



**E-mail Newsletter from
BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (ELCJ).
The ELCJ has its headquarters in Jerusalem and is working in
Jerusalem, Palestine, Jordan and Israel.
March 21, 2002**

Grace and salaam in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from a heartbroken church and people in Jerusalem.

We echo the words of St. Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:

"We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything."

Israeli invasion of Ramallah, Bethlehem and other Palestinian-controlled towns

On Friday, March 15, Bishop Munib Younan, Rev. Gustaf Odquist and Rev. Mary E. Jensen, with two Finnish journalists visited people, damaged homes, the Lutheran church and a refugee camp in Ramallah shortly after the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) tanks and soldiers had moved out of town and then encircled it. The devastation and chaos left behind are unspeakable. Many individual homes and businesses have been terribly damaged and ransacked. The whole infrastructure of Ramallah has been severely damaged, such as the electrical system, the water mains, the telephone service, the roads and sidewalks, and the medical services. Even a center for handicapped children in Al-Ama'ri refugee camp was invaded, vandalized and heavily damaged. Many people have been injured and at least six people were killed.

The Lutheran Church and School of Hope were not entered or damaged, but the road very near the entrance to the church was completely broken by the tanks, rendering it impassable. Rev. Ramez Ansara stated that the members of the church are safe, with some damage to buildings, cars and shops. All the schools in Ramallah had been closed for over a week, due to the IDF attack. The emotional and mental trauma of invasion, occupation and terror has been and continues to be experienced by everyone.

The same thing has happened in Bethlehem and Beit Jala. The tanks and soldiers stayed in Bethlehem much longer than they did in Ramallah but have now moved out to encircle the towns. The Dar al-Kalima school, situated on a hilltop, has suffered damage, especially to outside and inside doors that were shot out by gunfire. By one metal door twenty-four shell casings were found. There was brutal vandalism and trashing of offices; children's artwork was torn off the walls and trampled by the soldiers. All the crosses were taken off the walls and smashed or broken. The clean up has begun immediately, now that the soldiers have left. The Lutheran Christmas Church, the guesthouse and visitor center were not invaded but the infrastructure of Bethlehem has been severely damaged, as well as homes and government buildings. Much damage had been done previously by F-16s and Apache helicopters, but the ground assault was lengthy and additionally disastrous for everyone in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, physically and emotionally.

We thank God that all the schools are now open and that the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour, Talitha Kumi School and the Boys' Boarding Home in Beit Jala as well as the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah are undamaged.

These Israeli military invasions are the strongest and deadliest in at least twenty years. The bishop has written many letters and called many people in leadership positions around the world regarding this situation for the whole Palestinian society, including the Lutheran churches and schools. The ELCJ is grateful for the prayers, support and statements that have been issued on behalf of the church and all the people in this land.

The Christian church in Palestine is living in martyrria. The physical attacks and destruction are very bad but the fears and uncertainty of the people continue long after the tanks have rumbled away and the invading soldiers have withdrawn, leaving utter chaos and incredible debris behind. The people pray together, help one another, visit and console one another, and encourage one another in the name of the loving Christ, who also suffered on this earth.

The ELCJ is asking, "How long will this occupation, terror and killing continue?" It is intended to make the Palestinian people kneel down and give up, but it is clear that nothing can quench the strong aspiration of the Palestinian people to live in just peace and reconciliation. At the same time, the Israelis are also living in fear even though they have the military power. The ELCJ is asking, "When will this fear end? When will the Israelis understand that their security depends on freedom and justice for the Palestinians?" We want security for Israel and freedom and justice for Palestinians.

Please continue to pray and to arrange the vigil prayers until just peace and reconciliation are implemented here. Please take a clear position in regard to ending the occupation and implementing the international legitimacy of the United Nations resolutions 242, 338, and the newest resolution 1397 that calls for a two-state solution, and then make your position known to leaders in churches and government. And please continue your support of the ELCJ so that its mission will continue. In the Lutheran congregational and educational work the church has a direct mission to Palestinian society. Please help to

secure the continuity of the Christian church which has been carrying the banner of the Resurrection for two thousand years in this land.

Christian-Muslim relationships and shared activities

On March 14 Bishop Younan and Rev. Jensen joined with Sheikh Muhammad Hussein, the preacher at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, and with other dignitaries from Jerusalem to visit wounded and burned men in Al-Maqassed Hospital on the Mount of Olives. The patients were from various towns, all of them victims of Israeli gunfire and bombs.

On March 11 Bishop Younan joined with at least a thousand other Arab Christian patriarchs, bishops and priests to attend a major conference in Amman, Jordan, all of them invited by King Abdullah to discuss the status, role and future of Christianity in the Middle East. Arab heads of state, including the king of Jordan, have recently emphasized the importance of the Christian people in their countries, and have noted with dismay the continued emigration of Christians to the west. The positive tone of the conference with its emphasis on Christian-Muslim relations was very evident. It is important to note that some Muslim leaders are themselves writing about the significance of Arab Christianity.

Later that day, still in Amman, Bishop Younan was interviewed for an hour program on a Lebanese television station. The interview focused on Christian-Muslim relations. He emphasized that Christians in this land live side by side with their Muslim neighbors. They know the Muslim people to be faithful, kind and compassionate. The bishop stated that Arab Christians must speak out on behalf of the true Islamic faith and people, telling friends in the west that their ideas of only dangerous, violent Muslims are absolutely wrong. Arab Christians have much experience in living with Muslim people and are able to share with western friends how beautiful and rewarding these relationships can be.

Thank you again for your prayers, support and actions on behalf of the ELCJ and all people in this land. Please continue your efforts. The people await an enduring peace in the land of Christ.

Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen