

MEMORIAL ON SUICIDE PREVENTION AND RESPONSE

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WHEREAS, suicide is the eleventh leading cause of death in the United States and claimed over 32,000 lives in 2005 (more than homicide and HIV combined) and the eighth leading cause of death for men of all ages, the second leading cause of death for people ages 25 to 34, the third leading cause of death among 15- to 24-year-olds, and annually claims the lives of *more than 350 members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (ELCA); and

WHEREAS, suicides carry a terrible stigma which has an impact on a wide circle of people, from immediate family to friends and neighbors and from workplaces and schools to faith and health communities and all of society; and

WHEREAS, the stigma attached to suicide severely impedes both the recovery of those impacted by suicide and efforts to help suicidal people; and

WHEREAS, the number of those who have lost a loved one to suicide (suicide survivors) is at least twenty times the number of suicides, and, due to stigma, these people remain largely without help and support; and

WHEREAS, survivors of suicide have, as a group, terrific potential to be a foundation of strength and energy to prevent additional suicides; and

WHEREAS, the number of people who have made a life-threatening act to end their lives is estimated to be anywhere from twenty to one hundred times the number of those who die by suicide; and

WHEREAS, those who have attempted suicide are six times more likely than others to complete suicide in the future and, so, are especially in need of the understanding, care, and support of faith communities, even though they are largely unidentified; and

WHEREAS, the *ELCA Message on Suicide Prevention*, approved by the ELCA Church Council on November 14, 1999, provides a basis for ELCA suicide prevention action in these words, "Our efforts to prevent suicide grow out of our obligation to protect and promote life, our hope in God amid suffering and adversity, and our love for our troubled neighbor;" and

WHEREAS, numerous new suicide prevention resources have become available since 1999, including inexpensive, web-based suicide prevention educational and training materials, federal funding for college and university prevention programs, evidence based prevention programs, a national "hotline," a national suicide prevention resource

42 center, an ELCA Suicide Prevention Endowment Fund, and broad interest of national
43 faith communities in collaborating to fight suicide; and

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45 WHEREAS, it is clear that prominent and repeated support from the top leadership of this church is
46 essential for the church to move from policy statement to action to prevent suicide;
47 therefore, be it

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49 RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod memorializes the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to
50 authorize creation of a volunteer Suicide Prevention Ministry Task Force for a trial period
51 of two years (with continuance beyond that left to the discretion of the Church in
52 Society unit), with a charge to: (1) be supervised by the Church in Society Unit; (2)
53 examine the prevalence of suicide and its impact on the church, its members,
54 institutions and rostered persons, along with ways in which such impact may be
55 reduced; (3) collaborate with other organizations on suicide prevention; (4) invite ELCA
56 survivors of suicide and those who have been suicidal to serve on the Task Force; and
57 be it further

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59 RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod memorializes the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to
60 encourage the communication voices of the church to promote the church's suicide
61 prevention work and its Suicide Prevention Endowment Fund; and be it further

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63 RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod memorializes the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to
64 encourage all rostered personnel to take a web-based survey of knowledge of suicide
65 prevention; and be it further,

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67 RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod memorializes the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to
68 direct the church's national advocacy office to advocate for expanded federal funding for
69 suicide prevention research; and be it further

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71 RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod memorializes the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to
72 require the Task Force to provide a report on its work and recommendations to the
73 executive director of the Church in Society unit.

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76 Submitted by:

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