



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

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Bishop Dr. Munib Younan Honored for his 42 Years of Leadership at the ELCJHL

Bethlehem, 10 January 2018 – Glowing tributes of the foundation that Bishop Younan established at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) matched the glow of friends, family, Jerusalem and international leaders, and dignitaries from Palestine and Jordan, as they celebrated the third Bishop of the ELCJHL.

Over 500 guests filled the Convention Palace in the small village of Bethlehem during the evening celebration of Bishop Younan's 42 years of service to the church as youth pastor, as pastor of three ELCJHL churches, and as Bishop for 20 years.

Fellow Lutherans as well as ecumenical representatives, international organizations, and interreligious attendees honored him in song, speeches, gifts and photos.

In keeping with Bishop Younan's longtime passion for gender justice, his wife Suad Younan was recognized for her own regional and international leadership toward gender justice. Many also thanked her for being a strong support for Bishop Younan throughout the years.

Susan Johnson, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC), emphasized how Bishop Younan insisted that the church in the Middle East value her role as a female bishop by always referring to Bishop Johnson as Her Grace. She also highlighted the genuine friendship that developed as their roles as bishops grew.

“You carved out a place for me in every meeting and helped me grow into my role as bishop. You are my brother,” she said.

During the service, Bishop Younan was presented with a gold cross from the pastors of the ELCJHL led by Bishop-elect Sani Ibrahim Charlie Azar, who will be consecrated as his successor on January 12, 2018.

“I partnered with you from the beginning in your work with youth. After that you took many positions, Beit Jala, Ramallah, and Jerusalem, until you were elected in 1998. Our hope is that you will remain a pillar of the church, and of all the projects that have been launched during your time as Bishop of the church,” said Bishop-elect Azar.

A representative from the Orthodox churches in Jerusalem said,

“We come to bid farewell to our brother who served the Holy Land with dedication. He has been holding up Jerusalem, and has built and established many organizations and schools that serve the church and country, and those have become a strong foundation that are unique in the church that was established by Christ 2000 years ago.”

Apostolic Administrator of Jerusalem Pierbattista Pizzaballa of The Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem also emphasized the value of Bishop Younan’s regional work.

“If your community grows and flourishes all of our communities grow and flourish because we are one body. We celebrate the Lord for what he did through you.”

“Thank you Bishop Munib Younan for being instrumental in the Lord’s providence among us. ”

Bishop Younan served 7 years as the President of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) where he worked closely with LWF General Secretary Martin Junge. However, General Secretary Junge recalls Bishop Younan’s global influence even before his term as LWF President.

“You came as a youth delegate in 1984 when some memorable decisions were being made: Apartheid in South Africa, equal participation of women and young people in the life of the communion.” General Secretary Junge, continued,

“I come here with a word of gratitude because these decisions taken decades ago are natural today. As a leader of the LWF you stood by them, reminding our churches that we have a commitment to all of them.”

The Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki, President of the Egyptian development organization, CEOSS, who because of political restrictions could not join the events this evening from Egypt, sent a video message as a friend and as a colleague of Bishop Younan.

Toward the end of the evening, Bishop Younan approached the podium to honor those who faithfully walked with him during his leadership as Bishop of the ELCJHL and to indicate that he is not retired from the Gospel.

“For the office may be passed on, and the Evangelical Lutheran bishop may retire according to the constitution of the church, but the call to serve the Gospel of Love cannot retire. The call of God never ends! For this reason, I will continue to be a servant of the Gospel, in whatever way God calls me next. I am out of office but not out of mission.”

Numerous gifts were bestowed upon Bishop Younan at the end of the evening.

Bishop Munib Younan's Words of Gratitude

WORDS OF GRATITUDE
From Bishop Dr. Munib Younan
Honoring service in Bethlehem
10 January 2018

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

My dear sisters and brothers,

First of all, I would like to thank you for your presence here today, as well as for the kind words I have received from so many. These expressions of gratitude for my service and my ministry have really touched me. Your presence here honors me, but it also honors our Lutheran Church as a whole. I thank especially the Representative of the Palestinian Authority and the Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan for being present with us today. Thank you to the Synod, to the members of our congregations, to all the pastors of the ELCJHL, and to Bishop-Elect Sani Ibrahim Azar for this distinguished honoring service. Special thanks also to the CCC for their contribution to making this event possible. I am humbled and honored by your presence here to honor me, but I give God all the glory for bringing me to this day. For as Jacob said, "I am not worthy of the least of all the steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant." (Genesis 32:10)

And again, as it is written in Luke 17:10: Jesus said "When you have done everything required of you, you should say, 'We servants deserve no special praise. We have only done our duty.'"

My friends, I have kept the same life motto from the day I was called to ministry at 11 years old, to when I was ordained in 1976, to when I was consecrated as a bishop of this church in 1998, throughout my ministry as President of LWF, until this day. Through it all, my guiding motto has always been taken from Romans 16:1 "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."

