

## **Middle East Council of Churches Unit on Faith & Unity and Christian Presence**

On the occasion of the centennial jubilee of the “Week of Prayer for Christian Unity” and within the framework of the 4 years plan of action, the Unit on Faith & Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East, emphasizes on going back to the ecumenical spirit to fulfill Lord’s purpose. Within its limited financial means, the Unit insists on strengthening the Christian presence through prayers, encounters and collaboration at grassroots level in communities and parishes. And in order to achieve this aim, the Unit is planning to:

**Activate prayer and ecumenical formation among the faithful of different churches** through the following:

- \* **Promoting ecumenical spirit among pastors through our program : “ecumenical parish ministers’ encounters”.**
- \* **Organizing ecumenical training within the different communities.**

The Unit started implementing these activities in Lebanon, aiming at achieving them in other countries of the Middle East region, as soon as the Unit is financially supported.

Here below are some of the achieved activities in addition to the celebrations and activities that were held by the Unit during the Week of Prayer:

### **\* In Broumana communities - Mount Lebanon**

Under the supervision of the Unit director, Fr. Gaby Hachem and upon an invitation from the Catholic and Greek Orthodox parishes and the participation of the Evangelical church (Quackers), H. E. Bishop Georges Khodr lead a Vesper service at St. Georges Orthodox Church in Broumana. On this occasion, the bishop also gave a lecture on ecumenical collaboration between different local churches. An ecumenical training project will be implemented in this area.

### **In Deir Al Wihda “Monastery of Unity” In Yarzé**

H.E. Archbishop Boulos Matar lead an ecumenical celebration at the monastery on January 18. The different parishes of this area were actively involved in the organization of this event which was followed by a friendly gathering and discussion.

- On January 20, Fr. Yousef Constantin gave a lecture followed by a discussion on “Franciscan Principles of Prayer for Christian Unity”. A good number of nuns, clergy and lay people were present.
- The Week of Prayer celebrations ended with an ecumenical service and brotherly gathering at the monastery on January 25.

**\* In st Mary Maronite Parish in Collaboration with the Orthodox Youth Movement– Sin el Fil**

- A gathering with the Orthodox youth was held at st Elias Church in Sin el Fil on Byzantine Icons. Some Icons were displaced in the community for two days.
- The Unit sponsors the ecumenical training for one solid year in this community. After the launching of this training by a lecture from Fr. Gaby Hachem, Unit director, a scientific introduction was given about the history of each church and its heritage for a period of 7 months (every last Thursday of the month). The present situation and challenges our churches are facing were discussed. In the second phase of this training, participants will get acquainted with the history of the ecumenical movement in general; its events, achievements and what remains to be achieved. An explanation of the meaning of ecumenical spirit and the importance of prayer for Christian Unity will be given and certificates of appreciation to all participants will be distributed by MECC. This is a pioneer program that deserves support and encouragement from the churches and the partners.
- A Vesper Service was held followed by a presentation about Byzantine Liturgy given by Fr. Costa Kayyal at St. Elias Church in Sin el Fil.

**\* In Ajaltoun Area – Kesrwan**

- Upon an invitation from the Youth Movement forum of the Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Syrian Orthodox in Ajaltoun and Sheile, Fr. Gaby Hachem gave a presentation on the ecumenical movement and an ecumenical celebration was held in the presence of around 100 youths. It was agreed that this ecumenical collaboration will continue, and a training program will be supported from the Unit.

**\* With a group of “New Road; Chemin neuf”**

- In collaboration with this group in the area of Ras Beirut, the Council is trying to form an ecumenical group that can meet once a month for prayer and debate. This group aims at spreading the ecumenical spirit among the faithful from different churches.

The Unit director held a one evening gathering for ecumenical formation in November 2007 for responsible groups from “Faith and Light” in Lebanon in order to define the ecumenical framework of these groups, which include handicapped, their families and friends from the different churches. He also held a one-day seminar on ecumenical movement to the priests from the Maronite Bishopric of Beirut participating in the continuous training seminars.

This is part of the Unit’s concerns and activities, through which we aim at achieving the ‘-years plan of action, and look forward to receiving financial support to enable us implement these activities in other countries of the region.

*Fr. Gaby Hachem*

*Director*

*Unit on Faith & Unity and Christian Presence in the Middle East*