



elcjhle-pistle

News from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace

Spring-Summer 2010

A passionate campaigner for peace and dialogue in the Middle East and the world Bishop Younan elected president of the Lutheran World Federation

STUTT GART, Germany, 24 July 2010 – Bishop Munib A. Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) has been elected president of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) by the Eleventh Assembly, a gathering of 418 delegates and others from the LWF member churches.

Three hundred and sixty registered delegates voted, representing 145 member churches from 79 countries. Younan received 300 votes affirming his election, 23 against; there were 37 abstentions. There were no other nominees.

Younan, 59, succeeds Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, who was president of the LWF since the organization's last Assembly in Winnipeg, Canada, in 2003.

Ordained in 1976 after study in Palestine and gaining a degree from the University of Helsinki (Finland), Younan was a youth pastor and teacher in his homeland. From 1976 to 1979 he was pastor of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem and he has also served parishes in Beit Jala and Ramallah. He studied at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chi-



ELCJHL Bishop Younan addresses the plenary after his election as president of the LWF with his wife, Suad Younan, at his side, in Stuttgart, Germany on July 24, 2010. Photo © LWF/S. Lim

cago and he holds an honorary doctorate, granted by Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. Younan was elected bishop of the ELCJHL in 1998.

In this new role, Younan will serve as the public face of the LWF, a global communion of Christian churches with 145 member churches in 79 countries representing more than 70 million Christians. A member of the LWF since 1974, the ELCJHL has about 3,000 members.

Younan is a former vice-president of the LWF and is a recent past president of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches. He is also a co-

Please see President, p. 4

ELCJHL confirms 9 young people

Two Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land congregations confirmed young people on Aug. 1, 2010. Nine young people ages 12 to 15 from Christmas Lutheran Church of Bethlehem and the Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour were confirmed after two years of preparation. The youth traveled with ELCJHL Bishop Munib A. Younan and ELCJHL pastor Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb for a June retreat in Jericho. ✕

Inside:

- ELCJHL women's workshop
- Discrimination, oppression is worldwide
- Rishmawi new Hope pastor
- Babies for two ELCJHL pastors' families

Calendar:

- Aug. 11-Sept. 9 Ramadan
- Aug. 30 ELCJHL academic year begins
- Sept. 9 Eid al-Fitr
- Sept. 9-10 Rosh HaShanah
- Sept. 17-18 Yom Kippur
- Sept. 23-29 Sukkot
- Oct. 31 Reformation Day
- Nov. 15 Eid al-Adha

Welcome to the world, girls!

The ELCJHL joins in celebrating the birth of two babies in their midst.

Rev. Saliba Rishmawi, pastor of the ELCJHL Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah, and his wife, Raeda, rejoiced at the birth of their first child, Mariam, on May 31, 2010.

On April 16, baby Yara joined big sister Daleen and parents Rula and Imad Haddad. Her father is pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour. ✕



Land theft, house demolition, worship restriction, denial of rights Discrimination, oppression afflicts peoples around the world

by Allison K. Schmitt

Like other Dalits of her village, Kasiama was unaware that she would lose her land to caste Indians by not registering it. The courts refuse to hear her case on the basis that a higher status group once owned the land.

Their homes are destroyed. They are denied public utilities. Their access to places of worship is restricted. Their land is stolen through legal sleight of hand. They are Dalits, India's so-called "untouchables." I had traveled to India before and have learned about the plight of Dalits. But after having lived in Palestine for a year, the parallels between Dalit and Palestinian oppression were startling.

This was especially true as I sat one morning last September with Pastor Daniel Gnanasekaran, a pastor of the Arcot Lutheran Church. In addition to leading Carmel Church in Tiruvannamalai, a small town in south eastern India, Gnanasekaran runs the denomination's Department of Dalit Concerns. On the day of my visit, about 15 people waited to seek the pastor's help.



PICTURED: Dalit homes are destroyed to instill the fear that maintains unjust social distinctions. Millions of Dalits experience such treatment throughout Southeast Asia. At its July meeting, LWF pledged to work for the liberation and restoration of Dalits.