I have carried this motto with me throughout my ministry, and will carry it to my last breath. For I believe it is imperative that our society and our churches unashamedly carry the Gospel of Love. We should never be ashamed of a Gospel that challenges extremism, hatred, prejudice, discrimination, and any kind of racism. This is what I said on the day of my consecration: That I would work always for that purpose, to never be ashamed of my faith, in spite of any challenges or obstacles.

Still today, this is my goal: Let the church be a church that proudly carries the Gospel of Love! Here in the Holy Land, we know that the Lord of Love, Jesus Christ, was incarnated on this Palestinian soil and was resurrected in our Holy City of Jerusalem. The Gospel of Love is integral to who we are! I have carried this belief with me in every part of my ministry, in my work with the church, in the ecumenical movement, in interfaith dialogue, in the wider society and in the global church. I have sought always to promote the truth that the Arab church is an integral part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church, as well as an integral part of Middle Eastern society. I promise you that I will continue in this belief and in this work until my last days.

I am not ashamed to carry the Gospel of love as an Arab Palestinian Christian Evangelical Lutheran and as a Palestinian refugee.

I am not ashamed to carry the Gospel of Christ in the land of Christ.

I am not ashamed to share this love with others.

I am not ashamed to carry the Gospel alongside other churches.

I am not ashamed to seek, with other monotheistic religions, the power of love that we share.

I am not ashamed to challenge, with the Gospel of Love, every oppression, injustice, colonialism, occupation, and challenge to freedom.

I am not ashamed to be the Gospel of Love for all the oppressed, displaced, and refugees.

I am not ashamed to be Christ's love in a world that does not understand the meaning of love.

This is what I have tried to do throughout my ministry, and this is what I will seek to continue in this next stage of life.

Pope Benedict XVI recently published a book, released just last month, in which he says, "A priest—pastor, bishop, or cardinal—never really retires, because the call never retires. God has called him to be a servant of the Gospel for as long as he lives." I agree with His Holiness in this matter. For the office may be passed on, and the Evangelical Lutheran bishop may retire according to the constitution of the church, but the call to serve the Gospel of Love cannot retire. The call of God never ends! For this reason, I will continue to be a servant of the Gospel, in whatever way God calls me next. I am out of office but not out of mission.

When I was consecrated as a bishop, I had a dream that peace based on justice and reconciliation would come to this land during my tenure. Of course, this has not yet happened, until this day. But I still carry this dream, and I still pray, and I still believe that the Holy Land will become a land of peace, justice, and security for all.

Here I would like to thank my church, the ELCJHL, which implanted in me the gift of faith in childhood, and has allowed me to explore God's call. This church that I love, the Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJHL), is the firm foundation which has allowed me to carry the Gospel of Love from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. It's from this church that I learned how to carry the Gospel of Love, and to never be ashamed of it.

I want to thank all our partner churches of COCOP: the churches of Germany, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Canada, and the USA, as well as the LWF and the WCC. You have believed in our small church, and you have never stopped supporting us so that we can continue to carry Christ's message from land of His resurrection to the whole world.

I thank my beautiful family, who have supported me without reservation. I want to thank first my life partner Suad, and my children Anna, Andrew, and Marta and their families.

My wife Suad has been my biggest supporter, and only she truly has seen both the beauty and the difficulty of this call. She has been there for me, but has never interfered with my work or with my decisions, even when my work took me away from home for many nights.

I am grateful for the work Suad has done in leading the women's work in this church. Suad, along with the other women of the church, challenged us to implement the value of gender justice. Because of the work of the ELCJHL women, the Synod accepted a new constitution for family affairs, the first in the Middle East which guarantees gender justice. From the depths of my heart, I thank Suad and all the women who have encouraged our church to pursue justice in this way.

The support of my family has always been the secret of my success and the basis of my determination. But above all I must thank the One God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who gifted me with everything I needed in this call. I asked for wisdom, understanding, and patience, and the Lord gave me more than I deserve. I have been blessed in this life with health, strength, love, and encouragement, beyond what can be measured. I have been blessed to be a pastor, a bishop, a husband, a father and grandfather, and above all, a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In answer to all these blessings, and in gratitude for the grace of God, I will never stop preaching the Gospel of Love, as long as I have breath.

I would like to close today with these words of St. Patrick, which will be as true on my first day of retirement as they have been every day as a called minister and a bishop:

"I rise today

with the power of God to pilot me,

God's strength to sustain me,

God's wisdom to guide me,

God's eye to look ahead for me,

God's ear to hear me,

God's word to speak for me,

God's hand to protect me,

God's way before me,

God's shield to defend me. Amen."

May the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Photos from the honoring service for Bishop Younan can be found and downloaded at <http://www.elcjhl.org/links/photos/>

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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