



Referanser: MKR 37/12 Den norske kirkes søsterkirkerelasjoner

Saksdokumenter:

Forslag til handlingsplan med IECLB

Forslag til avtaletekst med ELCSA

Rapport nr. 14/2015 **Jon Aalborg og Berit Hagen Agøy**

Rapport fra møte i COCOP, Beit Jala, 5.-7. mai 2015

Samarbeid med søsterkirker

Sammendrag

I 2012 behandlet MKR en sak om søsterkirkerelasjonene vi har med tre lutherske kirker (MKR 37/12):

- Den evangelisk-lutherske kirke (etter den augsburgske bekjennelse) i Brasil (IECLB)
- Den evangelisk-lutherske kirke i Det sørlige Afrika (ELCSA) og
- Den evangelisk-lutherske kirke i Jordan og Det hellige land (ELCJHL)

Foranledningen for behandlingen var at selv om avtalene er inngått på forskjellige tidspunkt, skulle alle evalueres og fornyes innen kort tid. I MKRs behandling av saken ble det foreslått å kutte underskrifter fra partnerorganisasjoner i avtalene, ettersom disse kan være prosjektbaserte og tidsbestemte. I stedet ble det foreslått å legge frem konkrete, treårige handlingsplaner, hvor konkrete prosjekter og samarbeid med partnerorganisasjoner kunne trekkes frem.

Ny avtale mellom Dnk og IECLB ble underskrevet i 2013. Ny avtale med ELCJHL ble underskrevet i 2014. Utkast til ny avtale med ELCSA foreligger til vedtak på MKRs septembermøte i 2015 (vedlagt).

Utkast til handlingsplan med IECLB foreligger til vedtak på MKR (vedlagt). En delegasjon fra den norske kirke reiser til Brasil i slutten av august 2015 for å diskutere planen. Mindre endringer kan derfor forekomme og forelegges i så fall muntlig på møtet.

Vedlagt følger også Rapport fra møte i COCOP, Beit Jala, 5.-7. mai 2015.

Forslag til vedtak:

1. Mellomkirkelig råd vedtar forslag til avtaletekst med ELCSA, med følgende endringsforslag:
...
2. Mellomkirkelig råd vedtar forslag til handlingsplan med IECLB, med følgende endringsforslag:
...
3. Mellomkirkelig råd tar Rapport fra møte i COCOP, Beit Jala, 5.-7. mai 2015 til orientering.

Økonomiske/administrative konsekvenser

Den norske kirke forplikter seg til å opprettholde nåværende nivå på den økonomiske støtten og det administrative samarbeidet med søsterkirkene inntil eventuell fornyelse av avtalene.

Plan of Action 2015 – 2017 for the Sister Church Agreement between IECLB and CoN

In 2013 the Church of Norway (CoN) and Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil (IECLB), renewed their Sister Church Agreement. The signing was done with the intention of developing a three-year action plan for the cooperation. Based on the cooperation so far, and on discussions on possibilities for future cooperation, the following areas of concrete cooperation is agreed:

1. Ecumenism:

- Both churches are committed to continue to cooperate through international, ecumenical organisations and institutions, such as the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World federation and ACT Alliance.
- CoN is committed to support the central administration of IECLB, also with the intention of strengthening IECLB's contribution to international ecumenical leadership.
- Both churches are committed to support each other's involvement in regional ecumenical cooperation, such as the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and Conselho Latino-americano de Igrejas (CLAI), particularly in the fields of poverty and economic globalisation, climate change, peace and justice.
- Both churches are committed to share information on plans for the celebration and commemoration of the 500 years anniversary of the reformation, and to contribute to the anniversary programme of the Lutheran World Federation.

2. Diaconia:

- Both churches are committed to continue to develop and share research and resources in the field of Diaconia, through establishing contact between educational institutions and diaconal organisations, such as Diakonhjemmet, EST and the organisation of Diaconia.
- CoN is committed to continue the support of a 3-project on education and research on diaconia at the faculty of EST.

3. Mission

- Both churches are committed to share information and follow developments on mission and evangelism within our churches, through continued work on the understanding of mission, and through following mission projects, such as the IECLB's mission programme, PAMI, and the cooperation between the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) and the seminary of FATEV.

4. Indigenous People

- Both churches are committed to share information on work and projects with and among indigenous peoples of our countries, e.g. by establishing contact between COMIN and the Sámi Church Council in Norway.

- Both churches are committed to support the involvement of Indigenous peoples of Brasil in the international network provided by the WCC for awareness building and work for Indigenous peoples' rights, where the Norwegian Sámi Church Council is already involved.

5. Sister Church Partnership

- CoN will visit the IECLB in 2015. The visit will include a visit to IECLB central offices, to EST faculty in São Leopoldo and COMIN. The delegation will also visit the Church of Norway Abroad and the Norwegian Consulate in Rio de Janeiro. A smaller delegation from NMS and CoN will also visit the seminary FATEV in Curitiba.
- Both churches are committed to meet during international ecumenical gatherings, to share information and explore further opportunities for collaboration.
- Both churches are committed to continue to share information and to pray for each other in our involvement in the Mission of God to the world.

(Draft proposal to be finalised in Brasil, August 2015. CoN Council on Ecumenical and International Relations will discuss the agreement in September 2015.)

(Church Logos)

Communion in Faith, Life and Witness

Partnership Agreement 2015-2023 (revised) between The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA) and Church of Norway (CoN)

1. PREAMBLE

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (ELCSA) and the Church of Norway (CoN) confess our common faith in the triune God, and believe that we through our common baptism belong to the one, holy, apostolic and catholic Church. We confess together that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as found in the Holy Scripture and as interpreted and confessed in the ecumenical creeds and the Lutheran Confessions, is the power of God that creates, equips and sustains for faithful participation in God's mission in the world.

As members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), we are in communion, sharing Word and Sacraments and recognizing one another's ministries. As members of LWF and the World Council of Churches (WCC) we affirm our common calling and commitment to unity in faith, life and witness. In our communion we are bound together to explore, extend and deepen our communion in mutual accountability.

We acknowledge the relationship and cooperation already established between our churches, as well as partnership agreements and cooperation between institutions and congregations of our churches.

2. OUR COMMON HISTORY

We acknowledge that ELCSA and the CoN through the Norwegian Missionary Society (NMS) have built a historical relationship through longstanding missionary and church cooperation since the first missionaries arrived in South Africa in 1883. We thank God for what has been granted to our churches through this relationship, by sharing of the Gospel, through the mutual sharing of spiritual gifts, through the longstanding encounters and through the sharing of our human resources. We also acknowledge the involvement of the CoN in the ecumenical struggle against racism and the apartheid regime as an important part of our common history. Other partners of our churches have also established cooperation and exchanged resources, like the Norwegian Church Aid, theological faculties and a few of our dioceses.. This history of our churches is intertwined in a way that has a deep impact on our churches. This inspires us to a further

common involvement in the life of one another, in order to encourage one another to fulfill our calling to share the Gospel in word and deed, each in our place in our common world.

3. TERMS OF AGREEMENT

As churches in communion in faith, life and witness for Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, we commit ourselves to deepen and develop our mutual relationship through common efforts, in order to:

- Exchange and share general information, experiences and concerns of our churches
- Exchange and share our experiences, spiritual gifts, intercessions and concerns,
- Facilitate consultation between church leaders and official delegations through visits and meetings in conjunction with synods and ecumenical assemblies
- Facilitate exchange between representatives of our churches in different positions in order to share information, work and experiences in specific areas of common interest through exchange of information, visits and exchange programs
- Explore further possibilities for concrete cooperation and action **in order to strengthen the holistic mission of the church**
- Establish a concrete Common Plan of action for a limited period of time, for possible renewal
- Pray for each other

4. Evaluation and reporting

This agreement shall be in effect for a period of eight years, from the date of its signing and celebration. Each church will implement the agreement according to the regulations of the respective church. The agreement shall be evaluated at the end of the period and revised according to a common understanding between the two parties.

Place and date of signing:

Signature

President?, ELCSA

Signature

Moderator, Council on Ecumenical rel., CoN

Signature

Presiding bishop, ELCSA

Signature

Presiding bishop, CoN

Rapport fra møte i COCOP, Beit Jala, 5.-7. mai 2015

v/Jon Aalborg og Berit Hagen Agøy

COCOP er det årlige møtet mellom Den lutherske kirken i Jordan og Det hellige land (ELCJHL) og dens nærmeste internasjonale lutherske partnerkirker.

Årets møte fant sted på Abrahams herberge i Beit Jala fra 5.-7. mai. →

Berit Hagen Agøy og Jon Aalborg deltok fra Den norske kirke. Det var også partnere fra lutherske kirker i Tyskland, Sverige, Finland, USA og Canada. I tillegg deltok alle prestene i ELCJHL og representanter fra kirkerådet og stab.



Årets møte var svært vellykket, med god stemning og konstruktiv samarbeidsånd, selv om kirken står overfor mange svært krevende utfordringer, ikke minst økonomisk.

1. Biskopens rapport

Biskop Munib Younan innleder alltid COCOP -møtet med sin årlige rapport om forholdene i ELCJHL og den konteksten kirken lever i. (Rapporten er vedlagt).

Noen sitater fra Younans rapport:

We need to [...] empower our clergy and our lay people to be a living witness in [...] a difficult situation. A great act of *martyria* came from Coptic Pope Tawadros II, after 21 Copts were murdered in Libya. He stated that we condemn the evil act, but we will forgive the perpetrators as Christ forgave us. This is the message we continue to carry with these living witnesses. ... We are called to be living witnesses to empower and form a strong Christian basis on why God has chosen us to be a living witness in this part of the world.

...we continue to be convinced that East Jerusalem must be the capital of a future Palestinian State with West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel without borders, walls, or military force. [The bishop] believe[s] this is possible.

We still are hoping that Western countries would be willing to build nation-states with pluralistic natures, including respect for human rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion – this is the only way to move forward.

We should not generalize in regards to the difficulties faced by Christians in the Middle East, but we should remember each country differently. Today, everyone is interested in Christians in the Middle East and maybe the interest differs from one group to another. ...[T]he future of Arab Christianity is dependent on the future of moderate Islam. [The bishop] believe[s] this is a good analysis of the situation – what's going on in the Middle East does not only effect Christians and other groups, but also the future of Islam itself.

We are also telling our Christian sisters and brothers, even in the midst of these difficult

situations, do not emigrate – stay steadfast in your country because your presence is very important. Our presence in itself is martyria.

Three churches: Coptic, Ethiopian, and Lutheran [...] were not registered in 1926 – the Lutheran Church was not registered because the English Mandate did not have good relations with the German authorities and removed the Lutheran Church from any agreements. ... the [present Israeli] Minister of the Interior, Mr. Gilad Erdan [...] was surprised to hear that the Israeli government does not recognize the Lutheran church, and he promised to prepare the process for the recognition of the church. We continue to wait on this recognition.

Through the good work of the Women's Desk of the ELCJHL and the entirety of the ELCJHL in regards to women's issues and gender equality, the Lutheran Church has adopted the gender justice policy – the only Constitution of its kind in the Middle East.

The Lutheran Church has also been instrumental in promoting ecclesiastical services for the deaf throughout the region and across confessions.



2. Hovedtema: Demythologising the Palestine - Israel conflict, challenges for the church

Store deler av den andre møtedagen var satt av til en temasamtale med utgangspunkt i to innledninger, en fra partnerne og en fra ELCJHL. Berit Hagen Agøy holdt en innledning om myter eller forestillinger om Israel og Palestina som er vanlige hos kristenfolk i Norge, og som hindrer at vi ser virkeligheten på samme måte, og som derfor bidrar til å hindre arbeidet for fred og forsoning. Hun utfordret møtet med å vise hvordan mange av dem kan speilvendes og brukes (misbrukes) i begge retninger. (Oppsummering av innledningen er vedlagt rapporten). Mitri Raheb, prest i Bethlehem, innledet om hvorledes myter og språkbruk bidrar til å utydeliggjøre konflikten og tilsløre maktrelasjoner.

