

A RESOLUTION: REGARDING THE TREATMENT OF MIGRANT CHILDREN IN THE CUSTODY OF THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS, according to the Migration Policy Institute, the Obama administration increased detention of undocumented migrant families by 173 percent in 2015 and continued to increase detentions to the end of the administration while keeping families together¹; and

WHEREAS, the recent May 7th, 2018 action by the Trump administration to separate children from their parents who cross the southern border splits parents and children without due process, while detaining these children in juvenile centers for months at a time²; and

WHEREAS, it has been suggested³ that the act of separating children from their parents may be considered torture as defined by the United Nations and adopted by the United States Citizens and Immigration Services: *“Torture is defined as any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or her or a third person information or a confession, **punishing him or her for an act he or she or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed**, or intimidating or coercing him or her or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity”*⁴; and

WHEREAS, the children leaving their native countries often leave to escape severe threats of violence with little to no financial stability and safe social structure thereby risking bodily harm along the escape route and often suffer greatly from post-traumatic stress disorders and depression⁵; and

WHEREAS these sweeping deportation actions are dividing families and parents from their children causing “psychological trauma, residential instability, and family dissolution...”⁶; and

WHEREAS such separation from family members and their placement with foster care agencies creates an undue burden on already limited resources of juvenile detention systems across the United States; and

WHEREAS God’s love for the stranger and our calling to love and serve the neighbors God gives to us are central to the Biblical narrative; and

WHEREAS God’s people have been called to love the stranger in their midst knowing that they were once strangers in a foreign land (Lev. 19:34); and

WHEREAS God’s people have been called to welcome the stranger in their midst because in so doing they welcome Christ who promises to be present among those in need of shelter (Mt 25:31-46); and

¹ <https://thinkprogress.org/churches-open-their-doors-on-christmas-to-immigrants-seeking-refuge-from-dhs-raids-74ed0ce2e528/>

² NPR “Sessions Says ‘Zero Tolerance’ for illegal border crossers, vows to divide families” May 7, 2018

³ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/posteverything/wp/2018/05/15/separating-children-from-parents-at-the-border-isnt-just-cruel-its-torture/?utm_term=.346af40a9c01

⁴ <https://www.uscis.gov/ilink/docView/SLB/HTML/SLB/0-0-0-1/0-0-0-11261/0-0-0-34922/0-0-0-35186.html>

⁵ <http://www.evidenceaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/1-s2.0-S0140673611600512-main.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/news/deportation-parent-can-have-significant-and-long-lasting-harmful-effects-child-well-being-pair>

WHEREAS the ELCA, in its Social Statement “For Peace in God’s World” has committed to promote respect for human rights, especially for “groups most susceptible to violations, especially all minorities, women, and children;” and

WHEREAS immigrant populations have deep roots within our American Lutheran churches and we have a long history of welcoming migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers as well as advocating for just immigration policies; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: The Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America meeting in Assembly, June 15, 2018, encourages its congregations and members to call for humane, compassionate treatment of persons designated as undocumented minors, including maintaining family unity; and be it further

RESOLVED, the Upper Susquehanna Synod calls upon the United States Congress, the President of the United States, the Attorney General of the Department of Justice and the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to halt the policy of separating children from their parents at the border or anywhere undocumented children and their families are found, and be it further

RESOLVED, the Upper Susquehanna Synod urges the Bishop of the synod, or her designee, to make the synod’s position on this matter known throughout the synod and to the public at large; and be it further

RESOLVED, the Upper Susquehanna Synod calls upon our synod leaders, pastors, deacons, and congregations to support the work of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, and the ELCA’s Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) program⁷, to welcome immigrants, and to advocate for public policies welcoming the stranger as we would the Lord. And be it finally

RESOLVED, the Upper Susquehanna Synod act to assist in equipping our congregations, institutions and ministries to engage in these expressions of advocacy appropriate to local contexts, capacity and discernment.

Submitted by

The Rev. Thomas M. Glasoe – Synod Secretary

The Rev. William S. Henderson – Dean, Buffalo Valley Conference

The Rev. James Park Bricker – Dean, Juniata Valley Conference

The Rev. Ted Cockley – Dean, West Branch Conference

The Rev. Robert Doll – Dean, Middle Creek Conference

The Rev. John Koons – Dean, North Branch Conference

The Rev. Andrew Weaver – Dean, Tulpehocken Conference

The Rev. Kristina Schaeffer – Dean-Elect, Middle Creek Conference

The Rev. Cinda Brucker – Pastor of Trinity and Mt. Zion Lutheran Churches, Hughesville

The Rev. Sarah Hershberger – Pastor of Grace, Shamokin

The Rev. Christine Kirchner – Pastor of Mt. Grove Parish, Bloomsburg

The Rev. Justin Lingenfelter, Pastor of United in Christ Lutheran Church, West Milton

Deacon Gary Schaeffer – Pastor of St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church, Shamokin Dam

Ms. Linda Weaver – Chair of Nomination Committee of Buffalo Valley Conference

Ms. Sue Teisher – Member of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church, Turbotville

⁷ Details, opportunities, and scope of the ELCA’s AMMPARO program are available at <https://www.elca.org/ammparo>.