadmap to Peace Is a Golden Opportunity"

Several weeks have passed since the historic and important summit meeting in Aqaba, Jordan, which launched the Roadmap to Peace in the Middle East. Almost immediately after the meeting of U.S. President George W. Bush, Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, new violence broke out between Israelis and Palestinians. The violence caused the world to gasp in horror because a peaceful solution to this conflict seemed to be so close. Immediately there were people saying the Roadmap was finished before it was started, but there were many others who said the situation only shows that everyone must work harder to implement the Roadmap.

Bishop Younan has endorsed the Roadmap and calls it "a golden opportunity" to find the ways to resolve the enormous problems which exist between Israelis and Palestinians. The bishop indicates three reasons why he sees the Roadmap as being a golden opportunity:

- The United States is now seriously involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Unlike other proposals and other opportunities, the U.S. involvement is now active and not only talk.

- The Roadmap is endorsed by the Quartet (the U.S., the U.N., the European Union and Russia). The Roadmap literally has the world behind it, unlike other plans and proposals.
- The Roadmap is good because it will end the military occupation, implement a two-state solution and has a final date (2005) for the State of Palestine to be a reality.

The test of the Roadmap is not for negotiation but for implementation on both sides. For this reason, I believe the American Administration and the Quartet need to put fixed dates for implementations for both sides. The benchmark dates are significant because the people at the grassroots will see there is a difference in the implementation of the Roadmap in comparison with previous plans which did not succeed.

The Palestinians, and Israelis, too, are doubtful and hopeful at the same time. There have been numerous other occasions when peace seemed to be at hand and then everything fell apart, and usually the situation grew worse instead of better. "It is for these reasons," Bishop Younan states, "that the Roadmap must not be a pacification but must address specific issues in order to bring about just peace and security for all. Those specific issues must include a plan to deal with the Israeli settlements on Palestinian land; a shared Jerusalem; a resolution for Palestinian refugees right of return; and a fair distribution of the water resources."

"As I watched the recent terrible violence and bloodshed on both sides, I wept. Why is the world quiet, I wondered, allowing this violence to continue. These waves of spiral violence create such fear and insecurity among the people here. I still believe that a negotiated settlement should be possible in the Roadmap in order to stop violence and allow us all to walk in peace. We must listen to the fears and the problems of the other, and not listen only to the mass media. The Lutheran Church does not believe in violence of any sort. Rather the Church chooses to teach by word and example that non-violent methods will bring us to a just peace. We pray that the world communities will stand by their commitment to bring a just peace through continued negotiation and hands-on involvement, not becoming fearful and discouraged. We have hope, knowing that God's will for all people is peace and reconciliation, and an abundant life."

Bishop Younan also states, "We must work on these issues to bring about a just peace – not only a time of no war and no peace. This is the time for the Middle East to jump into the bosom of justice. When the two-state solution succeeds, we will have moved from lip service into genuine implementation. I know there are some critical remarks about the Roadmap but a conflict of more than fifty years needs a serious track of justice and peace so this train will roll. The Roadmap is a golden opportunity because we are at the beginning of the right track of implementation."

2. Lutheran World Federation Youth Pilgrimage

"We did not simply encounter Christ in history or along the pilgrim path. Rather, Jesus embraced us in community and was present as we celebrated and worshipped and even more so when we cried in this land of injustice and oppression." This statement was made by one international participant in the 2003 group of young people who traveled,

worked, communicated and worshiped together April 13-20 in Palestine and Israel. Eight members of the group came from LWF member churches in Argentina, Canada, Chile, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Suriname and the USA. Four of the Palestinian participants were from the ELCJ: Fouteen Ansara, Ala Tannous and Rami Jaraiseh from Ramallah, and Annaliza Younan from Jerusalem. Nadia Taraze was a Palestinian ecumenical guest from the YWCA in Jerusalem.

Rev. Ramaez Ansara, pastor of the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah and also the ELCJ youth pastor, worked closely with the LWF Youth Pilgrimage. The pilgrimage was the result of an invitation made by Bishop Younan to young people in the global Lutheran community to visit the Holy Land and share in the daily life of people here.

Rev. Ansara stated that the aim of the visit was to "follow the steps of Jesus as we live in faith and walk with hope," a phrase he described as the slogan of the pilgrimage. Together the youth visited holy sites found in Nazareth, the Mount of the Beatitudes and at the Sea of Galilee, and also took part in the ecumenical Holy Week celebrations, such as the Palm Sunday procession from Bethany to Jerusalem and an Easter sunrise service on the Mount of Olives. They worshiped together in a synagogue in West Jerusalem. The group experienced the reality of checkpoints, armed military restrictions and refugee camps in Ramallah and Bethlehem. The young people committed themselves to continue to work for peace and justice. A Palestinian young woman expressed her desire to "tell my youth group how much international people still care about us," and emphasized the solidarity she experienced among the pilgrimage participants. Rev. Ansara believes that "the Palestinian youth had a very significant impression and for most of them it was the first time to participate in such activities."

Thank you to Rev. Ansara and the Lutheran World Information Service for the details about the youth pilgrimage.

3. Heads of Middle East Evangelical Churches Meet in Amman

During the week of June 1 the Heads of the Evangelical Churches in the Middle East met in Amman, Jordan. The Evangelical Churches include Lutherans, Anglicans and Reformed who also are part in the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) together with Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Catholic Churches. However, the Evangelical Churches also meet regularly around their own particular issues and concerns.

