

Middle East Network Newsletter

December 11, 2009

Israeli High Court Decides Against Bethlehem University Student

Bethlehem University student Berlanty Azzam will not be allowed to complete her college degree but instead must remain in Gaza according to a decision handed down by the Israeli High Court on December 9. Azzam was two months short of completing her degree when she was forcibly deported to Gaza by the Israeli military who accused her of being in the West Bank illegally. The Israeli human rights organization, Gisha, which has been pursuing the case, notes that the military “makes no claim that she poses any security threat.” Many advocates worked on behalf of Azzam, including ELCA Bishop Bruce Burnside, chair of the Conference Committee on Middle East Issues, who wrote in a letter to the U.S. Consul General in Jerusalem, “it is with a sense of urgency that I write to ask you to do whatever you can to see that Ms. Azzam is allowed to return to Bethlehem University to complete her studies...Clearly it is in her interest, and the interest of a peaceful future, to allow students to complete their higher education and to go on to become capable and knowledgeable members of their communities.” [Churches for Middle East Peace](#) also advocated for Azzam.

In a December 9 update relaying the news of the Israeli High Court’s decision, Brother Jack Curran of Bethlehem University writes that while he had previously talked about “justice delayed,” he now sums up the outcome with the words, “justice as an elusive reality.” Reporting on his conversation with Berlanty he writes, “somehow – by the grace of God – she was still positive and strong – ever hopeful that ‘maybe at least they will give me permission to go for Christmas. – and please, Brother, let everyone who supported me know that I really appreciate all of their help.’” For next steps, Brother Jack suggests a pause, saying, “For now, we want to take a moment to reflect and consider what to do and how to move forward.” The full press release from Gisha giving details and background can be read at [Gisha](#).

3rd Annual Bethlehem Prayer Service December 19

The 3rd Annual Bethlehem Prayer Service will take place Saturday, December 19, 2009 at 10:00 AM Eastern Time/ 5:00 PM Bethlehem Time. This joint simulcast service will bring together worshipers at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., with those at the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem, Palestine.

Participants in Washington include the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church; the Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, Episcopal bishop of Washington; the Rt. Rev. Richard H. Graham, bishop of the ELCA Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod; the Very Rev. Samuel T. Lloyd III, dean of the Cathedral; and the Rev. Canon Stephen Huber, Cathedral vicar.

In Bethlehem, participants include the Rt. Rev. Suheil Dawani, bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Jerusalem; the Rt. Rev. Munib Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land; and the Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb from Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem.

The service will be broadcast live at [National Cathedral Web site](#) - plan now to join in person or on-line. For more information, go to [Bright Stars Bethlehem](#).

Send Prayers for Bethlehem during Advent and Christmas

From the World Council of Churches:

Since December 2000, a new Christmas tradition has been taking shape: sending peace messages to people in Bethlehem. Once again, individuals, communities, churches and congregations, organisations and partners from across the world are invited to e-mail Advent and Christmas wishes and prayers for justice and peace to Bethlehem. This year, the project is being carried out in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF).

Please e-mail your Christmas messages and prayers for peace before the 25th of December 2008 (Western Christmas) and/or the 7th of January 2009 (Eastern Christmas). Messages can be e-mailed to the Arab Educational Institute at the following address: aei@p-ol.com. For more information, [click here](#).

Nine Synod Bishops Travel to Israel and Palestine

Nine ELCA bishops traveled to Israel and the West Bank November 28 - December 8 as part of a "Bishops' Academy II" trip planned for those who were unable to participate in the first Bishops' Academy trip to the region in January of this year. The trips are an important part of the church's commitment to implement the "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine," adopted by the ELCA in 2005. The itinerary for the Nov.-Dec. journey included a tour of a Palestinian refugee camp, worship in a synagogue, meetings with Israelis and Palestinians, and visits to ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the Lutheran World Federation. [Click here](#) for the ELCA news release on the trip.