Kasiama's case is illustrative. Kasiama lives in a small village some 50 kilometers from Tiruvannamalai. Like other Dalits of her village, she was unaware that she would lose her land by not registering it. So now villagers of a higher social class have claimed the land. Gnanasekaran says the courts, which tend to reinforce prejudiced social distinctions, refuse to hear her case on the basis that the higher status group owned the land in the past.

In Gelpakkam village, a higher status group ("caste" people) wanted a particular site, so they bulldozed the existing Dalit homes. The village's six Dalit ("outcaste" people) families were also subjected to labor and sexual exploitation by the 150 caste families. Only after a long struggle have police agreed to look into the matter, Gnanasekaran said.

In other cases, caste people took advantage of outcaste people's ignorance of the law and persuaded them to – illegally – sell them their land. Now that they are aware of their rights, the outcaste people want to buy the land back – which is lawful – but the current land holder refuses.

In another village, Dalits built huts on their land but the government refused to allow them to access

electricity and water available to others in the village. It took 17 years to reverse this injustice.

What keeps the clearly unjust system in place, Gnanasekaran said, is that if Dalits get human rights, they will outnumber those of higher status and will no longer be forced to perform the menial work of their oppressors. ❖ ❖ ❖

Land theft, house demolition, worship restriction and denial of human rights are not unique to Dalits and Palestinians. Probably every oppressed group experiences these same injustices. Undoubtedly, it was the echo of Palestinian experience in the Dalit struggle that grabbed my attention that day. As the circumstances of Palestinians and Dalits demonstrate, inhumanity knows no geographic boundaries. Greed and prejudice produce similar atrocities wherever they operate. Human history is filled with stories of the abuse of power – and will probably continue to be so until the end of time.

In my home country of the United States, there is a tendency to categorize such problems as "political" and thus outside the jurisdiction of the church. But you cannot read the Old Testament without seeing the prophets indict their own people for oppressing the weak and impoverishing the poor. The struggle for justice is central to the story of divine redemption. For without justice, God would be no better than a tyrant.

It is disheartening to be confronted with injustice not just here or there but everywhere. I frequently get discouraged and feel that my efforts for justice are inconsequential. That's when I have to remind myself that I am not called to solve the world's problems. I am called simply to use my gifts and my life in service of God's justice. I can only trust that bearing witness to the oppression of Dalits and Palestinians is a response to that call. And may the witnessing be one step in God's justice prevailing for all of God's children. ❖

Allison K. Schmitt is grateful to have served as communication assistant to the ELCJHL for the last two years. She was sent by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to help tell the Palestinian story. She hopes to speak widely about her experiences once she resettles in the U.S. in August 2010.



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ELCJHL schools celebrate *tawjihi* graduations in May

Graduates perform poems, rap songs, give speeches to celebrate

Large crowds and local dignitaries were on hand to celebrate graduation at the Lutheran high schools. A total of 127 students, including 59 girls and 68 boys, received certificates at the four ceremonies.

Graduate Majdi Habash called the Ramallah School of Hope a candle to light the graduates' paths as they set out to contribute to society. They are armed not with guns or stones but with education, he said, quoting Palestinian-American academician Edward Said. He encouraged his 39 classmates to imitate a child learning to walk – to laugh when they fall down and get up to try again, he said at the May 27 ceremony at the Ramallah Cultural Palace in Beitunya.

ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan encouraged the graduates to dream, even if it seems impossible, of a bright future for themselves and the Palestinian people. Improbable things – like having an African-American president in the U.S. White House – do happen, he said.

Amidst Palestinian and German flags at the Talitha Kumi School in Beit Jala, school principal Dr. Georg Dürr encouraged graduates to use the *kairos* (opportunity) time wisely. Although they have hoped since childhood for their own state, “now is the time for resolution,” he said at the May 28 event.

In his English speech, Jameel Sarras said that parents and teachers were the “wind beneath our wings” for him and his 41 classmates. He encouraged them to work to “bring freedom and peace back to our beloved Palestine.” He offered special thanks to Dr. Dürr, who was completing his last year at the school.

At their May 29 graduation ceremony, Nataly and Tania Hannoneh thanked their teachers for “putting up with us for 15 years” at the Lutheran school in Beit Sahour. Their school years are like a harbor closing behind them, with the world an ocean before them, they said to the audience and their 37 classmates.

