



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Feb. 26, 2018

Today, I join our partner church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), in expressing solidarity with the churches in Jerusalem to defend their properties and protect the Christian presence in the Holy Land. A few weeks ago, based on a new legal opinion, Jerusalem began collecting property taxes from churches despite an agreement with Israel to exempt them (as they had also been when the city was previously under Jordanian, British and Ottoman control). While the city's action can be seen partially as a financial dispute with the central government, it is noteworthy that this tax collection is taking place alongside a proposal in the Knesset to confiscate church-owned land. The net effect has been to attempt to undermine the historic status quo in Jerusalem and mount increased pressure on the Christian community and its ministries in the Holy Land.

In response to these moves, the churches in charge of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre – the Armenian Apostolic (Orthodox) Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and the Catholic Custody of the Holy Land – on Feb. 25 closed the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem in protest. Today, the ELCJHL, in conjunction with the German Lutheran Church, decided to close Church of the Redeemer and its tower for one day in solidarity.

The ELCJHL has asked us to stand with them and the Christian community and pray for them during this time of trial. I will do so and ask members, congregations and synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to join me. We will continue to be in conversation with our partners in Jerusalem as this situation further develops.

God's peace,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America