



# elcjhle-pistle

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

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace

Fall-Winter 2009



ELCJHL Bishop Munib A. Younan met with 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate Prof. Muhammad Yunus at the headquarters of Grameen ("Village") Bank in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on the topic of microfinance in September. Pictured above are, from left, Yunus, Younan, LWF Deputy General Secretary Chandran Martin and Executive Director of RDRS Bangladesh Kamaluddin Akbar. (Photo: RDRS)

## Younan joins faith leaders in Bangladesh to affirm religious freedom, peaceful coexistence

ELCJHL Bishop Rev. Dr. Munib Younan was one of some 50 religious leaders to gather in Rajendrapur, Bangladesh, to discuss putting faith into action across religious boundaries. The Lutheran World Federation Department for Mission and Development organized the Sept. 8-10, 2009, event, which was hosted by RDRS Bangladesh in cooperation with the Bangladesh Lutheran Church and the Bangladesh Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church.

The three-day consultation, "Interfaith Diapraxis: Building Communities of Solidarity and Mutual Interest across Faith Boundaries," aimed to reflect on and affirm the importance of religious freedom in any process of peaceful coexistence. The group drafted the "Dhaka Statement on Interfaith Diapraxis," which is available at <http://tiny.cc/Dhaka>. You can read more about the consultation at <http://tiny.cc/Diapraxis>. ✕

## ELCJHL women gather, consider their role as peace makers

Women in the Bible often defied social traditions in order to follow God and chose the way of peace in difficult circumstances.

This was one of the messages at the ELCJHL women's retreat in September. More than 40 women and ELCJHL staff members participated in the Sept. 20-21, 2009, retreat at Haddad Tourism Village in Jenin. Bishop Munib Younan commended those in attendance for supporting local tourism.

One Bible study, led by Suad Younan, focused

on the story of Abigail, who saved her household by overruling her husband's foolish decision not to cooperate with King David (1 Samuel 25). Bishop Younan followed with a lecture on the retreat theme, "Women builders of peace." Peace begins inside and spreads to all aspects of life, he said.

"Only when Christ gives me inner peace, it overcomes hatred and anger and then I can be the builder of peace," he said.

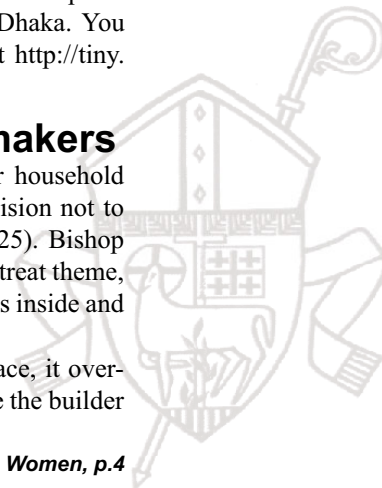
*Please see Women, p.4*

### Inside:

- Women as peace makers
- It's olive season!
- Asian Lutherans discuss daily bread
- Faith leaders declare 'Kairos' time is now

### Calendar:

- Aug. 29, 31 ELCJHL academic year begins
- Sept. 18-20 Rosh Hashanah
- Sept. 20-24 Eid al Fitr
- Sept. 27-28 Yom Kippur
- Oct. 3-9 Sukkot
- Nov. 27 Eid al Adha



## ELCJHL schools hold annual Reformation Day celebration



**MUSICIANS at Talitha Kumi School contributed their skills to the ELCJHL schools' annual Reformation Day celebration, held on Oct. 29, 2009, at the in Beit Jala school. (A. Johnson photo)**

by Anna Johnson and Rachel Zarnke

Eighth graders from the four ELCJHL schools gathered at Talitha Kumi to celebrate the 492 years since Martin Luther posted his 95 theses in Wittenberg, Germany. About 120 students participated in the fifth annual Reformation Day celebrations.

Dr. Charlie Haddad, ELCJHL Director of Education, asked the students in an opening assembly who had heard of Luther before they started learning about his life and ministry in their Christian education classes in preparation for the celebration. Only a handful of students

raised their hands. But throughout the day it became evident that they knew more than most people about Luther and the Reformation.

Wearing colored T-shirts bearing the Reformation logo, students rotated through six activities throughout the day. Dar Al-Kalima School's sport station introduced participants to the fundamentals of table tennis, jump rope and basketball. Hope School provided information about Luther and the Reformation through a PowerPoint presentation, as well as stimulated inter-school mingling at a games and songs

station. The Lutheran School of Beit Sahour brought the Reformation to life through a theatrical production about Luther's theological journey, as well as tested the student's knowledge in a trivia game. Talitha Kumi's talented musicians accompanied the students through hymns and spirituals.

