



# Frequently Asked Questions

## A. General Overview

### 1. Why is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict important?

For generations, Palestinian Christians, Muslims, and Israeli Jews have suffered the fear and pain of ongoing warfare and insecurity.

Palestinian Christians and Muslims have suffered the loss of their land and dignity, disruption of their livelihood, and lack of human rights. This land is sacred to three monotheistic religions, whose adherents have the right to safe and unfettered access. On the positive side, this common cause offers opportunities for interfaith collaboration. In terms of global politics, what happens in the Holy Land can either help resolve conflict in the Middle East or expand it into even more deadly conflicts.

### 2. Why is the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) involved?

The profound injustice and suffering in the Holy Land compel us as people of faith to act for peace with justice. ELCA members in particular are called to respond because of the ELCA's longstanding connections with sisters and brothers in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). The ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have contributed to humanitarian projects that provide health and education for both Christian and Muslim Palestinians through support for such institutions as Augusta Victoria Hospital, the International Center of Bethlehem, and the schools of the ELCJHL.

### 3. What changes are Lutherans and the ELCA advocating?

First, ELCA members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the history of the Middle East and 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. Second, 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. Third, the ELCA has advocated that the use of U.S. tax dollars for foreign assistance must be related to the willingness of nations in the Middle East to negotiate with one another in good faith.

### 4. What is the ELCA's position on peace in the Middle East?

The ELCA has called for vigorous 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 areas; (2) bringing about an end to the occupation; (3) establishing an international presence in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza; (4) advocating for an



end to the separation barrier's construction on Palestinian land and, ultimately, for a shared Jerusalem; and (5) supporting diplomacy that leads to recognition for the state of Israel and normalized relations with its Arab neighbors.

A number of these calls for action were endorsed by Churchwide Assemblies and resolutions adopted by the Church Council and are included in the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine adopted by the Church Council in April 2005.

## **5. What does the ELCA say about violence and terrorism?**

The ELCA has two social policy documents that discuss these issues. The social statement, "For Peace in God's World," discusses this topic, calling us to be part of the church's community of peace. While we "recognize sin's persistent, pervasive, and subtle power," we affirm that "God continues to work through people, their communities and structures, to make earthly peace possible." In 2004, the Church Council adopted a Message on Terrorism that describes terrorism as political violence and calls on governments to respond effectively and fairly. Christians are furthermore challenged to live beyond fear in the truth of God's love in Christ Jesus, which frees us and calls us forth into the world.

## **6. Can we make a difference? Of course we can. Here are some examples:**

### **(a) as a church body**

As a church body, the ELCA has connections with companions in the Lutheran World Federation and with Jewish, Muslim, and Christian colleagues in the United States who are committed to a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Working together worldwide, we can make a difference to help

bring an end to occupation and violence. ELCA members in congregations, colleges, seminaries, and social service organizations can use their power to express their commitment to build an enduring peace for all in the region.

### **(b) as congregations**

As congregations, we can organize educational series for adults and youth as well as church-to-church exchanges with Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land and here in the United States, and with Muslim and Jewish groups seeking Middle East peace. We can sponsor trips to the region to build awareness and engage members in dialogue with Israeli Jews and Palestinian Christians and Muslims. We can encourage generous donations to the schools and ministries of Lutherans in the Holy Land. We can train members to advocate for peace, and we can establish monthly observance of the national ecumenical prayer vigil.

### **(c) as individuals**

As individual Christians called to responsible citizenship, we can educate ourselves about the historical background and current issues in this long-term conflict. We can take our concerns to our local communities, congregations, and elected officials. We can pray for wisdom and magnanimity among the political and religious leaders charged with negotiating a just end to the conflict and with establishing a viable Palestinian state as a neighbor to a secure Israel.

