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Prepared by the Consultative Panel on Lutheran–Jewish Relations of the office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Your ideas about these topics are very welcome and will be considered by the Panel in its further work. To submit personal reflections or the results of a group discussion, please use the accompanying Response and Evaluation form or simply send a letter to the ELCA office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations at the address below, or send an email to erinfo@elca.org.

Further information on Jewish-Christian relations, including a downloadable form of these “Talking Points,” may be found at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Christian-Jewish-Relations/Talking-Points.aspx. See also the comprehensive set of resources on the ecumenical web site www.jcrelations.net.

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TALKING POINTS

#1

TOPICS IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

INTRODUCTION

JUDAISM THEN AND NOW

Modern Judaism is a vibrant community with much to offer us in faith, ethics, and piety. Christians err if we dismiss Judaism as a misguided relic of the past.

No one who reads the New Testament can escape the fact that Jesus was a Jew, as were all of his original followers. The early Christians viewed their faith as continuous with and a fulfillment of the Jewish heritage in which they had been reared. The Jewish faith, however, found another continuation in rabbinic Judaism, taught and led by those known – as Jesus once was – as rabbis.

Christianity soon became predominantly Gentile, and the Roman Empire eventually became officially Christian. The majority of Jews, though experiencing great tribulations, continued in faithfulness to their ancient covenant (“I shall be your God, and you shall be my people”), shaped by observance of the biblical and rabbinic commandments.

A complete and self-governing Jewish culture grew around strong families and communities, study of the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud,* a distinctive way of life, and the hope of ultimate redemption, including the vision of an eventual return to Jerusalem. The Hebrew language was nurtured in worship, and great literary traditions developed in ethnic languages such as

“Talking Points” is a set of eight leaflets issued by the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America’s office of Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations to set forth propositions for discussion and debate on topics in Christian-Jewish relations. These “Talking Points” are not intended as position papers, but as discussion starters, with the hope of eliciting a broad range of responses to the point as stated in the box above. See back page for information on how to offer feedback.

*I WILL MAKE OF YOU A GREAT NATION,
AND I WILL BLESS YOU...*

*AND IN YOU ALL THE FAMILIES OF
THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.*

GENESIS 12:2,3

*THEY ARE ISRAELITES, AND TO THEM
BELONG THE ADOPTION,
THE GLORY, THE COVENANTS,
THE GIVING OF THE LAW,
THE WORSHIP, AND THE PROMISES...*

ROMANS 9:4

Yiddish. The Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides was a major influence on the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas, and great rabbinic scholars such as Shlomo ben Issac of Troyes ("Rashi") were cited frequently in Luther's biblical commentaries. Jewish thinkers, writers, artists, and activists have also been prominent in many modern intellectual and cultural movements.

The living Jewish community of today – in North America, in Israel, and around the world – continues the heritage of biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism in new and vibrant ways. While diversity has led to denominational differences among Jews, there remains a core communal identity and loyalty to the ancient faith. Often giving leadership in philanthropy and social justice causes, the Jewish community is a powerful partner with the church in living out God's call to be stewards of healing for the world.

* The Talmud is a compilation of legal, moral, and religious traditions codified by the rabbis between the second and sixth centuries that remains a central source of Judaism to this day.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does it mean that both Christianity and Judaism claim to continue the heritage of biblical Israel?
2. In what arenas are you aware of Jewish contributions to community life in your locality, in this country, and on the world scene?
3. How might you learn more about the living community of Judaism in your locality? Consider setting up a discussion group with members of a local Jewish congregation, and ask both the Christians and Jews present to express what is most meaningful to them about their faith. (The "Interfaith Circles" program, listed under Resources in this packet, offers help in setting up such discussions.)
4. What can you find out about the four denominations of Judaism and what their respective emphases are? Try doing an Internet search for Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Judaism.