



Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan  
and the Holy Land

# NEWSLETTER

November 2025



## PALESTINIAN HERITAGE DAY

ELCJHL Schools Celebrated  
Palestinian heritage Day on the  
15<sup>th</sup> of November with cultural  
lessons and activities.



## FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Our congregations welcomed the  
season of Advent and the start of  
a new Liturgical Calendar.

## BISHOP AZAR WELCOMES VISITING DELEGATIONS

Bishop Azar and the ELCJHL  
welcomed visits from the LWF and  
ELCA this month.

# BISHOP'S NEWS

## BISHOP AZAR WELCOMES INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS

This month the ELCJHL was honored to receive a visit from Lutheran World Federation President Bishop Henrik Stubkjaer and LWF Regional Secretary for Asia Rospita Siahaan.

The LWF delegation met with Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar and other ELCJHL pastors, ministry directors, staff, and students to learn more about the situation in Palestine and the work of the Lutheran, Christian, and broader Palestinian community on the ground. They also met with the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem including Greek Orthodox Patriarch Theophilos III.

The following week, Bishop Azar met with a visiting delegation of key ELCA and Latin American leaders who visited the ELCJHL schools and ministries, met with leaders from the Augusta Victoria Hospital, and worshiped with the Jerusalem congregation.

We are grateful for the partnership and solidarity of these leaders and the opportunity to build stronger relationships with our global Lutheran and Christian community.



## BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMPETITION



In November Bishop Azar took part in the adjudication of the 8<sup>th</sup> Holy Land Bible Knowledge Competition, held at St. Anthony Center in Nazareth.

## VISIT TO MUNICH



Bishop Azar traveled to Munich this month to meet with partners there. He met with Bishop Thomas Prieto Peral to discuss the ongoing friendship between our churches.

# CONGREGATIONS

## ADVENT BEGINS

At the end of November, we celebrated the first week of the Season of Advent, and the beginning of a new Liturgical Calendar.

Each of our congregations held service for the first Sunday of Advent, and special tree lighting and fellowship activities were included in Beit Sahour and Ramallah. We lit the first candle to watch for Messiah as we enter the time of anticipation before Christ's miraculous birth.



## WELCOME PASTOR CHRISTY LOHR SAPP AND FAMILY

Bishop Azar, the ELCJHL, and the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer are proud to welcome Pastor Christy Lohr Sapp and her family to Jerusalem. Pastor Christy will serve as Pastor of the English-Speaking Congregation of the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem with Pastor Sally Azar. Ahlan w' sahlan!



# EDUCATION

## PALESTINIAN HERITAGE DAY

The ELCJHL schools celebrated their Palestinian heritage with cultural activities, performances, and special foods during the week of November 15<sup>th</sup>. As the anniversary of the signing of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988, the 15th is traditionally recognized as Palestinian Independence Day.



## LWF AND ELCA VISITS

Guests from the LWF and ELCA delegations visited the ELCJHL schools in November. They met with ELCJHL Director of Education Eva Azar and the principals of the schools. They also heard stories from students and school social workers about the difficult circumstances our students and teachers are enduring. We appreciate the prayers and solidarity of our partners as we continue providing education in our community.



## TEACHER'S OUTING

The Education Office organized a special hiking day for teachers and staff from the Evangelical Lutheran School in Beit Sahour and Dar al Kalima Lutheran School this month. The hike was led by the tour guide Esperansa Hanania Qumsieh and went from Husan to Battir. The hikers also stopped for traditional Palestinian musakhan for lunch and visited the former Jerusalem/Jaffa Railway.

Opportunities for stress relief, relaxation, and connection are so important for our teachers who work incredibly hard to support their students every day.



## TEACHER'S TOURNAMENT

This month the ELCJHL Education Office organized the first Lutheran Schools' Teachers' Football Tournament, held in Beit Sahour. Both female and male teachers participated with great enthusiasm and team spirit, creating an atmosphere of joy and excitement for all who attended. The tournament concluded with Beit Sahour winning the first-place cup, while the School of Hope proudly claimed second place.



