



Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ)

**E-Mail Newsletter from
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of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ).
The ELCJ is serving in
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.
March 19, 2004**

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

Greetings from Bishop Younan and the pastors and members of the ELCJ. We are in the season of Lent and in 2004 we are happy that the Western churches and the Orthodox churches are observing Holy Week and Easter at the same time. Because of separate church calendars, the Easter observances often differ by one or even several weeks. During Holy Week there will be many services in Jerusalem commemorating the various events of Jesus' Passion and then April 11, 2004, will be the Feast of the Resurrection of Christ for all Christians in Palestine and Israel.

In this newsletter we will tell you about the observances for the 2004 World Day of Prayer; a special honor conferred upon Pastor Jadallah Shihadeh of Beit Jala; a series of Lenten Taizé Vespers on Sunday evenings in Jerusalem; an update on the earthquake-damaged Christmas Lutheran Church tower; the second gathering of International Centers, including the International Center in Bethlehem; special visits to the ELCJ by delegations and individuals; and the mounting problems caused by the Israeli Separation Wall as it is extended around Jerusalem.

1. World Day of Prayer Observed in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Beit Sahour

"The women of our church love to attend the World Day of Prayer Service each year," a Lutheran woman in Ramallah said. This year the special prayer service was held on Friday afternoon, March 5th, at the Greek Catholic church in Ramallah and women from all five Christian communities in the city were in attendance. A woman from the Greek Catholic church brought the message based on the theme of the 2004 World Day of Prayer, "In Faith, Women Shape the Future." The Lutheran woman also said, "The church was packed with at least 150 people. It was wonderful. I simply won't miss going to this service." Ramallah is one of the many Palestinian cities and towns which are surrounded by the Israeli military forces. Events like the World Day of Prayer Service must be observed within the town because of the difficulties Palestinian people experience to get permits to travel to Jerusalem or Bethlehem, for example, to attend one large prayer service.

Many women also gathered in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem on the afternoon of March 5th for the Jerusalem observance of the World Day of Prayer. Once again Ms. Aida Haddad of the Lutheran church worked with a committee of women from many Christian churches to plan the service. The choir from the Greek Catholic church in the Old City sang, and Ms. Shafeeqa Dawani of the Anglican church

brought the message. The 2004 World Day of Prayer Service was written by Christian women from Panama.

On Sunday afternoon, March 7th, women from many churches in the Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala area (to the south of Jerusalem and behind the Separation Wall) gathered for their World Day of Prayer observance in the Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour. Ms. Shireen Awwad of the Lutheran church brought the message. It was estimated that at least 170 women filled the church to join others around the world in observing the World Day of Prayer 2004.

2. The Rev. Jadallah Shihadeh Elected to the Jerusalemverein Board

On February 21st the Rev. Jadallah Shihadeh, pastor of the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala, became the first Palestinian Lutheran person elected to the Jerusalemverein Board in Germany. The ELCJ was pleased to nominate Pr. Shihadeh for this position. For 115 years this German church organization has been helping the Lutheran churches and schools in Palestine. Pastor Shihadeh has been elected to the board for a three-year term and he believes he can help articulate the situation, needs and aims of the Lutheran Palestinian community very clearly. Two or three times each year Pastor Shihadeh will travel to Germany for the board meetings. He stated that he felt very welcomed by the other board members. Thirty-five people from churches all over Germany and now from Palestine serve on the Jerusalemverein Board.

3. Lenten Taizé Vesper Services Held on Sunday Evenings in Jerusalem

Many Christian churches in Jerusalem are participating in a series of Sunday Taizé Vesper services during the season of Lent. At 6:00 pm for five Sundays, people from the various Protestant and Reformed churches gather for reflection, prayer, singing and Scripture reading. On Sunday, March 7th, the English-language congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer hosted the vesper service in St. John's Chapel. The Rev. Russell Siler, pastor of the Redeemer congregation, led the worship which occurred "in the round," focused on the altar table, cross and candles which had been moved into the center of the chapel nave. The pew benches were arranged in a diamond shape around the altar, allowing people to sing the Taizé chants to one another and to easily approach the altar for prayer and the lighting of individual candles. The first Sunday in Lent the prayer service was held at the Ecce Home chapel on the Via Dolorosa. On following Sundays the services will be held at the Scots Presbyterian Memorial Church and the Swedish Theological Institute, both in West Jerusalem, and at the East Jerusalem Baptist Church.

