

## **The Evangelical Reformation Conference and the Middle East**

### **The Final Communiqué**

At the invitation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, 80 leaders of the Evangelical Churches in the Middle East gathered on 26-28 September 2017 in Amman, the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, on the 500<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Evangelical Reformation. We were honored to have our meeting under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Mohammed.

Pastors, theologians, leaders, members of The Evangelical Churches and theology students of the Evangelical Bible seminaries in the Middle East, men and women, attended the meeting from Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait and Egypt. They represented the member churches of the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC). Representatives of other ecumenical ecclesiastical families also participated. Our meeting was held in the midst of difficult and turbulent political situations, violence and displacement that are ravaging the Middle East.

The conference was organized in the form of plenary sessions, workshops and papers dealing with the following topics: the Reformation and the Middle East Context; the Roots of Reformation in the Middle East; Evangelical Identity in Orient; Evangelicals, Citizenship and Political Action; the Contribution of Evangelicals in Culture; Evangelicals and Gender Justice in the Church; Contemporary Arab Evangelical Theology; and Evangelicals and the Ecumenical Movement.

The conference was crowned by a historic church service in commemoration of the Reformation 500 held in The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd in Amman, Jordan. It was presided by The Rev. Dr. Munib Younan, Bishop of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), with the participation of the Heads of Churches, and pastors of the Reformed Churches in the Arab world. The service included a co-celebration of the Holy Sacraments, as a visible expression of love, unity, and full communion among the participating Churches, in accordance with the 2006 Amman Declaration for the Common Recognition of the Lutheran Church and the Reformed Churches in the Middle East. Bishops from the Catholic Church also attended the worship.

This conference was grateful for the ordination of the first two women pastors in the Middle East from the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. The conference valued these two ordinations, one of who participated in the conference and in the co-celebration.

All the participants valued the historic positions of His Majesty King Abdullah II Ibn Hussein, Hashemite Custodian of the Islamic and Christian Holy places in Jerusalem. They also valued his honorable positions on justice and the preservation of the Christians in the Middle East as an integral part of the Arab fabric. The participants also appreciated the patronage of Prince Ghazi Bin Mohammed for the conference, and the assistance provided by the his office to ensure the success of this conference.

During the conference, participants:

- Celebrated and appreciated the Oriental Evangelical Heritage, especially with regard to the major theological issues called for by the Reformation: the justification by faith, the priesthood of all believers, the centrality of the Bible, and the issues of education, enlightenment and advancement of women.
- Emphasized the need to re-read and re-write the history of Evangelical Movement from a Middle East and critical perspective. Today, there is an urgent need for a common Middle Eastern Evangelical vision regarding the contribution of Evangelicals, today and in the future, in their Arab societies, in light of contemporary changes, especially in the field of education.
- Emphasized the importance of the principle of “continuous reformation” in the Church, and the need to avoid the lack of inertia in thought, theology and confinement to the past. This principle includes issues such as accountability of servants and leaders, and participation in service based on the principle of the priesthood of all believers.
- Cherished the Middle Eastern Evangelical identity as an essential component of the Church of the East, and emphasized the importance of developing a local Middle East Evangelical theology, that addresses real issues on the ground, that is open to the other, and converses with Islam in the East and all Christians in the world, including the Christians of the South.
- Emphasized the importance of contributing to the principles of equal citizenship, equal rights and duties, embracing diversity, spreading a culture of respect for pluralism, building bridges of reconciliation and dismantling religious fundamentalism. And the need to prepare Arab Christian Evangelical leaders who are able to interact with society, engage in the defense of the oppressed and defeated, work for social and economic justice, gender justice and freedom of religion and expression.
- Emphasized the importance of continuing to play a leading role in the ecumenical movement towards unity among Christians.

The participants made the following recommendations to the Evangelical Churches in the Middle East:

1. To urge the FMECC to network with the Evangelical Churches in the Middle East in order to learn about the various theological and pastoral initiatives.
2. To exchange invitations in order to benefit from the different theological expertise.
3. To develop a local Middle Eastern theology, especially allowing the seminars to play a central role in this development, and in cooperation with our ecumenical partners.
4. To organize a meeting in which the leaders of the Evangelical Churches and a number of Evangelical thinkers meet to form an Evangelical Middle Eastern vision for the future through the Fellowship of Evangelical Churches in the Middle East.
5. To hold this conference periodically, and to dedicate the next conference to the issue of the woman, the church and theology.
6. To encourage member churches of the Fellowship of Middle East Churches to implement the principle of equality between men and women in ministry, in application of the Fellowship's decision in 2010.
7. To encourage the teaching of the papers of this conference and future conferences in the seminaries, the participating churches and their institutions.

“We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1: 3).