



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Peace and Conflict*

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." -- Matthew 5:9.

We wake up in the morning to headlines of conflict – wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan and elsewhere, conflict in the Middle East and scattered bombings around the planet. Lives are lost and others are shattered by injury and sorrow. Many of us have loved ones serving in war zones - - our concern is personal, and our grief is heartfelt in the deepest sense. Often we feel helpless, unable to lessen, much less end, bitter and raging divisions.

Yet there are important ways that we can make a difference. Jesus promises that peacemakers are blessed. This is a hopeful message that invites us to rise above the discouraging signs around us to work for positive change.

Of all the war-torn places on the planet, the challenges in the region of Israel and the Palestinian territories seem perhaps the most intractable. Many who have engaged in the region, however, see possibilities for resolution and offer the message that the current impasse *can* be overcome. It is God's promise to dwell precisely in the difficult areas that in itself gives us courage to get involved.

Therefore, the ELCA has made this region an area of special emphasis through the adoption in 2005 of a Church-wide Strategy for engagement under the banner, **"Peace not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land"** (see www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Justice/Peace-Not-Walls.aspx).



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Through *awareness*, *accompaniment* and *advocacy* Lutherans are making a difference. *Awareness* involves learning about the region; *accompaniment* has to do with supporting our Lutheran partners in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and others who are working for peace and justice; and *advocacy* means being active citizens, and using our voices for those who are not heard.

Turning our attention to government, we see that the ELCA statement, *For Peace in God's World*, affirms the legitimate role of governments in law enforcement and defense. At the same time, this statement recognizes that, "governments should vigorously pursue less coercive measures over more coercive ones: consent over compulsion, nonviolence over violence, diplomacy over military engagement, and deterrence over war."

Exercising our privileges and responsibilities as citizens includes staying informed and making our views known to elected officials. To that end, we must ask how our elected leaders will address peace and conflict. What plans do they have for U.S. military and diplomatic involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere? How are they planning to address the Israeli/Palestinian situation, and what are they doing to build a comprehensive peace throughout the region?

* This bulletin insert draws from the issue brief on peace and conflict in "Called To Be A Public Church" (see www.elca.org/advocacy). It is grounded in the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God's World* (adopted 8/1995, see www.elca.org/socialstatements), and relates to the ELCA document "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine" (see <http://archive.elca.org/assembly/05/0813/IsraelPalestine.pdf>).

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