This annual tradition allows students to learn about Luther's work through a fun and informative event. The day reinforces the students' understanding of Protestant values that undergird ELCJHL educational ministries. ✠

*Anna Johnson is a volunteer through the ELCA's "Young Adults in Global Mission" (YAGM) program. She is a member of Zion Lutheran in Iowa City, Iowa.*

*Rachel Zarnke is a volunteer at Dar al-Kalima school through the ELCA's YAGM program. She is a member of Augustana Lutheran in Chicago, Illinois.*

*Dar al-Kalima teacher Tony Nassar contributed to this article.*

### New school planned for Ramallah

by Anna Johnson

Located in the heart of Ramallah, the Lutheran School of Hope has provided quality education for more than 30 years. The school, which educates both girls and boys, brings together Muslims and Christians and encourages interreligious dialogue.

The ELCJHL is in the process of building a new school that will house up to three times more students than the current school, in response to the growing need and demand. Funding has already been obtained to begin the first phase of the project, which will allow the school to move its current student body of approximately 500 students to the new facility within two years.

The next phase of the project, not yet funded, will include finishing a part of the basement to include important facilities such as a shelter, music room and art room. Eventually, with phases three and four, the school will accommodate up to 1,500 students and will include a theater, recreation center, sports center, playgrounds and more classrooms for school and community use. The new facility will help the school provide quality education to more students and continue its mission of building bridges in a society influenced by the occupation's oppressive measures and conflicts. The new school with its modern facilities will be open to the community as well. ✠

### Good tawjihi scores reflect quality ELCJHL education

by Anna Johnson

ELCJHL schools performed very well on the 2008-09 *tawjihi* exams. *Tawjihi*, the secondary education exam given throughout Palestine, is used in determining college entrance qualifications. Students in ELCJHL schools scored above average for private schools in Palestine. The Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour, the School of Hope in Ramallah and the Talitha Kumi School each had a student rank in the top 10 students in their district. *Tawjihi* exam results reflect the dedication to quality education that the Lutheran schools embody. ✠

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✠

## Talitha Kumi students, German congregation harvest olives

### **Occupation threatens but does not derail an annual tradition at the Augusta Victoria Hospital**

by Bernhard Scheurenbrand

It has been a long tradition that students and staff members of Talitha Kumi School have picked the olives of the Augusta Victoria Hospital compound in East Jerusalem. It is said the olive trees were planted by German evangelical deaconesses in 1910 and harvested by them for many years. In those years it used to be an exciting event for all the students. Generations of students remember these joyful trips to Jerusalem.

Although made more difficult these days by a separation wall and permit process, the journey was still eagerly undertaken by students, school volunteers and members of the German-speaking congregation during the most recent olive harvest.

In mixed groups of volunteers and students they started their work at Augusta Victoria, enjoying the marvelous view of the Judean desert to the Dead Sea. Picking from below, picking from above, climbing the trees, thousands of olives fell on the plastic and were finally collected in buckets. Again and again students started to chat in English with the German volunteers. To their disappointment, they did not succeed, for their teacher had instructed them to respond exclusively in German.

The more than 1,000 kg of olives were taken to Beit Jala, where they were sorted, washed and finally



cold-pressed in the old olive press of Beit Jala. In spite of being less productive than an industrial approach, this traditional method results in an extraordinary high quality and taste.

Talitha Kumi staff and volunteers will fill handmade carafes from Hebron with this olive oil and sell them. The revenue will contribute to Talitha Kumi's ministry, including benefiting children of families unable to cover school fees.

**Volunteers of all sizes helped pick olives at the Augusta Victoria Hospital campus in the fall.**

**See Olives, p. 6**

## Americans, Palestinians plant hope, trees in Al-Walaja

by Yoann Uehlinger

Americans and Palestinians wielded tools together to plant 50 olive trees last November as part of the "Planting New Hope" project. The Nov. 16, 2009, event came after many months of preparation by Environmental Education Center personnel and volunteers at the ELCA Lutheran Church of the Atonement in Barrington, Illinois, USA.

"Planting New Hope" aims to support Palestinian farmers by providing them olive trees. Members of the Illinois Lutheran church raised funds to purchase trees while EEC staff distributed trees to farmers.

