

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN
AMERICA**

Church Council

MINUTES

Nov. 12, 2025

**Prepared by the
Office of the Secretary**

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**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
CHURCH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES
Nov. 12, 2025**

The 121st meeting of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) convened electronically Nov. 12, 2025, at 6:00 p.m. (all times Central Standard Time unless otherwise noted).

ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

The following people were present for all or part of the meeting:

Voting members

Officers:

The Rev. Yehiel Curry, presiding bishop
Mr. Imran Siddiqui, vice president
The Rev. Lucille “CeCee” Mills, secretary
Ms. Lori S. Fedyk, treasurer

Vice Chair of the Conference of Bishops:

The Rev. Deborah K. Hutterer, bishop of the Grand Canyon Synod (*excused*)

Church Council:

The Rev. A. Elizabeth (Lisa) Ahlness	Mr. Mitch S. McCartney
The Rev. Ryan H. Anderson	Mr. Joel A. Miller
The Rev. Heather E. Brown (<i>absent</i>)	The Rev. Alvaro Nova
Ms. Jamie Brueschoff	Ms. Deborah M. Nyquist
The Rev. Leroy Cannon (<i>absent</i>)	Deacon Kari A. Olsen
Mr. Benjamin J. Caseley	The Rev. Moses P. Penumaka
Ms. Sheena R. Foster (<i>excused</i>)	Mr. Iván A. Pérez
Mr. Hans W. Giller	Ms. Linda C. Rivera
Ms. Jessi Grieser (<i>absent</i>)	Ms. Terri L. Robertson
Ms. Patricia P. Harper	The Rev. Barbara R. Rossing
Ms. Deidre D. Hayes	Ms. Spencer Sanders (<i>absent</i>)
Ms. Kristy K. Henriksen	Mr. Matthew A. Schur
Mr. Timothy Hiller	Mr. Andrew W. Stevens
The Rev. Chad M. Huebner (<i>excused</i>)	Ms. Jillian C. Stierwalt
Mr. Rindra Josoa	Ms. Jennifer E. Trom
Mr. Moses Kavishe	Mr. Christopher A. Vergara
The Rev. Gwendolyn S. King	Ms. Emma L. Witt
Ms. Olivia L. Martin-Call	

Liaisons from the Conference of Bishops:

Bishop Brenda K. Bos, Region 2	Bishop Laurie A. Larson Caesar (<i>for Bishop Manlove</i>), Region 1
Bishop Amy L. Current, Region 5	
Bishop Christopher deForest, Region 7	Bishop Craig A. Schweitzer, Region 3
Bishop Suzanne D. Dillahunt, Region 6	Bishop Kevin L. Strickland, Region 9
Bishop William J. Gohl, Region 8	Bishop Joy F. Mortensen-Wiebe, liaison bishop-elect
Bishop Scott Johnson, Region 4	

Advisory members of the Church Council:

The Rev. Jesse W. Brown Jr., president, African Descent Lutheran Association
The Rev. Joann Conroy, president, American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association
Ms. Desta Goehner, president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
The Rev. Alejandro Mejía, president, Asociación de Ministerios Latinos – ELCA
The Rev. Bimen Limbong, president, Association of Asian and Pacific Islanders
Mr. Ryan LaHurd, president, Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage
Ms. Aubrey Thonvold, executive director, ReconcilingWorks (*excused*)

Churchwide Staff Resource People:

Office of the Presiding Bishop:

The Rev. M. Wyvetta Bullock, interim executive for administration
Mr. Aaron Cooper, senior director for strategic communications
Mr. Ryan P. Cumming, director for theological ethics
Ms. Victoria Flood, director for Mission Support
Ms. Kathryn M. Lohre, executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations and theological discernment
Ms. Judith E. Roberts, senior director for diversity, equity, and inclusion
Ms. Mary J. Streufert, executive director for theological discernment
Deacon John E. Weit, executive for worship
The Rev. Roger A. Willer, program director for theological ethics
Ms. Rachel K. Wind, executive for development
Ms. Andrea Young, interim executive for human resources

Office of the Secretary:

Mr. Thomas A. Cunniff, general counsel
Mr. Adam DeHoek, senior director for research and evaluation
Mr. Dan F. Eppley, manager for official documentation
The Rev. N. Keith Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration
Mr. Paul K. Irwin, associate general counsel
Mr. Joseph Schmidt, administrative services coordinator
Ms. Jodi L. Slattery, executive for governance

Christian Community and Leadership:

The Rev. Sara A. Cutter, interim executive director

Service and Justice:

The Rev. Khader El-Yateem, executive director

Innovation:

Ms. Rahel Mwitula-Williams, interim executive director

Media:

Ms. Candice Hill Buchbinder, public relations manager

Separately Incorporated Ministries:

Ms. Jennifer Hockenbery, interim executive director, Women of the ELCA
Mr. Christopher Johnson, president and CEO, Portico Benefit Services
Ms. Katie Murphy, director for ELCA Foundation Marketing and Communication
Ms. Annette Shoemaker, interim president and CEO, ELCA Foundation

Ecumenical Guest:

The Rev. Deborah Jackson, ecumenical liaison of The Episcopal Church (USA)

CALL TO ORDER AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

(Agenda I.A.)

