



# 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.  
September 17, 2003**

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

Violence has once again broken out in Israel and Palestine, much to our dismay and sorrow. Bombings, more bombings, more occupation by IDF forces, injuries, killings – these multiple sorrows pour forth from our local news, from the mass media, and from our hearts. The café bombing in West Jerusalem on September 9 has touched the bishop's staff in a personal way. Shafiq, a 27 year-old Palestinian man working at the café, was killed in the bombing. Shafiq was a nephew of one of our staff members and a second cousin of another staff member. He had only worked at the café for a month and was so happy to be employed, having been out of work for a long time. We mourn his passing as we mourn the deaths of so many Israelis and Palestinians in this vicious conflict. We ask for your continued prayers and your work for an end to the occupation and a new beginning of a Palestinian state side by side with the State of Israel. Israelis and Palestinians alike need a new opportunity for reconciliation and just peace.

A whole summer has passed with Bishop Younan, Rev. Jensen and other staff members out of the country for working and vacation purposes. We greet you once again in September 2003 and wish to bring you up to date on the political and human situation in Palestine and Israel; the dedication and grand opening of two significant facilities in the Bethlehem Lutheran ministry; information about the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada; the Biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in Milwaukee, WI; the installation of Rev. Russ Siler as the pastor of the English language congregation at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem; and the arrival of Andrew Willis as an assistant to Dr. Charlie Haddad, director of the ELCJ schools.

In a follow-up newsletter which will come in about two weeks, we will bring more news and information about the local situation and the activities of the ELCJ.

## **1. The Palestinian and Israeli Situation in September 2003**

Our Palestinian cities and villages are under siege in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. If the Israeli military is not actually in the town, the military is encircling the town with soldiers, armaments and military vehicles. Many villages are invaded, houses demolished and Palestinian people traumatized, injured and killed. People are existing under difficult circumstances: there is a 70% unemployment rate in the West Bank and Gaza. At least

65% of the people are living under the poverty line -- \$2.00 per day or less, according to the World Bank. Israeli checkpoints are everywhere and Palestinian people are prevented from keeping medical appointments, seeing family, going to work and school and going to pray. Our ELCJ church council and synod council frequently cannot meet because of checkpoints, closures and sieges.

At the moment our country is watching with grief the building of the separation wall. This wall is being erected by Israel not along the green line, but carving inside the West Bank, taking Palestinian land, villages, and sources of water. The West Bank, occupied by Israel in 1967, is about 22% of historic Palestine; the winding route of the wall is probably going to take about 10% of this small piece of land. In some places the wall is made of concrete eight meters high. In other places it is high barbed wire fencing with elaborate deterrents for crossing (including deep trenches, raked sand, lookout towers, additional fencing) extending many meters on each side. When completed the wall will be several hundred kilometers in length. Jerusalem itself will be enclosed in a barrier called the Jerusalem envelope.

“Once again we know that spiral violence and separation of people are not the answers. Security will only come when justice will prevail. Right now we are at the crucial point to witness that the world powers can divert the eyes of the world from justice and only concentrate on symptoms and contemporary problems. But history teaches us that justice is the main pillar for any solution, “ Bishop Younan states.

A whole cycle and spiral of violence are occurring in our midst. We certainly condemn violence of any sort, whether Israeli or Palestinian, as this cycle of violence continues. We plead with the world to intervene and bring an end to the military occupation and the violence because both nations are tired from injustice, bloodshed and hatred.

Now Israel has decided in principle to expel President Arafat from Ramallah and Palestine. This may or may not happen, but it has raised the temperature of the Palestinians who want to protect their elected president. This act by Israel could lead to horrific problems and could create a political vacuum. On September 16th the Patriarchs and local Heads of Churches visited President Arafat in Ramallah. Patriarch Michel Sabbah of the Latin Catholic Church stated that this situation must be used to enhance justice for both Palestinians and Israelis. It must not create a political vacuum among the Palestinians but should be invested to build the infrastructure and society, and everybody should be under the rule of the law.

According to Bishop Younan, “Right now, with the upsurge in violence, the assassinations, the bombings and the threat to expel President Arafat, the Roadmap plan would appear to be greatly compromised. But I continue to say that we must do our utmost to implement the Roadmap because I believe it is one of the last chances we will have to see a just solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

Palestinian Christian people are emigrating, unable to raise their families in this atmosphere of political instability and a deteriorating economy. As churches we are trying to find ways to help families remain in this country by means of community-based

education; providing jobs and housing; and strengthening Christian institutions such as schools, social agencies, hospitals and clinics. We need assistance from the churches in the world to help us in this struggle to keep our people in Palestine until a true peace is established and we Palestinians have our own state where we may be free. It remains always our policy that the situation will be solved with a two-state solution and a shared Jerusalem with solutions found to the problems of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza; the right of return for Palestinian refugees; and shared water resources.

## **2. In the Midst of Chaos, Good News**

The Good News of the Gospel prevails, despite the chaos around us. The love of God in Christ is proclaimed in our churches Sunday after Sunday, and the care of people in the community continues through the schools, the social work programs and women, children and youth programs.

