



NEWSLETTER

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem

January 2009

Message from Bishop Suheil S. Dawani

The Christian journey is often a walk through parables - narratives of “ordinary people” wherein surprising things happen; sometimes things that contain great meaning. We are in such a time now here in the Holy Land.

For several weeks at this time of year, all our Christian brothers and sisters are celebrating the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ and then the Epiphany, the appearance of the Incarnation to all the world. These are usually seasons of hope, promise, joy, and raised awareness of God’s presence among us.

This year, however, these seasons coincided with a devastating conflict just a few miles away in Gaza. Many people died, many suffered injuries – physical and psychological – and many continue to endure extreme hardship. We keep the people of Gaza constantly in our prayers, but of course we are especially mindful of our brothers and sisters at our Al Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza City. The heroic, dedicated staff of Al Ahli continues to honor their mission of service to all, even under the recent horrendous conditions. We ask for your particular prayers and support for them.

For me personally, this season also marks the third anniversary of my Consecration as the 14th Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem. In the midst of the remembrance of that event at our Epiphany Service in St. George’s Cathedral, the people of Gaza were much in my heart.

This is the parable we are experiencing today in the Holy Land – the concurrence of Holy Seasons, conflict, and our own ministries. What is the meaning of this particular parable? I believe that we must remember during these difficult days that we are celebrating at this very moment the Incarnation of our Lord. That God is present among us, and it is in our own ministries that each of us witnesses to His presence. Yes, especially amidst conflict and strife, we Christians stand for something here. We stand for Peace, Justice, Reconciliation and Forgiveness, and the Promise of a time when we can live together in fellowship. I believe the meaning of this parable we are living now is that we must hold firmly to our faith and **trust** in the promise that the Lord made to us.

So as always, but especially now, I ask that you walk this parable of Peace and Reconciliation with me, each in your way and in your own ministry.

May the Peace of the Lord be always with you.

The Diocese Supports Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza

As most readers know, the beginning of 2009 brought difficult circumstances to our region. The Diocese of Jerusalem maintains an important ministry in Gaza, Al Ahli Arab Hospital. Al Ahli has been providing health care to the people of Gaza for more than 100 years, most recently as an Episcopal/Anglican institution. The mission of Al Ahli continues to be, as it always has been, to provide care and medical services to the people of Gaza, regardless of their affiliations or ability to pay. Through all the contentious times in this region, Al Ahli has maintained its strict impartiality and focused only on its humanitarian mission.

Now, Al Ahli faces one of its most difficult challenges ever. Surrounded by conflict, the hospital stayed open throughout the difficult weeks, ministering to up to 50 patients each day who needed care for their injuries, wounds, and burns. Of course, in addition, the hospital had to continue to care for all other people as well. The hospital leadership of Ms. Suhaila Tarrazi, Director, and Dr. Maher Ayyad, Medical Director, set an example for all the hospital employees of courage, dedication, commitment, and unyielding faith.

We all stand in awe of the work continuing at Al Ahli in service to the people of Gaza and to the Church. Through all of this, Bishop Suheil has kept in constant contact, looking out for the safety and well-being of everyone at the hospital. He has led efforts within the Diocese and throughout the Christian world in responding to Al Ahli's time of need:

- The ministries, clergy, and parishioners all throughout the Diocese are helping out in numerous ways. This generosity is well-typified by the children at St. John's Episcopal School in Haifa who recently launched an Appeal on their own, and then raised 20,000 shekels (about \$5,000) for Al Ahli's needs. In a surprise for Bishop Suheil, the children presented their donation to him when he recently attended the school board meeting in Haifa.



Rev Hatem, Bishop Suheil, and friends in Haifa prepare the donation for Al Ahli Hospital

- The staff at the Diocese have made Al Ahli the *First Priority* at this time. The administrative staff, the health care department, and the accounting department remain available around the

clock to help out.

- The staffs of the Diocesan offices, Cathedral of St. George, and St George's Cathedral Pilgrim Guest House have offered at least one day of their salaries for donation to Al Ahli. They invite all other Diocesan institutions and personnel to do the same.
- The Guest House of the Diocese's Episcopal Technological and Vocational Training Center was opened free of charge to 12 Gazan families who were caught in the West Bank for Christmas holiday when the conflict broke out and could not return to their homes. They are shown below worshipping at St. Andrew's Church in Ramallah before they were able to return to their homes in Gaza in early January.



