

Resolution for New England Synod Assembly June 2017

Whereas the evangelical mandate of Christ to his apostles in Matthew 28:18-20 calls us to make his teaching and presence known throughout this earth's nations¹; and

Whereas the discipleship and gospel entailed in that Great Commission is obscured and diminished if the dissemination of its witness is thought of as *exclusively* intended for or achieved in the conversion of others to Christianity; and

Whereas Christian discipleship and witness bids us reach out with a love that not only gives account of our faith but also genuinely values and respects our neighbors; and

Whereas the current wording of the ELCA Constitution in C4.02b and its parallels in the model synod and congregation constitutions ("*reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ*") can too easily be heard to narrow the definition and motivation of our outreach and stand as a contradiction of the good faith of witness; and

Whereas the ELCA has declared itself "committed to fostering unity among the children of God for the sake of the world;"² and,

Whereas in the *Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community* (adopted by the ELCA Church Council, April 18, 1994) we officially expressed "our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people" and offered "prayer for the continued blessing of the Blessed One upon the increasing cooperation and understanding between Lutheran Christians and the Jewish community;" and,

Whereas in the ELCA's *Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations* we affirm that "encounter with living and faithful Judaism can be profoundly enriching for Christian self-understanding;" and,

Whereas in the ELCA's *Guidelines for Christian-Muslim Relations* we affirm that "the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls Christians to mutual understanding and friendship with Muslim people in the United States and around the world. By learning about Islam and seeking opportunities to know Muslim people better, we bear witness to God's saving love incarnate in Jesus;" and

Whereas "the Scriptures have no single teaching about the relationship between the people of the covenant and those who practice other religions;"³ and,

Whereas "reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ" goes beyond the previous C4.01 which states that "The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity

¹ "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

² www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations

³ *Engaging Others, Knowing Ourselves: A Lutheran Calling in a Multi-Religious World*

in the world," we are called and sent to bear witness, not to "bring" which is the work of the Holy Spirit; and,

Whereas Martin Luther teaches in the Small Catechism that we believe that we cannot by our own "understanding or strength believe in Jesus Christ our Lord or come to him, but that the Holy Spirit calls us through the Gospel;" and,

Whereas Martin Luther's theology of the cross calls into question all human efforts to speak with certitude about the pathways of God; and

Whereas in the light of the growing positive and rich multi-faith engagement of the 21st century, we have come to a new humility about the question of God's relation to other religions:

Be it resolved that the New England Synod memorialize the ELCA Churchwide Assembly to initiate a process to amend the phrase "bring all people to faith in Christ" in C4.02b and its constitutional parallels in order to achieve greater consonance with both our understanding of Christian witness and sensitivity to our interfaith contexts. And,

Be it further resolved that the resources of the ELCA enlist and consult its teaching theologians, Bishops, and other leaders in the drafting of such an amendment for consideration at its subsequent CWA.

Submitted by: Pr. Ross Goodman Pr. Donald Larsen Pr. John Stendahl