Noen sitater fra Raheb:

Demythologising» is a term borrowed from Rudolf Bultmann («Entmythologisierung»). There are many «myths» in the Bible. We have to distinguish between the form and the contents. The form is the myth's, but the «kerygma», the contents, is the «gospel of the story». The myths in the Bible thus have to be deconstructed for people of different ages and societies in order to be understood.

«Mythology» is not just a theological exercise. E.g., the assumption, also among theologians, that there is actually a connection between the land promises of the OT and the political situation today. To political scientists there is no question that what is

happening here is a product of European colonial history from the middle of the 19th century on. To theologians history seems to start with Abraham and stop with the second Jewish revolt, and then to take a break until ca 1948. In other words they have very little to speak about. This gap needs to be bridged if we want to demythologise the narrative of Israel.

The «branding» of the State of Israel started among Christians in the UK, later the US, when the return was seen as divinely ordained. This argument usually shown as love of Jews is in reality telling Jews that they don't belong «here», i.e., in Europe. Modern examples: The novel «Exodus» by Leon Uris and the movie made from it, is rebranding the OT. «The six day-war» alludes to the Creation story; the David and Goliath narrative shapes its perception. This is using religious connotations to brand and repackage political terms.

The myth continues to flourish for two main reasons:

- The international community continues to supply Israel with all the military hardware and media coverage it needs.
- The churches continue to supply Israel with the software for that hardware. Do not forget that the hardest and strongest narrative we confront is not Jewish, but Christian. When we are attacked, it is usually by strongly feeling Christians, often pastors.

3. Skolearbeidet

ELCJHL driver fire skoler med om lag 2.000 elever, i tillegg til tre andre utdanningsprosjekter. Det er omtrent like mange jenter som gutter på skolene, og de går i samme klasse (noe som er uvanlig i denne delen av verden). 53 % av elevene er kristne, resten muslimer. De lutherske skolene skiller seg ut ved i blant å ha felles religionsundervisning for alle elevene, med den hensikt at de også skal lære om hverandres religion. Skolene har omlag 200 ansatte. Skolene støttes fra norsk side av Kirkens Nødhjelp.

Direktøren for skolene, Charlie Haddad, gikk igjennom driften og pekte på aktuelle utfordringer. Momenter fra diskusjonen etter presentasjonen:

- Hva gjør vi den dagen de kristne skolene evt. ikke har kristne elever igjen? Skal vi legge ned, eller er det da de trengs?
- Godt forhold mellom muslimske og kristne barn og foreldre.
- Diskusjon om effekten av kjønnsblandet skole som vil skje etter en skolesammenslåing. Vil noen holde barna borte?
- CRIHLs skolebokprosjekt - har det noe innslag i de lutherske skolene? Vi ser at de palestinske skolebøkene nesten totalt ignorerer de kristnes rolle og plass både i historien og i det aktuelle bildet. Dette er kommunisert til PA. De israelske bøkene er minst like dreid i fokus, og det er vanskeligere for oss å gjøre noe med.
- Hvor mange av de lutherske barna går faktisk i ELCJHL-skoler? Vi vet ikke, men det er de fleste. Dessverre ønsker noen å sende barna til kjønnsdelte skoler, som oftest er ortodokse eller katolske.

Talitha Kumi-skolen drives av tyskerne i samarbeid med ELCJHL. Skolens praksis med å la palestinske og jødiske ungdommer møte hverandre som obligatorisk del av opplegget, er kontroversielt. (Skolen finansieres av tyske kirker gjennom Berliner Missionswerk og skal ha en tysk profil, bl.a. med språkopplæring; tyske sponsorer ønsker slik dialog. Er det «normalisering»? Det er uansett et svært sensitivt spørsmål. Stor skepsis fra palestinsk side, følelse av overstyring: hva er skillet mellom dialog og «normalisering»?)

We are not against working together as long as there are criteria in place by Palestinian NGOs as to what is normalisation. These criteria need to be published and recognized. We cannot be taken to accept normalisation.

4. Kvinnearbeid, ungdom og Baptismal Site

LWFs representant på møtet stilte spørsmålet: Hvorfor er det ingen kvinner med i representasjonen til COCOP? Sier det noe om det arbeidet som gjøres for «gender justice»? Vanskelig å ta rapporten om arbeidet helt alvorlig når det ikke vises på institusjonelt nivå. Hun fikk til svar at kvinnene dessverre ikke kunne møte denne gangen, enten fordi de ikke fikk fri fra jobb eller ikke hadde mulighet til å reise. Kvinneskogens koordinator har sluttet i stillingen, og man er nå i ferd med å rekruttere en ny.

Ungdomsarbeidet drives godt og aktivt. Gode utvekslingsprogrammer.

Dåpsstedet i Jordan er i god utvikling under ledelse av et svensk preste- og diakonpar som er lånt ut av Svenska Kyrkan for å etablere pilegrimsvirksomheten. Men har en utfordring finansielt. Man vil lage et konsept med seminar kombinert med besøk på grensen; dåpsstedet med militære vakter på begge sider av elva.

5. Rapporter fra menighetene i ELCJHL

Til møtet forelå den en kort skriftlig rapport fra arbeidet i hver av de seks menighetene, som prestene kommenterte muntlig. Hovedinntrykket er at det drives et godt menighetsarbeid selv om menighetene er små, og det er mange utfordringer knyttet til den politiske situasjonen.

Partnerne bad om en liste over samarbeidsmenigheter (evt. bispedømmer) for palestinske menigheter blant COCOP-kirkene som hjelp for partnerkirkenes planlegging og kommunikasjon. Lister over samarbeidsbyer på kommunalt nivå også nyttig.

Andre rapporter, inkl. fra utenlandske partnere, ble framlagt.

6. Finanser

Oppsummering av regnskap 2014:

Samlet faktisk underskudd for 2014: 481.269 NIS, mot budsjettet 831.615, dvs. en forbedring i forhold til budsjett på ca. 350' NIS (sml. faktisk underskudd i 2013 på 304.363). Kumulativt underskudd er på omlag 2,7 mill NIS, dekket av kortsiktig gjeld. Langsiktig gjeld er ikke inkludert. Situasjonen er alvorlig.

Budsjett 2015

Budsjett 2015 er gjort opp med underskudd på omlag 880' NIS. Av det er 493' innen utdanningsaktivitetene og 387' på kirkelige aktiviteter. Egen inndeckning på de to feltene er henholdsvis 60% og 35% av utgiftene, resten kommer fra donorer.

Diskusjon ut fra tallene for lønn og godtgjøringer som ser forskjellige ut for ansatte i Øst-Jerusalem og på Vestbredden (og Jordan). På Vestbredden betales nettolønn (dvs. arbeidsgiver betaler skatt og sos. utg.), «Jerusalemities» får bruttolønn så de kan betale selv og dermed dokumentere «centre of life» der. (Se under.) Netto utbetalt skal være det samme, og pensjon ivaretas. Ikke ideelt, men antagelig det beste som kan oppnås.

«Palestinian Jerusalemities are considered alien residents. You have to continually prove your «centre of life» is in EJ, or you lose your ID and rights. At the same time you have no rights with the PA as you live in Israeli occupied territory. (?) If one of your seven requirements (paying taxes, water, etc., in EJ; your children live and school there, etc.)

is not fulfilled, you lose your Jerusalem resident right. The cumulative effect will be to make you stateless.»

Viktig å fokusere på at dette er et generelt problem for alle «Jerusalemities», ikke et spesifikt kristent problem. Mulig å tenke kristne som brekkstang i advocacy-arbeid, men må ikke glemme at dette er et menneskerettighets spørsmål som gjelder alle det angår.

«Free to serve»-kampanje

Det ble noe diskusjon om formalitetene rundt møtet for arbeidsgruppen i Oslo i november. Man ble enige om en bedre informasjonsflyt så alle medlemmer kan bestemme selvstendig om de vil involveres i slike møter. COCOP bestemte seg for at en kampanje skal planlegges i en firetrinns prosess fram til 01.11.15, hvor partnerkirken kan bidra med å støtte ELCJHL ut fra sine egne økonomiske ressurser og kontekster.

7. Feedback på COCOP 2015

God feedback fra alle, generelt mange som sier at det var god stemning i møtet – ‘et av de beste COCOP -møtene’.

Mange ønsket å bruke kirkerommet mer til daglige andakter; ønske om ekskursjon til en menighet og en skole i løpet av samlingen.

Spørsmål etter en fast mal for å skrive landrapport til COCOP. Innskjerpning av deadline for rapporter minst seks uker før møtet.

8. Neste møter:

COCOP 2016 (9.-)10.-12. mai 2016. (Finanskomiteen møter den tidligste datoen.)

COCOP 2017 (5.-)6.-8. juni 2017, pga. reformasjonsjubileet.

9. MKR-oppfølging:

- Innen 1. juli må vi gi tilbakemelding på spørreskjemaet om ‘Free to serve’-kampanjen
- SMM-turen til høsten: Man må ha tid på dåpsstedet i Jordan. Det holder ikke med en time, knapt med to. Det tar minst 30 minutter bare å få billetter og komme ned til dåpsstedet. Så skal man gå til kirken og snakke sammen. Inngang 100 JD (ca. 140 USD) for grupper, uten mat og drikke.

Jon Aalborg og Berit Hagen Agøy
Oslo, 18.05.15

Vedlegg:

Biskop Munib Younans rapport

Berit Hagen Agøy: Demythologising the Palestine-Israel conflict challenges for the church.

THE BISHOP'S REPORT

By the Rt. Rev. Munib Younan of the ELCJHL

Introduction

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

- John 16:33

Dear COCOP Partners,
Local and International Partners,
Coworkers in God's mission:

On behalf of the ELCJHL, I would like to welcome As you are coming to the Holy Land for our COCOP meeting, I imagine that you come with fear and awe. Fear for the future of this place that often drowns in extremism and war, with no prospective for peace, political turbulence, and struggles among world powers. But through that fear, filled with awe at those Christian churches and the Lutheran church here – that in the midst of all of these things, these churches have decided to remain here as a living witness. The ELCJHL is an integral part of the Christian church in Jerusalem and persists in staying steadfastly in the country with all the challenges that we face. As living witnesses, we continue to find creative ways and means to help our people to stay in this country. We intend to stay steadfastly, even if we are few. We intend, with other churches, to empower our people with the spirit and strength of the Resurrection through the carrying of the cross – the denial of ourselves.

Emeritus Patriarch Michael Sabah in his speech has stated that the Arab Christian church should be one of *martyria* – not because we wish to be martyrs, but that we should live in a way that

denies ourselves at the foot of the Cross. We believe that the Acts of the Apostles continues to be written through many in the church in Palestine who continue to witness, even in difficult situations. We need to empower them and to empower our clergy and our lay people to be a living witness in such a difficult situation. A great act of *martyria* came from Coptic Pope Tawadros II, after 21 Copts were murdered in Libya. He stated that we condemn the evil act, but we will forgive the perpetrators as Christ forgave us. This is the message we continue to carry with these living witnesses. Even though we see many of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East murdered for carrying the cross, we will carry our cross with them. As difficult as it is, even if we are alone we will carry the cross with those throughout the Middle East.

It is with this spirit that I want this year's COCOP meeting to begin. We must understand that today we don't have time for luxury discussions and debates. We are called to be living witnesses to empower and form a strong Christian basis on why God has chosen us to be a living witness in this part of the world.

