

Oct. 16, 2023

Grace and peace to all people of peace,

It has been ten days since Hamas organized its brutal attack targeting civilians in southern Israel. Such violent atrocities, wherever they occur, are abhorrent; they violate human dignity, and they offend God. We join our voices to others in denouncing them in no uncertain terms. As subsequent military actions in Gaza unfold, and many Palestinians are displaced, a humanitarian crisis degrades in the region by the day and puts more lives at serious risk. To make matters even worse, around the world, and close to home, people use this conflict to justify their antisemitism, islamophobia, or both, with instances of hate crimes targeting these communities on a significant rise.

When we witness tragedies of this magnitude, messages and statements are always insufficient to adequately express the feelings of anger, pain, grief, and despair. Sometimes it is better simply to join the groans of our hearts and spirits to those of the most directly suffering. Mindful of this, many Christian leaders living in Jerusalem have designated this coming Tuesday, October 17, as a day for fasting and prayer, calling on others around the world to join with them in a spirit of vigil on that day.

While this will be in part an opportunity to fast and pray for peace, may it also be about more. May it also be a time to fast and pray prayers of confession, to acknowledge the biases and hatred we so often hold towards others deep within our hearts; a time to fast and pray for repentance, seeking to see people turn away from the hostilities that divide the human family and prevent us from seeing one another as kin and fellow beloved children of God; a time to fast and pray intercessions, asking God for wisdom to know how to advocate and act for true restorative justice in Israel-Palestine and in our local communities; a time to fast and pray for healing for the generations of trauma and harm.

As local church leaders representing communities from Greater Edmonton, Central/Northern Alberta, and surrounding areas, we invite members of our communities to embrace this call from our siblings in faith in the Holy Land on Tuesday Oct. 17, either by engaging on their own, or gathering together when this is possible.

Lord, have mercy. Amen.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens, Moderator, Mennonite Church Alberta

Rev. Dr. Larry Kochendorfer, Bishop, Synod of Alberta and the Territories, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Rev. Helen Reed, Chairperson, Northern Spirit Regional Council, The United Church of Canada

Moravian Church, Canadian District

Rt. Rev. Stephen London, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Edmonton