



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

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## Joint-Common Prayer Shared Locally ELCJHL, Catholic Latin Patriarchate Follow Up Lund

*Amman, 12 February 2017* – In celebration of years of cooperation and dialogue already nurtured in the Holy Land, church leaders from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and the Catholic Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (LPJ) made a visual commitment to unity and shared service to its community in the Middle East. The service was co-hosted at The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan on Sunday, and another service is scheduled at St. Catherine Church in Bethlehem on Saturday.

Heads of both Jerusalem churches, The Right Rev. Dr. Bishop Munib Younan of The Evangelical Lutheran Church and The Most Rev. Archbishop Pierbattista Pizzaballa of the Catholic Latin Patriarchate co-presided at the service and delivered homilies jointly in the Lutheran church, which served as a model for ecumenical relationships in the region.

“Ecumenism does not come only through theological dialogue but through friendships and trust. We are thankful for the friendship and trust that will take us further as Lutherans and Catholics,” Bishop Munib Younan said of the service.

The Common Prayer in Amman was fashioned after the historic event in Lund, Sweden on 31 October 2016, which commemorated the coming 500<sup>th</sup> Year of Reformation. The Reformation formed the Lutheran church movement and set it apart from the Catholic church. The Common Prayer in Lund was co-presided by Pope Francis, Head of

the Roman Catholic Church and Bishop Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation and The Rev. Martin Junge, General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation.

On a local level, leaders and members of the two denominations gathered to continue the healing and reconciliation started in Lund, Sweden. The Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd was filled to its capacity with equal parts Catholic visitors and Lutheran parishioners. There were about 20 clergy present representing each church, including the Ambassador of the Vatican Archbishop Alberto Ortega Martin and other church leaders from the Orthodox, Anglican, Syrian and other churches.

“Even though it was rainy and cold, it was a packed church. Some [attendees] asked, ‘Why didn’t we do this earlier,’” Bishop Younan said.

“It [the Common Prayer] was a spiritual and a devotional moment of commemorating the Reformation, but we were celebrating unity in diversity,” he said. “You could hear a pin drop in the church it was so devotional and spiritual.”

*The Common Prayer Liturgy* was adapted and translated by Pastor Isaac of the Lutheran Church and Vicar Bishop William Shomali of the Latin Patriarchate for this setting.

“What happened in Lund should take place at all levels. Unity is not simply between the heads of churches. It was not a one-time thing and then we go back, each to our own church life. We hope that more initiatives take place at smaller levels - in towns and in villages,” said ELCJHL Rev. Munther Isaac, Associate Pastor at Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

The liturgy begins with prayer then leads into thanksgiving for each church’s contribution to the world, confession and repentance of church sins against one another and a commitment to focus on the five imperatives (listed below) agreed upon in the document *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran – Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation 2017* compiled by The Lutheran World Federation and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity after 50 years of previous dialogue.

Before the Holy Land churches assembled on Sunday, the *From Conflict to Communion* 100-page booklet, which was just recently translated into Arabic, was distributed. Some copies were available before and after the common prayer.

While some prayers followed the structure of the *Common Prayer Liturgy* verbatim, other prayers were given to petition God for the specific needs of their context such as prayers for refugees, the Middle East, and for Jordan. The roles involved in the service alternated between Catholics and Lutherans much like the service in Lund.

“What happened [tonight] is against division, against war and conflict of which there is too much of in the Middle East,” Rev. Isaac said.

“It [the service] was amazing. We felt the Spirit leading us. There was a sense of joy and reverence. It was mutual, both of our churches came together with a sense of enthusiasm, both the Bishops, clergy and the people.” “It is like there is a thirst for unity in our region.”

In his sermon on the Gospel of St. John 15:1-5, the same text proclaimed at Lund, Archbishop Pizzaballa is persistent about the importance of unity between the Jerusalem churches, “Where there is division we are not bearing the fruit that Jesus seeks from us.”

Next week, Saturday 18 February, the two churches will meet again in Bethlehem for a second joint prayer, this time hosted by the Catholic Church of St. Catherine.

“Christian unity is a living witness. Unity is the only way for reconciliation,” Bishop Younan stressed.

#### FIVE IMPERATIVES PULL OUT

*The first imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should always begin from the perspective of unity and not from the point of view of division in order to strengthen what is held in common even though the differences are more easily seen and experienced.*

*The second imperative: Lutherans and Catholics must let themselves continuously be transformed by the encounter with the other and by the mutual witness of faith.*

*The third imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should again commit themselves to seek visible unity, to elaborate together what this means in concrete steps, and to strive repeatedly toward this goal.*

*The fourth imperative: Lutherans and Catholics should jointly rediscover the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ for our time.*

*The fifth imperative: Catholics and Lutherans should witness together to the mercy of God in proclamation and service to the world.*

#### **About the ELCJHL**

Though Palestinian Christians have been in Jerusalem since the first Pentecost, the roots of the ELCJHL are in the mid-19th century when German and English missionaries came to teach and minister to the local people. Today, we have six congregations in Jerusalem, Ramallah, the Bethlehem area, Amman, Jordan, and a site at Beyond Bethany, 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.

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