



Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine

“Pray for the peace of Jerusalem . . .” (Psalm 122:6).

I. Background

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is “called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” As it participates with others in God’s mission, the ELCA is committed to “serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs . . . advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations . . . (ELCA constitutional provisions 4.01. and 4.02.c.).

Nowhere is the task of transforming these words into action more challenging than in the land that Christians, Muslims, and Jews call “holy.” The tragic, generations-long conflict between two peoples in one land involves more than Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Rather, this conflict has been shaped from its beginning by wider historical, political, and religious commitments and tensions.

A. History and Assets the ELCA

Brings to the Peace-building Task

Working in partnership with other Lutherans, ecumenical and interfaith partners, and others of good will, the ELCA is committed to building a movement that will strengthen the resolve of political leaders to find a peaceful and just solution in the Holy Land. The ELCA, its predecessor bodies, and their members have actively worked for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Through the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), it has provided humanitarian and refugee assistance. However, in this time of both increased urgency and increased opportunity in the region, the ELCA faces new challenges that move it, as a public church, to act and speak boldly, engaging in coordinated and strategic actions for the sake of both Israelis and Palestinians.

At its April 2004 meeting, the ELCA Church Council called on the Division for Church in Society and the Division for Global Mission to develop a churchwide strategy that would enable this church to translate official statements into focused and effective direct action that will contribute to peace with justice in the Middle East—specifically in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Such a strategy will build on the “assets” the ELCA brings to this task. These assets include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The ELCA is a five-million member church, with voice and influence in the United States, a nation whose national policy and foreign aid helps frame the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.
2. The ELCA and its predecessor bodies have a long history of public involvement in this work, consistently advocating for just political solutions that address the rights of both Palestinians and Israelis to security and peace with justice.
3. The ELCA is part of the world-wide Lutheran communion that advocates for and accompanies one of its members—the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)—in ministry under very difficult conditions.

4. Through the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the ELCA has over 50 years of history and experience in advocacy and humanitarian work among Palestinian refugees. This historical experience in fact began in the region as Palestinians lost their homes when the state of Israel was created. Advocacy and humanitarian work continues today in many areas, including through the work of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, a facility located in East Jerusalem that serves both Palestinians and Israelis in the West Bank.
5. The ELCA and the ELCJHL have a long-term church-to-church relationship. The ELCA’s capacity for advocacy and public witness in its U.S. context is strengthened by its accompaniment of the Palestinian church.
6. The dialectical and non-triumphalist tone of Lutheran theology and a Lutheran understanding of Scripture can contribute to the movement toward peace in the Middle East. The ELCA also has the ability to articulate this theology in the public arena, where “Christian Zionism”¹ is sometimes presented as “what Christians believe.”
7. Through the history of its interfaith involvement, the ELCA has demonstrated a commitment to and a growing experience of dialogue with Jews and a growing commitment to dialogue with Muslims. The ELCA also has spoken out consistently against all forms of both anti-Semitism and anti-Islamic prejudices.
8. The ELCA has members who are deeply committed to peace in the Middle East. Many of these members have developed independent networks and relationships that work toward this end.

B. A Sense of Urgency

The ELCA approaches this strategic plan for engagement in Israel and Palestine with a renewed sense of urgency. The situation in the region, bleak for many years but now with signs of hopeful possibility, calls for action. The sense of urgency includes the following factors:

1. The possibility of two viable, secure states living side-by-side in peace is waning due to 1) the placement and extension of the separation wall on Palestinian land; 2) the resultant loss of natural resource (e.g., water); 3) the expansion of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory; and 4) the persistence of extremist factions in carrying out attacks on civilian targets.
2. The indigenous Christian population in Israel and Palestine is shrinking, due in large part to Palestinian emigration to

¹“Christian Zionism is a predominantly American movement that believes that the modern state of Israel is the catalyst for the end of times, the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, and the return of Jesus with final judgment.” (a short definition of a complex movement, from “Christian Zionism,” Resource Sheet 21, February 2005, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

escape the economic, social, and political effects of Israeli occupation, including, most recently, the Israeli separation wall. Living in the midst of communities in crisis, the congregations, ministries, and schools of the Christian churches in Jerusalem and Palestine—including the Lutheran church—are at risk. Should the situation continue, the presence and witness of the living Church in the Holy Land could disappear completely within a few years.

3. The very existence of ministries with which Lutheran churches have been in partnership—some since 1948—is threatened. For instance, the Lutheran World Federation’s Augusta Victoria Hospital is in jeopardy due to proposed Israeli tax policy and the Israeli separation wall that prevents workers and patients from reaching the hospital.

Although these factors reveal a sense of urgency, there are simultaneously signs of positive change. These include the election of new Palestinian leadership and its renunciation of attacks against civilians and the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and key occupied cities in the West Bank. Agreements between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority could lead to a reduction in cycles of violence in suicide bombings and Israeli military reprisals. If positive changes are nurtured, they will contribute to 1) an easing of distrust among both Palestinians and Israelis about the political motives of leaders in the other community and 2) the development of a durable solution and a lasting peace in this region.

Given this window of both urgency and opportunity, concerted and strategic actions on the part of the ELCA are needed.

C. Current ELCA Policy and Practice: Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Since its formation, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has expressed its concern about the conflict between Israelis and the Palestinians through Churchwide Assembly and Church Council actions, building on the witness and commitment of its predecessor bodies. Since 1995, this work has been guided by the ELCA social statement “For Peace in God’s World,” which was adopted by the Churchwide Assembly that year. This social statement articulates the theology and principles that guide the ELCA’s peacemaking advocacy.

