

The South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina  
The Episcopal Church in South Carolina  
The Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston  
The South Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church

## STATEMENT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION

April 2014

To the People of South Carolina,

“You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5: 13-16). Jesus of Nazareth used this simple image to inspire his followers to make a difference in the world. We are bishops of the Lutheran, Episcopal, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist Churches in the state of South Carolina. As shepherds of our churches, we are charged to lead the faithful in ways that direct our energies to the building up of the Kingdom of God and to make a difference around us. We believe that Jesus’ desire for the unity of his followers (John 17: 20-23) calls us to work together, and we are conscious as well that “no one should seek his own advantage, but that of his neighbor” (1 Corinthians 10: 24).

In support of the American experiment in democracy, our nation has realized that education is an essential component to equipping members of society who can in turn help lead the United States of America into a better future. The family remains the foundation of our society’s ability to nurture and develop people of character. Our congregational leaders and people work constantly to empower and lift up families, and we believe this contribution to the good of society—together with the efforts of all religious communities—is one of our most important contributions to our state.

Public education is also an essential component of ensuring that the people of our state are formed to be good citizens, prepared to be contributors to our economy, and given passion for the common good of society. Individual school districts in partnership with the State of South Carolina are primarily responsible for ensuring that the opportunity for a complete and empowering education is available to every child in our state. Unfortunately, our state is marked by disparities in the delivery of education. Many school districts are hampered by a scarcity of resources because they are located in economically challenged, often rural, counties in our state. We believe there is indeed a “Corridor of Shame” in our state. Crumbling buildings, inadequate funding, and low expectations mark too many districts at a time when a Twenty-first Century economy demands more of our people. How can the next generation rise to the challenge of this day and age when they are not given the superior education they deserve? Even in the most successful of school districts, too many students underachieve, or worse, fall through the cracks and do not achieve success. All too easily they can become caught in the grip of poverty.

We, as pastoral leaders, pledge our commitment to support the full flourishing of public education in South Carolina. We ask our congregations—as well as all people of good will—to offer what we can to lift up our schools and those students who face hurdles to reach the

best they can achieve in their education. Congregations and members of our churches already offer tutoring, mentoring, supplies, and expressions of appreciation to our schools. We pledge ourselves and the resources we are able to engage through our congregations to address concrete ways to support public education in an intentional way over the next five years and beyond. In this effort, we welcome partnerships with all religious communities and people who share our concerns. Over time, we also pledge to engage in a dialogue with our state legislators to craft and support initiatives to improve public education, especially where these issues are related to the areas of our state with schools that are not equipped to provide a superior education.

Finally, we commit ourselves to pray for our state's leaders, educators, and students. We are convinced prayer that trusts God and longs for insight helps bring clarity regarding what is important and strength to make a difference for what is good. We invite our congregants and all people of good will to join us in prayerfully discerning how God calls us to make a difference—to be light for our world—in educating students of our state so that they will not only be good members of society, but empowered for their journey to a fuller life.

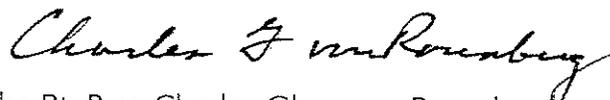
Faithfully yours,



The Rev. Dr. Herman R. Yoos, III  
Bishop  
South Carolina Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America



The Rt. Rev. W. Andrew Waldo  
Bishop  
The Episcopal Diocese of Upper South Carolina



The Rt. Rev. Charles Glenn vonRosenberg  
Provisional Bishop  
The Episcopal Church in South Carolina



The Most Rev. Robert E. Guglielmone  
Bishop  
The Catholic Diocese of Charleston



The Rev. L. Jonathan Holston  
Resident Bishop  
South Carolina United Methodist Conference

## Resolution on Public Education

Whereas, In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus stresses the importance of the care of children when he says, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them." (Matthew 19:14);

Whereas, The South Carolina Synod Mission statement defines God's purpose for the people of our synod as: Joining neighbors, serving boldly, loving all, through Christ;

Whereas, One of the missional priorities of the South Carolina Synod is to engage congregations and the synod in addressing issues of public education in their communities;

Whereas, According to the United States Census 40% of children in South Carolina live in low income families;

Whereas, According to a 2013 study from the United States Department of Education 29.5% of students from low income families do not graduate from high school in four years; and

Whereas, According to a 2014 Annie E. Casey Foundation study 72% of SC fourth graders are not proficient in reading and 69% of eighth graders are not proficient in math; therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That congregations of the South Carolina Synod acknowledge and pray for the teachers, school staffs, and students of South Carolina schools during worship at the start of and throughout the school year, and be it further

*Resolved*, That congregations of the South Carolina Synod strongly encourage and equip their members to be actively involved in public schools through mentoring, tutoring, and volunteering during the academic year, as well as participating in summer education initiatives; and be it further

*Resolved*, That congregations be in partnership with nearby public schools to serve, love, and join with neighbors; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the South Carolina Synod Community Outreach Network in partnership with synod staff, create and regularly update the synod's communication platforms to provide information and resources for the synod's congregations to help effectively implement the aforementioned resolutions; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Bishop and those appointed by the Bishop for this purpose advocate with elected legislative and education officials the commitment of South Carolina's Lutherans to help meet needs in the public education system, and specifically present the South Carolina superintendent of education the 2007 ELCA Social Statement, "Our Calling in Education"; and be it further

*Resolved*, That every congregational council of the South Carolina Synod will share this resolution with their congregation and report to the Bishop by October 31, 2015 any ministry partnerships with schools in their communities; and be it further

*Resolved*, That the Office of the Bishop and the South Carolina Synod Council will report the compiled information to the 2016 Synod Assembly.

Submitted by:

Community Outreach Network

Public Education Task Force

Poverty Task Force

Rev. Nathan J. Rice – St. Luke's Lutheran Church, Summerville

Rev. Karen Hawkins – St. Johannes Lutheran Church, Charleston

Rev. Paul Wollner - Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Columbia

Tara Lentz-Friedrichs, A.I.M. – Mt. Hermon, West Columbia

Joseph Rice – Trinity Lutheran Church, Greenville

Anne Hightower-Patterson White – St. Mark's, Saluda

Rev. Rick Mason – Ehrhardt Lutheran Parish, Ehrhardt

May 13, 2015