On Monday, September 1, the long-awaited dedication and grand opening was held of the Ad-Dar Cultural and Conference Center alongside the Lutheran Christmas Church (ELCJ) in Bethlehem. Many guests came from Finland (the government of Finland gave generous financial support in building the Conference Center), the United States and other countries to join the Palestinian Church and people in celebrating the event. The International Center of Bethlehem (ICB) is a Lutheran-based, ecumenically-oriented institution serving the whole Palestinian community. Through empowering the local community, developing human resources, cultivating artistic talents and facilitating intercultural encounters, the ICB actively promotes the building of Palestinian civil society. Another way of building the society is the Dar al-Kalima Academy which is a small community college facility offering training in music, arts and crafts, media, communication, cultural management, tourism and Christian ministry. Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb and the ICB, church, school and academy staffs along with Bishop Dr. Munib Younan, Ms Paula Lehtomaki, the Finnish Minister for Foreign Trade and Development, and Dr. Nabeel Kassis, Minister of Planning in the Palestinian Authority celebrated the dedication and grand opening with many guests. Music was provided by the National Conservatory of Music at ICB. Bishop Younan said, "Music, arts and theology will help in building a modern civil society, teaching freedom of speech, opinion and expression. I pray that Ad-Dar would play an active role where the ELCJ is seen as empowering the powerless."

On Friday, September 5, the Dar al-Kalima Health and Wellness Center celebrated its dedication and grand opening in an outdoor ceremony on the school grounds. Bishop Younan, Rev. Dr. Raheb, Dr. As'ad Ramlawi, director of Preventive and Community Medicine at the Palestinian Ministry of Health, Ms Naila Kharub, Principal of Dar al-Kalima School, and Dr. Nuha Khoury, Dar al-Kalima Deputy Director, spoke to the many guests from Palestine, the United States and the Nordic countries. Wheat Ridge Ministries from the U.S., a major contributor to the Wellness Center, was represented by a delegation of eighteen people; Mr. Gregg Smith and Dr. Richard Bimler addressed the audience. Performing were karate students from Dar al-Kalima and musicians from the community. Dar al-Kalima students sang the school anthem and released many balloons. The Health and Wellness Center tour following the program revealed exercise and training rooms, classrooms, and a beautiful swimming pool. "As the Lutheran World

Federation (LWF) has the theme 'For the healing of the world,' such a Health and Wellness Center shows that the Lutheran Church's theology is to care for the whole person, mentally, physically and spiritually," Bishop Younan said.

These major institutions in Bethlehem are the result of years of planning and building despite the continuing occupation and the frequent curfews and closures. Thanks be to God for their completion, for the local and international help in building them, and now for the multiple opportunities provided for contributing to the health, development and future of Palestinian society.

### **3. Bishop Dr. Munib Younan Elected as LWF Vice President from Asia**

The Lutheran World Federation Assembly 2003 met in Winnipeg, Canada, in July. Bishop Younan and Ms Dalia Habbash were the delegates from the ELCJ. Many international delegates were denied visas by the Canadian government and the assembly protested this action. Bishop Younan stated, "We were reminded of the fact that we as Lutherans are a confessional church and a global church. It is important that we get out of our shells and listen to our brothers and sisters, learning about other cross cultural issues and problems. Our Lutheran communion with one another is always colored in nuances of life, culture and experience. We do not always agree on issues and some of these issues arose in Winnipeg: Christian marriage, family, sexuality. The issue of sexuality does not seem to have a clear cut answer between South and North, but it is a social/ethical issue that touches the lives of many people in our communion. Also discussed were the problems and situations in the Middle East. I was very impressed by the concern of the Lutheran communion for justice in the Middle East."

Elections were held and the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Rev. Mark Hanson, will soon assume the presidency of LWF. This is an additional responsibility for Bishop Hanson, and Bishop Younan believes his election is very good news for the Lutheran communion. His voice will be a strong one for justice, for the people in the South, for people who are oppressed. In further elections, Bishop Younan of the ELCJ was elected as an LWF vice-president, representing Asia. Other vice-presidents were also elected, representing Africa, South America and other areas of the world.

### **4. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly**

Bishop Younan and Suad Younan were special guests at the ELCA Biennial Churchwide Assembly, held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, during the second week in August.

Bishop Younan stated: "I noticed that a Church body remains human, no matter if it is small or large. Every Church body has its strengths and weaknesses; it may be more organized or less organized. But each Church has much to give the others, no matter what its size or organizational style or culture may be. As the Apostle Paul wrote, 'We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.' (II Corinthians 4:7)

"I was thankful for the support that was shown for the ELCJ and its work in memorials and resolutions which consolidated our relationship with the ELCA. As two Churches our

prophetic voice may be disturbing to injustice and oppression but the Church follows its head, Jesus Christ, who disturbed injustice for the sake of humanity.”

### **5. Welcoming New ELCA Staff People to the ELCJ**

In August the ELCJ was happy to welcome two new staff people sent to us from the ELCA Division for Global Mission (DGM).

The Rev. Russell Siler was installed on September 7 as the pastor of the English language congregation at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. Rev. Siler is both a pastor and a lawyer, and has much experience in parish ministry as well as working with social concerns and legislation. He was the director of the ELCA Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs (LOGA) in Washington, DC. The English language congregation council worked closely with Bishop Younan and Rev. Said Ailabouni of the DGM in calling Rev. Siler as the pastor.

Mr. Andrew (Andy) Willis is working as an administrative assistant to Dr. Charlie Haddad in the ELCJ Schools Office as of the first of September. A recent graduate of St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, USA, Andy brings his gifts of English, theology and international study to the ELCJ. During his senior year at St. Olaf, Andy spent time studying in Egypt, India, Europe and Far East countries.

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***Part Two of the September 2003 newsletter will arrive soon.  
Thank you for your continued prayers and support of the ministry of the ELCJ.***

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

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