



## Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ)

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**E-Mail Newsletter from  
BISHOP DR. MUNIB A. YOUNAN  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ).  
The ELCJ is serving in  
Palestine, Jordan and Israel.  
October 14, 2003**

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

The past days have brought the sad news of the death of Dr. Edward Said. On September 25 the world lost Dr. Said, a Palestinian American writer, scholar and strong advocate for justice. We extend our condolences to his family. All of us are further along the path to justice and peace because of Dr. Said's work for human rights over many decades. On October 10 we heard the glad news that Ms Shirin Ebadi, a Muslim woman from Iran who has worked and struggled for human rights for many years, was awarded the 2003 Nobel Peace Prize. We congratulate her and see her accomplishment as yet another step along the path to justice and peace. As Bishop Younan has commented, Ms Ebadi's work helps us to see that Islam is a religion of tolerance and peace.

In this newsletter we will bring you up to date on the experience of three Palestinian young people who had the opportunity to attend the ELCA Atlanta Youth Event in the U.S.; on the youth exchange trip from the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer to Hamburg, Germany and three ELCJ retreats; on the nineteen Ecumenical Accompaniers currently in Palestine and Israel; and news from Bishop Younan's recent journey to Germany and Sweden.

### 1. Three Palestinian Students in Lutheran Schools Go to Atlanta, Georgia

An exciting and life-changing experience lay ahead of three Palestinian young people as they contemplated their upcoming trip to the United States last summer. Ashraf ("Ash") Tannous from Ramallah; Nadia Kamal from Ramallah; and Klara Shihadeh from Beit Jala were feeling great joy in the anticipation of joining thousands of other young people at the August 2003 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Youth Gathering in Atlanta, Georgia. Nadia said she felt very honored to be chosen for such an event and to be able to give a picture of Palestine and its people by what she might say or do.

The two-week Atlanta Youth Event in the Georgia Dome included Bible studies, worship, music, messages from youth and adult leaders, the Learning Village which taught the youth how to be activists for peace and justice, and many opportunities for fun and social activities. More than 40,000 young people and adults took part in these activities, including over 14,500 who worked on seventy

service projects in the Atlanta area, such as helping to build and paint Habitat for Humanity homes.

Ash, a 17 year-old Lutheran young man, stated that he enjoyed everything about the Youth Assembly, especially meeting with the international youth and the worship time each day in the Dome. He learned much from the youth at the assembly about their situations, how they live in their countries, about their faith in Christ and how they live out that faith in word and example. Nadia, a 17 year-old Muslim young woman, stated that she enjoyed the songs that were played at the gathering. "They were almost all about humanity and how people were supposed to love each other. And that is true no matter which religion says so." One thing Nadia will never forget is an Assembly speaker who said that God has gifted every one of us with something special. When Nadia learns what her special gift or talent is, she knows she'll remember what that speaker said. Klara, a 17 year-old Lutheran young woman, was also impressed with the speakers and will never forget praying and having Holy Communion with upwards of 25,000 people.

Either prior to the Youth Event or following it, each international youth was hosted by an ELCA Synod and congregation. Ash and Nadia were hosted by two different families belonging to Joy Lutheran Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Klara was hosted by two congregations in Nashua and Salem, New Hampshire. All of the Palestinian young people enjoyed being with their host families and congregations. Ash thought his host family was "really nice, unbelievably nice and good in everything." He also enjoyed the pastor of Joy Lutheran and was impressed that people made coming to church a priority on Sunday. Nadia said that "the people who hosted me were very generous people. And when I went to church I enjoyed finding out that I understood things. They were things anyone who believes in God and has a big heart could understand. The pastor of Joy Lutheran thought it was wonderful that I had been comfortable at the Youth Assembly, being the only Muslim there, and he called me 'an incredible person.' That was about the greatest praise I have ever gotten so I'll never forget that." Both Ash and Nadia enjoyed recreational activities with their families, such as swimming, horseback riding, peach picking, basketball, tennis, and shopping. Klara noticed a great interest in youth and children's work in the congregations she visited, and found the people very open to the world and very welcoming. Klara enjoyed whale watching in the Atlantic Ocean and visiting an Indian museum as well as art galleries, science museums and a trip to Boston.

(Be watching for a separate article about the three Palestinian young people and their momentous trip to the US, the Atlanta Lutheran Youth Assembly and their host families in the Arkansas-Oklahoma and the New England ELCA Synods.)