The Political Situation

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

We are living in a time where the political situation is unsettled, not only in the entire Middle East, but also in Palestine and Israel. The last year has been strenuous, with tensions between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority, beginning with the end of the last rounds of the

peace process. With the end of the peace process, the Palestinian Authority was obliged to sign the Rome Accords to join the International Criminal Court (ICC) and to go to the United Nations (UN) as a form of non-violent protest. The signing of the Rome Accords was followed by a series of sharp penalties by the Israeli government, including withholding tax funds and the continuation of settlement expansion. And, of course, this has caused a great deal of tension throughout the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. President of the PA, Mahmoud Abbas, in his speech to the PLO stated clearly that he will continue on the path of non-violence. But, at the same time, he asked the Central Committee of the PLO to advise him on the coordination situation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces, with the Committee suggested the PA cut security ties with Israel. Though the Central Committee proposed ending coordination, the Presidential Palace has stated that it will take the Committee's discussion as a recommendation, not a decision.

In regards to the withholding of the tax revenues, we have seen the results of this in all of our institutions. Since the Gaza War in July 2014, we have seen a great drop in tourism – as large as 60%. The economic situation in the PA is not healthy and continues to deteriorate. During this time, Israel has held elections, which was very difficult to watch. One day before the elections, the Prime Minister of Israel stated in an interview that there won't be a Palestinian State while he holds office. He also posted a video on Facebook the day of the election telling his followers that Arabs were loading busses to polling stations and voting to change the nature of the state. This video caused a great stir in the International community and has caused a great amount of uncertainty – is this the real agenda of the new government? And will there be peace? Our people continue to ask what we should do and we ask them to be steadfast in this country.

We will have to expect that we will have long years of suffering ahead with no solution in sight. The challenge is: how can the church continue to be the voice of the voiceless and help the people remain steadfast in their faith?

Jerusalem

The issue of Jerusalem continues to be a very important one. We are facing a number of challenges and the Heads of Churches are not happy. In a meeting with the Mayor of Jerusalem, we protest that Jerusalem is becoming like Disney Land. We have expressed our dismay at events taking place outside of Jaffa Gate that make it harder for locals and pilgrims to make their way to holy sites in the Old City. We are alarmed about the cable car that the Mayor is discussing. Jerusalem is losing its spirit of pilgrimage with these wild and extravagant ideas. His Beatitude Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III in his speech to Israeli President Reuven Rivlin emphasized that disrespect to the Holy Places and the historical status quo are provoking governments in the region, especially Jordan and throughout the Muslim world with regards to the Haram es-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque. The Palestinian Authority and the Jordan government are strongly convinced that there is an attempt to divide the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Haram es-Sharif, not by space, but by time. Although we hear from the Chief Rabbis of Israel that Jews must not enter this area at all. However, in March 2015, the Supreme Court of Israel stated that Jews have the right to pray at the Haram es-Sharif. This confusion is creating tension, which Jerusalem does not need. We have to respect each other's holy places. Jerusalem must be a sign of coexistence and mutual respect, not a place where we feel division, anger, and hatred. This is the reason that we continue to be convinced that East Jerusalem must be the capital of a future Palestinian State with West Jerusalem

as the capital of Israel without borders, walls, or military force. I believe this is possible.

The Situation in the Middle East

The Middle East is boiling. Unfortunately, we are seeing that power struggles are causing countries like Libya and Yemen, in addition to Iraq and Syria, to fall apart. I don't know how this will effect the development of democracy in the Middle East. We are afraid that this power struggle will only leave behind devastated countries. We have seen in these struggles, even in Yemen, that Arabs are fighting with Arabs and this will have it's own impact on the future. Some will say this is the process of democracy – however democracy cannot be brought by military power.

If peace should come to the Middle East, then the construction of nation-states should be encouraged through political dialogue. Military interventions do not bring solutions, but only create complications. We still are hoping that Western countries would be willing to build nation-states with pluralistic natures, including respect for human rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion – this is the only way to move forward.

We cannot discuss the chaos in the Middle East without mentioning ISIS and the fear that they are creating. ISIS did not come out of the blue: there are some circles in the world that allowed ISIS to grow and to own an oil cistern so that they could receive money to fund their extremism. Today, there are 60 countries that are allied together in order to fight ISIS and to stop them from expanding. However, the growth of these extremist groups will continue without the building of stable nation-states and unless justice comes to the Middle East.



Bishop Younan and Director of Berliner Missionswerk Rev. Roland Herpich led a prayer at the Brandenburg Gate in remembrance of the start of World War I. (© BMW)

The suffering these extremists cause is not only directed at Christians, but at all groups that have different ideas – those in Islam included – and a different culture. The danger of ISIS is that they want to kill the pluralistic tapestry of the Middle East and, in the political vacuum ISIS is creating, they are trying to transform political problems into religious wars.

We are also afraid that these extremists, especially those who are coming from different European countries, may transfer the problems of the Middle East into Europe and Western



Top: Two students pose at the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Bottom: A student colors in the cross on a Luther Rose during the Reformation Day activities at Dar Al-Kalima School in Bethlehem. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

countries, as we have seen with the attack at Charles Hebdo, the attack of the synagogue in Denmark, or attacking a Jewish museum in Belgium. For me, what is the difference between freedom of speech and freedom of religion? Yes, in our churches and schools, we promote both, but freedom of speech should never be a tool to humiliate or attack other religious symbols. At the same time, we make it very clear – using violence to silence people is not a method of solving conflict. We continue to believe interfaith dialogue and education are the only way to combat any and all extremism.

I'm afraid that these extremist groups are now increasing in the Middle East, not decreasing. The problem we are facing today is that they are embellishing this scenario with an apocalyptic vision. One will cleanse the other and, if the Middle East continues to live with this mentality, we are afraid that the Middle East will become a battlefield where the local people will be the victims of extremist's sick ideologies.

Christians in the Middle East

We should not generalize in regards to the difficulties faced by Christians in the Middle East, but we should remember each country differently. Today, everyone is interested in Christians in the Middle East and maybe the interest differs from one group to another. However, the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) met in Cairo in September, 2014 with some partners and discussed the theme "Evangelicals and Christian Presence in The East." All fourteen member churches, as well as Muslims, Druze, and others were present and gave their point-of-view regarding Christianity in the Middle East. Prior to that meeting of FMEEC, we, the leaders of the Fellowship, had a meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azzhar, Dr. Ahmad El Tayyib. In this meeting, we raised two important questions: what does Al-Azzhar think of extrem-



Children help light the Advent wreath at the English-Speaking Congregation in Jerusalem. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

ist groups that are terrorizing the Middle East? What is the role for Christians in the Middle East? Rev. Habib Badr of the National Evangelical Church in Beirut told us in that meeting that the future of Arab Christianity is dependent on the future of moderate Islam. I believe this is a good analysis of the situation – what’s going on in the Middle East does not only effect Christians and other groups, but also the future of Islam itself. The Grand Imam has promised to gather a conference and come out with a statement, as well as a fatwa on these two issues. We were

delighted to know that the voices of our Evangelical Churches were heard and that a statement from the conference held in Cairo in December 2014 with 500 imams was very clear in stating that extremist groups are kahawarij – outsiders – and that they do not talk in the name of Islam, as well as being apostates of Islam. There is no need for an Islamic caliphate at this moment - the test of true religion is living with the other. They stated that Christians and Muslims have lived together for 1,400 years in the Middle I have once again been appointed to be one

East. Christians are the original citizens of Arab countries and that they have cooperated with their Muslim compatriots in building a modern, civil society. Even in Islamic rule, Christians are considered to be "People of the Book" where even the Quran asks to respect them, as well as their Bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and even the Cross. I think this is something we can tell the world, even if we Evangelicals are a minority of minority in number. But I think this voice that we offer to the Arab world and to the West, is an essential and significant voice that shows that we as Christians have a role to play in the Middle East. We are also telling our Christian sisters and brothers, even in the midst of these difficult situations do not emigrate – stay steadfast in your country because your presence is very important.

Our presence in itself is *martryia*.

Government Relationships

Recognition of the ELCJHL

During the visit of Rev. Martin Junge, the General Secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in December 2014, the issue of recognizing the church was discussed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The importance that the church's status not be dependent on the mood of the governor was conveyed to those present. We explained that there are three churches: Coptic, Ethiopian, and Lutheran who were not registered in 1926 – the Lutheran Church was not registered because the English Mandate did not have good relations with the German authorities and removed the Lutheran Church from any agreements.

Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA) and her delegation also raised this issue with the Minister of the Interior, Mr. Gilad Erdan. He was surprised to hear that

the Israeli government does not recognize the Lutheran church and he promised to prepare the process for the recognition of the church. He was evaluating before or after elections, but said that this process must happen quickly. After that visit, we had several meetings in my office, discussing the importance and significance of this recognition, as well as fears presented by others.

It was very constructive when Bishop Gerhard Ulrich and his delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of North Germany visited with the Foreign Affairs office. He emphasized that recognition of the church is significant and important for the Lutheran Churches in Germany. Bishop Ulrich stated that the Lutheran church in this country is recognized because of its bridge building, reconciliation, and peace work in this country and throughout the Middle East.

We continue to wait on that recognition.

Ecclesiastical

Pastor's Meeting

In 2014, we held a pastor's meeting to discuss the Lutheran identity of our church and how can it be reflected in our congregations. The simplicity of the Evangelical message must be reflected in all our churches. We discussed the issue of the church's structure and how we can celebrate the anniversary of the Reformation. One of our ideas is to hold a celebration in Jerusalem on October 31st, 2017 while also planning a conference on the Spirit of Reformation in the Middle East in September. Unfortunately, we were planning to follow Martin Luther's footsteps in Wittenburg, but we could not secure funding. I am still looking for funds for this year's pastor's conferences, which also serves their families. It is crucial in this political situation with a wall dividing us that we make be able to spend time together

to create a spirit of communion in our church.

In addition, my aim is to help the pastors and their families learn to live together and grow a contextual Lutheran identity. Lutheranism today is not individual, but a communal identity that works for the benefit of the people we serve, the church, and for the whole world.

Candidates for Ordination

Dr. Munther Ishaq, who holds a PhD from Oxford University in Biblical Studies and who works part time at Bethlehem Bible College, is also currently serving the Bethlehem Congregation as a vicar under the supervision of the Bishop, as well as assisting in the Lay Preachers Academy. He has also upgraded the Evangelical literacy of our Christian Education teachers. We hope that by the end of 2015 or the beginning of 2016 that we can ordain him.

Vicar Fursan Zu'mot, currently serving as vicar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem as well as the leader of the Deaf Ministry, will study for Lutheran theology for one year in Australia so that we may ordain him on his return. Thank you to Bishop John Henderson from the Lutheran Church in Australia for his partnership. The Lutheran World Federation (LWF/DMD) has applied for funds to support Vicar Zu'mot's studies. The Lutheran Church in Australia, Church of Scotland, VELKD, and FELM have stated that they will be providing an answer soon regarding the remaining amount for his studies.

We are very thankful to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) for providing a scholarship for Sally Azar to study theology at the Near East School of Theology (NEST) in order that, once her studies are finished, she will be the first female pastor to be ordained in our church. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Nord Kirche has offered to provide one year of vicarage after the completion of her four-year studies.

Ecclesiastical Court

On Friday, February 27th, 2015, the Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land voted to adopt a Constitution for their Ecclesiastical Court – a court that was given authority to deal in family matters starting on January 1st, 2015 by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas – based in gender equality. The Constitution voted on by the Synod accepted equality in family life, including equal inheritance between male and female members in a family. The prevailing constitutions for Ecclesiastical Courts often give women 1/8th of the inheritance of men. Through the good work of the Women's Desk of the ELCJHL and the entirety of the ELCJHL in regards to women's issues and gender equality, the Lutheran Church has adopted the gender justice policy – the only Constitution of its kind in the Middle East.

