



## 2009 ELCA Bishops Guide to Holy Land Travel

*We don't want you to come as tourists. We invite you to come as pilgrims, to walk side by side with us, your sisters and brothers in Christ in the Holy Land.*

*~Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land*

### **I. Why visit the Holy Land and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)?**

In a world troubled by economic disparity, violence, and fear of others, the choices we make have real-world consequences and reflect who we are, as individuals and as a church. This includes our travel and tourism. More and more people are fostering a new understanding of travel, especially in the Holy Land.

Millions -- including church groups -- flock to Israel every year, most in well-designed tour packages that generate \$3 billion in revenues annually. Unfortunately for the local Palestinians (including Christians), this usually does not include meeting Palestinian Christians such as in our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Palestine accounts for only 3% of this tourism industry, according to the Alternative Travel Group in Beit Sahour.

The conflict between Palestine and Israel has been long, sometimes violent, and highly-politicized. It involves real people who have suffered terribly on both sides, with ongoing realities that are virtually unknown by much of the world. The ELCA encourages people to take a different approach to tourism to the Holy Land by focusing as much on the local people -- especially local Christians -- as we do on the holy sites.

Alternative tourism includes more than an itinerary to the sites. It also provides opportunities to build relationships with the people and to see firsthand the realities of different people in the conflict, including the Palestinians, who are often not heard in the international media. For Lutherans especially, it is important that they understand the investment they have in the Lutheran and ecumenical ministries of the Holy Land. The ELCJHL has six churches and various exemplary ministries, with four schools and four additional educational programs.

Together, the ELCJHL and Lutheran World Federation are sponsoring a vital program to help keep the Palestinian Christians in the Holy Land, the Mt. of Olives Housing Project. The LWF also has crucial ministries of health and empowerment in the community, including the Augusta Victoria Hospital, its clinics, and the vocational schools. We are happy to facilitate trips that will introduce you to the faith and life of the Lutherans in the Holy Land. Pilgrimage groups can also schedule trips so that they can participate in the annual fall LWF olive harvest.

Visiting the Holy Land can be both a rewarding faith pilgrimage and the best way to meet Palestinians and Israelis, to understand their current political and living conditions, and to learn about efforts toward a permanent and just peace. The ELCA Peace Not Walls team encourages you to plan a trip with at least two types of balance. First, we urge you to plan a mix of visits and speakers to expose your group to varied Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Christian and Muslim

perspectives and life experiences. You can decide what percentage of time you want to devote to each according to your trip's purposes and foci.

Second, we urge you to remember that ELCA accompaniment of our Lutheran partners in the Holy Land means engaging the various Lutheran ministries in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Your group should plan to spend some time with Bishop Munib Younan and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (based in Jerusalem) and with any of the ELCJHL pastors to explore their unique and various programs in Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Beit Sahour, and Ramallah. You should also plan to meet the Reverend Mark Brown and visit the Lutheran World Federation-Jerusalem ministries. Again, your own group's focus and interests can guide how you distribute your time. The ELCA Peace Not Walls team in Chicago and the Holy Land can assist you in making these arrangements.

## II. Practical advice for planning your trip

You can get the following assistance from Peace Not Walls staff:

- Advice about visiting Lutheran partners in the Holy Land
- Contact information for potential speakers and site visits
- Advice about logistics and tour companies
- Pre and post-trip session outlines
- Cross-cultural understanding
- Pre-trip readings and news sources
- Middle East educational resources and videos

Please see these resources and ideas provided by the ELCA Peace Not Walls team in the U.S. and the Holy Land:

- Find a downloadable **Holy Land travel guide, A Pilgrim's Guide to Israel and Palestine, and upcoming trips list** at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/travel](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/travel) Note that these guide have both practical advice (what to wear, security concerns, etc.) and suggestions for seeing both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives and being sure that you meet and see the ministries of Lutherans in the Holy Land. See itineraries of upcoming trips to get ideas for your own trip.
- See the **trip report, photos, and step-by-step planning guides** assembled by a Lutheran congregation in Illinois at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/tripreports](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/tripreports)
- Contact these staff for specific help: Young Adults in Global Mission and Holy Land Trips Coordinator **Martin Shoffner** can share lists of **accommodations, peace groups, local Palestinian tour companies**, etc. **The Reverend Mark Holman** can help your group plan to **attend worship** and/or visit with him as the ELCA pastor serving the English-speaking congregation at the Lutheran Church of the Redeemer in the Old City of Jerusalem. **Sister Sylvia Countess** can help arrange **visits with the school ministries** of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. **Bishop Bruce Burnside** of South Central Wisconsin Synod and chair of the bishops' Middle East "Ready Bench" can advise synod and congregational trip-planners. Direct your queries to [peacenotwallsinfo@elca.org](mailto:peacenotwallsinfo@elca.org), putting "trip help" in the subject line.
- Learn about the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land at <http://www.elcjh.org/>

- If you have further questions, please email or phone Carol LaHurd, Peace Not Walls Coordinator, [carol.lahurd@elca.org](mailto:carol.lahurd@elca.org); 800-638-3522 ext. 2117; 773-380-2117
- To learn more about the Israeli-Palestinian situation, please explore the ELCA Peace Not Walls campaign web site pages at [www.elca.org/peacenotwalls](http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls)
- To learn about ELCA efforts toward a permanent peace, see the FAQs at <http://www.elca.org/peacenotwalls/faqs>

### **III. Questions to start the planning process**

- What are the primary objectives of your trip?
- How are you balancing the experience of religious sites (ancient stones) with the people of the land (living stones)?
- How will you experience the Lutheran church in action? Will you meet leaders of your Lutheran partners through the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF)?
- Will you be meeting local Palestinian Christians and Israeli Jews and hearing their stories?
- Does your trip include a visit to a Palestinian refugee camp?
- Does your trip include a visit to an Israeli settlement?
- When your tour takes you to the West Bank (Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jericho, etc.) you will be going through the “separation barrier,”--either the electrified fence in rural areas or the 30 foot high concrete wall in urban ones. Have you considered walking through a checkpoint for the purpose of further education?
- Are there opportunities for real human interaction between guest and host that will lead to an in-depth knowledge of another peoples' way of life?
- Whom is your tourism benefiting?
- Whom are your tourism dollars benefiting? (i.e., Who owns the hotels you are staying in and the bus companies you are using?)
- Are you seeing and discussing issues of justice and peace from different points of view?
- Have your trip plans adequately addressed issues of security?
- What reading material will you suggest prior to your visit?
- Is the cost of your trip being subsidized in any way? What are the expectations and viewpoints of your funders?
- Does your trip allow for daily and intentional periods for reflection and discussion?
- Will your schedule include intentional conversation about how participants will share their experience with family, neighbors, church members, the media, etc.?
- Will your group discussions (both in preparation and while you are experiencing the trip) allow for discussion about your experience, concerns, hopes, and responsibilities as Americans? As Christian Lutherans? Is there any difference?
- Are you planning to have all trip participants complete an evaluation and to share the results with the Peace Not Walls staff?

***TRAVEL WELL and remember these words of the apostle Paul: “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18).***