- Invaluable assistance has been given to the hospital from many partners, including US AID, Episcopal Relief and Development, the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese in Jerusalem, and Norwegian Church Aid and other members of the Palestine Forum of Action by Churches Together International (ACT). Through their generosity, much needed food, medicines, medical supplies, blankets, and plastic sheeting to cover shattered windows have been given to Al Ahli.



- Finally, there has been a constant stream into the Diocesan offices of emails and phone calls from friends around the world who ask how they can help. They have given prayers, emotional support, and monetary assistance in times of sore need.

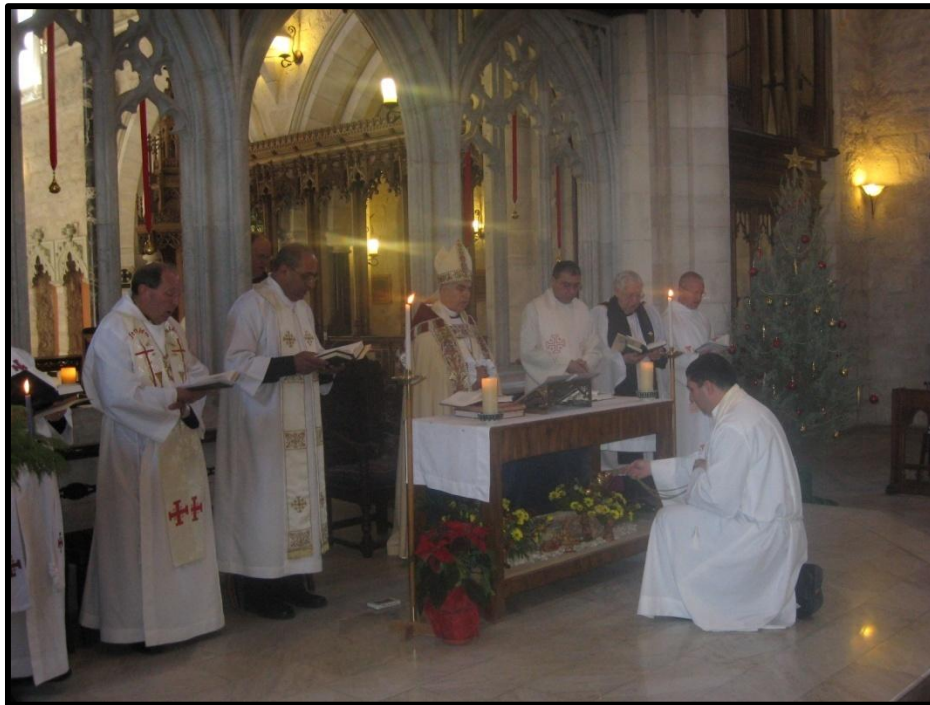
Eras like the present one present new challenges to a place already beset with challenges. But they also present opportunities for Grace. As Bishop Suheil recently said, *"We are so grateful for the immediate and exceptionally generous response in prayers and monetary gifts. In addition, the generous donations of medical and urgent humanitarian supplies such as food, blankets, plastic sheeting, bedding, fuel, and even detergent for washing clothes and linens make all the difference. We are inspired and touched deeply by the devotion of Suhaila, Dr. Maher, and the Medical, Nursing, and related Staffs at our Hospital in Gaza."*

Holidays in the Diocese of Jerusalem

Before the conflict broke out in Gaza, the people of the Diocese were celebrating the Holy events of the Season. For the weeks surrounding the Western calendar Christmas, Bishop Suheil was able to visit every parish in the Diocese – in all five countries it encompasses – to celebrate with his parishioners and fellow clergy. In addition, there were some unique occasions this year.

