



AUGUSTA VICTORIA HOSPITAL (AVH)

Our synod has long been a supporter of AVH and its extended ministries. We have placed much trust in this fine institution. Our trust and support are both merited.

AVH remains open to all and particularly the main hope for Palestinians with health issues. As we walked the halls and grounds we saw countless examples of medical ministries that bring great hope to those who are suffering. (For a full review of AVH's ministries go to www.avh.org)

This ministry has long been a proper point of advocacy for Lutherans around the world. Though the Israeli government has reached an agreement on the tax exempt issue that has been a threat for some time, AVH 's worries are not over.

~AVH occupies a beautiful and strategic chunk of land atop the Mount of Olives. Those in power will always be tempted to seize this land.

~'The Wall' as it currently is structured on Palestinian soil, makes it hard for Palestinians to get to the hospital.

~Financial support from partners around the world remains necessary.

~The tax exempt resolution is great for now but must be watched closely.

~For some reason, the Israeli government views this ministry with skeptical eyes.

~Advanced technologies are needed as this is really the only hospital for Palestinians.

If you want to do something today that truly matters, make a contribution to the ministries of AVH. Go to their website and get acquainted with their olive oil project. (Similar to the fair trade coffee/chocolate project.) Study their work and advocate for its on-going presence and its purpose.



The view from the Mount of Olives is gorgeous. To stand over the city as Jesus did twenty centuries ago tugged at my heart and soul. Sadly, the city beneath the beautiful view remains divided and strife-ridden. It would be uglier still if the ministry of AVH was interrupted by one more layer of human pride and sin.

THE ELCJHL

I must admit to you that I was surprised by the vitality of our partners in the ELCJHL.

Though their numbers are small and dwindling, Lutheran Christians are known among Palestinians for their humanitarian zeal. Their ministries are open to Christians and Muslims alike.

~ELCJHL schools are strong and offer hope for the next generation.

~Programs and ministries for training and support are strong.

~Bishop Younan is a tireless advocate for a "just" peace between nations.

~Mitri Raheb and the ELCJHL pastors are vibrant partners in the Gospel.

~Social ministries are making a difference in local communities.

~Congregations have revived around ministries of service to the 'other.'

The schools of the ELCJHL are worthy of your immediate support and advocacy. (You can review their ministries at www.elcjh.org) Here's why...

- ~Young girls are offered the same dignity as the boys.
- ~The ELCJHL schools are the best Palestinian society can offer.
- ~The schools offer financial support for families.
- ~All are welcome.
- ~The graduation rate from the twelve year program is amazing.
(High 90+% 's)
- ~The support for further education and career training is excellent.
- ~The schools are 'safe havens' in a difficult world.
- ~The sites of the schools are beautiful and offer easy access.
- ~The ministries are managed very well.

Bishop Younan is a 'player' in this troubled society. He represents a crucial ray of hope in the midst of dark and trying times. His message is tirelessly aimed at a fair and peaceful existence for Palestinians and Israelis.

THE ANSWER?

As I have mentioned, this one visit does not make me an expert. In fact, for every answer I now have 10-20 more questions. However, two men who visited with us for an entire evening may be close.

Their names are Mazan and Rami. Mazan, a Palestinian, saw his father killed by Israeli forces. Rami, an Israeli, had a fourteen year-old daughter killed by a suicide bomber. Each man has ample reason to hate and to continue to hate. Each man refuses.

"We are here because the hate must stop. We come together because our only hope is to travel together to find the peace we are looking for." (This was literally true. Rami had gone through two check-points on his scooter to get Mazan. Without Rami's presence Mazan would not be allowed to travel into Jerusalem.)

"It is time for this to stop. We must learn to want our future more than our past. We must stop comparing our wounds to see which one of us is hurt the most. We must share our pain-not compare our pain. We must focus on our children-not our ancestors. It is a time to shake hands-not fists! We must listen to each other and find a way to make it work for us all."

For me, and many, this was the high-point of the trip. We could visualize the solution if but for a fleeting moment. Here was an Israeli. Here was a Palestinian. Both had reasons aplenty to repeat the cycle of hate and violence. Both have decided it must stop.

As we huddled around them in prayer, few eyes were dry. As we sent them on their way, few hearts were left untouched. Rare and precious 'glimpses of God's design' do have the power crash through the walls of human sin.



CONCLUSION

It will take months for me to unpack the many emotions and experiences of this journey. You have the opportunity to read many accounts of this trip and I heartily encourage you to do so.

My expressions are my opinions and my feelings. If the words here cause concern or create questions I'd be glad to speak with you privately or to a gathered group. I'd love to visit congregations and talk about this trip during 'Adult Forums.'

For now, even though the situation looks bleak in the Holy Land, dare to work for peace.

- ~Forgive the one who has done you wrong.
- ~Open your life to one who is lonely and struggling.
- ~Feed the one who is hungry.
- ~Clothe the one who is naked.
- ~Visit the one who is in prison.
- ~Offer a drink to the one who is thirsty.
- ~Be the one who is more informed about justice issues in the world.
- ~Be the one who curbs harmful zealotry into faith-filled service.
- ~Be the one who models compassion.
- ~Be the one who is patient when tempers flare.
- ~Be the one who challenges oppression.
- ~Be the one who refuses to give in to bitterness and gossip.
- ~Be the one who is forgiven and freed from sin.
- ~Be the one who was baptized for this time and this moment.
- ~Be the one who dares to be the change the world needs right here-right now.
- ~Be the one who as a gifted child of God sows at least one seed of hope and peace in every day.

“Surely God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid,
For the Lord my God is my strength and my might.
God has become my salvation.”
(Isaiah 12:2)

Yours In Christ's Eternal Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bishop James A. Justman". The signature is stylized and includes a small cross-like symbol at the end.

Bishop James A. Justman

