

Resolution on Children and Vulnerable Youth

WHEREAS, The Old Testament repeatedly commands us to care for the widow, the orphan, and the alien (10 times in Deuteronomy alone) and judges the nations on their treatment of these same groups; and

WHEREAS, The Jesus told us that whoever welcomes a child welcomes him (Mark 9:36-37), and whoever puts a roadblock between any child and Christ's grace puts their own selves in grave danger (Matthew 18:5-6); and

WHEREAS, The importance of protecting and supporting vulnerable children and youth is particularly pressing at this time, given that in just 2022-2023 there was controversy and debates at the State and Federal levels of government on the following topics: abortion and whether medical care should be provided to a pregnant youth who is not ready (physically or mentally) to give birth, transgender youth in sports, whether the medical treatment of gender dysphoria is child abuse, whether children have a right to privacy from their parents or if schools must out them, the use of corporal punishment, what books can or cannot be in school libraries, what constitutes age appropriate teaching on gender orientation and sexual identity, whether to teach youth topics that expose them to our history of racial atrocities, whether 18-year-olds should be allowed to vote, whether 10-year-olds in Wisconsin can be tried as adults, whether minors in Wisconsin can work until 11pm, how to protect children in schools from gun violence, what's causing the major rise in teenage female suicides, whether to limit youth media usage like China's weekend-only online gaming policy, whether children can be taken from their homes if they, their parents, or their siblings are transgender, what constitutes sexualized content and the extent to which children may or may not be exposed to it, etc., etc., etc.; and

WHEREAS, These issues point to a larger debate active in our society over the value and role of a child, over the extent to which youth can make responsible decisions or be accountable for their actions, over the bodily autonomy of youth, over the cognitive abilities of youth to learn difficult or controversial concepts, over the extent parents have autonomy to raise their children vs. the government's responsibility to protect children and raise educated citizens, etc.; and

WHEREAS, In addition to all this, there are the many other issues that affect youth in unique ways, such as bullying and gangs, social media and screens, marketing, mental health, access to childcare, being a ward of the state or placed in foster care, adoption, violent or abusive homes or relationships, gun violence, lead exposure, being born with disabilities, medical conditions, or addictions, trafficking, status offense laws, sexual assault, divorce, trauma, the ways youth are disproportionately affected by poverty, racism, climate change, and homophobia, etc.; and

WHEREAS, The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* includes among the church's purposes (4.02.c.) semi-equivalent modern language concerning widows (caring for [...] the aged) and aliens (embracing and welcoming [...] diverse populations), but it does not contain semi-equivalent modern language explicitly naming the concern of the orphan as a purpose of this church; and

WHEREAS, Though some ELCA social statements and social messages consider (often in limited ways) the needs of youth, no ELCA social statement or social message is organized around the unique needs and value of children nor the importance of protecting and supporting the vulnerable youth in our society; and

WHEREAS, Three ELCA synods memorialized the 2022 Churchwide Assembly to develop a social statement on child abuse and child protection, and it is true that this church needs to speak out about the rampant child abuse within the Church, but the unique issues youth face, unfortunately, are much greater than abuse; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly direct the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council to form a task force to organize one or more listening sessions with the youth of this Synod to hear the issues facing them and consider actions the Synod could take in support of their needs, that this task force would report back to the Synod Council with recommended actions, that the task force be

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provided funds from the Cross Generational Programs line in the synod budget, and that this task force would prepare a report for the 2024 Synod Assembly.

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly encourage the congregations and ministries of this synod to pay increasing attention to their children and youth, particularly those who are in at-risk populations (such as those who are living in poverty, living in out-of-home settings or are experiencing homelessness, neurodivergent, living with substance use disorders, identity with a racial minority group, LGBTQ+, living with medical conditions or disabilities, being bullied, or have encountered traumatic events), to advocate on their behalf in our communities, and to work to build up assets within our communities that support these populations; and

RESOLVED, That the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly direct the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council to request the Church Council and the Office of the Secretary to develop amendments to 4.02.c., †S6.02.c., and *C4.02.d. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, as well as any other applicable places, to be presented at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly that adds “supporting vulnerable youth” to the purposes of this church.