



ELCA E-ADVOCACY NETWORK  
MIDDLE EAST/ INTERNATIONAL  
**ACTION ALERT**

## Middle East Network Newsletter

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Middle East Peace News  
Advent 2008

12-18-08

**2009 Conference of Bishops Academy in the Holy Land:** Fifty-nine bishops of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and five bishops of the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada](#) (ELCIC) will visit the Middle East January 6-13, 2009. This trip will be a major way in which the ELCA lives out its commitment to accompany our brothers and sisters in the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land](#) (ELCJHL) as outlined in our [Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine](#). Please keep the bishops and their fellow travelers in your [prayers](#). To follow the trip through first-hand accounts, check the [ELCA home page](#) for a link to the trip blog in early January.

### **NILI calls for vigorous engagement for Middle East peace by Obama**

**Administration:** Declaring that they won't give in to cynicism or despair and that they are "people of hope," 31 U.S. Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders, including the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), called for members of their communities to pray for peace in Jerusalem. They also urged U.S. political leaders to advance a two-state solution "with vigor both now and in the early months of the new (Obama) Administration." See the latest statement of the [National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East](#).

### **"Christian Grassroots Advocacy and Solidarity: Leadership for Serious**

**Engagement,"** a panel discussion at this year's Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation Conference, included a presentation by the Rev. Robert Smith, ELCA Global Mission Director for Europe and the Middle East for the ELCA. To read the presentation, [click here](#). For conference highlights, go to [www.hcef.org](http://www.hcef.org).

Thank you to all who have signed on to the **Ecumenical Letter to President-Elect Obama on Holy Land Peace**. The letter, signed by Christian leaders including the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, urges the new administration to make Israeli/Palestinian peace a priority from day one. The hope is that as many concerned American Christians as possible will add their names so that thousands of signatures can be delivered to the new President at the time of the inauguration. **The deadline for signing is January 16.** To view the text of the letter and the list of prominent signers, and to add your name, visit [www.cmep.org/letter](http://www.cmep.org/letter).

**Send a Christmas Prayer for Peace to Bethlehem:** Individuals and organizations around the world are invited to send Christmas prayers for peace and justice to Bethlehem as part of a tradition started in 2000 which is being carried out this year in collaboration with the World Council of Churches and its Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum. The organizers urge participation, saying, "*Sending a wish or a prayer by e-mail is an important way of communicating with many people who long to hear a word of hope.*" Messages should be e-mailed by December 25 (Western Christmas) and/or by January 7, 2009



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(Eastern Christmas). Send messages to the Arab Educational Institute at [aei@p-ol.com](mailto:aei@p-ol.com).  
Read all messages at [www.aeicenter.org](http://www.aeicenter.org).

**A Joint Simulcast Worship Service with the people of Bethlehem will be held Saturday, December 20 at 10:00 am ET.** Worshipers in the Christmas Lutheran Church in Bethlehem will join their voices with those in the Bethlehem Chapel of the National Cathedral in Washington, DC in seeking and offering hope for a better future for all people in the Holy Land. Lutheran leaders participating in the service are Bishop Munib Younan and the Rev. Mitri Raheb in Bethlehem, and Bishop Richard Graham, the Rev. Said Ailabouni, and the Rev. Susan Wilder in Washington. To watch the service live, [click here](#). If you are in Bethlehem or Washington, you are most welcome to attend!

**Join the Peace Not Walls national database** and participate in online conferences calls to discuss ELCA Middle East policies and programs. The database will enable us to link peace workers around the ELCA, to recommend speakers by state and region, to communicate with synods about new resources, to increase grassroots advocacy via the media and among members of Congress, and to provide leadership training. If you are interested in being part of this database and have not yet completed the activist survey, please email Peace Not Walls database assistant Carolyn Albert ([Carolyn.albert@elca.org](mailto:Carolyn.albert@elca.org)).

**ELCA member becomes United States coordinator for the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)** [<http://www.eappi-us.org>] Ann Hafften, the first coordinator of Peace Not Walls and of this email service, has been hired to recruit and support volunteers who will make a commitment to spend three months with Palestinians and Israelis and to offer protection through non-violent presence, to monitor and report human rights violations, to engage in public policy advocacy, and to stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation.

The ELCA has sent ten ecumenical accompaniers since the beginning of the program in 2002. You can contribute to the ELCA's EAPPI-US scholarship fund by writing a check made out to "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" with "EAPPI Level II" on the memo line. Send with donor's name and address to ELCA Global Mission Support, Attn: Twila Schock, 8765 W. Higgins Rd, Chicago, IL 60631. To give via credit card or direct bank transfer, please call (773) 380-2700 with your credit card information ready, and specify your gift for "Global Mission Level II – EAPPI."

See personal blogs of current and past ELCA accompaniers by [clicking here](#).

**"The Bern Perspective":** In September 2008, over 80 Christian theologians and biblical scholars gathered in Bern, Switzerland, to discuss some of the basic theological and biblical elements that inform many perspectives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Robert Smith, ELCA Global Mission Director for Europe and the Middle East, participated in the conference and served on the drafting committee for the conference statement, titled "The Bern Perspective."

The conference was designed to further the process begun in 2006 with the previous conference document, titled "The Amman Call." Discussion during the conference centered on questions of the land of historic Palestine (now containing both the State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories) especially on whether the Bible understands the land to



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be promised unconditionally to any ethnic or religious group. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/middle-east-peace/13-09-08-bern-perspective.html>

**Peace Not Walls T-shirts** are one way to participate in the ELCA's Middle East peace strategy implementation. Newly printed shirts (with Peace Not Walls logo on front and new ELCA logo on back) are now being distributed at <http://ga6.org/ct/F7r0a1n1DcTB/>

Prices range from \$7.75 to \$9.75, with savings on shipping costs for group orders.

## Three new publications

**"Time For Realism In The Middle East"** by Philip C. Wilcox Jr. argues that "only renewed, sustained American diplomatic leadership and partnership can redeem our reputation and stabilize the region." See this article in the *Foreign Service Journal* (December 2008) at <http://www.fmep.org/analysis/analysis/time-for-realism-in-the-middle-east>. Ambassador Wilcox is president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace and a member of the Churches for Middle East Peace Leadership Council.

***Restoring the Balance: A Middle East Strategy for the Next President***, a combined effort of the Saban Center at the Brookings Institution and the Council on Foreign Relations, was released this month. Of particular interest to those seeking Israeli/Palestinian peace is Chapter 5: "Addressing the Arab-Israeli Conflict" by Steven A. Cook and Shibley Telhami. See [www.brookings.edu/saban.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/saban.aspx).

**From OCHA OPT -- Gaza Situation Report: The Impact of the Blockade on the Gaza Strip- A Human Dignity Crisis (15 December 2008)** The 18-month long blockade on the Gaza Strip has created a profound human dignity crisis, leading to a widespread erosion of livelihoods and a significant deterioration in infrastructure and essential services. The consequences for the Palestinian population are profound, pervasive and difficult to reverse. This report surveys the impact on livelihoods, electricity, water and sanitation, food security and the health services.

Arabic ( [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_gaza\\_situation\\_report\\_2008\\_12\\_17\\_arabic.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_situation_report_2008_12_17_arabic.pdf) )

English ( [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_gaza\\_situation\\_report\\_2008\\_12\\_17\\_english.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_gaza_situation_report_2008_12_17_english.pdf) )

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