More than 30 people came from the United States for the event. After a visit to the center, the group went to the community of Al-Walaja, located

northwest of Bethlehem. Surrounded on all sides by Israeli settlements, the village has suffered from the Israeli occupation. Much of its land was confiscated for construction of the separation wall and many of its trees uprooted by bulldozers.

Braving the bad weather, the visitors and EEC staff planted about 50 trees at the event. Another 141 trees were available for later distribution. Participants had the opportunity to get to know better the complicated situation of Al-Walaja farmers. Both sides benefited greatly from this wonderful experience and were looking forward to strengthening their cooperation in the "Planting New Hope" project. ✕

*Yoann Uehlinger lives in Fribourg, Switzerland, and volunteered at the EEC for three months in 2009.*

*Olive trees produce fruit about four years after planting but aren't really productive until the 10th year. Under good soil and irrigation conditions, trees are most productive between their 30th and 70th birthdays. Olive trees have been known to live for hundreds – even thousands – of years.*

## Annual Olive Harvest Festival supports farmers, offers fun activities

by Yoann Uehlinger

On Oct. 31, 2009, in Beit Jala, the Environmental Education Center (EEC) hosted, in cooperation with Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce & Industry, the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Olive Harvest Festival in the Bethlehem area. Every year, EEC is assigned the task of organizing this fun and supportive event in cooperation with local farmers, women's cooperatives and craftsmen.

Indeed, the festival is always a good opportunity to affirm Palestine's rich cultural and environmental heritage, as well as to spread awareness by promoting fair-trade and organic farming.

During the duration of the harvest, EEC organized for the local farmers training workshops about environmentally-friendly methods to preserve their olive

**See Festival, p 6**

## ELCJHL women building peace, spirituality; challenging barriers

*Women, from p. 1*

*Christ gave women full rights and equal humanity, and, considering their influence in educating children, women have a great responsibility for teaching reconciliation and toleration, for building a peaceful or a hateful nation.*

– Munib Younan

Further, Christ gave women full rights and equal humanity, and, considering their influence in educating children, women have a great responsibility for teaching reconciliation and toleration, for building a peaceful or a hateful nation. A nation's constitution must grant its women full rights, he said.

“Can the Palestinian women be builders of peace in Palestinian society? Can you build a just peace?” the bishop asked in conclusion.

Participants then divided into three discussion groups. Asked how women can work for peace in the face of repression was the first question, the group suggested that raising children with love, tolerance and mutual respect is one way. Others advised that women can take a lead in being peacemakers in the family, church, society, nation and the world. They also said they can follow in the steps of righteous women.

The second group discussed how Palestinian women can challenge social barriers in spite of feelings of defeat. By emphasizing Christian teachings of justice, love and equality within the family, women can serve as role models, participants said. Laws regard-

ing inheritance and divorce should be written to ensure justice for women. Women should be educated and encouraged to be strong and violence against women should not be tolerated. Women should use their prophetic voices, responding to injustice with peaceful resistance.

A third group discussed how women can develop evangelical Lutheran spirituality. Promoting mutual respect in the home and the education of females, as well as church attendance, knowledge of Scripture and understanding of other religions were some suggestions. Bishop Younan told the group that the ELCJHL synod approved ordaining women 10 years ago and currently has some women receiving theological training or who have expressing interest in training for the ministry.

Rev. Saliba Rishmawi provided a devotion for the gathering.

**In summing up the year** since taking the job, ELCJHL women's desk facilitator Bassima Jaraiseh said the focus has been on information sharing; networking, advocacy and awareness-raising; ecumenical cooperation and emphasis on training you women leaders.

**Other recent activities** for ELCJHL women include:

- a gathering in Bethlehem for a presentation on the Kairos Palestine document, followed by Christmas meditations and a meal last December.

- a one-day ecumenical training program, “Witness of Church and Society – Women's Work and Self Empowerment,” in August 2009. ✕

*Women's desk facilitator Bassima Jaraiseh provided the information for this article.*



**PEACE BUILDERS**  
More than 40 ELCJHL women and staff gathered in Jenin for a retreat in September. Speakers encouraged to break away from social traditions in order to follow God and foster peace inspite of difficult circumstances.

