



# The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)

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## Media Kit

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## 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation Commemoration ELCJHL Bishop Munib A. Younan Responds

Thank you for your interest in interviewing The Right Rev. Bishop Munib A. Younan for your publication. As Lutherans around the world prepare for this monumental commemoration of the Reformation, we at the ELCJHL approach the 31 October 2017 anniversary in a spirit of ecumenical accountability to the world. There are two distinct events planned for the Reformation anniversary:

1. The Ecumenical celebration of common prayer between Lutherans and Catholics on 31 October 2016 as a preparation to the 2017 Reformation anniversary. In this important milestone, **Bishop Younan**, Lutheran World Federation Deputy Secretary Junge and Pope Francis will lead a joint commemoration (or remembrance) of the Reformation. [www.elcjh.org](http://www.elcjh.org)
2. Under the theme of “Liberated by God’s Grace” the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) will celebrate the Reformation in 2017 in Windhoek, Namibia. [www.2017.lutheranworld.org](http://www.2017.lutheranworld.org)

### Included in this kit:

1. Bishop Younan’s Bio
2. Q&A from Bishop Younan
3. History of the ELCJHL
4. Link to high resolution photo of Bishop Younan
5. Link to video

### About the ELCJHL

Though Palestinian Christians have been in Jerusalem since the first Pentecost, the roots of the ELCJHL are in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century when German and English missionaries came to teach and minister to the local people. Today, we have five congregations in Jerusalem, Ramallah and the Bethlehem area and one in Amman, Jordan. The churches in Amman and Ramallah are comprised largely of families of refugees who fled their homes at the time of the tragic wars that followed the formation of Israel. We also operate four schools and four education programs.

## #1 Bishop Younan's Bio

Bishop Younan was born on 18 September 1950 in Jerusalem. Both his parents were Palestinian refugees, and he holds United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNWRA) refugee status.

After completing his primary and secondary education in Palestine, Bishop Younan studied diaconry at Luther Opisto College in Järvenpää, Finland (1969 to 1972), and theology at the University of Helsinki (1972 to 1976), obtaining a Master's degree with a thesis on "Election in Deutero Isaiah." He also undertook study and research at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, Illinois (USA), in 1988, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Divinity by Wartburg College, Iowa (USA), in 2001.

In 1976, Younan was ordained at the Church of the Redeemer, Jerusalem. Over the next twelve years he served the ELCJHL in various capacities in areas of pastoral leadership, youth leadership and Christian education. In 1990 Younan was appointed president of the ELCJHL Synod, a position he held until his election and consecration as bishop in January 1998. As bishop, he also chairs several boards and committees within the ELCJHL.

Bishop Munib A. Younan was elected to the presidency of The Lutheran World Federation by the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, on 24 July 2010. As president, he also chairs the LWF Council, Executive Committee and Board of Trustees.

Younan's involvement with the LWF dates back to 1981. It includes membership of its Youth Committee (1981-1984); adviser to the Council (1990-1997); Council member, vice- chair of the Board of Trustees of the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg and vice-chair of the LWF Program Committee for Mission and Development from 1997 to 2003. From 2003 to July 2010 Younan served as LWF vice-president for the Asia region, Council member and member of the LWF Executive Committee and Board of Trustees.

Younan continues to make a substantial contribution to the life of the churches and ecumenism in the Middle East. Younan has been an active member of the Middle East Council of Churches, serving in various capacities since 1985, and presently serves as President for the Evangelical Family. From 2004 to 2010, Younan served as president of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical

Churches (FMEEC), leading them to a unanimous vote in favor of women's ordination in January 2010. A founding member of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), Younan has chaired its Local Reference Group since 2002.

In the field of interreligious encounter, Younan has been active since his work as co-founder of the Al-Liqa' Center for Religious Studies in Jerusalem in 1982. Since 1991, with the Jonah Group, Younan has launched several long-running, informal dialogues providing space for joint reflection by local Christians and Jews. Younan is also a founding member of the Council for Religious Institutions in the Holy Land (CRIHL), an organization of interfaith dialogue with membership including the Heads of Churches in the Holy Land, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, the Ministry of Waqf and Religious Affairs, and the Islamic Shari'a Courts of the Palestinian Authority.

Younan helped bring about a Mutual Recognition Agreement between Middle East Evangelical churches in 2006 for full communion between churches of the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. It established the mutual recognition of baptism, Eucharist, ministry and ordination. A participant in Anglican-Lutheran dialogue in Jerusalem since 1984, Younan was named the Lutheran patron of the Anglican Lutheran Society in 2010. He was a member of the World Council of Churches' Orthodox Study Group from 1998-2006.

A high-profile lecturer and speaker, Younan is sought after for his perspective on just peace as a Palestinian Christian. Younan is also active in interreligious encounter, ecumenism and reconciliation in his own region and internationally. His work has been recognized with a number of awards and prizes.