The strategy described in this document builds on these commitments and experience, which include the following:

1. Building Awareness and Relationships.

The ELCA has encouraged prayer and concern for a peace settlement, including participation in the ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Peace in the Middle East. It has thus encouraged ELCA members to familiarize themselves with the history of the Middle East and the current issues, to be advocates for “responsible political action,” and to listen to the voices of Palestinians and Israelis through visits to the region in coordination with local partners. In this regard, the ELCA has called for the mobilization of grass-roots activists in the U.S. for prayer and advocacy, the development and distribution of congregational resources, and engagement with public media concerning U.S. policy toward the Middle East. Work in this area, as is also the case for the other areas described below, has been undertaken in close collaboration and cooperation with other churches and

ecumenical and interfaith partners who share a similar commitment to peace in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

The ELCA has affirmed its solidarity through church-to-church accompaniment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. Accompaniment has been expressed through 1) the building of relationships (church-to-church, companion synod, congregation-to-congregation, and individual relationships); 2) visits to each other’s church; 3) the placement of ELCA mission personnel with the ELCJHL; 4) intentional use of ELCA channels and networks to amplify the voice of the ELCJHL in the U.S. context; 5) public witness and advocacy efforts; and 6) financial assistance for the church, its schools, and other ministries. The above means of accompaniment will enhance the capacities of both the ELCA and the ELCJHL to witness for peace. The ELCA’s church-to-church accompaniment of the ELCJHL takes place within the context of the Lutheran World Federation’s accompaniment of and advocacy on behalf of this member church.

Furthermore, through its substantial and long-term financial support for the Lutheran World Federation’s humanitarian work in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (the Augusta Victoria Hospital, but also the vocational schools and other ministries on the West Bank), the ELCA has also been active in providing assistance to Palestinians who lack basic services. Because the viability of the Augusta Victoria Hospital is of great importance to the Palestinian people, the ELCA has called for continued advocacy efforts related to the State of Israel’s tax case that threatens the future of the hospital and other LWF ministries.

The ELCA also has called upon its members to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in nonviolent efforts to end the occupation. There have been expressions of concern about the lack of access for Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to Jerusalem and the resulting destructive effect on the Palestinian economy as well as the ability of Palestinians, who reside in different areas of the Occupied Territories, to marry and raise families.

2. Pursuit of the Peace Process.

As illustrated in the digest of official church body actions found in Appendix A, the ELCA has called on both parties in the conflict to adhere to international law and human rights conventions, including the protection and preservation of internationally recognized human rights. It has called for continued U.S. leadership in support of the Road Map for Peace, including support for an end to terrorist attacks and all other forms of violent conflict, as well as for a viable, contiguous, independent Palestinian state and a secure Israel. The ELCA has urged U.S. leaders to seek an immediate cease-fire and stronger U.S. diplomatic pressure on all groups that wish to destabilize the region or otherwise promote violence. Other steps which have been named include 1) facilitating the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian-controlled areas; 2) bringing about an end to the occupation; 3) establishing an international presence in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; and 4) advocating for an end to the separation wall’s construction and, ultimately, for a shared Jerusalem.

3. U.S. Foreign Assistance.

To advance these objectives, the ELCA has focused attention on the use of U.S. tax dollars for foreign assistance. The ELCA has stated that such aid must be related to the

willingness of nations in the Middle East to negotiate with one another in good faith. Specifically, the ELCA has urged 1) that no U.S. funds be used for military assistance; 2) called for a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity; 3) opposed further housing loan guarantees to Israel unless and until the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories is stopped; and 4) opposed moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

The ELCA's advocacy structures in place in Washington, D.C., and at the United Nations in New York, plus an increasing use of the Internet to share information among networks, have further enabled the public witness of the ELCA and its members.

D. Process for Strategy Development

The Church Council action calling for the development of a churchwide strategy represented an acknowledgment of the work that had been done by the ELCA in this area—and recognition that the changing situation in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories requires further intensification and strategic alignment of the ongoing activities.

A staff working group on the Middle East, which includes both churchwide and synodical staff, developed a plan to gather input and advice from individuals and ELCA groups with expertise and experience, as well as from companions in the region. Among those who brought their gifts to this task, through an October 2004 meeting and a larger January 2005 consultation were: grass-roots activists; academics; people representing the ELCA in Lutheran-Jewish Dialogue; people with expertise in the study of Islam and in the building of relationships with Muslim communities; ELCA members of Palestinian background; synod staff; the vice president of the ELCA; and churchwide staff from the Division for Church in Society, the Division for Global Mission, the Commission for Multicultural Ministries, and the Department for Communication. Living out the ELCA's commitment to the accompaniment model of mission, companions from the region also were invited to participate, including Bishop Munib Younan of the ELCJHL and Guirgis Saleh, general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches, plus a representative from an ELCA full-communication partner, the United Church of Christ. Companions in the Middle East, who were not able to be present at the consultation, also made written contributions. (Funding for this consultation was provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, which also helped to facilitate the consultation.)

Having reviewed all of these perspectives, staff members of the Division for Church in Society, the Division for Global Mission, the Commission for Multicultural Ministries, and the Department for Communication, prepared the following strategy document, which was endorsed by the Church Council for submission to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

II. An ELCA Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine

A. A Time for Intensified Action

The strategy that follows reflects many of the ideas and advice shared by participants in the January 2005 ELCA

consultation, who brought a variety of perspectives to the table. However, participants expressed agreement that this is the time to intensify and focus the ELCA's response. They agreed not only that ELCA work for a just peace in the Holy Land should be "an urgent, deliberate, fully resourced priority throughout this church," but also that this intensified action should focus on an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of a viable contiguous Palestinian state that will exist peacefully alongside a secure Israeli state.

