



GOD'S WORK, OUR HANDS
Exploring God's Work Among Us

ACTIONS REGARDING RESOLUTIONS AT THE 2009 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

I A Memorial Concerning Lutheran Disaster Response

The following resolution was received from Pr. Virginia Biniek; Pr. John Deisinger; Pr. John Houck; Pr. Dennis Moore; Pr. Bruce MacLaughlin; Pr. Michael Metz; Pr. Dennis Ritter and Pr. David Rowe

The resolution was **adopted**.

WHEREAS, The Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) encourages us to be “a public church that witnesses boldly to God’s love for all that God has created;” and

WHEREAS, the ELCA over the last decade has developed a nationally recognized and effective tool for bringing comfort, healing and renewal to those affected by disasters known as Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR); and

WHEREAS, thousands of ELCA members have been empowered to do God’s work through their hands by being inspired, trained and deployed by LDR and its affiliates to provide life transforming ministry to those affected by disaster and offering on-going assistance to those in need well after others have left the affected area; and

WHEREAS, disasters can affect anyone – but disproportionately they affect the disenfranchised due to the historic location of poorer communities in vulnerable areas, mobility restrictions, and the lack of access to other resources; and

WHEREAS, disaster preparedness and response offers opportunities for members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church to manifest faith in action by growing spiritually and in striving for justice; and

WHEREAS, disaster preparedness and response offers opportunity for the Church to bear witness to the love of Christ through diverse efforts and coordinated response; and

WHEREAS, the scientific community is raising the alarm that natural disasters will be increasing due to climate change, and as a nation since September 11, 2001, we have become more acutely aware of the potential for disaster created by acts of terror; and

WHEREAS, the deficits in our nation's response to Hurricane Katrina visibly demonstrated our need to be better prepared, and that research has demonstrated that preparedness is a primary predictor of survival and recovery in disaster; and

WHEREAS, professionals for local preparedness and response are integral for leadership and coordination of Lutheran congregations, agencies, institutions, volunteers and resources for best response; and

WHEREAS, the national Lutheran Disaster Response office provides national coordination but the primary preparedness and response happens through the LDR local affiliates and congregations; and

WHEREAS, LDR lacks the resources to support preparedness plans that would allow the Lutheran Church to be more effective in ministering to people affected by disaster; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly memorializes the ELCA in assembly to direct the Presiding Bishop to create an advisory committee charged with crafting a clear vision for LDR to help frame the expectations and requirements of LDR affiliates throughout the country and that the committee continue to develop guidelines to help affiliates create standard preparedness and response tools; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly memorializes the ELCA in assembly to reaffirm the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's commitment to the mission of disaster preparedness through the Church in Society Program Unit by empowering the advisory committee to work with the staff of LDR to improve its funding streams to assure sustainability of the ministry and the work of LDR and of LDR affiliates; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly memorializes the ELCA in assembly to direct the Conference of Bishops and the Church in Society Program Unit to collaborate in facilitating national and local conversation with ecumenical partners and community resources to create national and local coordinated service relationships in disaster response; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly memorializes the ELCA in assembly to direct Lutheran Disaster Response to use the technological tools available to it effectively to develop, support and maintain a national network to connect those affiliates engaged in response with the resources (equipment, supplies, and work teams) throughout the national network.

II A Memorial Concerning Fullness of Leadership in the ELCA

The following resolution was received from Pr. Rachael C. Dietz

The resolution was **adopted**.

WHEREAS, Project Connect, an initiative of the Eastern Cluster of ELCA Seminaries, has been endeavoring to strengthen the efforts of the ELCA to encourage young adults (specifically those under the age of 30) to consider that God might be calling them to public ministry in the church; and

WHEREAS, the Multicultural Planning group of Project Connect has identified several factors that inhibit this initiative from effectively strengthening the Ecology of Call in the ELCA as identified in the document, "Is There a Place?"¹, particularly as it pertains to increasing the number of young adults of color in rostered leadership; and

WHEREAS, the scripture reminds us that we are all inheritors of God's promises because we know that Christ "has broken down the dividing wall that is the hostility between us;"² we are no longer foreigners and aliens but fellow citizens with all of God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is 97% people of European descent even as a commitment was made to be a church comprised of at least 10% people of color by 1998, this has not yet happened. We are convinced that one of the overwhelming factors in this reality is racism - a mix of power, privilege, and prejudice; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA in its social statement, "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture," acknowledges racism as sin, a violation of God's intention for humanity that fractures and fragments both church and society; and

WHEREAS, studies have shown that in its institutional form, racism creates a system that allows those of European descent to stand at the center and pushes all others to the margins. Due to racism people of European descent not only maintain their

¹ Clergy of color are more likely to be paid below synod guidelines; clergy of color receive lower retirement benefits; clergy of color wait for a first call for significantly greater period than those of European descent; the culture of the ELCA believes that only certain congregations have a mission for ministry in ethnic communities. Taken from, "Is There a Place?" and documented in a presentation to the Multicultural Seminar, August 1, by The Pr. Dr. M. Wyvetta Bullock, Executive for Administration, Office of the Presiding Bishop, ELCA, "New Day Begun, Engaging Our Wholeness"

