

Synodical Resolutions for Referral

NOTE: The following resolutions were approved by synod assemblies as memorials but were received as resolutions by the Office of the Secretary because they direct specific units or offices of the churchwide organization to take action.

1. Review of the FBI Raids on Peace Activists Minneapolis Area Synod (3G)

WHEREAS, in the social statement *For Peace in God's World* (1995), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America declares, "We dedicate ourselves anew to pray and to work for peace in God's world"; and

WHEREAS, in that same social statement this church affirms, "Freedom of association and activities of non-governmental local, national, and international organizations are indispensable to building peace today;" and

WHEREAS, on September 24, 2010, there were FBI raids on several peace activists in Minneapolis and Chicago with subsequent grand jury subpoenas; and

WHEREAS, these peace activists have not been arrested or charged with any crime; and

WHEREAS, these people are entitled to presumption of innocence under the U.S. Constitution; and

WHEREAS, a report by U.S. Department of Justice Inspector General Glenn A. Fine (*A Review of the FBI's Investigation of Certain Domestic Advocacy Groups*, September 2010) had roundly criticized the FBI for improperly targeting domestic peace and anti-war groups for investigation; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod meeting in assembly memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly to call upon the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Church Council to call upon U.S. Senators and Representatives, U.S. Attorney General Holder, and President Obama to investigate these raids and subpoenas for constitutional legality in order to ensure that the legitimate right to dissent from the policies of our government remains guaranteed to all citizens.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To thank the Minneapolis Area Synod for their attention to the issue of FBI raids on peace activists and for connecting faith, public life and a concern for human rights and the U.S. Constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and assembly;

To express solidarity with the principles raised by the Minneapolis Area Synod and the synod's concern as outlined by the social policy of this church, including "For Peace in God's World" as cited and the social message, "Living in a Time of Terrorism" (1994);

To note the report already provided by the Inspector General of the Department of Justice as partial response to the Synod's request;

To refer this item to the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit for further review of the Department of Justice report with the possibility of further contact with the Department of Justice and the United States Congress regarding the report and its stated recommendations and changes for investigative methods used by the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and

To request the secretary of this church to inform the synod of this action.

2. Human Rights Violations Against the Oromo People Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod (8G)

WHEREAS, we are called to follow Jesus Christ "to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has repeatedly called upon its congregations to intercede for those around the world who are being subjected to systematic violation of human rights; and

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WHEREAS, the Constitution of the Oromo Evangelical Church in Washington, D.C., like the constitutions of many ELCA congregations, calls on members to “serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless...” (*C4.02.d.); and

WHEREAS, the Oromo people, who number 30 million within the territory of Ethiopia, have known more than a century of persecution at the hands of successive governments; and

WHEREAS, the people of the Oromia region of Ethiopia are presently being subjected to a massive campaign to deny their human and civil rights, including arbitrary detention, the torture of detainees, and extrajudicial executions; and

WHEREAS, Human Rights Watch, in a report released on April 6, 2011, called on the Ethiopian government to immediately release those detained without charge during “several waves of apparently politically motivated mass arrests of more than 200 ethnic Oromo Ethiopians;” and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of State, in its annual Human Rights report on Ethiopia (April 2011), has documented “unlawful killings, torture, beating, and abuse and mistreatment of detainees and opposition supporters by security forces... poor prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention, particularly of suspected sympathizers or members of opposition or insurgent groups” and has called on the Government of Ethiopia to comply with its commitments under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to cease its practice of jamming Voice of America broadcasts that seek to report on the present situation and its denial of access to federal prisons by the International Committee of the Red Cross; and

WHEREAS, the Oromo Evangelical Church of Washington, D.C., as well as other Oromo congregations, stand ready to provide documentation and study materials on the present situation in Ethiopia through the synod office; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the ELCA Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod Assembly encourage congregations of the synod to pray regularly for those in prison in Ethiopia and to devote time to studying the situation of the Oromo people; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod Assembly direct the bishop of the synod to send a letter to the U.S. Secretary of State expressing the synod’s concern for the well-being of the Oromo people and requesting that all developmental and military aid to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia be tied to that government’s compliance with internationally-recognized human rights agreements; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod Assembly memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly meeting in Orlando, Florida, to undertake programs of education and advocacy on behalf of the human rights of the Oromo people.

Background

As baptized Christians, we are called by our baptismal covenant to stand in solidarity with people most affected by injustice and repression. To that end, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continually has affirmed its commitment to the promotion, preservation and protection of universal human rights.

The global engagement and awareness present in every expression of this church is formed through the practices of accompaniment, the mission theology of the ELCA. The blend of solidarity and accompaniment motivates ELCA members toward effective advocacy.

