

2009 Churchwide Assembly
Action Regarding "Peace Not Walls" Campaign¹

On August 22 by a vote of 690-125, the 11th ELCA Churchwide Assembly reaffirmed the ELCA's commitment to eight tasks relative to the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine. Specifically, the assembly voted "to reaffirm the commitment of this church to:

1. Continue its awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;
2. Evaluate and refine its peace-making efforts to demonstrate as fully as possible the "balanced ... care for all parties" expressed in the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine (2005; Sect. II.A), while continuing our unique relationship with and accompaniment of Palestinian Christians and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL);
3. Learn more about the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians and their mutual fears, aspirations, and hopes;
4. Work to convey the concerns and perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis that dispel stereotypes and caricatures and promote better understanding;
5. Lift up the voices within both communities, especially those of victims of violence, that seek peace with justice through nonviolent responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
6. Continue to help alleviate the humanitarian needs of all of those affected by the conflict, especially in Gaza;
7. Support U.S. funding that promotes peace and cooperation for all parties to the conflict; and
8. Continue to pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and for the Israeli and Palestinian peoples."

The second task above was added by the Assembly to the report of the Memorials Committee which included the other seven tasks. The new task was moved by voting member Pr. Richard B. Geib of Lower Susquehanna Synod.

The second task quotes from Section II A of the Strategy, from a list of "assumptions" which "undergird the ELCA's commitment to intensify its work for peace with justice in Israel and Palestine." The sentence from the Strategy reads in full:

2. **Balance.** Effective ELCA action will be balanced in terms of its care for all parties in the conflict, but must address forthrightly imbalances of power as they play out in the lives of people in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories.

Earlier at the Churchwide Assembly, on Tuesday, August 18, a hearing was held on the Strategy. The meeting place was "standing room only," and initial comments were made by Bishops Bruce Burnside, Dean Nelson, Duane Pedersen and Margaret Payne.

Peace Not Walls staff responded to questions such as how we can interact with our Jewish neighbors when discussing the Israel-Palestine conflict, what we can do if we can't travel to the Holy Land, how the church can speak more clearly than governments which are often constrained in what

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they can and cannot say, what the ELCA is doing to promote economic progress in the West Bank, and what resources are available to teach about peace in our congregations. Voting members also described personal experiences and offered opinions, such as having been a medical staff volunteer at Augusta Victoria Hospital, the value in meeting with the "Living Stones" in all three faith communities when visiting the area, the importance of being aware of the conflicting narratives and concerns of Israelis and Palestinians and the need to build trust and come to discussions and encounters with humility, the benefit of doing critical biblical and theological work about the conflict, and the dire need for the Mount of Olives Housing Project to provide shelter and a way for the Christian community to remain a significant part of the Palestinian population.