Annual Report for The ELCJHL
2018

“We must obey God rather than human authority”
Acts 5:29

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Diyar Theater

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Cover Art: By Nadia Arafat, ninth-grade student at Mustaqbal School in Ramallah. Nadia belongs to one of the 20 Environmental Education Center’s (EEC) Environmental Clubs in Palestine. Nadia was the second place winner in the EEC Spring Festival Art Competition Our Land, Our Identity.
Dear Partners, Companions, Supporters and Co-Workers in God’s Mission, Thank you for walking with us on this pilgrimage of partnership that leads us into fellowship with each other and with our Lord.

As I look back on 2018 and ponder the challenge of the text “We must obey God rather than any human authority,” (Acts 5:29) I am grateful for the Koinonia between you and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. With the stirring of the Holy Spirit, the ELCJHL together with you, and through its churches and ministries, is able to faithfully seek obedience to God by following his teachings and demonstrating them in practical ways no matter the external circumstances.

Our local churches are able to stand steadfast in the face of unjust laws, movement restrictions, systemic discrimination, aging in Palestine, as well as disabilities, with your love and support.

Therefore, in this year’s debut Annual Report, I would like to share with you the work that God has tasked the ELCJHL with, such as: the Lutheran ecclesiastical court, the religious sites program, gender justice efforts, our highly recognized education ministries, our outreach to the deaf community, and a growing new program to reestablish the diaconate in the ELCJHL.

As we look back, may we continue to look forward to a strong, sustainable church here in the Holy Land.

Let us rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, never cease praying and contribute to the needs of the saints.

In Christ,
+Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar
Where Laws and the Spiritual Meet

ELCJHL Ecclesiastical Court

In Palestine, legal cases concerning the family are heard by the religious community. The laws that govern those cases are called personal status laws, which are cases such as divorce, inheritance, child custody, alimony, and other family matters, such as marriageable age.

Outside of the Islamic Sharia court, there are four Christian ecclesiastical courts: the Catholic, the Anglican, the Orthodox and the Lutheran courts.

In 2015, the ELCJHL adopted the Lutheran Family Law that provides a framework for answering questions raised about how to rectify gender imbalances in the personal status laws in Palestine that are still used by religious institutions of all faith backgrounds.

The Lutheran Family Law serves as a theological- and biblical-inspired model that other religious communities can use to craft their own laws guided by gender equality.

The Lutheran World Federation's Gender Justice policy influenced the ELCJHL's Lutheran Family Laws.
The ELCJHL has taken the lead in hosting the *Side by Side: Faith Movement For Gender Justice* campaign, which is a growing global movement of people of faith who want to see gender justice become a reality throughout the world. The ELCJHL is committed to making a genuine change in its society by eradicating gender inequalities, injustice, and gender-based violence. Additionally, the ELCJHL Women’s Desk is part of a working group for *Side by Side’s Palestine chapter*. The ELCJHL will be represented as a model church to encourage other faith organizations in the Middle East and globally to adopt a similar model.

In the fall of 2018, The Women's Desk represented the ELCJHL in a leadership seminar for women from churches across Europe and the United States. The seminar was sponsored by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and was held in The Wittenberg Center in Lutherstadt Wittenberg, Germany. The Women’s Desk shared information about the status of women in the Holy Land and addressed both the challenges faced by women and the opportunities available for women. Together, the participants built relationships and networks that have continued long after the conclusion of the seminar.
Freedom of Movement and Unity

Holy Site Trips

The ELCJHL West Bank and Jerusalem churches took a series of holy site visits around Palestine and Israel.

The initiative began with The ELCJHL Rev. Saliba Rishmawi when he realized that a new generation of Christians had not visited the holy sites, or as Rev. Rishmawi calls them, "The Fifth Gospel."

Although the churches are not geographically far away, members of the five churches rarely have an opportunity or access to the holy sites that fuel tourism by other Christians. This is partly due to the difficulties in navigating "security" checkpoints and border crossings that separate the West Bank communities, but also due to the lack of ELCJHL coordinated events.

With the blessings of ELCJHL Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar and funding from Deans of The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway (CoN), Rev. Rishmawi developed a series of holy site tours.

