

**Introduction to the Draft of a Revised and Renewed COCOP Agreement
Between the ELCJHL and Overseas Partners
May 2022**

After 45 years of growing together, and more than twenty years of being guided by the previous constitution and bylaws, the ELCJHL and overseas COCOP partners *will review* these previous documents and *approve* updated documents to better reflect current realities and the ways the COCOP relationship has grown and will continue to develop in the future.

Rationale and Principles for Proposed Changes

In addition to needed updates for accuracy of terminology, notably the 2005 decision by the then-ELCJ to become the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL), proposed revisions and additions to the current COCOP constitution and bylaws have been made to reflect the following principles:

1. **Christian Presence in the Holy Land:** Currently, the local (Palestinian, Arabic-speaking) Christian community in the Holy Land is threatened by many factors—including the ongoing occupation, displacement, harassment and discrimination, and emigration for better opportunities and quality of life. Recent statements by the ecumenical Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem signify that this crisis is widely recognized. After 2,000 years of continuous local Christian presence in the birthplace of Christianity, local Christian churches are calling on all members of the one holy catholic and apostolic church to offer support to help ensure that local Christianity has a future in this land.
2. **The ELCJHL as the local expression of the global Lutheran communion:** The most effective and theologically appropriate way for overseas COCOP partners to offer this support is to recognize the ELCJHL, as the only LWF member church in the Holy Land (and the whole Middle East), as the local expression of the global Lutheran communion in the Holy Land, and to recognize the ELCJHL bishop as the primary representative/head of church for the Lutheran presence in the Holy Land. This commitment serves as a global witness to the truth that the ELCJHL shares a common Lutheran theological identity with the global Lutheran communion, and at the same time embodies a *unique and irreplaceable* contextual theological identity within Palestine/Israel, Jordan, and the wider region that enhances the local church as well as the Lutheran communion.
3. **Reflecting current and future directions in ministry and mission:** In the years since the last COCOP agreement was formed, the ministries of the ELCJHL—in collaboration with and supported by overseas COCOP partners—have greatly expanded to include ministries focused on youth, gender justice, environmental justice, and diakonia ministry, among others, which should be included in this document.
4. **Reflecting current and future growth in the ELCJHL:** The ELCJHL now operates ministries and programs under the auspices of three separate governments: Israeli, Palestinian, and Jordanian. In the years to come, the ELCJHL intends to work even more closely with local, regional, and international partners to grow in ministry and mission to support Christian community in the wider MENA region. As growth continues, the ELCJHL recognizes a need for greater coordination of collaboration between COCOP partners and individual congregations and ministries of the ELCJHL, through the office of the bishop, for the sake of transparency and cohesiveness of mission.

CONSTITUTION
for
THE COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR CO-OPERATION
between
THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN JORDAN & THE HOLY LAND (ELCJHL)
&
ITS OVERSEAS PARTNERS (COCOP)

1. Preface

1.1. History of ELCJHL

Together with the other local churches in the Holy Land, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) finds its roots in two thousand years of Palestinian Christian presence and witness in the region, underscored by the noted presence of Arabic-speaking believers at the first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2). At the same time, the Lutheran theological identity of the ELCJHL began with mission work from several international Protestant churches, which began with efforts to establish the joint Prussian-Anglican bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841.

Educational, missionary and diaconal work from Germany was undertaken by the organizations Jerusalemverein, Kaiserswert and “Syrisches Waisenhaus” (Schneller). This led to the gradual establishing of a Palestinian Lutheran community, which in 1959 became the recognized, established Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan (ELCJ). The ELCJ Synod, in its meeting on January 14, 2005, changed the name to the *Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL)*. Since gaining membership in the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in 1974, the ELCJHL remains until today the local expression of the global Lutheran communion in Jordan and the Holy Land, as the only LWF member church in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The ELCJHL has been a member of the Middle East Council of Churches since 1974 and is also a founding member of the Fellowship of the Middle East Evangelical Churches (FMEEC). THE ELCJHL became a full member of the World Council of Churches in 2013. In addition, the ELCJHL is recognized by the Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem as a part of this ecumenical group that includes all of the Latin, Orthodox, Coptic, and Protestant churches in Jerusalem.

1.2. History of COCOP

COCOP was founded in 1977 “in order to secure the possibility for a responsible, continuous, and constructive joint relationship with the ELCJHL” (as per the bylaws).

