

# **An invitation from ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson**

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May 24, 2011

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Although it is perhaps difficult to believe, we are just four months away from the ten-year anniversary of September 11, 2001. Even as we seek public healing from the violence and hatred of terrorism, the losses we experienced that day are deeply personal, especially to those in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. Our words of healing must speak to the grief that still remains.

On September 11, President Obama will dedicate a national memorial to those who died on that day ten years ago. This memorial is made possible by the Association of Victim's Families, a group founded, funded and supported by the ELCA through Lutheran Disaster Response of New York. Even as we dedicate this national memorial, we affirm that our real strength lies in our neighborliness and in relationships that have the power to shape the future of religious expression in this country.

In the 2004 ELCA message, "[Living in a Time of Terrorism](#)", this church made sober assessments about what it means to be Lutheran in the United States at a moment when Islam is so quickly paired with terrorism. As Lutherans, we affirm our baptismal commitment "to proclaim the good news" and "strive for justice and peace in all the earth." These words are often spoken on Sundays in our congregations throughout the ELCA, where we pray "for all the baptized everywhere" to be "sent into the world to witness" to God's love. The liberating power of the gospel releases us from human limitations so that we are freed in Christ to reach out to all our neighbors.

In the past ten years, ELCA members have served frequently with Muslim, Jewish, Christian and other religious partners in efforts to heal national wounds and address the rise of bias against Muslims. A Quran burned in Florida or Michigan is an attack against the very faith we confess if we do not speak out on behalf of our neighbors. Religion must not be used as a foil for human hate; we know that Muslims join us in our commitment to combat terrorism. As we seek to build trust through these relationships, we experience the truth that terrorism is not in the core of any religion, that sacred scriptures have deep relevance to communities today, and that God's vision for our future will not be diminished by unchecked fear.

Fear of Muslims all too frequently shows up in our society as public suspicion of an entire religion. As a consequence, ethnic and religious stereotyping against Muslims spills into broad

discrimination of Eastern Christians, Sikhs and others. Thoughtless acts against these groups also have an impact upon Christian communities, because they are contrary to God's vision for our future together.

I encourage you to reach out to ecumenical partners, including Muslim and Jewish partners, in your communities to plan 9/11 commemorations. I invite you to focus on increased awareness, healing of relationships and our future. I've provided information below about events being planned across this country, along with specific resources that will help you choose activities that promote healing and solidarity.

My prayer is that we dedicate ourselves to a common mission of reconciliation and restoration, focusing on the larger issues of peace, justice and interfaith encounter. Our local communities can be places of healing. Let us show the world that dialogue is possible and that there is room for voices that represent faith without rushing to judgement and closing off discussion. Thanks be to God that through our baptismal vocation we are freed in Christ to do God's work with our hands.

In God's grace,

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson  
Presiding Bishop  
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