ELCJHL Director of Schools Dr. Charlie Haddad referenced Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. and Nelson Mandela in encouraging the students to be the kind of leaders Palestine needs.

Gandhi's name was invoked at the Dar al-Kalima graduation as well. Delivering the English speech at the May 31 ceremony, Yousef Al-Ramahi, quoted the Indian leader: “Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.” He thanked instructors for teaching them to be “good, sensible people” and exhorted his seven classmates to contribute to Palestine's development.

Al-Ramahi joined his fellow graduate Mohammed Teilakh in performing a rap song, to the delight of the audience gathered in the auditorium of the International Center of Bethlehem.

After graduation, the students were scheduled to join their Palestinian peers in taking the *tawjihi* exams – a set of exams administered over three weeks in as many as 10 subjects to determine college eligibility. ✖

ELCJHL schools graduated 59 girls and 68 boys from their high schools this year.

BELOW: Talitha Kumi graduates celebrate their accomplishment at their May 28 graduation ceremony. They were among 127 young people to graduate from ELCJHL schools this spring.



EEC director's new book showcases birds of Palestine



EEC Executive Director Simon Awad

There was a large crowd on hand to help Simon Awad, executive director of the ELCJHL Environmental Education Center, launch his new book on birds found in Palestine on March 10, 2010, at the Lutheran School of Beit Sahour.

With dozens of full-color photographs, the book is not only beautiful but full of scientific



information about the birds of Palestine. Its five chapters address such subjects as the importance of the region's

geography and climate to its birds, the important role birds play in nature and reasons why birds must be protected.

You can learn more about the Environmental Education Center and the book at their website at www.eecp.org ✖.

ELCJHL women focus on family at workshop

Participants said families should help members develop skills in communicating, accepting constructive criticism and bearing life's frustrations. They said schools should communicate with families, provide an accepting atmosphere and offer sex education.

The fast pace of societal change has led to a crisis of the family, said Bishop Munib A. Younan at a recent ELCJHL women's conference on the family from a Palestinian Christian perspective.

About 48 women from ELCJHL congregations in Israel-Palestine attended the June 17-18, 2010, conference, according to ELCJHL Women's desk facilitator Bassima Jaraiseh. Women from the Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan, planned to attend the conference, which was held in Jericho, but they were unable to do so.

In his opening lecture, Younan said Palestinian society must find ways to cope with changes to the family, which have more to do with cultural pressures than with the Israeli occupation or difficult economic conditions. Once "family" meant father, mother and children, but societal changes make it a difficult word to define.

In the face of societal pressures, Christians must maintain traditional values of mutual commitment, compromise, planning for the future,

equality and firm parental guidance of children, he said. The church can help by giving its youth a healthy, positive view of married life and offering pre-marital counseling.

Also addressing the group was Dr. Yahya Hijazi, professor at Naqab University and educational counselor and lecturer for the Palestinian Counseling Center.

Hijazi told the group that 40 percent of Palestinian children are subject to harassment – much of which occurs inside the family. What makes this verbal, physical and sexual violence worse is that it is seen as a family secret, he said, which prevents victims from seeking help.

Families should focus on building good communication skills and providing for good psychological health for its members, he said. Parents need to exercise their authority appropriately, provide clear rules and spend time with their children.

Conference participants broke into groups to discuss the roles of families and schools in this work. They said families should help members develop skills in communicating, accepting constructive criticism and bearing life's frustrations. They said schools should communicate with families, provide an accepting atmosphere and offer sex education.

Jaraiseh said she felt participants gained new skills at the workshop, including strategies for raising children "in a more positive way." She said participants commented positively on the program organized by Minerva Khayyat and asked that more effort be made in the future to encourage ELCJHL women ages 18-25 to attend. They also suggested that the ELCJHL have a marriage counselor on staff.

Jaraiseh is at work on the next women's event, a two-part workshop, "The psychological differences between the two sexes and the challenges of marital life," scheduled to begin in September. ✕

FMEEC supports female ordination, adds members

One of the ELCJHL's important affiliates took a significant step in January. The 29 delegates of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) voted unanimously to urge their denominations to ordain women as pastors. The vote occurred at FMEEC's sixth general assembly, held in Harissa, Lebanon, Jan. 11-13, 2010.

ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan said the historic vote was in keeping with the Middle Eastern evangelical tradition of leading the way in ministry. The fellowship's action means its 16 member churches are urged to open the doors to women's ordained ministry, he added. For the full press release on the decision, go to <http://tiny.cc/FMEEC>.

FMEEC was formed in 1974 to strengthen and promote unity among member churches. ✕

Rev. Saliba Rishmawi, center, was installed as pastor of the ELCJHL Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah, West Bank, on Sunday, March 14, 2010. Many clergy, ELCJHL members and friends, as well as local dignitaries, attended the festive event. ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan, left, and Bishop Martin Lind of the Diocese of Linköping, Church of Sweden, officiated during the installation service. The event was broadcast by a local TV station.



Younan elected LWF president

President, from p. 1

founder of the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land, made up of the two chief rabbis of Israel, heads of the local churches, the chief judge of the Islamic Court in Palestine and other Muslim leaders.

He is the author of *Witnessing for Peace*, a book about the search for peace in his homeland and numerous articles on churches and the search for peace in the Holy Land.

His wife, Suad, is director of the Helen Keller School in the Jerusalem suburb of Beit Hanina, which educates visually-impaired children. She is also the chair of the women's committee of the ELCJHL.

You can read more about the Assembly on the Web at <http://www.lwf-assembly.org/experience/>. ✕

Adapted from LWI with permission.



150 years for Christmas Lutheran

People gathered at the International Center of Bethlehem on May 1, 2010, to celebrate 150 years of “service, education and health” provided by the ELCJHL Christmas Lutheran Church since its founding. Organizers noted the fact that both Christmas Lutheran and the ICB, its main ministry, are located just minutes from the Church of the Nativity, the site traditionally honored as that of Jesus’ birth.

There were vintage photos and documents on display as well as lectures by ELCJHL members and guests on the history, political context and leaders of the Bethlehem church. Among presenters was Ahmad Mrowat (pictured at left), who spoke about Karima Aboud, a noted Palestinian photographer and daughter of Said Aboud, who was the pastor of Christmas Lutheran Church during the first half of the 20th century.

You can find more about the celebration, as well as about the church, at <http://www.bethlehemchristmaslutheran.org/>. ❖

Christmas Lutheran Church celebrated 150 years of “service, education and health” on May 1, 2010.

Good Shepherd members visit partner diocese in Germany

Several people from ELCJHL Church of the Good Shepherd, Amman Jordan, attended “Damit Ihr Hoffnung Habt” (“So that they may have hope”) at the invitation of their German partner, the Bad Tölz district. Mirvat Shatara, Hanan Younan and Rev. Samer Azar attended the ecumenical conference in Munich, Germany, on May 12-19, 2010.

With nearly 120,000 people participating in the closing worship service, the event gave a “great message of hope, love and faith to the worldwide Christian church,” Azar said.

Azar said they were warmly welcomed and enjoyed German food, language and spirituality while staying with diocese residents. A group of 10 people from Bad Tölz visited their congregation last fall. ❖



Good Shepherd launches a new ministry to senior citizens

The ELCJHL Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan, has a new ministry: Ajial (“Generations”) Retreat for Seniors is intended to help local elderly people. The ambitious project will offer programs to help seniors meet psychological, social and health needs and exercise their human rights. Leading the program is Samira Fakhoury, a social researcher with experience in helping seniors.

A long list of activities are planned for the ministry. In addition to recreational activities like cards, bingo and parties, organizers anticipate offering medical consultation events, field trips, family activities, educational events, movies and musical performances.

The congregation began this ministry when it recognized the lack of senior services in the community. Good Shepherd Pastor Samer Azar said he hopes the church’s partners will consider sending volunteers to serve in the ministry.

In other news, the status of women in Jordan was

the topic of a February event. Speakers Rihab Qadumi and Samira Fakhury agreed that the status of women in Jordan has improved but that work is needed to improve their rights and privileges. Whether mothers should be able to pass their citizenship to their children was a topic of intense discussion.

In addressing the topic of violence against women, Fakhury said the monotheistic religions all reject even legal and economic violence.