Mr. Imran Siddiqui, vice president of the ELCA and chair of the Church Council, called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. Mr. Mitch S. McCartney led the council in an opening devotion.

A motion was made to adopt the agenda. Vice President Siddiqui invited discussion and, there being none, called for a vote.

VOTED:

CC25.11.44 To adopt the agenda and to permit the chair to call for consideration of agenda items in the order the chair deems most appropriate.

ADOPTION OF THE STANDING RULES

(Agenda I.B.)

The Church Council conducted this virtual meeting using standing rules. The proposed standing rules were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting. Vice President Siddiqui reviewed the standing rules, invited discussion and, there being none, called for the vote.

VOTED:

CC25.11.45 To adopt the standing rules for the November 2025 Church Council meeting.

REPORTS FROM THE OFFICERS

REPORT OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP

(Agenda I.C.1.)

The Rev. Yehiel Curry, presiding bishop of the ELCA, provided an update on recent and approaching bishop installations and the recent election of a new bishop by the Allegheny Synod Assembly. He discussed his reasons for a proposed personnel policy change that would require that churchwide organization employees living within fifty miles of a churchwide organization worksite (the Lutheran Center, the Archives, and the Washington, D.C., office) be expected to work in-office at least two days each week, beginning in 2026. The presiding bishop also reported on recent activities to deepen his relationships with leadership of the separately incorporated ministries of this church.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY

(Agenda I.C.2)

The Rev. Lucille “CeCee” Mills, secretary of the ELCA, reported on the beginning of her tenure as secretary, then invited Mr. McCartney to provide an update on upcoming activities of the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose.

REPORT OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

(Agenda I.C.3)

Vice President Imran Siddiqui invited Presiding Bishop Curry to assume the chair. Presiding Bishop Curry assumed the chair and invited Vice President Siddiqui to deliver his report. The vice president reported on work related to the recently launched Church Property Resource Hub. He celebrated the diversity of the Church Council, particularly the Executive Committee. Following the report, Presiding Bishop Curry returned the chair to Vice President Siddiqui.

REPORT OF THE TREASURER

(Agenda I.C.4)

Ms. Lori S. Fedyk, treasurer of the ELCA, provided an overview of unrestricted fund results through September 2025. She stated that, through this period, churchwide organization unrestricted revenue was about \$2.6 million below spending, in line with budget projections. She reported that Mission Support and investment revenues are favorable to budget projections and spending is about \$3 million below plan or 93 percent of budget projections.

The treasurer summarized recent cost-cutting measures introduced by the churchwide organization, noting the challenges associated with additional cost reductions. She stated that, as a result of better-than-projected revenue

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performance, later in the meeting there would be a proposal to increase the spending authorization for the 2026 fiscal year (FY2026).

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(Agenda I.D.)

Vice President Siddiqui provided the report of the Executive Committee. Background information related to the report was shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting

ELECTION OF A CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBER

(Agenda I.D.1.)

The Rev. Daniel Collins, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod [8H], resigned from the Church Council in September 2025, and a vacancy was declared by the secretary. The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod Council nominated a rostered minister, the Rev. Ralph Dunkin, former bishop of the synod, to fulfill the remainder of the term ending in 2031. The Executive Committee forwarded the nomination to the Church Council for consideration.

VOTED:

CC25.11.46 To elect the Rev. Ralph Dunkin, Wheeling, W.Va. [8H], to the Church Council for a six-year term ending in August 2031.

Vice President Siddiqui declared Pastor Dunkin elected.

RESPONSES TO THE REPORT OF THE EDUCATIONAL DEBT TASK FORCE

(Agenda I.D.2.)

At its Spring 2022 meeting, the Church Council authorized the creation of the Educational Debt Task Force [CC22.04.05]. The task force was charged with studying the issue of addressing educational debt among rostered ministers and developing a comprehensive strategy to provide educational debt relief to as many rostered ministers as possible. The final report of the task force and related actions recommended by the Executive Committee were shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Secretary Mills introduced the first motion recommended by the Executive Committee in response to the Educational Debt Task Force report.

VOTED:

CC25.11.47 To receive the report and recommendations from the Educational Debt Task Force and thank the members of the task force for their care and due diligence in the work;

To request that the churchwide organization re-imagine and enhance programming and fundraising efforts (e.g., Fund for Leaders) to include a debt reduction dimension that would reduce the educational debt incurred by current rostered ministers of this church, especially for rostered ministers of color and ministers ordained between the mid-1990s and the late-2010s;

To direct that the churchwide organization explore the feasibility of convening a specific task force to focus on the unique challenges faced by historically underrepresented groups;

To direct that the Strategic Communications Team, in consultation with the appropriate units in the churchwide organization, promote the research findings from the task force and provide congregations and synods with information about the importance of supporting educational debt reduction, including information about the state of educational debt among ELCA rostered ministers;

To request that the appropriate churchwide organization units convene quarterly meetings with the financial Separately Incorporated Ministries to share

learnings and collaborate on the financial well-being of rostered ministers with respect to educational debt;

To direct that the Office of the Secretary Research and Evaluation team conduct further analysis on the impacts of educational debt on historically underrepresented groups and the unique challenges faced by these groups for the purposes of moving beyond narrative to reliable evidence, particularly as it relates to intersectionality;

To direct that the Office of the Secretary Research and Evaluation team evaluate and measure the ongoing progress of educational debt reduction programs; and

To call upon the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with appropriate units in the churchwide organization, to establish and oversee processes for implementation of and accountability for these directives and to report to the Fall 2027 meeting of ELCA Church Council.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Secretary Mills introduced the second motion recommended by the Executive Committee in response to the Educational Debt Task Force report.

Moved;

[Seconded]:

To encourage synods to support churchwide and synod-specific educational debt reduction efforts for current rostered ministers and to evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts to attract and retain rostered ministers;

To call upon synods to communicate with their rostered ministers and congregations about educational debt reduction programs and educate lay leaders on the importance of financially supporting rostered ministers; and

To urge synods that do not have educational debt reduction opportunities to include questions about seminary debt in their annual questionnaires to learn more about the educational debt among the rostered ministers in their synod.

In response to a question from a liaison bishop, Mr. Adam DeHoek, senior director for research and evaluation, provided clarification regarding the assignment of churchwide organization staff to support activities in the proposed action.

VOTED:

CC25.11.48

To encourage synods to support churchwide and synod-specific educational debt reduction efforts for current rostered ministers and to evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts to attract and retain rostered ministers;

To call upon synods to communicate with their rostered ministers and congregations about educational debt reduction programs and educate lay leaders on the importance of financially supporting rostered ministers; and

To urge synods that do not have educational debt reduction opportunities to include questions about seminary debt in their annual questionnaires to learn more about the educational debt among the rostered ministers in their synod.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Secretary Mills introduced the third motion recommended by the Executive Committee in response to the Educational Debt Task Force report.

Moved;

[Seconded]:

To urge congregations to educate their members by sharing information on the educational debt challenges faced by rostered ministers, including rostered ministers of color and people with additional intersectionality, and the need to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in congregational call processes; and

To call upon congregations to actively support their rostered ministers through such ways as participating in churchwide and synod-specific efforts for educational debt reduction for current rostered ministers.

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In response to questions from council members, Mr. DeHoek, provided clarification regarding the meaning of “intersectionality” and how this concept could be more effectively communicated to the broader membership of this church. A council member expressed support for the motion, emphasizing the challenges in securing calls often faced by rostered ministers of color and those with additional intersectionality. Ms. Linda C. Rivera requested that her abstention from the vote be recorded, and Vice President Siddiqui so ordered.

VOTED:

CC25.11.49

To urge congregations to educate their members by sharing information on the educational debt challenges faced by rostered ministers, including rostered ministers of color and people with additional intersectionality, and the need to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in congregational call processes; and

To call upon congregations to actively support their rostered ministers through such ways as participating in churchwide and synod-specific efforts for educational debt reduction for current rostered ministers.

On behalf of the Executive Committee, Secretary Mills introduced the fourth motion recommended by the Executive Committee in response to the Educational Debt Task Force report.

Moved;

[Seconded];

To call upon this church’s colleges, universities, seminaries, and related institutions, organizations, and ministries to create, provide, and prioritize grants and scholarships for undergraduate students pursuing theological education, especially for historically underrepresented groups;

To encourage undergraduate students and seminarians to consider the type of theological education needed to be effective in ministry and to include financial education, counseling, and debt impact awareness throughout their discernment process; and

To call upon all expressions of this church to support, strengthen, and promote, when appropriate, alternative and bi-vocational ministry learning programs, such as Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and certificate programs as means of equipping congregational leaders in the midst of a changing church landscape.

In response to a question from an advisory member, Mr. DeHoek stated that, in communicating the action, resources could be provided to help institutions support students. A council member asked whether and how candidacy committees take student debt into account when considering approving applications for candidacy. Mr. DeHoek and the Rev. Moses P. Penumaka, a member of the task force, provided clarification regarding resources available to candidacy committees to assist them in taking student debt into account in candidacy decisions.

A council member recommended that additional guidance be provided to candidacy committees in addressing student debt. The Rev. M. Wyvetta Bullock, interim executive for administration, and the Rev. Sara A. Cutter, interim executive director for Christian Community and Leadership, stated that there is churchwide organization staff support for candidacy committees, adding that the proposed motion would serve to support churchwide staff in such efforts.

