

Resolution 2 – 2018 Greater Milwaukee Synod Assembly Resolution in Support of Expanding Support of Prison Congregation, Prison/Jail Re-Entry Ministry and Prison Reform Advocacy

WHEREAS, Jesus, in Matthew 25, says that when we visit someone in prison, we are visiting Christ; and

WHEREAS, The United States, with over two million persons in jails and prisons, has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, and Wisconsin has the second highest rate of incarceration of African American men in the United States; and

WHEREAS, The Greater Milwaukee Synod, in collaboration with the ELCA Congregational Centers for Mission and with Prison Congregations of America, launched Breaking the Chains congregation at the Felmers Chaney Correctional Center (minimum security prison), 2825 N. 30th St., Milwaukee, in 2016, with Rev. Mark Thompson serving as pastor; and

WHEREAS, Project RETURN was founded by a Synod congregation, Cross Lutheran, Milwaukee, in 1980, to help meet employment, housing, and counseling needs of men and women leaving incarceration and engaging in the reentry process; and

WHEREAS, Congregations and individuals of the Greater Milwaukee Synod have been engaged in prison reform efforts for the past 15 years through four congregation-based justice organizing groups—MICAHA (Milwaukee), RIC (Racine), CUSH (Kenosha), SOPHIA (Waukesha); and

WHEREAS, Several Synod congregations and individual members have responded to the 2017 Assembly resolution urging participation in Breaking the Chains congregation and in prison and jail ministry (number of individuals attending worship at the Chaney Center or signed up for required orientation is 33; number of individuals who have prepared or provided materials for the ministry is 13; number of congregations that have had Breaking the Chains Pastor Mark Thompson as a preacher or discussion leader, have contributed funds, and/or provided volunteers is 13); and

WHEREAS, A Synod Prison/Jail Ministry Task Force has been formed by the Breaking the Chains Steering Committee in cooperation with Synod staff, to encourage and coordinate participation by congregations and individuals in all three levels of prison ministry—in-prison/jail ministry, reentry ministry, and prison reform advocacy; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That congregations and individual members of the Greater Milwaukee Synod be encouraged to begin, or to continue, their support of Breaking the Chains congregation, by sending volunteers to participate in the Saturday evening worship and Wednesday evening Bible class, by membership on the Breaking the Chains Steering Committee, by inviting Pastor Mark Thompson to speak/preach at congregational worship and gatherings, and by contributing financially to the ministry needs of Breaking the Chains congregation; and be it further

RESOLVED, That congregations be encouraged to participate on the Synod Prison/Jail Ministry Task Force, to be engaged in the development of the Synod's prison ministry and prison reform advocacy strategy; and be it further

RESOLVED, That congregations be encouraged to support and participate in the reentry ministry of Project RETURN and in the prison reform campaign (Restoring Our Communities) of MICAHA, RIC, CUSH, and SOPHIA; and be it further

RESOLVED, That congregations be encouraged to participate in ministries at local county and city jails, and nearby youth detention centers and state prisons, as opportunities are available; and be it further

RESOLVED, That the Synod Prison/Jail Ministry Task Force send a report to all the congregations of the Greater Milwaukee Synod in December 2018, and in May 2019, in preparation for the 2019 Synod

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Assembly, indicating the number of congregations and individuals involved in the three levels of prison ministry—Breaking the Chains congregation and other in-prison and in-jail ministries, Project RETURN and other reentry ministries, and prison reform advocacy (MICAH/RIC/CUSH/SOPHIA ROC Campaign).

*Submitted by: Hephatha Lutheran Church; Rev. Mary Martha Kannass, Pastor and
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