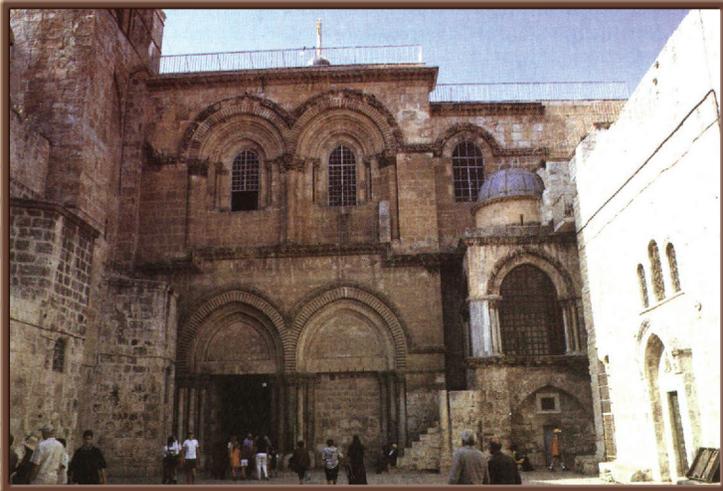


# استراتيجية الخدمة المسيحية العربية والشرق اوسطية

جسور عبر التاريخ والاراضي والحضارات



# Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy:

Bridges across history,  
Lands, and Cultures





**Arab and Middle Eastern  
Ministry Strategy:  
Bridges across History,  
Lands, and Cultures**



*Empowered by Christ, rooted in the lands and culture of the Bible and earliest Christianity, and sent to the world, we seek to serve and proclaim the Gospel among Arabs and people of the Middle East and to share this community's gifts with the whole Church.*

Approved by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly August 11, 2005



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

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# Table Of Contents

## I Introduction

- a. Historical Background 3
- b. Theological and Biblical Foundations 5

## II Goals and Strategies

- a. Support for Congregations 9
  - 1. Full Participation in the ELCA 10
  - 2. Stewardship 10
  - 3. Worship 11
  - 4. Christian Education 11
- b. Evangelical Outreach 12
  - 1. Evangelism 13
  - 2. Hospitality 13
- c. Sharing God's Love with the World 14
  - 1. Advocacy 15
  - 2. Social Ministry 15
- d. Global, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Relationships 16
- e. Leadership Development for a Pluralistic World 18
  - 1. Clergy 19
  - 2. Lay Adult Leaders 19
  - 3. Youth Leaders 20

Executive Summary 21

Appendix 25

# 1. Introduction

## A. Historical Background

*Empowered by Christ, rooted in the lands and culture of the Bible and earliest Christianity, and sent to the world . . .*

The origins of the Arab and Middle Eastern community within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) extend back many millennia to Mesopotamia, the land “between the rivers,” often considered the biblical garden of Eden and the cradle of human civilization. Passing through this land to Canaan was a man with roots in Ur in the northern Arabian peninsula: Abraham is the father through tradition and faith of Jews, Christians, and Muslims and the ethnic father of Jews and Arabs through his sons Isaac and Ishmael. Centuries later Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, gave his life for all humanity. His followers led the mid-first century Jewish movement that became universal Christianity. Even in the earliest days of the Christian community, the arrival of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was witnessed by Arabs and Middle Easterners along with others living during the Roman Empire in the multi-ethnic Palestine and Fertile Crescent. As this dramatic event unfolded, the observers asked, “And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (Acts 2:8-11). Acts 2:41 tells us that “three thousand people” were added to the body of Christ that day a striking reminder of the long history of Christian presence in today’s Middle East.

Today’s ELCA members of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage, from such places as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine, are the descendants of these earliest Christians. The Arabic language of their liturgy has close ties with the Hebrew and Aramaic of Bible times. The specifically Lutheran

presence in the region dates back to the middle 19th century, when English and German Christians began to found schools, hospitals, and churches. The Evangelical Lutheran Church (ELCJ) based in Palestine and Jordan became autonomous in 1959, and has been led by local Arab bishops since 1979.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants from Palestine are serving as pastors in the ELCA's Arab language congregations in Brooklyn, N.Y., Chicago, Ill., and Dearborn, Mich. Throughout the ELCA, Lutherans from diverse Middle Eastern heritage are involved as pastors, lay leaders, and members of synodical committees and the boards of churchwide units.

Beyond those in the ELCA, other Arab and Middle Eastern Christians have been part of waves of immigration to the United States. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Christians came from the Mount Lebanon region of the Ottoman Turkish province of Greater Syria. During and after World War I, many more Christians and Muslims came from Arab countries to work in places such as Detroit with its automobile industry and Akron with its tire factories. Immigration has continued to the present day, including Palestinian Christians after the 1948 formation of the state of Israel and the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; Lebanese Christians during their country's recent long civil war; and Christians from Iraq, thousands of whom now live in Dearborn, Mich. Although only a small percentage of these Middle Eastern Christians were Lutherans in their home countries, they and their descendants are often unable to find in the United States churches of any denomination with their language and cultural background. For this and other reasons, the existing ELCA Arab congregations include Copts, Orthodox, Catholics, Protestants, and converts, as well as Lutherans from primarily Palestinian origins. There are many more such Middle Eastern Christians not currently served by any denomination or congregation in the United States.

