

Munib Younan, Palestinian Lutheran bishop, passes torch to Sani Ibrahim Azar

Before his consecration as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, Azar was a pastor in Jerusalem's Old City for three decades.

by [Christian Century staff](#) in the [February 28, 2018](#) issue



Munib Younan (left) hands off the role of bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land to Sani Ibrahim Azar at his consecration January 12, 2018, at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Jerusalem's Old City. Photo by Ben Gray / ELCJHL.

Sani Ibrahim Azar was consecrated bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land on January 12. Munib Younan, now bishop emeritus, had been in the role since 1998.

The bishop's duties include governing six Palestinian Lutheran churches and four schools and administering a pilgrimage center at the baptismal site on the Jordan

River. Addressing international partner churches the day after his installation, Azar said his priorities would include spiritual care for members, financial sustainability, gender justice efforts, and service to the community.

“Our pastors and laypeople will go where the people are, we will not sit by idly in our churches waiting for the people to come to us,” he said.

Azar, who was born in Lebanon in 1961, served as pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem’s Old City for 30 years. He also works with the Department of Services to Palestinian Refugees, a division of the Middle East Council of Churches.

In his sermon at his consecration, he gave thanks to his predecessors.

“From Bishop Munib Younan I have learned, and am still learning, that the basis for successful interfaith relations is to be unashamed of your faith in Jesus Christ and your identity as a Christian,” he said.

Younan, who was born in 1950 in Jerusalem to parents who were Palestinian refugees, [won the Niwano Peace Prize in July](#) for his work fostering dialogue between Christians, Jews, and Muslims since the 1990s.

He has also been active in ecumenical efforts, including the Middle East Council of Churches and the Fellowship of Middle East Evangelical Churches. He was president of the Lutheran World Federation from 2010 to 2017 and is believed to be the first person to translate the Augsburg Confession, a Lutheran document written in 1530, into Arabic.

Younan, speaking at the consecration, noted that Azar is the fourth Arab Palestinian bishop of the church in Jordan and the Holy Land, which was established in 1959 by Germans and previously led by German clergy. He also noted that bishops are elected.

“But this democratic process does not mean that when a new bishop takes office, one party or faction takes over for another,” he said, citing 1 Corinthians 3:4-8. “We are one church.”

A version of this article, which was edited on February 12, appears in the print edition under the title “People: Sani Ibrahim Azar, Munib Younan.”