

## **A Resolution on Welcoming the Neighbor: Migrants and Refugees**

- WHEREAS warfare, economic distress, civil disorder, and oppression in many parts of the world have displaced people from their homes in the highest numbers in human history--with 65.3 million displaced people in 2015--in addition to the regular flow of migrants around the world for other reasons<sup>1</sup>; and
- WHEREAS it is a foundational and widely shared religious value to welcome the neighbor, to shelter the refugee, and to build holy community with newcomers, as we are reminded in Leviticus 19:33-34: "When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (NRSV); and
- WHEREAS like the ancient Hebrew people who knew what it was to be "aliens in the land of Egypt," Lutheran Christians around the world have known throughout the generations what it means to live as immigrants and refugees, and so we have dedicated ourselves to supporting migrant peoples around the world and to welcoming them into our own communities, particularly but not solely through Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), Lutheran World Relief, and the Lutheran World Federation; and
- WHEREAS rhetoric around migrants and refugees has become increasingly heated, polarized, and politicized, a rhetoric often implicitly or explicitly connected with racism and religious bigotry, a rhetoric which is working to undermine the broad consensus among people of faith toward a broad, compassionate, and grace-filled welcome toward migrants and refugees; and
- WHEREAS rhetoric which attempts to turn people against one another, to sow seeds of distrust, to label any human being "illegal," and to increase fear of the "other" dehumanizes our beloved neighbors and directly contradicts our Christian understandings, which hold that each person is created in the image of God with inherently good and equal ethical standing, which hold that we look to see Christ in the face of the stranger whom we welcome, which hold that the grace of God poured out for us in the person, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ transcends divisions of culture, language, legal status, and national origin, such that we "are no longer strangers and aliens, but [we] are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19, NRSV); and

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**1** "Global forced displacement hits record high", United Nations High Commission on Refugees, June 20, 2016. Accessed on June 1, 2017.  
<http://www.unhcr.org/afr/news/latest/2016/6/5763b65a4/global-forced-displacement-hits-record-high.html>

WHEREAS the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and its predecessor bodies have consistently advocated in the public sphere for a more gracious, compassionate, and just treatment of migrants and refugees in our country and around the world, including our ELCA Social Message on Immigration<sup>2</sup>, no less than six statements or letters issued by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton<sup>3</sup>, and our ELCA Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO)<sup>4</sup> program working alongside migrant children from Central America and their families;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that our congregations are urged to seek out opportunities to build personal relationships with migrants and refugees, to learn about their experiences, and to better understand the challenges they face, including but not limited to sponsoring refugee families, building relationships with nearby ecumenical and interfaith communities populated by immigrants and refugees, and partnering with local resettlement agencies; and

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<sup>2</sup> "A Social Message on Immigration," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, November, 1998. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ImmigrationSM.pdf?\\_ga=2.125241922.974492514.1496337303-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ImmigrationSM.pdf?_ga=2.125241922.974492514.1496337303-1953820235.1492057171)

<sup>3</sup> "ELCA statement on U.S. response to refugee resettlement," ELCA, November 19, 2015. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA\\_statement\\_on\\_US\\_response\\_to\\_refugee\\_resettlement.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_statement_on_US_response_to_refugee_resettlement.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

"An open letter to the Muslim American community," Bishop Eaton, December 11, 2015. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Open\\_Letter\\_to\\_Muslim\\_American\\_Community.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Open_Letter_to_Muslim_American_Community.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

"Letter on Refugee and Immigrant Executive Order," Bishop Eaton, January 30, 2017. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop\\_Eaton\\_Letter\\_on\\_Refugee\\_and\\_Immigrant\\_Executive\\_Order.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop_Eaton_Letter_on_Refugee_and_Immigrant_Executive_Order.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

"Remember the Refugees and Migrants," Ecumenical bishops, Ash Wednesday, 2017. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop\\_Ash\\_Wednesday\\_Statement\\_2017.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop_Ash_Wednesday_Statement_2017.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

"Ecumenical Declaration: Protecting Welcome, Restoring Hope," National Council of Churches, March 3, 2017. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Ecumenical-Declaration-Protecting-Welcome-Restoring-Hope.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Ecumenical-Declaration-Protecting-Welcome-Restoring-Hope.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

"Pastoral Statement on Syria," Bishop Eaton, April 8, 2017. Accessed on June 1, 2017. [http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop\\_Eaton\\_Pastoral\\_Statement\\_on\\_Syria.pdf?\\_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171](http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Bishop_Eaton_Pastoral_Statement_on_Syria.pdf?_ga=2.261584847.339882085.1496337120-1953820235.1492057171)

<sup>4</sup> Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities. <https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/AMMPARO>

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that our congregations are urged to learn about the legal, social, and policy context of migrants and refugees, including but not limited to the *Stand For Welcome, Rebuilding Hope*, and *Refugee Sunday* programs offered by LIRS, the AMMPARO resources offered by the ELCA, and Know Your Rights and Bystander trainings offered by civil rights organizations such as CASA de Maryland<sup>5</sup>; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that our congregations and rostered ministers are urged to come directly alongside and serve migrant and refugee neighbors, and support each other in that work, including but not limited to visiting migrants in detention (through programs like that offered by LIRS), prayerfully accompanying migrants and refugees to their legal hearings and holding vigil with their friends and family, and providing tangible resources and spiritual support to the families of those detained; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that our congregations and rostered ministers are urged to advocate in the public sphere for a more gracious, compassionate, and just treatment of migrants and refugees in our country and around the world, in partnership with organizations such as LIRS, CASA de Maryland, and the ELCA Washington office.

Submitted by:

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<sup>5</sup> CASA de Maryland. <http://wearecasa.org/>

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