



Video Discussion Guide

Peace Not Walls: Making A Difference in the Holy Land

March 2008

Introduction

The social, political, economic, and religious situation in the Holy Land is complex. This video, “Peace Not Walls: Making a Difference in the Holy Land,” highlights the ways that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is working for peace with justice in this area of the world.

Through its Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine (2005), the ELCA committed to promote **a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**. The strategy calls for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state that exists at peace with its Arab neighbors.

The strategy also encourages ELCA members to **learn, pray, and act for peace with justice in the Holy Land**.

This video provides a glimpse into the ELCA’s actions, including the Peace Not Walls campaign, and the ELCA’s engagement with partners (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim) who are working for peace, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Find more information at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/.

The video also includes a brief discussion of Christian Zionism, a theological movement that has exerted political and economic influence in the Holy Land. This study guide includes further information about that movement and the difficulties it poses for the ELCA’s partners in the region.

Discussion starters

After watching each chapter in the video, you may pause the video and ask the following discussion questions. Supplemental resources for some of the questions are provided in “Supplemental Resources” at the end of this discussion guide.

1. The ELCA Middle East Peace Initiative

- Is it important to you that the ELCA is involved in this conflict? Why or why not? Does the strategy fit with your idea of how Lutherans are active in the world?
- Have you ever heard anyone describe Jerusalem as a city of peace? If not, how does that change your perception of the city at the heart of the Holy Land?

2. The Separation Barrier

- In the video, Carol Schersten LaHurd talks about the many “walls that stand in the way of peace.” What barriers to peace in the Middle East were you aware of? Were there any barriers mentioned that surprised you?



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- Rabbi David Rosen said of the separation barrier, “Every society has a responsibility to protect its citizens.” He also mentioned the long-term consequences of the “contours of the barrier” and the “distress and difficulties” to Palestinians. What do you think the long-term effect of the barrier will be?

3. The Settlements

- How do settlements in the West Bank* create a barrier to peace? (More information on the legal status of the settlements under international law, including Israeli justifications for settlements, is available in Appendix I of the “Supplemental Resources.”)

4. Accompaniment

- What examples can you think of that embody the ELCA’s commitment to accompaniment? (More information about the memorial passed at the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly is available in Appendix II of the “Supplemental Resources.”)
- When you heard from the parents in the Bereaved Families Forum, how do their perspectives affect the way you view the conflict and possibilities for a peaceful resolution?
- How do you respond to Rami Elchanan of the Bereaved Families Forum when he said, “What we need is not walls. What we need is bridges.”

5. Working with People of Other Faiths?

- How does your congregation partner with people of other faiths locally? (For additional resources, consult the ELCA’s downloadable resource, “Windows for Understanding,” at www.elca.org/ecumenical/interreligious/; for further information, call 800/638-3522, ext. 2612, or e-mail erinfo@elca.org.)
- Yigal Bronner said “we need to talk to the other people on the same level. To look them in the eye.” What are some barriers that can keep people involved in a multigenerational struggle that can keep them from “talking as equals”? What examples in this country may demonstrate how difficult this can be?

6. A Call for Engagement

- Is it important to you that the ELCA is involved in this conflict? Why or why not?
- What role do we as U.S. citizens and members of the Christian community play in this conflict? What responsibilities do we have to be part of its resolution? (Additional information on Christian Zionism is available in the May 2007 issue of the Journal of Lutheran Ethics, www.elca.org/jle, including articles by Robert O. Smith, JoAnn G. Magnuson, Bishop Munib Younan and Peter A. Pettit.)

* The “West Bank” refers to the west bank of the Jordan River and is commonly used to refer to the Occupied Palestinian Territories that lie between the Jordan River and the internationally recognized border with Israel called the “Green Line.” East Jerusalem commonly refers to that portion of Jerusalem now occupied by Israel that was held mostly by Jordan (the exception being a small area known as “no-man’s land”) from 1948 until the 1967 war. The Gaza Strip, although geographically separate from the West Bank, is also part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories.



- As you follow the news, where do you see examples of the U.S. government committed both to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to seeking peace and security in the region? Consider likewise U.S. funding toward the defense budget of Israel; what is your opinion about the balance between seeking peace and military funding? Please explain. (A January 2008 report from Congressional Research Service about U.S. foreign aid to Israel is available online at <http://openocrs.com/document/RL33222>.)

7. How You Can Help

Discuss these ideas to see if there are further opportunities for members of your congregation to learn, pray, and act for peace with justice in the Holy Land.