The First Instant Ecclesiastical Court will include:

- › Rev. Sani Ibrahim Azar as the Head of the court
- › Rev. Samer Azar
- › Ms. Scarlet Bishara, Esq
- › Mr. Osama Muallem, Esq

The Appeal Court will include:

- › Bishop Munib Younan
- › Rev. Mitri Raheb
- › Ms. Rawan Muallem, Esq
- › Mr. Fadi Khalim, Esq

Thank you to the lawyers who worked on the guidelines for the Ecclesiastical Court:

- › Mr. Osama Muallem, Esq
- › Ms. Scarlet Bishara, Esq
- › Mr. Fadi Khalim, Esq
- › Ms. Lina Khleif, Esq

Lay Preachers Academy

In June 2015, the ELCJHL will conclude its first Lay Preachers Academy (LPA). The LPA began in 2013, with participants meeting once a month



Top:

Participants of the Women's Conference in Jordan pose for a group photo. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Bottom (left to right):

An owl caught in an Environmental Education Center's net in Jericho. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

The Good Friday walk ends in front of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

for 6 hours. Eleven participants, 6 women and 5 men, have been selected from four congregations: Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Beit Jala, and Beit Sahour. During these two years, they covered a wide range of topics that included: Lutheran Theology, the Sacraments, history and mission of the ELCJHL, Old and New Testament, Salvation History, Pauline theology, characteristics of a servant, Christian leadership, Ecumenism, women in ministry, strategic planning, and religious extremism. These topics were in addition to a focus on preaching, where the participants studied the element of a good sermon, and prepared their own sermons and were evaluated on content and delivery.

Dr. Munther and myself did the evaluation. Rev. Saliba Rishmawi has also assisted in the Lay Preacher's Academy.

The LPA held a preaching conference at the Dead Sea in Jordan. Participants practiced their sermon skills as well as listened to lectures on subjects such as worship and communion presented by Bishop Munib Younan and Dr. Munther Ishaq. The conference was part of the continuing education of the Lay Preachers. The first graduates of the Academy will be honored this fall when they complete the course.

The LPA can be considered a success. Participants were committed and serious and they are now equipped to take ministry roles in their congregations. A new "culture" of lay leaders/preachers is being developed at the ELCJHL where the laity – men and women – feel that they have a role in the life and ministry of the church.

At the completion of this cycle, we will start a new course to continue training leaders.

Youth Work

Our year has been full of activities, including a

number of trips across the globe. The Youth Desk held three conferences for the youth of different ages at the Jericho Resort Hotel under the theme of Baptism. The conferences took place over three separate weeks in the month of July for three different age groups – ages 8-12, 13-17, and 18-25. Eighty children and youth participated in the three conferences in games, Bible lessons, songs, and fellowship, all around the theme of Baptism. A warm thanks is due to the adult volunteers who helped pull together these conferences.

The first visit outside the country took place in Dresden, Germany to the Frauens Kirche for the Peace Academy. The Peace Academy takes place every two years with the theme when we attended being on Freedom of Conscience. Twelve young adults, two from each congregation, attended the conference. It was very successful and our youth were very involved, especially when it came to discussing the Palestinian Christian situation, both our case in Palestine and our case as Christians.

The Crossroads program between Palestine, Mozambique, and Sweden that was supposed to run for three years before being discontinued was resumed in Mozambique. Six youth went to Mozambique to represent the ELCJHL, with young people in attendance also representing the Church of Sweden and the Diocese of Lebombo, the Anglican Church in Mozambique. The program took place in Maciene, Mozambique. The conference revolved around several topics: conflicts in the world, challenges for the church, visions for the future, right to land, faith and belief. The youth involved enjoyed experiencing a new culture. They learned a great deal from their experience and from the faith and warm hospitality of the people in Mozambique. The next event will take place in Sweden in June 2015.

Later in the year, twelve youth from the six congregations went to Germany for two weeks to

visit our partner church in Bad Tölz.

A group of youth from our six congregations, two from each parish, participated in a new program started by the Church of Sweden, Diocese of Skara, the ELCJHL, the Church of South Africa, and the Lutheran Church in Bavaria entitled "Walking to Emmaus." The project was developed with the thought that when people walk and talk in the same way that Jesus and his disciples walked and talked, eyes can be opened, relationships will develop, and people can become true brothers and sisters in Christ. They walked and talked about the situation in each of our countries. They walked, they talked, they prayed, and shared communion. They hiked, enjoying the nature in and around Skara. They formed new relationships. The Bishops of each country joined on the last day of the program and a large celebration was held, celebrating the 1,000 years of the diocese in Skara and the launching of the "Walking to Emmaus" project. Preparation for the 2015 program took place on February 22nd to the 27th. The 2015 walk began on April 4th and lasted until April 12th while the walk took place around Nazareth, Galilee, Jericho, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Emmaus.

Thank you to Rev. Ashraf Tannous for his tireless work with the youth and young adults of our church and for the summer conferences.

Women's Work

The Women's Desk, in 2014, planned a great many activities. The general hope for our activities in 2014 was in empowering women and teaching them about gender justice – a continuation of our programming from 2013.

The Women's Desk continues to work for gender justice, a program that began in 2013 and will continue for the next two years and will be

centered on the topic "Ending Violence Against Women." The ELCJHL Women's Desk is committed to implementing all UN resolutions pertaining to women and gender rights and working towards achieving justice and equality for women.

The Women's Desk held two conferences for women to participate in regarding gender justice: one was held in Jericho for women in Jerusalem and the West Bank and another was held at the Dead Sea for women from the Amman congregation.

Ms. Suad Younan was invited by the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in her capacity as the Chairperson of the Women's Desk of the ELCJHL to attend LWF-organized meetings around the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) as part of the body of NGOs and faith-based organizations. The LWF meeting coincided with the CSW meetings at the United Nations (UN), with a special focus on the Beijing endorsements 20 years ago regarding Resolution 1325, which calls for the protection of women in conflict and crisis areas around the world. The Women's Desk has done a great deal of work with regard to this resolution via the education of women, awareness promotion, and workshops. This was part of the reason that church representation from the Middle East was invited to be part of the CSW meetings and the ecumenical organizations working throughout the region. Ms. Suad Younan took part in two major panels regarding how Resolution 1325 has been implemented in churches and organizations and changes in the last 20 years.

As far as the voice coming from the Middle East is very intricate, was not loud, and was fragmented. Ms. Younan failed to see a sharp, poignant address of the challenges faced in the Middle East while the African and Asian voices came through very clearly. As far as we are concerned in the Middle



Clockwise starting at top left: The newly completed EEC wooden walkway. (©Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

The English Speaking Congregation helps harvest grapes on the Mount of Olives. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Students pose for the camera at the Dar Al-Kalima kindergarten graduation. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Women from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala make kubbeh for their Christmas bazaar. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

East, especially in Palestine, Israel, and Jordan, there is a great need for engagement with the wider community both locally and globally – not only through fellowship and celebration together, but also through organization and collaboration.

In regards to the Lutheran Church, the work of the Women's Desk has pushed two major resolutions in the church based on the resolution itself and the recommendations that came out of Beijing. The first one is the adoption of a gender justice policy in the church. It was incepted a few weeks ago, but it needs to mature in our congregations and in the practice of our church and leadership. The second major contribution of these programs based on Resolution 1325 and from the Beijing endorsements was the call for a change in the Ecclesiastical laws that were gender-biased with regards to women and women's rights. The strong push of the Women's Work for gender justice is a strong reason we have established the Ecclesiastical Court.

One item taken from the CSW meetings is that the work of the women and the Women's Desk needs to be strengthened. We need to have a strong Women's Desk with strong, skillful people – both women and men – that will take this work to the community at large and to governmental decision-making bodies. In the past, the Women's Desk spent more time focusing inwards, but we hope to turn towards the larger community in the future. In Palestine, Jordan, and Israel, we need to find a way to pull our work together and to form a strong and united voice regarding gender justice. The Women's Desk needs a clear orientation – to be strong in advocacy and to connect with the community at large – both in Palestine, Jordan, Israel, and throughout the world. It is necessary that we unite with other women's groups throughout the region and world to push governments towards enshrining gender justice into law.

Deaf Ministry

The work of the Deaf Ministry has focused on building a strong community. This was done through weekly meetings and outside activities. Services for the Deaf were held weekly, every Monday in Ramallah and every Friday in Bethlehem. A field trip to the Jordan River was organized to see where Jesus was baptized and to tell the story behind that biblical site. This trip was followed by a swimming period to build up a strong relationship among the members of the ministry. A bible school was organized and divided into two different days at Abraham's Herberge in Beit Jala. During these days, Bible stories and lessons were taught. In addition, home visitations were increased to help to bring more members to the meetings. During Christmas time, a Christmas party was organized with a visiting preacher from the United States who knows sign language and told the story of Christmas. Presents were given as a symbol of God's present for humanity, Jesus Christ. Some educational materials were also provided, such



Youth pose for a photo at their youth retreat in Jericho. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

as stories in Sign Language.

Rev. Janne Rissanen who has spent four years with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) in Jerusalem and has headed the Deaf Ministry has finished his time here. Vicar Fursan Zu'mot has been running the ministry, but plans to spend one year in Australia for his education. With both of these clergy gone, the ELCJHL will find a way through this transitional period.

Church Council Partnership

Bishop Atle Sommerfeldt, Bishop of the Diocese of Borg, Church of Norway, and the Church Council from the same region visited the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan of the Holy Land from Thursday, February 26th, 2015 to March 2nd, 2015 in a bid to strengthen their relationship and to learn more about the operation of each church's council.

The meeting included discussions on being the Lutheran Church in each church's unique context as well as finding new ways in which the churches could further develop cooperation between not only each Church Council, but between the

church bodies as a whole. I would recommend other churches use this channel to deepen our relationships

The Renewal of the Bishop

I am turning 65 this year and the Constitution of the Church states that retirement age is 65. Last year, on December 20th, 2014, the Synod unanimously accepted that the Bishop will serve until January 2018. In 2017, the new Bishop will be elected and the Bishop Elect will be consecrated the following year. As Bishop, I stood before the Synod and thanked them for the unanimous vote. This is the first time in the history of our church that, for the sake of the living church and the Lutherans in this country, we came together in agreement.

Educational Ministries

New School of Hope

We are already more than two years behind schedule. Unfortunately, there is nothing that we can do – the situation is out of our hands completely and in the hands of the Ministry of Education. In October 2014, Dr. Charlie and I



Heads of Churches and Islamic leaders in Jerusalem pose for a photo after a joint meeting in support of the Status Quo, regarding religious sites in Jerusalem. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

had a meeting with the European Union (EU), who then set up meeting with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the contractor. After this meeting, things began to move forward, but unfortunately a lack of agreement ended this progress. Dr. Charlie and I met with the EU representative again in March 2015. They promised that they are following things up and the PA is being pressured to move forward with plans. We are pushing through the EU because our hands are tied and the EU can't divert the money to the ELCJHL. We are now at the mercy of the EU and the Ministry of Education.

We are applying to USAID to finish the other stages of the school's construction, but fear we will lose credibility because Stage 1 isn't completed yet.

Nursing School

We were planning to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), but based on recent developments and new findings and based on the market needs, demands, and relevancy and in consultation with Augusta Victoria Hospital and Dr. Tawfiq Nasser, we came up with an alternative plan. We will replace the BSN concept and will replace it with the Martin Luther Advanced Academy for Nursing Studies. We will be targeting licensed professionals for continuing education and specialization with emphasis on specialties like intensive care, oncology, geriatrics, and diabetes. It will be a modular program to further qualify professionals. We decided to work this way because there is a bigger need for specialization rather than a generalized program.

