Message from Bishop Suheil S. Dawani

Alleluia! Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Salaam and warm greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from here in Jerusalem to all of our friends and partners, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

The great celebration of Easter will soon be upon us. The Easter acclamation noted above will soon be said or sung with enthusiasm among Christians all over the world. The world-wide body of Christ will join in offering our alleluias of thanksgiving, praise and celebration for our Lord’s victory over sin and death. Christ is risen. Alleluia!

These words proclaiming Christ's resurrection are central to our faith in God's overwhelming love for us. Each Easter celebration, with hearts and souls full of hope for the future, supports each Christian in the faith that God's goodness is more powerful than the greatest evil. Easter is our time to celebrate the truth of the power of God to change our hearts from despair to hope, from sorrow to joy and from death to life.

To be risen to new life is essential to our celebration of Easter. We, in our lives today, do not escape Good Friday's day of suffering any more than our Lord did. We Christians are a people who know suffering is part of life, yet we are not defined by our suffering. We are defined by our love. We are a people who know struggle and hardship, yet we are not defined by such things. We are defined by our compassion. We are a people who face death, yet we are not afraid. We are defined by our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ who died, yes indeed . . . and is risen. We die from an old life with him in order that we may be risen to new life with him. Alleluia!

In a time when the world economy is in such turmoil, when violence continues to erupt along ethnic and racial divisions, when peace seems so distant, Easter assures us of a future. The power of Christ's victory over death empowers us to choose life over death. In choosing life we find new possibilities unfolding before us.

Is it possible that the Christian community in the Land of the Holy One will be strengthened in its witness for peace and reconciliation? Is it possible that politicians and those who shape public opinion will lay their agendas aside and use their God-given gifts and talents to work for peace with justice for all people? Is it possible that the lion and lamb will rest together without fear of one another? Is it possible a world economy may be created in which poverty and the destructive exploitation of God's creation is ended? Is it possible that someone might love us all so much that he would die for us, even die on a cross? Is it possible that God's power of love overcame death once and for all for you and for all who believe?

Easter is the time to celebrate all that is possible with God, for with God all things are possible. Alleluia. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia! Happy Easter!
The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem has long been involved in medical ministry and is actively working to enhance its comprehensive network of health care, family support and critical medical services for people in need, particularly in the challenging regions in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. With four major medical facilities in operation, the diocese is dedicated to expanding its much needed services, and creating medical and health care jobs for Palestinian Christians.

“We are exceedingly grateful for the donations that have come to the diocese to support our work at Ali Arab hospital in Gaza,” said Bishop Suheil Dawani. “It also is important to remember that we have three other facilities that each perform their own unique mission to help maintain the fragile health care network in this area.”

The bishop noted that the diocesan facilities provide employment opportunities, particularly for the Christian community, offering support to the dwindling Christian population and encouraging a Christian presence in the Land of the Holy One.

In the past year, with the help of Dr. Hisham Nassar, a local surgeon and the Bishop’s Consultant for Healthcare, and Dr. Harry Gunkel, a volunteer from the Episcopal Church USA, the diocese has been able to vastly improve the delivery of medical and family support services. After lending his valuable medical expertise to the diocese for nearly a year and half, Dr. Gunkel has returned to his home in West Texas, where he occasionally assists Dr. Nassar in follow up conversations with American healthcare institutions. His leadership, advice and experience have played an integral role in updating and improving the diocese’s medical clinics and hospitals.

In this issue, we will give you overview of the four facilities in the diocesan network, and subsequent newsletters will highlight each institution individually.

Al Ahli Hospital -- Located in Gaza, Al Ahli is a Christian hospital operating under harsh conditions to alleviate the suffering of the poor. “”We want to let people feel Christianity not through preaching, but through doing,” says hospital administrator Suhaila Tarazi. Due to various difficulties in getting commercial and humanitarian assistance to Gaza, there are severe shortages in medical supplies, fuel, electricity, spare parts, and food. Electricity is available no more than three times a week and only for short periods of time. Water is in extremely short supply. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) currently supports up to 50 daily hospital beds at Al Ahli, but the hospital often serves – through both in-patient and out-patient facilities - - 3,000 patients a month. During the recent incursion into Gaza, the hospital handled more than 400 civilian casualties.
Princess Basma Center for Disabled Children – The center serves disabled children in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Located in East Jerusalem, Princess Basma Center offers ambulatory care and temporary live-in facilities where mothers of disabled children can learn about proper care-giving techniques. The Center is working with Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian institutions to better coordinate cerebral palsy research, and is leading the effort to improve the diagnosis of autism cases in the West Bank and Gaza. Most recently, the Center is providing artificial limbs and physical therapy services for children permanently maimed or wounded during the recent crisis in Gaza.

St. Luke’s Hospital -- St. Luke’s hospital is the essential symbol of Christian presence in the region of Nablus, serving more than 4,000 patients a year. Nablus is one of the most isolated cities in the West Bank, in a region of high anxiety and unemployment. St. Luke’s is preparing to provide the only advanced neurosurgery facility in the West Bank/Gaza region, and its maternity ward is considered the very best in the northern region. St. Luke’s serves as one of the largest – if not the largest – employer of Christians in Nablus, and many Christians depend on St. Luke’s to earn their living and support their extended families.