The strategy that follows is built on the conviction that the ELCA is called to intensify and sharpen its efforts, giving greater visibility to its commitments both among its members and in the public sphere. The development of a "campaign for peace with justice" in Israel and Palestine is an integral part of the wider ELCA strategy. This intensified effort is built upon the assumption that synergy among the various Lutheran and ecumenical actors, coordination of the elements of an ELCA strategy, and the widening and deepening of involvement by ELCA members will make this church more effective as it works for peace in the Middle East.

Such an initiative benefits from having a name, a clear set of goals, and sufficient resources and energy directed to it to move beyond the usual pace of work. It reflects a sense of urgency, an understanding that partners bring different gifts and experience to achieve broadly stated goals, and a commitment to intensified, coordinated efforts under the banner:

"Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land."

The following assumptions undergird the ELCA's commitment to intensify its work for peace with justice in Israel and Palestine:

1. **Clarity of Goals and Clarity of Message.** Effective ELCA action will convey a clear message in the public sphere and will provide clear and reliable information to ELCA members.
2. **Balance.** Effective ELCA action will be balanced in terms of its care for all parties in the conflict, but must address forthrightly imbalances of power as they play out in the lives of people in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.
3. **Accountability.** Effective ELCA action requires partners with differing interests, experience, or expertise to operate with accountability to each other, within the context of clearly articulated common principles.
4. **Cooperation.** Effective ELCA action seeks synergy with the Lutheran World Federation and ecumenical and interfaith partners doing similar work, thereby avoiding unnecessary duplication and magnifying the impact of actions.
5. **Relationships.** Effective ELCA action will draw energy from and be shaped by the various relationships in which the ELCA is engaged, as it seeks to accompany the living Church and its ministries in Israel and Palestine. The relationship of the ELCA with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land is a primary relationship that will shape the ELCA effort, in tandem with ministries of the Lutheran World Federation, ecumenical partners, and the work of Jews and Israelis who share the goal of peace with justice.

6. **Listening and Learning.** Effective ELCA action will be shaped by a commitment to listen and learn from companions and from both those with whom participants agree and those with whom they disagree. It will involve opportunities for church and government leaders to listen and learn from those in the region and thereby shape U.S. policy accordingly.
7. **Scripture and Lutheran Theology.** Effective ELCA action will draw its energy from the shared faith of participants and will be rooted in Scripture, be expressive of Lutheran theology in ways that are evident to ELCA members, and faithfully reflect ELCA social statements.
8. **Dialogue.** Effective ELCA action will draw insights from dialogues with Jews and with Muslims—dialogues that seek ever-deeper understanding of the other faiths.
9. **Differentiation.** Effective ELCA action will clearly differentiate between theological understandings of what God wills for humankind and judgments about or critiques of political structures and government policies. Such differentiation in no way lessens our responsibility for careful consideration of the political and humanitarian implications of our theology.
10. **Respect.** Effective ELCA action will reflect respect for differing opinions and zero tolerance for anti-Jewish and/or anti-Muslim sentiments or actions.
11. **Responsibility.** Effective ELCA action will require clarity of roles and responsibilities among actors, both within the churchwide organization and with ecumenical and interfaith partners.
12. **Prioritization and Resource Allocation.** Given limitations on resources, not everything that is good and useful can be done. Effective ELCA action presupposes identification of those activities that are most strategic, with priority given to those that leverage the greatest change or movement toward desired outcomes. It also will require additional designated funding to widen and deepen ELCA involvement in the movement to build peace with justice in Israel and Palestine.

B. Outcomes: What Are the Changes the ELCA Is Working Toward?

Outcomes in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to working in partnership with ecumenical and interfaith partners and others of good will to achieve the following outcomes in Israel and Palestine:

1. Political and Humanitarian Outcomes
 - a. Israelis and Palestinians co-existing in justice and peace, as citizens of viable and secure Israeli and Palestinian states.
 - b. A reduction in poverty and unemployment among Palestinians and access to basic services (*e.g.*, health care, education).

Mid-range outcomes:

- An end to Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.
- An end to terrorism and violence by individuals, groups, and states.²

²“Terrorism may be understood as violence or the threat of violence directed toward civilians to create a climate of fear and uncertainty. State actors use terror to maintain their grip on power. Non-state actors use terror to disrupt

- The establishment of and international support for a viable, contiguous Palestinian state.

Short-range outcomes:

- An end to further expansion of the separation wall on Palestinian territory and the related appropriation of natural resources (*e.g.*, water, farmland).
 - A cessation of all settlement activities and withdrawal from settlements on Palestinian territory to the 1967 boundaries.
- c. A negotiated, final status agreement, which includes a “shared Jerusalem” that can serve as a capital to both Palestine and Israel, with access by and full rights in the city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims.
2. Church-Related Outcomes
 - a. The continuation of the witness of indigenous Christian churches in Jerusalem and the Holy Land.
 - b. The continuation of Christian humanitarian ministries, both indigenous and international, in Israel and Palestine on behalf of the most vulnerable.

Mid-range outcomes:

- The continued vitality of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and Lutheran World Federation ministries, together with those of ecumenical partners.
- A reduction in the emigration of Palestinian Christians that is a result of the economic, social, and political impact of Israeli occupation.

Short-range outcomes:

- The re-affirmation of the long-standing comprehensive tax exemption by the State of Israel for the Lutheran World Federation's Jerusalem programs, including Augusta Victoria Hospital.
- Suspension of the planned construction of the separation wall, the path of which threatens the viability of the ELCJHL schools in the Bethlehem area and LWF health ministries and vocational schools that serve Palestinians.