VOTED:

CC25.11.50

To call upon this church’s colleges, universities, seminaries, and related institutions, organizations, and ministries to create, provide, and prioritize grants and scholarships for undergraduate students pursuing theological education, especially for historically underrepresented groups;

To encourage undergraduate students and seminarians to consider the type of theological education needed to be effective in ministry and to include financial education, counseling, and debt impact awareness throughout their discernment process; and

To call upon all expressions of this church to support, strengthen, and promote, when appropriate, alternative and bi-vocational ministry learning programs, such as Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and certificate programs

as means of equipping congregational leaders in the midst of a changing church landscape.

ELCA FOUNDATION

(Agenda I.D.3.)

In 2017, the Church Council approved a governance structure for the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (also known as the ELCA Foundation), but changes since then have prompted the Resource Development Committee, which reports to the Budget and Finance Committee, to recommend further review. A joint committee, consisting of representation from the Foundation and the churchwide organization, was approved at the October 2024 meeting of the Executive Committee [ECES24.10.36]. The joint committee was charged with reviewing Foundation compliance with Church Council action CC17.11.21, which states, “To approve the proposed governance structure and organizational structures by functions as outlined in the ‘Report of the Task Force on the Structure and Governance of the ELCA Foundation.’”

The Foundation currently uses the ECIS database for donor management but has expressed a desire to move forward with HubSpot, a customer relationship management system. At its October 2024 meeting, the Executive Committee requested that the ELCA Foundation cease activity related to implementation of HubSpot until such time as the report and recommendations were received from the joint committee.

The joint committee developed a report, provided at the May 2025 meeting of the Executive Committee, but progress on the action items within the report has been minimal. During its meeting on Nov. 4, 2025, the Executive Committee received an additional update. The Foundation has indicated it no longer desires access to ECIS and has requested a one-time transfer of a limited amount of donor information from ECIS, as well as the creation of a separate website domain apart from the ELCA.

Presiding Bishop Curry and Treasurer Fedyk stated that they intend to meet with Foundation leaders for further discussion. After that discussion, the Executive Committee may be able to take more informed action, pending authorization from the Church Council.

Moved;

[Seconded]: To authorize the Executive Committee to act on behalf of the Church Council pertaining to requests from the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (dba ELCA Foundation) for transfer of specified ECIS data.

Treasurer Fedyk, Presiding Bishop Curry, Ms. Rachel K. Wind, executive for development, Ms. Annette Shoemaker, interim president and CEO for the ELCA Foundation, and Mr. Thomas A. Cunniff, general counsel, provided clarification regarding the motion, particularly the consistency of the proposed action with churchwide organization privacy and information security policies.

VOTED:

CC25.11.51 To authorize the Executive Committee to act on behalf of the Church Council pertaining to requests from the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (dba ELCA Foundation) for transfer of specified ECIS data.

REPORT OF THE BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

(Agenda I.E.)

The Rev. Elizabeth A. (Lisa) Ahlness, chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, provided the report of the committee. Background information related to the report was shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

REVISION OF FY2026 CURRENT SPENDING AUTHORIZATION

(Agenda I.E.1.)

Pastor Ahlness, Treasurer Fedyk, and Pastor Bullock provided an overview of the rationale for a proposed increase to the FY2026 churchwide organization spending authorization and responded to questions clarifying the FY2026 budget. On behalf of the committee, Pastor Ahlness introduced a motion to approve the increase.

VOTED:

CC25.11.52 **To increase the Unrestricted (Current Fund) 2026 fiscal year spending authorization from \$61,500,000 to \$63,150,000.**

RECESS

The 121st meeting of the Church Council recessed at 7:37 p.m. and reconvened at 7:48 p.m.

REPORT OF THE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW COMMITTEE

(Agenda I.F.)

Mr. McCartney, chair of the Budget and Finance Committee, provided the report of the committee. Background information related to the report was shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

REVISION OF THE *MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE ROSTERS OF THE ELCA*

(Agenda I.F.1.)

The *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (also known as the “Roster Manual”) is a governance document that outlines the policies, procedures, and standards for managing this church’s rostered ministers. It governs how individuals are admitted to, maintained on, and removed from the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of the ELCA. It also includes information on non-roster related matters such as synod-authorized ministry.

The manual was last updated in 2022. Key proposed changes for 2025 include:

1. clarifying the process for exceptions to the initial congregational service bylaw for ministers of Word and Sacrament; and
2. adding a new section outlining policies on supply ministry calls for ministers of Word and Sacrament; and
3. new policies related to on leave status.

These revisions are based on recommendations from the Task Force on On Leave and Specialized Ministry, whose report was submitted to the Church Council at its November 2024 and April 2025 meetings. The revisions have been reviewed by the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops and have been subject to consultation with the full conference. The proposed revisions reflect changes made to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The proposed revisions were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting. On behalf of the committee, Mr. McCartney brought forward a motion to approve the revisions. The Rev. N. Keith Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration, explained that the revised Roster Manual policies would go into effect immediately upon approval by the Church Council.

On behalf of the committee, Mr. McCartney introduced the motion to amend the Roster Manual.

