



Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

The 500th Reformation Anniversary is not only a time to celebrate being Lutheran but also to think about our ecumenical and inter-religious relationships.

The synod encourages and supports your efforts to meet your ecumenical and inter-religious neighbors.

LUTHERAN-JEWISH RELATIONS, DIALOGUE AND PARTNERSHIP: GUIDELINES FROM THE METRO D.C. SYNOD ¹

Even as we celebrate this anniversary, we bear in mind that Martin Luther's writings have been used to harm our Jewish brothers and sisters (as well as Muslims). *Luther's On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543) includes disturbing suggestions for action against Jews. ²

"In the spirit of that truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews," states the "Declaration of ELCA to Jewish Community." ³ "As did many of Luther's own companions in the sixteenth century, we reject this violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our day.

"Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred," the Declaration continues, "moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people. We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry, both within our own circles and in the society around us. Finally, we pray for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community."

Find out where your local synagogue(s) and/or Jewish Community Center is/are.

- Have you met the rabbis or leaders yet?
- Are they involved in local interfaith dialogue?
- Are there opportunities for partnership to address common community issues?

Read resources offered on the ELCA website for helpful background on Inter-Religious Relations. ⁴ Talking points offer information on specific topics related to Christian-Jewish Dialogue. ⁵

To avoid anti-Jewish preaching and teaching, read an essay, "Bearing False Witness: Common Errors Made about Early Judaism," by Dr. Amy-Jill Levine. ⁶ Use the notes throughout the text that contains the essay, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. ⁷

There are many topics to consider in Lutheran-Jewish dialogue, but two come up frequently.⁸ It is helpful to consider what Lutherans believe in these areas.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is extremely complicated, and there is a wide spectrum of views from both Lutherans and Jews, ranging from support/advocacy for Israel and its policies to striving for a two-state solution and everything in between. There are also both Christian and Jewish Zionist groups which advocate for the state of Israel often based on the understanding of a divine mandate for Israel's existence. Care, mutual respect and humility should be taken when engaging in conversation around this topic.⁹

"Christian Seders" also come up. The Seder meal as practiced today developed after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE – it is not the same meal Jesus and his disciples shared at the Last Supper.¹⁰

For more information and local resources, check out:

- Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington: <http://www.jcouncil.org>
- Institute for Islamic, Christian, Jewish Studies: <http://www.icjs.org/>
- Dr. Amy-Jill Levine Vanderbilt University: amy-jill.levine@vanderbilt.edu, 615-343-3967 (office)

Consider contacting a neighboring rabbi or Jewish leader via phone, email or letter! Our synod bishop has funds which he is prepared to use to cover the cost of rostered ministers sharing a meal with other local religious leaders.

1 Prepared by the Rev. Annabelle Peake Markey and the 500th Reformation Anniversary group

2 Luther's *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543) includes the following suggestions German princes could take against Jews because he was upset that they would not convert: "Luther now proposed seven measures of 'sharp mercy': (1) burn their schools and synagogues; (2) transfer Jews to community settlements; (3) confiscate all Jewish literature, which was blasphemous; (4) prohibit rabbis to teach, on pain of death; (5) deny Jews safe-conduct, so as to prevent the spread of Judaism; (6) appropriate their wealth and use it to support converts and to prevent the lewd practice of usury; (7) assign Jews to manual labor as a form of penance." (Source: *Christianity Today* <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-39/was-luther-anti-semitic.html>)

3 On April 18, 1994 the ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted the "Declaration of ELCA to Jewish Community," which repudiates Luther's anti-Jewish writings, expresses deep regret for their historical consequences, and reclaims the desire to live in "love and respect for Jewish people." Find the full pdf file from <https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Online-Resources> .

4 A list of online resources can be found at <https://www.elca.org/en/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Online-Resources> .

5 When visiting the online resources from the ELCA listed above, the right hand side of the page contains a “Talking Points” box listing topics in Christian-Jewish relations.

6 Dr. Amy-Jill Levine was our presenter at “Understanding Jesus means Understanding Judaism,” an event jointly sponsored by the Metro D.C. Synod and Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington in December 2016.

7 Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, editors. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament : New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation*. Oxford ; New York :Oxford University Press, 2011. Find Dr. Levine’s essay on pages 501-504.

8 See “Talking Points” mentioned above on elca.org.

9 Background for engaging in conversation on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict includes the following.

- The ELCA supports the Peace Not Walls Campaign – <http://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church-Peace-Not-Walls> and <http://www.elca.org/Resources/Peace-Not-Walls>. “The ELCA has long and deep relationships with Jewish and Muslim communities that foster mutual understanding and challenge all to uphold justice, peace and non-violence,” reads page on elca.org.
- The ELCA works with The Council of Religions Institutions of the Holy Land (CRIHL – <https://www.crihl.org/>) The CRIHL is the first consultative body representing the highest official religious authorities in the Holy Land (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).
- The ELCA works with the National Interreligious Leadership Initiative for Peace in the Middle East (NILI) – <http://www.nili-mideastpeace.org>. NILI represents Jewish, Christian and Muslim groups.
- Jewish groups interested in working toward a two-state solution include Americans for Peace Now (APN) – <http://peacenow.org/> ; and J-Street – <http://jstreet.org/> .
- Jewish groups representing different viewpoints on the issue which you may hear about include Jewish Voices for Peace – <https://jewishvoiceforpeace.org/> ; and Zionist Organization of America – <http://zoa.org/> .

10 The Seder recalls God’s saving acts for Israel as told in the Exodus story and prepares them to live to live out the *mitzvot* (commandments) given at Sinai; it is a celebration of their freedom from slavery in Israel. To celebrate a Seder in a Christian context is a form of co-opting another’s tradition for our own purposes. If you are considering a Seder for educational purposes, contact a local rabbi to see if s/he will lead one. For more information, see “Jesus Didn’t Eat a Seder Meal” in *Christianity Today* – <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/march-web-only/jesus-didnt-eat-seder-meal.html> ; and “Do Christians hold Seder Meals?” from ELCA worship faq – http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Do_Christians_hold_Seder_meals.pdf .