The ELCJHL has contacted American and German universities to help affiliate the program with an international program. The German Flinder University of Applied Sciences has agreed to affiliate this advanced program with their university. We will develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with this university.

Flinder University will also help us be affiliated with European Network of Nursing Academies (ENNA).

We are also waiting for an American partner. We are currently speaking with an educator who is currently researching to see who will work with us. The more affiliations internationally the stronger our program will be.

The ELCJHL will form a board of international and local stakeholders.

This idea is much more market relevant, as well as flexible – it allows us to change the modular courses depending on the market needs. We hope that this program will be up and running by January 2016.

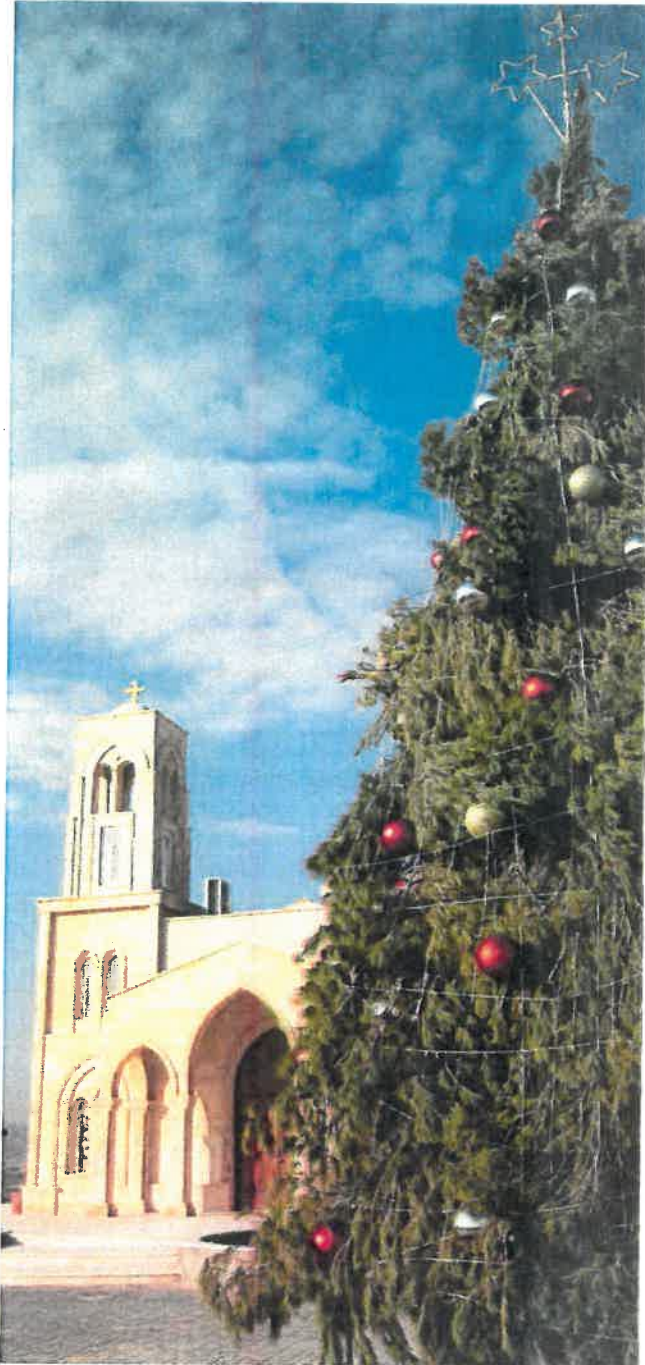
BMW/ELCJHL Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

In May 2014, COCOP delegated a small group to sit with both Rev. Jens Neiper (BMW) and Dr. Charlie Haddad (ELCJHL) to modify the original draft of the MoU. In February 2015, Mr. Jens Neiper and Dr. Charlie updated the third MoU draft. We are currently in need of adding the theological and accompaniment basis of the MoU and how the entire ELCJHL will be involved. It must be approved by ELCJHL Church Council and the BMW. This MoU is very important for the relations between Talitha Kumi, the Educational Ministries of the ELCJHL, and the BMW.

We still hope that the Environmental Education Center (EEC) will also have an MoU between the BMW, the Kaiserswerth, and the ELCJHL.

Environmental Education Center

The Environmental Education Center is a leading organization working to raise environmental



A Christmas tree sits outside the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan.
(© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

awareness, protect biodiversity, encourage ecotourism, and promote capacity building. The EEC has continued to develop and implement a wide array of programs to work for eco-justice in Palestine.

The EEC has completed construction on the wooden walking trails and observation tower, the first of their kind in Palestine. The trails and observation tower, which are now in use, provide more opportunities for local and international visitors to learn about native Palestinian flora and fauna. The EEC also upgraded the existing wastewater treatment system on the campus, which recycles wastewater from the Talitha Kumi School and guesthouse to be used for irrigation in the gardens, and serves as a model for others to adopt in Palestine. The system opens new opportunities for visitors to learn about ecology in Palestine and how people can contribute to the care of creation.

Two initiatives launched in 2014, were adopted by the Palestinian Cabinet of Ministers in February 2015: Palestinian National Day, to be observed nationally on March 5 each year, and recognizing the Palestine Sunbird as the national bird of Palestine. During the month following the first Palestinian Environment Day organized by the EEC and Environment Quality Authority in 2014, more than 2,000 students and community members participated in various activities. These activities play a crucial role in developing the future young leaders and environmental activists.

Through various projects, the EEC continued to educate students on topics including Palestinian identity, civic education, peace and tolerance, environmental awareness, animal welfare, waste management, water conservation, and health and organic food through visiting classes and operating environmental clubs in 26 different schools. Students also participated in field trips,

tree-planting campaigns, and clean-up campaigns organized by the EEC, and school groups visit the EEC campus to learn about new developments, native species, protection of nature, and bird ringing. The EEC organized a spring festival and the annual Olive Harvest Festival, which included various competitions for students. The EEC has also established environmental forums for teachers, university students, and women in the West Bank.

The EEC organized two National Weeks for Bird Ringing and Monitoring in 2014, one each in the spring and fall migration seasons, including temporary ringing stations in Jericho and Tulkarem in collaboration with the SE European Bird Migration Network (SEEN). These stations have allowed the EEC to observe and record new species and further develop scientific research opportunities and bird knowledge in Palestine.

The fifth annual Palestinian Environmental Awareness and Education Conference, "Eco-Justice between Violations by the Occupation and Infringements by the Community," was held in December, with over 500 local and international participants. The conference led to the development of a five-year action plan, through which the EEC, government institutions, and other NGOs will seek to combat environmental degradation.

The EEC is active in a number of local and international networks, including the WCC's Working Group on Climate Change, NEPTO, OPGAI, PENGON, and SEEN. The EEC's publication of factsheets and interviews on national radio and television programs has helped to reach a wide audience in Palestine and abroad.

School Hymnal

A hymnal was developed with the help of Vicar

Fursan Zu'mot and Mr. Salameh Bishara, under the leadership of Rev. Sani Ibrahim Azar and the review of Rev. Ashraf Tannous. It was finished and distributed to all the Lutheran Schools. It has been communicated with the principals that it could and be used for all occasions, including but not limited to morning assemblies, celebrations, Christian education classes, and the choir.

Localization of the Vocational Training Center (VTC)

A committee has been working to develop a MoU for the localization of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Vocational Training Center (VTC). The LWF VTP Localization Committee did its work, finalized it, and submitted it to CC/ELCJHL and LWF with 12 recommendations. The Localization Committee proposed a working group that includes members of the committee as well as extra LWF and ELCJHL members. This working group will follow up on these recommendations on both sides. The ELCJHL has named the extended group and we are waiting for the LWF to name their additional persons. We hope that the localization process will conclude in 18 months, as stipulated in the agreement.

Good Shepherd Swedish School

There has been a working group formed that includes members of both Dar Al-Kalima School and the Good Shepherd School. A number of scenarios have been presented, but not without fears on both sides. The ELCJHL Synod has voted for us to move forward with a working scenario that will be accepted both by the ELCJHL and the Swedish Jerusalem Society.

Unified Lutheran Education

With the localization of the VTC and the joining of the Good Shepherd School with the ELCJHL,

we have made two significant steps to unify the Lutheran Education ministries in this part of the world. I hope that this is an example that can be followed.

Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM)

The Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) program, sponsored through the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), continues to do good work at the Lutheran Schools. Each year, we are doing a good job because we are learning from the previous year. We have had a very successful program over the last seven years. This program has to continue. The YAGM program serves in many different ways – it serves our schools, the YAGMs, the ELCA, and the ELCJHL in sending advocates for our work once they return to the United States.

Impact Study

The findings of the Impact Study – a study regarding the impact of our work as a school after graduation – we started in 2012 are taking longer to compile. For the study, we have interviewed

parents, employers, graduates, professors, as well as current and former students. Once ready, the findings will be distributed to all our partners.

Curriculum Evaluation

The Department of Education did an evaluation of curriculum for the Palestinian Authority and in June 2014, Dr. Charlie and I handed our report to Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah. The important thing that came out of this meeting, which included Patriarch Emeritus Michael Sabbah, was naming three people who must be on the Curricular Committee on the Ministry of Education representing the private Christian schools:

Rev. Feisal Hijazin: Coordinator of Catholic Schools

Dr. Suliman Rabadi: Director of Frère School in Jerusalem

Dr. Charlie Haddad: Evangelical Lutheran Schools

Educational Projects

We have noticed that many of our partners are assisting in one-off projects and programs rather



Ladies at Dar Al-Kalima pose in their traditional Palestinian dresses before the 2014 DAK graduation
(© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

than supporting the budget of the church. This is an issue we need to address in COCOP - to balance both spending on projects and supporting the church budget.

Salary Increase

For the past 8 years, there have been no salary increases. In January 2015, a 2% raise was given. A 2% raise will be enacted on January 2016 and once again in January 2017. A raise in registration and tuition fees will cover this salary increase.

I would like to thank Dr. Charlie Haddad and the Department of Education staff for the work they are doing for the church. I also would like to thank all our partners that financially contribute to the Lutheran Schools.

Media and Communications

Our media and communications strategy continues to be heavily social-media oriented. We currently have five active social media platforms:

- › Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/ELCJHL>)
- › Instagram (<http://www.instagram.com/ELCJHL>)
- › Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com/ELCJHL>)
- › YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/ELCJHL>)
- › SoundCloud (<http://www.youtube.com/ELCJHL>)

We have had a number of people contact us after interacting on social media with hopes of partnership and accompaniment. It is so important that we don't let these people who are so enthusiastic fall through the cracks. We need to find a better way to continue communication with them.

We would like to highlight not only the work of our church, but the work of our partners on behalf of the ELCJHL for our Advent calendar. If your church is willing to help, please e-mail our Communications Coordinator, Danae Hudson, at dahudson@elcjh.org

Publications

From Conflict to Communion

We have translated the "From Conflict to Communion," a document of the LWF, into Arabic. Thank you to Dr. Alam who translated the document. I still need to read through the document to make sure that it has the correct theological terminology. Because this is a joint Lutheran-Catholic document, Bishop William Shomali for his opinion of the translation. We are currently still looking for funds to print.

Confessions Book

In cooperation with the Faculty of Theology at Valparaiso University, we are printing the Small Catechism and Augsburg Confession in the Arabic language. We are currently discussing the best way to celebrate the printing in 2017,



Volunteer Benedikt von Pappenheim dances during the Carnival festival at Al-Mahaba Kindergarten.
(© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

both at Valparaiso University and here.