Zebabdeh Penman Clinic -- Zebabdeh is a small Christian village located near Janine in the West Bank. Behind the diocese’s St. Matthew’s church is a clinic with a family doctor, a nurse, a small lab, dental services, and a pharmacy. Most of the villages in the area around Zebabdeh do not have adequate social services, so the Penman clinic behind St. Matthew’s is an important and active symbol of the ministry of Christ.

Easter in the Diocese of Jerusalem

In the Jerusalem Diocese, we observe many of the same traditions as Anglican communities around the world. Lenten fasts, Palm Sunday processions, Easter Eve vigils, and joyous Easter morning services are just a few of many common ceremonies and rituals. Christians in the Holy Land participate in the tradition of buying new clothes for Easter, to symbolize the beginning of a new life. Easter eggs and bunnies decorate homes as families gather for the Easter feast.

Easter is a true family gathering in the Holy Land – much larger than even Christmas in the United States and is known as “Al Eid Al Ka’beer” or “The Great Feast.” During Easter, Christians in the Middle East observe an Arab tradition of visiting family and friends, in particular checking on women relatives to make sure they have everything they need.
Throughout the Holy Week, there is the Majadera (Lentils) diet, composed of special vegetarian fasting dishes. On Easter Day, the dinner is always lamb and rice, and two types of very special cakes filled with sweets or dates, one representing the Golgotha and the other representing Christ’s crown.

Diocesan Ministries News

Financial, Accounting Seminars Prepare Diocese Staff

The Diocese of Jerusalem is organizing a series of workshops to strengthen and improve accounting and financial standards across the dioceses’ many institutions. The workshops are the first of their kind, conducted for the benefit of the diocese institution staff and establishing new policies and procedures for the financial and accounting field.

Bishop Suheil Dawani stressed the importance of creating a unified financial reporting system throughout the diocese, and making sure reports and financial statements are prepared based on the same accounting bases and standards.

“These unified financial and accounting policies and procedures are based on International Accounting Standards, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles, and best practices applied by not-for-profit institutions,” said the Bishop. “The application of these policies and procedures will strengthen the Diocesan institutions’ system of internal control, and make institutions’ financial statements and reports more comparable.”

The new policies were prepared by Mr. Mirabo Shammas, the director of Internal Audit at the Diocese of Jerusalem. They were approved by the Finance Board and the Church Council, according to the bylaws of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East/Diocese of Jerusalem. The first workshop was held on March 20, 2009, and attracted directors, along with financial and accounting staff, from various diocesan institutions. The second workshop was held on April 2nd, serving diocesan institution staff from Jordan and Lebanon.
Diocese Holds First Ecumenical Women’s Meeting

The Diocese of Jerusalem held its first Ecumenical Women’s Meeting at St. George’s Cathedral on April 19, hosting about 40 women from different churches committed to enhancing the ministry of the diocese.

Shafeeqa Dawani, wife of presiding bishop Suheil Dawani, has encouraged numerous women’s regional gatherings focusing on the empowerment of women. The personal enrichment, friendships, and spiritual growth that result from these meetings are important to maintaining a vital, lively and active diocese.

“We have so many talented women in our region,” said Mrs. Dawani. “Together and individually, we have many gifts to share. Working as a team, we can make great strides in improving family life and civil society.”

Mrs. Dawani also has included women members of the diocese’s English-speaking congregation in her outreach efforts. “As women, we are all members of the same community,” she said. “Working together, we are strengthened for our mutual benefit.”

Diocesan Women Meet in Jericho

A group of 150 women – and their clergy – from Palestinian and Israeli parishes in the Diocese of Jerusalem met in Jericho in March in order to prepare for empowerment workshops and the Second Anglican Women’s Conference to be held in October.

Mrs. Suheil Dawani, wife of the Anglican Bishop, spoke of the importance of strengthening the relationship between women in the diocese and the central committee.

“As we get ready for the Second Anglican Women’s conference in October, we need to think about ways to activate and empower the role of women in our church and in civil society,” she said. “We need to strengthen our ties and relationships, because we can accomplish so much more with one, united voice.”

The program started at 10 a.m. with morning prayer, a hymn, a prayer prepared by the women, a Bible reading and a short meditation presented by Rev. Ibrahim Nairouz, the women’s consultant for the diocese. Rev. Fuad Dagher and Rev. Hosam Naoum led the women and clergy in musical hymns.
The women engaged in lively, group discussions. Each group provided important feedback and the committee promised to take their input into consideration.

Bishop Suheil, on his way back from Jordan, visited the gathering and emphasized his support for the important work of the women’s group.

“The work you are doing is of vital important to our diocese,” said the Bishop. “We need your talents, your commitment, your voice and your dedication to help us continue the strong presence of our church and face the tremendous challenges in this region.”

The Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem, a diocese of the worldwide Anglican Communion, extends over five countries, including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, within the Province of Jerusalem and the Middle East. There are 27 parishes that minister to the needs of their communities, centered on the Cathedral Church of St. George the Martyr in Jerusalem. The church supports 33 institutions, which include hospitals, clinics, kindergartens and schools, vocational training programs, as well as institutions for the deaf, the disabled and the elderly, reaching out to interfaith neighbors in mutual respect and cooperation.

Cathedral Staff:
Bishop of the Diocese of Jerusalem: The Rt Rev’d Suheil Dawani
St. George’s Cathedral Church, Arabic Speaking Congregation, Jerusalem: The Rev’d Canon Hosam Naoum
The Cathedral Church of St. George, English Speaking Congregation: The Rev’d Canon Robert Edmunds