



Recommendations: Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy

Background Information

In the early 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). As part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's plan to develop long-range ministry strategies for this church's various ethnic groups, a task force from the Arab and Middle Eastern community began meeting in October 2003, leading to discussion of a strategy draft at the July 2004 ALAMEH gathering in Orlando, Florida.

Recommendation for Assembly Action

To receive with appreciation the Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America developed by the Arab and Middle Eastern community;

To express support and deep appreciation for existing ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with Arab and Middle Eastern people; and

To recommit the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to partnership with existing Arab and Middle Eastern congregations and to intensified outreach with the Gospel among the wider Arab and Middle Eastern communities.

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

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

I. Introduction

A. *Historical Background*

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

10 The origins of the Arab and Middle Eastern community
11 within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA)
12 extend back many millennia to Mesopotamia, the land
13 "between the rivers," often considered the biblical garden of
14 Eden and the cradle of human civilization. Passing through
15 this land to Canaan was a man with roots in Ur in the northern
16 Arabian peninsula: Abraham is the father through tradition
17 and faith of Jews, Christians, and Muslims and the ethnic
18 father of Jews and Arabs through his sons Isaac and Ishmael.
19 Centuries later Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh, gave
20 his life for all humanity. His followers led the mid-first century
21 Jewish movement that became universal Christianity. Even in
22 the earliest days of the Christian community, the arrival of the
23 Holy Spirit at Pentecost was witnessed by Arabs and Middle
24 Easterners along with others living during the Roman Empire
25 in the multi-ethnic Palestine and Fertile Crescent. As this
26 dramatic event unfolded, the observers asked, "And how is it
27 that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

28 Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia,
29 Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and
30 Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,
31 and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and
32 Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about
33 God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:8–11). Acts 2:41 tells us that
34 "three thousand people" were added to the body of Christ that
35 day—a striking reminder of the long history of Christian
36 presence in today's Middle East.

37 Today's ELCA members of Arab and Middle Eastern
38 heritage, from such places as Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq,
39 Jordan, and Palestine, are the descendants of these earliest
40 Christians. The Arabic language of their liturgy has close ties
41 with the Hebrew and Aramaic of Bible times. The specifically
42 Lutheran presence in the region dates back to the middle 19th
43 century, when English and German Christians began to found
44 schools, hospitals, and churches. The Evangelical Lutheran
45 Church (ELCJ) based in Palestine and Jordan became
46 autonomous in 1959, and has been led by local Arab bishops
47 since 1979.¹ Immigrants from Palestine are serving as pastors
48 in the ELCA's Arab language congregations in Brooklyn,
49 N.Y., Chicago, Ill., and Dearborn, Mich. Throughout the
50 ELCA, Lutherans from diverse Middle Eastern heritage are
51 involved as pastors, lay leaders, and members of synodical
52 committees and the boards of churchwide units.

¹"Brief History of the ELCJ," at www.holyland-lutherans.org/history.htm.

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 nineteenth and early twentieth 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.

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.² 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."³ 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."⁴

The ELCA's 1993 social statement on race and ethnicity urges us to move beyond "an 'assimilation' approach to culture" to benefit from "the plurality of cultures already present in our church" and society.⁵ 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."⁶ Evidence of this varied heritage is apparent even in the contrasting worship styles of

² "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.

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

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

⁵"Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture," adopted by the Churchwide Assembly on August 31, 1993, pp. 3-4.

⁶"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.

