

VOLUME 5, ISSUE 4

# Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

APRIL 2025 NEWSLETTER

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# Bishop's Corner

## Easter Greetings

Bishop Azar and a delegation from the ELCJHL and our local protestant partners exchanged Easter greetings with our siblings from the Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, and Armenian Patriarchates. During this combined Eastern and Western Easter Season we are honored to share the hope of the resurrection with all our Christian siblings in Jerusalem.

## Pope Francis Memorial Mass

Bishop Azar attended the Memorial Mass for His Holiness Pope Francis at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and sent condolences to Jerusalem Patriarch Cardinal Pierbattista Pizzaballa and our Catholic siblings in Christ.



## ELCA/ELCIC Solidarity Visit and Statement

Bishop Azar welcomed a solidarity visit from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American and National Bishop Susan Johnson of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, accompanied by several of their colleagues.

During their visit, the delegation met with ELCJHL pastors and ministry directors, local heads of churches, and interfaith and ecumenical partners. The group also visited Lutheran schools and Augusta Victoria Hospital. At the end of the week, the three bishops held a webinar about the current experiences of Palestinians and Palestinian Christians. After the group returned to North America, they issued a joint statement with Bishop Azar calling for our siblings in Christ in their churches to show solidarity with ELCJHL by visiting and sharing the reality of what is happening in Palestine. The statement is available on the ELCJHL website and the webinar can be viewed on the ELCA Facebook page.

## ELCJHL Hosts German Delegations

This month Bishop Azar hosted a visit for some of our German partners from including Regional Bishop of Swabia Old Bavaria Thomas Prieto Peral, Councillor for Ecumenism and Global Responsibility Hans-Martin Gloël, and members of the board of the Dr. Gerda von Mach Gedächtnisstiftung (Memorial Foundation) Dr. Frank Roitzsch, Mrs. Ulrike Flaig, Dr. Alexander von Negenborn, Mr. Frank Meinel, and Mr. Wolfram Katthaen. The group met Bishop Azar and ELCJHL Pastors and Ministry Directors for dinner and visited the Lutheran Schools.



# Holy Week in the ELCJHL

This year the Western and Eastern Church Calendars aligned for Holy Week and Easter, meaning all six ELCJHL congregations celebrated during the same week.

Special services were held in each congregation for Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday. On Maundy Thursday in Jerusalem, a multi-lingual service at the Church of the Redeemer was followed by a procession with the cross to Gethsemane. On Friday, we joined our Anglican Siblings for a procession and prayer service along the Via Dolorosa.

## Palm Sunday in Amman



## Palm Sunday in Beit Sahour



## Maundy Thursday in Jerusalem



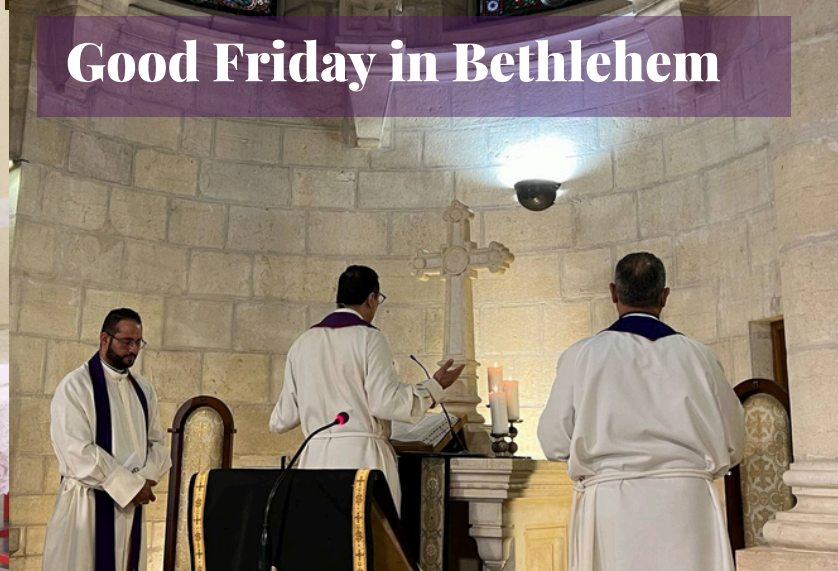
## Maundy Thursday in Beit Jala



## Good Friday in Ramallah



## Good Friday in Bethlehem





# Easter in the ELCJHL

All six ELCJHL congregations held services on Easter Sunday, April 20<sup>th</sup>. It was a gift to share in the hope of the resurrection together during a joint Eastern and Western Easter. Several congregations also hosted special activities for children after the service including egg hunts and special holiday treats.