# GENDER JUSTICE

## JUDGES TRAINING WITH PJI

This month the ELCJHL Ecclesiastical Court in partnership with the ELCJHL Gender Justice Ministry held a three-day training for all judges and pastors for the church, led by the Palestinian Justice Institute with support from the Sawasya Programme Palestine.

In the Palestinian legal system, issues related to personal status and family law are handled by religious courts. Though all Sharia and criminal Palestinian court judges receive legal training through the PJI, the ELCJHL court is the first Ecclesiastical Court to hold this training for its judges.

Building on this training, several additional training sessions are planned to address more critical aspects of the legal system, including a specialized training on women's and children's rights and the main international conventions related to gender justice and child protection. We are proud of this step to further integrate the ELCJHL court with other parts of the Palestinian legal system and promote equality and justice for those accessing services through our court.



## BAKING COURSE IN RAMALLAH

Earlier this year, women from the Ramallah congregation completed a 5-part training course in how to bake cookies in a healthy way. This program was organized by the Gender Justice Ministry as part of the ongoing skill development courses designed to help empower women economically through income-generating skills. Many women have lost income due to the decline in tourism and the difficult economic climate. Participants in the course recently received their training certificates.



## ELCA MEETING

Gender Justice Ministry Director Ranan Issa met with the visiting delegation of ELCA and key leaders from Latin America during their solidarity trip. During the meeting she spoke about the difficulties faced in daily life and work due to the political situation and the importance of continuing the work of Gender Justice in Palestinian society.



# DIAKONIA

## MEETING WITH SWEDISH THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE

In November the Diaconal Ministry Team including Director Rana Zeidan met with representatives of the Swedish Theological Institute including Rev. Anna Hjalm, Rev. Karin Sarja, and Rev. Erik Gyll. In the meeting they discussed opportunities for future cooperation between the two organizations!



## DEAF MINISTRY

The Deaf Ministry has been working on making candles this month, especially candles for Advent wreaths. These Advent candles will be gifted to our congregations for the Advent Season.

## COOKING THERAPY PROGRAM

This month the Diaconal Ministry launched a pioneer program called "Cooking to Cure." The program supports women struggling with mental health issues and gives them strategies to face difficult changes and life circumstances. The course is implemented in partnership with Psychologist Jumana Kaplanian and Chef Muna Khroufeh, and helps women learn new techniques for mindfulness and stress relief while developing life skills.



# ENVIRONMENTAL



## EEC WELCOMES VISITORS

This month the EEC Director Simon Awad welcomed visiting delegations from the Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These solidarity visits were an opportunity for our partners to learn about the essential work of the EEC and discuss important topics like climate and ecological justice, care for creation, and the ongoing ecocide happening in Palestine.

## COLLABORATIONS WITH PA MINISTRIES

In November the EEC led a workshop for farmers in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Agriculture. They also held a Palestinian cultural Heritage Day in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture.

We are proud of these partnerships that further environmental, natural, and cultural issues in our society.

## OLIVE HARVEST FESTIVAL

The Environmental Education Center of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, together with the Peace Center of the Bethlehem Municipality, and in cooperation with the Ministries of Agriculture, Education and Higher Education, and Culture, as well as the Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry, celebrated the silver jubilee of the National Olive Harvest Festival, which was first launched in the fall of 2000. Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar spoke at the event along with EEC Director Simon Awad. ELCJHL Youth and EEC team member Lubna Nassar was the MC.

As part of the celebrations, 91 drawings created by students from Palestinian universities were showcased, representing the significance of the olive tree in Palestinian heritage. The festival included a market featuring a wide array of olives, olive oil, and related products that highlighted the richness of local production and the enduring symbolism of the olive harvest.

