



Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ)

June 2003 Newsletter
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of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ).
The ELCJ is serving in
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.
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Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, the city of Christ's death and resurrection.

Once again the eyes and ears of the world are directed toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the "Roadmap for Peace" is debated and discussed. Once again we are praying for a positive result – a process resulting in two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side with a shared capital, Jerusalem, and with all rights, privileges and responsibilities of citizenship and freedom enjoyed by both Palestinians and Israelis. The test will be not only in good intentions but in the implementation of the Roadmap that will allow people to live in reconciliation and a just peace. We invite you to pray with us, as many of you have been doing in an ongoing vigil of prayer, that a comprehensive and enduring peace may soon be experienced in the Middle East.

May 2003 has been an extremely busy month for us in the ELCJ. As you will see in the short articles which follow, we have welcomed many international partners in ministry during May. Together we have visited the ELCJ churches, schools and community ministry sites, and we have consulted and prayed together for our partnership work. We want to thank all the churches and groups around the world who hold the ELCJ in their prayers and for their ongoing partnership support.

We have also celebrated a confirmation service in Ramallah and three graduation ceremonies at Lutheran schools in Ramallah, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. Congratulations to the newly confirmed young people and to all the graduates and their families, as well as the schools, principals and faculties.

1. The 2003 COCOP Meeting, May 12-16

The Coordination Committee for Cooperation between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Her Overseas Partners (COCOP) met in Jerusalem from May 12-16, 2003. Representatives of national churches and mission groups in the USA, Germany, Finland, Sweden and Norway came to meet with the ELCJ for annual business sessions, a study day and also a school board meeting. Locally, all the ELCJ pastors, the evangelist, schools' director, bishop and bishop's staff attended the meetings while people working in Jerusalem from Germany, Finland, the USA and Sweden attended as guests and/or participants.

The theme for the 2003 COCOP meetings was “For the Healing of the World,” the same theme under which the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assembly will gather in July 2003 in Winnipeg, Canada. Bishop Younan in his annual COCOP report spoke about the wholistic approach of the ELCJ in being an instrument of healing in our broken world. As an example, Bishop Younan reported on the Diaconal Work of the ELCJ:

“We are pleased to see that diaconia is one of the essential tasks of the ELCJ and that it is increasing.

Ramallah, Lutheran Church of Hope: The Meals on Wheels program continues helping over 60 elderly people with hot meals, staple foods, prescriptions, transport to medical appointments and home visitation.

Beit Jala, Lutheran Church of the Reformation: The Social Program addresses the needs of the elderly, the unemployed, and the ill with the help of a social worker on staff. It also works with the Boys’ Home and with women’s programs.

Jerusalem, Lutheran Church of the Redeemer: The Day Center for the Elderly re-opened in March 2003, providing a comfortable and happy place for people over 60 years to spend their days. More than 130 people are using the center. Another 120 people are visited in their homes by nurses and social workers.

Amman, Jordan, Lutheran Good Shepherd Church: The ELCJ offered its hostel to the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and Action by Churches Together (ACT) as a regional center for humanitarian aid to Iraq.”

The business of the COCOP meetings ranged over many topics, including the following:
 A. The proposed building of a housing project on the Mount of Olives. A feasibility study has been finalized and sent to governments interested in helping to build the 84 unit housing project for Palestinian Christian families on LWF/Augusta Victoria Hospital land. Bishop Younan pointed out, “The U.S. State Department reports that 1600 Palestinian Christian families emigrated to the U.S. in 2002. Our goal in building this housing project is to give 84 Palestinian Christian families the opportunity to stay in the country and to continue Palestinian Christianity in this land.”

B. The ELCJ schools: Dr. Charlie Haddad, Schools’ Director, reported on the developments in the five schools during his first year as director. Because of the frequent curfews and closures, he has made “distance learning” a priority for all the schools and teachers. A survey indicated that 80% of the schools’ students have access to a computer at home. Older model computers are available to families at very low cost. Teachers are being trained to use computer techniques and the internet, which will help during general blockades and daily curfews but which will also facilitate effective communication tools between teachers and pupils at any time. It will facilitate research and project work assigned to students and will encourage and facilitate twinning and pen-pal programs with other local and international schools as well as communication with the outside world. Dr. Haddad states that to his knowledge no other Palestinian school has

implemented this concept as yet. This makes the Lutheran schools pilots in the area of distance learning for school children in Palestine.

C. Martin Luther Community Development Center: Dr. Haddad also reported on the developing plans for the ELCJ Schools to begin a center in the former Martin Luther School Building which would provide vocational training for youth and adults. The listing of “Values, Beliefs and Assumptions” is as follows:

- * A local Evangelical Lutheran Christian institution
- * Believe in peace, non-violence and religious tolerance
- * Work on maintaining Christian presence
- * Believe in market and community relevance and financial responsibility
- * Believe in human rights
- * Serve without regard to race, color, religion, gender or nationality
- * Give priority to the marginalized and unprivileged, especially women
- * Yearn to be a leading institution providing wholistic and comprehensive services
- * Provide a safe haven to groups and individuals in need
- * Uplift hope and morale
- * Value the work of our staff

The MLCDC has already upgraded its computer laboratory and will offer many training courses. Gradually lectures and educational programs will be added.

The ELCJ values and treasures its partnerships and relationships with so many churches and mission groups around the world. The annual week of COCOP meetings are an opportunity to develop those relationships and to thank the many partners who help to support and encourage the ministry of the ELCJ.

