

elcjhle-pistle

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

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace

November 2008

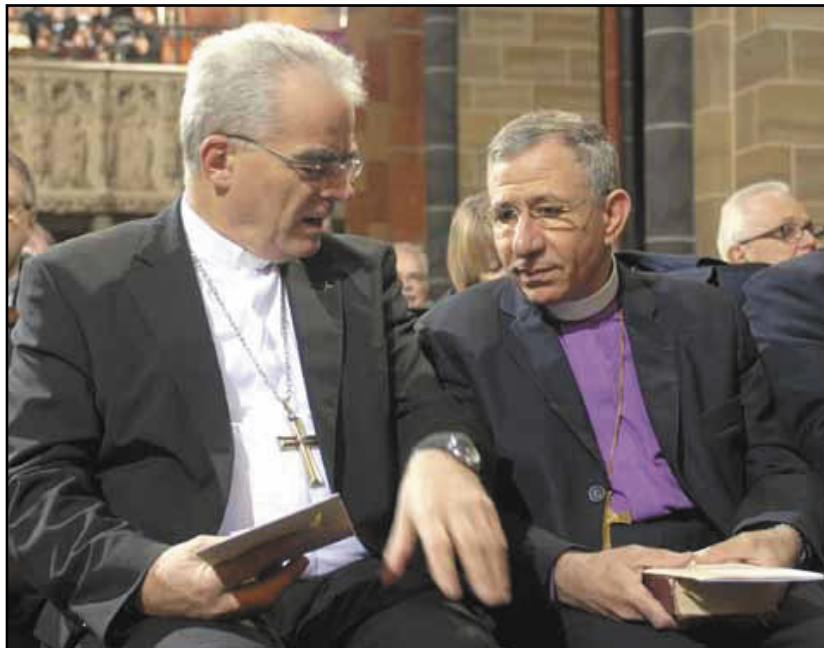
Bishop travels to Europe

ELCJHL friendships, partnerships affirmed

Neighbors to the north affirmed their relationships with the ELCJHL as church representatives traveled through Europe the last two months. Their travels took them to Sweden, Finland, Germany and Norway.

Bishop Munib Younan addressed representatives of the world's largest Lutheran church body and signed a partnership agreement in Sweden. Speaking before the church assembly of the more than 7 million member Church of Sweden on Oct. 22, Younan commended the church for its strong theology of accompaniment and hoped that it would inspire other churches. Citing a lack of charismatic leadership in the world, Younan called on the church to address the greed that contributed to the current global economic crisis.

Humanity must have "economics with eth-



EKD bishop Martin Schindehütte and ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan confer at the German church's general assembly held in Bremen, Germany, in November. (www.epd-bild.de/Hanno Gutmann photo.)

ics and politics with morals," he said. "It's not how much you can make but how much you are accountable in what you invest."

His well received address came just days after the ELCJHL and the Diocese of Strängnäs signed a second five-year partnering agree-

ment, which calls for the Swedish diocese to stand in solidarity with the ELCJHL and remember the Palestinian church in its prayers.

David Tannous, Ruba Abu Erdeineh, Nancy Qumsieh and Adel Nassrat also traveled to Sweden with the bishop.

Finland was next on the bishop's itinerary, where he attended the executive committee of Lutheran World Federation as that organization's vice president.

While there, the LWF executive committee dined with Martti Ahtisaari, former president

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Inside:

- 8th annual Olive Festival a success
- Report from the schools
- Occupation watch

Calendar:

- Nov. 15 Palestinian Independence Day
- Nov. 27 Thanksgiving (U.S.)
- Dec. 8 Eid al-Adha
- Dec. 21-29 Chanukah
- Dec. 25 Christmas (Western)
- Jan. 7 Christmas (Orthodox)

Church celebrates anniversary with candle-lit peace march

The ELCJHL Lutheran Church of the Reformation turns 125 and Abraham's Herberge turns five this year. So last month the Beit Jala church, the oldest Lutheran church in the region, held an interfaith worship service and peace march to the separation wall to commemorate the milestones. Leaders of the Abrahamic faiths as well as political officials and a large crowd of marchers gathered near the walled-in Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, where prayers for the disintegration of the wall were offered by Muslim, Jewish and Christian spiritual leaders. One of the texts for the event was Psalm 18:30, "With my Lord I can jump over walls."

You can read an article about the Oct. 30

worship service and march, written by Rev. Jadaleh Shihadeh, at our website at www.elcjhle.org. ✕



Olive festival showcases Palestinian products, talents

by Kendra Kintzi

This year's Olive Harvest Festival in Bethlehem was an exciting and memorable event, which made national news because of the appearance of Prime



Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, at left, inspects olives at the Olive Harvest Festival in Bethlehem.