Bishop Younan, as the head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ) in Jordan and Palestine, reports on the recent meeting in Amman:

"We began our meetings with a worship service in the Lutheran Good Shepherd Church in Amman. Rev. Dr. Salim Sahiouni, the President of the Higher Evangelical Council in Syria and Lebanon, was the preacher. He is one of the four presidents of the MECC.

"The aim of the meeting in Amman was to discuss the possibility of developing a multi-lateral agreement between Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican Church bodies in the Middle East. We carry the same joys and problems of the Christian Church worldwide, even though we are not majority churches in any of our locations in the Middle East. It

became apparent in our discussion that a multi-lateral agreement will not be possible at the moment. Instead, I believe we as Lutherans will move ahead on two tracks:

- We will pursue the Jerusalem Lutheran-Anglican Mutual Full Recognition Agreement which is already in process.
- We will begin work on a Lutheran-Reformed Agreement in the Middle East.

“If the ELCJ succeeds on these two tracks, we would be preparing fertile ground for a multi-lateral agreement in the future, such as the Anglican-Lutheran-Reformed agreement in France, the DeReuilly Agreement.

“We also had an important discussion about the name ‘Evangelical.’ We are facing a large problem in the Middle East with right wing Christian groups who use the name Evangelical but whose theology, practices, exclusivity and frequent espousal of Christian Zionist beliefs are counter to the ecumenical, mainline Evangelical Churches (as described above). The policies of the right wing groups are also harming Muslim-Christian relationships in the region. We as Heads of the Evangelical Churches had a long discussion about the name issue but could not resolve the problem.”

Bishop Younan states, “We embrace our identity as ‘Evangelicals’ and should not be ashamed to use it. We cannot allow the right wing groups to kidnap the name Evangelical that we have had since the time of the Reformation. The name Evangelical is connected to the principle of the Reformation to preach the gospel purely and rightly administer the sacraments. It is precious to the established mainline churches in the Middle East. No resolution to the name problem can be found now; it will take time. Meanwhile, we are praying about the problem, asking God to help us find a way to maintain our strength in ministry and to address our fears.”

The MECC also gathered in Jordan at the end of May, preparing for its assembly in early December 2003 which will have as its theme "Remain in My Love." The Heads of Middle East churches, including Jordanian church leaders, met with Crown Prince Hamzeh. The need for strengthening Muslim-Christian dialogue was discussed, understanding that the time is right for deeper and richer dialogue.

4. President of the German Federal Republic visits Talitha Kumi Lutheran School

On Sunday, June 22, the principal of Talitha Kumi Lutheran School, Mr. Wilhelm Goller, together with Bishop Dr. Munib Younan of the ELCJ and other guests, welcomed His Excellency Johannes Rau, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, to Talitha Kumi. President Rau expressed his delight and honor to be visiting the Lutheran school. He spent time visiting with the children.

The visit by President Rau was significant for Talitha Kumi and all the Lutheran schools in Palestine. There is financial support given to the schools from the German government and related agencies. The German president was impressed with his visit to Talitha Kumi and we are thankful for his presence with us.

5. Farewell and Godspeed to the the Pastors Thomas

For the past five years Pastors Susan and Michael Thomas (ELCA) have served the

English-speaking congregation at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. On Sunday, June 15, many people gathered in the worship service and the reception which followed to thank the Thomases and say farewell and Godspeed to them and to others in the congregation who are now leaving Jerusalem.

Bishop Younan spoke of “accompaniment” which is a primary policy for the ELCA Division for Global Mission in its overseas work and he emphasized the ongoing need for this accompaniment to continue in Jerusalem.

The Thomases are now the pastors at Our Savior Lutheran Church, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA. We thank them for their ministry among us for the past five years.

6. Special Luncheon in Ramallah for "Meals on Wheels" Participants

.A noon luncheon was held at the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah on June 13 for fifty-five elderly people who participate in the congregation's Meals on Wheels program. Special transportation was arranged for the guests. A short program featured a medical doctor who spoke to the people about the basics of First Aid and alerted them to safety measures regarding gas stoves and other potential dangers in their homes. A choir of the Sunday School children entertained the guests with several songs, both before and after the lunch.

Ten people from the Lutheran Church and the church women's group helped to serve chicken and rice, salad, fruit, sweets and coffee to the guests. Much conversation took place until it was time to be transported home. These special luncheon gatherings at the church are held about twice each year.

Sixty-two people participate in the various aspects of the Meals on Wheels program in Ramallah, which is administered by a five-person committee from the Lutheran Church. The program offers hot meals twice each week (about twenty-five people receive the meals) and also transportation to medical appointments, payment for the delivery of prescriptions, provision of basic foodstuffs (rice, coffee, flour, etc.) and perishable food such as meat, vegetables and fruit, help with laundry and also friendly visits from Church members. Neighborhood gatherings each week are another feature of the Meals on Wheels program. Five or six "neighborhoods" have been identified, based on the location of program participants. Six or eight people come to a home, usually within walking distance, and enjoy cake, coffee and conversation. Many elderly people live alone so the weekly gatherings provide an important social connection.

Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen

Communications Assistant to Bishop Dr. Munib A Younan, ELCJ

Bishop Younan: ga_elcj@netvision.net.il

Rev. Mary Jensen: inasmuch@aol.com

www.holyland-lutherans.org