



Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ)

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

SPECIAL EDITION: A CALL FOR HELP FROM CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN REGARD TO THE SEPARATION WALL

November 24, 2003

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

This edition of the ELCJ Newsletter is devoted entirely to the issue of the Separation Wall that Israel is building between the State of Israel and the West Bank. The projected route for this controversial barrier is not along the 1967 borders, the Green Line, but is gouging deeply into valuable Palestinian land. The wall is taking Palestinian villages and farmland, Palestinian water resources and other natural resources, and disrupting the lives of tens of thousands of Palestinians. The United Nations (UN) estimates that nearly 15% of the West Bank land will be taken away from Palestinians and included inside Israel by the winding wall that is already built in many places and is projected to be completed in the very near future. The UN's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has stated that according to a map released by Israel, the Separation Wall will be about 650 kilometers long, which is more than 400 miles.

We are deeply concerned about all the people whose livelihood, education, health care, religious practices, homes and families are being damaged or lost altogether because of the Separation Wall. Just imagine if a high concrete wall or an electrified fence with deep ditches and patrol roads on either side was being constructed through the middle of your city or town. Just imagine how you would cope with a situation in which your job, your farm, your school and your doctor were on one side of that wall and your home and family were on the other side. The only way you could get to the other side of the wall to your property, education and health care would be to use a gate that was locked most of the time and was opened by heavily armed soldiers only at certain hours, perhaps to let the school children go through to class or to return home. Since there would be only one gate for your town, you would have to travel far out of your way and then wait until a soldier came to unlock the gate so you could cross to go to work, do shopping, see your doctor, and perhaps even go to your church.

We are now hearing about the plans to create the "Jerusalem envelope," which means that Israel is planning and even beginning to build the Separation Wall to keep the City of Jerusalem apart from the surrounding Palestinian parts of the city and from nearby

Palestinian villages. The disruption and chaos this is already creating are very frightening. We also can see that Israel is establishing artificial lines and barriers as a prelude to any decisions about a Palestinian state, shrinking the land area and removing natural resources.

In this newsletter you will find copies of two letters written by people to the south of Jerusalem in Bethlehem, and by people in the northern suburbs of Jerusalem, in Beit Hanina/Dahia district. You will find comments by Bishop Younan and several important things that you can do to help the situation. You will also find information about websites for more information, photos and maps regarding the Separation Wall.

1. “An Urgent Appeal from Bethlehem Municipality and the Citizens of Bethlehem to all International, Religious and Human Organizations in the World”

“The citizens of Bethlehem extend this urgent humanitarian appeal to all governments, to international, religious and human organizations in the world to assist them in confronting the Israeli government’s tyrannical order to deprive them access to over two thousand acres of their agricultural land located north of the ethnic separation wall which the Israeli Government constructed on the Bethlehem northern lands that are rich with blessed olive trees exceeding ten thousand trees.

“We were prevented from picking olives this season and we were barred from reaching our land to take care of it and derive benefit from it as an Israeli preliminary step toward its confiscation. This matter increased the state of poverty and destitution that we are suffering from, due to the Israeli measures in erecting military checkpoints, continuous closures cutting interconnection between the Palestinian territories and preventing our citizens from joining their work in the other cities thus causing an acute increase in the raging unemployment in town.

“From the town of the Nativity, we appeal to all governments, religious bodies and human rights organizations in the world to pressure the Israeli Government to cancel this oppressive order, to restore the rights to their legitimate owners and to enable our people to reach their lands to utilize them in order to help them earn the living of their families at this difficult time. We call upon them to prevent Israel from executing its expansionist brutal project of annexing Rachel’s Tomb and the surrounding lands and closing our City’s main entrance, linking the two Holy cities of Jerusalem and Bethlehem and suffocating our town and obstructing the flow of tourists and Christian pilgrimage to Bethlehem.”

This letter is signed “The Citizens of Bethlehem”, is dated November 8, 2003, and written on stationery from the Bethlehem Municipality of the Palestinian National Authority.

2. “A Call and an Appeal” from Christians in the Beit Hanina/Dahia District (northern suburbs of Jerusalem, dependent on the center)

“To your eminences the patriarchs, the honourable custodian, and the reverend heads of the Christian churches in the Holy Land!

A Call and an Appeal.

“Jerusalem is in danger,
The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is in danger,
The Christian holy places are in danger.

“We, the undersigned, the representatives of the religious, educational and youth Christian institutions, and the Arab Christian Palestinian citizens living in the Beit Hanina/Dahia district and number more than 150 families, implore you to interfere with the Israeli plans to build a racial barrier wall. We heard of this information which was spread around by the various media and was based on what Israeli responsible persons have said.

“Needless to say, the building of the racial wall will do us great harm in many ways. It will increase the severance of relations between us and our Jerusalem churches. This is regarded as a violation against all international conventions and signed agreements which permit believers access to the worship places. It also violates the signed agreement with the Vatican which permits all people free access to the worship places. The building of the racial wall will sever the relations among members of the one family. It will deny our children the educational and our sick the medical treatment services. It will separate us from our work places, the source of our means of living. It will do harm to our living circumstances which have been deteriorating already.