Arabic Translation of the Losungen

We continue to yearly publish an Arabic translation of the Losungen, a daily prayer book. I would like to thank Rev. Imad Haddad for his work in translating and preparing the Arabic version. We have learned that the Presbyterian Church in Egypt is also translating and publishing the Losungen, which came as a surprise to us since the ELCJHL holds the translating and printing rights. We hope to reach out to the church and see if we can work together to reach a larger audience.

Ecumenical Relations

World Council of Churches (WCC)

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), as well as Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Metropolitan Dr Gennadios of Sassima and Bishop Mary Ann Swenson, vice-moderators of the Central Committee, spent time with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land during their pilgrimage to Palestine and Israel on March 7th-12th, 2015.

The delegation held worship at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem led by myself, Propst Wolfgang Schmidt, Representative of the Evangelische Kirche Deutschland (EKD) in Jerusalem and Rev. Carrie Smith, pastor of the English-Speaking Congregation in Jerusalem and Special Assistant to Bishop Munib Younan on Monday, March 9th, 2015. At the conclusion of worship, the group went together to visit the Haram Esh-Sharif and Al-Aqsa Mosque where they met with the director of the Islamic Waqf in charge of the holy site.

As well as visiting the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the delegation, with Bishop Munib Younan, were

invited with the Heads of Churches to an official lunch at the Latin Patriarchate by Patriarch Fuod Twal. During this lunch, we held a meeting to discuss the revival of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF).

Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC)

The Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC) held its second International Conference on the topic: Evangelicals and Christian Presence in The East from 10-12 September 2014 at the Concord El Salam Heliopolis Hotel in Cairo – Egypt.

This Conference comes as a follow up to FMEEC's previous conference on the same topic that was held in Beirut, Lebanon in 2012. It also comes at a very critical moment in our history because of the tragically deteriorating situation of Christians in the Middle East region, but especially in Iraq and Syria; where widespread proliferation of "takfiri" terrorism and violence, unprecedented in Middle East history, has wrought waves of killing, destruction and displacement. All this, is in addition to the tension and violence currently prevailing in Palestine and Lebanon.

The Conference had two parts: The first consisted of official visits made by some of the participants to the Prime Minister of Egypt, Engineer Ibrahim Mahlab, to the minister of Religious Trusts (Awqaf), Dr. Muhammad Mukhtar Gom'aa, as well as to "Sheikh Al Azhar," the Grand Imam Dr. Ahmad El Tayyib.

The composition of the delegation included the President of FMEEC, Rev. Dr. Andrea Zaki of Egypt, the Vice President, Rev. Dr. Habib Badr of Lebanon, the General Secretary, Mrs. Rosangela Jarjour of Lebanon, accompanied by members of FMEEC's Executive Committee that included

the myself from Jerusalem, Rev. Adib Awad of the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon (NESSL) and Rev. Dr. Helmi Kades of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile in Egypt (ESNG). Other members of the delegation included the Rev. Dr. Safwat El Baiady, President of the Protestant Churches of Egypt, Rev. Dr. George Shaker, President of the Synod of ESNG, Rev. Rif'at Fathy, the General Secretary of the Synod of ESNG, Rev. Dr. Riad Jarjour of NESSL, Bishop Dr. Mouneer Hanna Anis, the Anglican Bishop of Egypt and North Africa and Rev. Farouk Hammo, pastor of the Evangelical Church in Baghdad, Iraq. During these visits, the topics of the Conference were discussed, and many current issues that occupy the Arab and Middle Eastern region were raised.

During the Conference, a celebration of the 40th anniversary of the foundation of FMEEC (1974) was held at the headquarters of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) in Cairo. The main speaker at the event was Mr. Samir Morcos.

Middle East Council of Churches (MEEC)

After long deliberations, the Middle East Council of Churches (MEEC) met on 21st-23rd January, 2015 at the Dead Sea in Jordan. The discussion revolved around taking a position on Christian presence, as well as Muslim-Christian relations. We have discussed the diaconal approach and how can we make it work in and through MEEC. At this point in time, we think MECC will have another meeting in 2015, in order to discuss all a number of ongoing issues. We are all very happy that the MEEC has revived and is continuing its good work - the unification of the Christian voice is what the MEEC was the original reason for it's founding.

Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme

in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

In 2014, 124 Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) from groups 51 to 54 and from 21 countries were visibly present in communities, checkpoints and agricultural gates through the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They recorded human rights violations perpetrated by settlers and Israeli security forces, conducted action appeals, advocacy work and awareness raising activities nationally and internationally based on the above mentioned incident reports and electronic documentation.

EAPPI launched a newly revamped website in September of 2014. This website uses software that is more user-friendly, allowing EAPPI's Communications Officer to modify it directly as opposed to working through the WCC's IT department. This makes changes to the content timelier, making the website livelier.

Since August 2014 (group 53) EAPPI uses an online form ("e-form") to report on Incidents, Checkpoints and the School Run. Before that, data was collected in Word-Documents and saved on the office server in a hard to compile way. The e-form allows easier input for the EAs, statistical analysis for the researcher and program manager and the sharing of data with other NGOs as well as UN-organizations. In the process of developing this e-form, categories were revised to enhance logic, connection to Human Rights violations and advocacy benefits.

Due to an ERF-UNOCHA funding, EAPPI was able to engage a programmer to develop a more specific database to collect, analyse and share data. This will be implemented with G56 (March 2015). Just from then on, coherent data can be gathered and scientific statistical analysis be done. In total EAPPI reported on 473 incidents in 2014. The most frequent incident EAs reporting on are demolitions of private houses or livelihood structures, settler related violence and Israeli



Top: Participants at the Lay Preacher's Academy Retreat practiced giving sermons in front of their fellow students. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Bottom: Participants of the "Walking to Emmaus" Project - where youth from South Africa, Sweden, Germany, and Palestine gather to walk, hike, and talk - walk through the Holy Land. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Defence Force incursions.

Whereas advocacy at the national level is undertaken by National Co-ordinations, EAPPI was also active at international level, both at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva, through oral statements. Oral statements were delivered on 24th March and on 23rd June, during the 25th and 26th Sessions of the UNHRC under Item 7 (Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories). The first one focused on the fate of Palestinian prisoners in Israel, while the second raised the issue of the continuing devastating effects of the occupation on education in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in particular with the high presence of military in the vicinity of schools.

The fifth EU lobby week of EAPPI took place between 2-6 November, 2014. Nine former EAs representing Finland, UK, Ireland, Germany, Sweden, France, Poland, the Netherlands and Austria participated. An EAPPI Advocacy staff from the UK coordination was present to gain more knowledge and experience on EU and provide experience from national lobby experience. The operation was coordinated and supervised by an EAPPI Advocacy staff from the EAPPI office in Geneva.

During the year, a new EAPPI placement was opened in the Jordan Valley. This came following the discussions during the Annual Meeting in September 2013. The first Jordan Valley team was in place in August 2014, following the summer break. The opening of the Jordan Valley placement has proved to be a very important accomplishment due to the strategic importance of the area and the number and types of incidents

Involvement with the local congregations allows EAPPI to show its presence and establish and build relationships, as well as join in worship

with the people around. The EAs logs show that the relations stretch beyond attending Sunday's services and include numerous accounts for visiting with isolated Christian families, attending Church related and ecumenical events. EAs attended church services and met with congregations in most cities in West Bank where there is Christian presence. This included Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, Beit Jala, Jerusalem, Al Izariya, Ramallah, At Taybeh, Jericho, Nablus, Rafidia, , and Zababideh.

The cooperation between UNICEF and EAPPI on the project "Access to Education" was continued and expanded. This was due to the successful completion of the first year of the project. In 2014, this project provided protective presence to 3,568 children (1,047 girls and 2,521 boys) and 304 teachers across the West Bank.

A professional filmmaker was recruited in 2014 to being working on four short films about Access to Education. One film will be an overview, while the remaining three will be on Access, Violence, and Displacement. These films will be made public in the first quarter of 2015. Moreover, a returned EA in Poland is also drafting both a static infographic, and an infographic video about Access to Education.

Since the summer of 2014, EAPPI is developing a focus on women's experiences of, and responses to, the Occupation, in an attempt to give women in the target communities EAPPI works with a greater voice but also gain better insight if men and women suffer under, and respond to, the Occupation in different ways. The Jordan Valley team (October 2014 – January 2015) started filming for a video on women's perspectives in Jordan Valley communities.

ACT Alliance/ACT Palestine Forum

The General Assembly was held in Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic. Mr Bassem Thabet represented the ELCJHL at the Assembly. Pre-assembly preparations took place on the 20th of October 2014, with a focused orientation about the assembly, agenda issues, decision-making processes, role of the delegate/observer at the assembly, dynamics of meetings/workshops, and report from the MNC on the election processes. Simultaneously, there were specialized workshops that were previously announced and circulated to all attending participants to indicate their area of interest and participation. These workshops covered: The benefits of Cobranding- ACT response to an Emergency-ACT as an advocacy alliance-Enabling environment for civil society: A pre-requisite for sustainable development- Stay Safe-Managing security Risks in any Context-Engaging local and National Actors World Humanitarian Summit.

The first day of the assembly was on Tuesday the 21st of October 2014. Deliberations of the first day gave way to the introduction of ACT strategy 2015-2018 with a roll-out plan with timeframes and responsibilities, challenges facing sustainability of the ACT Alliance, and the restructuring process underway.

Later, all these issues were taken to the regional meetings where the members reflected on how do we as a region intercept with the global strategic directions with priorities. These discussions will link national performance with the regional plan that will feed into the global directions with its three pillars as a baseline for the future of ACT Alliance. Outcomes of the regional meetings were reflected in a 3-minute video brief presentation of the sectorial engagement with priorities. Those presentations were shared with the assembly as feedback from the regions.

Committee on Strategy 2015-2018: Heard the



The 2014-2015 Young Adults in Global Mission. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

regional reports related to the strategic plan, affirmed the strategic direction and made recommendations to the general assembly related to the implementation of the plan. Discussed the sustainable funding mechanism of the alliance and the ACT secretariat restructuring.

The assembly received in full plenary the reports from the various committees with all the recommendations, discussed them, challenged and made modifications to others and a voting mechanism was in place which approved these recommendations as outlined and modified.

I am happy to hear that the issue of the Income Based Fee (IBF) was raised in the Assembly. The agreement among participants was that, if we want to encourage churches from the Global South, the fee must be waived so that churches with less income can take part in the ACT Alliance.

Near East School of Theology (NEST)

On March 19th, 2015, I gave a lecture on "Reformation and Politics" at the Near East

School of Theology (NEST) in conjunction with the Catholic University of St. Joseph and the German Embassy in Lebanon, as well as the German congregation in Beirut and the National Presbyterian Church of Beirut. My lecture was responding to a presentation by Rev. Dr Margot Käsmann, the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) special envoy for the 2017 Reformation Jubilee. The theme of the lecture was on Reformation and Politics.

Interfaith Dialogue

World Interfaith Harmony Week

I have once again been appointed to be one of the judges for the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week competition. The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought of Jordan has joined the World Interfaith Harmony Week to provide a prize to the three best events or texts created to promote the goals of interfaith harmony. After reviewing 93 applications from 900 events held around the world, prizes were awarded in April 2015 to three events: First prize went to Universal Interfaith Peace Mission (President- Dr

Allama G R Chishti) of Pakistan for their various events in a range of locations including 1. Islamia University of Bahawalpur 2. Roz TV Pakistan, 3. Jame Masjid New Sohan Islamabad, 4. Divine Light Public School Islamabad; Second prize went to Mrs Gisela Jahn and Dr. Beatrix Jakubicka of Germany for their "Friedenskette der Religionen" in Munich connecting 15,000 people in a human chain of light between five houses of worship; third prize went to World Interfaith Harmony Week Toronto Steering Committee of Canada for their eight events during the WIHW including: Launch Event, Interfaith Dialogue Circle, How We Talk To God, Race And Religion, Faith And Social Justice, Christian-Jewish Dialogue, An Evening Of Interfaith Performing Arts, Interfaith Ecology Hike, and Efforts To Obtain Government Of Canada Support. We congratulate the winners and all who entered the competition and hope that they will continue their good work. We are grateful to The Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute for their work; interfaith harmony is essential both in Arab Society and around the world.