4. Update on the Restoration of the Christmas Lutheran Tower in Bethlehem

As reported in the February ELCJ newsletter, the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem had the misfortune of earthquake damage to its tower that is more than one-hundred years old. A large chunk of concrete fell from the top of the tower to the street below. No one was hurt, thankfully. At first it seemed that more pieces of the tower would also fall and that severe damage might be done to the church building and other structures nearby in the crowded area of Bethlehem's Old City. However, the cone-shaped steeple continues to stand, despite cracking on the inside. The iron cross at the top of the steeple continues to give its silent witness. Recently Pastor Mitri Raheb reported that consultations with contractors have clarified the only way repairs can be made, namely, by having a

contractor and crew build scaffolding around the tower and climb up to make the necessary repairs. This work will soon begin and the search for funding will continue.

5. International Centers from around the World Gather in Mexico

The International Center of Bethlehem (ICB), part of the ministry of the ELCJ through the Christmas Lutheran Church, was represented at the recent gathering of International Center leaders from around the world. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the ELCJ are partners in the ministry of several International Centers. The gathering was held February 28-March 5 in Mexico. Ms. Rana Khoury of ICB attended the conference but Pastor Mitri Raheb, director of the ICB, was unable to obtain a visa. He consulted with the conference participants by telephone. The Mexico conference is only the second time the International Centers have held this intensive week of study, information gathering, sharing, discussion and planning for the future. The first gathering of the International Centers was held in Texas in 2003. In 2005, this annual gathering of ELCA and ELCJ International Center leaders will be held in Bethlehem.

The first three days of the conference involved an “immersion experience” in Mexico City and Cuernavaca. Visits were made to places that taught about the periods and themes of Mexican history, such as museums, cathedrals and the National Palace. Other visits were made to “squatter settlements” where many poor and oppressed people are living. Various people who work with base Christian communities and their nearly fifty-year-old struggle for justice were able to share their work and ministry. The contrasts between rich and poor and between modern commercialism and the struggle for human rights became very apparent.

The rest of the conference was spent in reflection and planning. The immersion experience was discussed, as was the work of the various International Centers, located in Mexico City, Bethlehem and Wittenberg, Germany. The Lutheran Center in Chicago (ELCA headquarters) was also represented by the Rev. Said Ailabouni from the Division for Global Mission and the Rev. Dick Bruesehoff from the Division for Ministry. Ideas and programs that the centers will be working on in the coming year were discussed. Some of those ideas and programs include:

- Video conferences joining the three centers
- Identity projects for the three centers using artwork reflecting the different cultures
- A common website, and also using other websites for training and presentations
- Developing training and resources for Global Servant Leadership
- Developing a short film dealing with an issue, featuring the work of the three centers
- Cooperation between ELCA seminaries and the three centers
- Possible changes to the current Mission Statement of the International Centers which reads as follows: *“Encountering people and places of formation, reformation and transformation to become Global Servant Leaders in a changing/tumultuous world and a changing /searching church.”*

Ms. Khoury found the gathering to be “a very enriching experience” in which it became clear that “the issues may be different but that poverty, struggling and suffering are very similar” no matter where they are happening. She and Pastor Raheb are looking forward to hosting the gathering of International Centers at the ICB in 2005.

6. Special Visits to the ELCJ from Overseas Delegations and Individuals

- Bishop Emeritus Krister Stendahl, former Dean of Divinity at Harvard University, U.S., and his wife Brita recently visited Jerusalem and Bethlehem. At the International Center in Bethlehem (ICB), a ministry of the ELCJ through Christmas Lutheran Church, the Stendahls were briefed on the center's activities as well as the current situation in the West Bank. The construction of the Separation Wall and its impact on the life of Palestinians was discussed. The new convent of the Bridgitte Sisters in Bethlehem was also visited by the Stendahls. Bishop Stendahl preached at a service at the Swedish Theological Institute in Jerusalem.
- Two visitors from Germany recently consulted with Bishop Dr. Munib Younan in Jerusalem: Dr. Cornelia Coenan Marx of Kaiserswerth, and the Administrator of the Berlin Mission Work (BMW), Rolf Peter Wiegard.
- A Danish Church delegation with representatives from the Lutheran, Baptist and Methodist churches as well as DanChurch Aid and the Ecumenical Council in Denmark have been visiting Palestine and Israel from March 13-20. The leaders of the delegation are the Rt. Rev. Kresten Drejergaard, Bishop of Fuenen (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, ELCD); the Rev. Ane Hjerrild, the General Secretary on International Relations for ELCD; and Mr. Uffe Gjerding, DanChurch Aids Coordinator.

