

Statement on Gaza Violence and Bishops' Visit to Middle East

A message from Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson

December 31, 2008

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

"For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." (Isaiah 9:5-7)

In this New Year, we turn again to the Lord of hosts – praying urgently for the justice, righteousness and peace hailed by the birth of the newborn babe in the manger, the humble child, the Prince of Peace.

In these days of terrible violence, death and destruction in Gaza and southern Israel, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) joins its voice with all in the region and around the world who call for an immediate ceasefire. The continuing loss of life, infliction of serious injury and devastation of property will only deepen hatred and divisions, and will serve no good end. Lamenting the recent escalation of violence, only negotiations, leading to a two-state solution, will bring about a durable peace with justice for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The ELCA and the [Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada](#) (ELCIC) are carefully monitoring events in the region as their bishops prepare for their upcoming Academy visit, the planning for which began two years ago. Bishops of both churches have met several times this week by phone, and are united in their assessment that the trip is timelier than ever and should proceed. In keeping with the 2005 ELCA "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine," the trip emphasizes accompaniment with its Lutheran partners in the region, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and The Lutheran World Federation (LWF). In this very difficult time, the bishops hope that their presence can be a source of comfort to these partners and manifest support for these ministries.

ELCA congregations are invited to join with the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, including Bishop Munib Younan of the ELCJHL, who have called for this Sunday, January 4, to be "a day for justice and peace in the land of peace." The ELCA joins them in calling upon, "officials of both parties to the conflict to...refrain from all violent acts, which only bring destruction and tragedy, and urge them instead to work to resolve their differences through

peaceful and non-violent means." And the ELCA joins them in praying, "for the victims, the wounded and the broken-hearted. May the Lord God Almighty grant all those who have lost loved ones consolation and patience. We pray for all those living in panic and fear, that God may bless them with calm, tranquility and true peace."

The ELCA and ELCIC bishops invite the continuing prayers of their church members for building peace among Christians, Jews and Muslims and all of the region's peoples. On behalf of their churches, the bishops offer to their Christian sisters and brothers and to all people affected by the conflict, their steadfast support and their efforts and prayers for peace to prevail and healing to begin.

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