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<sup>1</sup>"Brief History of the ELCJ," at [www.holyland-lutherans.org/history.htm](http://www.holyland-lutherans.org/history.htm)

## B. Theological and Biblical Foundations

*Seeking to serve and proclaim the Gospel among Arabs and people of the Middle East and to share our community's gifts with the whole church. . . .*

Just as the Holy Spirit enabled all to understand the preaching of Peter and the other disciples in their own languages at Pentecost, we also affirm that being the one body of Christ does not demand that Lutherans all worship in the same language and with the same cultural heritage. The seer John of Patmos describes his vision of those gathered in the presence of God in the end times as “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!’” (Revelation 7:9–10). Similarly, the apostle Paul frequently adapted the style and content of his preaching to best reach the particular ethnic and cultural groups he was evangelizing: “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings” (1 Corinthians 9:19–23).

The Arab ministry strategy seeks ways to invite Arabs and Middle Easterners into the Lutheran expression of the body of Christ through biblical hospitality (Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:2) and in the spirit of Jesus’ admonition that the neighbors we are called to love and serve are all our fellow human beings. As the United States deals with heightened tensions from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the Arab-Israeli and Iraqi conflicts, newcomers from the Middle East, whether Christian or Muslim,

face increased suspicion, hostility, and even abuse. Some Lutheran church members, for example, have lost jobs or have been imprisoned without being charged. By contrast, Genesis 18 recounts how Abraham welcomed strangers into his tent. In the tradition of Abraham, American Lutheran churches have an impressive record of hospitality toward refugees, including resettling 57,000 after World War II and 50,000 at the end of the Vietnam War.<sup>2</sup> Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service and Catholic Relief Services continue to be the largest organizations involved with resettlement.

On behalf of Arab and Middle Eastern people among us, we feel called as a community of faith to be a “bridge over troubled waters for strangers in a strange land.”<sup>3</sup> The metaphors of building bridges and being bridge people portray both the potential role for Christians of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage in the ELCA and the specific recommendations in this ministry strategy.

Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well in John 4 illustrates the value of bridge-building and of religious and cultural diversity as the Church shares the Good News. The Samaritan woman Jesus addresses is different from him in gender, ethnicity, religious practice, and perceived moral character. Yet after she has experienced first-hand the “living water” Jesus offers, she becomes the witness who bridges the cultural distance between Jesus the Jewish Messiah and her fellow Samaritans.

Journalist and novelist Amin Maalouf is Lebanese, French, Arab, and Christian. He explains that he and others like him live on the “frontier between opposed communities.” They can integrate the diverse elements that form their identity and be “a kind of mortar joining together and strengthening the societies in which they live.”<sup>4</sup>

The ELCA’s 1993 social statement on race and ethnicity urges us to move beyond “an ‘assimilation’ approach to culture” to benefit

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<sup>2</sup>“A Message on Immigration,” approved by the ELCA Board of the Division for Church in Society and adopted by the ELCA Church Council on November 16, 1998.

<sup>3</sup>Pr. Frederick E. N. Rajan, executive director, ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries, Oakland, Calif., meeting in January 2004.

<sup>4</sup>In the Name of Identity: Violence and the Need to Belong, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), p. 36.

from “the plurality of cultures already present in our church” and society.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, this church's 2003 Evangelism Strategy affirms the “rich diversity” of communal prayer and worship in the Lutheran tradition and calls for a renewal of worship among “people and congregations that represent a variety of perspectives and practices regarding worship.”<sup>6</sup> Evidence of this varied heritage is apparent even in the contrasting worship styles of Lutheran churches with members of European descent. Norwegian-background congregations in North Dakota may emphasize simple sanctuaries and a worship service marked primarily by preaching and hymns. In contrast, some German-background congregations in New York may stress weekly observance of Holy Communion with such liturgical accompaniments as incense and bells. An ELCA that can embrace diverse northern European customs can be enriched by the presence of Arab-language congregations and their use of icons, candles, incense, and the ancient melodies of the oldest Christian churches. Arab and Middle Eastern Christians bring many distinctive gifts to the ELCA:

- 1) A cultural insight into the Arab values of hospitality and celebration, two areas the ELCA has been seeking to enhance;
- 2) Access to a more passionate, poetic rhetorical style, more akin perhaps to African American Baptists than traditional Lutheranism;
- 3) A more experiential and direct sense of the world in which biblical material arose, not only from recent immigrants from Arab countries but also from second and third generation Arab Americans. In their work on the parables, biblical scholars Kenneth Bailey and Carol Schersten LaHurd<sup>7</sup> have demonstrated how such experience enriches understanding of the New Testament. Arab and Middle Eastern Lutherans have unique interpretive insights to share with the whole ELCA;

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<sup>5</sup>“Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture,” adopted by the Churchwide Assembly on August 31, 1993, pp. 3–4.

<sup>6</sup>“Sharing Faith in a New Century: A Vision for Evangelism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in August 2003.

<sup>7</sup>For example, see Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), and *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1992); and Carol Schersten LaHurd, “Re-Viewing Luke 15 with Arab Christian Women,” in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff (London and New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 246–268.

- 4) A cultural orientation toward appreciation of the mysterious, irrational, and mystical elements of religion and humanity. This is a good fit for Lutheranism. As Paul Tillich noted in his 1936 comparison of Calvinism and Lutheranism in America, “[Lutheranism] includes...an awareness of the irrational and demonic nature of existence, an appreciation of the mystical element of religion, and a rejection of Puritan legalism in private and corporate life”;<sup>8</sup>
- 5) An orientation toward valuing family and communal life more than individualism, which has reached problematic proportions in American life;
- 6) A stronger emphasis on religious practice in daily life—such as reciting family prayers before an icon in the home—than is true historically in the European stream of Lutheran Protestantism— which tends to focus mainly on religious doctrine. Thus, Arab Christians have something in common with Jews and Muslims, a connection that could be helpful in interfaith dialogue and shared ventures; and
- 7) An unusual perspective on living with prejudice. Unlike groups generally more easily recognizable as “persons of color,” Arab-Americans can often “hide” within the majority population. Thus, while anti-Arab prejudice and discrimination is extensive in the United States, many Arab-Americans have the choice of escaping it by hiding or never calling attention to their Arab background.<sup>9</sup>

All these gifts, including worship styles adapted from the Holy Land’s oldest Christian churches, can enrich the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as members of varied ethnic origins celebrate together the Reformation gift of freedom for diversity in both ceremonies and church structures.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Paul Tillich, as quoted by James Luther Adams, “Paul Tillich on Luther,” in *Interpreters of Luther: Essays in Honor of William Pauck*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), p. 306.

