

We are the children of Abraham, the descendants that God promised to Abraham that would be as numerous as the stars in the sky - adopted children of God because Jesus Christ opened up the Abrahamic Covenant to each of us and everyone. Thus, we are also the children of immigrants and refugees. Abraham and Sarah (Still only known as Abram and Sarai) were called by God to leave their families and their home, to travel crossing the desert into a new country, a new land, a new territory, to live, to raise their children, and establish for themselves a home in this new place. Our faith ancestors over and over again, story after story, experienced war, hardship, and poverty that caused them to leave their homeland in search of a new country to call their new home, in search of a better life. Each time they found it easier or harder to settle in their new land - sometimes rejected and sometimes welcomed. But God gave our faith ancestors the command, *“Just as you were once a foreigner in the land of Egypt, do not oppress or mistreat the foreigner that resides among you in your land, treat them as a native-born citizen. For I am the Lord your God.”* (Leviticus 19:33-34) And just as God gave our faith ancestors this command, God gives us the same command, because, by our faith ancestors, we too were once foreigners in the land of Egypt, we too know what it is like to be dejected and rejected, so we seek to welcome and to reveal God’s kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven to all people - citizens, residents, and migrants alike, for we are all humans created in God’s image and loved by our Creator.

The Immigration and Refugee Task Force was commissioned after Resolution 05-03 was passed at the synod assembly in 2005. Excerpts from the resolution that highlight the work of this task force include:

“Whereas, Jesus calls those who follow Him to love their neighbors, the hungry, the homeless, and the vulnerable; and...Whereas, the United States of America is a nation of immigrants with a long history of welcoming newcomers to our shores; and...Whereas, refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants face a myriad of burdensome laws, procedures, and unjust practices that contribute to such problems as the “warehousing” of refugees in overseas camps, the detention of asylum seekers in US jails, the lack of legal protections for unaccompanied children and asylum seekers, and the separation of families; and...whereas, burdensome laws and procedures and unjust practices undermine our security; and...whereas, the congregations and members of the ELCA have a long tradition in refugee resettlement ministry; therefore be it resolved, that each Synod Bishop be requested to appoint a task force to give leadership in involving congregations in refugee and immigration justice issues, including education, advocacy, and local service.”

We are deeply concerned with the current immigration and refugee policies and laws in the United States as well as the lack of accurate information that is present in our news media and general understanding of immigration and refugee process. As there is no legal way to immigrate to the United States without

immediate family who are citizens or without at least \$500,000, and no legal process for an immigrant already here to become a citizen, as there are people seeking a way out of extreme poverty, war, and natural disasters, our immigration system is broken and reform is necessary. As Lutheran-Christians we can unite in agreement over the mistreatment of the God’s beloved people who are stuck in the middle of this broken system - of the children of God whose lives are put in danger, living in extreme poverty, families who are broken apart by immigration laws, and our own family - Lutheran and Christian churches being broken apart by immigration laws and deportations.

The Immigration and Refugee Task Force in the year 2017-18 saw a change-over in leadership and membership. Rev. Robert and Darlene Munneke retired from their positions as co-chairs of the task force after many years of leadership and involvement in immigration and refugee work through the church. We give thanks to God and to Rev. Bob and Darlene for their work accompanying immigrants and refugees and working for God’s justice to be known to immigrants and refugees. We bless them as they move into new callings and new roles in their lives and thank them for their continued support for the task force and this important work.

Taking over leadership in May 2017, I, The Rev. Beth Pottratz, have been re-organizing and re-committing the task force to immigration and refugee work. Myself and the committee have been consulted by and presented at various congregations, pastoral conference meetings, and synod events in the past year: including a synod assembly workshop 2017, Lake Superior conference meeting, Kettle River conference meeting, Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Duluth, Zion Lutheran Church in International Falls, and Zion Lutheran Church in Cloquet.

Looking forward to 2018-19, the Immigration and Refugee committee hopes to continue educating and advocating for immigration and refugee justice, to collaborate with the AMMPARO ministry, with other synods and churches doing immigrant and refugee justice work, with the ELCA churchwide offices, Minnesota Lutheran Advocacy, and ELCA Advocacy organizations, and with our international sister church relationships, especially with the Honduras sister church and task force.

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“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer immigrant or citizen, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”
(Galatians 3:28)