National Interreligious Leadership Initiative travel to Jordan, Israel and Palestine

The National Interreligious Leadership Initiative, of which Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson is a member, will have a delegation visiting Jordan, Israel and Palestine from December 17-23. Bishop Margaret Payne of the New England Synod will participate on behalf of Bishop Hanson in the delegation that includes nine other Christian leaders, as well as three Jewish and four Muslim leaders. They plan to meet with religious and political leaders in all three locations, as well as U.S. officials, and pay a visit to the Augusta Victoria Hospital.

Economic Measures in Support of Justice in the Holy Land

In 2007 at the Churchwide Assembly the ELCA passed a resolution to:

Call upon the ELCA to underscore the call for economic initiative by this church and its members in the "Peace Not Walls" Campaign. Such initiatives in consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land could include:

- *Purchasing products from Palestinian providers and*
- *Exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements. Also to be explored is the entire investment activity by this church. Examination of investments would exclude the option of divestiture.*

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program of ELCA has been busy working through this directive with the following updates:

- A guideline for developing a purchasing policy with a specific section on the Middle East has been developed and can be found [here](#).
- CSR has been an active participant in a newly formed group of partners working on Middle East issues. The group, called the Ecumenical Action Group for a Just Peace in Israel-Palestine, is comprised of several full communion partners of the ELCA as well as other Protestant denominations and Catholic religious orders. All have partners on the ground in the Holy Land.
- The Ecumenical Action Group has gathered research around the presence of corporations in Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and those involved in profiting from the occupation and has gained insights from the work of our ecumenical partners in Europe.
- Members of the Ecumenical Action Group filed resolutions asking for:
 - A report on a company's human rights policy in areas of conflict
 - A new human rights policy
 - A foreign military sales program policy and
 - A report, at reasonable cost and omitting proprietary and classified information, of foreign sales of military and weapons-related products and services
- ELCA joins with these ecumenical partners at the dialogue table with corporations talking about their presence on the settlements and how they participate in the occupation. Often discussions center on diversity of their work force. In this situation ELCA is blessed to have the stories from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land's (ELCJHL) schools and their training programs and the abundance of well trained potential employees. At other times the discussion centers on the understanding of the corporation of the facts on the ground. ELCA again is able to describe the Christian presence and our work there with medical facilities including Augusta Victoria Hospital as well as the schools.
- This group has also followed the work of many of the peace groups in the Holy Land. We have been watching the work of "[Who Profits](#)" an on-going grassroots investigation effort by activists in [The Coalition of Women for Peace](#), a leading Israeli feminist peace organization. In addition, this year we have

noted the [Stolen Beauty](#) campaign focusing on Ahava products (beauty products from the Dead Sea laboratories).

- This coming year a trip for this Ecumenical Action Group is planned to meet several corporations on the ground in the Holy Land to exchange views about the situation.
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East Jerusalem Update

East Jerusalem has been a particularly volatile area in recent months due to house demolitions, home evictions, the expansion of Jewish settlements and residency revocations for Palestinians. See the [November update from Ir Amin](#), an Israeli non-profit organization which works for a shared Jerusalem. Read about residency revocations in the article, [“Israel stripped thousands of Jerusalem Arabs of residency in 2008.”](#) by Nir Hasson.

Walk the Green Line

Invitation from the Israel-Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI):

We are beginning to get people to sign up for [Walk the Green Line](#)

May 24-28, 2010

Visit the web site and make a decision to participate in this amazing experience. You can support IPCRI, make a political statement and see the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and chances for peace with your own eyes.

New Peace Not Walls resources online

[Advent meditations and new prayers and litanies](#)

[Summary of Peace Not Wall implementation personnel and partners](#)

[Holy Land Youth Mission application, flier, poster, and fundraising ideas](#)

The following new educational resources at the updated [Peace Not Walls Resource Web page](#)

[Working for Peace](#), a new two-sided color flier describing ways your congregation can engage in the Holy Land

User guides that suggest content and format for such educational sessions as a [three-part adult forum, a single youth forum, a single forum on theological issues](#)

[Downloadable fliers from the ELCJHL](#)



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