Jewish-Christian Dialogue

From April 29th to May 1st, 2015, the ELCJHL and the Evangelische Kirche im Rheinland (EKiR) hosted a Jewish-Christian dialogue at the Martin Luther Center around the issues of land, water, and promise under the title, "Be Prophetic! Hermeneutics of Liberation in Judaism and Christianity." Led by Rev. Barbara Rudolf of the EKiR and myself, the conference involved three days of discussion on how to become more capable of acting towards good in the context of the Israel/Palestine conflict and in the context of Jewish-Christian relations in general. This conference follows the conferences hosted the previous two years on the Book of Exodus. This is a very constructive dialogue

Council of Religious Institutions in the

Holy Land (CRIHL)

The Council of Religious Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL) remains one of the best interfaith platforms of the Middle East and this country. We continue to meet and we continue to look for the best ways to do interfaith dialogue. Our most important work today is finding ways the Textbook Study entitled "Victims of Our Own Narratives? Portrayal of the 'Other' in Israeli and Palestinian School Books" can have an impact in Palestine and Israel. We have been contacting politicians on both sides – from civil servants to ministers – in order to see how can we start the process of influencing them to change the curriculum. At the same time, we are also looking for new Jewish and Muslim participants in CRIHL as some of our current members are growing older. We are looking to the future, including how this platform can help influence decision-making for future negotiations. We are again thankful for the Church of Norway that continues to be a large supporter of CRIHL. We also thank the American diplomats who are challenging us to continue and to become even more involved in this work. They tell us how deeply they need our voice.

Financial Situation

We continue to struggle financially, especially due to the shifting of focus from the Palestinian issue to Gaza specifically as well as to Iraq and Syria. We are asking - how do we get this funding back?

In regards to the registration and sale of the land, the registration and zoning has been completed. By the time of reading, we hope that the land will be sold to the Mercedes company.

The Synod has voted on what to do with the proceeds and action will be taken as follows:

- › \$USD 2M will be invested in Vanguard



The Deaf Ministry got to take a trip to Jericho. Here, congregants from both Ramallah and Beit Sahour pose for a photo. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

- › Up to \$USD 400,000 will be used as a loan from the Church Council to offset the budget, especially the ecclesiastical budget

In the future, the interest will be used to supplement the Church budget. The Church Council hopes to discuss how to assist congregations with this money as well.

The Church of Norway has invited some of the partners to meet in November 2014 to discuss the financial situation of the ELCJHL. We spoke on the creation of a campaign called "Free to Serve" with the goal of helping the ELCJHL in financial matters. The hope that people around the world would help

fund the ELCJHL that it would be free to serve the community and all the church.

Rev. Rafael Malpica-Padilla from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has offered that Christina Jackson-Skelton can work on this project as a financial advisor. We also hope that Ms. Berit Hagen Agøy of the Church of Norway would also help us in this campaign.

After 10 years working with PriceWaterhouseCooper (PwC) for our yearly audit, the Church Council has approved HLB as the new auditor that will work in a venture that will combine both the ELCJHL and

the Diyar Consortium. This is a consolidation that we have been working on for a long time and has been requested both by the church and our COCOP members.

I would like to thank Mr. Adeb Murabia and the Office of Finance for their tireless work under intense pressure, especially when salaries are delayed due to cash flow problems.

Asset Management Unit (AMU)

The Asset Management Unit (AMU) has already produced four feasibility studies to increase the income of the ELCHL. One feasibility study was made for building a multi-functional building in the Ramallah area. Another study examined the various uses of the school building in Ramallah and the best use of that building after the new school building is completed. However, there has been a delay in completing the new building, which has hindered the immediate use of the old building. A third study proposed building a four story building in Bethlehem to be used as offices for institutions and companies. The fourth one was for Abraham's Herberge where the study examined the feasibility of expanding the capacity of the hotel and proposed a marketing strategy to increase profit.

This unit has been particularly helpful, and the Church Council has asked Mr. Bassem Thabet to lead it. However, the Church Council has also decided to hire financial experts to implement any and all programs.

However, a discussion needs to happen with the Church Council and the Synod regarding investments.

Abraham's Herberge

Abraham's Herberge continues to bring in guests,

however, after the Gaza War in 2014, tourism in the area has dropped by at least 60%. Many of these tourists have canceled out of fear of ISIS due to the mistaken belief that the extremist group is next door. The director of Abraham's Herberge, Mr. Naim Muallem, is doing his utmost to diversify in regards to customers. We hope to see the fruits of his labors in the near future.

It is important to keep in mind the rising number of hotels in the Bethlehem area and the price competition. Abraham's Herberge and Abu Jibrán cannot lower the prices anymore - neither hotel would be able to cover expenses.

The Abraham's Herberge Förderverein has been dissolved. I have contacted a number of our friends, resulting in a visit from the Reformed Church of Hamburg. Peter Burghold has been appointed as our representative in Germany.

A board has been assembled with representatives from the Reformed Church of Hamburg, the Church of Werthe in Switzerland, and the ELCJHL.

We are currently discussing how to revive the Abraham's Herberge student scholarship fund, as well as Abraham's Tent, an education program for nearby villages. The goals of the board also include developing a strategy for internal pilgrimage, such as by Christians from the Galilee and Nazareth area. Lastly, we are thinking of ways that Abraham's Herberge can assist in the social work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala.

I am thankful for these developments that create trust between us and our partners - we hope these interactions will encourage former partners to return to the ministry.

Partner Relationships

Martin Luther Forum Ruhr

I was the keynote speaker at the Martin Luther Forum Ruhr in Gladbeck (Germany) in June 2014, speaking on religion and politics. On the afternoon of June 26, I met with the Mayor of Gladbeck, Ulrich Roland. They conversed on questions of integration and peaceful coexistence of religions, and afterwards, I signed the Golden Book of the city. Afterwards, I joined in the traditional summer festival of the Martin Luther Forum. OKR Detlef Mucks-Büker, the chair of the board of trustees of the Martin Luther Foundation Ruhr, was the host for the program. This included greetings by Prof. Dr. Reinhard Klenke, the chief administrative officer of the district, and the OKR Norbert Denecke, executive secretary of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and her delegation visited the ELCJHL in January 2015. Children at both the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour and Dar Al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem welcomed the Bishop and her delegation with songs and dancing. The delegation toured the Environmental Education Center where the delegation was able to learn more about the center's ecological projects and bird ringing. The group also toured Dar Al-Kalima University College of Arts & Culture.

Bishop Eaton was also able to visit the Evangelical Lutheran Church at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan, the newest church of the ELCJHL, built at site where it's believed John the Baptist baptized Jesus. The Evangelical Lutheran Church at Bethany-Beyond-the-Jordan was built in part with the help of an ELCA Mission Investment Fund.

Five young adults from the ELCJHL will be attending the 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering to take place in Detroit, Michigan with the help of the Southeast Michigan Synod of the ELCA, a partner church of the ELCJHL.

Australian Lutheran Church

In June 2014, Bishop John Henderson and Mr. Stephen Rudolph of Lutheran Education of Australia discussed how we could promote a partnership between the ELCJHL, the Lutheran Church of Australia, and our two schools system. We also discussed sending Vicar Fusan Zumot to Australia to complete a year of Lutheran studies.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church of the North of Germany (ECCNK)

The Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the North of Germany, Bishop Gerhard Ulrich, and an accompanying delegation officially visited the ELCJHL from Wednesday, February 18th to Monday, February 23rd, 2015.

The delegation was able to visit the ELCJHL's Lutheran Schools despite the snowy weather that kept them trapped at Abraham's Herberge in Beit Jala for part of their trip. The delegation spent time with the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour, Dar Al-Kalima in Bethlehem, as well as the Environmental Education Center and Talitha Kumi School. Bishop Gerhard Ulrich and the delegation also spent time speaking with the pastors of the ELCJHL about the work of their congregations in and throughout the Holy Land.

Bishop Gerhard Ulrich and Bishop Hans-Jürgen Abromeit joined Bishop Munib Younan and Rev. Imad Haddad for a service at the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope in Ramallah, where all presided and Bishop Ulrich gave the sermon. Bishop Younan and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan in the Holy Land would like to



A participant of the ELCJHL's youth retreat for ages 8-12 enjoys a break in activities to spend time in the swimming pool in Jericho. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

thank Bishop Ulrich and his delegation for their visit, the support of himself and his church, and for past, present, and future accompaniment.

Berlinermissionswerk (BMW)

I joined the Berliner Missionswerk (BMW) for the celebration of their founding 190 years earlier in Berlin on August 31st, 2014. The celebration was both a jubilee of celebration and a conference to discuss religious issues affecting the BMW and its partners.

I addressed the Conference of International Partners of BMW on "cheap reconciliation" in the context of ignorance and violence and the need for mutual recognition in the Middle East. During the Jubilee on August 31st, 2014, Bishop Younan and the BMW dedicated a stone from the Holy Land to the BMW as a gift of partnership.

I, as well as the Director of Berliner Missionswerk Rev. Roland Herpich, led a public prayer for the representatives who joined them at Brandenburg Gate to remember the outbreak of World War II 75 years earlier. The public prayer was followed by a memorial service at St. Mary's Church in

Berlin.

Church of Norway (CoN)

Bishop Atle Sommerfeldt, Bishop of the Diocese of Borg, Church of Norway, and the Church Council from the same region visited the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan of the Holy Land from Thursday, February 26th, 2015 to March 2nd, 2015 in a bid to strengthen their relationship and to learn more about the operation of each church's council.

The meeting included discussions on being the Lutheran Church in each church's unique context as well as finding new ways in which the churches could further develop cooperation between not only each Church Council, but between the church bodies as a whole.

Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM)

This year, the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM) celebrated the 90th Anniversary of their work in the Middle East. I gave the sermon for

the celebratory service and spoke on the power of mission when working with the local church.

The Diocese of Kuopio, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF)

We are strengthening the relationship between the ELCJHL and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), Diocese of Kuopio. I visited Kuopio and have been lecturing in university. I was received by the mayor of Kuopio, as well as the Bishop of the Diocese of Kuopio, Jari Jolkkonen, before lectures at the municipality of Kuopio and in the University of Eastern Finland on the transforming power of education. I also met with the pastors of the ELCF, diocese of Kuopio, companion synod of the ELCJHL.

Staff

Local Staff

Mrs. Bassimah Jaraiseh submitted her resignation after five years of service with the ELCJHL's Women's Desk. We thank her for her faithful service to the women of the ELCJHL and we wish her all the luck in her future.

We are currently in the process of hiring a new facilitator for the Women's Desk after receiving a proposal from the Women's Committee.

We welcome Mr. Bassem Thabet in the role of Church Secretary. We welcome him to our church staff and we hope that local and international partners will cooperate with him in this demanding work.

Mr. Rif'at Kassis has been appointed by the LWF World Service as the Regional Representative of the LWF Amman. We congratulate him and ask God's blessing on his work.