² "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture", ELCA Social Statement, 1993

privilege and status unconsciously, but all people are pressured into remaining silent about the realities of race relations even in the church³; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod meeting in assembly call upon its members, congregations, and institutions to continue to be led by faith, the scriptures, and church resources (such as "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture" ELCA Social Statement 1993) in order to address the racial barriers that have made the vision of a more multicultural church so difficult to achieve, while also recommitting to seek out, raise up, and support young people from all races, ethnic groups, and cultures for public leadership in the church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod meeting in assembly memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to urge the ELCA in all its expressions to join us in this commitment and task; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod meeting in assembly memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to encourage the appropriate churchwide structures to work with Project Connect to explore and address these concerns and work toward the end of racism.

III A Memorial Concerning Human Sexuality

The following resolution was received from Pr. Manfred K. Bahmann; Elizabeth M. Elterich, AiM; Pr. Kenneth C. Feinour; Pr. John P. Fritch; Pr. Jean L. Huber; Pr. Roxanne M. Kringle; Pr. Jason M. Lee; Pr. Peter D. Kuritz; Pr. John E. Lamb; Terry M. Lieb, AiM; Ruth T. Miller, AiM; Pr. Dennis W. Moore; Pr. Nancy L. Moore; Pr. Grace C. Olson; Pr. Fred S. Opalinski; Pr. Anthony P. Pagotto; Pr. Edith B. Roberts; Pr. Susan D. Ruggles; Pr. Michael J. Scholtes; Pr. Martha S. Sipe; Pr. Philip C. Spohn; Sister Gunnel Sterner; Pr. Richard H. Summy; Christine L. Summy, AiM; Barbara-Anne Taylor, AiM; Pr. Christopher M. Thomforde; Pr. Deborah M. Wagner; Melanie E. Werley, AiM; Pr. Jimmy Lee Werley; Pr. Janell D. Wigen; Kathleen A. Yenser, AiM; Thomas R. Yenser, AiM; Yvonne Osmun, Arndts, Easton

The resolution was **adopted**.

WHEREAS, the Task Force for ELCA Studies in Sexuality has earnestly studied and struggled with these matters for eight years, and their work models and invites mutually respectful dialogue about sexuality throughout this church; and

³ "A Place at the Table: An African American Lutheran Preaching from Margins to Mainstream," thesis submitted to LSTC for D.Min. in preaching 2007

WHEREAS, the proposed Social Statement powerfully proclaims this church's teachings on trust, love, and service to the neighbor as the proper foundation of sexuality, while honestly recognizing that there is no consensus regarding same-gender relationships or the rostered ministry of people in them; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA Church Council, at its March 2009 meeting, voted by an overwhelming margin to recommend to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality, its impending resolutions, and a Recommendation on Ministry Policies; and

WHEREAS, the Recommendation on Ministry Policies allows a way to maintain a uniform standard and process for candidacy and call throughout this church while respecting the bound consciences of all; and

WHEREAS, the time has come for both those in this church who support publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships and those who oppose them to join together in creating a means to continue living together faithfully in the midst of disagreement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, meeting in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to adopt the proposed Social Statement on Human Sexuality and its implementing resolutions, as recommended by the ELCA Church Council; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, meeting in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to adopt the four parts of the proposed Recommendation on Ministry Policies, as recommended by the ELCA Church Council; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, meeting in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to adopt the following additional implementing resolution of the Social Statement on Human Sexuality, "To direct appropriate churchwide units to develop, in consultation with those most affected, resources for congregations or faith-communities and ministers that choose to do so to support same-gender relationships by holding them publicly accountable in the exchange of promises of lifelong love and fidelity;" and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, meeting in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to adopt the following, "Resolved, that the Vocation and Education unit be directed to develop, and the Church Council be directed to approve, procedures for the reception from another Lutheran church-body and for the expedited reinstatement to the roster or to candidacy of those whose rostering was precluded by previous policies on same-gender relationships."

IV A Resolution Concerning Requirement for Two-Thirds Vote...

The following resolution was received from Pr. Michael Frost; Alfonzo Martinez, Zion's Stone, West Penn Twp.; Margaret Martinez; Zion's Stone, West Penn Twp.; Pr. John Miller; Pr. Amy Godshall-Miller; John Schroeder, Schwarzwald, Reading; Elsa Hessler, Schwarzwald, Reading; Pr. Brett Jenkins; John Bachofer, Christ Hamilton United, Sciota; Donald Palaski, Christ Hamilton United, Sciota; Pr. Barry Fritts; Pr. Timothy Boyer; Pr. Donald Schwartz; Pr. John Pearson

The resolution was *not adopted*.