For a second year in a row, Easter in Palestine is without its usual joy. We cannot celebrate as we normally do while our siblings in Gaza are experiencing unimaginable suffering, and the situation in the West Bank and Jerusalem is becoming more unstable every day.

Though we did not hold scout parades or joyous festivals, we still celebrate Christ's triumph over the grave, which reminds us that death never has the last word. We pray continuously for our siblings in Gaza, and we hold on to the hope that the resurrection promises.

## Beit Jala



## Ramallah



## Beit Sahour



## Jerusalem



## Bethlehem



## Amman





# Education

## Students Travel for MUN

A delegation from the Evangelical Lutheran Schools traveled to Istanbul for the Model United Nations conference held under the theme: "Enhancing Cooperation: Mending the Cracks in the Rules-Based International Order."

Our delegates represented Germany in the following committees: the Disarmament Committee, Political Committee, Legal Committee, Human Rights Council, Economic and Financial Committee, and the Economic and Social Council.

## Math Olympiad

Math Olympiad exams for the 6th, 8th, and 10th grades were held this month. The Olympiad is conducted by the ELCJHL Education Office to test students' reasoning aptitude and skills.



## Open Day at Dar al Kalima

DAK held their Open Day and Educational Exhibition this month to honor creativity, academic excellence, national identity, and cultural heritage.

The day began with an opening ceremony featuring speeches, Dabke folk dancing, gymnastics performances, and poetry readings.

During the event students exhibited projects in the subjects of Arabic, English, German, mathematics, science, technology, and Palestinian heritage, and participated in chess exhibition matches.

## Easter Egg Hunt

Students at the four schools and al Mahaba Kindergarten participated in an Easter Egg Hunt organized by the ELCJHL Education Office.



## Sports Day

Dar al Kalima hosted their Annual Sports Day this month. Students from Dar al Kalima, ELS Beit Sahour, Talitha Kumi, and Hope School in Beit Jala participated in a variety of competitive sports in the school including football, chess, and ping pong.





# Diakonia

## Easter Activities

The Diaconal Ministry hosted Easter activities for the children of the church and the Abraham's Tent after-school program at the Lutheran Church of the Reformation in Beit Jala.

The afternoon included songs and prayers in the Church of the Reformation, an Easter craft, an Easter egg hunt, and a visit from the Easter Bunny. As we mark the Easter season during a very difficult time for our community for the second year in a row, it is important to provide activities for children that lift their spirits and keep the message of the holiday alive.

## Partner Visits

This month the Diaconal Center welcomed visits from our partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Kerk in Actie, and ACT Church of Sweden. We are thankful for all our partners do to support our work.



## Environmental

### Greenhouse Days at DAK

The EEC led a replanting initiative at the greenhouse of Dar Al-Kalima School. Students from the school's Environmental Club rolled up their sleeves and planted fresh cucumbers. As part of the same initiative, the EEC also introduced waste separation containers across the school as part of our waste-free schools program.

### Eco Tech Factory Visit

As part of a hands-on learning experience organized by the EEC, students from the Environmental Club at ELS Beit Sahour took a deep dive into the world of electronic waste recycling. During their visit to the Eco Tech Factory, the students toured the facility and witnessed the process of transforming discarded electronics into valuable raw materials like gold, silver, and copper.

### Swedish Good Shepherd School Joins Zero Waste Program

The Swedish Good Shepherd School joined the Zero Waste Schools Project, guided by the EEC. The school received specialized waste-sorting containers designed to encourage recycling and reduce landfill waste. The Environmental Club launched awareness campaigns across campus to encourage students and staff to embrace more eco-friendly habits.