## 2. Summer Activities: Youth and Family Retreats

### Jerusalem and Hamburg Youth Hold a Joint Retreat in Germany:

Twelve Palestinian young people (girls and boys ages 13-18) from the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem, traveled with Rev. Ibrahim Azar to Hamburg, Germany, in August for a ten-day stay with about twelve German Lutheran youth and their families. The St. John Lutheran Church in Hamburg and the Lutheran

Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem have had an exchange program for the past five years. Twice the German youth have come to Jerusalem and this was the second time Palestinian youth traveled to Hamburg. The theme of the gathering was “How to Live in a Difficult Time as a Christian.” In workshops the young people shared the difficulties they face in life. Palestinian youth spoke of checkpoints, difficult travel and the fact there is no peace. German youth spoke of environmental concerns in their country and the desire to spend more time with their families. Every day the whole youth group spent time in prayer, and on Sunday the youth conducted the worship service. Some of the recreation activities included swimming and bowling. These youth exchanges are essential for growing a mutual understanding for a common vocation in a broken, globalized world.

#### Jerusalem Congregation Enjoys Family Retreat in Nazareth:

About thirty-seven men, women and children (from age 2 to 88!) spent four days at St. Margaret’s Guest House in Nazareth in July. Ordinarily this family retreat would include members of the other ELCJ congregations, but due to closures and checkpoints, the Redeemer congregation was the only one able to travel to Nazareth this summer. The theme for the retreat was “The Significance of Christian Belief in a Multi-religious Country.” Bishop Emeritus Daoud Haddad and Rev. Azar led the studies and discussions with the adults while the children had a special program of their own, including opportunities to swim. Together the retreat group visited holy sites by the Sea of Galilee, such as Tabgha and Capernaum.

#### Two ELCJ Youth Retreats in Nazareth:

Rev. Ramez Ansara, pastor of the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah and also the Youth Pastor for the ELCJ, brought two groups of youth to St. Margaret’s Guest House in Nazareth this past summer. From August 4-7 the “juniors” attended their retreat. Ages 14-17, the 53 young people from four of the ELCJ congregations had rich discussions on their theme: “How Can We Be Good Christians in Our Country?” The entire program was led by Rev. Ansara, Deacon Faraj Lati and Mr. Saliba Rashmawi. From August 18-21 the young adults, ages 19-26 years, from four ELCJ congregations, attended their retreat. Rev. Ansara and Rev. Fuad Dagher, an Anglican priest, led the discussions among the 42 young people on “Liberty and Christianity.” Recreation activities at the retreats included swimming, games and visits to holy sites in the Galilee. Rev. Ansara stated that the young people were hopeful and happy, but have many questions and concerns about their future. The youth retreats were particularly special this year because they were not held in 2002 due to extreme difficulties related to the military occupation.

### 3. The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI):

A few years ago the Heads of Christian Churches in Jerusalem asked the World Council of Churches (WCC) to send people to “accompany” oppressed people in their daily struggle with the military occupation and all the problems which ensue. The WCC responded with the EAPPI, sending willing volunteers from Europe and North America to spend three months in various villages, cities and projects in Palestine and Israel. For nearly one and one-half years these volunteers have

been coming to this land and then returning home to tell about the facts on the ground. This fall nineteen EAPPI volunteers from Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States have come. They are accompanying Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the occupation and to report to the world their observations of what the occupation is doing to Palestinians and Israelis on a daily basis.

#### 4. Bishop Younan Visits Partner Churches in Germany and Sweden:

Bishop Younan spent three weeks in Germany and Sweden during September and October, visiting partner churches and consolidating relationships. “I was happy to have a long visit in Germany because the ELCJ is the outcome of German mission in Palestine. I was pleased and surprised to see the amount of knowledge many German churches have about our work, and I felt their love for the ELCJ. I was also very pleased to see the support for the ongoing Palestinian Christian witness.”

IN GERMANY: Bishop Younan visited with church leaders and church gatherings in Berlin, Naumburg, Kaiserswert, Hanover, Greifswalds, Hamburg and Rensburg. Just a few of the highlights of the bishop’s visit to Germany included the following:

- A one-day session with the Berlin Mission Work (BMW) Board in regard to restructuring the educational work of the ELCJ including the Talitha Kumi School in order to strengthen the educational mission in Palestine.
- An evening spent with Johannes Kirchengemeinde in Berlin, which is a partner church with the Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah.
- A constructive conference with the Board of Jerusalemverein, the establishing mission of the ELCJ, in regard to consolidating German mission and churches and ELCJ relations.
- The opportunity to thank the Evangelical Education Development (EED) for their generous financial support for the schools of the ELCJ and Abraham’s Herberge in Beit Jala.
- A visit to the Pomerania church which, like the ELCJ, is a minority church and fully understands the struggle and suffering of the Palestinian Christians.
- The Evangelical Mission Work (EMW) which expressed interest in ecumenical and interfaith exchanges and dialogues, with a special interest in Christian-Jewish-Muslim dialogue and Dar al-Kalima Academy.
- The Northern Albanian Church synod gathering where the bishop thanked the church for its support of the ELCJ’s ecclesiastical and educational work in addition to Abraham’s Herberge. The bishop also had discussion and negotiation with the director and staff of the Nord Elbian Mission Center (NMZ).
- Constructive dialogue with the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Germany (VELKD) and with the Evangelical Churches in Germany (EKD) on continuing relationships with the ELCJ.
- The celebration of 167 years of Kaiserswert mission. The bishop participated in a dialogue sermon including Slovenia, Jerusalem and Germany on the words of St. Paul in Acts 17:28, “For in Him we live and move and have our being.”

Bishop Younan spoke about the Palestinian Christian Church being a church of martyria. “The golden time of the living Church is never in luxury and affluence. History teaches us that the golden time is when the Church is in the throes of suffering and persecution. It is only then that the Church grows. It grows in membership as well as in its spirituality because its witness is always in the suffering. Additionally, within the Church’s suffering, Christ repeatedly gives us the promise, experience and knowledge that only ‘in Him do we live and move and have our being,’ as the Apostle Paul said in his sermon in Athens, in Acts 17. It is Christ who stands with us in the deepest darkness and says, ‘I am with you until the end of the Earth.’ (Matt. 28:20) It is Him who comes to the fearful Church and says, ‘My peace I give to you, not as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ (John 14:27) It is Him who says, ‘Do not be afraid, little flock.’ (Luke 12:32)

“It is Christ who gives us courage to live and move, who continuously calls the Palestinian Church to be salt in the society and light in the Middle East. It is Him who calls us in our suffering, frailty and weakness to be instruments of love, brokers of justice, defenders of human, civil and religious rights, ministers of reconciliation and apostles of love. Christ does not only allow us to live and move and have our being in Him, but He calls us, Palestinian Christians, to be living witnesses and carry the banner of witness of His crucifixion and resurrection in this land where they occurred, until He comes again.”

Bishop Younan expresses his deep gratitude to everyone who made the arrangements for his journey through Germany. He found the trip very beneficial, enjoyable and successful and believes this should be an annual event because of the diverse, rich relations with German churches and mission boards.

IN SWEDEN: Patriarch Michel Sabbah of the Latin Catholic Church in Jerusalem and Bishop Younan were invited by the Swedish Lutheran Archbishop and the Bishop of the Catholic Church to speak to the Council of Churches in Sweden. The two Palestinian heads of Christian churches spoke at a one-day seminar on the topic of Jerusalem and the witness of the Palestinian Christian Churches in regard to religious fundamentalism, democracy and human rights. “Both of us addressed the church people on these issues,” Bishop Younan said, “and had very constructive discussions, especially on the subject of how the Palestinian church can build a culture of justice, peace and life in a time of destruction, spiral violence and occupation.”

On Sunday, October 5, Patriarch Sabbah was a guest of the Catholic churches and Bishop Younan participated in the St. Michael’s Day observance with the ELCJ partner, the Strangnas Diocese. A special seminar was held on the subject of martyria in Christianity and Islam. Participants in the seminar included ambassadors, members of the Swedish parliament, politicians, journalists and members of the Swedish Lutheran churches.

On Monday, October 6, Bishop Younan and Patriarch Sabbah visited the Swedish Foreign Ministry Department and the Swedish International Development Aid (SIDA) program. “We updated them on the role of the Christian church in building just peace, a civil society and democracy,” Bishop Younan stated. “We urged them to give support for the indigenous Palestinian church to continue its challenging work. It was clear that the mere fact that a Catholic patriarch and a Lutheran bishop were standing up together for human rights issues was a powerful, ecumenical witness. We together were standing for the right thing at the right moment. It is our hope that such ecumenical visits can be encouraged in other countries.”

Bishop Younan expresses his gratitude to the many Swedish churches and people who made the visit so enjoyable and successful for him and for Patriarch Sabbah.

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We continue to thank you for your prayers and your support. The busy autumn schedule is upon us and despite closures, checkpoints and continued harassments as we live under military occupation, we thank God for every opportunity we have to proclaim God's grace and love in our words and in our actions. Thanks be to God!

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**Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen**

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