Outcomes in the U.S.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to working to achieve the following outcomes at home:

1. Outcomes for the ELCA
 - a. A better understanding among ELCA leaders and members, along with their legislators, about the situation in Israel and Palestine.
 - b. Stronger advocacy by the ELCA and its members with the U.S. government that reflects the urgency of the situation in Israel and Palestine and provides a more effective voice for peace with justice in the region. This will be done, wherever possible, in partnership with ecumenical and other partners.
 - c. Amplification of the voices of companions in Israel and Palestine in the U.S. policy-making process.
 - d. A deepening of ELCA leaders’ and members’ knowledge of and commitment to their companion

a political, social, or economic order,” *Living in a Time of Terrorism*, adopted by the ELCA Church Council in April 2004, p. 4.

church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and LWF ministries in the region.

- e. Increased engagement with conservative Christians and clearer and more forceful expression of Lutheran theology in the public debate, as differentiated from Christian Zionism and other forms of religious extremism.
 - f. ELCA leaders and members being better informed about and willing to confront misunderstanding about other faiths in the U.S. and more actively confronting anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim sentiments and action.
2. Interfaith Outcomes (Interfaith Relationships)
 - a. A deepening of mutual understanding between Jews and Lutherans and Muslims and Lutherans through dialogue and shared action.
 - b. The enrichment of the ELCA strategy for engagement in the Holy Land through these relationships.
 - c. Identification of areas of common commitment (especially vis-à-vis U.S. government policy) and common action upon them that enhances the prospects for peace with justice in the Middle East.
 - d. Increased cooperation and collaboration between the ELCA and Jewish groups in the U.S.—and with groups within Israel—that seek peace with justice in Israel and Palestine.
 3. Elements of a Strategy: Action Steps to Achieve Outcomes
The churchwide campaign for peace with justice in the Middle East—“Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land”—would involve three interlocking “A”s: awareness building, accompaniment, and advocacy.

Awareness Building

1. Strategic Visits to Palestine and Israel and Follow-Up
 - a. In the spirit of accompaniment, intensify relationship-building between the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and the LWF Jerusalem programs by coordinating and encouraging visits involving ELCA members: communicators, vocational groups (e.g., farmers, doctors, etc.), companion synods, church-to-church delegations, bishops, and others.

Direct experience of people—including key Lutheran leadership—with the on-the-ground experience of the ELCJHL and LWF ministries is a key factor in building the will and ability of the Lutheran family to advocate effectively. There are Lutheran groups going to Palestine in the spirit of accompaniment; there are also many trips to the “holy sites” made by Lutherans each year. This strategy will seek to 1) increase the number of visits and encourage participation of “multipliers” within the Lutheran community; 2) prepare those who are visiting—include urging expansion of “holy site” visits to include interaction with the ELCJHL and its ministries and with the LWF Jerusalem program as “windows” into the realities of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories; and 3) have an intentional plan for follow-up, providing ways people can use their experience to

teach others and advocate.

- b. Arrange visits pairing ELCA leadership with members of Congress.
The model of Lutheran bishops traveling with a member of Congress has been an important way for the experience of companions to be known by legislators, who in turn raise the awareness of fellow members to the issues.
- c. Encouraging interfaith visits involving Christians, Muslims, and Jews to the Holy Land, in coordination with partners of other faiths.

2. Focus

Choose a few among various issues to emphasize and articulate in a churchwide effort, in partnership with grassroots networks. An example would be the separation wall, which is symptomatic of the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The visual image of the wall can help members understand the complexity of the conflict: fear for safety and the need for security; occupation and the environment of oppression; concern for human dignity; issues of land ownership political borders, and control of land and resources.

3. Resources

Resource congregational, synod, and churchwide leaders with events, study guides for congregational and campus ministry use, accompaniment programs, Web links, and speakers, and provide access to ecumenical and interfaith resources. Use existing ELCA channels (e.g., publications and press releases) to make members aware of the campaign, telling the stories that can compel action.

4. Networking

- a. Through a Web site, provide a churchwide “node” for information sharing among the various grassroots groups working on this issue and official ELCA entities.
- b. Use interlocking networks to focus on specific issues, building awareness that can lead to advocacy.
- c. Engage ELCA members through Synod Assemblies, on a multi-year cycle.
- d. Engage ELCA educational institutions and seminaries in building momentum for the campaign.

Accompaniment

1. Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, the Lutheran World Federation, and Other Companions

Building relationships, giving, prayer, and advocacy would be linked in a campaign for peace with justice in Israel and Palestine.

- a. Building Relationships

In addition to visits to the Holy Land described earlier, pastoral visits of encouragement would be arranged. Conversely, arranging strategic visits from the ELCJHL to the ELCA, especially in connection with major Lutheran meetings and networks, would build relationships, express companionship, and increase the ELCA’s capacity to do advocacy. Such visits would also present opportunities for companions in the region to speak with Members of Congress.

- b. Prayer

Reinvigorating the Prayer Vigil and encouraging regular prayer for peace in the Holy Land would be a

key part of this campaign.

c. Giving

Prayer, advocacy, and giving would be linked as ways ELCA members can help ensure that the witness of the living church in the Holy Land continues and that existing Christian ministries continue and thrive. Web and other means for inviting giving would be explored. Invitations to giving would be made for:

- ELCJHL ministries and schools;
- LWF ministries, including Augusta Victoria Hospital and vocational schools (in concert with the World Hunger Appeal); and
- The special building project on the LWF campus on the Mount of Olives that would provide housing for Christian families.

d. Other Companionship Activities

Other companionship activities would include scholarships, determined in conversation with colleges.

e. Advocacy (see below)

2. Ecumenical Accompaniment

- a. Encourage and support ecumenical partnership (*e.g.*, the Middle East Council of Churches).
- b. Provide additional support and encourage participation in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel.
- c. Encourage local ecumenical efforts to highlight the above strategies of the ELCA. Such efforts would include awareness and strategy through the respective ecumenical offices in church bodies within the North American context. Likewise, these efforts would involve cross-conversation of ecumenical offices with respective offices, units, or departments of interfaith dialogue in church bodies within the North American context.