The members visited Saint Peter’s Church, The Beatitudes Basilica, Church of the Annunciation, Qumran, the Baptismal Site, and St. Ely’s Monastery.
Stewards of God’s Gifts

Giving

All ELCJHL congregations are required to give 10,000 New Israeli Shekel (NIS) each year to the synod. Beit Sahour is required to give 5,000 NIS. The money goes to support the administration, however, there is local giving that goes unaccounted for: Church carpets replaced by members, special Thanksgiving offerings, doors fixed, meals made, and other acts of kindness beyond the required congregational giving.
For the last five years a committee consisting of the Ministry of Education, Christian churches and ELCJHL Principal Anton Nassar of Dar al-Kalima School in Bethlehem, have developed a curriculum from different denominations to teach students in the 12th-grade Christian concepts and doctrine in order to prepare for exit-exams. Before 2018, there was only a Muslim portion of the governmental exit exam required for graduating students. Christian students did not have an opportunity to earn these extra points on the exam, called the INJAZ, until the curriculum focused on Christianity was developed. Now, for the first time in Palestine, INJAZ students will be recognized for their Christian identity.

“We have worked hard for years with the League of Private Christian Schools to develop a Christian education program that all schools can add to their curriculum, endorsed by the Ministry of Education...This long-term dream became a reality when the Palestinian Ministry of Education decided to include the Christian education curriculum for the 12th grade in the general secondary school exam starting in the 2019 school year. This new curriculum allows Christian students to have a choice in their classes, opens opportunities for graduates to find work in careers like Christian education, and brings economic benefit for our children in the long term. These benefits are not only for Christian students at Christian schools, but all Christian students throughout Palestine,” said Principal Anton Nassar, Dar al-Kalima School.
We Are Called by God to Serve

Diaconal Formation Program

Remembering the work of his father, Deacon Charlie Azar, and his deaconess aunts, Bishop Azar requested that a diaconate be reestablished at the ELCJHL. Understanding the call to serve the community in an intentional way means revisiting the role of the deacon and how it may lead the way in programs to feed the hungry and clothe the widow. A group of five international deacons met with ELCJHL pastors to outline the local and global history of deacons and deaconesses serving at the ELCJHL. The ELCJHL is in the second phase of identifying members who display the character of a deacon as outlined in the Bible. Deacons from the Liaison Office of the UK Methodist Missions, The Reformed Dutch Protestant Church, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Sweden (CoS), The Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), and The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) participated in the first of a three-part series of deacon seminars.
Meals On Wheels
Serving For 24 Years

Visitors 1,008
The Baptismal Site
11 Baptisms

ELCJHL SCHOOLS
The Evangelical Lutheran School - Beit Sahour
The Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope - Ramallah
Dar al-Kalima Evangelical Lutheran School - Bethlehem
The German Evangelical Lutheran School, Talitha Kumi – Beit Jala
Al-Mahaba Nursery and Preschool - Jerusalem
The problems that residents of Jerusalem face are different than the problems of West Bank residents.

In Jerusalem, the challenges of economic burden such as extraordinarily high housing and education costs, and the racial discrimination against Palestinians are prevalent. There is also the burden of encountering Israel everyday in Jerusalem.

There are laws, rules and legislation made to push the people out, according to the Arabic-speaking Jerusalem Church pastor, Rev. Zu’mot.

Consequently, Tawfiq a member of Redeemer feels those pressures often, and has to face a constant struggle to stay or to go. Tawfiq has opportunities to leave and make a better life in the U.S. or Canada, yet he remains. Occasionally, he is tempted to apply for Canadian citizenship, which he is confident he could easily obtain, but he stays, he stays for the church.

Pastor Fursan Zu’mot says,

“Tawfiq is a good example of a devoted Christian who stays to help his church. The authority is pushing us out yet he says ‘No, I will obey God by remaining a Christian presence in this place.’”
**The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala**

*The City on a Hill*

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**Belonging**

*Caption:* Twenty-eight-year old Minerva, who has Down syndrome, moves up close to Bishop Azar during the Good Friday Via Dolorosa Walk. Minerva knows she belongs with her church, front and center.

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*Pastor Ashraf Tannous said,*

“Minerva does not allow societal norms to tell her that she can’t fully participate in the life of the church because of her differences. Minerva attends church worship and activities with the confidence that God is the center of her life. We can all learn from watching her boldness as an example of what it means to be a faithful member.”
Rami Khader, the founder and managing director of Diyar Theater on the campus of Dar al-Kalima University of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem was moved by the stories of 380 children imprisoned by the Israeli military and agreed to manage a dance production, titled *Taken* created by Royston Maldoom.

