

Middle East Network Newsletter

November 8, 2010

Peace Not Walls campaign remains strong, revises staffing, following ELCA restructuring

As the ELCA undertakes necessary churchwide office restructuring, the ELCA's commitment to the emphases of the Peace Not Walls (PNW) campaign—Accompaniment, Awareness-building, and Advocacy—remains strong. The immediate result of restructuring for Peace Not Walls staffing, and evidence of that enduring commitment, is the decision by the ELCA's design team to consolidate the coordinator position with that of the Middle East director for ELCA Global Mission. The result is that the Rev. Robert Smith, PhD, is now PNW campaign coordinator. Dr. Carol LaHurd will continue serving as Associate Coordinator until her contract ends on January 31, 2011.

Many Peace Not Walls staffing elements will remain the same, as both the Washington Office and the Lutheran Office for World Community have been carried forward within the ELCA's new Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit. The Rev. Susan Wilder will continue working as the PNW-supported Middle East policy director through the ELCA Washington Office, and Dennis Frado will continue leading PNW Advocacy Coordination.

As the ELCA Corporate Responsibility Program was eliminated in the new design, the helpful work of Pat Zerega and Patty Ruffner will not continue. Meanwhile, the remaining PNW team members are assessing how to continue implementing the economic measures addressed in the Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine and subsequent Churchwide assembly actions.

The Rev. Julie Rowe will carry on her work with website and resource development. Also ongoing will be close cooperation with the executives for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, specifically with the Rev. Donald McCoid and Dr. Michael Trice.

The Peace Not Walls campaign to implement the ELCA's Middle East churchwide strategy is strengthened by the dedication of Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, respected around the world when he speaks on Israeli-Palestinian peace. Equally essential is the passionate involvement of members in synods and congregations across the ELCA. In this critical time for U.S. efforts to work toward a negotiated settlement between Israelis and Palestinians, the Peace Not Walls staff team looks forward to increased collaboration with ELCA grassroots leaders and synod and local activists to promote peace.

Church leaders raise issue of Middle East peace in meeting with President Obama

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and about 20 other Christian leaders met with President Obama at the White House on November 1. The ELCA news article on the meeting notes that with regard to the Middle East, "the religious leaders said they appreciated the administration's recent efforts to promote peace between Israelis and Palestinians, and at the same time emphasized the need to preserve Jerusalem as a shared city for all and protect the place of Christians in the region, the ELCA presiding bishop said." **Read the full ELCA news article [here](#).**

Vatican convenes Synod on the Middle East, invites Bishop Younan to speak

A Special Assembly for the Middle East, held at the Vatican in Rome in October, brought together Pope Benedict XVI, Catholic leaders from the Middle East and elsewhere, Orthodox Christians, and Jewish and Muslim guests.

The assembly's concluding statement, "An Appeal to Safeguard the Faith," offered a pastoral message and touched on a wide range of subjects including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, saying, "We have taken account of the impact of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the whole region, especially on the Palestinians who are suffering the consequences of the Israeli occupation... We have reflected on the suffering and insecurity in which Israelis live. We have meditated on the situation of the holy city of Jerusalem. We are anxious about the unilateral initiatives that threaten its composition and risk to change its demographic balance. With all this in mind, we see that a just and lasting peace is the only salvation for everyone and for the good of the region and its peoples."

Bishop Munib Younan, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and president of The Lutheran World Federation, was invited to address Pope Benedict XVI and the Synod of Bishops at the

assembly on October 21. In his address Younan said, "It is essential that we strengthen our ecumenical relations both in Israel-Palestine and the whole Middle East." He highlighted the importance of interfaith dialogue, including offering his endorsement of "World Interfaith Harmony Week" (see article below). "Our challenge," he said, "is nothing less than loving our neighbors as ourselves."

- Read the [Concluding Statement from the Special Assembly for the Middle East of the Synod of Bishops](#).
 - Read [Bishop Younan's address to the Synod](#).
 - Read the [ELCJHL article about the Synod](#).
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World Interfaith Harmony Week proclaimed by UN General Assembly

On Oct. 20, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming an annual World Interfaith Harmony Week, an event to include people of all beliefs. Initiated by Jordan and co-sponsored by five other member states, World Interfaith Harmony Week is a call for religions to unite around the basic principles that people of all beliefs agree upon, and to understand that harmony can come only if we build upon a solid foundation of dialogue that has "love of God and love of the neighbor" as its core principle for engagement. [Learn more](#).

Churches for Middle East Peace condemns killing of Iraqi Christians in letter to Secretary of State

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) sent a November 1 letter to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton denouncing the killing of Iraqi Christians at Our Lady of Salvation Catholic Church in Baghdad on October 31. The letter reads in part, "Churches for Middle East Peace condemns all violence directed against civilians, including Iraqis of all religions and ethnicities. Violence against minority populations creates additional concern because of their special vulnerability. While Christian communities represent one of the oldest faith traditions in Iraq, as many as 500,000 have fled the country or are internally displaced. Yesterday's violence will only serve to aggravate conditions for Christians and other minorities in Iraq and across the Middle East." In addition, the letter urges, "that U.S. policies seek in every way possible to reinforce the strong history of peaceful religious coexistence in Iraq."

- Read the full letter [here](#).
 - Read a [statement from the World Council of Churches](#).
 - Read a [statement from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops](#).
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Presbyterian mission network calls for boycott of settlement products

The Israel/Palestine Mission Network (IPMN) of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., voted at its annual meeting in Chicago in October to join the boycott of goods produced in Israeli settlements, noting that the decision came "in response to a call to action from the Christians of the Holy Land." The network voted to direct its initial boycott effort at Ahava Cosmetics, King Solomon Dates, and Jordan River Dates, and "to identify companies profiting from the illegal military occupation, initiate dialogue with them and expand the boycott list if needed, at a later date."

Read the full IPMN press release [here](#).

Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Muslim Relations ready for use

"Talking Points" is a set of eight leaflets issued by the office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations of the ELCA, for discussion and engagement. These are intended to stimulate reflection, response, and activity on key issues as part of ongoing inter-religious discourse today. The leaflets address particular topics, from Women in Islam to Belief in God, and are ready for use by congregations. [Learn more](#).

Peace Not Walls website being revamped

Visit the newly-streamlined home page for [Peace Not Walls](#). The Did You Know section features relevant news and resources. The green boxes have been simplified into a Quick Links section with links to the Kairos document, the 2009 Bishops' Academy and the Peace Talks, among other subjects. The intention is to keep just one story on the front page and list the older headlines with links to an archived news page containing those stories.

Several new Major Issues pages, such as Christian Presence, Shelter (Settlements and Home Demolitions) and the Status of Jerusalem, are under construction [here](#) and, like the Gaza page, will include sections on What's at Stake, Human Stories, the Church's Voice, Act Now, Background and International Law.

Oxfam provides Gaza update

Oxfam's "Gaza weekly update" for October 24-30, 2010 provides statistics on "Mortars/rockets/casualties/incursions," "Fisherman," Tunnel related fatalities," and a number of other topics including supplies of electricity, cooking gas, and diesel/petrol for the people of Gaza. **Read the [full report](#) under the stories section of the Gaza web page.**



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