Learn

- Invite a speaker to your church
- Plan a seminar or teleconference
- Participate in the ELCA Holy Land Communion Ware Journey (see www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/communionware.html)
- Plan an adult forum or Sunday school class using resources at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/educate
- Hold a panel discussion on Christian Zionism and Lutheran theology
- Go to www.elca.org/peacenotwalls for resources and information about the ELCA's strategy for engagement in Israel and Palestine. Call or e-mail Peace Not Walls, 800/638-3522, ext. 6466, peacenotwalls@elca.org

Pray

- Participate in a prayer vigil for peace in the Middle East. Find resources at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/pray and www.elcjh.org/resources/worship

Act

- Call your congressional representative. Visit www.elca.org/advocacy for talking points and contact information
- Donate online at www.elca.org/giving to the Mount of Olives Housing Project or ELCJHL school ministries

Accompany

- Engage other faiths in your area by having a shared prayer service or speaker
- Meet Palestinian Lutherans here in the United States
- Visit the Holy Land. Download a guide at www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/accompany/travel.html



Supplemental Resources

Appendix I: The Legality of the Settlements in the West Bank

Following are excerpts from international press, humanitarian and church organizations' Web sites about the legality of the settlements in the West Bank. Full text of each is available online at the stated links.

1. BBC News summary on the Geneva Convention and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

“It is widely accepted that under international law, the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel are illegal.”

Read more at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1682640.stm

2. International Committee of the Red Cross on “occupied territory” and legal issues:

“Territory is considered ‘occupied’ when it is actually placed under the authority of foreign armed forces, whether partially or entirely, without the consent of the domestic government . . . Occupation is by definition a temporary situation that interferes with, but does not diminish or terminate, the sovereign rights of the people under occupation.”

Read more at:

www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/html/section_ihl_occupied_territory

3. World Council of Churches urges Israel to observe Fourth Geneva Convention Dec. 5, 2001.

“Throughout its 34-year occupation of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, Israel has been alone amongst the High Contracting Parties in refusing to recognize the legal applicability of the Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.”

Read more at: www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/press/01/43pu.html



Appendix II: 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly actions

ELCA Churchwide Assembly action passed Aug. 11, 2007, by vote of 697 – 245

Text of resolution:

To receive the memorials from the Pacifica Synod, Metropolitan New York Synod, Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, New England Synod, Southeast Michigan Synod, and Metropolitan Chicago Synod and to thank them for their support of efforts by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to promote peace with justice in the Holy Land;

To note the participation of the ELCA in ecumenical and inter-religious forums where religious extremism is addressed;

To acknowledge the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine, including its call for “increased engagement with conservative Christians and a clearer and more forceful expression of Lutheran theology in the public debate”;

To call upon the ELCA, in all of its expressions, to recommit itself to the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine through awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy activities, including pilgrimage visits, sustained financial support, and other forms of economic stewardship; and

To call upon the ELCA to underscore the call for economic initiatives by this church and its members in the Peace Not Walls campaign.

Such initiatives, in consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, could include purchasing of products from Palestinian providers and exploration of the feasibility of refusing to buy products produced in Israeli settlements.

Also to be explored is the entire investment activity by this church. Examination of investment would exclude the option of divestiture.

Comment on 2007 Assembly actions

What the amendment is:

The amendment added by the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, as well as the entire memorial, is consistent with the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine adopted in 2005. This strategy is grounded in the commitment of this church to a sustainable resolution of the conflict for both Palestinians and Israelis and responsible political action on the part of this church. The strategy calls for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and the establishment of a viable, contiguous Palestinian state that will exist peacefully alongside a secure Israeli state.

As the ELCA moves forward, this amendment highlights the importance of consultation with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), in keeping with the practice of “accompaniment,” a fundamental principle of the strategy.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The strategy, popularly known as the Peace Not Walls campaign, has a section called Stewarding Economic Resources (II., B., Advocacy, 4.). That section reads in part:

The ELCA in all its expressions, institutions, and partner agencies, and its members will seek to expend God-given economic resources in ways that support the quest for a just peace in the Holy Land. Working within the framework of ELCA policy, this Strategy will explore economic initiatives that may include: ...

b. 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).

...

e. Making consumer decisions that favor support to those in greatest need (e.g., Palestinian providers as distinct from Israel settlers on Palestinian territory).

f. Managing collective or personal investments with concern for their impact on the lives of all Holy Land peoples who suffer from the ongoing conflict.

This amendment focuses on two areas which are provided for within the strategy:

- selective purchasing of Palestinian products (b., e.) and products produced in Israeli settlements (e.)
- managing our collective investments (f.)

The first allows for the exploration of Palestinian products, the purchase of which would promote economic development in the region. It also calls for an exploration of the feasibility of not purchasing products which are manufactured in the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories. These settlements have been rejected as illegal by both the United States government — as recently as July 2007 when President Bush spoke about the conflict — as well as the United Nations. Consistent with the ELCA's strategy and policies, the ELCA will engage in dialogue with all parties concerned about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict before recommendations are developed.

The ELCA reiterates its commitment, as well as that outlined in the strategy, to be engaged in conversation and in relationship with ecumenical and interfaith partners in the United States and around the globe about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Finally, the selective purchasing advocated here is just that and NOT a boycott. This church has a procedure for the consideration of boycotts, which is rather extensive and exhaustive, and is not the route being proposed here. We are, at this stage, exploring how we should engage on the issue of ethical consumer decisions, whether relating to Palestine or the illegal settlements.

What this is NOT:

- A major departure from existing strategy
- A boycott of Israel

This amendment does not apply to products produced in Israel. It does call for an exploration of the feasibility of not purchasing products that are manufactured in the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America