<sup>9</sup>Most of these points are taken from “Arab-American Lutherans, Diversity, and Inclusiveness in the ELCA,” an address by Ryan LaHurd on September 1, 1990, at an ELCA consultation.

<sup>10</sup>See Article VII, “The Church,” *The Augsburg Confession*.

## 11. Goals and Strategies

### A. Support for Congregations

Many Christians of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage currently are active in the life of the ELCA as members of English-language congregations and as representatives on synod committees and the boards of churchwide units. In addition, three ELCA-sponsored Arabic-language ministries are serving Middle Eastern Christians in New York, Michigan, and Illinois. The presence of a large Arab Lutheran community in San Francisco, Calif., indicates that opportunities exist for expansion of Arab and Middle Eastern ministries in the ELCA. In addition, awareness of people and cultures of Middle Eastern background is increasing in the United States and the ELCA through educational television broadcasts and congregational adult forums. Many Americans, however, continue to respond to such people and cultures on the basis of ignorance and stereotypes. It will be vital for the success of all this church's ethnic-specific ministries to develop strategies for educating ELCA members toward the goals of being a diverse and inclusive community of faith and enhancing cultural awareness among pastors and synod leaders.

Even where the climate is favorable for congregational development among Arab and Middle Eastern people, too often personnel and funds are insufficient. For example, although the existing Arabic-language congregations have a rich worship life that incorporates words and melodies that sometimes date back to the early Aramaic-speaking church, the congregations need help in developing and publishing English-Arabic liturgies and hymnals. They also need financial resources for hiring church musicians and youth directors and educational resources sensitive to the language and cultural needs of immigrant and second-generation Christians of Middle Eastern heritage. In addition, the congregations need assistance with youth programs that can identify, equip, and nurture a new generation of clergy and adult lay leaders for Arab and Middle Eastern ministries. Frequent consultation with the ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers,

will be important for developing and providing such resources. Finally, many of the specific recommendations in this section match recommended objectives and actions in the ELCA Evangelism Strategy, which was approved by the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Particularly relevant is that document's affirmation of the "interrelatedness between vibrant worship, evangelism, and discipleship."<sup>11</sup>

**To bridge the gap between what Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage have and what they need in order to gain greater participation in and strengthened affiliation with the ELCA and to enhance their ministries of stewardship, worship, and Christian education, we recommend strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Congregational Ministries, the Renewing Worship project, the Division for Outreach, the Division for Ministry, and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers:**

## **1. Full participation in the ELCA**

**We recommend:**

- a. strengthened partnerships among synods and congregations, in consultation with churchwide units, with Arabic language congregations and new mission starts, including revitalizing existing congregations by joining them with emerging Arab ministries; and
- b. increased support and hospitality for Arab-language congregations by neighboring congregations, local synods, and the ELCA; and more specifically, working with bishops and conference deans to build relationships between Arab-language and English-language congregations so that all may become partners in God's mission.

## **2. Stewardship**

**We recommend:**

- a. support for new ministry starts and assistance for organized congregations becoming self-sufficient;

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<sup>11</sup>"Sharing Faith in a New Century," Objective IV, Action H.

- b. adaptation of Division for Congregational Ministries stewardship materials and synod training strategies to educate Arab and Middle Eastern congregation members about the importance of giving time, talents, and money and the uses of benevolence support for synodical, churchwide, and partner ministries;
- c. consultation and sharing stewardship materials with ecumenical partners;
- d. increased opportunities for Arab and Middle Eastern Christians to contribute time and talents to the ELCA, through a churchwide public speaking network and service on synod boards and committees; and
- e. expanded use of the Mission Partners program for Arab ministries through consultation with the Division for Outreach and synods.

### **3. Worship**

#### **We recommend:**

- a. publication of a service and hymnal resources in Arabic and English, including both Middle Eastern and traditional European and American hymns, possibly as downloadable PDF files suitable for loose leaf binders, with accompanying music on compact disc;
- b. congregation-based and regional resource centers for Arabic language worship materials, with resource lists posted on the ELCA Web site;
- c. churchwide affirmation of the worship styles of Arab and Middle Eastern churches, including distribution of translated and transliterated hymns for general use in the ELCA;
- d. capability for simultaneous English-Arabic translation during worship and adult education in local congregations; and
- e. training of leaders to broadcast Arabic language worship services on the Internet, radio, and television.

### **4. Christian education**

#### **We recommend:**

- a. enhanced programs for prayer, Bible study, and the essentials of the Lutheran tradition all levels, in

collaboration with Division for Higher Education and Schools and ecumenical partners such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), including:

- 1) Internet-based and reproducible confirmation, Sunday school, and vacation Bible school materials sensitive to the particular values, culture, and concerns of the American Arab and Middle Eastern Christian community; and
  - 2) Assistance from the Division for Congregational Ministries and Division for Global Mission for finding globally available materials from both Lutheran heritage and ecumenical perspectives;
- b. programs for recruiting and training lay teachers, possibly in collaboration with other ethnic associations and ecumenical partners, including:
- 1) creating ethnic-specific tracks within existing ELCA Christian education workshops; and
  - 2) using the ELCA's theological education network and SELECT continuing education videos;
- c. congregation-based and regional resource centers for Arabic language religious education materials, with resource lists posted on the ELCA Web site; and
- d. church-sponsored after school programs for children.