*The “carat,” the unit by which diamond weight is measured, originated with the ancient practice of weighing gold and gemstones against carob seeds. (Source: Wikipedia.org)*

## EEC organizes students to plant carob trees near Ramallah

by Simon Awad

The Environmental Education Center organized a campaign to plant carob trees in the Al Teereh region on tree day, in cooperation with the Ramallah municipality. More than 100 students from the School of Hope, Al Mostaqbal School, the Latin Patriarchate School and the Catholic school participated.

This is one of the many activities of the EEC in its “A Tree for Every Student in Palestine” project, which was initiated by the EEC and adopted by the

Palestinian Authority Education and Agriculture ministries in order to motivate students to engage in environmental field and voluntary work, as well as to raise awareness about the importance of planting native Palestinian trees to preserve natural heritage. The EEC asked each participant to take good care of his/her tree and to water it from time to time, with the help of the municipality. ✕

*Simon Awad is the executive director of the ELCJHL Environmental Education Center, Beit Jala.*

*LWF Asia Region Pre-Assembly Consultation and Asia Church Leadership Conference*

## Asian Lutherans gather to discuss daily bread, global justice

As the ancient prophets challenged the powerful who ignored the cries of the needy, so too must the church today act to dismantle systems that prevent people from getting their daily bread.

This was the central message of the keynote address from Bishop Munib Younan at the opening of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Asia Pre-Assembly Consultation (APAC) and Asia Church Leadership Conference (ACLC), held Dec. 6-9, 2009, in Bangkok, Thailand. "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread: A Holy Call to Justice" was the title of the keynote address.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Thailand hosted the APAC and ACLC, bringing together around 100 delegates from the 47 LWF member churches in Asia. It was the region's preparatory meeting for

the July 2010 LWF Eleventh Assembly, to be held in Stuttgart, Germany, under the theme "Give Us Today Our Daily Bread."

Noting the communal language of the LWF assembly theme, Younan said that "a sincere prayer will seek daily bread for all and will be lived out in ministry to the poor and needy." Jesus, in continuity with the prophets, called for redistributive justice that earned them no favors with political leaders, he remarked.

After hearing responses to the keynote address from women and youth representatives, participants concluded their meeting with an appeal to the global Lutheran communion to strengthen advocacy on responsible stewardship over God-given resources. ✕

*Adapted from LWI with permission.*

## Palestinian Christians, faith leaders declare the 'kairos' time is now

Last Advent, Palestinian Christian leaders gathered in Bethlehem to launch "A Moment of Truth: A Word of Faith, Hope and Love from the Heart of Palestinian Suffering." The so-called Palestinian Kairos document is a statement of reality and hope from a broad coalition of Christian leaders in Palestine. ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan and the 12 other Patriarchs and Heads of Local Christian Churches in Jerusalem wrote a letter in support of the effort.

Among those attending the Dec. 11, 2009, launch was Rabbi Brian Walt, of Jewish Fast for Gaza, a panelist at the Kairos document launch.

"The most challenging spiritual and moral question for the Jewish community today is the occupation of Palestine by Israel," he said.

You can read the Kairos document, add your name as a supporter and read more about it at the website at [www.kairos-palestine.ps](http://www.kairos-palestine.ps). ✕

*The LWF Asia region includes Lutheran churches representing more than 8.5 million members.*

*Patriarchs and Heads of Local Christian Churches in Jerusalem wrote a letter in support of the Palestinian Kairos document.*

## International Lutheran bishops meet with partners, visit holy sites

Norwegian bishops and officials joined Bishop Munib A. Younan on a tour of the Haram es-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary") in Jerusalem's Old City in late January. They paused in Al-Aqsa ("Farthest") Mosque for a photo (pictured).

The bishops visited sites in Jordan, Israel and Palestine during their week-long trip to the Holy Land. It included visits with Dr. Rafiq Husseini, Chief of Staff Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and with Nasser A. Lozi, chief of the Royal Hashemite Court of Jordan's King Abdullah.

Earlier, nine synod bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America visited the ELCJHL Nov. 28-Dec. 8, 2009, as part of their

denomination's church-wide strategy for engagement in the region.

Dubbed Bishops' Academy II, it included bishops who were unable or opted not to join 44 colleagues who traveled to the region in January of that year. Participants in both trips did many of the same things, such as

meeting with religious, political and community leaders in the region and visiting religious sites. Their visit focused on support and encouragement for the local Lutheran church.

ELCJHL Bishop Munib A. Younan welcomed the visit saying, "We are happy they can finally

come. ... Even though there is no war now, things are not better because there is (still) an impasse in the region."