VOTED:

CC25.11.53 **To approve the updated *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* for use by synod bishops, synod staff members, and others who hold responsibilities for such matters in this church;**

To authorize the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to provide periodic updates reflecting new or revised policies subsequently adopted by the Church Council; and

To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.

UPDATES TO ELCA CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION PERSONNEL POLICIES

(Agenda I.F.2.)

Revisions to Section 4.1. (Core Hours) and 4.7 (People First Hybrid Workplace Model) are being proposed for the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies.

Employees of the churchwide organization of the ELCA, including contracted employees, are expected to read, understand, and comply with the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies, which are adopted by the Church Council in accordance with bylaw 14.21.06.

On behalf of the committee, Mr. McCartney introduced a motion to approve the revisions.

VOTED:

CC25.11.54 To approve the amended Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies; and To authorize the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with Human Resources in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTICO BENEFITS CHANGES

(Agenda I.F.3.)

At its meeting on Feb. 20, 2025, the Board of Trustees of Portico Benefit Services endorsed the recommendations resulting from Benefits reExamined research and consultation. The board also directed Portico to take actions that are necessary to present the recommendations to the Church Council for approval and move forward with implementation and communication plans pending approval by the Church Council.

The Church Council endorsed the changes in principle at its April 2025 meeting [CC(ES)25.04.02]. The Legal and Constitutional Review Committee reviewed the resulting amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plans that are consistent with the recommendations presented in April 2025. The proposed amendments were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting. On behalf of the committee, Mr. McCartney moved the proposed action.

MOVED;

[Seconded]: To receive the recommendations of Portico Benefit Services' board of trustees endorsing and recommending approval of ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits plan amendments implementing four new health plan benefit options, as presented to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting;

To express gratitude and appreciation to the *Benefits reExamined* task force, staff, and board of trustees of Portico Benefit Services for their continued faithfulness and compassion in designing, testing, rolling out, evaluating, and anticipating the implementation of four new health plan benefit options, which both reflect the principles underlying the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits and recognize the complexities of health care changes; and

To approve the four new health plan benefit options, identified and described as the Select Copay 2000, Select HDHP 2000, Value Copay 4000, and Value HDHP 4000 plan options, and the proposed amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan identified in "Portico Benefit Services Explanation of Plan Amendments" document, effective Jan. 1, 2026.

A council member and an advisory council member expressed concerns regarding some of the proposed changes. Mr. Christopher Johnson, president and CEO of Portico Benefit Services, clarified the process by which the proposed amendments were determined, emphasizing the varied perspectives that were taken into account. A council member asked about the consequences if the council did not approve the motion. Mr. McCartney and Mr. Johnson stated that failure to approve the motion would jeopardize health insurance coverage for plan participants in 2026, emphasizing that the changes had already been approved in principle by the Church Council at its Spring 2025 meeting. A council member called the question, and the council voted to end debate.

VOTED:

CC25.11.55 To receive the recommendations of Portico Benefit Services' board of trustees endorsing and recommending approval of ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits plan amendments implementing four new health plan benefit options, as presented to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting;

To express gratitude and appreciation to the *Benefits reExamined* task force, staff, and board of trustees of Portico Benefit Services for their continued faithfulness and compassion in designing, testing, rolling out, evaluating, and anticipating the implementation of four new health plan benefit options, which both reflect the principles underlying the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits and recognize the complexities of health care changes; and

To approve the four new health plan benefit options, identified and described as the Select Copay 2000, Select HDHP 2000, Value Copay 4000, and Value HDHP 4000 plan options, and the proposed amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan identified in “Portico Benefit Services Explanation of Plan Amendments” document, effective Jan. 1, 2026.

REPORT OF THE FAITH, SOCIETY, AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

(Agenda I.G.)

Ms. Jamie Bruesehoff, chair of the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee, provided the report of the committee. Background information related to the report was shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

CONSIDERATION OF A SOCIAL MESSAGE ON CHILD PROTECTION

(Agenda I.G.1.)

The development of a social message on child protection and maltreatment was authorized by the Church Council at its Spring 2024 meeting (CC24.04.05). The council’s Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee reviewed the proposed social message and provided a recommendation for the council’s consideration. The proposed social message and related materials were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting, and council members were invited to send concerns or recommended amendments related to the social message to the director for theological ethics by Nov. 5, 2025.

Ms. Bruesehoff provided an overview of the contents and production process of the social message. On behalf of the committee, she introduced a motion to adopt the social message.

Moved;

[Seconded]: **To adopt “Child Protection” as a social message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.**

A council member introduced a motion to amend the statement by addition.

Moved;

Seconded: **At line 744, to add an additional point to the list of public policies for which members of this church are encouraged to advocate:**

Legislation that promotes child and community safety through gun violence prevention, including safe storage laws, universal background checks, and restrictions that limit children’s access to firearms.