The author of *Witnessing for Peace: In Jerusalem and the World* (Augsburg Fortress, USA, 2003), *Our Shared Witness: A Voice of Justice and Reconciliation* (Lutheran University Press, 2012), and of *The Augsburg Confession in Arabic* (Emerenzian Est., Jerusalem, 1993), Younan has written numerous articles, lectures and presentations relating to the life of Palestinian Lutherans in the Middle East. Bishop Younan is married to Suad Yacoub; the couple has a son, two daughters and a grand- daughter.

*Prepared by the LWF Office for Communication Services November 2010,  
Revised by the ELCJHL October 2016*

## #2 Bishop's Responses to Reformation 500<sup>th</sup>

**Q:** How relevant are the teachings of Martin Luther to the church today?

**A:** The Lutheran Church considers itself to be a church that is based on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and for this reason, in the middle ages, Dr. Martin Luther, the reformer, protested with 95 theses, bringing the church back to the Bible, to a focus on Jesus Christ as savior, and at the same, to depending on the grace of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

For 500 years this church has existed, but it has not existed alone. We have existed working with other ecumenical churches... the Catholic, the Orthodox, the Presbyterian, the Methodists, the Mennonites and with other Evangelicals. All of us are the Body of the Christ and Lutherans are an integral part of the Body. Our mission of dialogue with other Christians is strong.

**Q:** What is the ministry focus of your church in the Holy Land?

**A:** Our focus is witnessing the Gospel of Christ through our ministries, and through education. The ELCJHL has 3,000 children attending our schools. 65% are non-Lutherans including Muslims, and 35% are from different Christian denominations. Our understanding of why we have schools is to modify the identity of the students, to teach them to value peace education, to accept the other and the otherness of the other, to promote gender justice and to give a quality education. It is very important, that in the midst of a society that is not Christian, we witness through the ministry of education. That is how the church should be today, addressing every human being, encouraging pluralism and diversity.

**Q:** What is the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)? And, how is relevant is the teaching of Martin Luther in a global perspective?

**A:** The LWF is not just offices in Geneva, it *is* 145 churches worldwide, and the 145 churches are distributed in every continent; we are all the LWF, a communion of churches. Why? Because today, no church can be independent. We are all interdependent as we are called by Christ to be witnesses to Him in the world. No church can do the work of Christ alone. Our mission is to proclaim the Gospel of Christ, and the mission of love from our Savior to every human being. The work of LWF is prophetic diakonia. We want to serve those who are suffering in the world. We serve the refugee, on behalf of the UNHCR, we serve people in Africa, in Asia, in Jordan, in Iraq, in Syria, in Lebanon; we serve everywhere there is human suffering. We want to alleviate poverty. LWF does not do this work because we want to give charity, but we do it to empower people for justice so that they can live in the dignity that Christ has given us all from the power of the cross. We center on prophetic diakonia not only to give food and clothes, but to empower people in education, to stand on their feet and to encourage them to work for justice. Lastly, LWF works together in ecumenism. We dialogue with other churches. For example we have had 30 years of dialogue with the Orthodox church, and 50 years of dialogue with the Catholic church and have signed a joint Declaration of Justification by Faith (1999), and now we have authored the *From Conflict to Communion* document with the Catholic church. This document discusses how we agree that baptism grafts us all into the body of Christ, and how we can work together. We are celebrating not the historic conflict but the living communion between the two churches. This 500 year Reformation celebration illustrates that even though we still have differences, we see the image of Christ in the other church.

We have to live together in dialogue in order to combat extremism and in order to find the common values of living together in this world - the value of peace, the value of justice, the value of reconciliation, the value of working together - for the rest of our humanity, and for working toward global peace and justice in the whole world.

**Q:** In some regions, interfaith dialogue could be interpreted as superfluous. How actual is interfaith dialogue in a divergent and pluralistic world 500 years after the reformation?

**A:** Interfaith dialogue is a spiritual growth. It is an opportunity for me to see how God is coming to everyone in different ways. To see the image of Christ in the other, who is different, is humbling. We do not come to the table to convert, but in order to find what values we share in our faiths, where we can find like values.

We cannot say we love God and hate our fellow human being. Jesus teaches us to love God and our neighbor. In John's first letter in chapter four it says: "Those who say they love God whom they don't see but hate their brother whom they do see are liars." How can we love God and hate different ethnicities, different faiths, different religions, different understandings?

So when I sit at the interfaith table, my strength is never weakened, it is strengthened because I see God's work in humanity.

**Q:** Reformation Commemoration? What is the focus of the 500<sup>th</sup> Year of Reformation Anniversary?

**A:** After 50 years of dialogue with the Catholic church, we will come together in a common prayer co-hosted by the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation. Pope Francis, myself, and LWF General Secretary Dr. Martin Junge will invite all to come together in prayer.

This historical moment is the harvest sent by the Holy Spirit from years of dialogue. This shows that religion is not a problem when reconciled it is the solution.

