

2005 Churchwide Assembly

*Background for Memorials concerning "Peace Not Walls" Campaign*¹

At its April 2005 meeting, the ELCA Church Council adopted a Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine. This strategy builds upon the long history of involvement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor bodies in the Holy Land. It also acknowledges that, at this time, there appears to be a window of opportunity in which a lasting peace may be crafted. This lends urgency to the ELCA work for peace with justice in the Holy Land. It also recognizes that the ELCA's companion church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), has requested the advocacy and assistance of the ELCA and other churches of the Lutheran World Federation in dealing with the hardships to Palestinian communities caused by the continuing Israeli occupation and its construction of the separation wall on Palestinian land. The ELCJHL also has expressed its deep concern that these actions pose a serious threat to its future and the future of the "living church" in the Holy Land.

The memorials of the Southeast Michigan, Metropolitan New York, and Oregon Synods call on the 2005 Churchwide Assembly to affirm actions described in the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine. This strategy was developed by the Division for Church in Society and the Division for Global Mission, with participation from other units, synods, and a wide variety of academics, experts in interfaith dialogue, advocates, and participants in grassroots networks. Background information is found in the *2005 Pre-Assembly Report*, Section IV, pages 75–78, and the Churchwide Strategy is found in Section V, pages 48–58. A summary of actions by the ELCA and its predecessor bodies is included in the strategy.

This strategy affirms the ELCA's commitment to accompany its companion church in the Holy Land in mission and calls for the development of a churchwide campaign, "Peace Not Walls," which encourages members, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to join in this effort. It calls for, among other things, "an end to terrorism and violence by individuals, organizations, and states" and states that the ELCA will express this commitment in its advocacy.

According to the strategy, one element of this advocacy will be to explore economic initiatives, including "promoting positive economic development in the region to help those most in need," "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 for economic growth and humanitarian needs," "making consumer decisions that favor support to those in greatest need," and "managing collective or personal investments with concern for their impact on the lives of all Holy Land peoples who suffer from ongoing conflict."

The promotion of economic initiatives can be manifested in many forms. For example, shareholder actions, including dialogue with corporate management, filing of shareholder resolutions, outreach to other shareholders and investment advisors, and voting of proxies, can be used to change corporate policies or practices. Other economic initiatives include boycotts of products and services to coerce or to express protest, divestment, social investing, and development of social screens. While all of these tools may be available to this church, certain actions such as divestment are not available to the Board of Pensions. The Board of Pensions has always taken the position that divestment, *per se*, of pension accumulations is an illegal violation of its fiduciary duties under both federal and Minnesota law.

As an alternative to divestment, the ELCA Retirement Plan provides eight investment fund options that are social purpose funds. These funds apply social screens in accordance with the values of this church and within the fiduciary responsibility the Board of Pensions bears for its plan members. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has no policy on the subject of divestment. While some other denominations have undertaken certain economic initiatives, it is the policy of the ELCA that this church does not comment on actions or matters that are internal to other church bodies.

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly will be considering a recommendation related to the Churchwide Strategy and the "Peace Not Walls" campaign (*2005 Pre-Assembly Report*, Section IV, pages 75-77, and Section V, pages 47-60), which deals with many of the concerns of the synods. However, the Metropolitan New York and Oregon Synods call on the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to take a separate action relating to the separation wall.

¹ From *2005 Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, 446-447.

At its April 2004 and April 2005 meetings, the ELCA Church Council took action on this issue (CC05.04.19), upon recommendation of the Division for Global Mission and the Division for Church in Society:

To acknowledge the urgent call of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land for action regarding the continuing construction of the separation wall in Palestine;

To encourage members, congregations, and synods to become aware of the effects of the separation wall on the lives of Palestinians, including:

- a. the threat to future hopes for peace; and
- b. the threat to the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and other churches;

To call for the immediate cessation of construction of the Israeli separation wall and the removal of all existing portions of this wall on Palestinian land;

To request that the Division for Church in Society intensify its advocacy relating to this critical situation, in accord with the Churchwide Strategy for ELCA Engagement in Israel and Palestine;

To request that members of this church and synods meeting in assembly respond to the request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's companion church in the Holy Land for bold advocacy that calls for construction of the separation wall to cease; and

To direct appropriate churchwide staff to provide information related to this issue for use by members, congregations, and synods.

At the time they conveyed this action to the council, the Division for Global Mission and the Division for Church in Society noted that ELCA Churchwide Assembly action on the separation wall might be desirable, should the Israeli government continue its construction of the wall. They suggested that, should this be the case, a resolution be crafted for consideration by the Churchwide Assembly, which would be conveyed to the assembly by the ELCA Church Council at its pre-assembly meeting. This approach will enable the Churchwide Assembly to act on the most current information in a rapidly changing situation.