



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES

LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

Office of the General Secretary

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the
Holy Land
P.O. Box 14076
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14 May 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,
Members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land,

In this month of anniversaries – marking 50 years of your church, 30 years of its Arabic bishopric, and 170 years of evangelical mission in the Holy Land – I send you greetings on behalf of all members of the global communion of the Lutheran World Federation. As you celebrate these landmarks in the life of the church in the Holy Land, you are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses from around the world and from throughout the church's history, thanking God for his steadfast love and praying for his continuing guidance and blessing of your ministry.

You celebrate these occasions under the theme “Living Witness – Creative Diakonia”. Truly, the ELCJHL provides all of us with a visible expression of this theme. In the midst of difficulties that few others can imagine – under occupation, surrounded by walls of separation, oppressed by ideologies of exclusion and hatred – you continue to proclaim faithfully the Gospel of Christ, to educate the young for peaceful and productive lives, to accompany the most vulnerable in a vulnerable community, to build bridges across the divides of race and religion, and to promote peace with justice in the land of Christ's birth. You are indeed the ‘Living Stones’ of the Holy Land.

Though you are commemorating anniversaries of 30, 50 and 170 years duration, you are not as young a church as these dates suggest. You are an integral part of the mother church in Jerusalem; part of an unbroken history of Christian witness and ministry in the Holy Land since the days of Christ's life on earth. You are our living link to the soil that he trod.

In your uniquely difficult context, the ecumenical challenge is especially pressing. In the midst of the pressures that Christian communities together face in the Holy Land, we may yet find more responsible and reliable expressions of the church universal. You are our voices and our hands in that key task.

As we celebrate your continuing Christian ministry, we must also celebrate your sustained commitment to inter-faith dialogue and cooperation. Indeed, in the midst of the volatile

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intermingling of religion and politics in the Middle East, your engagement in dialogue and cooperation with Muslim and Jewish communities is an important contribution in the search for peace in the region, and hence in the wider world. It is also through the lens of such inter-faith engagement that we may more clearly discern the true genius of the Gospel.

You are few to carry so many responsibilities and hopes, and – under the pressures of occupation, intolerance and violence – becoming fewer. The rapid decline in the indigenous Christian presence in the Holy Land ought to be a fundamental and urgent concern for all Christians around the world.

But few though you may be, your witness is not diminished. You are the salt of the earth. The quality of salt lies not in the amount, but in its saltiness. The right measure of your witness is not your numbers, but the faithfulness of your proclamation of the Gospel of Christ in the long and continuing apostolic tradition.

Along with all your sisters and brothers around the world, I join you in celebrating your history. Even more do I pray for your future – for an end to violence and hatred, for the removal of walls of separation and exclusion, for peace with justice among Israelis and Palestinians, for two states living side by side in peace and security, and for the continued Christian presence and witness in the Holy Land.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, enclosed in a hand-drawn oval. The signature is stylized and appears to read 'I. Noko'.

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General Secretary