Advocacy

The ELCA churchwide staff, consulting with concerned networks and companions in the Holy Land and acting in accord with this church's social statements and policy framework, will develop an information, training, and action initiative for church leaders and members. This advocacy initiative will inform and equip leaders and members to create grass-roots pressure for rapid change in U.S. policies and foreign aid allocations in the Holy Land. It will express the ELCA's opposition to terrorism and violence against civilian populations by individuals, groups, or states. It also will seek to ensure that basic human rights are respected and encourage the U.S. to confront any entity that blocks the delivery of humanitarian services to Palestinians. Churchwide staff and ELCA activists will, through existing and new collaborations with ecumenical, interfaith, and international partners, coordinate and thus make more effective their advocacy efforts.

1. Intensifying ELCA Efforts to Support Advocacy by Members

- a. Clearly identify advocacy objectives.
- b. Build and provide input to the E-Advocacy network established by the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs.

2. Ecumenical and Interfaith Partnerships

Consistent with ELCA policy, build support for

ecumenical partnerships that seek changes in U.S. policy and would contribute to peace with justice in Israel and Palestine, including:

- a. National Inter-religious Leadership Initiative;
- b. Churches for Middle East Peace;
- c. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA;
- d. Washington offices of ecumenical and interfaith partners; and
- e. Advocacy Days.

3. Focused Advocacy

Advocacy would be focused on issues emerging out of the ELCA's accompaniment with the ELCJHL and LWF, which illustrate the larger issues of justice and peace in the region. Two issues requiring immediate attention are:

a. LWF's Augusta Victoria Hospital

Tell the story of the Lutheran World Federation's Augusta Victoria Hospital (AVH). The commitment of the ELCA, its predecessor church bodies, and the wider LWF to AVH, which serves Palestinians who would otherwise lack basic health care, is both historical and immediate. Convey the threats to the future of the hospital posed by the separation wall and the proposed change in Israeli tax policy. Encourage a special focus by ELCA hospitals and health care facilities. Focus on advocacy with members of Congress and indirect advocacy with U.S.-based Jewish groups with strong connections to Israel.

b. Peace, Not Walls—From Bethlehem to Jerusalem

Focus on the impact of the separation wall being built on Palestinian land on communities in and around Bethlehem and the imminent threat it poses to the future of the Church in the Holy Land, including ELCJHL schools in the Bethlehem area and LWF vocational training and health facilities in Jerusalem and the region.

4. Stewarding Economic Resources

The ELCA in all its expressions, institutions, and partner agencies, and its members will seek to expend God-given economic resources in ways that support the quest for a just peace in the Holy Land. Working within the framework of ELCA policy, this strategy will explore economic initiatives that may include:

- a. Supporting generously ministries in the Holy Land (see above).
- b. Promoting positive economic development in the region to help those most in need (*e.g.*, support for Palestinian businesses, including the establishment of micro-loans).
- c. Insisting that U.S. tax dollars for foreign aid be distributed to both Palestinians and Israelis with equity and on condition that aid be used only for economic growth and humanitarian needs. For example, U.S. foreign aid should be made available for humanitarian projects in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, such as for the LWF program.
- e. Making consumer decisions that favor support to those in greatest need (*e.g.*, Palestinian providers as distinct from Israel settlers on Palestinian territory).
- f. Managing collective or personal investments with concern for their impact on the lives of all Holy Land

peoples who suffer from the ongoing conflict.

5. Public Media

The ELCA will intensify its use of the public media both to “tell the story,” amplifying the voices of companions in the region, and to articulate in the public arena an alternative understanding of the Christian faith than is presented by Christian Zionism.

- a. Through the ELCA communications channels and synod networks, achieve greater visibility in the public media, in particular through ELCA governance and leadership actions and visits, visits by companions, and participation in ecumenical and interfaith actions.
- b. Through ELCA communications channels and making use of E-Advocacy, equip ELCA leaders and members to engage with the media at the community level on this issue, through “op eds,” letters to the editor, interviews, and other means.
- c. Assist those returning from group trips to visit companions in the Holy Land (including companion synod trips) to engage with the public media.

Theological Reflection in an Interfaith Context

The interlocking “A”s of “Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land”—awareness building, accompaniment, and advocacy—would be undergirded by concerted action in the following areas of emphasis within the broader ELCA strategy:

1. Deepening Theological Understandings in the ELCA

- a. Addressing Religious Extremism
 - 1) In cooperation with ecumenical and full communion partners, ELCA theologians will be invited to assist this church and its members to understand better the Bible and Lutheran theology and to be able to articulate it clearly vis-à-vis expressions of religious extremism, including Christian Zionism. This could involve a long-term ELCA study process and the immediate development of resources on this issue.
 - 2) The ELCA will attempt to engage with those it understands to be theologically conservative Christians, for the purpose of building bridges and contributing to a constructive engagement about what it means to be Christian in the public sphere.
 - 3) The ELCA will better use the public media to share Lutheran theological perspectives, and thereby contribute to the changing of the public understanding of religious extremism.
- b. Theological Reflection
 - 1) Continuing ELCA-wide theological reflection on the accompaniment paradigm for mission, the land, and justice and peace-making will undergird the ELCA’s strategy for engagement in Israel and Palestine.