## B. Evangelical Outreach

The mission statement guiding this ministry strategy is “Empowered by Christ, rooted in the lands and culture of the Bible and earliest Christianity, and sent to the world, we seek to serve and proclaim the Gospel among Arabs and people of the Middle East and to share this community’s gifts with the whole church.” This declaration confirms the commitment of the Arab and Middle Eastern community to participate in this church’s overall evangelism strategy and its emphases on prayer, leadership, discipleship, and the formation and renewal of congregations. In particular, the ELCA evangelism strategy calls for training ethnic-specific leaders, equipping “lay evangelists to work in ethnic and language specific settings,” and creating “ethnic and language-specific evangelism resources.”<sup>12</sup> Christians in the

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<sup>12</sup>“Sharing Faith in a New Century,” Objective II, Actions C and F; Objective III, Action D.

ELCA's Arab and Middle Eastern community have a passionate desire to share Christ in the world through the witness of their words and actions. They will be able more fully to participate in ELCA evangelism efforts through intentional and intensive collaboration within synods and with churchwide units.

**To bridge the distance from shore-to-shore by assisting Arab and Middle Eastern Christians and their congregations to grow in evangelical outreach, we recommend strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Outreach, the Division for Ministry, the Department for Communication, and the Division for Congregational Ministries:**

## **1. Evangelism**

**We recommend:**

- a. the start-up of at least five new Arab and Middle Eastern congregations by the year 2015, complementing the 2003 Evangelism Strategy's call to this church to "phase into existence by 2010 the pattern of annually starting 100 new congregations";<sup>13</sup>
- b. doubled participation of Arab and Middle Eastern Christians in the ELCA from 1,500 to 3,000 by the year 2010;
- c. resources on the ELCA Web site for Arab ministries, with links to Christian Arabic book stores and other resource outlets and to the Web site of the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH);<sup>14</sup> and
- d. continuing education for mission pastors, including information about existing ELCA resources, such as the SELECT theological education videos.

## **2. Hospitality**

**We recommend:**

- a. creating worshipping and educational communities where people will feel at home using their languages and sharing their cultures;

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<sup>13</sup>"Sharing Faith in a New Century," Objective IV, Action A.

<sup>14</sup>The ELCA's 2003 Evangelism Strategy recommends expansion of "electronic communication for internal and external communication and evangelism," Objective IV, Action E.

- b. extending a welcome through advertising and personal communication;
- c. building ministries that include Christians of varied denominational backgrounds and worship styles;
- d. networking and shared ministry with families in non-Arab churches;
- e. campus ministry programs in concert with the Division for Higher Education and Schools, including its annual campus ministry conference, that invite participation by international students through campus pastors and international student offices;<sup>15</sup> and
- f. exploring the possibility of cooperative grant proposals with the Division for Higher Education and Schools.

### C. Sharing God's Love with the World

The ELCA is a church still comprised primarily of the descendants of immigrants, some of whom came from Scandinavia, Germany, and France as long ago as the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This church's statements on peacemaking, race and ethnicity, and immigration all stress the value in these times of welcoming newcomers into our midst because we believe that all people are "God's creatures, sinners for whom Christ died"<sup>16</sup> and thus people worthy of our respect and concern. Now is a fitting time to reexamine our attitudes toward newcomers and to commit ourselves as a church to "advocate for immigration, refugee, and asylum laws that are fair and generous"<sup>17</sup> and to welcome new immigrants into our congregations. In order to neutralize mistrust and negative attitudes toward Middle Eastern people in particular, the ELCA Arab ministries and congregations can provide safe haven and function as community service centers. These centers, with the help of volunteers, could offer a variety of services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, citizenship classes, computer training, counseling services, and reconciliation ministry. Such outreach is already

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<sup>15</sup>"Sharing Faith in a New Century," Objective II, Action E.

<sup>16</sup>"For Peace in God's World," adopted by the fourth Churchwide Assembly on August 20, 1995, p. 13.

<sup>17</sup>"A Message on Immigration," p. 1.

occurring in the Arab ministry locations in Brooklyn, N.Y.; Chicago, Ill.; Dearborn, Mich.; and Glendale, Calif. The impressive community impact of these ministries and their social outreach underscores the need to expand existing services and add programs in such potential outreach growth areas as southern Florida and northern California.

**To enable Arab and Middle Eastern Christians who have become part of the ELCA not only to step forward as members of a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created, but also to be bridges over troubled waters providing Good News for people who need good news, we recommend strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Global Mission, the Division for Congregational Ministries, the Division for Church in Society, the Lutheran Office for Governmental Affairs, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and Lutheran Services in America:**

## **1. Advocacy**

**We recommend:**

- a. use of the resources of ELCA divisions and agencies to engage Arab and Middle Eastern ministry communities in consultation with the ELCA in advocacy for such justice issues as Middle East peace, Augusta Victoria Hospital,<sup>18</sup> and “just laws that serve the common good”;<sup>19</sup> and
- b. encouragement for Arab and Middle Eastern church members to take active leadership roles in local communities and to develop positive relationships with public officials, including politicians, police, and the FBI.