As this phrase suggests, the initial identity and purpose of COCOP was envisioned primarily as a way for overseas partners to streamline coordination among themselves in their relationship with the ELCJHL, rather than as a mutual cooperation of overseas partners and the ELCJHL as equal partners in shared mission together. After 45 years of growing together, and more than twenty years of being guided by the most recently formulated constitution and bylaws, the ELCJHL and COCOP meetings in May 2022 *examined* the previous documents and *will recommend to members for adoption* an updated document that better reflects current realities and the ways the COCOP-ELCJHL relationship has grown and will continue to develop in the future.

2. Name

THE COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN JORDAN & THE HOLY LAND AND HER OVERSEAS PARTNERS (COCOP)

3. Theological Foundation

3.1. A Communion in Mission

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

COCOP is an expression of our commitment to be together in mission, acknowledging this as being our joint response to God’s mission in this world.

The ELCJHL, as the local expression of the global Lutheran communion in the Holy Land, has a unique contextual theological identity within that Lutheran communion. As an integral part of the fabric of Palestinian Christianity and Palestinian communities as a whole, the ELCJHL shares a cultural, linguistic, and historical connection to the Holy Land that enriches the local Christian community and the global Lutheran communion, and that positions the ELCJHL to be a crucial voice and Christian witness among its Palestinian and Israeli neighbors in a region where the Christian church is both indigenous to the context and greatly challenged within that context.

3.2. Basis of Cooperation

The theological basis of our cooperation is to be found in our affirmation of the gracious acts of the Triune God to save humankind and restore all creation.

We therefore:

- identify with people as God identified with us in Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, found refuge in Egypt, grew up in Nazareth, and who made God’s reign known in Christ’s ministry to the people of this land. (Luke 2-4)
- proclaim the good news of salvation by Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection, which took place in Jerusalem. This saving and redeeming action is the basis for the realization of the reign of God in Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).
- are inspired by the Holy Spirit, poured out on the first church in Jerusalem as a gift, empowering for mission to all nations until the very end of the age. (Acts 2)

3.3. Relationships

Our relationships are modeled on the image of the church as the body of Christ, where all members of the body—the smaller as well as the larger—are equally integral to the body and share the same status and dignity (Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12). The diversity of expression and of gifts in the Christian church is no accident; it is as purposeful as the diversity of the human body, in which the differences among members complement one another for the good of the body as a whole. However, in the history of Christian mission (and already in the time of the early church, as Paul’s letters attest) relationships between members of the body have

not always fully honored this mutuality and diversity. We are committed to honoring all of our members as equal partners and members in Christ's body; it is in that spirit that we joyfully proclaim the ELCJHL-COCOP relationship as one in which the ELCJHL is accompanied by overseas partners and entrusted with the responsibility to represent the global Lutheran communion as the local expression of the Lutheran church in the Holy Land.

To that end, we acknowledge and agree that:

- a) The bishop of the ELCJHL is the primary representative/head of church for the Lutheran presence in the Holy Land.
- b) The office of the bishop of the ELCJHL will be consulted in all cooperative endeavors between COCOP partners and individual congregations and ministries of the ELCJHL, to ensure the transparency, health, and cohesiveness of shared mission efforts.
- c) The ELCJHL will commit to transparency of communication and reporting on financial and other cooperative endeavors with COCOP partners.

God calls us to mutual interdependency, which will be at the heart of our communion in mission. This principle of interdependence calls us to be responsible and involved in God's mission wherever God calls us to serve. We all need the good advice and faithful support of one another in our responsibility of taking the lead in responding to God's call in our respective countries.

3.4. Mission Goals

As a communion in mission, *COCOP* is commissioned to support and walk with the ELCJHL as the local expression of the global Lutheran communion in the following mission goals:

1. the proclamation of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments
2. the education, edification, and formation of the local Christian community in Jordan and the Holy Land, in love and service to its neighbors of all faiths and backgrounds
3. unity among the churches
4. engagement in interreligious dialogue
5. advocacy and work for justice, peace, reconciliation, and human rights for all Palestinians and Israelis.
6. service to the poor, needy, and marginalized in society through education, health care, diaconal work, youth ministry, and gender justice ministry, among others
7. stewardship and care for God's creation through environmental ministry
8. preserving and strengthening the continuity of local Christian presence and witness in the context of ongoing occupation, harassment, discrimination, and displacement/emigration, through material help as well as advocacy efforts

4. Principles of Partnership

4.1 To share the joys and hardships of discipleship in our respective contexts through visits, conversations, and the intentional building of relationships.

4.2 To encourage and strengthen each other in witnessing to Jesus Christ in our respective ministry contexts through prayer and fellowship.

4.3 To exchange insights and experiences in edifying our congregations and churches.

4.4 To mutually discover and identify challenges of our common mission.

4.5 To strengthen each other by sharing personnel, financial and other needed resources in our common mission.

4.6 To provide a forum for all partners to share statements of needs, to address financial and situational realities, and to explore possibilities for mutual support.