The council member spoke in support of the motion, emphasizing the importance of addressing gun violence for child protection. Mr. Ryan P. Cumming, director for theological ethics, expressed concern that the proposed amendment was outside the scope of the message and noted that the proposed language did not go through the vetting process through which the rest of the statement had gone. He expressed concern that, if the Church Council amends a statement that was vetted and approved by this church more broadly, it might foster a misperception that social messages are imposed from the churchwide expression rather than arising from broadly based processes of discernment. He also pointed out that the proposed language was not consistent with other social messages of this church. In response to a question from a council member, Mr. Cumming stated that this church has addressed gun violence in other statements, reiterating that earlier statements are in some ways inconsistent with the language in the proposed amendment.

A council member introduced a motion to amend by substitution.

Moved;
Seconded:

To amend the proposed amendment by substitution:

At line **744743**, to add an additional point to the list of public policies for which members of this church are encouraged to advocate:

~~Legislation that promotes child and community safety through gun violence prevention, including safe storage laws, universal background checks, and restrictions that limit children's access to firearms.~~

Gun violence prevention legislation, such as universal background checks,⁹⁵ that reduces risk to children in situations of abuse in the home.⁹⁶

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁵“Gun Violence Prevention,” Social Policy Resolution, CA16.02.031.

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁶“Guns in the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers to threaten and control.” “Gun-related Violence and Trauma” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2024), 10.

In response to a question from a council member, Mr. Cumming and the Rev. Roger A. Willer, program director for theological ethics, discussed ways members of this church are educated about social messages. They clarified that the proposed substitute amendment reiterates social teachings that this church has put forward elsewhere.

Moved;
Seconded;
Carried:

To amend the proposed amendment by substitution:

At line **744743**, to add an additional point to the list of public policies for which members of this church are encouraged to advocate:

~~Legislation that promotes child and community safety through gun violence prevention, including safe storage laws, universal background checks, and restrictions that limit children's access to firearms.~~

Gun violence prevention legislation, such as universal background checks,⁹⁵ that reduces risk to children in situations of abuse in the home.⁹⁶

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁵“Gun Violence Prevention,” Social Policy Resolution, CA16.02.031.

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁶“Guns in the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers to threaten and control.” “Gun-related Violence and Trauma” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2024), 10.

Moved;
Seconded;
Carried:

To amend the proposed social statement by addition:

At line **743**, to add an additional point to the list of public policies for which members of this church are encouraged to advocate:

Gun violence prevention legislation, such as universal background checks,⁹⁵ that reduces risk to children in situations of abuse in the home.⁹⁶

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁵“Gun Violence Prevention,” Social Policy Resolution, CA16.02.031.

[ADD new endnote] ⁹⁶“Guns in the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers to threaten and control.” “Gun-related Violence and Trauma” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2024), 10.

Vice President Siddiqui declared that the motion to amend had passed and called for the vote.

VOTED:
CC25.11.56

Two-Thirds Vote Required
To adopt “Child Protection,” as amended, as a social message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

CONSIDERATION OF THE NEXT SOCIAL MESSAGE

(Agenda I.G.2.)

ELCA social teaching and policy result from an extensive, inclusive, and accepted process of deliberation throughout this church. The development, adoption, application, and interpretation of social teaching entails a shared responsibility across all three expressions of this church in which various actors carry out specific roles as spelled out in “Policies and Procedures for Addressing Social Concerns of the ELCA” (2018).

The ELCA Church Council’s role in the development of social messages includes oversight and is proactive, since the Church Council serves as the ELCA’s interim legislative body. Social messages may be requested by several leadership bodies but are adopted by council action and the council’s responsibility includes determination both of whether and when requests will be authorized.

The general capacity of the theological ethics team for writing projects during any given year is work on one social statement, one social message, and one study resource. Recommendations for social message development also take into account the capacity of review bodies such as the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council.

There are currently three requests for social message development that have been approved by the Church Council:

- Development of a new social message on confronting white supremacy;
- Reconsideration of the social message on “Homelessness” (1990); and
- Reconsideration of one element of “Message on End-of-Life Decisions” (1992)

The Theological Ethics team prepared recommendations following discussions with churchwide organization staff, the Theological Ethics Advisory Working Group, the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee of the Conference of Bishops, and the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee of the Church Council.

On behalf of the committee, Ms. Bruesehoff introduced a motion to authorize reconsideration of sections of the social message on “Homelessness.”

Moved;

[Seconded]:

To authorize the substantive reconsideration of the sections on “Remembering the Reality” and “Walking with People Who Are Homeless” and other relevant references in “A Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990) with attention to contemporary and systemic issues affecting housing in the United States and impacting individuals experiencing homelessness. These issues may include, though are not limited to, matters such as the definition of homelessness, the right to housing, the needs and responsibilities of local communities, intersectional issues impacting homelessness, and the calling of this church. This work shall be done in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

In response to a question from a council member, Mr. Cumming provided additional clarification regarding the nature of reconsiderations in general and reconsideration of this message in particular. A council member spoke in support of the motion.