# Gender Justice

## Women's Month Activity

To celebrate International Women's Day and Mother's Day, both of which were in March, the Gender Justice Ministry held a special event at the beginning of April for the women of the church. A concert by the Edward Said Conservatory Choir was held at the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, followed by games, activities, lunch, and gifts at Dar Annadwa. Women from all five Palestine congregations were in attendance. Special activities for children were offered as well.

As Women's Month comes to an end, we recognize and celebrate the role of women in our church and society all throughout the year, and we are grateful for this opportunity for fellowship and renewal.



## Training with PJI Begins

Last year the ELCJHL began a partnership with the Palestinian Judicial Institute, supported by the Sawasya Programme Palestine, aimed at advancing justice within the ecclesiastical court system.

This month a joint meeting gathered ELCJHL ecclesiastical judges, pastors, and representatives of the Gender Justice Ministry to strengthen our connection with the PJI, explore its services, and begin outlining the next phases of cooperation.

As part of this collaboration, the ELCJHL and PJI will jointly develop a tailored judicial training curriculum specific to the needs of ecclesiastical courts. This effort will ensure that judges and court staff are equipped with knowledge of gender justice, legal procedures, and current human rights standards.

## Al Hakimat Council Meets with Visiting Bishops

Gender Justice Ministry Director Ranan Issa and Judges Scarlet Bishara and Somoud Damiri of Al Hakimat Council met with the visiting National Bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada about their work helping vulnerable populations, particularly women and children, find justice in through the Palestinian legal system.





## ***Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar's Easter Message 2025***

*Mark 16: 1-4*

*“Saturday evening, when the Sabbath ended, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome went out and purchased burial spices so they could anoint Jesus’ body. Very early on Sunday morning, just at sunrise, they went to the tomb. On the way they were asking each other, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?” But as they arrived, they looked up and saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled aside.”*

Dear sisters and brothers, grace and peace to you from Jerusalem, the city of the risen Jesus Christ.

When I wrote my Easter message last year, I could not have imagined that this year our people would be facing another Holy Week and Easter season amid a brutal and devastating war. After 18 months of violence and destruction, the situation in our land is as dark as it has ever been.

As Easter approaches, we are looking for the hope of the resurrection, but we find ourselves at the cross. In this, we see ourselves in the story of Jesus’s companions during the first Holy Week.

After the darkness of Good Friday, Mark writes in his gospel that Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices and came early on the first day of the week to anoint Jesus's body. But as they made their way to his resting place, Mark tells us the women were worried. They asked each other, “Who will roll the stone away for us from the entrance of the tomb?” The stone door to the burial site was enormous, far too heavy for them to move alone.

We are facing many such stones in our life today. As Palestinians, we face the stones of military occupation, forced displacement, and the inability to move freely.





As Palestinian Christians, we face the stones of discrimination, erasure, and, as many of our brothers and sisters leave this land, the risk of extinction as a community.

These stones seem unmovable, like the stone at the entrance of the tomb must have seemed to the first witnesses of the resurrection, Palestinian women. Like these women, we fear that Jesus is behind these stones, and we will not have the strength to reach him.

But when the women reached the tomb that Sunday morning, they were shocked to find that the stone had already been rolled away. Jesus Christ, who conquered death and the grave, had already moved the stone.

When we feel we lack the strength to move the stones that burden us, those that separate us from God, the wonder we experience is that Christ of the Resurrection has already moved them. Even when we do not see him, God is acting in our time.

The stones in our lives are not only external. We each have a stone in our hearts that separates us from one another, and from God. We have not loved God with our whole hearts, and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. But we know that through prayer and through our work to understand and love one another, these stones can also be moved. We can draw closer to God and closer to each other. Through his unconditional grace and love, Jesus rolls away these stones.

Though for another year we will not celebrate as usual, we will uplift the joy and the mystery of Easter: Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again. We will pray for the day that the stone will be rolled away, and we will bear witness to the resurrection. Until then, we continue to proclaim the truth of the Risen Christ. May his peace be with you, and may you have a blessed Easter. Amen.

Bishop Dr. Sani Ibrahim Azar

Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land