Minister Salam Fayyad. The festival took place at Manger Square on Oct. 24-25, 2008, where visitors had the opportunity to taste traditional foods, buy artisanal crafts and goods and see performances of Dabka dancing, theater, choral groups and circus tricks. The festival was organized by the Environmental Education Center and the Bethlehem Peace Center to give local olive farmers and crafters an opportunity to showcase their wares and celebrate the rich Palestinian cultural and environmental heritage.

As the pressures and hardships faced by so many Palestinian farmers continue to increase, this festival provides a crucial interface between agriculturalists and the public in order to raise awareness about the importance of the olive tree, and to promote fair trade and organic traditional farming practices. Four educational lectures were given concerning the geopolitics of olive trees, fair trade concepts and environmentally sound agricultural practices. Participants came from schools and or-

ganizations throughout the Bethlehem area to display their musical and theatrical talents.

The situation for most Palestinian farmers is far from easy, because many face increasing aggression and pressure from military forces and illegal settlements. Many farmers are denied access to their land or are forced to endure the uprooting of their trees and the confiscation of their property. Throughout the West Bank and particularly in the Bethlehem and Ramallah areas, the construction of the separation wall has had a direct and damaging impact on agricultural productivity and the ability of local farmers to maintain their traditional livelihoods.

The words of Prime Minister Fayyad that morning speak to the importance of the olive tree and the importance of festivals to uplift and sustain the Palestinian way of life: "Such festivals indicate the survival and resilience of the Palestinian people, as the olive tree is such a powerful symbol of peace and our existence here, in the land of our grandfathers and our sons," he said. "This tree is a message for the whole world that we are insisting to stay on this land, and that no one can exclude us from our land, not even occupational forces."

After the success and excitement of the festival in Bethlehem, the EEC worked to organize an additional festival for the Ramallah area, which was held Nov. 22. The first of its kind in Ramallah, the festival was held at the Al-Ahliyah College Hall. The general enjoyment of the crowd and the success of the farmers and crafters involved give hope that this tradition will flourish in the future.

Kendra Kintzi is a volunteer at the EEC through the ELCA's "Young Adults in Global Mission" program. She is a member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Santa Maria, Calif.

Students perform traditional dances at the Olive Harvest Festival in Bethlehem.



Schools, from p. 3

school are functioning, folk dance groups are practicing and performing, and choral and vocal music classes are important parts of the program. Through its varied activities, the Lutheran schools hope to reflect the philosophy of the Reformation by building community schools for educated and godly citizens and by creating responsible leaders to meet the needs of today's Palestinian society.

Sylvia Countess, EL-CJHL assistant to the Director of Education, is a member of St. John's Lutheran Church in Knoxville, Tenn.

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Students celebrate Reformation, enjoy sports and help with olive harvest

by Najwa Kreitem

Olive picking season is an important time for Palestinians. Saturday, Nov. 1, 2008, 62 students from the environmental club at the Lutheran School of Hope, students from 8th grade and 9th grade with their science teacher Raja' Basir, went to Deir Ibzee a small village 12 km west of Ramallah.

The students helped Palestinian families to harvest their groves. The students arrived at Deir Ibzee at 9 in the morning. The weather was mild and they started picking the olives, learning from the farmers how to pick the olives. They worked hard for two hours, after which they had a break

In one grove there were very old trees, called Roumani olive trees, which are believed to have been planted during Roman times.

It was hard work but enjoyable as the stu-



dents spent the day in the fields and climbing the mountain there. The students went back home tired but happy to participate in picking olives.

Najwa Kreitem is an English language teacher at the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah.

ELCJHL students have had an active fall. Above, Ramallah students take a break from olive picking to pose for a photo. Below, students participate in the annual soccer tournament at the Beit Sahour school.

School activities reflect holistic approach

by Sylvia Countess

The religious, cultural and sports activities of the past few weeks reflect well the holistic approach that is the hallmark of the philosophy of the Lutheran schools and educational programs.

The annual celebration of Reformation Day in the Lutheran schools took place this year at Dar al-Kalima School in Bethlehem. Eighth grade students accompanied by both their Christian and Islamic religion teachers from the Lutheran

School in Beit Sahour, Talitha Kumi School in Beit Jala and the Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah, assembled and quickly formed groups with classmates from the four schools. They then shared in the morning's worship, music and games commemorating the life and work of Martin Luther. Students shared PowerPoint presentations made for their religion classes and enjoyed physical recreation and a meal together before returning to their hometowns in the afternoon.