VOTED:

CC25.11.57

To authorize the substantive reconsideration of the sections on “Remembering the Reality” and “Walking with People Who Are Homeless” and other relevant references in “A Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990) with attention to contemporary and systemic issues affecting housing in the United States and impacting individuals experiencing homelessness. These issues may include, though are not limited to, matters such as the definition of homelessness, the right to housing, the needs and responsibilities of local communities, intersectional issues impacting homelessness, and the calling of this church. This work shall be done in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

DEVELOPMENT OF STUDY RESOURCES ON THE ISSUE OF WHITE SUPREMACY

On behalf of the committee, Ms. Bruesehoff introduced a motion to direct the Theological Discernment team to develop study resources for this church related to the issue of white supremacy.

Moved;

[Seconded]: **To direct the Theological Discernment team to begin development of study resources for this church on the issue of white supremacy. These efforts would call on such resources as insight from the Racial Justice team, diverse networks within the ELCA, the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, and others in order to engage this whole church in communal moral discernment and learning, with a report on progress to the Church Council in April 2026.**

A council member emphasized that the creation of study resources is an effective way to foster awareness of social teachings of this church among the membership of this church, and Mr. Cumming provided additional clarification regarding the sharing of resources. An advisory member of the council spoke in support of the motion. A council member called the question and the council voted to end debate.

VOTED:

CC25.11.58 **To direct the Theological Discernment team to begin development of study resources for this church on the issue of white supremacy. These efforts would call on such resources as insight from the Racial Justice team, diverse networks within the ELCA, the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, and others in order to engage this whole church in communal moral discernment and learning, with a report on progress to the Church Council in April 2026.**

REPORT OF THE BOARD DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

(Agenda I.H.)

Mr. Hans W. Giller, chair of the committee, provided an update on planning for the Church Council's 2026 spring retreat that will offer council members a dedicated opportunity for deeper connection through worship, prayer, and team building, for strategic planning, and for justice through faith education. He encouraged council members to consider joining the Board Development Committee.

NEW BUSINESS

(Agenda I.I.)

Secretary Mills announced that no new business had been brought to the Church Council.

CONSIDERATION OF ITEMS REMOVED FROM *EN BLOC*

(Agenda I.J.)

Secretary Mills announced that no items had been removed from *en bloc*.

EN BLOC APPROVAL OF CERTAIN ITEMS

(Agenda VII.K.)

The *en bloc* resolution includes agenda items that were judged to be non-controversial in nature that do not require plenary discussion and a separate vote. As the items were voted on *en bloc*, there was no discussion. The text of *en bloc* items and associated background information were shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting. Vice President Siddiqui announced that, because one of the *en bloc* actions related to amendment of continuing resolutions and required a two-thirds vote, *en bloc* items would be considered in two actions.

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AMENDMENT OF CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS

VOTED: *EN BLOC: Two-Thirds Vote Required*

CC25.11.59 To adopt *en bloc* the following amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*:

10.31.B25. *Association of Synod Vice Presidents: The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the synod vice presidents of this church. The churchwide vice president shall be a member with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. ~~Triennially~~ Annually, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall elect a chair and vice chair to preside at meetings for one-year terms with the possibility of re-election for a second year. Terms begin September 1 of the year of election. The persons who would make themselves available for election as chair or vice-chair would have at least two years remaining in their term.*

14.41.H22H25. *Resource Development Committee*
... Non-Church Council members, each of whom shall be a voting members of an ELCA congregation or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshipping community,...

The vice president called for a vote on the remaining *en bloc* action items.

VOTED:

CC25.11.60 To take action *en bloc* on the remaining items listed in *En Bloc Items and Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions*.

ACTIONS OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL

A. Audit Committee Membership

VOTED: *EN BLOC*

CC25.11.60a To appoint the following individuals to serve on the Audit Committee for a two-year, renewable term: Mr. Kevin Anderson, Ms. Patricia P. Harper, Mr. Rindra Josoa, Ms. Tami Jo McHugh, and Ms. Terri L. Robertson.

B. Audit Committee Report

VOTED: *EN BLOC*

CC25.11. 60b To receive the draft minutes of the ELCA Audit Committee describing their approval from June 2025 of the audited financial statements for the churchwide organization's fiscal year ended Jan. 31, 2025.

C. Engagement of Audit Firm

VOTED: *EN BLOC*

CC25.11. 60c To assign responsibility for the engagement of an audit firm to perform the audit service plan for the churchwide organization's year ending Jan. 31, 2026, to the Executive Committee.

D. Approval of Proposed Amendments to Portico Benefits Services Restated Bylaws

Background:

The Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA (Portico Benefit Services) provide that its bylaws can be amended only with prior approval of the Church Council or the Churchwide Assembly.

At its November 2025 meeting, the Portico Benefit Services Board of Trustees approved a resolution to amend Section 4.3 of the Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA pending ratification by the Church Council. The proposed amendments were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60d To approve the proposed amendments to the Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA as identified in the “Portico Bylaw Changes November 2025” document.