“The building of this wall and the separation of Jerusalem from its surroundings will lead to our isolation and separation from our religious, cultural, health, social and economic life center. It will also cause that similar harm comes to the inhabitants of Jerusalem themselves and to their various institutions. This means that Jerusalem as a whole is the real target of building the wall and it is not for security reasons as pretended by them.

“We submit this letter before you as our patience has come to an end. We humbly request you to put an end to this act of injustice which will surely happen. Enough of our torment with obtaining our daily bread. We are in urgent need for keeping our permanent bond with our Jerusalem Christianity. Otherwise we shall be like sheep without a shepherd. Nobody of all people but you can attend to this request which we write to you for consideration.

“Therefore we entreat you to do everything you can and to use your influence on all levels in order to convey the gloomy picture confronting us. We hope that you will interfere to put an end to these threatening Israeli plans which aim at the Jerusalem inhabitants with the intention of evacuating them. In consequence thereof the churches will be left as museums, and the bells will ring with nobody giving a response. All this is only a pretense of security means, which is unfounded.

“Signatures and stamps of (Christian religious institutions, all in Beit Hanina):
 The Jerusalem Rosary Monastic Order
 The School of the Rosary Monastic Order
 St. Anton Coptic College of the Orthodox Coptic Patriarchate
 The Life Shelter of the Jerusalem Diocesan Council, of the Arabic Episcopal
 Church
 The Arabic Orthodox Club
 Terra Santa Parish Center
 Mar Yakub Latin Housing Project
 The Patriarchal Housing Project (of the Latin Patriarchate)
 Mar Anton Housing Project Committee (Franciscan Fathers project)
 Mar Boulos Housing Project Committee (Franciscan Fathers project)”

Dated November 8, 2003

3. Bishop Younan’s Statement regarding the Christian Perspective of the Separation Wall and the Effect on the ELCJ

“Recently his Holiness, Pope John Paul II, said that the Holy Land does not need a wall but needs bridges among people. I affirm that statement and want to make people aware of the great problems we as Palestinians are currently facing as the Israeli Separation Wall is being built. We long for bridges rather than walls. Walls prevent the construction of bridges.

“Israel has said that it needs this Separation Wall for its own security. I would submit to you, rather, that this is a wall of insecurity. It is bound to create more hatred, more anger and more outrage because of the enormous losses and suffering it is creating among the Palestinian people. Many families are being caught in the ‘seam zone’, which is the area between the Green Line and the Separation Wall being built deeply into the West Bank, taking so much Palestinian land. These families are neither in Israel nor in the West Bank. They will become refugees, some of them for the third or fourth time since 1948.

“We believe that the security of Israel lies only in freedom and justice for the Palestinian people. There is no security in the material walls that divide us.

“We in the ELCJ are already experiencing problems resulting from the Separation Wall but soon we will have many more problems, if the wall is actually built through the Beit Hanina/Dahia district, as described in the letter above. This heavily populated area is a suburb of Jerusalem and is dependent on the center of the city. On a very practical level, the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer Arabic congregation in Jerusalem will be divided in two. Nearly half of the people in this ELCJ congregation will be on the east side of the Separation Wall. They will be caught in a situation which means they cannot enter Jerusalem by the normal roads but must travel north first toward Ramallah (which most of them cannot enter due to Israeli military laws) and then further east and south in order to enter Jerusalem through one gate in the

wall behind the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus. This gate will be opened when the soldiers choose to open it, and in any case only people with Israeli-issued permits will be allowed to enter. How can the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, located in the Old City of Jerusalem, expect to hold worship services and other church-related activities when nearly half of the congregation is being held behind a wall? This also has ramifications for the Lutheran Church of Hope, ELCJ, in Ramallah. If the wall is built through Beit Hanina/Dahia district, the pastor and other members of the Ramallah congregation who do have permits to leave Ramallah will then run into the problem of gaining access to Jerusalem through the Separation Wall.

“In the Bethlehem-Beit Sahour-Beit Jala area just south of Jerusalem the situation will be similar. While the three ELCJ congregations and schools located there could relate to each other, they would have other serious difficulties. Many members of the congregations would find themselves on the ‘wrong’ side of the Separation Wall; their daily lives and work would become even more disrupted than they already are. My conviction is that we will lose many more Christian families to emigration. Sadly, they will be allowed to pass through the gate if they promise not to return to this land.

“In the larger picture of the ELCJ we will have heightened problems in regard to our ecclesiastical work, as well as problems for our pastors and members to leave their towns for any reason. Already we have great difficulty getting permits and visas even for our pastors to go to local church meetings, speaking engagements, retreats and any purpose taking them overseas. Our ELCJ church council meetings, for example – already problematic for people to attend – will become infinitely more difficult to arrange and to hold. The same situation exists and will become much worse for women’s groups, youth gatherings, family retreats, worship and social occasions involving our six ELCJ congregations and six schools. My own work as the ELCJ bishop will become markedly more difficult as I try to cross through multiple borders, checkpoints and infrequent gates in the Separation Wall. Even the difficult crossings through the Separation Wall will be impossible when closures and curfews are imposed on the Palestinian towns by the Israeli military.

