

The Delaware-Maryland Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, at its annual assembly in Ocean City, Maryland, May 31-June 1, passed resolutions on the Maryland Civil Marriage Protection Act and in support of the Uniting American Families Act currently before the U.S. Congress.

The Maryland Civil Marriage Protection Act was enacted by the Maryland Legislature and signed by Governor O'Malley in March 2012. The law provides legal civil marriage for all couples, including same-gender ones, while protecting the right of pastors and congregations to choose whom they will bless or allow to use their facilities. A provision of the law is that it does not go into effect until January 2013, to allow time for what is now a certain referendum on the November ballot for the citizens of Maryland to affirm the law or repeal it.

The resolution passed by the Delaware-Maryland Synod assembly "encourages its congregations to study the Civil Marriage Protection Act, as enacted by the Maryland legislature," before the referendum in the November election.

Further, the resolution requires the synod to offer "at least three public forums prior to the beginning of Early Voting (October 27, 2012), providing members of our faith communities the opportunity to study together the issues involved in light of the ELCA Social Statement, 'Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust.'"

And, by this resolution, the Delaware-Maryland Synod assembly requested the synod bishop "issue a pastoral letter offering his guidance prior to the anticipated referendum."

The assembly also overwhelmingly passed a resolution in support of the Uniting American Families Act (UAFAs), calling on President Obama to support and press for the passage of the act before Congress, and further calling on Delaware and Maryland elected officials in Congress to "co-sponsor and to press for passage of the same and to enact inclusive, comprehensive immigration reform legislation that ends the long-standing discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender immigrant families by including the Uniting American Families Act." This act would remove the barrier in current immigration law whereby a U.S. citizen or legal permanent resident is permitted to sponsor his or her spouse, child, or parent for permanent resident status, but is not permitted to sponsor his or her same-gender partner for permanent resident status.

Rev. Wolfgang Herz-Lane, bishop of the synod, relinquished the chair of the assembly briefly to speak in favor of this resolution.

The assembly required the synod bishop to communicate the synod's support of UAFA to President Obama and members of Congress representing Delaware and Maryland. The assembly commended 16 ELCA bishops, including their own, "for their courageous witness and their stand for justice in adding their names to the *Faith Coalition for UAFA*."

And, the assembly encouraged its pastors and other congregational leaders to support UAFA by communicating with their elected representatives to encourage them "to co-sponsor and to support both these bills and a just, comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration law."

John Carter, Convener, Lutherans Concerned Maryland Chapter, said of these resolutions, "These are historic achievements. The Delaware-Maryland Synod has taken a giant, positive step forward. In acknowledging and appreciating the diversity within its faith community, these actions will help factually educate ELCA Lutherans prior to the start of 2012 referendum voting on the Civil Marriage Protection Act, and send a strong message of support for immigration reform and the need for equal protection and privilege under law.

"I am very pleased with the adoption of these resolutions," Carter continued. "Many forward-looking people worked hard for the Synod to take action to adequately prepare its membership to responsibly and graciously hold conversations about and factually educate its members on important civil issues. I am extremely proud of our Church."