The ELCJHL also welcomed delegations from partner churches in the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland and the Evangelical Church of Westphalia in October. ✕



**Norwegian bishops and officials joined Bishop Munib A. Younan on a tour of the Haram es-Sharif ("Noble Sanctuary") in Jerusalem's Old City in late January. They paused in Al-Aqsa ("Farthest") Mosque in Jerusalem's Old City for a photo (pictured).**

## Al Kheimh showcases its activities for German, U.S. visitors

It is appropriate that an event on the topic of Christian-Muslim cooperation was held at Al Kheimh (The Tent), because the ecumenical community center was created in 2007 to foster understanding among Christians of all denominations and Muslims. It is a ministry of the ELCJHL Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan.

The Sept. 14, 2009, program was presented to a group of 45 people coming from the Lutheran University of Applied Sciences in Nuremberg, Germany, as part of the German-Jordanian partnership program. Speakers included Bakr Al Hiyari, an official under His Royal Highness Prince Hassan Bin Talal, who said that Arab Christianity is an important part of the Middle East, where it arose. Rev. Samer

Azar talked to the group about the role of Christian churches in developing society and in providing a bridge between East and West and Christianity and Islam.

In other news, Good Shepherd hosted 13 people from the ELCA's Southeast Michigan Synod, which is a companion to the ELCJHL, in November 2009.

Two congregations in the synod, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran, of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan, and St. George Lutheran Church in Brighton, Mich., are sister congregations to Good Shepherd.

- Good Shepherd's annual cheese and wine event in December hosted some 240 people of various Christian churches and some Muslims. "This activity has become an annual tradition that gives the real feeling of ecumenical spirit the Lutheran church is trying to nurture," Rev. Samer Azar said.
- Rev. Samer Azar preached at the Redeemer Church of Jabal, an Anglican church in Amman, Jordan, on the fourth Sunday of Advent. He said it is a sign of the growing cooperation between the two churches.
- Church members hosted a Christmas party for the children of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which included a program, games, carols, refreshments and gifts for all the children and their supervisors.
- Good Shepherd recently released a collection of hymns, speeches and sermons by its emeritus pastor, Rev. Numan Smir, who led the church from 1979 to 1991. The book includes 11 hymns composed by Smir.
- Also hosted at Al Kheimh recently were book signings for Dr. Jamil Alloush and Dr. Jalal Fakhury. ✕



**KUSA COMMITTEE** Men of the ELCJHL Church of the Good Shepherd, Amman, Jordan, try their hand at hollowing out *kusa*, a small squash that is stuffed with rice and sometimes beef for a tasty and traditional Middle Eastern dish. The men were plying their skills at the congregation's "Cheese and Wine Celebration," an event held each year to foster ecumenical and interfaith relations during the Christmas season.

## Students, Germans pick olives

*Olives, from p. 3*

If you are interested in supporting Talitha Kumi or in purchasing olive oil, contact the school at [info@talithakumi.org](mailto:info@talithakumi.org). If you are in Jerusalem, you can purchase the products at the Church of the Ascension souvenir shop on the campus of Augusta Victoria Hospital. In Germany you can get the tasty Mount of Olives olive oil exclusively from [www.palolive.de](http://www.palolive.de). ✕

*Since March 2009, Bernhard Scheurenbrand has worked as Talitha Kumi School's administrative director, a position created and financed by the Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst. A member of the Lutheran church in Reutlingen, Germany, Scheurenbrand also served as administrative director of the Jerusalem Foundation in 1990-1993.*

## EEC olive festival draws crowd

*Festival, from p. 3*

trees, and harvest and press olives. In addition, many gifts were given to the farmers during the festival and olive trees were sold for rock-bottom prices.

Taking place this year in the Arab Orthodox Club, the Olive Festival was a great success. While many officials attended the opening ceremony in the morning, the multifaceted program brought a varied audience during the all day. The numerous musical and dance performances and displays of traditional arts and crafts made the festival a joyous and enjoyable event for all, while helping local farmers to sell their goods and to maintain their traditional lifestyle.

After this successful event, EEC staff and volunteers began to prepare for the Ramallah Olive Harvest Festival on Nov. 17. They went back to work with their "batteries" recharged by the numerous smiles seen in the lovely courtyard of the Arab Orthodox Club. ✕

*Yoann Uehlinger lives in Fribourg, Switzerland, and volunteered at the EEC for three months in 2009.*