Nov. 15 is Palestinian Independence Day, and students in each of the schools studied the history of their country, discussed the effects of the present occupation and shared their future hopes for an independent country. Students and staff at all grades shared in assemblies, special breakfasts and creative activities to re-

member the day.

The weather was perfect for the annual soccer tournament held at the Evangelical Lutheran School of Beit Sahour. Each of the four teams played each other to determine the winners, but, as Dr. Charlie Haddad, Director of Education, reminded the participants and guests during his

welcome, the primary purpose of the day was to enjoy the opportunity to be together in a spirit of healthy sportsmanship.

Meanwhile the schools continue to develop other facets of student leadership and creativity. The student council and the environmental clubs at each **Please see Schools, p. 2**

Occupation watch:

Recent eviction feared a sign of things to come

In November, Israeli police enforced a court order to evict Mohammad and Fawzieh al-Kurd from their home but ignored another that would have forced settlers out of the home's addition, which they have occupied since 1999.

A senior Palestinian couple was evicted from their Jerusalem home before dawn on Nov. 9, according to www.haaretz.com. Mohammad and Fawzieh al-Kurd had lived in the home for decades. Police officers and soldiers carried out the court-ordered eviction despite protests from human rights groups such as the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.

The incident exemplifies the complexities and discrimination involved in land ownership in Israel. The al-Kurd family had been given the home in 1956 by Jordan, which gov-

erned the area at the time. They had added a wing to the home for their son Raed. But in 1999, Israeli courts kicked him out, claiming that an Ottoman-era document granted ownership to an Israeli organization. Settlers have occupied the wing since and sought to have the al-Kurds removed from the rest of the house.

In July, a Jerusalem court ruled in favor of the settlers, resulting in the eviction. Another court order, dated Sept. 14, according to one witness, called for the settlers to vacate the premises. But "on the 9th, the police took only the al-Kurds family,"

said Dudu Masango, an EAPPI volunteer from South Africa.

The eviction occurred in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, which is predominantly Arab. Israeli settlers have been acquiring properties there for some time. Observers fear that this action is just the first

of many that will force out some 500 Palestinians in the area.

Update: In ill health for some time, Mohammad al-Kurd died of a heart attack on Nov. 22 in hospital. Fawzieh al-Kurd remains defiant, living in a tent near her home, despite attempts of the Israeli army to evict her yet again. ✕

New EA group begins service

A group of 24 ecumenical accompaniers from nine countries began their three-month volunteer service for the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel with a handover ceremony on Nov. 17. EAs have been kept busy lately in the Hebron area escorting children to school and supporting families attacked by settlers. The Jerusalem team responded to three home demolitions and the eviction of the al-Kurd family (see accompanying story).



Bishop Munib Younan displays his UN-issued refugee card during a sermon at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

Remembering the Nakba is sermon theme

The importance of memory, facing reality and working toward a shared vision for the future were the themes of Bishop Munib Younan's Nov. 19 sermon for the Sabeel 7th International Conference closing worship in Jerusalem.

Entitled "The Nakba: Memory, Reality and Beyond," the week-long conference focused on the 1948 "catastrophe" in which thousands of Palestinians lost homes and lives in the violent creation of the modern state of Israel.

Bishop builds ties during Europe travels

From Friends, p. 1

Finland and 2008 Nobel Peace Prize winner. Noting his work as an international mediator, Younan invited Ahtisaari to come to Palestine to mediate a just peace with Israel. His stay also included a meeting with the Rt. Rev. Jukka Paarma, archbishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, and meetings with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission. There, discussions yielded an agreement to enter into a partnership with the

diocese of Kuopio in northeastern Finland. A formal agreement will be signed in February.

In late October, representatives of the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land and of the Alliance of Civilizations, met in Lisbon at the invitation of Jorge Sampaio, a former president of Portugal. The Alliance is an initiative of the UN and seeks to galvanize international action against extremism. Younan said the organizations agreed to work together and, as a result, expects the UN to better appreciate the role of religious leaders in Palestine-Israel.

International partners of the EKD, the Evangelical Church in Germany, were asked to comment on the church's renewal strategy. Younan reported that the German church's

priorities mirror those of the ELCJHL: education, leadership training and deepening Lutheran identity.

Younan also attended the general assembly of the Church of Norway, addressing the body on Nov. 12. He thanked the church for its accompaniment and asked for their continued support. He conveyed particular gratitude that the church has sent the Rev. Canon Dr. Trond Bakkevig to serve as facilitator for the Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land, and for the Rev. Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit.

In response to his message, Ole Mjos, Nobel Peace Prize committee chairman, thanked Younan for his work for peace and justice in the Middle East and his concern for Arab Christianity. ✕