One of the commitments intrinsic to the practice of accompaniment is consultation with global companion churches prior to ELCA action outside the territories of the ELCA. In many areas, including governmental advocacy, operating without prior consultation can lead to unintended consequences, both for the ELCA and for our companion churches.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To thank the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod for its resolution related to human rights violations against the Oromo people;

To refer the resolution to the Congregational and Synodical Mission and Global Mission units for consultation with the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2011 meeting of the Church Council; and

To request the secretary of this church to inform the synod of this action.

3. Suicide Prevention

Southeastern Synod (9D)

WHEREAS, “A Message on Suicide Prevention,” which the ELCA Church Council adopted on November 14, 1999, urges synods to support members, congregations, and affiliated institutions in their efforts to prevent suicide (page 10); and

WHEREAS, in the years since approval of this message, a number of significant public/private suicide prevention efforts have evolved, including the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention (NSSP in 2001), the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report “Preventing Suicide: A National Imperative” (2002), the Suicide Prevention Resource Center (2002), the National Council for Suicide Prevention (NCSP, 2005), the Interfaith Dialogue on Suicide Prevention (2008), the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention (NAASP, 2010), and the ELCA Suicide Prevention Ministry, Inc. (2010); and

WHEREAS, 34,598 U.S. citizens died by suicide in 2007 (latest statistics available), with an age-adjusted rate of 11.27 suicides per 100,000 people, resulting in a projection of 507 ELCA suicides annually based on an ELCA membership of 4.5 million, which would create an estimated 10,100 new ELCA survivors of suicide annually; and

WHEREAS, suicide prevention is a major concern of the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration; and

WHEREAS, suicide is the third leading cause of death in college aged people (15–24), and the NSSP Objective 4.3 calls for increasing the number of colleges and universities with suicide prevention programs, and the 26 ELCA-affiliated colleges and universities constitute a significant body of at-risk persons, and the 2010 suicide of a pastor at Valparaiso University starkly portrays the randomness of suicide; and

WHEREAS, the federally sponsored Interfaith Dialogue on Suicide Prevention produced a consensus statement including this sentence: “The time is right for the life-enhancing strengths that are the foundation of our most ancient faith traditions to find application in preventing suffering and loss from suicide;” and

WHEREAS, the NSSP Objective 1.2 calls for regular national conferences on suicide prevention to maintain broad-based participation and involvement in reducing the toll of suicide and generate open discussion and assessment of suicide prevention programs; and Objective 6.4 calls for increasing the proportion of clergy trained in identifying and responding to suicide risk and behaviors; and Objective 7.5 calls for increasing the proportion of clergy trained in the unique needs of survivors of suicide; and

WHEREAS, the NSSP Objective 10.2 calls for increasing the funding (public and private) for suicide prevention research, and the mission of the NAASP includes cultivating the resources needed to sustain progress, and the IOM report includes specific recommendations on needed suicide prevention research, and federal suicide prevention research funding is minimal and sporadic at best; and

WHEREAS, limited financial resources have precluded active support by the churchwide and synod offices in implementing “The Message on Suicide Prevention,” and a Suicide Prevention Endowment Fund has been established within the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust to build future financial support for churchwide and synod support of suicide prevention; and

WHEREAS, membership in a faith community is often cited as a protective factor against suicide but is not supported by any current research, and the magnitude of the problem of completed suicide within the ELCA is unknown, and factual knowledge about such a problem will enable prudent application of limited resources to alleviate the problem; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Synod memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly to:

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1. encourage all ELCA-related colleges and universities to adopt a comprehensive suicide prevention and educational program, which includes plans for immediate responses to a completed campus suicide, and appropriate ongoing support and counseling actions.
2. direct the ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Office to support a collaborative effort with other national faith communities to request the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to convene regular meetings of national faith communities for the purpose of advancing suicide prevention through the cooperative work of national faith communities.
3. encourage the congregations and members of the ELCA to call upon the U.S. Congress to convene regular national conferences of representatives from all constituencies with a vested interest in suicide prevention for the purposes of (a) promoting broad collaboration, (b) establishing priorities for the application of limited national resources, (c) engaging survivors of suicide in prevention activities that will promote their grieving and healing process, and (d) providing clergy training.
4. direct the ELCA Office of Advocacy Ministries to collaborate with other national faith communities, the NCSP, and the NAASP for the purpose of promoting the development of a “grassroots” funded National Suicide Prevention Research Endowment Fund, similar to existing research funds for heart and cancer research which are largely supported by the “grassroots,” for the purpose of conducting scientific suicide prevention research as recommended by the IOM and supported by Objective 10.2 of the NSSP.
5. encourage synods, affiliated institutions, congregations, and members to contribute to the established ELCA Suicide Prevention Endowment Fund, part of the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust, for the purpose of building future financial resources for suicide prevention work within the ELCA, and providing survivors of suicide a convenient and meaningful way to honor and memorialize their loved ones lost to suicide through gifts to the Endowment Fund.
6. direct the Office of Research and Evaluation to include, over a period of three years, in the required annual report from each ELCA congregation, a question enabling that office to determine the annual number of completed suicides in the ELCA for the purposes of (a) assessing the impact of suicide on the ELCA, (b) comparing suicide rates of the general population to the ELCA, and (c) evaluating whether or not membership in the ELCA may be a protective factor for preventing suicide.

Background information

The Southeastern Synod submitted a resolution on suicide prevention in 2009, a time—like the present time—when "the availability of funding and staff resources" is challenging. Given budget constraints, staffing responsibility for projects currently in process and unit commitments to focus work around two churchwide priorities¹, it is recommended that the Church Council decline the request of the synod, but invite the possibility of resubmission of the request when the budget constraints are less challenging.

¹ The churchwide organization, working collaboratively with congregations, synods, agencies and institutions and other partners, will give priority to: accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and building capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the resolution of the Southeastern Synod related to suicide prevention;

To acknowledge with gratitude the deep concerns and strong commitments expressed by the resolution, but to decline to initiate a process for response to the synod's request due to budget constraints and the resulting capacity limitations related to additional work in this area;

To invite resubmission of the request by the synods in consultation with the Congregational and Synodical Mission program unit as funding and staff resources permit; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

4. Support of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network

Southwestern Minnesota Synod (3F)

WHEREAS, "People were bringing little children to Jesus to have him touch them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mark 10:13-16); and

WHEREAS, children and adults are welcomed into the family of God and called in baptism to a life of service; and

WHEREAS, this church has called pastors, lay ministers, volunteers, and parents to equip and empower young people for ministry; and

WHEREAS, adult youth ministry leaders live out Martin Luther's vision for the Church by teaching young people; and

WHEREAS, for more than 10 years the ELCA Youth Ministry Network has renewed, educated, and connected adult youth ministry leaders for service in the church and the world; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that congregations of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA encourage their members to pray for our young people, adult youth ministry leaders, and the ELCA Youth Ministry Network; and be it further

RESOLVED, that congregations of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA encourage adult youth ministry leaders and pastors to take advantage of opportunities that renew, educate, and connect them and their ministries; and be it further

RESOLVED, that individuals from the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA be encouraged to become members of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network; and be it further

RESOLVED, that congregations, organizations, and individuals of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA be encouraged to support the ELCA Youth Ministry Network by sending adult youth ministry leaders to the annual Extravaganza in New Orleans, La., February 8-12, 2012, and Anaheim, Calif., January 24-28, 2013; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly to encourage synods, congregations, adult youth ministry leaders, and pastors of the ELCA to support the ELCA Youth Ministry Network by joining the network and by sending adult youth ministry leaders to the annual Extravaganza in New Orleans, La., February 8-12, 2012, and Anaheim, Calif., January 24-28, 2013.

Background

This memorial affirms the development of strong youth ministries within the ELCA, including the Youth Ministry Network and its annual conference, called the Extravaganza. The Youth Ministry Network was begun in the late 1990s by ELCA adults working with youth who

knew there was a need to support one another as Lutherans in this ministry. In 1998 they organized the first Extravaganza event for adults working with youth. The network continues as an independent group welcoming members. Extravanzas are held annually.

Along with synods, the independent Youth Ministry Network is a primary network partner for the youth ministry staff of the Congregational and Synodical Mission (CSM) unit. CSM strongly supports the intent of this memorial to widen participation in the Extravaganza and encourage membership in the network.

In 2011, the CSM youth ministry budget provides for a partnership grant of \$25,000 to the Youth Ministry Network.

As indicated, the next two Extravanzas are planned for New Orleans, La., February 8–12, 2012, and Anaheim, Calif., January 24–28, 2013

CSM youth and young adult ministry staff consider partnership with the Youth Ministry Network to be a primary expression of the unit's goal to support networks and equip leaders for youth ministry.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the resolution of the Southwestern Minnesota Synod and to commend commitment to youth ministry wherever it exists in this church;

To call for broader and deeper awareness of the importance of Lutheran ministry to and with youth and to encourage leadership development and strong networks to undergird this work;

To encourage all the congregations and synods of this church, and adult youth ministry leaders, whether lay or rostered, paid or volunteer, who are engaged in youth ministry, to find ways to become more skilled for this important work, including joining the Youth Ministry Network and attending the annual Extravanzas for adult youth ministry leaders; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

5. Advanced Health Care Directives

Sierra Pacific Synod (2A)

RESOLVED, that the Sierra Pacific Synod memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly to advocate for the completion of Advanced Health Care Directives by all members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Sierra Pacific Synod's Witness and Service Discipling Team encourage the use of the ELCA's "Message on End-of-Life Decisions" and its 2003 social statement on health healing and health care as tools for education and guidance by its congregations and rostered leaders.

Background from the Theological Discernment Team

The memorial from the Sierra Pacific Synod urges renewed attention within the ELCA to the importance of Advanced Health Care Directives. It views such directives as one significant tool for making health care decisions, especially those related to the end of life. This attention and this view reflects what the ELCA has expressed in its social documents about health decisions and end-of-life.

The social message on "End-of-Life Decisions" (1992) mentions "advance directives" (p. 1), including a durable power of attorney, living wills, and other forms that vary from state to state, all of which communicate future health care decisions.

The ELCA social statement, *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (2003), highlights the Christian perspective that health care is a shared endeavor with both personal and social responsibilities. It encourages Christians to understand patients as people in relationships rather than as isolated individuals making solo decisions. In that light it discusses personal responsibilities for future health care choices and advocates for the use of advance directives as one means to communicate with loved ones, pastors and others in a way that will respect a “person’s desires and minimize the tremendous stress and suffering that later treatment decisions may entail” (p. 8).

The implementing resolutions of the statement encourage all members, congregations and ministry sites within the ELCA to use the social statement to aid discernment and to advance health care in as a shared endeavor. Resolution number five specifically encourages congregations and church-related institutions to be centers for dissemination of health education for their members and their communities (p. 26).

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the resolution of the Sierra Pacific Synod prompting renewed attention to the importance of Advanced Health Care Directives as one significant tool for making health care decisions, especially those related to the end-of life;

To reaffirm the resolve of the ELCA to be a church dedicated to sharing the endeavor for health care and wise decision-making by the adoption of the following social policy resolution:

RESOLVED, To express the encouragement of the ELCA Church Council to all members of the Evangelical Church in America to complete Advanced Health Care Directives; and be it further

RESOLVED, To encourage congregations, synods, social ministry organizations and church-related institutions to be centers for dissemination of education regarding advance directives, including the use of “End-of-Life Decisions” and *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* as tools for education and guidance toward discerning wise health decisions; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

6. Fair Milk Pricing

La Crosse Area Synod (5L)

WHEREAS, dairy farmers are being paid less for milk than it costs them to produce it; and

WHEREAS, forty percent of Wisconsin farmers are eligible for or are currently receiving health insurance benefits through the Wisconsin Badger Care program; and

WHEREAS, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack estimates the number of dairy farms in the United States declined from 111,000 to less than 65,000 in the last decade; and

WHEREAS, farmers are receiving a very small proportion of the retail cost of food; and

WHEREAS, in the social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All* (1999), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms this church’s commitment to support, advocate, and pray for those who farm the land, and calls for changing the way producers of food are paid so that they receive adequate prices for what they produce in order to fairly compensate them for their costs of production and labor; and

WHEREAS, dairy farmers are leading a national campaign to seek support among other sectors of the dairy industry for a more fair milk price; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the La Crosse Area Synod support dairy farmers in their campaign calling for fair and adequate compensation for their milk; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the congregations and the pastors of the La Crosse Area Synod raise awareness of the current and persistent financial crises facing farm families through study, discussion and prayers; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2011 La Crosse Area Synod Assembly memorialize the 2011 Churchwide Assembly to specifically include fair milk pricing as a poverty and justice issue.

Background

As the memorial from the La Crosse Area Synod indicates, the ELCA's 1999 social statement on economic life, *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, states the strong support of the ELCA for farmers and ranchers:

Through the calling of agriculture, farmers produce the grain for our daily bread and the rest of our food supply. Without a bountiful and low-cost food supply, most Americans would not enjoy the livelihood they do. Farmers face the challenge of producing this food in ways that contribute to the regeneration of the land and the vitality of rural communities. At the same time, society as a whole must address the high levels of risk farmers face and the low prices they often receive. Changing agricultural policies and the growing power of large agribusiness corporations make this even more challenging.
(p.15)

Prices for staple foods like milk are a complex issue with many implications for issues of poverty and justice. If higher prices for farmers lead to higher consumer prices, low income consumers are harmed. But if, in turn, farmers are not compensated sufficiently for what they produce because of flawed government subsidy policies or a lack of competition, that also is an issue of justice. As a church, the ELCA lives in the tension between these needs and seeks to promote justice for all.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the resolution of the La Crosse Area Synod related to milk pricing, and to thank the synod for its commitment to fair prices for farmers and for bringing the plight of U.S. dairy farms to the attention of the 2011 Churchwide Assembly; and

To affirm the support of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for fair prices for farmers that compensate them adequately for their costs of production; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.