## **2. Social Ministry**

**We recommend:**

- a. development of community service centers in one or two Arab-language congregations by the year 2010 to reinforce the congregations' social ministry outreach by:

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<sup>18</sup>See “Support for Lutheran Ministries in Palestine,” Churchwide Assembly Action CA03.04.09.

<sup>19</sup>“A Message on Immigration,” pp. 3–4.

- 1) serving as safe havens for Arab and Middle Eastern people;
  - 2) offering a variety of services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, women's education, geriatric social services, citizenship classes, computer training, a food bank, and reconciliation ministry; and
  - 3) seeking government faith-based initiative funds as appropriate and in collaboration with congregational social ministry program staff;
- b. wherever such centers cannot be established, development of networks of personnel who can provide advice and referrals for such services as noted above;
  - c. family and crisis counseling using bilingual counselors and ethnically and culturally sensitive resources, wherever possible in collaboration with Lutheran Services in America; and
  - d. cultural sensitivity training for Lutheran social ministry organization personnel and others.

## D. Global, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Relationships

Heightened tensions between Arab Islamic countries and the United States and among Jews, Christians, and Muslims here and abroad provide both challenges and opportunities for Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage to be bridge people. They can act as bridges to unite and strengthen the communities in which they live, work, and worship.

Examples include:

- The Arab Lutheran ministry in Dearborn, Mich., that brought together Christians and Muslims for a September 11 memorial service;
- St. Elias Church in Chicago, which reaches out to other Christians through such education efforts as a newsletter, Bible study, and concerts;
- The Arab Lutheran church in Brooklyn, N.Y., which has united all the local Middle Eastern Christians and involved them in constructive dialogue with Jews and Muslims and with civil authorities, such as the local police and the FBI; and

- Palestinian Lutheran intern pastor in a Michigan congregation is educating other Lutherans about Middle Eastern Christians and their culture.

Arab and Middle Eastern Christians are especially capable of building new bridges of understanding to Muslims in the United States and abroad. Not only have most of them experienced religious pluralism in predominantly Muslim countries, but their worship shares with Islam the Arabic language and even the Arabic name of God, “Allah,” which simply translates, “The God,” and is used in prayer and worship by both Muslims and Christians. In addition to their experience of mutual witness and dialogue with religious others, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians can contribute to a “culture of peace” and help “foster a dynamic vision of difference in unity,” as envisioned in the ELCA social statement, “For Peace in God’s World.”<sup>20</sup>

**To build new bridges and to deepen and extend the ELCA’s global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God’s mission we recommend strategies in the following areas, to be carried out by working in partnership with the Department for Ecumenical Affairs, the Division for Global Mission, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land:**

**We recommend:**

- a. education of ELCA members and congregations about the Middle East, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians and their gifts through:
  - 1) units on our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters in vacation Bible school and/or Sunday church school materials; and
  - 2) a national speakers bureau of Arab and Middle Eastern ELCA members and interested others;
- b. strengthened and expanded relationships with ecumenical partners in doing Arab and Middle Eastern ministries;
- c. advocacy on interfaith and Middle East peace issues and increased interaction of ELCA members and

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<sup>20</sup>“For Peace in God’s World,” p. 13.

- programs with Jews and Muslims in local communities;<sup>21</sup> and
- d. enhancement of the ELCA's global commitments through
- 1) the resource of ALAMEH for the Division for Global Mission;
  - 2) continuing and strengthening the ELCA's mutual interchange with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL); and
  - 3) strategies to link the ELCA with Christians of the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

## E. Leadership Development for a Pluralistic World

Most of the pastors and lay leaders of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage currently serving in the ELCA are immigrants from such places as Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Second generation leaders, however, need to be recruited, trained, and supported. These efforts will present challenges of language and culture that are difficult, but not insurmountable, especially with careful and creative planning. A proposal is in process to recruit and train five lay members from each of the four Arab congregations for leadership in worship, preaching, and pastoral care. If funded and implemented, this training program may become a model for future use in other congregations, especially those that serve the ELCA's ethnic-specific communities. Such training serves well the objectives and recommended actions of the ELCA's 2003 Evangelism Strategy.

**To build support for future bridges by developing faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God's mission in a pluralistic world, we recommend strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Ministry, the Division for Outreach, the Division for Higher Education and Schools, the Department for Synodical Relations, and the Division for Congregational Ministries:**

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<sup>21</sup>"Peace in the Holy Land," Churchwide Assembly Action CA03.02.07 concludes, "To encourage the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to continue its interfaith activities in the United States to promote mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect."

<sup>22</sup>"Support for Lutheran Ministries in Palestine," Churchwide Assembly Action CA03.04.09 lists a number of concrete strategies for achieving this goal.

## 1. Clergy

### We recommend:

- a. recruitment and training of at least five new Arab-language clergy by 2015, by encouraging and enabling congregations to identify potential leaders;
- b. strengthening the Arab and Middle Eastern pastors currently serving through regular meetings and communication and visits to each other's ministries;
- c. educating Arab-language seminary students about ELCA policies and procedures;
- d. finding local ELCA families to provide hospitality and mentoring for Arab and Middle Eastern seminary students; and
- e. encouraging ELCA seminaries and synods, in cooperation with the Division for Ministry, the Division for Higher Education and Schools and the Department for Synodical Relations, to offer opportunities to learn about traditional Middle Eastern liturgical styles and culture; and, especially in regions with growing Middle Eastern populations, drawing upon the wisdom and experiences of Arab and Middle Eastern congregational leaders.

