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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

#2

TOPICS IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

COVENANTS OLD AND NEW

Living in the new covenant given by God in Jesus Christ, we also affirm God’s continuing faithfulness to the covenant with the Jewish people.

While most Lutherans think of our relationship with God in terms of faith, forgiveness, and salvation, we also know this relationship to be one of covenant. Indeed, the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ comes to us in the scriptures known as the “New Testament” or “New Covenant.” Likewise, Jesus comes to us in the Lord’s Supper with the words of promise, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Guaranteed by God’s faithfulness, a covenant brings a promise that helps to define the life of God’s people. In this, it goes far beyond any mere legal contract.

From ancient Israel to our own day, Jews have lived in covenant with God as well. This is seen not only in the circumcision of Abraham and his offspring, but also, for example, in the kingship of David, the gift of the Torah at Sinai, and the appearance of the rainbow in the heavens. Israel’s prophets were the ones who proclaimed God’s faithful intent to establish a new covenant with the people, a living covenant “written on their hearts” (Jeremiah 31:33), even embodied in a “new heart” (Ezekiel 36:26). This would not have to supersede the existing covenant

“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.

*FOR AS THE NEW HEAVENS AND THE NEW
EARTH, WHICH I WILL MAKE,
SHALL REMAIN BEFORE ME,
SAYS THE LORD,
SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS
AND YOUR NAME REMAIN.*

ISAIAH 66:22

*I ASK THEN, HAS GOD REJECTED
HIS PEOPLE? BY NO MEANS!*

ROMANS 11:1

understandings, but in continuity with them it would renew and extend Israel's hope and confidence in God's loving commitment.

Encountering Jesus, some Jews of the first century saw in him the power and presence of God renewing the world and including Gentiles among the people of God. They proclaimed that the promised new covenant had come into being. It was the witness of Paul that this new covenant now brought Gentiles and Jews into one people, so that in and through Christ, Gentiles, too, can now become "Abraham's offspring" (Galatians 3:29).

So we now live in the new covenant established by God in Jesus Christ, joined in continuity to those who have already been made God's people in the covenant of Sinai, and rejoicing with them that God's covenant, new and old, is a gift that is "irrevocable" (Romans 9:4, 11:29).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think of when you reflect on your life of faith as lived in covenant with God? How is a "covenant" different from a "contract"?
2. What other relationships in your life would you describe as being "covenants?" Why?
3. If we can be in multiple covenants simultaneously, can God also? What does that mean for Jews and Christians in their relationship with God and with one another?