

Canada Lutheran  
January-February 2009

### Bishops Plan Visit to Middle East January 6-13

Five of the six bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) and sixty of the 66 bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the ELCA secretary, plus spouses and staff will visit the Middle East, January 6-13, 2009. Participants will meet with Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian religious, community and political leaders, visit congregations and schools, and sites of religious significance.

The visit is the 2009 Bishops' Academy, an annual event in which leaders from both churches engage in theological reflection and study. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and its bishop, the Rev. Munib A. Younan, plus staff of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) are partners with the ELCA and ELCIC in planning the visit. Bishops and spouses contributed synod funds as well as continuing education and personal funds for the visit.

The purpose of the visit is to develop awareness of the situation on the ground for Israelis and Palestinians, to accompany members of the ELCJHL as they seek to be faithful, and to engage in advocacy for specific strategies aimed at attaining a just and lasting peace for all people in the region.

The ELCIC has had a partner church relationship with the ELCJHL since 2001. Through visits from Bishop Younan the ELCIC has grown in our understanding of the challenges facing Palestinian Christians living in the cradle of Christianity. This study trip is an opportunity for us to see first hand how our companions in faith are living out God's mission in their context.

“The Evangelical Lutheran Church faces many challenges in this new century. A particular concern is the emigration of many Palestinian Christians from the Holy Land. And, as Palestinians continue to struggle for autonomy and nationhood, they are confronted with the need for improved education, better access to health care, improved employment opportunities, stronger leadership, and a greater recognition within the international community. The ELCJHL remains a Christian presence in these demanding times, providing leadership in ecumenical efforts and offering both spiritual and social services to meet the daily needs of the people.” (From the website of the ELCJHL, <http://www.holyland-lutherans.org/>).

By the time this article is published the bishops and spouses will have returned from our study trip to the Holy Land with stories, reflections and messages of hope to share with our members. Thank you to members throughout the ELCIC for their support of this visit. We pray that our journey will bring many blessings to our church while we support our sisters and brothers in the Holy Land.

Grace and peace,

Bishop Cindy Halmarson