158 Lutheran churches with members of European descent.
159 Norwegian-background congregations in North Dakota may
160 emphasize simple sanctuaries and a worship service marked
161 primarily by preaching and hymns. In contrast, some German-
162 background congregations in New York may stress weekly
163 observance of Holy Communion with such liturgical
164 accompaniments as incense and bells. An ELCA that can
165 embrace diverse northern European customs can be enriched
166 by the presence of Arab-language congregations and their use
167 of icons, candles, incense, and the ancient melodies of the
168 oldest Christian churches. Arab and Middle Eastern Christians
169 bring many distinctive gifts to the ELCA:

- 170 1) A cultural insight into the Arab values of hospitality and
171 celebration, two areas the ELCA has been seeking to enhance;
- 172 2) Access to a more passionate, poetic rhetorical style, more
173 akin perhaps to African American Baptists than traditional
174 Lutheranism;
- 175 3) A more experiential and direct sense of the world in which
176 biblical material arose, not only from recent immigrants from
177 Arab countries but also from second and third generation Arab
178 Americans. In their work on the parables, biblical scholars
179 Kenneth Bailey and Carol Schersten LaHurd⁷ have
180 demonstrated how such experience enriches understanding of
181 the New Testament. Arab and Middle Eastern Lutherans have
182 unique interpretive insights to share with the whole ELCA;
- 183 4) A cultural orientation toward appreciation of the
184 mysterious, irrational, and mystical elements of religion and
185 humanity. This is a good fit for Lutheranism. As Paul Tillich
186 noted in his 1936 comparison of Calvinism and Lutheranism
187 in America, “[Lutheranism] includes . . . an awareness of the
188 irrational and demonic nature of existence, an appreciation of
189 the mystical element of religion, and a rejection of Puritan
190 legalism in private and corporate life”;⁸
- 191 5) An orientation toward valuing family and communal life
192 more than individualism, which has reached problematic
193 proportions in American life;

ELCA’s Strategic Directions:

- Support congregations in their call to be faithful, welcoming, and generous, sharing the mind of Christ;
- Assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach;
- Step forward as a public church that witnesses boldly to God’s love for all that God has created;
- Deepen and extend our global, ecumenical, and interfaith relationships for the sake of God’s mission; and
- Assist this church to bring forth and support faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations serve God’s mission in a pluralistic world.

⁷For 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.

⁸Paul 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.

194 6) A stronger emphasis on religious practice in daily
195 life—such as reciting family prayers before an icon in the
196 home—than is true historically in the European stream of
197 Lutheran Protestantism—which tends to focus mainly on
198 religious doctrine. Thus, Arab Christians have something in
199 common with Jews and Muslims, a connection that could be
200 helpful in interfaith dialogue and shared ventures; and

201 7) An unusual perspective on living with prejudice. Unlike
202 groups generally more easily recognizable as “persons of
203 color,” Arab-Americans can often “hide” within the majority
204 population. Thus, while anti-Arab prejudice and
205 discrimination is extensive in the United States, many Arab-
206 Americans have the choice of escaping it by hiding or never
207 calling attention to their Arab background.⁹

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

214 II. Goals and Strategies

215 A. Support for Congregations

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

235 Even where the climate is favorable for congregational
236 development among Arab and Middle Eastern people, too
237 often personnel and funds are insufficient. For example,
238 although the existing Arabic-language congregations have a
239 rich worship life that incorporates words and melodies that
240 sometimes date back to the early Aramaic-speaking church,
241 the congregations need help in developing and publishing
242 English-Arabic liturgies and hymnals. They also need
243 financial resources for hiring church musicians and youth
244 directors and educational resources sensitive to the language
245 and cultural needs of immigrant and second-generation
246 Christians of Middle Eastern heritage. In addition, the

⁹Most 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.

¹⁰See Article VII, “The Church,” *The Augsburg Confession*.

247 congregations need assistance with youth programs that can
248 identify, equip, and nurture a new generation of clergy and
249 adult lay leaders for Arab and Middle Eastern ministries.
250 Frequent consultation with the ELCA Division for
251 Congregational Ministries and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers,
252 will be important for developing and providing such resources.
253 Finally, many of the specific recommendations in this section
254 match recommended objectives and actions in the ELCA
255 Evangelism Strategy, which was approved by the 2003 ELCA
256 Churchwide Assembly. Particularly relevant is that
257 document's affirmation of the "interrelatedness between
258 vibrant worship, evangelism, and discipleship."¹¹

