

RESOLUTION # 5

A Resolution Calling the Church to Speak and Act to Prevent Bullying, Harassment and Related Violence

Whereas, “*If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.*” (1Cor. 12:26); and

Whereas, in the *ELCA Social Statement on Education* (2007) we declared, “*The ELCA expects communities of learning and teaching to be safe places. We recognize that school safety is an issue for all students, staff, and teachers. Unfortunately, incidents of bullying, intimidation, and other forms of violence are not unusual. We affirm that personal safety and security are essential for optimal teaching and learning*”; and

Whereas, research indicates children with disabilities or special needs are at a higher risk of being bullied than others (Rigby, K., 2002, *New Perspective on Bullying*. London. Jessica Kingsley Publications); and has concluded that *Bullying around issues of sexual orientation, non-conforming gender behaviors, and dress was the most common form of bullying, second only to issues of appearance (e.g., body size and disability).*” (The National School Climate Survey, conducted in 2005); and

Whereas, in the *ELCA Social Statement on Sexuality: Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) we declared, “*Likewise, it will attend to the particular needs of children and the families of those with actual or perceived differences in sexual orientation or gender identity because they are especially vulnerable to verbal, physical, emotional, spiritual, psychological, and sexual abuse.*”; and

Whereas increased media attention has made us acutely aware of tragic consequences (including youth suicide) if steps are not taken to prevent bullying, harassment, and other related forms of violence; and

Whereas, the voice of the church addressing the intersection of race, economic status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, and physical ability is a powerful witness to the healing and life affirming Gospel promise,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED . . .

That the Rocky Mountain Synod encourages new partnerships among our congregations, the synods, the Churchwide Organization, outdoor ministries, campus ministries, Lutheran School Associations, Lutherans Concerned/North America, Lutheran Social Services organizations, public schools, counseling centers and other governmental

organizations in order to support and offer preventative programs addressing bullying, harassment, and other related violence, especially with higher risk populations; and **Be it further resolved** that these partnerships be encouraged to create or join with existing preventative programs which:

- a. utilize positive, inclusive, empowering and developmentally appropriate materials,
- b. raise participant's awareness about the issue,
- c. focus on prevention,
- d. seek to change bystander behavior into ally behavior,
- e. create partnerships between youth and adults,
- f. [offer tools and counsel to decrease the vulnerability of those who experience and/or are at risk for bullying and harassment](#), and;

Be it further resolved that these partnerships seek funding for these efforts from a combination of existing funds and new funding sources not otherwise accessible individually such as foundation grants, synod and other Lutheran organizational grants (for example, Thrivent, Wheat Ridge Ministries, Women of the ELCA, etc...), private and governmental funding sources.

Implications of the Resolution (if adopted):

1. What is the financial impact of this resolution on the synod budget? If expenditures are required, what are the sources of income anticipated to accomplish the purpose of the resolution? One of the key points of this legislation is that it avoids absolutely mandating that the synod take on a new program that it may not have the financial or staffing resources to adequately support. Instead, the resolution encourages the church to get creative, to draw upon the great concern and energy that the problem of bullying has awakened in our community. If there are resources available in the synod budget, that's great, let's use them – but I suspect there are not. So the great gift of the resolution is that it provides a platform on which various parts of our church (congregations, conferences, synod committees, social service organizations, etc...) can use the model identified in the resolution: to focus on prevention, not just intervention; to change the bystander, behavior into ally behavior; to create partnerships with other groups.
2. What are the personnel implications within our synod? Who will be responsible for the implementation of the resolution? One of the powerful aspects of this resolution is that it encourages us to form partnerships linking church groups with other organizations in the community. Our kids need to feel safe in the church youth room, in the public schoolhouse, at Bible camp – everywhere they go. It is only by working within and through all parts of our society that we will be able to create a climate and culture where this kind of violence is less possible.

3. How does this resolution enhance and forward the mission of our church and synod? Too many kids feel as if there is nowhere for them to go, no place where they will be accepted for who they are. Schools have often been unable (and sometimes unwilling) to adequately address the needs of some students, in particular the needs of those whom this legislation identifies as “higher risk populations,” who could be gay or lesbian kids, Latino or African American kids, economically disadvantaged kids, etc... Tragically, a great many young people feel that the church is exactly where they will not find meaningful support. For instance, just on the issue of sexual orientation, a recent survey of utilizing a random sample, two thirds of those surveyed said that they believe that messages from religious bodies are contributing to higher rates of suicide among gay and lesbian youth. Another study from the Barna group found that 80% of un-churched youth, believe that Christians show excessive contempt and unloving attitudes toward gay and lesbian people. Regardless of whether the perception is correct, we need to work to change that perception. We need to change the climate in society and church. This resolution gives us a good starting point for doing so.

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