2. Deepening Interfaith Relationships

- a. Build bridges of understanding and mutual respect between Christians and Jews by:
 - 1) Continuing support for and visibility of the ELCA’s Lutheran-Jewish Dialogue.
 - 2) Encouraging Lutheran colleges to offer courses on

interfaith relationships and study in the Middle East.

- 3) Encouraging seminaries to offer courses on interfaith relationships and study abroad for all M.Div., M.A., and diaconal programs.
- 4) Engaging in conversation with groups like the American Jewish Committee, together with ecumenical partners, in which differences of perspective concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be addressed.
- 5) Expanding and strengthening solidarity with members and organizations within the Jewish community that share a commitment to achieving the political and humanitarian outcomes described above.
- 6) Encouraging and supporting programs of Christian-Jewish studies at Lutheran colleges and seminaries.
- b. Build bridges of understanding and mutual respect between Christians and Muslims by:
 - 1) Developing a formal Lutheran-Muslim dialogue similar to the Lutheran-Jewish dialogue.
 - 2) Encouraging workshops in congregations, synods, and national gatherings (utilizing “Meeting and Greeting Our Muslim Neighbors”).
 - 3) Encouraging Lutheran colleges to offer courses on interfaith relationships and study abroad.
 - 4) Encouraging seminaries to offer courses on interfaith relationships and study abroad for all M.Div., M.A., and diaconal programs.
 - 5) Encouraging and supporting the programs of Christian-Muslim studies at Lutheran colleges and seminaries.
- c. Join with interfaith efforts to bring the voices for peace and justice to members of churches, synagogues and mosques and encourage three-way conversations among Jews, Muslims, and Christians.

IV. Conclusion

Sometimes strategies, once completed, are placed in binders and then filed with other binders on bookshelves that line the walls of church offices. But neither inaction nor weak action is an option for the ELCA if it intends truly to accompany the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, the LWF Jerusalem program, and other partners in this time of urgent crisis and opportunity. The ELCA’s companions in the Middle East have challenged it to rise to the challenge: to move from words on paper to action, to “turn up the volume,” and to intensify its implementation of churchwide resolutions on Israel and Palestine through a strategic campaign that seeks both peace with justice for both Palestinians and Israelis and the continuation of the Christian witness in the Holy Land.

To move to that next level requires a number of renewed and reinvigorated commitments:

1. To develop the “political will” to use all of the means available to the ELCA as a church to give visibility to this commitment, in both traditional and creative new ways, including active participation by leaders throughout the

ELCA.

2. To realign churchwide staff time and resources to support this campaign, using where possible existing resources and channels to highlight this campaign.
3. To seek additional financial and human resources to enable the ELCA to move to a mode of action that acknowledges the urgency of the situation in Israel and Palestine.
4. To develop alliances with others, including networks, ecumenical and full-communion partners, interfaith organizations, and others of good will in the common task of working for peace with justice in the Middle East.

Through the development of this strategy, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recommits itself to humanitarian outreach to the most vulnerable, faithful accompaniment of the church in the Holy Land, living out its faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for all people—Jewish, Christian, and Muslim—and unflagging pursuit of peace with justice for all in the region. With the hope and the confidence that is rooted in faith, this church will continue to join ecumenical and interfaith partners to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem . . .” (Psalm 122:6).



Appendix A: ELCA Actions Related to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Background

United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 states that all parties must show “. . . respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats of acts of force” and that Israeli forces must “withdraw from territories” occupied as a result of the 1967 war.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 calls for a cease-fire, the implementation of UNSC resolution 242, and the initiation of negotiations.

On September 13, 1993, Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed a peace accord. Article I of that accord states that a permanent peace settlement will be based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

In October 1974, the Seventh General Convention of the American Lutheran Church adopted a statement on “the American Lutheran Church and the Jewish Community. According to this document, “The tragic encounter of two peoples in the Middle East places a heavy responsibility upon Lutherans to be concerned about the legitimacy of the Jewish state, the rights of the Palestinians, and the problems of refugees.” The statement continues, “Lutherans are deeply divided in their evaluation of the situation in the Middle East. . . . But there should be a consensus with respect to our obligation to appreciate, in a spirit of repentance for past misdeeds and silences, the factors which gave birth to the State of Israel and to give prayerful attention to the circumstances that bear on the search for Jewish and Arab security and dignity in the Middle East.”

Statement of Purpose, constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world. To participate in God’s mission this church shall . . . serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs . . . advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations. . . . (provisions 4.01.–4.02.c).

On February 22, 2004, the Executive Committee of The Lutheran World Federation issued a statement on the construction of the separation wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory that includes the following statements: “The LWF unreservedly condemns indiscriminate acts of violence targeting civilians. Our prayers are with the victims of all such crimes, and with their families. . . . The separation wall in Israel-Palestine is an obstacle to dialogue and mutual understanding. It is an obstacle to a just peace. It violates applicable principles of international humanitarian and human rights law” (Full text online at www.elca.org/middleeast/lwf-wall.html).