2. The Visit of ELCA Presiding Bishop and Delegation, May 22-28

Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan and the ELCJ welcomed the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Rt. Rev. Mark S. Hanson, and his delegation during their visit May 22-28. Included in the eight-member delegation were two ELCA bishops: Bishop Stephen P. Bouman from the Metro New York Synod and from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, Bishop Floyd M. Schoenhals. Completing the delegation were Mrs. Ione Hanson; Mrs. Betty Schoenhals; Rev. Said Ailabouni; Rev. Mark Brown; and Mr. John Brooks.

The delegation visited ELCJ churches and schools, including two of the graduation ceremonies. Time was spent at the Day Center for the Elderly, part of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer ministry in the Old City of Jerusalem, and the Lutheran Home for Boys, part of the ministry of the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala. The delegation also spent time with the Lutheran World Federation representative and at Augusta Victoria Hospital, one of the LWF projects in Jerusalem.

The ELCA delegation’s visit was comprehensive, including time with Israeli and Palestinian officials and with Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders. In many ways the visit was an “eye opener,” according to delegation members. Bishop Younan stated, “The

ELCA delegation's visit consolidated our partnership. We are one Church with one mission."

3. "Celebration and Jubilation!" at Three Graduation Ceremonies

A total of 96 young people graduated from three Lutheran schools during May. Bishop Younan and the ELCJ Schools' Director, Dr. Charlie Haddad, spoke at all three ceremonies, joining the three principals in awarding the diplomas and gifts to the graduates. Hundreds of people – family, friends and dignitaries – gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of the young people.

*** On May 20th the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah graduated 29 students in an outdoor ceremony in the late afternoon. Headmaster Michael Abu-Ghazaleh spoke words of congratulation and encouragement to the students, and several musical numbers were offered by a choir and instrumental group, and also by one of the graduates. A dance group from the school performed "debka," traditional Palestinian dances. In 2002 the Ramallah graduation ceremony was delayed until August, due to closures and curfews, but now in 2003 the graduates received their diplomas at the proper time. The Lutheran School of Hope was founded in 1963 with the kindergarten class. The larger school began in 1965 and the first senior class graduated in 1979.

*** On May 23rd Talitha Kumi Lutheran School in Beit Jala graduated 47 students. The name of the school is the Aramaic phrase Jesus spoke when raising Jairus' daughter from the dead: "Arise, little girl." For much of its one-hundred fifty-two years of history, Talitha Kumi was a girls' boarding school; in 1982 it became a co-educational school. The boarding section for girls continues, serving about 35 girls this year. The graduation ceremony was held outdoors on a Friday afternoon with many speeches of congratulation and encouragement as well as several choir numbers. Principal Wilhelm Goller spoke to the graduates; ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson also shared his good wishes.

*** On May 25th the graduation ceremony for 20 students was held at the Beit Sahour Lutheran School in Beit Sahour. This was the sixth graduation of seniors at the Beit Sahour school following the addition of the 11th and 12 grades seven years ago. However, this Lutheran school was founded 102 years ago, making it the oldest school in Beit Sahour. The late afternoon outdoor ceremony included a debka dance group, musical numbers by two choirs, and instrumental and vocal numbers by three of the graduates. Principal Hani Odeh addressed the students; Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson also spoke to the graduates.

Many of the Lutheran school graduates will seek to continue their studies in colleges in Palestine or in other countries. Others will seek work. In either case, the future for the graduates is uncertain in the light of the continuing Israeli military occupation, the high unemployment rate, the high number of Palestinian families living under the poverty line, and the continuing curfews and closures. Nonetheless, the graduation ceremonies were filled with joy, encouragement and celebration. Please pray for these young people as they step into their uncertain future.

4. Confirmation Service at the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah

On Sunday, May 11th, the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah rejoiced with 14

confirmands as they reaffirmed their baptismal vows. Bishop Younan and Rev. Ramez Ansara laid their hands on each confirmand as he or she knelt, and the bishop spoke the words of blessing and confirmation. The church was filled with happy families and friends, and a reception followed the service.

The important work among the youth of the ELCJ continues despite difficulties from curfews, closures and checkpoints. Each ELCJ congregation works closely with its youth, and when possible the youth of the whole ELCJ gather for study and fellowship. Our thanks go to Rev. Ibrahim Azar of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem, for his work as the ELCJ's Youth Pastor for the past thirteen years, and now we welcome Rev. Ramez Ansara as the new Youth Pastor. The work of Youth Pastor is done in addition to the ongoing parish ministry tasks.

5. Reflections on the War in Iraq and the Ongoing Violence in the Middle East

In his COCOP report, Bishop Younan stated: *"We were convinced that the war in Iraq should not have taken place. Such a war was interpreted to be a war between the Christian West and the Islamic World. In fact, it is not a war between East and West, between Christianity and Islam. Instead it is a war of power in which the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. As we observe the bloodshed and military operations, we still pray that Iraq will soon start the process of healing and self-determination."*

"We are very pleased, however, to hear the voices of our partner churches joining with us and many others to create a symphony of justice, non-violence, dialogue, peace and reconciliation. We are also pleased to see that the Muslim world is now noticing that the Christian Church in the West and East is joining forces with the peace camp, calling for negotiations, peace and reconciliation. This is a vivid example of how the war is NOT between Christianity and Islam, or between their cultures. Rather, it is indeed a war of power and enlarged economy."

"We are still convinced that Arab Christianity will continue and even consolidate its role of bridge building between East and West, North and South, Christianity and Islam. This role will be strengthened through the help and support of our partner churches."

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