4.7 To provide a reliable platform in the spirit of full commitment for mutually growing trust, reliability, and advocacy, with the central goal of supporting and uplifting the local Christian presence in the Holy Land (and MENA region).

5. Membership

5.1 Membership of *COCOP* is open for churches, church-related organizations, and agencies, sharing its aims and objectives.

5.2 Applications for membership shall be received by the chairperson and endorsed by the ELCJHL prior to being submitted three months in advance to the annual meeting of *COCOP* for acceptance.

5.3 New members of *COCOP* can be accepted in their appropriate membership status at the next *COCOP* meeting after their application for membership is approved by ELCJHL and confirmed by a two-thirds vote of the *COCOP* members.

6. Structure and Proceedings

6.1. *COCOP* shall consist of an equal number of representatives from the ELCJHL (elected by the Church Council of the ELCJHL) and the overseas partners (nominated by the church or organizations represented) with full right to voice and vote.

6.2. There shall be an annual meeting of the *COCOP*. The chair and co-chair may together call additional meetings as needed. A majority of the members of *COCOP* shall be required for the quorum to hold the meeting and take decisions.

6.3. The meeting shall be called and chaired by the Bishop of the ELCJHL.

6.4. A co-chairperson from the overseas partners shall be elected by *COCOP* for a period of two years, with the possibility of renewal.

6.5. At the annual meeting of *COCOP* two secretaries, one from the ELCJHL and one from the overseas partners, shall be elected for a period of two years who will be responsible for the minutes of the meeting.

6.6. In the spirit of stewardship and in the discipline of sharing, the ELCJHL shall be free to present a statement of her needs of support in form of a budget at the annual meeting of *COCOP*. The budget shall be comprehensive and indicate priorities of the church. The overseas partners also shall be free to present

needs for special joint mission programs for mutual support at the annual meeting.

- 6.7. In the spirit of transparency each *COCOP* partner shall fully and openly account for joint funds used and openly present the financial situation and possibilities for mutual support of the church or organization represented. Generally accepted accounting practices shall be followed in administering and auditing joint funds. Procedures may be agreed to in more details both by *COCOP* and by partners.
- 6.8. At each annual meeting, it should be decided who among the partners reports about relevant developments in the churches and organizations represented at the next annual meeting. In the same way, issues of common interest for all *COCOP* partners could be identified for a joint study day at the following annual meeting.
- 6.9. Each partner shall be free to present at the annual meetings requests for personnel assistance through other partners. Details of job descriptions and conditions of employment shall be agreed upon mutually by the partners.
- 6.10. In each annual meeting possibilities and challenges of joint mission endeavors should be explored including personnel needs and financial assistance.
- 6.11. Whenever partner representation is requested in joint committees, these persons shall be appointed by *COCOP*.
- 6.12. The present members of *COCOP* are: **Berlin Mission Work (BMW), Church of Sweden (CoS), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), Northelbian Evangelical Lutheran Church (NEK/NMZ), United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD), Church of Norway (CoN), Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD),** and the **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC)**. The present related agencies of *COCOP* are the **Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW)** and the **Lutheran World Federation (LWF)**.
- 6.13. This constitution may be amended at any regular meeting by a two-thirds affirmative vote of the voting members present. Such proposed amendments shall be in the hand of all members at least three months prior to the meeting at which they are to be considered.

Signatures of COCOP Partners

Jerusalem on -----

On behalf of the ELCJHL

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Stamp

Berlin on-----

On behalf of **Berlin Mission Work (BMW)**

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

On behalf of the ELCJHL

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Stamp

Uppsala on-----

On behalf of **Church of Sweden (CoS)**

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

On behalf of the ELCJHL

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Stamp

Chicago on-----

On behalf of **Evangelical Lutheran Church in
America (ELCA)**

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

On behalf of the ELCJHL

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Stamp

Helsinki on-----

On behalf of **Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission
(FELM)**

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

Hamburg on-----

On behalf of the **ELCJHL**

On behalf of **The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany “ZMOE”**

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

Hannover on-----

On behalf of the **ELCJHL**

On behalf of **United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany (VELKD)**

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

Fredrikstad on-----

On behalf of the **ELCJHL**

On behalf of **Church of Norway**

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

Hanover on-----

On behalf of the **ELCJHL**

On behalf of **Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)**

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Name:
Title:

Stamp

Stamp

Jerusalem on -----

Winnipeg on-----

On behalf of the **ELCJHL**

On behalf of **Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada
(ELCIC)**

Bishop Sani-Ibrahim Azar
The Bishop of the ELCJHL

Name:
Title:

Stamp

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