Terminology Used in

ELCA Policy Documents

- **Social statements** are social policy documents, adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, addressing significant social issues.
- **Messages** are adopted by the ELCA Church Council, are built on the social policy of the church (including social statements), draw attention to current social issues and encourage action.
- **Resolutions** are adopted by either the Churchwide Assembly or the Church Council and also constitute ELCA social policy.
- **Occupied Territories:** Golan Heights, West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. Land occupied by Israel as a result of the 1967 war—commensurate with U.N. usage and usage by ELCA partners in the region.
- **Separation Wall:** Barrier currently under construction between Israel and the Occupied Territories (Also referred to as “segregation wall or barrier,” “separation fence,” “security fence,” or “barrier”). Visit www.elca.org/middleeast/lwf-wall.html to read The Lutheran World Federation statement on the wall.
- **Accompaniment:** ELCA global mission principle understood as “walking together in a solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality.” (from “Mission Strategy for Latin America” (pp. 9–10), quoted in “Global Mission in the 21st Century: A Vision of Evangelical Faithfulness in God’s Mission” (p. 5) (www.elca.org/globalmission/policy/index.html)).
- **Green Line:** Internationally recognized border between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the 1949 Armistice Line.

ELCA Partners

- **ELCJHL:** Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (www.holyland-lutherans.org)
- **LWF:** The Lutheran World Federation (www.lutheranworld.org)
- **WCC:** World Council of Churches (www.wcc-coe.org)
- **MECC:** Middle East Council of Churches www.mec-churches.org)
- **NCCUSA:** National Council of the Church of Christ in the U.S.A. (www.nccusa.org)
- **CMEP:** Churches for Middle East Peace (USA) (www.cmep.org)
- National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (www.walktheroadtopeace.org/national_leadership.php)

Issues	ELCA Policies	Churchwide Assembly Actions	Church Council Actions	Official Letters and Statements
<p>www.elca.org/middleeast Interfaith Relations</p> <p>www.elca.org/ecumenical/interfaithrelations/index.html</p>	<p>www.elca.org/advocacy/issues/middleeast/actions.html “We reject [Martin Luther’s] violent [anti-Judaic] invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations.” “We express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people.”</p>	<p>1991: encouraged individuals and congregations “to reach out to people in the Muslim and Jewish communities in North America, in order to foster interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding so that we may build trust relationships” (CA91.6.33). 2003: encouraged continuation of “interfaith activities in the United States to promote mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect” (CA03.02.07).</p>	<p>April 2004: urged ELCA members, especially its bishops, to learn about the situation in Israel-Palestine and listen to the voices of Palestinians and Israelis through visits to the region in coordination with local partners.</p>	<p>April 18, 1994: “Declaration Of The Evangelical Lutheran Church In America To The Jewish Community” Nov. 16, 1998: “Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations” Nov. 25, 2003: Jewish, Christian, Muslim leaders express support for Road Map for Peace.</p>
Accompaniment	<p>Participate in the World Council of Churches–sponsored Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel.</p> <p>Work with ecumenical and interfaith partners to provide needed humanitarian services, especially to Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza.</p> <p>Educate ELCA members about the ongoing conflict.</p> <p>Support ELCJHL ministries, and ecumenical and interfaith efforts for peace, justice, and reconciliation.</p>	<p>1989: affirmed the ELCA’s solidarity with the ELCJHL and encouraged ELCA members to familiarize themselves with the history of the Middle East and the current issues and to be advocates for “responsible political action” (CA89.8.114). 2001: affirmed efforts to accompany Palestinians and Israelis in nonviolent efforts to end the occupation (CA01.02.09).</p>	<p>April 1989: “Message on the Israeli Palestinian Conflict”: “A peaceful settlement can only be accomplished when human rights abuses against the Palestinians are ended.” www.elca.org/socialstatements/israelpalestine/</p>	<p>May 1998: open letter to President Clinton calling for a redoubling of peace efforts.</p>
Peace, Human Rights, and International Protection	<p>Social statement “For Peace in God’s World”: We should promote respect for human rights in order to keep, make, and build international peace.</p> <p>Violent acts such as suicide bombings and military actions against civilians are not conducive to peace—the cycle of violence must end.</p> <p>An international peacekeeping force, agreed upon by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, should oversee Israeli withdrawal from Occupied Territories.</p>	<p>2003: reaffirmed commitment to accompany the ELCJHL and offer humanitarian relief and development assistance (CA03.02.07). 1989: affirmed the CC’s adoption of the “Message on the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict” and encouraged ELCA members to be advocates for “responsible political action” (CA89.8.114). 1991: encouraged ELCA members to write to their political leaders asking them “to relate U.S. foreign assistance to the willingness of those nations to negotiate with one another in good faith and to adhere to international law and human rights conventions” (CA91.6.33). 1995 adoption: ELCA social statement on peace, “For Peace in God’s World” www.elca.org/socialstatements/peace/ 2001: Affirmed efforts to mobilize grass-roots activists in the U.S. for prayer and advocacy; to develop and distribute congregational resources, and to engage the public media concerning U.S. policy toward the Middle East; requested the presiding bishop send a letter to U.N. and U.S. political leaders urging that no U.S. funds be used for military assistance and that the “human sacrifice by suicide bombings” cease (CA01.02.09).</p>	<p>April 1996: encouraged prayer and concern for a peace settlement and called on “the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to protect and preserve internationally recognized human rights” (CC96.4.12).</p>	<p>June 2001: letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell supporting U.S. efforts to bring an end to Israeli-Palestinian violence as called for in UNSC Res. 242.</p>
<p>Prayer Vigil for Peace in the Middle East www.pepm.org/PrayerVigil/PrayerVigilHome.htm</p>	<p>Begun Dec. 3, 2000, ELCA members are encouraged to pray for a just and lasting peace among all people in Israel and Palestine—Christians, Jews, and Muslims.</p>	<p>2001: encouraged ELCA members to participate in the ecumenical Prayer Vigil for Peace in the Middle East (CA01.02.09). 2003: affirmed the Prayer Vigil (CA03.04.09).</p>	<p>April 2002: Affirmed the Prayer Vigil for Peace in the Middle East (CC02.04.09).</p>	<p>June 2002: “Statement on Developments in the Middle East”—“We pledge that this vigil will continue until there is peace for all people in that part of the world.”</p>
Land for Peace and Israel’s Security	<p>Support for U.N. Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 (see above)—namely, Israel’s right to exist within secure borders, the establishment of a viable Palestinian state, and an end to the Israeli occupation.</p>	<p>1989: affirmed the Church Council “Message on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (CA89.8.114). 1993: affirmed the CC 1989 “Message on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” (CA93.8.98).</p>	<p>April 1989: “Message on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” supports self-determination and possible independence for Palestinians and security for Israel. (Affirmed by 1989 and 1993 CWA.)</p>	<p>Oct. 2001: letter to President Bush</p>

