

December 19, 2008

Dear Partners in Ministry,

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; ... for unto us a son is given, ... the Prince of Peace. The One in whom these words of Isaiah are fulfilled is the Child whose birth we are about to celebrate. Jesus comes as the Prince of Peace and we who walk in the ways of the Christ are called to be peacemakers.

I write to invite your prayers as Anita and I will be joining other ELCA bishops and spouses on a peacemaking trip that will take us to Jordan, Israel and Palestine. The January 2-16 trip is part of the ELCA "Churchwide Strategy for Engagement in Israel and Palestine," adopted by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly. Also on the trip will be bishops and spouses from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

The purpose of the trip is threefold: to grow in **awareness** of what is happening "on the ground" among Israelis and Palestinians; to **accompany** Bishop Munib Younan and the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Jordan and the Holy Land; and to **advocate** for strategies that lead to a just and lasting peace for all peoples living in the Middle East.

During the trip we will meet with Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian religious, community and political leaders, and visit congregations, schools, and sites of religious significance.

Having been to the Holy Land in 2005, I know the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land are eager for us to learn the reality of their lives. We will be worshipping with them in their churches and meeting with their leaders. But we will also be advocating for justice and peace in the Middle East, as we meet with leaders of both Israel and Palestine.

In preparation for this trip, I read **The Lemon Tree: An Arab, a Jew and the Heart of the Middle East** by Sandy Tolan. It is a true story that illuminates both the depth of pain and the difficult path to peace in the Middle East. Peace is possible in the Middle East by the power of God at work in people of all faith traditions. Thus we shall travel in January, bearing witness to God's deep love and care for all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

A Merry Christmas to all of you.

Peace in Christ,

Bishop Gerald Mansholt
Central States Synod