## **B. Biblical and theological dimensions**

### **1. How do the Bible and Lutheran theology relate to the ELCA Middle East peace campaign?**

The 1995 ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* begins, "We of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America share with the Church of Jesus Christ in all

times and places the calling to be peacemakers.” Two aspects of this calling, proclaiming “the Gospel of God’s final peace” and working for “earthly peace,” are central to our efforts to educate ourselves and others and to urge a just earthly peace for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Further, our legacy from both the Gospel and from the teaching of Martin Luther impels us to treat all people of the world as neighbors to be known, loved, and served.

The ELCA’s commitment to accompaniment with our global companions is an extension of this theological legacy. The ELCA’s companion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) moves us to be in solidarity with all the people of the region and to give voice in particular to the concerns and aspirations of Palestinian Christians, as they strive for reconciliation and independence.

## **2. How is the Lutheran approach to Israel and Palestine different from that of Christian Zionism?**

Christian Zionism is a politically mobilized strand of Christian fundamentalism committed to preserving Jewish control over all of historic Palestine to ensure the realization of Christian Zionists’ own end-times hope. In its contemporary North American forms, Christian Zionism is based on the “rapture theology.”

While even Martin Luther had an intensely apocalyptic hope, our hope is not for escape from this world; rather, our hope is that the world will be reconciled in Christ through God’s mercy and love.

The focus of Christian Zionism on the United States and its support of the State of Israel leads to intense nationalism that stands at odds with the traditional Lutheran

understanding that no political entity is uniquely blessed by God.

Christian Zionists also damage interfaith relationships when they portray Muslims as a global menace and when they treat Jews as a temporary means to their apocalyptic ends.

## **C. Partners and collaboration**

### **1. Why should ELCA members be supportive of both Israel and the Palestinians?**

The ELCA [Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine](#) calls for viable and secure Israeli and Palestinian states. A lasting peace between the two peoples will only come about with the development of mutual understanding, respect and renunciation of violence in all forms by all parties to the conflict. This requires efforts on the part of the ELCA and like-minded groups (particularly within the Israeli and Palestinian communities) to build bridges between the two communities and between the U.S. and those communities.

### **2. What is Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP)? What is the relationship between the ELCA and CMEP?**

The ELCA and its predecessor church bodies have been members of Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) from its inception in 1984.

The organization is “a Washington-based coalition of 21 national churches and agencies — Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant,” according to its Web site, [www.cmep.org](http://www.cmep.org). CMEP “promotes a vision of peace and justice for both peoples through a negotiated solution with two viable states — Israel and Palestine — living side by side within secure and recognized borders and sharing Jerusalem.”

Churches for Middle East Peace provides “a constructive and balanced voice on Capitol Hill for member churches, engaging directly

with Congress and the Administration and providing educational materials and advocacy guidance to individuals and congregations throughout the country.”

### **3. How is the ELCA approach enhanced by our accompaniment of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)?**

The ELCA’s companion relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) moves us to be in solidarity with all the people of the region and to give voice in particular to the concerns and aspirations of Palestinian Christians, as they strive for reconciliation and independence.

The ELCJHL is a voice of moderation in the region. ELCJHL Bishop Munib Younan has continually exhorted companion churches, including the ELCA, “to be not simply pro-Palestinian or pro-Israeli, but to be pro-justice.”

The ELCA has several missionary staff in the West Bank who work to support the mission of the ELCJHL.

The ELCA receives the gifts of the ELCJHL’s involvement in dialogue (or triadialogue) among the three communities of Abrahamic faith: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Within both Israel and Palestine, the ELCJHL is a trusted participant in these efforts.

The learning acquired through participation in genuine encounters deepens the ELCA’s ability to be a trustworthy and truthful voice when it speaks out on issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

### **4. Does the ELCA have Jewish and Israeli peace partners?**

ELCA members and leaders who are Middle East peace advocates communicate and collaborate with Jewish and Israeli partners at grassroots, national, and international

levels. ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson is active in the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East ([www.nili-mideastpeace.org/](http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org/)), a national group that includes major Jewish - as well as Christian and Muslim - leaders, and that regularly communicates shared concerns with the U.S. government.