International Staff

Young Adults in Global Mission

Our seventh group of young adults taking part in the YAGM program arrived in September 2014 and we are pleased to have them working in accompaniment with us this year:

- › Sheldon Way, graduated from St. Olaf College with a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and Religion, is serving the Environmental Education Center in Beit Jala and attending the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala;
- › Clare McElaney, graduated from Fairfield University in Connecticut with a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies and Politics, is serving the Hope Lutheran School in Ramallah and attending the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hope;
- › Kanika Staten, graduated with Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Goucher College and is currently working toward a dual Masters degree in Elementary Education and Special Education, is serving the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour and Dar Al-Kalima Lutheran School in Bethlehem and attends the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour;
- › Michael Dickson, graduated from the University of NC, Chapel Hill, with a Bachelor of Arts in English and in Journalism/Mass Communication, is serving Al Mahaba Kindergarten in Jerusalem and is attending the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem;
- › Amy Gulliksen, graduated from Texas A&M University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Sociology, is serving Helen Keller School for the Blind and Other Disabilities in Beit Hanina and is attending the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem.

The term for the current YAGM expires in July 2015 and we expect to get the next group in August 2015. We would like to thank Ms. Julie Rosate and Rev. Jeff Von Wald for their help in coordinating the YAGM program and thank them for their four years of service to the ELCJHL.

German Volunteers with the ELCIHL

A number of German volunteers serve the ELCJHL and Lutheran partners through work with students at Talitha Kumi, Al-Mahaba Kindergarten, The Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour, the Bethlehem Arab Society, Brass for Peace, an organization that teaches students music on brass instruments.

We give our sincere thanks to:

Merit Stein
Naomi Güntzel
Mirjam Oliva
Andreas Jenne
Fridtjof Wagner
Stefan Knauff
Rick Shapoehler
Benedikt von Pappenheim

The ELCJHL is happy to have you working in accompaniment with us.

Farewells

Ms. Julie Rossate and Rev. Jeff Von Wald

We would like to thank Julie Rossate and Rev. Jeff Von Wald for their work with the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM). We thank them for their gracious service. We wish them the best for the rest of their time here and for their future.

Welcomes

Rev. Carrie Ballenger Smith

In August 2014, Rev. Carrie Smith has joined the ELCJHL as the English-Speaking Pastor and the Special Assistant to the Bishop. Rev. Dr. Robert Smith has continued his role as my Special Advisor to the Lutheran World Federation President. We thank them for their service thus far and look forward to many years together.

Rev. Jeni Grangaard and Rev. Colin Grangaard

Pastors Jeni and Colin Grangaard will be serving as the new coordinators for the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program. They are fresh out of Northwest Minnesota where Jeni was serving as pastor of Glyndon Lutheran and Colin served first as the Associate Pastor for Young Adults, Evangelism and Global Mission at Trinity in Moorhead and then as Pastor of Our Savior's in Barnesville. This is their second time living in Jerusalem and the West Bank five years ago as part of the Graduate Preaching Fellowship Jeni was awarded. In July, Rev. Jeni Grangaard and Rev. Colin Grangaard will move with their young daughter, Josephine, to Jerusalem.

Awards and Honors

2014 Civis Mundi Award

On Wednesday, October 22nd, 2014, I was awarded the 2014 Civis Muni Award for Global Citizenship by the Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Waterloo, Canada. The award is being presented to Bishop Younan for his dedication to bringing peace to the Middle East. The award is given to those who embody global citizenship and who tirelessly work towards peace, justice, and integrity. The award is in recognition of my efforts through both the ELCJHL and the global Lutheran communion to bring peace based on justice to the Middle East.

Thank you to Bishop Susan Johnson and Rev. Dr David Pfrimmer for suggesting my name for this award.

Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster Honorary Doctorate

I have been honored with the title of Doctor Theologiae Honoris Causa from the Protestant Theological Faculty of the Westfälische Wilhelms-

Universtät Münster. I am being awarded for reconciling and ecumenical work in the Middle East by Dr. Hans-Peter Grosshans. This distinction was bestowed on November 19th, 2014 at the University's Faculty of Theology Centennial celebration.

Role As LWF President

This has been a very active year in regards to my work as the President of the Lutheran World Federation. I visited the Baltic churches. I participated in the consecration of Estonian Lutheran Archbishop, Urmas Viilma. I have visited Taiwanese Lutheran leaders in Taipei. I attended the general synod in Brazil and visited their seminary. I appreciate the warmth of the Brazilian Lutheran Church – the similarities of our church with many churches in the South that are struggling for their identity.

In Canada, I met the Foreign Minister and head of opposition as well as governmental representatives, all one day prior to the terror attack in Canada. I have also met many of the friends of Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) who really committed themselves to fundraising for the Elderly Care Pavilion and have an interest in fundraising for the schools.

I thank the Lutheran Church in our communion for continually trusting me to serve them.

Conclusion

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

- John 16:33 -

With all that you have seen, you know the troubles are not easy. But I want to assure you

even in these troubles we do not feel frustrated or broken. We will continue to do our work and we are mistaken to think if this is an individual work. Our church, along with the COCOP partners, is a communion that works together for one purpose – to glorify our Lord and to further his kingdom to implant the peace of the risen Lord in the heart of the people. I am very thankful for all those people who are gathered and believe in this vision. They help us progress.

I would like to thank all of our COCOP members for their belief in our vision and for the love that they share with us. I also want to thank all my colleagues in our church. The smallness of our church has never stopped us from our role in God's mission. All of this work, even if we have issues and disagreements, is for the benefit of the ELCJHL. All the advice and the work of the partners; the cooperation of the President and members of the Synod; the hard work of all of our pastors and clergy; the zeal and fervor of the lay leaders; the diligent work of all the staff in Jerusalem; the Director of Education and his assistants; the Directors of Finance and his aides; the Women's Facilitator, women's committee, and consultant; the youth pastor; the Lay Preachers Academy students; and all others who work to make the ELCJHL what it is. Without every one of you, our witness would not be as strong as it is.

May God bless you.



Top: Angels wait to take part in the Christmas pageant at the Evangelical Lutheran School of Hope in Ramallah. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Bottom: Meeting with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, His Excellency Ahmed Tayyib. (© Al-Azhar)



(Clockwise from top left):

Bishop Munib Younan gives his condolences at a church service for the 21 slain Coptic Christians in Libya. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Bishop Munib Younan and Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the ELCA pose outside of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

A young girl giggles as she tries to hide from the camera. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

A volunteer holds a Bluethroat after ringing the bird at the Environmental Education Center's ringing station in Jericho. (© Danae Hudson/ELCJHL)

Demythologizing the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict – Challenges for the Church

I will present ten myths / misinterpretations / illusions / opinions found among Norwegian Christians that, in my opinion, can be hindrances for the work for Just Peace in Israel and Palestine.

They are meant to stimulate and provoke a discussion. Some opinions are more common than others, and the same 'myth' can be used very differently by different groups.

1. Theology: Christian Zionism

- The Old Testament's prophecies and promises concerning the land and people of Israel are directly applicable to the present day State of Israel. Israel 1948 is a fulfilment of God's promise.
- The role of the Jews in the last days: the return of the Jews to Jerusalem as a precondition for the Second Coming of the Messiah/Jesus Christ.
- 'Replacement Theology' is used as an accusation and intentionally misinterpreted.
- Jews are no longer included in the People of God – unless they convert to Christianity.

2. Faith: Israel and Jews are synonymous

- A Christian's obvious loyalty is to the Jews and to the State of Israel. This is an integrated part of the Christian faith.
- To criticize present-day Israeli politics is construed as criticism of the Jews in general and a betrayal of the people of God.
- You cannot be a true Christian if you do not support Israel. Personal conviction and faith.
- More sympathy and support for Jews than for fellow Christians living in Israel.
- Lack of knowledge of Palestinian Christians.
- Israel as a 'Jewish' state? Intentionally unclear?
- All Jews (in Israel and elsewhere) are responsible for the policy of the State of Israel.
- All Palestinians are responsible for Hamas, terror and radical Islam.

3. The land was empty – there are no Palestinians

- The 'Promised land' was empty (ancient times, 1948).
- Palestine never existed historically – it is an artificial state.
- Palestinians are Arabs and can move to join their country fellowmen in neighbouring Arab countries. This is where they belong.
- Denial/silence about what happened with the Palestinians around 1948.
- All Palestinians are Muslims – they do not belong in Israel.
- The Jews have no right to the land today.
- Silence about what happened with the Jews in Arab countries after 1948.

4. The power to define sensitive words

- The (mis)use of power to silence those who disagree with you.
- Terms that destroy the dialogue.

- Occupation: Reality, legal, illegal? Who has the power to interpret International Law?
- Holocaust: History never ends. Feeling of guilt. Compensation. Uniqueness of the Jews as those who suffer most.
- Anti-Semitism = all criticism of Jews.
- Boycott: memories of persecutions and pogroms against European Jews. Unjust towards the Jews. The Palestinians will suffer most.
- Apartheid: Relevant comparison with South Africa – or a term used as a tool of power against those who disagree?
- Underestimating existing and increasing (?) anti-Semitism among Christians and Muslims – in Europe and in Israel, Palestine and the Middle East.

5. **The balance: Israelis and Palestinians are equally wrong**

- Never blame or criticize only one side.
- Occupation is about security.
- Arab/Palestinian plan to abolish the State of Israel
- Criticism of Israel is brushed off with criticism of the Palestinian Authority
- Israel has the right and obligation to defend its population against Arab aggression
- The Wall: power and shame ---- barrier of security?
- Human Rights abuses on both sides
- The right to return → majority of Muslims = the destruction of the Jewish state (ultimate aim).
- Israel is demonized.
- Neglect of lack of democracy and of respect for Human Rights in Palestine

6. **Israel is the only well-functioning democracy in the region**

- Israel is a bulwark of civilization and democracy in a region of Conflict.
- Israel is a well-functioning democracy and defender of human rights.
- Palestinian are better off in Israel than in the occupied areas and in the neighbouring countries.
- Why do you always only criticize Israel – and not other countries?
- Lack of criticism of the Palestinian Authority for human rights abuses, corruption and lack of democracy.
- Lack of common understanding of international agreement and humanitarian law.

7. **Palestinian Christians are persecuted by the Muslims**

- Christian and Muslims can never live in peace with each other.
- The Christians emigrate because of harassment from the Muslims.
- Most of the Palestinian Muslims are supporting extremism and promoting a radical Islamic state (even though they do not openly admit it).
- Palestinian Christians are too friendly and naive towards the Muslims and Arabs.
- The historic Churches are silent and they are underestimating the Christian-Muslim conflict
- ELCJHL's partner churches (Cocop) are naive and one sided Palestinian-friendly

9. **Christians in Palestine / the Middle East use their energy to fight each other**

- Ecumenical relations between historic churches and between them and the evangelical groups are strained.

- Leaders in the historic churches are old-fashioned and patriarchal and their churches do not promote democracy.
- Women and youth do not get a fair share of influence in their church.
- Silence and lack of knowledge of the situation for the Messianic Jews.
- Lack of cooperation between Christians and Jews.
- Different understanding of the Mission of the Church: proclamation – diaconia – advocacy
- Western Evangelical groups: Open proclamation of the Gospel to the Muslims is the test of a ‘true church’.

10. There will never be peace before the return of Christ

- History shows that people of different faiths can never live peacefully together.
- Two State solution is an illusion – will never be realized.
- One state solution is a catastrophe for all parties – it will never work.
- ‘Every thing is becoming worse’.
- Apathy, loss of hope.

In ending:

- Who represents the different opinions among Christians in Norway?
- The most common myths/opinions.
- Church of Norway’s official position on Israel and Palestine.
- Disagreement in the Christian Council of Norway. Ecumenical challenges.
- Who are the Norwegian Christian Zionist Group?
- BDS-Movement in Norway.
- At present: polarization (support Israel/Jews --- support Palestinians)
- Survey by Hans Morten Haugen

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