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

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

270 **We recommend:**

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

282 **2. Stewardship**

283 **We recommend:**

- 284 a. support for new ministry starts and assistance for
285 organized congregations becoming self-sufficient;
- 286 b. adaptation of Division for Congregational Ministries
287 stewardship materials and synod training strategies to educate
288 Arab and Middle Eastern congregation members about the
289 importance of giving time, talents, and money and the uses of
290 benevolence support for synodical, churchwide, and partner
291 ministries;
- 292 c. consultation and sharing stewardship materials with
293 ecumenical partners;
- 294 d. increased opportunities for Arab and Middle Eastern
295 Christians to contribute time and talents to the ELCA, through
296 a churchwide public speaking network and service on synod
297 boards and committees; and
- 298 e. expanded use of the Mission Partners program for
299 Arab ministries through consultation with the Division for
300 Outreach and synods.

¹¹"Sharing Faith in a New Century," Objective IV, Action H.

301 **3. Worship**

302 **We recommend:**

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

319 **4. Christian education**

320 **We recommend:**

- 321 a. enhanced programs for prayer, Bible study, and the
322 essentials of the Lutheran tradition all levels, in collaboration
323 with Division for Higher Education and Schools and
324 ecumenical partners such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),
325 including:
 - 326 1) Internet-based and reproducible confirmation, Sunday
327 school, and vacation Bible school materials sensitive to
328 the particular values, culture, and concerns of the
329 American Arab and Middle Eastern Christian community;
330 and
 - 331 2) Assistance from the Division for Congregational
332 Ministries and Division for Global Mission for finding
333 globally available materials from both Lutheran heritage
334 and ecumenical perspectives;
- 335 b. programs for recruiting and training lay teachers,
336 possibly in collaboration with other ethnic associations and
337 ecumenical partners, including:
 - 338 1) creating ethnic-specific tracks within existing ELCA
339 Christian education workshops; and
 - 340 2) using the ELCA's theological education network and
341 SELECT continuing education videos;
- 342 c. congregation-based and regional resource centers for
343 Arabic language religious education materials, with resource
344 lists posted on the ELCA Web site; and
- 345 d. church-sponsored after school programs for children.

346 **B. Evangelical Outreach**

347 The mission statement guiding this ministry strategy is
348 "Empowered by Christ, rooted in the lands and culture of the
349 Bible and earliest Christianity, and sent to the world, we seek
350 to serve and proclaim the Gospel among Arabs and people of
351 the Middle East and to share this community's gifts with the
352 whole church." This declaration confirms the commitment of
353 the Arab and Middle Eastern community to participate in this
354 church's overall evangelism strategy and its emphases on
355 prayer, leadership, discipleship, and the formation and renewal
356 of congregations. In particular, the ELCA evangelism strategy
357 calls for training ethnic-specific leaders, equipping "lay

358 evangelists to work in ethnic and language specific settings,”
359 and creating “ethnic and language-specific evangelism
360 resources.”¹² Christians in the ELCA’s Arab and Middle
361 Eastern community have a passionate desire to share Christ in
362 the world through the witness of their words and actions. They
363 will be able more fully to participate in ELCA evangelism
364 efforts through intentional and intensive collaboration within
365 synods and with churchwide units.

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

373 1. Evangelism

374 We recommend:

- 375 a. the start-up of at least five new Arab and Middle
376 Eastern congregations by the year 2015, complementing the
377 2003 Evangelism Strategy’s call to this church to “phase into
378 existence by 2010 the pattern of annually starting 100 new
379 congregations”;¹³
- 380 b. doubled participation of Arab and Middle Eastern
381 Christians in the ELCA from 1500 to 3000 by the year 2010;
- 382 c. resources on the ELCA Web site for Arab ministries,
383 with links to Christian Arabic book stores and other resource
384 outlets and to the Web site of the Association of Lutherans of
385 Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH);¹⁴ and
- 386 d. continuing education for mission pastors, including
387 information about existing ELCA resources, such as the
388 SELECT theological education videos.