The ELCA is fully involved in Churches for Middle East Peace ([cmep.org](http://cmep.org)), an ecumenical Christian alliance that cooperates with such groups as Americans for Peace Now ([peacenow.org](http://peacenow.org)) and the Israel Policy Forum ([ipforum.org](http://ipforum.org)). Palestinian Lutherans ([elcjh.org](http://elcjh.org)) are led by Bishop Munib Younan, a key organizer in the Council of Religious Institutions in the Holy Land, a group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim leaders who meet regularly to foster mutual respect, protect holy sites, and consult with government officials.

## **D. The ELCA’s distinctive role in Middle East peacemaking**

### **1. Is there a precedent for Lutherans being involved in international conflicts?**

Lutherans in the U.S. have often been involved in peacemaking and advocating for the resolution of conflict, particularly since the end of World War II. Of particular note have been our efforts to bring about the independence of Namibia, the end of apartheid in South Africa and the end to civil wars in Central America.

The [Lutheran World Federation](http://lutheranworldfederation.org) has been involved in these efforts, actively seeking peace between the Guatemalan government and its insurgency in the late 1980s and early 1990s, mediating a border dispute between Botswana and Namibia, and attempting to mediate the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

## **2. Does the ELCA advocate divestment from Israel?**

No. At the 2007 Churchwide Assembly, a resolution was adopted which included a provision underscoring the call for economic initiatives made in the 2005 [Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine](#) and for exploring the entire investment activity of the church, but the resolution specifically excluded the option of divestment. [For more, read the Aug. 15, 2007, [ELCA News release](#)]

## **3. How does the ELCA campaign compare with the U.S.-backed Middle East Road Map?**

Although the *Peace Not Walls* campaign is less specific about internal Palestinian governance matters and comprehensive regional peacebuilding, there are many similarities between the U.S.-backed Middle East Road Map and the *Peace Not Walls* campaign. Both call for an end to violence and terrorism; an end to the occupation; Palestinian acceptance of Israel's right to exist; and a negotiated settlement addressing issues (such as borders, the future of Jerusalem, refugees, and settlements) based on UN resolutions.

On the other hand, the campaign takes up issues not covered by the Road Map, such as Israeli removal of all settlements beyond the 1967 borders, the need for an international presence in the Occupied Territories (including East Jerusalem), a halt to the construction of the separation barrier on Palestinian lands, conditioning U.S. foreign aid on successful negotiations, the creation of a shared Jerusalem, prohibiting the movement of the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem, advocacy for the Lutheran World Federation tax case, and the use of economic measures, such as purchase of Palestinian products but excluding divestment from Israel.

## **4. How is the ELCA addressing these issues with the U.S. Congress?**

The ELCA works primarily through Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) to take up its advocacy agenda with the U.S. Congress. The ELCA's policy is largely reflected in that of CMEP because of the ELCA's involvement on the CMEP board of directors, but the [ELCA Washington Office](#) often issues action alerts similar to those sent by CMEP to ensure fuller coverage through the e-Advocacy network.

## **5. I'm interested in learning more by traveling to the Holy Land.**

### **How can I be sure my trip includes more than one perspective on these contentious issues?**

The Holy Land is filled with multiple perspectives and overlapping history, culture, language and belief. Often, it's the variety of viewpoints that travelers encounter that leaves a lasting impression.

The *Peace Not Walls* Web site has a downloadable Holy Land travel guide at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/accompany/travel.html](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/accompany/travel.html) with practical advice as well as suggestions on how to build diverse Israeli and Palestinian perspectives into your experience of the Holy Land. In light of our longstanding accompaniment of the Palestinian Lutheran community, be sure that you don't miss experiencing the many Lutheran ministries in the Holy Land!

Before you leave, consult "Middle East News Sources," a downloadable resource at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/educate/index.html](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/educate/index.html) for a listing of international, Israeli, and Palestinian media outlets and organizations that will help you learn about the conflict from multiple viewpoints.