Halfway through summer already? June and July have been packed with events for our ELCJHL ministries, including youth conferences, family congregational retreats, gender justice educational workshops, leadership courses with our Environmental Education Center, and more!

One of the partners of the ELCJHL are the diocese of Strangnas, in Sweden. At the beginning of June, Bishop Azar, Pastor Rodny, and Mrs. Rana represented the ELCJHL at this conference. The overall subject of the conference was the youth of the church. Bishop Azar, Pastor Rodny, and Mrs. Rana presented to the group about the youth ministry of the ELCJHL, the overall experience of youth in Palestine, and the complicated identity of being a Palestinian Christian, particularly a Lutheran Palestinian Christian.

The ELCJHL is very grateful to have our international network, and we are so happy we get to resume in-person visits to these partners.

Bishop Azar traveled a lot this summer to represent the church in Sweden, Germany, and Austria. He also attended Beit Sahour’s confirmation service, helped with some of our youth retreats, and was present for President Biden’s address at Augusta Victoria Hospital during the president’s visit. Read on to learn more.
CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY
Throughout the summer, almost all of our congregations had the opportunity to attend their church’s summer retreat in Jericho. There was pool fun, pastor-led sessions where members can further explore their faith in discussion groups, and shared meals and time together. As our members are so busy throughout the year, especially those of our members with children in school, this time together to bond as a congregation could not be more crucial to our ministry, and serves as an important reminder that we are the church, one body.

CONFIRMATION IN BEIT SAHOUR
Our Evangelical Lutheran Church of Beit Sahour welcomed eight new confirmands this June under the guidance and tutelage of the Reverend Doctor Munther Isaac. We are so proud of these youth for affirming their baptism and sharing their faith with their confirmation. Alf mabrook, congratulations, confirmands!

BIDEN'S VISIT TO AUGUSTA VICTORIA
In July, President Biden visited Israel and Palestine. One stop on his short visit was our Augusta Victoria Hospital, to which he is pledging 100 million USD in a multi-year commitment. This is the first time any sitting U.S. president has visited the East side of Jerusalem. Though the President did not speak individually with senior staff, Bishop Azar sent him a letter after his visit. To read the letter sent to President Biden from Bishop Azar, go to our website elcjhl.org, under "posts".
Our talented students in the “Brass for Peace” program, a partner of the ELCJHL that sends German volunteers to teach band lessons throughout the year in Palestine, had the wonderful opportunity this July to travel to Germany and perform on tour. Students had the privilege of traveling through East Germany, meeting their German counterparts, and celebrating their hard work throughout the past year growing as musicians under the tutelage of their talented German teachers. We are so grateful for this program, and look forward to the arrival of next year’s volunteers soon!

The trip to Germany with Brass for Peace helped me build confidence in myself and talk about the Palestinian cause through dialogues in different languages and through music.” - Fadi Qumsieh, student participant

In the middle of June, our teachers had a chance to sit back and celebrate the momentous accomplishment of completing another school year. We are so lucky to have such amazing people teaching our children each day, and wish them a restful and wonderful summer break.
Our youth have had a wonderful summer so far, the highlight of which easily being our youth conferences! We had three conferences this summer, one for our older youth ages 18 and up entitled "Christian Unity", one for our youth ages 13-17 entitled "Faith and Uncertainty", and one for our Sunday School-aged youth entitled "Pray and Work".

One session at each youth conference was dedicated to educating and advocating for Gender Justice in the church, as facilitated and coordinated by our Gender Justice Department under Gender Justice Program Manager Ranan Issa and program assistant Shadin Nassar. Our 13-17 year old youth, for example, learned about positive masculinities, breaking down gender norms, different societal expectations, and gender discrimination in the Palestinian and Christian contexts. Ms. Ranan Issa encouraged each youth in attendance to "be the change" in our society and communities, and build a future where all are treated equally, regardless of their gender. #YouthforChange #YW4A

As youth are out of school and can often get time away from work during the summer, these retreats are a very important way to "center" the youth program, where youth can have space to discuss their faith among their peers, meet in small groups with pastors, and meet other Christian youth.

SESSION HIGHLIGHT: YOUTH LEADING THE CHANGE

(Photos courtesy of Shadin Nassar).
Summer is an important time for the ELCJHL’s Environmental Education Center, as the center hosts its annual Leadership Training. Seventh grade students were elected by their peers last spring to be in their school’s Environmental Club as incoming eighth graders this coming school year. Students learn a variety of environmental topics, including some of the unique aspects of Palestinian biodiversity, the cultural importance of environmental protection to Palestine, and general environmental concepts such as climate change mitigation, water conservation, waste reduction, and more. Upon completion of this training, students are equipped to be Environmental Leaders in their schools.

RESEARCH UPDATE

Throughout this summer, Executive Director Mr. Simon Awad, along with EEC Researchers Michael Farhoud and Bashar Jarseyeh, have been working hard to continue their research of bird populations and migration patterns in Palestine. In 2015, the EEC published the first National Bird Checklist, a detailed list of each of the known avian species native to Palestine. Since then, the team has discovered sixteen new species to add to this list. You can read about this research and see beautiful photos of the birds documented at our website elcjhl.org.
DIACONAL MINISTRY

We are so excited about the exciting momentum happening with our Diaconal Ministry! This summer, our Deaf Ministry has continued to meet, participating in fun and engaging sessions such as the one pictured above, where our group got to learn the art of resin pouring from a trained professional who works at the Palingual center based in Bethlehem. Members created a beautiful cross using dried flowers from the Diaconal Center’s gardens. The Diaconal Center places a lot of priority in offering sessions and courses that empower and equip our community, as well as providing an engaging and fun atmosphere in which to connect with each other.

RETREAT AT THE MARTIN LUTHER CENTER IN JERUSALEM

Earlier this month, the Diaconal Center in collaboration with FELM, facilitated a retreat for the women of the Martin Luther Center for the Elderly. In this retreat, members had a chance to learn tools to talk about their emotions, as well as participate in small dialogue sessions with leaders from the Diaconal Center and FELM to talk about self-care and what it means to lead a healthy lifestyle.

LOCAL ARTIST PAINTS MURAL FOR DIACONAL CENTER

One member of our Deaf Ministry, Ms. Randa Mansour, is a local artist and paints using ceramic and canvas mediums. As the Diaconal Center comes together, Director Rana Zeidan commissioned Ms. Mansour to paint a mural on the wall of the center’s activity room. This mural will be a welcoming sign to all who enter, while lifting up a local artist in our community. This piece adds beauty and character to a place of such important work. Many thanks for your talent and time Ms. Mansour!