“The letter from responsible Christian people in Beit Hanina/Dahia district points up the kinds of problems all Christian churches and institutions in Jerusalem will be having if the Separation Wall is built through the northern part of Jerusalem. For example, children going to the Christian schools on one side of the Separation Wall but living on the opposite side will have to take long, arduous bus rides in the morning and afternoon. What today is a half-hour trip to school would require over two hours through unfamiliar territory and uncertain crossings through a gate just to reach the school by 8:00 am.

“Jerusalem needs more places for bringing people together for mutual understanding, not walls to keep them apart.

“When we look at history, it is clear that all fences and walls in the world intended for divisive security purposes have not succeeded. Like the Berlin Wall, they have been uprooted and demolished because people cannot tolerate them. To erect a wall in

these modern days is to use very old, ancient mentalities, mentalities that intimidate. Instead, we need to find ways to bring about more communication, not less; more face-to-face encounters, not less; more avenues to peace and reconciliation, not less.

“I call upon the worldwide Christian Church to speak up loudly and clearly to their governments to influence Israel to STOP BUILDING THE SEPARATION WALL and to TAKE DOWN THE SEPARATION WALL ALREADY IN PLACE. The deliberate provocation of the Separation Wall is only yielding more suffering, more pain, more hatred and more bitterness in this already volatile, violent situation between Israel and the Palestinians. As the Separation Wall extends and rises, the walls of hatred are also rising higher and higher. We urge you to be advocates for Palestinian Christians who are bridge builders, to do your utmost so that your governments and churches will stop another human tragedy – no matter what good name may be given to the tragedy – a tragedy that is the Wall of Separation. When we call for a stop to that tragedy, it is a call to save both Israelis and Palestinians from being closed up behind walls that bring no justice and no peace.

“We in the ELCJ commit ourselves to build bridges, not walls; to build trust, not fear; to dialogue for justice and peace in peaceful ways. We commit ourselves to work against all kinds of hatred, bitterness and despair. We commit ourselves to help people see God in the other and not to blind our eyes regarding the humanity of the other. We commit ourselves to let the beams of justice spark in our country, not the dooms of war, occupation, humiliation and separation. We ask, for these reasons, that you help us in this mission to pull down all walls of hatred because our Lord calls us to be bridges for justice and peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

“My friends, as Christians around the world we all need to work together to gain true security for Israel and actual justice for Palestinians, bringing peace to this divided, suffering land and people.”

4. Here Are Ways to Get Information about the Separation Wall

In order to speak and write knowledgeably about the Separation Wall, you need the widest possible information base.

NEWSPAPERS, NEWSMAGAZINES: Reading material and photos on the Separation Wall can be found in print. With the perspectives we have outlined in this newsletter, you will be able to determine the point of view being expressed. Watch for

photos and maps.

TELEVISION: While we know that much of TV news and opinion is focused on the Israeli perspective, we also know that some TV channels are broadcasting humanitarian stories about the Separation Wall.

WEBSITES: We are noting several websites which have maps, articles, personal stories and photographs about the Separation Wall and its effects.

www.elca.org/middleeast This is the website for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and particularly the web page for the Middle East. Note the box speaking of “A Wall Is Going Up” to click for more detailed information. There you will find several articles and many photos by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen, the Communications Assistant to Bishop Younan. The material by Mary about Jayyous, for example, also contains photos and an article by Larry Fata, of the EAPPI World Council of Churches program entitled, “Something There Is That Does Not Like a Wall.”

www.loga.org/MiddleEast/SeparationWall.htm This is the website for the Lutheran Office of Governmental Affairs in Washington, DC. In addition to LOGA material, there are also links to two other important resources:

1. World Council of Churches booklet about the wall, to be read online or ordered as a booklet to be sent to you.
2. A United Nations Special Report on the wall.

www.pengon.org/wall/wall.html This website gives specific information about the routes and plans for the wall, and connects with a group named “Stop the Wall” working out of Jayyous, a Palestinian community directly and adversely affected by the wall. Please note the maps on the Pengon website.

www.btselem.org B’Tselem is an Israeli information gathering group that tells the authentic stories of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. On this website you can click on “Barrier Through Jerusalem” to learn more about the Beit Hanina/Dahia district problems with the proposed wall.

www.palestinemonitor.org This Palestinian website is highly respected for giving authentic information about the situation for Palestinian people. Now there is an article on the site, “Israeli Separation Wall”, which will be helpful.

Please note that these websites also have information about many aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and situation. We recommend that you keep the sites on your “Favorites” list, or list them elsewhere in order to have easy access to quick, authentic information now and in the future.

In closing, a prayer from Kenya, Africa:

*From the cowardice that dare not face new truth
From the laziness that is contented with half truth
From the arrogance that thinks it knows all truth
Good Lord, deliver us.*

Noted by Rev. Dr. Mary E. Jensen Communications Ass’t to Bishop Dr. Munib A Younan, ELCJ

Bishop Younan: ga_elcj@netvision.net.il Rev. Mary Jensen: inasmuch@aol.com
www.holyland-lutherans.org