



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

PO Box 14076, Muristan Road • Jerusalem, Israel 91140 • +972-2-626-6800 •
administration@elcjh.org

Address for “The Evangelical Reformation and the Middle East:
A Way Forward” Conference

Presented by Bishop Dr. Munib Younan

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Amman, Jordan

Your Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad , Represented by Dr. Minwer Hmeid, the General Secretary of Al Elbeit, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen...

First of all, may I welcome you all on behalf of The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land to our conference “Evangelical Reformation and the Middle East: A Way Forward.”

We welcome you to this conference here in Amman, the Capitol of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

It is a great honor that this conference is under the patronage of His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, represented by Dr. Minwer Hmeid. This clearly shows the determination of Jordan to protect the value of freedom of religion which includes all Christian churches which are an integral part of the Arab Jordanian society of this kingdom, under the leadership of His Majesty King Abdullah II.

For this reason, you are welcome in the country of Amman Message and of the Common Word, and of the Interfaith Week of Harmony, and we welcome you as brothers and sisters to this conference celebrating 500 years of Reformation.

The commemoration of 500 years of Reformation began with the co-hosted, Joint-Common Prayer by Pope Francis, me as the President of the Lutheran World Federation, and with the LWF General Secretary Martin Junge.

Pope Francis and myself signed the historical reconciliation statement between the Catholic and the Lutheran churches in Lund, on the 31 of October last year. This historical reconciliation has created positive energy towards the ecumenical

relationship, not only between Lutherans and Catholics, but with other denominations and religions. In response to that historical reconciliation, our church has decided to host such a conference in Jordan, celebrating 500 years of Reformation, by inviting all the heads of the mainline Evangelical churches that belong to the Evangelical Family of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) in order that together we discuss our role, religiously, culturally, civically, and nationally in building the Arab society on the Reformation principles of freedom, justice, and equality.

The Evangelical Reformation entered the Middle East over 200 years ago, and today it consists of the Lutheran, the Anglican and the Reformed, both Presbyterian and Congregational, churches.

Our Evangelical forefathers and foremothers have shown for us by example that the Evangelical Family in the Middle East is an integral part of the ecumenical churches and of the Arab world. By their understanding, in 1864 they translated the Bible, both Old and New Testament into the Arabic language in order that it may be read in their mother tongue, and used to enrich the Arab library. They emphasized education, established schools for boys and girls, and constructed universities in order to empower the Arab Christian to build their countries, their society, their churches with their own hands. The American University in Beirut (AUB) and the American University in Cairo (AUC), are examples of this emphasis on education that exist today.

Despite our small numbers, we have initiated the ecumenical movement in the Middle East that embraces all the church families.

In 1974 we succeeded in establishing the MECC with the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox and in 1990 the Catholics joined. We play a constructive role in molding a constructive Arab nationalism that is built on equality, fraternity, equal citizenship, and embracing diversity.

Today we stand with all our achievements in the Middle East thanking the Lord for all we have done in the last two centuries while at the same time asking how will the Lord use us in the Middle East, presently and in the future? The ELCJHL has signed, with the six Reformed churches in the Middle East, the Amman Declaration, in 2006 where we mutually recognized each others' churches, ministries, and even the Holy Sacrament. This shows that no one church can live in isolation from the other, but together we can only witness to the Lord our Savior in the Middle East. For this reason, unity starts from within the church moving outwardly.

Today we are very proud that the second female pastor to be ordained in the Middle East, The Rev. Najla Kassab has been elected as the President of The World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) two months ago. We bless her and pray for her success in this demanding call.

But today in Amman we stand at this conference thinking together, what are the next steps for our unity? What is our Christian Evangelical witness with other

churches in the Middle East? What is our constructive national role? What is our strategy for the next 500 years? Yes, we have achieved a lot together, but we do not want this conference on the Reformation and the Middle East to live in the glories of the past or the glories of our achievements, rather we are meeting in Jordan to learn that our history solely must not determine our present nor our future.

The Lutheran Reformation that Martin Luther started with other reformers 500 years ago, concentrated on retaining the dignity of human beings. The reformers' mottos were grace alone, Christ alone, Gospel alone. The Lutheran Reformation has concentrated on the centrality of the doctrine of justification by faith, and its impact on human life. The Reformation concentrated on the freedom of human beings. God has created us equally with equal freedom and equal dignity, and from this theological premise we ask ourselves, what is our role today?

The Reformation contributed to equal citizenship that embraces diversity in our different Arab societies. What is our Evangelical role in implanting the culture of love and the culture of accepting the other in the midst of hatred and religious and political fanaticism? What is our Evangelical role in combating the evangelistic thought that uses the Bible with strange interpretations that are far from our mainline Middle Eastern Evangelical line? What is our role as Evangelicals in strengthening the meaning of fraternity in the Muslim and Christian relations that are very special in our society and in the Arab world? Can we be the ambassadors to the world of constructive relations with Muslims, locally, regionally and internationally? What is our role of empowering Arab Christians to remain steadfast in their countries? Our agenda is very long but important, however our diverse Evangelical church leaders come together to ask the Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, to guide us in his way of love and knowledge. As it reads in the Epistle of 1 John 5:4, "For whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith."

Finally, I want to thank you Dr. Minwer Hmeid, for your presence among us, and we ask that you convey our greetings to His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, and to express our love to him and our appreciation to Jordan, also thanking Prince Ghazi for assistance with the logistics that made this conference possible in Jordan. I am asking that our One God bless this conference and its proceedings in order that it may be a great support for the Arab Christian presence in the Middle East.

May the peace of the Lord be with you.