

ELCA Presiding Bishop Responds to Letter from Muslim Leaders  
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CHICAGO (ELCA) -- The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and president of the Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, responded Oct. 12 to an Oct. 11 letter sent to him and several global Christian leaders by 138 Muslim leaders from throughout the world.

The 29-page open letter, "A Common Word Between You and Us," calls for Muslims and Christians to work more closely together for peace.

"Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population," the Muslim leaders wrote. "Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists."

Information about the contents of the letter is available on the Web from news organizations

The text of the presiding bishop and LWF president's response reads:

"Greetings to you in the name of Almighty God, our Creator and Sustainer.

On October 11, a copy of a letter was delivered to me from Muslim scholars and religious leaders addressed to Christian religious leaders around the world. As presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and president of the Lutheran World Federation, I receive this letter in the sincere expression of faithfulness intended by its drafters, and with the hopeful expectation for peace that calls to us from the origins of our sacred texts and professions of faith. I encourage prayer and planning for communities of justice, peace, and security where Muslims, Jews, and Christians draw from these origins as from essential wells of living water.

The letter attests to both the love of God and our shared heritage of true hospitality to one's neighbor. These commandments convey prophetic witness for mutual and vital co-existence that Christians and Muslims must embrace in one another. The letter further references how the commands to love God and neighbor are linked "between the Qur'an, the Torah and the New Testament." I encourage everyone everywhere to read the beauty of these passages found in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic faiths, which signify God's vision for how and whom we love in a broken world. This common vision for Jews, Muslims, and Christians signifies fidelity and fellowship in a world where conflict offends our common heritage as children of God.

In 2005 I, along with an LWF delegation that included General Secretary Ishmael Noko, met with His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi, personal envoy and special advisor to King Abdullah II of Jordan. Our delegation was grateful for the sincere hospitality and friendship that were so freely displayed in our conversation. The delegation spoke at length with Prince Ghazi about the origins of the Abrahamic faiths in that region of the world. In another meeting, Akel Biltaji, advisor to His Majesty the King, stated, "We are honored to be servants and custodians of the Holy sites."

I acknowledge this letter in gratitude and recognition of the need for its further study and consideration. I likewise accept it in the belief that Jews, Muslims, and

Christians are called to one another as to a holy site, where God's living revelation in the world is received in reverence among the faithful and not in fear of our neighbors.

I pray for God's continued blessings among Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike, and thank God for such displays of wisdom and humility from their leaders."

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson

Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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