389 2. Hospitality

390 We recommend:

- 391 a. creating worshiping and educational communities
392 where people will feel at home using their languages and
393 sharing their cultures;
- 394 b. extending a welcome through advertising and
395 personal communication;
- 396 c. building ministries that include Christians of varied
397 denominational backgrounds and worship styles;
- 398 d. networking and shared ministry with families in non-
399 Arab churches;
- 400 e. campus ministry programs in concert with the
401 Division for Higher Education and Schools, including its
402 annual campus ministry conference, that invite participation by
403 international students through campus pastors and
404 international student offices;¹⁵ and
- 405 f. exploring the possibility of cooperative grant
406 proposals with the Division for Higher Education and Schools.

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

¹³“Sharing Faith in a New Century,” Objective IV, Action A.

¹⁴The ELCA’s 2003 Evangelism Strategy recommends expansion of
“electronic communication for internal and external communication and
evangelism,” Objective IV, Action E.

¹⁵“Sharing Faith in a New Century,” Objective II, Action E.

407 C. *Sharing God’s Love with the World*

408 The ELCA is a church still comprised primarily of the
409 descendants of immigrants, some of whom came from
410 Scandinavia, Germany, and France as long ago as the
411 seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This church’s statements
412 on peacemaking, race and ethnicity, and immigration all stress
413 the value in these times of welcoming newcomers into our
414 midst because we believe that all people are “God’s creatures,
415 sinners for whom Christ died”¹⁶ and thus people worthy of our
416 respect and concern. Now is a fitting time to reexamine our
417 attitudes toward newcomers and to commit ourselves as a
418 church to “advocate for immigration, refugee, and asylum laws
419 that are fair and generous”¹⁷ and to welcome new immigrants
420 into our congregations. In order to neutralize mistrust and
421 negative attitudes toward Middle Eastern people in particular,
422 the ELCA Arab ministries and congregations can provide safe
423 haven and function as community service centers. These
424 centers, with the help of volunteers, could offer a variety of
425 services such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes,
426 citizenship classes, computer training, counseling services, and
427 reconciliation ministry. Such outreach is already occurring in
428 the Arab ministry locations in Brooklyn, N.Y.; Chicago, Ill.;
429 Dearborn, Mich.; and Glendale, Calif. The impressive
430 community impact of these ministries and their social outreach
431 underscores the need to expand existing services and add
432 programs in such potential outreach growth areas as southern
433 Florida and northern California.

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

445 1. Advocacy

446 We recommend:

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

¹⁶“For Peace in God’s World,” adopted by the fourth Churchwide
Assembly on August 20, 1995, p. 13.

¹⁷“A Message on Immigration,” p. 1.

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

¹⁹“A Message on Immigration,” pp. 3–4.

456 **2. Social Ministry**

457 **We recommend:**

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

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

479 **D. Global, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Relationships**

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

- 487 ● The Arab Lutheran ministry in Dearborn, Mich., that
488 brought together Christians and Muslims for a September
489 11 memorial service;
- 490 ● St. Elias Church in Chicago, which reaches out to other
491 Christians through such education efforts as a newsletter,
492 Bible study, and concerts;
- 493 ● The Arab Lutheran church in Brooklyn, N.Y., which has
494 united all the local Middle Eastern Christians and
495 involved them in constructive dialogue with Jews and
496 Muslims and with civil authorities, such as the local
497 police and the FBI; and
- 498 ● Palestinian Lutheran intern pastor in a Michigan
499 congregation is educating other Lutherans about Middle
500 Eastern Christians and their culture.

501 Arab and Middle Eastern Christians are especially capable
502 of building new bridges of understanding to Muslims in the
503 United States and abroad. Not only have most of them
504 experienced religious pluralism in predominantly Muslim
505 countries, but their worship shares with Islam the Arabic
506 language and even the Arabic name of God, "Allah," which
507 simply translates, "The God," and is used in prayer and
508 worship by both Muslims and Christians. In addition to their
509 experience of mutual witness and dialogue with religious
510 others, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians can contribute to
511 a "culture of peace" and help "foster a dynamic vision of
512 difference in unity," as envisioned in the ELCA social
513 statement, "For Peace in God's World."²⁰

²⁰"For Peace in God's World," p. 13.

