



THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION

A COMMUNION OF CHURCHES – EINE KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT – UNA COMUNIÓN DE IGLESIAS – UNE COMMUNION D'ÉGLISES
LUTHERISCHER WELTBUND – FEDERACIÓN LUTERANA MUNDIAL – FÉDÉRATION LUTHÉRIENNE MONDIALE

A Christmas greeting from the LWF President in December 2012



Children holding hands in the Za'atri refugee camp. The LWF is present in Jordan supporting Syrian refugees with winter clothing, winterization of tents, prefabricated container houses and psychosocial support. © Magnus Aronson

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Christmas greetings to you in the seven regions of the LWF from Jerusalem, the city of our Lord's death and resurrection. Although long known as the city of peace, Jerusalem has been afflicted with centuries of conflict. Today, the people of Jerusalem join in the laments of too many other places torn by strife.

The hope of Christmas is the same now as it was over two thousand years ago: that God was in Christ reconciling the world to God's own self. Reconciliation was present in that



humble cave in Bethlehem, and reconciliation is God's message and gift to us today. As Isaiah writes,

*For you have been a refuge to the poor,
a refuge to the needy in their distress,
a shelter from the rainstorm
and a shade from the heat. (Isaiah 25:4 NRSV)*

As a global communion, we know well the human costs of disasters, conflicts, and wars. One of the reasons for the founding of The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1947 was to respond to the needs of refugees in Europe after the Second World War. Among our many forms of shared ministry, we have retained a focus on accompanying refugees.

In this Christmas season, our hearts are again drawn to the experience of Mary and Joseph who "laid Jesus in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7) and then, under threat of persecution, were forced to flee by night into Egypt (Matthew 2).

We can see the faces of the Holy Family today in refugee families forced to flee from Syria into the Za'atri refugee camp in Jordan, in Somali refugee families in the Dadaab complex in northeastern Kenya, and in other refugees throughout the world. In Europe today, we see the Holy Family in the experiences of Roma communities. An ancient nomadic culture, Roma are still exposed to marginalization simply because they do not conform to dominant culture.

Many refugees are uprooted with little hope for a solution. I am one of them, a Palestinian who carries a refugee card. I know what it means to be rejected, neglected and stateless. My heart breaks for every refugee, for every family forced from their home.

In this Christmas season, we know that Christ finds his manger in every person who seeks asylum, in each of the nearly 44 million refugees and internally displaced people throughout the world. Forced to escape Herod's persecution, Christ experienced abuses of power and the effects of armed struggle.

The child of the manger continues to understand the plight of every refugee wherever they are. The duty of the church is to be a safe haven for all refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. To them we say, "Do not be afraid. A Savior is born to you and the whole world." They must find a place in our inn.

We in the Lutheran communion continue to commit ourselves to accompanying God's people, especially those who are marginalized and displaced. Our call is to provide refuge from violence and poverty, shelter in the storms, and shade from the heat. Today, the LWF is directly serving nearly 1.5 million refugees throughout the world. That means that each of our 143 member churches is responding to the needs of 10,500 refugees. This generous spirit reflects the strength of our communion working together to respond to God's call to welcome the stranger.

We do this and much more in response to the mothering love we have received from the God revealed in the humility of the manger and the suffering of the cross. This is the God we recognize in the stranger and the outcast, the God who has promised to never leave us or forsake us, the God who is Emmanuel, God with us. We accompany one another just as God, in Christ, accompanies us.

As Christ is our peace, incarnated in Bethlehem, we ask our member churches to pray for peace based on justice and reconciliation based on forgiveness for every area where strife,

conflict, oppression or war exists, so every refugee can be empowered with justice. Especially today, I ask for your prayers for peace in the Middle East. With Psalm 122, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

As the star shines over Bethlehem, it is my prayer that you will again be drawn to the manger and there meet Christ so he may find a place in our manger this Christmas.

Merry Christmas! Feliz Navidad! Joyeux Noël! Fröhliche Weihnachten!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. A. Younan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bishop Dr Munib A. Younan
President, The Lutheran World Federation
Bishop, The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

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