We are also focused on the center of our biblical Lutheran doctrine, which is Liberated by God's Grace. On the cross we were all liberated from all of our human sins, from all things that disturb human beings... God has liberated. This is a crucial point for us; you are saved freely on the cross. This is the core message of the reformation, and this is the core message that we carry forth in this 500<sup>th</sup> year celebration. With liberation in mind, LWF has chosen three themes based on this biblical/Lutheran understanding:

- a) Human beings are not for sale – every human being is dear to Christ.
- b) Creation is not for sale – God said tend the earth and take care of God's creation.
- c) Salvation is not for sale – We are saved through Christ. The cross is not for sale.

Ultimately, we celebrate 500 years of Reformation to remind us that we are liberated, and we must live in that freedom of the Gospel.

**Q:** Why aren't Lutherans celebrating the Mass with the Pope?

**A:** The Holy Spirit has allowed us to come to THIS first step today and to cooperate with each other today. We are waiting for the Holy Spirit to lead us to the next step. We must remember that the fruit of dialogue is not from humans!

**Q:** What is the image that Lutherans want to give of themselves during this 500<sup>th</sup> Reformation anniversary? What is the message they want to give to the world?

**A:**

**Unity.** Put aside small issues and be united for the mission of the Gospel. St. Paul says in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, we are all co-workers in the vineyard of Christ. Be united for the sake of your country, for the sake of your people, for the sake of the love of Christ, because when we are united, those who are non-Christians will see how much Christians love one another.

**Never be satisfied.** We should not be naïve to think that when we are preaching the Gospel in our churches that everything is fine. We must know that Christ works in his own ways, and that the church needs constant reformation. When the church forgets the Gospel of love or the cross, Christ reminds her to come back and be reformed to the roots of Christianity which is Jesus Christ.

**Every church needs reformation.** As a Lutheran, The Reformation did not end when the reformers died. No, the Reformation continues in the church. When I carry the gospel of love to my people and to others, then Christ is reforming us, the Holy Spirit is molding us, sustaining us, sending us into the world as missionaries in our work, to prophetic vision and prophetic diakonia. Even if we are servants of the Lord, let us humble ourselves to ask the Lord to use us to be an instrument of peace and a broker of justice and reconciliation. Use us and reform us so that we can see only Christ when we are working in our churches and in the world. The church needs to be reformed to carry more and more love.

### #3 History of the ELCJHL

The ELCJHL traces its origin to the middle of the 19th century when German and English Evangelical Christians came to Palestine to support the Christian minority in the area through diaconal and mission work. Their activities were many and were channeled through a variety of organizations and institutions.

The initial phase of the Lutheran mission efforts began in 1841 when a joint British Anglican and Prussian Evangelical bishopric was established in Jerusalem. In 1851 Theodor Fliedner, of Kaiserswerth, was invited to bring four deaconesses to the Holy Land to begin a hospital. Four years later, a school for girls, Talitha Kumi, was begun. This was the first school to offer girls a proper education.

In 1860 Johann Ludwig Schneller founded the Syrian Orphanage in Jerusalem. His work among homeless boys had its origin in a civil war in Syria, at that time a province of the Turkish regime. Some 30,000 Christians lost their lives in that war and many children became orphans. (Eventually that work was moved to the Bekka Valley of Lebanon and was administered by the Lutheran World Federation.)

The Anglicans and Lutherans worked together as one body until 1886 when the Prussian Lutherans went their own way, partly due to political and theological differences in Europe between Prussia and England. The German Lutherans focused their efforts on social work and education at a time when the British Anglicans were emphasizing conversion. Today the ELCJHL continues this call to witness through education and health care for Palestinians regardless of faith and provides for the spiritual needs of the Arab Lutheran community.

The original aim of these Protestant mission efforts in the Holy Land was not to create a new church in the area, but to serve the poor and provide a proper education for Christians. Only later the former pupils of the Lutheran Schools helped to establish the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Many of these members became refugees at the time the State of Israel was created.

Until 1947 the Lutheran Church was a mission church under the spiritual leadership of a Propst appointed by the Evangelical Church in Germany. On 7 May 1959, at a time when what is now the West Bank was part of Jordan, the ELCJHL was officially recognized as an autonomous religious community with a royal decree from King Hussein. Thus it was officially called the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan though in practice it is known simply as the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ). The

ELCJ Synod met on Jan. 14, 2005, and unanimously decided to add “and the Holy Land” to the name, so that the name more accurately reflects the full scope of the ministry of the Lutheran church that is serving in Jordan, Palestine and Israel.

During the 1970s the ELCJHL began to make its way toward independence as Lutherans world wide focused on “church to church” relationships rather than “church to mission field” relationships. In 1979 the German Propst transferred spiritual leadership to the first Palestinian Bishop, the Rev. Dr. Daoud Haddad, who had been vicar of the Jerusalem congregation for more than 30 years. The Synod of the ELCJHL had elected him as the first Arab Lutheran bishop in the whole of the Middle East.

#4 High Resolution Photo Link

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/fj1g9ramtw2g8dg/global\\_gov\\_pres\\_1.jpg?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/fj1g9ramtw2g8dg/global_gov_pres_1.jpg?dl=0)

#5 Video Link

<https://youtu.be/Vr7ezqdnQpg>