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

522 **We recommend:**

523 a. education of ELCA members and congregations
524 about the Middle East, Arab and Middle Eastern Christians
525 and their gifts through:

- 526 1) units on our Middle Eastern brothers and sisters in
527 vacation Bible school and/or Sunday church school
528 materials; and
 - 529 2) a national speakers bureau of Arab and Middle
530 Eastern ELCA members and interested others;
- 531 b. strengthened and expanded relationships with
532 ecumenical partners in doing Arab and Middle Eastern
533 ministries;

534 c. advocacy on interfaith and Middle East peace issues
535 and increased interaction of ELCA members and programs
536 with Jews and Muslims in local communities;²¹ and

537 d. enhancement of the ELCA's global commitments
538 through:

- 539 1) the resource of ALAMEH for the Division for Global
540 Mission;
- 541 2) continuing and strengthening the ELCA's mutual
542 interchange with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
543 Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL); and
- 544 3) strategies to link the ELCA with Christians of the
545 Middle East.²²

546 **E. Leadership Development for a Pluralistic World**

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

562 **To build support for future bridges by developing**
563 **faithful, wise, and courageous leaders whose vocations**
564 **serve God's mission in a pluralistic world, we recommend**
565 **strategies in the following areas, to be carried out in**
566 **partnership with the Division for Ministry, the Division for**

²¹"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."

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

567 **Outreach, the Division for Higher Education and Schools,**
568 **the Department for Synodical Relations, and the Division**
569 **for Congregational Ministries:**

570 **1. Clergy**

571 **We recommend:**

572 a. recruitment and training of at least five new Arab-
573 language clergy by 2015, by encouraging and enabling
574 congregations to identify potential leaders;

575 b. strengthening the Arab and Middle Eastern pastors
576 currently serving through regular meetings and communication
577 and visits to each other's ministries;

578 c. educating Arab-language seminary students about
579 ELCA policies and procedures;

580 d. finding local ELCA families to provide hospitality
581 and mentoring for Arab and Middle Eastern seminary students;
582 and

583 e. encouraging ELCA seminaries and synods, in
584 cooperation with the Division for Ministry, the Division for
585 Higher Education and Schools and the Department for
586 Synodical Relations, to offer opportunities to learn about
587 traditional Middle Eastern liturgical styles and culture; and,
588 especially in regions with growing Middle Eastern
589 populations, drawing upon the wisdom and experiences of
590 Arab and Middle Eastern congregational leaders.

591 **2. Lay Adult Leaders**

592 **We recommend:**

593 a. recruitment, training, and ongoing support of people
594 with particular gifts in the Arab-language congregations;

595 b. assisting Arab-language pastors to share ministry
596 with lay people; and

597 c. regional training events with attention to Arab culture
598 and a community's particular needs, using:

599 1) the theological education network; and

600 2) possible joint lay leader workshops in Chicago for
601 training in stewardship, Christian education, evangelism,
602 and youth.

603 **3. Youth Leaders**

604 **We recommend:**

605 a. increased congregational involvement and
606 responsibility on congregation councils and in outreach and
607 social ministry activities;

608 b. assistance with the cultural "balancing act" between
609 American lifestyle and Middle Eastern heritage;

610 c. regular exchange visits for youth, both among the
611 Arab ministries and with rest of the ELCA, in partnership with
612 the Division for Congregational Ministries and in collaboration
613 with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries placement of international
614 camp counselors; and

615 d. increased participation by Arab and Middle Eastern
616 youth in ELCA youth programs and in the multicultural
617 advisory committee through:

618 1) providing scholarships; and

619 2) the eventual establishment of an informal association
620 for Arab and Middle Eastern youth.

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