ELCA Joins Ecumenical, Interreligious Partners in Calling On the Turkish Government to Maintain Hagia Sophia as a Unifying Heritage Site

Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary
(Psalm 28:2).

On Friday, July 10, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey announced his decision to convert the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul from its long-term status as a museum to a mosque. This decision will have negative repercussions on interreligious dialogue and coexistence worldwide. As the Byzantine structure was originally the pre-eminent basilica of the Christian world for nearly one thousand years, its announced change of purpose is also a source of significant pain for the Orthodox Christian family.

“As a church, we join with our Christian family and our Muslim neighbors in calling for the Hagia Sophia to remain a museum,” said ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. “Turning it back into a mosque is not only a return to divisive history but an erasure of a living religious and spiritual expression. The whole human family stands to benefit when the Hagia Sophia serves not only as a site for holy pilgrimage but as a sacred place for encounter and exchange among peoples of different religions and cultures.”

Since Erdoğan’s announcement, the World Council of Churches, the Middle East Council of Churches, the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Orthodox Churches worldwide, the Vatican, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA have decried the decision and called for its reversal. The voices of Christians worldwide are united in lament, prayer and protest.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) joins the global ecumenical family in calling on the Turkish government to maintain the Hagia Sophia as a museum rather than converting it into a mosque. Heeding the call of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, we urge our elected leaders to appeal to the Turkish government to maintain the status quo.
for the Hagia Sophia, which "allows for the peaceful and harmonious cohabitation of nations, religions, races, and ethnicities."

The Islamic Society of North America, a key interreligious partner of the ELCA, has also condemned this action as a threat to peaceful relations and dialogue between Christians and Muslims. ISNA President Dr. Sayyid Syeed wrote, "We need to work together to convince President Erdoğan not to convert Hagia Sophia into a mosque in Istanbul. It is clear that our Islamic texts and the practice of the Prophet and his rightly guided Caliphs define the role of Islam as the protector of others' holy places."

“We hear the cries of those who seek God’s help, and join in solidarity with all people who are committed to safeguarding this sanctuary’s unifying purpose,” said Bishop Eaton. "As the Christian family, and with our Muslim neighbors, we are united in our efforts to thwart that which would seek to divide us."

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**About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:**

The ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the United States, with nearly 3.5 million members in more than 9,100 worshiping communities across the 50 states and in the Caribbean region. Known as the church of “God’s work. Our hands.,” the ELCA emphasizes the saving grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, unity among Christians and service in the world. The ELCA’s roots are in the writings of the German church reformer Martin Luther.

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