



elcjhle-pistle

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

Salaam and grace to you from Jerusalem, City of Peace

October 2008

Economic situation difficult for ELCJHL but does not undermine faith, Bishop says

The interdependence of the nations was never so evident as it has been during the ongoing international economic crisis.

The insecurity threatens the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, according to its leader, Bishop Munib Younan. "Can we pay salaries for our teachers and our employees? What about next year – how can we plan it? What are the prospects? How can the pension fund of our employees be secured?" These are some of the concerns the bishop listed during an interview in his Jerusalem office in early October.

Palestinian Christian churches that receive outside support "have no stocks or reserves but depend on the benevolence and generosity of our partner churches in the world, to whom we are very thankful," Younan said.

The church, whose fiscal calendar follows the calendar year, planned its current budget based on last year's exchange rate. The rate has now lost 30 to 35 percent of its value, which Younan said will result in deficits for the 2,000-member church.

It is expected that the ELCJHL will end this year about \$300,000 in deficit because of currency losses. This is significantly higher than the \$20,000 deficit expected by church leaders when they adopted the 2008 budget in November 2007.

It may also prompt a one-time switch for school tuition: for fees to be collected in shekels instead of dollars for one academic year.

The crisis is world-changing, the failure of an economic system in which many had put their trust, Younan said. "When we see banks collapsing, when the economy is on the verge of collapsing, it reminds us that there is one Lord who is our savior, Jesus Christ," he said. However painful, it reminds us that "we are not the lords of ourselves, of our economies" and that the one who is Lord "wants justice for the poor as well as the rich countries," Younan said.

"Our lord should not be our economy or what is in our pockets. Our Lord should be the Lord who saves us from the greed and from what is in our pockets, Younan said. "I will trust only him for what kind of future we will have." ✠



VOLUNTEERS young and old from the English congregation of the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem, participated in the first day of the olive harvest at Augusta Victoria Hospital, Jerusalem. Volunteers picked nearly 18 burlap bags of olives, which are pressed for oil that is sold to raise money for needy Palestinian patients at the hospital.

ELCJHL 50th anniversary plans continue to be finalized

Next year is a big one for the ELCJHL: As well as its own 50th anniversary, the synod will observe the 30th anniversary of its bishopric and 170 years of Lutheran witness in Palestine.

Festivities begin May 16, 2009, with workshops, cultural events and a barbecue at the International Center of Bethlehem and the Lutheran School of Beit Sahour. Next is a festive

service and reception at 3 p.m., May 17, at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

The synod will welcome many guests and friends to the area for events, including its international partners in the Coordination Committee for Cooperation, better known as COCOP, for its annual meeting.

Watch for details in coming newsletters. ✠

Inside:

- News notes
- 2009 anniversaries
- Bishop's Academy

Calendar:

- Reformation Day Oct. 31
- Worldwide Prayer for the Nations Nov. 23 (www.oracionmundialporlasciones.org)

Join us!

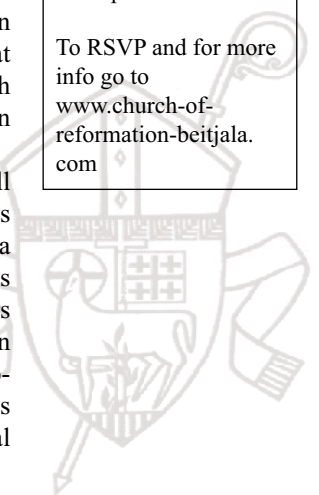
3 p.m., Oct. 30, 2008

Church of the Reformation, Beit Jala

- 125th jubilee of the church
- 5th anniversary of Abraham's Herbage

Worship service and candlelight march to the separation wall

To RSVP and for more info go to www.church-of-reformation-beitjala.com



THANKSGIVING SUNDAY – Children voice their thanks during Thanksgiving Sunday festivities on Oct. 12 at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. (Meredith Harber photo)



Council sets leadership training as top priority

Training future school and church leaders for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land topped the agenda at a recent meeting of the enlarged ELCJHL church council. With current leaders aging and Christian numbers declining, identifying new leaders for synod positions is a serious concern.

Staff training, financial independence and income-generating projects are among the church council's priorities for the coming three years.

The council and invited guests discussed ideas for leadership development and strategic plans, submitted by church and school leaders, at a special meeting held Sept. 25-26 in Jericho.

School officials joined the group on the first day to discuss school matters. Providing staff training was one strategy proposed for promoting leadership development in the schools. Broadly speaking, the group's school guidelines involve spending, building maintenance, equipment, staff development and strategic planning for the next three years.

Church matters were on the agenda on the second day. Bishop Munib Younan highlighted the importance of strengthening Lutheran identity. This means making sure members understand what it

means to be Lutheran. Council members discussed addressing "Lutheran literacy" in every area of the church, from Sunday school to women's groups to leadership training programs.

In addition to the leadership question, participants also discussed strategies – which impact all church programs – for the ELCJHL's next three years. They decided to focus on staff training, reaching financial independence, developing income-generating projects, educational development and raising up church leaders, to name a few, in the coming years. All program proposals are contingent on the availability of funding.

The ELCJHL council is comprised of the bishop, synod president Rev. Ibrahim Azar and five others elected from the membership: Rifat Kassis, Rev. Jadallah Shihadeh, Rev. Mitri Raheb, Jack Bahbah and Sani Kasabreh. Three non-voting advisers – church secretary George Awad, director of education Charlie Haddad and church accountant Adeeb Mreibe – attend the meetings. ❖

American bishops to visit ELCJHL in January 2009

Work is still underway to prepare for the bishop's Academy scheduled for January 2009. For nine days that month, more than 70 North American Lutheran bishops will be in Jerusalem for their annual conference. Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and their spouses will tour the Old City, meet with local government officials and leaders of Jerusalem congregations as well as conduct church business. Details will be published as they are finalized.



Bishop Munib Younan attended the conference, "Loving God and Neighbor in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians," at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, U.S. July 28–31, 2008. Here he is pictured with (from left) Sheik Tayseer Tamimmi, chief judge of the Islamic Court of Palestine; Bishop Younan; His Highness Prince Ghazi of Jordan; Father Nabil Haddad, executive director of the Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center; and Metropolitan Mykhayil Champion, Archbishop of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, New York.

News Notes

❖ ELCJHL churches celebrate the harvest each autumn on Thanksgiving Sunday. On Oct. 5, Bishop Munib Younan participated in Thanksgiving Sunday on Oct. 5 at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan.

❖ Bishop Munib Younan recently participated in the meeting of the executive committee of the Middle East Council of Churches. The committee affirmed its commitment to Christian-Muslim dialogue and reviewed the humanitarian work

done for migrants and refugees by its diakonal unit.

The committee called for the withdrawal of forces in Iraq in stating its refusal of the use of violence or arms. The committee called for the Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories. It condemned violence against Christians in the region and called for its Muslim partners to raise their voices against such violations of human rights.

The Sept. 29-Oct. 2 meeting took place at Kikko Monastery in Cyprus.

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Your comments, critiques
 and questions are welcome
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