

## 2025-2026 Update from ELCJHL Task Force

*Our purpose as a Synod Task Force is to support the companion relationship that the SEMI Synod shares with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). Our goals of Advocacy, Action, Awareness, and Accompaniment require us to share our work with others, building understanding of the need to protect human rights, oppose all violence, and advocate for a just peace in Palestine and Israel.*

The task force meets regularly (every four-six weeks) in person at Mother of the Savior Lutheran Church in Dearborn as well as via zoom in the winter months. Our work and goals are to:

**Educate** (Speakers, programs, & gatherings to raise awareness in Synod & ELCA)

**Accompany** (Companion congregations, sustained relationships, connecting with “Living STONES” on visits to the Holy Land)

**Advocate** (Churchwide Assembly, Advocacy Days, communication with legislators & elected officials)

**Respond** (to harassment, discrimination, persecution of minority groups)

**Support** (ELCJHL, Palestinian-made goods, local events & gatherings, SUMUD, Churches for Middle East Peace)

**Promote** (trips to the Holy Land, visits to the US for Palestinian youth and adults, local events)

**Pray** (for our siblings in the Holy Land, for an end to violence, for a just and lasting peace)

Our meetings over the past year have included work on providing ELCA advocacy links and event information to the synod through the SEMI newsletter. We continue our commitment to partnering with Mother of the Savior (our synod's only Arabic-speaking congregation, located at Christ Episcopal in Dearborn). We have members who are working regularly to schedule meetings with state legislators and our Bishop in order to discuss concerns over the continued conflict and conditions in Gaza.

Our ongoing commitment to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land has resulted in new relationships with SUMUD and its leaders. We've promoted their Advent and Lenten offerings of video series and bible studies for individuals and groups, as well as other resources and events. We encourage people to connect with them on social media and at

<https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/sumud>.

Task force members have developed relationships with and provide updates from a broad spectrum of faith-based and secular organizations who support our Palestinian siblings, including: Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP), Friends of Sabeel North America (FOSNA), Global Refuge, Samaritas, Opportunity Palestine, ELCA Advocacy, Michigan United, Not Another Bomb, Christians for a Free Palestine, Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH), US Lutheran Palestine-Israel Justice Network (USLPIJN), as well as area clergy and interfaith groups. Several members are involved in USLPIJN and currently working on boycott policies, with our campus ministries, and other follow-up from Churchwide Assembly resolutions.

We've participated in and promoted many events this year, including: The People's Conference on Palestine, CMEP events, the Let Children Live campaign, a speaking engagement with Senator VanHollen, No King's Day rallies in 2025 and 2026, Joint Christian Advocacy Summit in Washington D.C., the SEMI Synod Justice Summit, and celebrating the installation of the new Bishop of the ELCJHL, Imad Haddad.

At the Justice Summit, team members presented on *Palestine and Israel—What Can We Do Now? Understanding & Engaging Efforts for Justice and Peace in the Holy Land*. We were able to share the ELCA commitment to working for the dignity, safety, security, and overall peace and well-being of both Israelis and Palestinians. The profound injustice and suffering in the Holy Land compel us as people of faith to act for peace with justice. We also shared how as a Synod we are called to respond because of our longstanding partnership with our siblings in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL). We offered answers to the question: "But what can we do now?" We offered on the ground updates from Gaza and the West Bank and taught strategies to advocate for, take action, and build awareness of justice for Palestine and Israel and the call for viable, secure, and lasting peace between the two peoples. The workshop included topics such as how the current conflict is affecting the lives of both Palestinians and Israelis, the question of antisemitism, engaging peace and justice initiatives, and opportunities to take action and offer support immediately. Advocacy calls were made that day—from the workshop—to legislators by Justice Summit participants .

Ongoing Projects over the past year included:

- Continuing to discern how to best engage congregations
- Securing meetings with state legislators to advocate for a just peace in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza)
- Building awareness and encouraging congregations to support the ELCJHL, Opportunity Palestine, and Augusta Victoria Hospital; sharing ELCA SUMUD resources with Synod
- Drafting a resolution for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly

- Praying for Gaza as well as for our partners in the ELCJHL

In April of 2026, SUMUD visited Southeast Michigan! Alison Richards and Gabi Alebouni from the ELCA and Maddi Froiland, director of SUMUD, spent time with Synod Staff, members of the Task Force, and congregations within Southeast Michigan for several days. Conversations revolved around opportunities with other companion synods, engagement through storytelling, setting priorities, praying for partner congregations within our SEMI Synod congregations, and setting up advocacy opportunities as a synod. We learned that 17 synods have appointed SUMUD ambassadors in addition to a task force, for direct communication with Sumud & their bishops. We were invigorated and inspired to continue the work as partners with our siblings in the Holy Land and to think about future directions for our Task Force. .

If interested in participating in or learning more about the ELCJHL Task Force, please contact the coordinator, Pastor Amy Cooley Higgs at [pastoramy@hopeon12.com](mailto:pastoramy@hopeon12.com).

Report Submitted by Amy Cooley Higgs on 4/30/2026.