



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Aug. 5, 2015

Dear Member of Congress,

As presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I am writing you regarding the "Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action," which seeks to "ensure that Iran's nuclear program will be exclusively peaceful." We urge your careful deliberation and consideration of a number of ethical dimensions that should be taken in account when deciding how to avoid conflict and war.

We believe God calls the ELCA to be a community for peace and justice; that is, to seek among ourselves and to call on other people to seek the things that lead to a world in which everyone may flourish. As such a community, the ELCA in its social teaching statement "For Peace in God's World," sets a high priority on seeking non-violent means and on arms control and specifically encourages "a sharp reduction in the number of weapons of mass destruction." It gives priority to agreements that "decrease the possibility of nuclear confrontation or accident."

Neither I, nor my church body, pretend to be knowledgeable enough to assess fully the adequacy of the "Joint Plan," although we have high regard for those in political authority charged with the heavy burden of having brought this plan into being. I am aware that the U.N. Security Council endorsed the plan unanimously. The plan is such a critical international agreement it deserves the most careful moral evaluation.

Our church believes that all humans are created for life in community with God, all other humans and the rest of creation. Our church recognizes that governments may employ justifiable force but should do so according to carefully assessed criteria to restrain evil, to succor the common good and to protect sovereignty. God's priority for peace remains paramount, however, and favors the use of wise restraint and sound cooperation that gives significance to the possibilities of peace through non-violent means for all people.

Based on the teachings of our church, we appeal to you to consider several critical questions about the Joint Plan – questions that have not been dominant in the public debates. Precisely because we have high regard for those in political authority, we invite you to weigh heavily the following ethical criteria:

- Does it strengthen the will and ability to resolve conflict peacefully?
- Does it have the support of an international community that fosters differences in unity?
- Does it advocate international codification and support effective ways to monitor and ensure compliance?
- Does it encourage the politics of cooperation that build confidence among nations through forms of state conduct that are legal, nonviolent, verifiable and open?
- Does it improve structures of common security for nations as a whole?
- Does it seem likely to prevent war or reduce the possibility of violence?

These criteria, our church teaches, are critical questions for any political initiative. If these, on the whole, may be answered positively regarding the Joint Plan, then we keenly urge you as a U.S. lawmaker to support this historic opportunity because it would strengthen the common good and prevent a march to war with attendant horrendous "collateral damage" and unanticipated consequences.

With prayers for your service in government, we commend to you these concerns.

God's peace,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop