

# September 2017

## News from Jerusalem

Rev. Carrie Ballenger Smith, ELCA Missionary



*PHOTO: Some of the wonderful kids of Redeemer Church, Jerusalem*

مرحبا

**Marhaba (hello!) from Jerusalem!**

I hope this newsletter finds you all healthy and happy, wherever you are in the world. Many thanks to you all for your friendship, your prayers, and your support! I hope you will take time to read and share this latest news from my ministry as an ELCA Missionary in Jerusalem, where I am starting my fourth year serving as Pastor of the English-Speaking Congregation at Redeemer Church, and Assistant to Bishop Munib Younan (Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.)

## **PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATION**

In a typical congregation, a pastor might feel a sense of relief when starting a fourth year on the job. Year four means you've preached the entire 3-year lectionary cycle! Year four means you've experienced three Christmases and three Easters, and have a pretty good sense of the culture of the congregation (and perhaps have made all the worst mistakes already!) In year four, maybe you can relax!

Well—at Redeemer Church in Jerusalem, things are a bit different. Our congregation members are moving in and out constantly. I would estimate we have about a 60% turnover each year (maybe more). This summer, it happened that a large number of our most active members and families were transferred to new positions in new countries, all at the same time. This is one of the hardest things about being a missionary pastor. I'm so grateful to get to know these folks from all over the world, to be the one to provide pastoral care and a sense of community while they are in Jerusalem—and I am incredibly sad when they leave.

Thankfully, as I've seen this pattern play out for three years now, I know new members will be arriving soon. As many consulate and NGO jobs begin in August and September, I look forward to welcoming many new church visitors this month. I'm praying extra hard for one of them to have musical skills! 😊

This fall, the Redeemer English-speaking congregation will continue to meet monthly at a bar/restaurant for our version of "Theology on Tap", which we have been calling "Holy Spirits." This gathering has been very popular and has brought folks from other churches and even from outside the church. I'll also be leading a study starting in mid-September on the book "[The Cross in Contexts: Suffering and Redemption in Palestine](#)" by my Bethlehem colleague Rev. Mitri Raheb. If your church is interested in learning and hearing more from a Palestinian Christian, this might be a good choice for your own book group!

Other fall activities include the beginning of Sunday School, participating in the olive harvest on the LWF property, and the Advent Bazaar at the church. It will be a busy season!

## **ASSISTANT TO THE BISHOP**

Bishop Younan has been incredibly busy with travel and speaking engagements in the last few months, which means we in the church office have also been very busy! The first big event of late spring/early summer was the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Namibia. Bishop Younan gave his final address as President of the LWF while there, and received recognition of his service.

In July, Bishop Younan was awarded a very prestigious peace prize from the [Niwano Foundation](#) for his nonviolent, faith-based approach to peace in the Holy Land. He traveled to Japan with his wife, Suad, and our colleague Ben Gray to receive this award. We are so proud to be here with Bishop Younan, walking in accompaniment with someone who is known worldwide for his bold words and work towards peace, justice, and reconciliation!



In the next few months in the ELCJHL office, our work will be focused on preparing for several exciting events: First, we are all preparing for January 2018, when Bishop Younan will hand over his role as bishop to Rev. Ibrahim Azar. Rev. Azar (known as “Barhoum”) was elected bishop by the ELCJHL church council in January. This is a huge transition for the office and for all the congregations, as Bishop Younan has been in office for 20 years. Please hold us in prayer during this time!

We are also making preparations for the consecration of our ELCA colleague, Adrainne Gray, as an ordained deacon. We are thrilled that this will take place here in Jerusalem, in the Arabic-speaking congregation at Redeemer! Please pray also for Adrainne and her family!

Finally, along with Lutheran churches across the world, we will be preparing to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation on 31 October. We always hold a special service on this day at Redeemer, which is attended by our Catholic and Orthodox sisters and brothers. This year will be even more festive!

## AL-AQSA CRISIS

Summer in Jerusalem was very stressful. We experienced about a month of violence, religious and political turmoil, and the closure of the Old City in what was called by the media the “Al Aqsa Crisis.” During this time, it was difficult for our church members to attend to worship. Members of the English-speaking congregation were forbidden by their employers from entering the Old City, for nearly 3 weeks. Members of the Arabic-speaking congregation were turned away from certain gates to the Old City and were harassed simply because they were Palestinian.

Although this was a terrible time for everyone in Jerusalem, one beautiful moment happened on the day that Al Aqsa was reopened for prayer. Members of the Palestinian Christian community showed up to re-enter the Aqsa Compound with Muslim leaders. This group of Christians included ELCJHL pastor Mitri Raheb, along with many of our other local partners. It was a beautiful sign of interfaith support



and friendship. *(In this photo, you see a Muslim community leader embracing Orthodox Priest Atallah Hanna, as the group of Christian leaders enters the mosque compound in solidarity with their Muslim neighbors. Pastor Raheb is in the middle, wearing the clergy collar.)*

Thankfully, the crisis ended after some successful nonviolent protests by Palestinians and careful negotiations between regional leaders. Things are calm now, if not exactly “normal” (there really is no “normal” in Jerusalem!) If you want to know more about the situation and how it played out, please check out this article written by my spouse, the Rev. Dr. Robert Smith, which was published in Political Theology Today:

[“When Religion Defeated the State”](#)





## FAMILY NEWS

The big news in the Smith family is that Caleb is now in Berlin, Germany, where he is studying at [Bard College Berlin!](#) We are all very excited for this opportunity. The school is quite small (260 students) and the students come from 60 different countries. We love the international nature of the school, and its philosophy of education. Bard Berlin provides full scholarships to Syrian refugees—in fact, Caleb’s roommate during the first 3 weeks orientation is from Syria! Caleb is studying Economics, Politics, and Social Thought. He’ll come “home” to Jerusalem for a visit in early November.

Zion begins his 11<sup>th</sup> grade year at the [Anglican International School Jerusalem](#) next week. He starts the rigorous IB program this year (International Baccalaureate Diploma) which will mean a lot more studying. He is excited to start Physics, as he hopes to study Astrophysics in college. He is not as excited about starting French! (Photo on the right is from the spring Shakespeare production at school – Zion played Romeo!)



## KEEP IN TOUCH!

These quarterly newsletters are a way to give my sponsors more in-depth updates about my ministry here in Jerusalem. However, you are also welcome to follow me on social media for daily updates!

Please keep in mind that some posts are silly ([#catsofjerusalem](#)) and some will reflect my own personal political views, and may not reflect the official positions of the ELCA or the ELCJHL. If I do not know you “in real life”, you may want to send me a personal message when friending me, so I know who you are!

You can find me on Instagram as doulapastor

On Twitter as doula\_pastor

On Facebook as Carrie Ballenger Smith

My sermon blog is

<http://knitpurlpraypreach.blogspot.com>

(subscribe to receive emails when the blog is updated)

We love mail! It takes a while to get here, but you can send things to us at:

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**Via ISRAEL**

**Of course, the VERY BEST WAY to support me is to give to ELCA Global Mission! I couldn't do what I do without your help!**

To give to ELCA Global Mission online in my name, go to:

<https://community.elca.org/jordanholyland> and be sure to choose "Carrie Smith" in the drop-down box.

**GOD BLESS YOU ALL! Thank you for your support!**

**Carrie, Robert, Caleb and Zion Smith**

