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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

#8

TOPICS IN CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS

CHRISTIANS AND JEWS IN THE CONTEXT OF WORLD RELIGIONS

Christians and Jews share a special relationship within the community of world religions. Their recent experience in building mutual respect and understanding can provide a model for wider interfaith relations.

The acknowledgment of Judaism as a co-community of faith carries with it significant challenges for the understanding of Christian faith and identity. These have to do both with our unique relationship with the Jewish people, to whom we are so closely bound by our shared history, and with the broader issues of religious pluralism.

Our relationship to contemporary Judaism requires both sensitivity to what we have in common and a respect for the independent right of Jews to define themselves as a community. A mature Christian respect for the work of God in Judaism thus affirms the faith and practice of Jews as more than a foil, a footnote, or a problem for our own identity.

“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.

*HAVE WE NOT ALL ONE FATHER?
HAS NOT ONE GOD CREATED US?*

MALACHI 2:10

*THEN PETER BEGAN TO SPEAK TO THEM:
“I TRULY UNDERSTAND THAT GOD SHOWS
NO PARTIALITY,
BUT IN EVERY NATION, ANYONE WHO
FEARS HIM AND DOES WHAT IS RIGHT
IS ACCEPTABLE TO HIM.”*

ACTS 10:34

Our two communities share historical and scriptural origins. We have also influenced one another in various ways over the centuries. Yet as Christianity has developed within diverse cultures, and as Judaism has lived through its own rich history, both have grown beyond the terms of their original relationship. Christianity has often been called a “daughter religion” of Judaism; alternatively, the two have been viewed as siblings, both sprung from the ancient faith of Abraham and Sarah. In fact, however, both communities have matured to be separate and fellow “adults” within the diverse world of human faiths.

Recognizing the independent integrity of Judaism, moreover, reminds us that there are other such adult faiths in that diverse world – other communities of faith and practice that also encounter the sacred. The growing reconciliation between Christians and Jews in our time may thus become an example of the way in which we might live together with people of other commitments and experiences.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do Christianity and Judaism have in common, and how do they differ? Are Jewish-Christian relations different than our relationships to other world religions?
2. What does the special relationship between Christians and Jews imply for our relationships to Muslims, who share the same monotheistic faith? What can we do in our local communities to foster understanding among all three groups?
3. How can one maintain a loyalty and commitment to one's own faith while at the same time respecting people of other faiths, and protecting their equal rights in civic life?