

Resolution 2 – 2019 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly Resolution on the Opioid Crisis

WHEREAS, Jesus sends us forth to “heal the sick” (Matthew 10:8); and

WHEREAS, as declared in its “Statement of Purpose”, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America must “lift its voice in concord and work with forces for good, to serve humanity, cooperating with church and other groups participating in activities that promote justice, relieve misery and reconcile the estranged” (Section 4.03(f) of the ELCA Constitution); and

WHEREAS, every day, more than 130 people in the United States die after overdosing on opioids (National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Opioid Overdose Crisis”, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>, revised Jan. 2019), causing misery for a vast network of victims and their families and communities; and

WHEREAS, the misuse of, and addiction to, opioids — including *prescription pain relievers, heroin, and synthetic opioids such as fentanyl* — is a serious national crisis that affects public health as well as social and economic welfare, so much so that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that the total economic burden in the United States of prescription opioid misuse alone is \$78.5 billion per year, including the costs of healthcare, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice involvement (National Institute on Drug Abuse, “Opioid Overdose Crisis”, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-overdose-crisis>, revised Jan. 2019); and

WHEREAS, during the year 2017, there were 916 overdose-related deaths in the State of Wisconsin, more than twice the number of such deaths during the year 2010 (Wisconsin Department of Health Services, <https://www.wisconsin.gov/wish/opioid/data.htm>), including a four-fold increase in heroin deaths during that period of years (National Institute on Drug Abuse, <https://www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/opioids/opioid-summaries-by-state/wisconsin-opioid-summary>); and

WHEREAS, in the year 2017, the President of the United States directed his Administration “to use all appropriate emergency and other authorities to respond to the crisis caused by the opioid epidemic (Presidential Statement, August 10, 2017); and

WHEREAS, the Governor of the State of Wisconsin created the Governor’s Task Force on Opioid Abuse (Executive Order #214, Sept. 22, 2016) and subsequently convened, in multiple locations, a Governor’s Faith-Based Summit on Opioids for pastors, priests, parish nurses, and others involved in faith-based community organizations confronting the prevention, intervention, recovery, and criminal justice consequences of the Opioid Crisis (Executive Order # 273, Jan. 19, 2018); and

WHEREAS, the churchwide organization of the ELCA declares, “The work God calls us to do in the world is never done alone or in isolation, and the churchwide organization plays a key role in developing and supporting a culture of interdependence, diversity and common mission across all expressions of the ELCA and its partners” (<https://elca.org/About/Churchwide>); therefore, be it

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RESOLVED, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly direct the Synod Council to respond to the opioid crisis by creating a Synod Task Force on Opioid Abuse to advise how synod leaders and congregations can collaborate and form effective partnerships with state and local authorities and nongovernmental organizations; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod appoint members of the Synod Task Force on Opioid Abuse, to include Synod staff, pastors, deacons, and lay leaders (especially those with experience-based perspectives) and task a synod staff member with responsibility to support the Task Force; and be it further

RESOLVED, that participants in the Synod Task Force on Opioid Abuse include those most vulnerable in this crisis — young people, people of color, people who identify among LBGTQIA+, people who have been in prison or jail, military veterans, and people from other groups that are disproportionately affected by this crisis; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Synod Task Force on Opioid Abuse encourage practical ways for rostered leaders and congregations to bring hope and healing to those affected by the crisis, and in so doing consider the actions suggested by the Center for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships in its Opioid Epidemic Practical Toolkit, including

- Hosting or connecting people to recovery programs and support groups (*Open Your Doors*)
- Providing educational opportunities that create understanding and encourage compassion (*Increase Awareness*)
- Offering training programs to build the capacity of communities to respond (*Rebuild and Restore*)
- Focused efforts on youth prevention (*Get Ahead of the Problem*)
- Joining substance-use prevention coalitions, so as to inform, connect, and strengthen efforts (*Connect and Collaborate*)

and help congregations to be informed about federal, state, and local resources available, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly direct the bishop of the Greater Milwaukee Synod to share this resolution with the presiding bishop of the ELCA and the appropriate staff people in the Domestic Mission Unit of the churchwide organization of the ELCA and to explore with them the formation of a churchwide task force that would provide information, networking, and support for ministries dedicated to combating opioid addiction and abuse.

Submitted by Clusters 1 and 2, Milwaukee (Authors: Rev. Molly Doreza, Bay Shore Lutheran & Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, Hephatha Lutheran)
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