The Danish delegation worshipped with the ELCJ congregation in the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Old City Jerusalem, on March 14 and visited with Bishop Younan and Pastor Sani Ibrahim Azar. Other visits included the International Center of Bethlehem, the Augusta Victoria Hospital and the Middle East Council of Churches programs in Gaza. The delegation also met with church leaders at Notre Dame in Jerusalem where they were briefed about the current political and humanitarian situation. At Tantur Ecumenical Institute the group was received by the Vice Rector Knud Jeppesen and his wife Ida, who are now leaving Tantur after six years of service. The Lutheran Church in Denmark will have a special collection and prayers for the ELCJ work one Sunday in the coming year.

- A delegation from the Lutheran Church of Norway is currently visiting the ELCJ from March 15-23, reviving and strengthening church relationships. Bishop Ole Christian Kvarme is the bishop of the Borg Diocese in Norway, which last year signed a Companion Synod Agreement with the ELCJ. Joining Bishop Kvarme are the Rev. Olav Fykse Tveit, the new Executive Director of the Church of Norway and Office of International Relations, and the Rev. Leiv Levinsen, a pastor in the Borg Diocese. The delegation is visiting many of the ELCJ churches, schools and ministry projects, as well as Augusta Victoria Hospital, several heads of churches in Jerusalem and Norwegian ministries in Israel. The delegation will also go to Amman, Jordan, visiting the ELCJ congregation there.
- A delegation from Community Church of Joy (ELCA), Glendale, Arizona, US, is currently visiting Palestine and Israel. Included in the delegation's visits are appointments with Bishop Younan in Jerusalem and with the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb at the International Center in Bethlehem.

We thank all of these people who have visited us to learn more about ELCJ ministry and to be of support to us.

7. Mounting Problems from the Israeli Separation Wall Extending around Jerusalem

The Israeli Separation Wall is slowly but surely enveloping Jerusalem and shutting off Palestinian communities from access to the city where people have work and family members and where they go to pray, to receive education and health care. Dr. Yisrael Kimche, a city planner and senior researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, is a member of a task force examining the civilian and urban consequences of the walls and fences around Jerusalem. Dr. Kimche is quoted in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz as saying that the barriers around Jerusalem have severe consequences for the lives of people living on either side of it. He calls it the most acute upheaval in the region since the war of 1967, affecting the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Thousands of Palestinians with Jerusalem identity cards are moving into East Jerusalem in order to avoid being caught behind the Separation Wall when it is completed. They are anxious not to lose their freedom of movement, access to the employment available in Jerusalem and the rest of Israel and their eligibility for national insurance allowances and state health insurance. All of this movement is already putting great pressure on the infrastructures of Jerusalem, such as water, sewage and garbage collection. Despite this movement into East Jerusalem, some 750,000 Palestinian people who live in Jerusalem's metropolitan area will remain outside the Separation Wall, and thus will not have ready access to work, education or hospitals. The number of poor people and people with no means of making a living is expected to increase on both sides of the wall.

In the meantime, the Separation Wall of 25 foot high concrete slabs is being built in Bethlehem. It continues the separation created by electrical fences which have signs in three languages warning people of "mortal danger" if the fence is approached.

The ELCJ is experiencing larger and larger problems directly due to the creeping extensions of the Separation Wall. Our schools and churches in the Bethlehem area are becoming more and more cut off from the other ELCJ churches and schools in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Amman, Jordan. Bishop Younan has increasing difficulty in reaching the Bethlehem area. If and when the plan for the Separation Wall in the northern suburbs of Jerusalem is completed, the same will be said of the ELCJ ministries in Ramallah, and the Jerusalem congregation of people will effectively be cut in half.

We ask you to join many others in praying for us and in protesting the Separation Wall to your respective governments, pointing out the human suffering which is being created for people on both sides of the wall. Dr. Kimche is quoted as saying, "It is time to think of solutions to other problems (other than Israel's security) that affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of people in Jerusalem's metropolitan area." This is true not only of Jerusalem, of course, but of every community in Palestine and people caught between the Separation Wall deep in the West Bank and the 1948 armistice line, the Green Line.

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