Qadumi said that societies need to empower women by making them aware of their rights. Standing against violence is the responsibility of government and civil institutions, she said, through developing legal protections and changing cultural acceptance of violence. Rather, the values of toleration, peace and respect for the other should be fostered. Women should be allowed to enjoy the rights and dignity given them by Scripture, she said. ❖



ملتقى الأجيال للكبار
Ajial Retreat For Seniors

Bishops meet prince, visit coexistence center; Blair misses the point

Swedish bishops tour Holy Land, strengthen relationship with ELCJHL

In an expression of solidarity and partnership with the ELCJHL, 12 Church of Sweden bishops spent a week visiting the Holy Land and their Palestinian counterpart's ministries.

The April 10-16, 2010, trip began in Amman, Jordan, and concluded in Jerusalem after meetings with religious and government officials, visits to holy sites and a brief desert retreat.

According to Rolf Pearson, the ELCJHL's new assistant for ecumenical affairs and international relations, a highlight of the trip was meeting with a member of the Jordanian king's administration. Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed is King Abdullah II's adviser on religious affairs in Jordan. At the meeting they discussed the kingdom's gift to the ELCJHL of land near the presumed site of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River. Another topic of conversation was "A Common Word Between Us and You," the 2007 open letter from Muslim scholars calling for understanding between Muslims and Christians.

Pearson said that the growing number of Muslim immigrants to Sweden means that the church needs to learn to relate to them, so the bishops appreciated the opportunity to meet with an open, moderate Muslim leader.

Other activities in Jordan included visits to the Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, Mount Nebo and the baptism site. They also celebrated communion with the Lutheran congregation in Amman.

Once in Jerusalem, the bishops met with several Israeli government officials as well as one of the chief rabbis of Israel, Rabbi Yona Metzger. They visited the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa mosques, as well as Yad Vashem, Jerusalem's Holocaust memorial. They also had a brief retreat at Wadi Qelt, a desert canyon between Jerusalem and Jericho.

They toured The Lutheran World Federation's Augusta Victoria Hospital, where supporters hope to build affordable housing for Palestinian Christians. The Church of Sweden has contributed half the cost of the 84-unit project. Archbishop Anders Wejryd, foreign director Margareta Grape and EL-



PHOTO: A TECHNICIAN in the oncology department at Augusta Victoria Hospital in East Jerusalem tells bishops from the Church of Sweden about treating cancer patients with the hospital's linear accelerator when they visited the hospital in April.

CJHL Bishop Munib Younan met with Jerusalem's deputy mayor to discuss the project. Speaking later to "The Day," a Christian newspaper in Stockholm, Wejryd said the project has been delayed "unnecessarily," but expressed hope the meeting helped city officials see its significance. "It is important for Israel to show that Christians can stay in Jerusalem," Wejryd said in the April 16, 2010, article.

Pearson said the bishops had an unexpected encounter with Tony Blair while passing through the checkpoint near Bethlehem. Unfortunately, Pearson said, the former British prime minister was there at mid-morning, long after the crowds had passed through to Jerusalem. ✕

Peace, unity service held at Redeemer

The ELCJHL Lutheran Church of the Redeemer was the location for a special worship service on Feb. 20, 2010. The "Extraordinary Prayer of all Churches for Reconciliation, Unity and Peace" was second in a series of services promoting Christian unity and peace in the Holy Land. The service was broadcast live by TV stations in the Middle East, Europe, Brazil and North America. Other Jerusalem churches were scheduled to host the series this year. You can read about the series at <http://prayrup.info/> ✕

MEMBERS OF COCOP, the organization of the ELCJHL's international partners, paused for a photo during their May 4-6, 2010, annual meeting at the International Center of Bethlehem.



ELCJHL, Church of Scotland affirm, formalize partnership

Churches cooperate in order to strengthen evangelical Christian witness, not their institutions. Our interdependence as churches is a source of strength. This was part of the message of ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan gave at the March 24, 2010, partnership service. There, Younan and the Rt. Rev. William Hewitt, moderator of the Church of Scotland, signed an agreement formalizing the relationship between the ELCJHL and the Church of Scotland. St. Andrew's Church in West Jerusalem hosted the afternoon event. ✕