WHEREAS, the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will consider recommendations from the Report and recommendations on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality that ask the ELCA to change its teaching policy to affirm the possibility of committed same-sex relationships for pastors and other rostered leaders in the ELCA; and

WHEREAS, the Constitutional and Legal Committee of the ELCA Church Council recommended that "any motion to come before this Churchwide Assembly regarding changes in this church's current policy and practice for the rostering of ordained ministers, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, and deaconesses shall require a two-thirds vote by the assembly for adoption;" and

WHEREAS, the ELCA Church Council voted 19-10 to delete this provision and is recommending rules of procedure to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly which would require only a simple majority vote to change ELCA standards to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships; and

WHEREAS, 15 Synod Councils asked the ELCA Church Council to change its simple majority proposal to a two-thirds majority vote (3 Synod Councils supported the simple majority recommendation); and

WHEREAS, a two-thirds majority of ELCA bishops recommended that a two-thirds majority vote be required on the ministry policies resolutions (March Conference of Bishops vote); and

WHEREAS, a two-thirds majority vote is usually required for major decisions including the adoption of an ELCA social statement and for amendments to the ELCA constitution and bylaws, so that such decisions will be accepted by the entire church as legitimate; and

WHEREAS, a decision to change church teaching and policy to allow pastors and other rostered leaders to be in same-sex sexual relationships holds the potential to be very divisive in many ELCA synods and congregations and to cause both membership and financial losses for synods and congregations; and

WHEREAS, a super majority vote – such as a two-thirds majority – would require an overwhelming majority of Churchwide Assembly voting members to make such a significant change to church teaching and practice; and

WHEREAS, the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly will adopt its rules for the assembly and could set a two-thirds majority for adoption of any changes to standards for pastors and other rostered leaders; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly recommend to the ELCA Church Council that it amend its recommendation to the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly so that, in accord with the perspective of a majority of ELCA bishops and the Constitutional and Legal Committee of the ELCA Church Council, it proposes to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly that any motion to come before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly regarding changes in this church's current policy and practice for the rostering of ordained ministers, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry, and deaconesses require a two-thirds vote by the assembly for adoption; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly direct the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council Executive Council for consideration and possible action.

V A Memorial Concerning the 2009 Assembly

The following resolution was presented by the Committee of Reference and Counsel

The resolution was adopted.

WHEREAS, the 22nd Annual Assembly of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod has met and is now drawing to a close; and

WHEREAS, a rainy start to this event coupled with the sounds and mention of various manner of livestock (such as birds, goats, and pigs) has reminded us of how grateful we are to be in the sturdy ark of the Church; and

WHEREAS, the crozier of bishop has been passed from our former bishop, David Strobel, to our present bishop, Samuel Zeiser, and we also note that chronic rain was also passed from bishop to bishop, and

WHEREAS, in Christian love we have worshipped the Triune God and been nourished at the Lord's Table, debated issues, learned new things, shared food and fellowship, engaged in visioning, and made decisions; and

WHEREAS, we have been blessed by the Presence of our gracious God through the light of Christ and the comfort of the Holy Spirit; and

WHEREAS, we now will go forth to continue working in the mission of the Church; therefore be it

RESOLVED that we humbly and wholeheartedly thank:

- Bishop Samuel Zeiser for his devotion to God and God’s people, and his faithful, prayerful leadership in this assembly and this synod
- Members of the Bishop’s Staff and Mission District Deans for their continuing dedication to supporting the congregations of this synod in their ministries
- Priscilla Kinney for her fine leadership through two terms as vice president of our synod and for proving that even though tradition during her younger years prevented her from putting on a robe and lighting the altar candles, she has responded to God’s call to serve as the vice president of our synod and helped to usher in a broader, more inclusive tradition for men and women, girls and boys
- The congregations of the West Berks Mission District for their warm and gracious hospitality
- All who gave their time and commitment to serve as voting members of this assembly
- Those who worked with diligence and grace to support the workings of this assembly—planners, ushers, tellers, secretarial and support staff, and volunteers in various tasks; and also the staff of the Sovereign Performing Arts Center
- The Jubilate Handbell Choir and other musicians and worship leaders for leading us in the praise of God
- Those who have upheld this assembly in prayer
- Rostered leaders who are celebrating major anniversaries for their example of faithfulness in a combined 1,485 years of ministry, newly rostered persons and candidates for rostered ministry for their willingness to answer the call to public ministry, and SALMS for their devotion to the church and the congregations they serve
- Ministry Teams for their ongoing work in this synod
- The Rev. Gregory Villalon, who addressed us on behalf of the ELCA, brought greetings from his granddaughter, Rebecca, and reminded us that “our God is an awesome God”
- Bishop Mark Hanson, who by video, inspired us with the thought that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is “called to bear witness to the faith at the intersection of fear and hope”

- All who participated in the small group sessions led by the Program Review Committee
- All who addressed this assembly, giving us information and inspiration that will aid us in ministry throughout this synod and beyond
- The “Tour de Revs” who have bicycled on their bamboo bike from many other synods to our synod, and soon will leave with our prayers and the prayers of others to visit all the remaining synods of the mainland ELCA in order to increase awareness and giving for World Hunger, so that we recommit ourselves not only to charity but also to justice for the hungry
- The congregations of this synod for their commitment to the work of Christ through the mission of the Church
- And most especially, Almighty God for abundant grace, the blessing of community in Christ, the call to Christian witness and service, and the vision, gifts, and abilities to fulfill that call