18.03 RESOLUTION FOR ADVOCACY AND ACTION FOR IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS we recognize our church, along with our country, continues to change with the steady of arrival of newcomers to the United States; that newcomers are increasingly assuming leadership roles in our congregations, synods, affiliated educational and social ministries agencies, and church wide ministries; and

WHEREAS as members of a church with roots in immigrant churches and in a nation of immigrants, we are familiar with the stories of persons who left their homes for economic or political reasons, journeyed into an uncertain future and now struggle in a strange land to begin a new life; and

WHEREAS undocumented aliens live, work, and worship among us in the North Carolina Synod, yet their undocumented status leaves them particularly vulnerable to negative stereotypes and exploitation including, but not limited to: human trafficking, work/wage oppression and abuse, substandard-housing, and physical violence and hate crimes; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, engages with these vulnerable children of God in our congregations and church-affiliated agencies including Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), Lutheran Services of the Carolinas (LSC), and with ecumenical partners. In all expressions of our church, we assist unaccompanied children, offer pastoral care and guide persons without legal representation to appropriate counsel, and with the citizenship process, and help these newcomers learn to live in their new country;¹ and

WHEREAS, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program is currently subject-matter of numerous cases now pending in several jurisdictions of the Federal Court system, it is incumbent upon Congress to pass legislation to resolve the crisis faced by some 800,000 young persons who arrived in this country as children through no action of their own, some of who are now rostered leaders in our church, students in Lutheran schools and colleges, and with their families are members and friends of our congregations; and

WHEREAS, immigrants and family members without any history of felony crimes, are routinely taken into custody without explanation, and are detained indeterminately without access to proper legal counsel or proper healthcare, in conditions which, “undermine the protection of detainees’ rights, their humane treatment, and the provision of a safe and healthy environment,”² as documented by inspections by the Department of Homeland Security and non-profit agencies established to provide services to detainees; and

WHEREAS, citizen children born in the United States to undocumented parents are forced into foster care upon arrest and detention of their parents, often physically and forcibly

¹ A Message on Immigration, as adopted by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly 1997 (CA07.6.39).
removed from their custody and detained separately without just cause until they are
placed in foster care;

WHEREAS such separation from family members traumatizes the minor children, and their
placement with foster care agencies creates undue burden on already limited resources of
foster care systems across the United States; and

WHEREAS policies separating families are not in keeping with the Christian teachings
regarding the sanctity and preservation of family unity; and

WHEREAS our faith teaches us to welcome the stranger in our land and to treat them as one
of our own for in as much as we receive the stranger in need, we receive the Lord (Matthew
25:40); and

WHEREAS the ELCA supports its members in their callings to: love their neighbor, to
advocate for justice and mercy in situations of brokenness; to work with and on behalf of
the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer; and to use our power and influence with
political and economic decision-making bodies to develop and advocate policies that seek
to advance justice, and peace; and

WHEREAS the ELCA affirms our call to “public policy advocacy at state, federal, and
international levels that seeks to eliminate racial or ethnic discrimination (and) private
sector advocacy that encourages corporate social responsibility for community
development;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT

• the North Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America meeting in
  Assembly, calls upon the United States Congress, the President of the United States, and
  the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security, to act to:

  - halt the detention and deportation of immigrants not found guilty of a felony until
    comprehensive immigration policy reform is fully enacted by Congress; and

  - pass permanent legislative solutions to protect Childhood Arrivals, also known as
    “Dreamers” and provide them an unrestricted path to citizenship; and

  - open a pathway to legal status and citizenship to immigrants residing in this
    country without legal documentation and who are not felons; and

  - reform the immigration policies and laws of the United States to provide
    opportunity for legal migration and a path to citizenship in the United States; and

3 Ibid.
4 ELCA Social Statement Freed In Christ: Race, Ethnicity, And Culture (1993).
• the North Carolina Synod meeting in Assembly, encourage its congregations and its
members to call for humane, compassionate treatment of persons designated as
undocumented aliens, including maintaining family unity; and

• the North Carolina Synod meeting in Assembly urges the bishop of the synod, or his
designee, to make the synod’s position on this matter known throughout the synod
and to the public at large; and

• the North Carolina Synod meeting in Assembly calls upon our synod leaders, pastors,
deacons, and congregations to support the work of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee
Services, Lutheran Services Carolinas, and the ELCA’s Accompanying Migrant Minors
with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO) program5,
to welcome immigrants, and to advocate for public policies welcoming the stranger as
the Lord.

Respectfully Submitted by the NC Synod Social Justice and Advocacy Ministries Team:
Michael E. Jones, Convener; Rev. Kyle Bates; Deacon Deborah Johnson; Deacon GeoRene
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Approved as amended at NC Synod Assembly, June 2, 2018

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