## 2. Lay Adult Leaders

### We recommend:

- a. recruitment, training, and ongoing support of people with particular gifts in the Arab-language congregations;
- b. assisting Arab-language pastors to share ministry with lay people; and
- c. regional training events with attention to Arab culture and a community's particular needs, using:
  - 1) the theological education network; and
  - 2) possible joint lay leader workshops in Chicago for training in stewardship, Christian education, evangelism, and youth.

### 3. Youth Leaders

**We recommend:**

- a. increased congregational involvement and responsibility on congregation councils and in outreach and social ministry activities;
- b. assistance with the cultural “balancing act” between American lifestyle and Middle Eastern heritage;
- c. regular exchange visits for youth, both among the Arab ministries and with the rest of the ELCA, in partnership with the Division for Congregational Ministries and in collaboration with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries placement of international camp counselors; and
- d. increased participation by Arab and Middle Eastern youth in ELCA youth programs and in the multicultural advisory committee through:
  - 1) providing scholarships; and
  - 2) the eventual establishment of an informal association for Arab and Middle Eastern youth.

## Executive Summary

In the 1990s, the Commission for Multicultural Ministries and the Division for Outreach began working with the Arab and Middle Eastern Lutheran community, culminating in the formation of the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH). The origins of the Arab and Middle Eastern community within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) extend back many millennia to Mesopotamia, the land “between the rivers,” often considered the biblical garden of Eden and the cradle of human civilization. Today’s ELCA members of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage, from such places as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Palestine, are the descendants of these earliest Christians. Throughout the ELCA, Lutherans from diverse Middle Eastern heritage are involved as pastors, lay leaders, and members of synodical committees and the boards of the churchwide units.

The Arab ministry strategy seeks ways to invite Arabs and Middle Easterners into the Lutheran expression of the body of Christ through biblical hospitality and in the spirit of Jesus’ admonition that the neighbors we are called to love and serve are all our fellow human beings. The five goals and their strategies parallel the ELCA’s strategic directions: support for congregations; evangelical outreach; sharing God’s love with the world; global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships; and leadership development for a pluralistic world.

**The goal of support for congregations** acknowledges the ministries presently serving Middle Eastern Christians in New York, Michigan, and Illinois and anticipates potential growth in such regions as northern California. Even where the climate is favorable for congregational development among Arab and Middle Eastern people, too often personnel and funds are insufficient. To bridge this gap the task force recommends strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Congregational Ministries, the Renewing Worship project, the Division for Outreach, the Division for Ministry, and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers:

1. **Full participation in the ELCA** through strengthened partnerships among synods and congregations, in consultation with churchwide units, bishops and conference deans.
2. **Stewardship**, especially by adaptation of Division for Congregational Ministry stewardship materials and synod training strategies to educate Arab and Middle Eastern congregation members about the importance of giving time, talents, and money.
3. **Worship** through publication of a service and hymnal resources in Arabic and English using downloadable PDF files and accompanying music on compact disc; and congregation based and regional resource centers for Arabic language worship materials.
4. **Christian** education through enhanced programs for prayer, Bible study, and the essentials of the Lutheran tradition, in collaboration with Division for Higher Education and Schools and ecumenical partners; programs for recruiting and training lay teachers; and congregation based and regional resource centers for Arabic language religious education materials.

**The goal of evangelical outreach** confirms the commitment of the Arab and Middle Eastern community to participate in this church's overall evangelism strategy and its emphases on prayer, leadership, discipleship, and the formation and renewal of congregations. The task force recommends strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Outreach, the Division for Ministry, the Department for Communication, and the Division for Congregational Ministries:

1. **Evangelism** by means of the start up of at least five new Arab and Middle Eastern congregations by the year 2015; doubled participation of Arab and Middle Eastern Christians in the ELCA from 1,500 to 3,000 by the year 2010; enhanced resources; and continuing education for mission pastors.
2. **Hospitality** in developing welcoming communities of worship and education through advertising, communication, and campus ministry.

**The goal of sharing God's love with the world** will enable Arab and Middle Eastern Christians in the ELCA not only to step forward as members of a public church that witnesses boldly to God's love for all that God has created, but also to be bridges over troubled waters providing Good News for people who need good news. To that end, the task force recommends strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Global Mission, the Division for Congregational Ministries, the Division for Church in Society, the Lutheran Office for Government Affairs, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, and Lutheran Services in America:

1. **Advocacy** on justice issues in consultation with ELCA divisions and agencies and encouragement for Arab and Middle Eastern church members to take active leadership roles in local communities.
2. **Social ministry** through development of community service centers in one or two Arab language congregations by the year 2010 and development of networks of personnel who can provide advice and referrals for such services as English language classes and family counseling.

**The goal of global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships** acknowledges heightened tensions between Arab Islamic countries and the United States and among Jews, Christians, and Muslims here and abroad and asserts that Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage can act as bridges to unite and strengthen the communities in which they live, work, and worship. The task force recommends these strategies, to be carried out by working in partnership with the Department for Ecumenical Affairs, the Division for Global Mission, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land: education of ELCA members and congregations about the Middle East, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians and their gifts; strengthened and expanded **relationships** with ecumenical partners in doing Arab and Middle Eastern ministries; advocacy on interfaith and Middle East peace issues and increased interaction of ELCA members and programs with Jews and Muslims in local communities; and enhancement of the ELCA's **global commitments**.

**The goal of leadership development for a pluralistic world** recognizes the need to recruit and train pastors and lay leaders, especially from the Arab and Middle Eastern heritage second generation. The task force recommends strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in partnership with the Division for Ministry, the Division for Outreach, the Division for Higher Education and Schools, the Department for Synodical Relations, and the Division for Congregational Ministry:

1. Recruitment and training of at least five new Arab language clergy by 2015, strengthening of current Arab and Middle Eastern pastors, and enhanced education of Arab language seminary students.
2. For lay adult leaders, recruitment, training, and ongoing support through regional training events.
3. For youth leaders, increased congregational involvement and responsibility, regular exchange visits, and increased participation by Arab and Middle Eastern youth in ELCA youth programs and in the multicultural advisory committee.