*Taken* tells the story of under-aged, imprisoned children. “The story of *Taken* tries to give a voice to these children imprisoned in Israeli jails, but also it addresses us as children. We have all witnessed the brutality of the occupation and how much it doesn’t only imprison people, but imprisons dreams and hopes. Also, the piece speaks to everyone, emphasizing the mental imprisonment that we all live in, not only the wall that surrounds us, but also the walls we create in our minds. However, we are not limited by the walls, prison cells, jails nor will we let it define us,” Rami Khader.

The production is scheduled to tour the West Bank in July 2019. Plans for performances abroad are awaiting offers.

The vision of the Diyar Dance Theater is to be a place where young adults can celebrate their Palestinian heritage through traditional folk dance and modern theatre and a space where creativity, imagination, and freedom of expression are celebrated as critical components of cultural and social development. This vision is a natural extension of the broader work of the Diyar Consortium founded by The Rev. Mitri Raheb in cultivating and empowering young leaders. Rev. Raheb is also the President of Dar al-Kalima University of Arts and Culture in Bethlehem.

**Pastor Munther Isaac said,**

“Human structure says that these children are criminals, that they are terrorists. In *Taken*, the creator and Khader were able to humanize them, in a beautiful way, and as victims of the occupation. Most of them are arrested for throwing rocks, but they are children.” “In *Taken* I see a form of what we call ‘creative resistance’ to the occupation.”
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah

The Church that remained Hopeful

Caption: Majdi communicates with ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) Genna Clemen using sign language and lip reading during a photo assignment at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour.

The Body of Christ

Majdi Mrebie came to confirmation class in 2013 and was confirmed in 2014 when he traveled to Finland with the confirmation group in an exchange program.

A member of Hope Ramallah church, Majdi was a student in Bethlehem where he and his sister learned lip reading and sign language, but due to transportation difficulties, Majdi and his sister had to leave the school for the deaf in Bethlehem. Majdi only had one year of study at the Bethlehem school. His sister completed her education there and learned to lip read, fully. Later, Majdi was enrolled in a school that emphasized sign language only. He didn't fully learn lip reading.

When Majdi graduated high school in 2017, he attended a local college for photography, his dream profession. He could use his eyes to share his vision of the world. However, the school did not have staff trained in sign language and could not provide any special learning accommodations for Majdi. He and his family arranged a sign language interpreter from his high school to accompany him during his college classes. The total people involved in sign language interpretation were three. Majdi completed the one-year photography program.

Working is difficult in Palestine for people with differences. Although there are laws that prohibit discrimination against potential job seekers, the laws are not enforced. Many people are passed by for work by employers who refuse to learn new ways of communicating or will not provide accommodations. Despite these human challenges against his success, Majdi received his driver’s license, found part-time work at a local gold jewelry store, and obtained an internship as a photographer with the ELCJHL in the communications department. Not only has Majdi found work but he also found a home and friendship at the ELCJHL Deaf Ministry.

These successes are not impossible but are very difficult especially with anything less than a four-year degree and with a difference.

Pastor Imad Haddad said,

“Majdi carries God’s image with him. It’s always precious when I say to him ‘This is the body of Christ given for you.’ It is a reminder that we are all the Body of Christ.”
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour

The City of Shepherds

Retirement

To be retired in the West Bank does not come with insurances, social security, and medical discounts as it does in other countries.

Seventy-three-year old Saeed of Beit Sahour must supplement his family income with money he makes at the Evangelical Lutheran School of Beit Sahour’s canteen. He rents the canteen space and sells sandwiches, snacks, coffee, tea and soft drinks to the students, faculty and staff at Beit Sahour school, the school that he worked at as house master, or head maintenance, for 20 years until his retirement. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour is on the same campus as the Beit Sahour school. If Saeed or his wife becomes sick, he must pay out of their income for health-care procedures and medications. Assistance outside of family and church is limited in the West Bank. Even though the ELCJHL offers private retirement benefits for its workers, Saeed’s family circumstances have left him without enough to cover monthly expenses.

In Jerusalem, there is a Center for the Elderly that provides a nurse, physical therapy and day trips for the elderly run by the ELCJHL, but Saeed has no desire to apply for permits and fight through checkpoints to go to Jerusalem. So, he continues to arrive at Beit Sahour school and church at 6 a.m. to prepare coffee, unlock doors, and arrange rooms for the day, and he leaves when every chair is put back in its place and every nook is cleaned at 6 p.m. He keeps returning to the campus day after day not for the small amount he makes from the canteen, but for the love of the church and the school.

Retirement doesn't keep him away from his church.

