



ELCA News in Brief

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Lutheran World Leader Joins in Call to End Middle East Violence

CHICAGO (ELCA) -- The leaders of three global church organizations -- including the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, president of the Lutheran World Federation, Geneva -- have called for an end to the fighting in Lebanon and Israel and conflict in Gaza. The church leaders issued a joint public statement Aug. 8, saying they were "shocked" by the violence, death and destruction occurring in Gaza, Israel and Lebanon.

Hanson, who also serves as presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), based here, joined in the statement with the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Geneva, and stated clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), Louisville, Ky.; and the Rev. Samuel Kobia, general secretary, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

"As followers of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, and as leaders of the World Council of Churches and the worldwide fellowships of Lutheran and Reformed churches, we are shocked by the relentless violence, death and devastation occurring in Lebanon, Israel and Palestine," the church leaders wrote.

"We mourn the loss of life. We abhor the untold human costs of this conflict, especially its impact on innocent people. We deplore the destruction of infrastructure and property. In the face of tragedy of such magnitude, we affirm that God calls us to do justice, reconcile with our enemies and live together in peace," they wrote.

The church leaders called on Hezbollah and Israel to end the fighting in Israel and Lebanon, and called for the United States, European Union and Arab States "to exercise their influence toward this end." They also called on Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas to end the conflict in Gaza.

When a cease-fire is achieved, the church leaders said political leaders and other parties should "begin the work for a compassionate order that will lead to a lasting peace. Our organizations and our churches are eager to share in that endeavor."

The full text of the joint statement is at http://www.elca.org/bishop/m_endviolence.html

ELCA Rural Ministry Gathering Emphasizes Networking

SELINSGROVE, Pa. (ELCA) -- About 100 people met here at the annual gathering of the Small Town and Rural (STaR) Ministry Alliance, emphasizing networking to address rural concerns through special interest groups known as "affinity groups." The alliance represents more than 5,800 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) 10,461 congregations.

The meeting was held July 20-22 here at Susquehanna University, one of 28 ELCA colleges and universities. Participants engaged in worship, workshops and affinity group meetings, and heard speakers focus on the theme "Celebrating Rural Life."

"The mission of this gathering is to celebrate rural life and the gifts that it brings," said Sandra L. LaBlanc, ELCA director for rural ministry and networking, Des Moines, Iowa, adding that the gathering purposely emphasizes the positives of rural life while acknowledging that small towns, farms and rural congregations have serious economic and social problems to confront.

ELCA Offers Resources for Possible Flu Pandemic

CHICAGO (ELCA) -- Domestic Disaster Response of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has prepared resources for congregations in event of a flu pandemic. Although avian flu is currently limited to fowl and is only occasionally transmitted to people in close contact with infected birds, infectious disease experts indicate that the virus could adapt and spread among people, said Heather L. Feltman, director of ELCA Domestic Disaster Response (DDR), in a July message posted on the ELCA Web site. If this occurs, the world may be faced with a flu pandemic, she said.

A document, "Responding Faithfully to Pandemic Flu," was created to prepare congregations in the event of a pandemic, according to the message. It refers directly to ELCA social statements on what it means to be a public church and the roles of congregations.

"Congregational Planning for Flu Pandemic" is a resource guide for congregations preparing for a possible pandemic. The document includes information on communication, worship and community outreach in the event of a pandemic.

DDR has also compiled a "top 10" list of ways to prepare for a possible pandemic, urging congregations to "reach out to community groups and public health officials" and "consider the special needs of the most vulnerable people in your congregation and community."

These resources are all located at www.elca.org/disaster/pandemic