Issues	ELCA Policies	Churchwide Assembly Actions	Church Council Actions	Official Letters and Statements
<p>www.elca.org/middleeast Land for Peace and Israel's Security <i>(continued)</i></p>		<p>2001: encouraged a negotiated solution in the "hope that the Quartet's "Road Map" will lead to an end to the occupation, terrorist attacks, and all other forms of violent conflict, as well as to both a viable, contiguous, independent Palestinian state, and a secure Israel" (CA03.02.07). 1991: "to oppose further housing loan guarantees to Israel unless and until the construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied territories is stopped" (CA91.6.33).</p>	<p>April 1996: acknowledged 1993 CWA action (CC96.04.12).</p>	
<p>Israeli Settlements</p>	<p>In accordance with U.N. resolutions, the ELCA opposes the expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza as counterproductive to the peace process.</p>			<p>Oct. 2001: letter calling for "a freeze on all Israeli settlement activity." June 2001: letter to Secretary of State Colin Powell calling on the U.S. to "do what it must to bring Israel's settlement activity to an end." Oct. 2001: letter to President Bush</p>
<p>Political Advocacy www.elca.org/advocacy</p>	<p>Recognition that the U.S. can be a powerful advocate for peace in Israel and Palestine; support for Road Map; advocacy with members of Congress, Secretary of State, the President, and other government officials.</p>	<p>1991: "to relate U.S. foreign assistance to the willingness of ... nations to negotiate with one another in good faith and to adhere to international law and human rights conventions" (CA91.6.33). 2003: expressed "hope that the Quartet's 'Road Map' will lead to an end to the occupation, terrorist attacks, and all other forms of violent conflict, as well as to both a viable, contiguous, independent Palestinian state, and a secure Israel" (CA03.02.07). 2003: resolved to continue advocacy efforts related to the State of Israel's tax case against the Lutheran World Federation, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital (CA03.04.09).</p>	<p>April 2002: Approved a "Statement on Palestine"¹ (see below) and urged all ELCA members to write to "the President of the United States and Senators and Representatives, appealing to them to do all in their power to end the violence, respect human rights, and create a climate for the establishment of a just peace through the resumption of negotiations between the parties" (CC02.04.02). April 2004: Affirmed "a negotiated settlement within the context of international support as outlined in the Road Map for Peace."</p>	<p>April 4, 2002: presiding bishop called upon ELCA members to write to U.S. political leaders urging them to use their offices to seek an immediate cease-fire and establish an international presence to provide for and maintain a just and lasting peace.</p>
<p>Jerusalem</p>	<p>Jerusalem should be a shared city that is a "holy place of reconciliation for humankind" where the human and political rights of both Palestinians and Israelis, as well as the rights of the three religious communities, would be respected. Need for the international community to guarantee the "stability and permanence" of such an arrangement.</p>	<p>1993: expressed concern about lack of access for Palestinians from the Occupied Territories to Jerusalem and the resulting destructive effect on the Palestinian economy as expressed by ELCA partners in "Christians in the Holy Land" (May 1993) and "Crisis in the West Bank and Gaza" (<i>The Washington Post</i>, Aug. 10, 1993) (CA93.8.98).</p>	<p>1996: endorsed the November 14, 1994, Memorandum of Their Beatitudes, the Patriarch, and the Heads of Christian Communities in Jerusalem on "The Significance of Jerusalem for Christians" calling for a shared Jerusalem. Urged "free access to Jerusalem for all peoples at all times"(CC96.4.12).</p>	<p>1995: letter to then Secretary of State Warren Christopher opposing moving the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem; 1996 & 1997: ads in the New York Times and Roll Call calling for a shared Jerusalem; May 1998: open letter to President Clinton calling for a shared Jerusalem</p>
<p>Separation Wall</p>	<p>Construction on the separation wall should end as it undermines a credible two-state solution and, in some places, engulfs Palestinian land and resources.</p>		<p>April 2004: joined with the LWF and WCC in calling for an end to the wall's construction.</p>	

ELCA Church Council "Statement on Palestine" (approved April 6, 2002) includes the following: We call upon the leaders of the United States in America to be resolute and determined in:

- seeking an end to the violence;
- establishing a cease-fire;
- calling all parties to adhere to their international obligations in regard to humanitarian law and human rights standards;
- seeking the establishment of an international peacekeeping presence in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza;
- facilitating the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Palestinian-controlled areas;
- bringing about an end to the occupation; and
- resuming negotiations that will lead to sustained peace with justice.

NOTE that there are many statements from the predecessor church bodies and many other ELCA documents that address these issues. Only ELCA Church Council and Churchwide Assembly actions, are included in this document. Likewise, while the ELCA has issued statements about the war in Iraq, they are not included here.