Pastor Ashraf Tannous said,

“Saeed knows every screw in the church and all the corners of the school. He is loyal and faithful and expresses his faith by his commitment. Through his work he is a servant of the altar much like Samuel who was the prophet of the Temple. I don’t worry about anything because I know he is there for us.”
The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman

The Church of Refugees

Prayers for All

In a Muslim country, Sunday is not the official day off. Christians working in the public sector are given two hours for worship on Sunday mornings. Friday is a day of rest, and for some institutions that includes Saturday, too.

At 7 p.m. on Sunday evening, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd conducts its worship services. This is their time to receive a Gospel message, communion and prayer. In the warmly lighted church, the Lutheran members gaze ahead, looking toward the altar, belting out worship songs projected on a screen. Then, the doors open without much notice of the Christian worshipers, and a Muslim woman slips inside with her gaze on the candle stand near the door.

She lights a candle, briefly bows her head and gives her prayer to God, to Allah, in the sand-filled iron candleholder with the cross atop. She slips out backward, without disturbing the Lutherans her eyes remain focused on the candle; on the prayer she has just offered.

Pastor Samer Azar, says,

“...We maintain a cohesive and brotherly relationship with our neighbor and context. This developed a special Christian-Muslim trust. Muslim women often step in during the Sunday services and light candles at the globe candleholder in silence or attend in some part of Sunday worship.”
A Peace Hero

A child of Syrian immigrants brought to the United States when she was an infant, Susan Shadid grew up listening to fascinating stories of people who had the courage to leave their country, their home, job, friends and sometimes family to escape conflict zones.

Little did she know that she would do the same, not to escape conflict but to face it head on.

When Susan was invited to come on staff at a school to be the Director of the Character Curriculum and Peace Heroes Curriculum (PHC), she was asked to adapt the curriculum and assist teachers by training them and modeling it in schools in Palestine. She left behind her home in Chicago to practice what she believes, “If we do not teach peace, someone will teach violence.”

The Peace Heroes Curriculum was launched in 2013 at a Jerusalem school. It is a curriculum that teaches stories of men and women who had courage and changed the course of history in their nations. It utilizes the transformative power of story to introduce children living everywhere, including in militarized countries to “real-life heroes” who use peaceful means to overcome adversity. This curriculum also includes 20 peace heroes from both the Israeli and Palestinian region that the students learn about during the cycle. The PHC has expanded to Kenya, South Africa, Burundi, Gaza and more.

Susan spent the last five years working with and mentoring Palestinian children and teachers in the K-12 school using this curriculum.

At the beginning of her work five years ago, Susan who is not a Lutheran, searched for a church home. She said, “Out of the many denominations in Palestine and Israel, the Lutherans were one of the denominations on the ground doing great work to address social justice.”

One of the reasons she chose to stay at Redeemer was because weekly they pray for the Israel/Palestine conflict. She said that as worshippers, “We are not void of what’s happening on the ground.”

When asked why she served four years on church council, Susan said, “Besides Pastor Carrie’s compelling sermons and leadership, Redeemer is a transient congregation and it is important to have consistency.” She stayed and offered her gifts as a “servant-leader.”
However, it is more than consistency that keeps Susan at Redeemer, it is what fuels her during the week.

“It gives me a spiritual community, a place to refocus my energy and to just be in community with followers of Jesus, regardless of denominations, that more often separates people. Loving God and loving others, which is the basis of the Ten Commandments - this is what fuels me. Redeemer challenges me so that I can keep growing in the Great Commission.”

www.Globalpeaceheroes.org

**Pastor Carrie Ballenger, said**

“Human authority says there is a wall and there is division among people, but God says you are all my children and Susan’s work with the Peace Heroes Curriculum teaches children around the world that they are God’s children and instruments of God’s peace.”
Thank You!

The Coordination Committee for Cooperation between the ELCJHL and Overseas Partners (COCOP)

- Church of Sweden (CoS)
- Berliner Missionswerk (BMW)
- The United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD)
- Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany (ELCNG)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
- Church of Norway (CoN)
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)
- Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD)

Affiliated Member

- The Lutheran World Federation

Companion Churches

- Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Diocese of Kuopio
- Church of Sweden, Diocese of Strängnäs
- Church of Norway, Diocese of Borg
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Dekanat Bad Tölz
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, New England Synod
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Southeast Michigan Synod
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Eastern Synod

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- Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC)
- The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)
- Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches (DSPR/MECC)
- Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF)
- Jerusalem Inter-Church Centre (JIC)
- Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL)
- World Council of Churches (WCC)
- The Presbyterian Foundation
- Kerk in Actie
- Sabeel
- Dan Church Aid/Norwegian Church Aid (DCA/NCA)

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