



Southeastern Minnesota Synod

of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



February 24, 2023

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. 1 Peter 3:15

A delegation of bishops and church leaders recently experienced the Holy Land together. Halfway through our two weeks, we were asked to reflect on what we had experienced so far.

We met with and learned from Palestinians as they shared the realities of life in a promised land. We visited schools, including a university that is partnered with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (which, like the ELCA, is a member of the Lutheran World Federation—or LWF). We experienced first-hand the impact these schools are making in their communities. I was struck by the seamless relationships between Christian and Muslim students within the schools. We toured Augusta Victoria Hospital and other ministries of LWF.

We listened to stories from Palestinian men in an East Jerusalem neighborhood. (Similar to the neighborhoods we have been reading about in the news.) They told stories of internal displacement and living as refugees in their homeland since 1948. We met men who still had the keys to the front door of the homes they were forced to flee decades ago.

Holding all of these stories, my colleagues around the table reflected aloud on the resilience and hope prevalent in the schools, hospital, and communities we visited. I found myself offering this reflection to the group:

I am thinking about how hope does not negate suffering.

The whole world is broken, and there is not a place we can go where injustice can't be found. And the only thing that can bring about transformation is the gospel of Jesus Christ. If that isn't our greatest commitment... then the work will be too much.

In this Lenten season, I am pondering the ways the road is marked with suffering. And I am struck by the persistence of hope in suffering's midst.

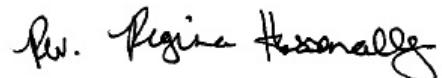
Dear friends, in this Lenten season, I want to invite us into the discipline of hope. Hope that acknowledges the deep suffering within and around us. Hope that, because of what Christ has done, refuses to let suffering be all there is.

The world is indeed broken. There is not a place we could go where injustice cannot be found. And, as the people of God, we know death will be swallowed up in life (1 Corinthians 15:54).

This Lent, I invite you to find ways to pay attention to the suffering, whether your own or your neighbors' (across the street or across the globe). And to pay attention to the persistence of hope in our broken world's midst.

We know how this Lenten journey ends. Indeed, we know how the story of God's work in the world ends. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians, it ends in death being swallowed up in victory. We will have a foretaste of that victory in the Easter celebrations to come. Until that victory is complete, amid a world rife with broken pieces, we have a hope that refuses to give way and longs to be embodied in the lives of Christians throughout the world.

In Christ,



Bishop Regina Hassanally
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