All of these efforts are intended to serve the mission articulated by the Arab and Middle Eastern ministry task force: **Empowered by Christ, rooted in the lands and culture of the Bible and earliest Christianity, and sent to the world, we seek to serve and proclaim the Gospel among Arabs and people of the Middle East and to share this community's gifts with the whole Church.**

## Appendix: The Arab Ministry Task Force

**Pastor Bassam J. Abdallah** is the ELCA Consultant for Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries. He has been pastor of First United Lutheran Church, Hammond, Indiana, for the past 15 years and was pastor of Redeemer Lutheran Church in Bryant, Indiana, for 13 years. In 1988 he encouraged the ELCA to start a ministry among Arabs and people from the Middle East and since 1995 has served as consultant on Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries for the Commission for Multicultural Ministries. He was born in 1950 in Jerusalem and attended Martin Luther School and St. George Middle and High Schools. He studied at Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, was ordained in February 1977, and has done postgraduate work at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. He and his wife, Katy, have one son, Joseph.

**Katy Abdallah** was born in Jerusalem, married the Rev. Dr. Bassam Abdallah in 1977 and moved with him to the United States. Katy has a master's degree in education and is working as a teacher in Chicago. She has also published with Augsburg Fortress Youth Ministries Magazine, has served on the board of ALAMEH (Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage) and is currently on the board of the ELCA Division for Church in Society

**Pastor Rani Abdulmasih**, a Christian Palestinian born and raised in Jerusalem, moved to the United States in 1989. He received the B.S. in Chemistry from St. Bonaventure University, New York, and worked as Synthetic Chemist and Quality Control Supervisor at Inolex Chemical Company in Philadelphia from 1994-2000. He attended the Ecumenical Theological Seminary, Detroit, and Pacific Theological Seminary, through the ELCA's Theological Education for Emerging Ministries program, for graduate theological education. Since 2000 Pastor Abdulmasih has been the mission developer and pastor of the Abundant Life Arabic Lutheran Ministry in Dearborn, Michigan. He is co-founder of the Council of the Middle Eastern Churches of Metro Detroit, and a member of the Domestic Violence Coalition, the Dearborn Ministerial Association, and Geriatric

Social Services of Michigan. He is involved in ongoing interfaith dialogue with Muslim leaders and ecumenical dialogue with other Middle Eastern Christian denominations. In October 2003, in recognition of his work establishing relationships and dialogue among Muslims and Christians in Metro Detroit, he received the “Building Bridges” award from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee under the patronage of Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah, Queen of Jordan.

**Pastor Gabi Aelabouni** was born in 1977 in Ailaboun Village, a small town near Nazareth in the Galilee region of Israel/Palestine. Pastor Aelabouni was raised in the Melkite Christian tradition and in 2000 was invited by the ELCA to come to the United States for theological study. In 2001 He began seminary studies in Chicago in order to become an ordained pastor in the ELCA. He received his B.A. in psychology and criminology from Unisa University in Haifa, and his Master of Divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Since June 2005, Pastor Aelabouni has been serving God’s people at St. Elias Christian Church, an Arabic-language ELCA congregation in Chicago, and at Faith Lutheran Church, an Anglo congregation in Brookfield, Ill. Pastor Aelabouni’s commitment to advocating for peace in Palestine and Israel has led him to work to build awareness by educating ELCA congregations in Michigan and the Chicago area about the land, the conflict, and the daily life of the people in the Holy Land.

**Pastor Michael Batarseh** was born and raised in Bethlehem and immigrated to the United States in 1971. He received an M.B.A. from Azusa Pacific University and a Ph.D. in Christian ministry and education from the California Graduate School of Theology. For the past 19 years he has served as pastor of the Arabic Community Christian Church in Glendale, California. He is also on the board of World Emergency Relief U.S. (an international humanitarian organization) and on the executive committee of the Arab World Evangelical Ministers Association (doing ministry in Arab countries), serving as vice chairman for the last four years. In October 2003 Pastor Batarseh was approved for ministry with the ELCA. He lives in Sun Valley in the Los Angeles area with his wife Mirna, a Palestinian from Jerusalem, and their two children, Jessica and Michael Jr.

**Grace Kuttab El-Yateem** was born in Bethlehem in 1966 and is from the Christian quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. She is a registered nurse in a hospital cardiac intensive care unit and the mother of four children: Rowan, Janette, Naim, and Isabelle. She is an active lay leader and member of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York. She served as president of ALAMEH from 2001-2004. She is chairwoman of the ELCA Commission for Multicultural Ministries Steering Committee and a board member of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service. She has served as a voting member to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, as well as to triennial gatherings of the Women of the ELCA. She advocates on behalf of the human rights of the Palestinian people and speaks frequently on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

**Pastor Khader El-Yateem** is chair of the Ministry Task Force. He was born in the West Bank town of Beit Jala in 1968. After graduating from high school he studied at the Bethlehem Bible College, graduated with a diploma in theology, and then studied at the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo, Egypt, where he received the BA degree. After working for a year at the Bethlehem Bible College and as youth minister at the Reformation Lutheran Church in Beit Jala, he was invited by the ELCA to work as a mission developer among the Arab and Middle Eastern community in the United States. He studied at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia and graduated with the M. Div. degree. Pastor El-Yateem was called by the Division for Outreach to start Salam Arabic Lutheran Church in Brooklyn, New York, which became the first official Arabic Lutheran Church in North America. He serves on many boards in the United States and abroad, including the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee. Pastor El-Yateem was featured in the Public Broadcasting System documentary "Caught in the Cross Fire: Arab Americans in War Time." He works tirelessly for justice and peace on behalf of the Palestinian people and helped plan the ELCA's Evangelism Strategy, accepted at the 2003 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. Rev. El-Yateem and his wife Grace have four children.

