

Resolutions from Reference and Counsel

The following resolutions were brought before the assembly by the Committee on Reference and Counsel, the Rev. David Rowe, chair:

I. Gambling (brought to the committee by Pastor Carol Kehler)

WHEREAS, Lutheran tradition affirms that government is God's instrument for achieving the common good, and

WHEREAS, Lutheran social teachings state that government services should be supported by a system of taxation according to the ability to pay, and

WHEREAS, Lutheran social teachings also oppose gambling as a source of government revenue, and

WHEREAS, the PA General Assembly is seriously considering legislation that would place more than 45,000 slot machines in Pennsylvania as a way to support public education through reduction of local property taxes, and

WHEREAS, many of these machines will be placed in independent casinos in some already impoverished urban areas, and

WHEREAS, the losses incurred by such gambling are known to be particularly harsh on those in poverty and others on fixed incomes, and

WHEREAS, known social consequences such as addiction, bankruptcy, crime, family violence and divorce become more prevalent as gambling venues become more accessible, and

WHEREAS, economic consequences such as the "substitution effect" are known to occur where money lost in slot machines will replace money now spent in restaurants and other businesses not connected to gambling casinos, and

WHEREAS, by promoting gambling, government promotes greed and denigrates work and saving,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in assembly, oppose any attempt by the General Assembly to bring slot machine gambling to the Commonwealth, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the synod communicate this opposition to Governor Rendell and all members of the General Assembly serving in the synod's territory, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all voting members of this assembly and others in their congregations be encouraged to communicate with their elected officials about the negative consequences of gambling, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the synod affirm support for a system of public education paid for by fair distribution of taxpayer dollars, according to the needs of individual school districts, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in order to pay for public education and other essential government services, the synod communicate to the governor and members of the General Assembly on synod territory its support for fair, progressive, long lasting tax reform in the Commonwealth that will provide responsibly for programmatic needs.

The original resolution was adopted as presented.

II. Wages and benefits for congregation lay employees (brought to the committee by Pastor Gary Langensiepen)

WHEREAS, the secretaries of Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod congregations, at their annual seminar, have become aware of wide variations in the wages and benefits given to parish secretaries; and

WHEREAS, it is always the mission of the Church to see that all people are treated justly and are honored for the talents that God has given to them and which they offer in service to the church, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod in assembly urges all of its congregations to review the wages and benefits provided to lay employees, seeking to ensure that

- **Wages are commensurate with skills, expectations and responsibilities**
- **The possibility of offering health benefits is explored when needed and possible**
- **Opportunities to gain new skills are provided**
- **A forum for addressing concerns or grievances is made available.**

The resolution was adopted.

III. Honoring 350 Years of Jewish Communal Life in North America (brought to the committee by Pastor Peter Pettit)

Whereas the biennium, 2004-2005, brings the 350th anniversary of the arrival of the Jewish community in North America;

Whereas, in its 1994 "Declaration to the Jewish Community" the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expressed the "urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people";

Whereas, the partnership of the Jewish community with the lay members, clergy, congregations, agencies, and institutions of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod strengthens our witness and service in God's name and educates us in God's will for the world;

Whereas, the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod has steadfastly committed itself to building mutual understanding among Jews and Christians through such partnership and through the work of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College;

Whereas, the Jewish congregations, community centers, and federations in the region comprising the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod share our devotion to God and a commitment to bring greater peace and justice to our local communities, our society, and the world, and have consistently contributed to the achievement of those aspirations; and,

Whereas, the 108th Congress of the United States of America, in its first session, adopted Concurrent Resolution 106, recognizing and honoring the efforts of "The Commission for Commemorating 350 Years of American Jewish History," including the designation of September 2004 as "American Jewish History Month"; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America hereby extends its congratulations and best wishes to the Jewish community on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the arrival of the Jewish community in North America; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reaffirms its commitment to continue to nurture mutual understanding among Jews and Christians through the work of its congregations and agencies, including the Institute for Jewish-Christian Understanding of Muhlenberg College; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the congregations of this synod shall be encouraged to use the occasion of American Jewish History Month, September 2004, as an opportunity for joint celebrations and commemorations with the Jewish community and as an opportunity for Christian education in the areas of

American Jewish History and the significance of Judaism for Christian self-understanding; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod memorialize the 2005 biennial assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to recognize and honor the Jewish community for its 350 years of life, work, civic involvement, and faithfulness in North America; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that the Secretary of the synod shall communicate this assembly action to the Jewish congregations, community centers, and federations on the territory of the synod.

The resolution was adopted.

IV. Stewardship (brought to the committee by Pastor John Hart)

WHEREAS, Stewardship is composed of service, mission, witness, financial giving, Bible study, and regular worship, and is our response to the gift of Salvation, offered to all by God through Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA faces a vision crisis as reported in the May 2004 issue of *The Lutheran* which will, if not addressed, lead to “the fraying of our common life and the reach of life-giving ministries will be shortened,” as stated in the May 2004 issue of *The Lutheran*; and

WHEREAS in this same issue Bishop Hanson in his article on page 69 of the May 2004 issue of *The Lutheran* invites all to join him: in starting and renewing congregations, expanding our commitment to global mission, renewing worship, living out our faith by working to reduce human suffering and poverty, growing our support for families and congregations, pursuing the ELCA’s commitment to become more multicultural and multigenerational, supporting ELCA colleges, universities and campus ministries, providing pastors and lay leaders who are grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran confessions and deepening our commitment to the body of Christ while tending to our Lutheran identity and relationships; therefore be it

RESOLVED, that all congregations who are awaiting candidates to fill a pastoral vacancy shall be required to make a four year commitment to be involved in an ELCA sponsored stewardship program before they can receive names of candidates. The cost for enrollment into an intentional stewardship program shall be covered by the congregations and implemented by the Bishop’s office.

The committee recommended adoption of the following substitute resolution:

RESOLVED, that, recognizing that we are all “blessed to be a blessing,” congregations of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod be strongly encouraged to make the ministry of stewardship a high priority; and be it further

RESOLVED, that all congregations, but especially those in time of pastoral transition, be encouraged to review their current stewardship ministries, develop four-year stewardship plans and draw upon the resources offered by the ELCA and the synod to grow in the theology and practice of stewardship.

Following brief discussion, the substitute resolution was adopted.

Other Resolutions adopted by the assembly

From Lloyd Wertz, chair of the Finance Committee of the Synod Council:

Resolved, that the 2005 program proposal (February 1, 2005 to January 31, 2006) be adopted. The Synod Council is hereby authorized to establish the 2005 budget no later than its January, 2005, meeting, making any necessary adjustments to the budget proposal in light of both realistic anticipation of receipts and synod priorities (in consultation with the ELCA Treasurer with respect to the ELCA portion thereof.)

The resolution was adopted.

Pastor Paul Braden presented the 2005 compensation guidelines:

Resolved, that the 2005 Minimum Compensation Guidelines for Parish Pastors as published on pages 24-25 of the *2004 Synod Assembly Bulletin of Reports* be adopted.

Resolved, that the 2005 Minimum Compensation Guidelines for Rostered Lay Professionals as published on pages 25-26 of the *2004 Synod Assembly Bulletin of Reports* be adopted.

The resolution was adopted.