- Jordan was the site of several meaningful events:
 - The Bishop's School for Boys and the Ahliyyah School for Girls shared a beautiful luncheon with the Bishop on December 26.
 - Bishop Suheil was honoured to have a visit with His Majesty King Abdullah II on December 28 at the King's Seasonal invitation to Church Leaders. The King expressed his deep concern for the heavy loss of human life in Gaza, called for the immediate secession of hostilities, and expressed his earnest hope for the resumption of the Palestinian/Israeli Peace Process. He also affirmed his full support for the continuing presence of the Christian community and the safeguarding of its properties.
 - On New Year's Day in Amman, the Bishop hosted a reception and dinner for clergy and their wives.
 - And then on January 2, Dr. Khalid Freij was ordained into the Diaconate in Amman.
- On December 20, for the second year, there was a joint prayer service shared through internet technology by people in The Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem and worshippers in the Bethlehem Chapel of the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C. Bishop Suheil and Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan participated from Bethlehem, and they were joined by Bishop John Chane and Canon John Peterson from Washington, DC.
- St. Andrew's Church in Ramallah recently underwent an extensive remodelling and refurbishment, and the beautiful "new" church was re-dedicated on December 14. It was an inspirational evening for Rev Nael Abu Rahmoun and the parishioners of St. Andrew's who all contributed in tangible ways to make the renovations possible. Bishop Suheil and many guests from Jerusalem and Nablus were also present for the event.
- Some days later, visitors returned to Ramallah for a large, festive lunch (with music and dancing!) honouring *senior citizens* of the area.
- Another lunch and Christmas party was enjoyed with the staff and guests of St. Luke's Hospital in Nablus on December 22.

- As it traditionally does, St. George's Cathedral hosted a visit to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. Five busloads of guests made the trip to celebrate a special service in the Church. The group was very pleased to share the beginning of the service with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayaad.
- On Western calendar Epiphany, January 6, 2009, the third anniversary of Bishop Suheil's consecration as Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem was remembered in St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem. Although it occurred at the height of the Gaza conflict, it was possible for the many guests and clergy who were present to celebrate the Bishop's ministry on this occasion.



Diocesan Ministries News

Peace and Reconciliation

The Peace and Reconciliation Department of the Diocese is embarking on some new activities. Recently it has begun implementing Interfaith Dialogues in Jerusalem and in other parts of the Diocese. The Department is headed by Rev. Shehadeh Shehadeh who sees in these gatherings the opportunity to promote peace and reconciliation through spiritual work. He says, "If we begin on our own personal spirituality and work from the 'inside out', we can begin to listen better to others and establish a basis for this peace and reconciliation work in faith and spirituality."

To this end, small groups of Muslims, Christians, and Jews will come together on regular bases. The group in Jerusalem conducts their meetings by asking a participant to select a passage from scripture or any source for the group to work with. Members of the group share their reactions to the passage, both personally and from the perspectives of their own wider contexts. As the discussion develops, the participants come to better understandings of their brothers and sisters of other faiths. Under Rev. Shehadeh's leadership, these dialogue gatherings will gain momentum to strengthen this important ministry of the Diocese.

Interfaith

On January 17, 2009, Bishop Suheil was very pleased to welcome the Druze community's Sheikh-led National Council in Israel to a meeting and luncheon at the Pilgrimage Guest House in Jerusalem.



The group enjoyed a fruitful discussion with the Bishop and several members of the Diocesan clergy and then relished in a delicious lunch in the Guest House. The spirit of fellowship and camaraderie was everywhere in evidence as the photo above attests.

Transition

The Diocese notes with sadness the passing in December of Mr. Nassar Nassar, father of Dr. Hisham Nassar, the Bishop's Consultant and Coordinator of Healthcare Institutions and Services. Our prayers and thoughts of support go to Dr. Hisham and his family.

If you would like to make a monetary contribution to support the ongoing ministry of Al Ahli Hospital in Gaza, as it embarks on a long period of recovery and assistance to the suffering people of Gaza, please note the following ways that donations can be made:

1. Send a check marked "Preference Gaza Medical Emergency" to
The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem
P.O. Box 19122
Jerusalem 91191,
Israel
2. Send a check marked "Preference Gaza Medical Emergency" to
DFMS Treasurer
Episcopal Church
815 Second Ave
New York, NY 10017
3. Contribute through the Appeals of Episcopal Relief and Development (www.er-d.org) or the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem (www.afedj.org).
4. Wire funds directly to the Diocese account. For wiring instructions, send an email to info@j-diocese.org