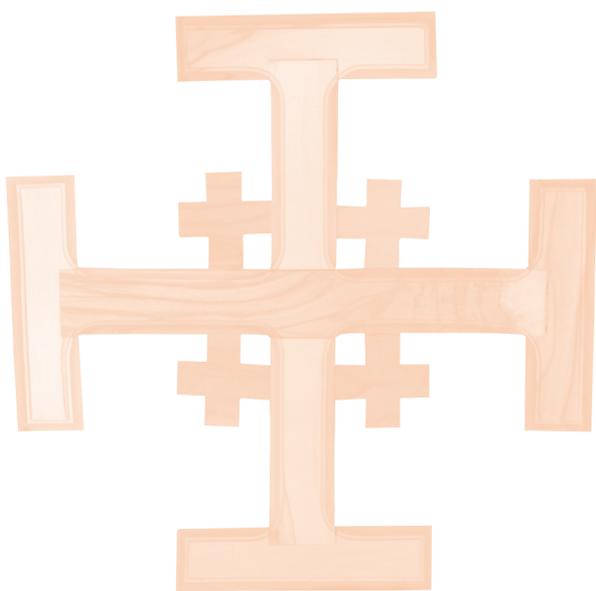
**Joseph Andony Husary**, born in Bethlehem in 1951 to Lutheran parents, grew up in the Evangelical Christmas Lutheran Church and attended its school until graduation in 1969. In 1972 he taught English, German, and Hebrew in several schools and in 1976 immigrated to the United States with his family. Currently he resides in San Leandro, California, with wife Olga and children, Andy and Alexy. They also have three grown children: Isaac, Amir, and Lara. Joseph and Olga own and manage two successful businesses, a floral shop and a restaurant near the Oakland Airport in California. In 1999 Joseph became treasurer of ALAMEH, and in July 2004 he was elected president. In 2003 he was elected vice president of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in San Leandro and chosen by the ELCA Church Council to serve on the Commission for Multicultural Ministries Steering Committee.

Strategy author **Carol Schersten LaHurd** lives in New Rochelle, New York, and currently teaches part-time at Fordham University. She has taught biblical studies and Islam at numerous universities, including St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Wake Forest in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Dr. LaHurd is a graduate of Augustana College (Rockland, Illinois), and she received the M.A. in English Language and Literature from the University of Chicago, and the Ph.D. in Religious Studies from the University of Pittsburgh (and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary). With her family she has lived and taught in Damascus, Syria, and Sana'a, Yemen, and has traveled widely. Her husband Dr. Ryan LaHurd, a Lebanese-American, was the first president of ALAMEH. Currently he heads the Near East Foundation, a private, nonprofit, development agency with projects in the Middle East and Africa. They have two adult children, Jeremy and Kristin. She has been co-chairperson of the Muslim-Christian Relations Committee of the Minnesota Council of Churches, chairperson of the Ecumenical Affairs Committee of the Minneapolis Area Synod, member of the ELCA Peace Task Force, and member of the North Carolina Synod Ecumenical Affairs Committee. Dr. LaHurd served on the Board of the ELCA Division for Global Mission from 1997-2003 and recently has been part of ELCA task forces working on Muslim-Christian relations and the Palestine-Israel engagement strategy.

**Adnan Naum** translated the strategy. He was born in 1936 in Kirkuk, Iraq. He received his bachelor's degree in geology from the University of Baghdad and his master's degree in geology from Manchester University in the United Kingdom. Mr. Naum was the chair of the Geology Department at the University of Baghdad in Iraq, where he worked until he immigrated to the United States in 1995. He has been a vital member of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church since it was started as a mission congregation in 1996. He now serves as council president and is an active lay leader in the congregation. Mr. Naum is also active in the community working with the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish leaders. He is a one of the founders of the Unity Task Force, building bridges and networking among religious and civic groups, especially post 9/11. Mr. Naum and his wife have two daughters, Sally and Teeba, and reside in Brooklyn, New York.

**Pastor Rimon Said**, born in Jerusalem in 1961 to Lutheran parents, grew up in Redeemer Lutheran Church, attended the same school until grade nine, and then continued at Hope Lutheran School in Ramallah. He graduated with a diploma degree in Christian Education from Bethlehem Bible College in Bethlehem in 1984. He also received the bachelor's degree from the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo in 1990 and the master of divinity degree from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in 1995. Ordained in April 1995, he started the first Arabic-speaking Lutheran congregation in Chicago. His wife Amira was born in Jaffa City, and they have three children: Hani, Sindy and George. Besides serving St. Elias Christian Church, Pastor Said is instructor for a driving school in Chicago. He has served two terms as vice president of ALAMEH.

**Nabeel Jamil Tannous** was born in Syria to a Christian family. His father was a pastor in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan before immigrating with the family to the United States in 1971. Currently Nabeel lives in Chicago and attends the Arabic-language St. Elias Christian Church, where he is an active lay assistant. He has two children and two grandchildren, works in a downtown Chicago parking garage, and sings Arabic gospel music as a soloist.



ISBN: 6-0002-1555-X

Born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and crucified in Jerusalem  
for the sake of the whole world.