

## 2007 Churchwide Assembly

### *Background for Memorials concerning "Peace Not Walls" Campaign*<sup>1</sup>

A "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine" was adopted by the ELCA Church Council in April 2005. The ninth ELCA Churchwide Assembly, meeting subsequently in August 2005, urged "members, congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and church-related agencies and institutions...to participate in the churchwide campaign for peace—Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land—by engaging in awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy activities..."

To follow-up on the actions assigned the churchwide organization, an inter-unit working group was established to undertake implementation of these tasks. A report has been prepared for the tenth Churchwide Assembly about these efforts in the three areas of focus (Section V).

With reference to corporate investments in Israel and Palestine, the ELCA Advisory Committee on Corporate Social Responsibility has been reviewing the involvement of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) program, a program of the Church in Society unit, in order to address this specific issue. The committee has recommended that the CSR program expand current dialogues with corporations around human rights issues to include the region where appropriate. In some instances, these corporations are operational in Israel, the occupied Palestinian territories, or both. In a number of these cases, attention is called to the impact of their business activities on the occupation and the degree to which they may or may not contribute to acts of violence. As the strategy continues to be implemented, further work with corporations is expected.

The ELCA churchwide strategy furthermore clearly addresses and advocates for the necessity of financial support for the ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). The strategy also notes the importance of visits to the region by members of the ELCA and the resulting development and strengthening of relationships with the ELCJHL, the LWF, other partners, and other groups and individuals in Palestine and Israel who share a commitment to peace and a just resolution of the conflict.

One aspect of the advocacy portion of the strategy titled, "Stewarding Economic Resources," calls on various expressions of the ELCA to be involved in "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)." Consequently, the CSR program is in conversation with a variety of business people and has researched possible economic development activities that the ELCA may be able to support. It also has had initial discussions with the leadership of the ELCJHL about these possibilities and has plans for further conversations about specific options that could be pursued. Should these efforts prove fruitful and consonant with the views of the ELCJHL, concrete steps would be taken to support such economic development as well as encourage ELCA members to consider doing likewise.

In terms of addressing the affects of Christian Zionism on the peace process in the Middle East, the ELCA churchwide strategy calls for "increased engagement with conservative Christians and a clearer and more forceful expression of Lutheran theology in the public debate..." The Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop (ER) administers the participation of this church in Christian Churches Together (CCT), Religions for Peace, U.S.A., and other conciliar and non-conciliar bodies where discourse with conservative Christians and inter-religious partners encourages clear and substantial articulation of Lutheran theology that contributes to public debate. Likewise, the ELCA participates on the Interfaith Commission of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC), where topics of religious extremism are addressed with ecumenical partners. For instance, the ELCA is present on an NCCC ecumenical task force convened for the purpose of addressing Christian Zionism. Members of the NCCC interfaith commission and subsequent task force look to develop and otherwise contribute to congregational and educational resources on the subject. Finally, in recent years ecumenical and inter-religious resources and toolkits for dialogue that have been developed for congregational use address religious extremism and the subsequent dangers of extremism for both North America and the peace process in Israel-Palestine.

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<sup>1</sup> From *2007 Churchwide Assembly Minutes*, 137-138.

The ELCA churchwide organization has continued its efforts to support efforts by the international community, including the United States, to realize a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that leads to justice and peace in the Holy Land with the establishment of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state co-existing alongside a secure Israel. Meetings with United States officials by the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (a group of more than 30 leaders of the three Abrahamic faiths) and the advocacy work of Churches for Middle East Peace (a Washington, D.C.,-based coalition of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox churches that promotes a more constructive U.S. policy toward the Middle East) are some of the contexts in which advocacy is undertaken by the ELCA churchwide organization.