E. Church Council Elections and Appointment

Background:

Pursuant to provision 14.22. and bylaw 8.21.03. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the Church Council is to elect or appoint nominees to vacancies on boards and committees of the churchwide organization as well as boards of seminaries of this church.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60e1 To elect to the board of directors of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University to a term beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2028: the Rev. Anthony Scott and Ms. Jill M. Meuser.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60e2 To elect to the board of trustees of United Lutheran Seminary to a term beginning September 2025 and ending May 2027: Mr. Donald E. Barb.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60e3 To appoint Ms. Deidre D. Hayes to serve as Church Council liaison to the Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team for a term ending August 2031.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60e4 To elect the following individuals to serve on the Committee of Hearing Officers for a six-year term ending 2031: Ms. Aja M. Carr Favors, Mr. Adam B. Kuenning, Mr. Eric E. Nord, Ms. Tammy L. Pust, and the Rev. Kim L. Lengert.

VOTED: *EN BLOC*
CC25.11.60e5 To elect the following individual to serve on the Committee on Appeals for a six-year term ending 2031: the Rev. Justin C. Boeding.

RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

F. Decarbonization of the Energy Grid

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06g]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Decarbonization of the Energy Grid” from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod;

To reaffirm the work of Lutherans Restoring Creation and encourage congregations and ministries to connect with its network and explore its resources for sustainable living;

To recognize the current efforts of the churchwide organization to reduce its carbon footprint and to request the churchwide organization consider transitioning to carbon-free electricity in its buildings by prioritizing community-based energy sources that do not perpetuate environmental injustice; and

To urge all expressions of the ELCA to make and continue commitments to decarbonization through adopting sustainable practices, carbon reduction goals, and environmental policy advocacy.

Response from Office of the Treasurer (November 2025)

The Lutheran Center and Archives Building recently completed a major lighting upgrade, replacing over 2,100 fluorescent fixtures with energy-efficient LED lighting. This project was funded through a combination of ELCA capital dollars and external grants. All old fixture components were recycled, and the fluorescent tubes—containing low-pressure mercury gas and phosphor—were safely disposed of to prevent environmental harm.

This upgrade is projected to reduce energy consumption by over 360,000 kWh annually, equivalent to more than 223,000 kgCO_{2e} in emissions savings.

ENERGY STAR Program

ENERGY STAR, administered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, promotes energy efficiency to protect the climate, improve air quality, and safeguard public health.

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Commercial buildings are scored annually from 1 to 100 based on energy performance, adjusted for weather and operational factors. A score of 71 or higher qualifies a facility for ENERGY STAR recognition. The Lutheran Center currently holds a score of 91—well above the average of 75 for similar buildings and up from 87 just a few years ago.

Additional Opportunities

During the LED upgrade, other renewable energy options were explored, including solar, wind, and geothermal. However, limitations such as insufficient roof space, restrictive building codes, and high installation costs made these options unfeasible. Given the age of existing equipment and low return on investment, the decision was made to pause further efforts for now. The churchwide organization remains open to future innovations and technologies that may offer viable solutions.

VOTED:

EN BLOC

- CC25.11.60f** **To receive the response on “Decarbonization of the Energy Grid” from the Office of the Treasurer;**
 To commend the churchwide organization for its efforts to reduce its carbon footprint;
 To recognize the current limitations to fully transition to carbon-free electricity in its buildings and encourage ongoing sustainability practices that support environmental justice;
and
 To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.

G. Increasing Continuing Education Commitments

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06i]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Increasing Continuing Education Commitments” from the Greater Milwaukee Synod;

To encourage congregations and agencies to increase the guidelines for financial commitments for continuing education; and

To refer the memorial to the Church Council, in consultation with the Christian Community and Leadership unit, to create a process for these guidelines by establishing a “Continuing Education Advisory Committee” tasked with regular reviews of the guidelines and recommending appropriate increases for continuing education support.

Response from Christian Community and Leadership unit (November 2025)

The Christian Community and Leadership unit plans to form a working group to help the staff respond to the memorial directed to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly “Increasing Continuing Education Commitments.” Please refer to the proposed timeline that outlines the dates, milestones, and participants involved in review of continuing education commitments. This group will be inclusive and representative, bringing together ministers of Word and Sacrament, ministers of Word and Service, Church Council members, persons associated with seminaries, bishops, and churchwide organization staff to support this initiative.

PHASE	TIMELINE	ACTION STEPS	OVERSIGHT BY
(1) Committee formation: To form a working group to bring recommendations to Church Council	December 2025– January 2026	To recruit six members to the working group representing: ministers of Word and Sacrament, ministers of Word and Service, Church Council, seminary professors, bishops, and CCL	David Anglada and CCL- Leadership team staff member
(2) First meeting of the working group (virtual meeting)	January 2026	Define working group purpose and scope of our work, goals and objectives plus, review timeline	David Anglada

(3) Data gathering and Assessment	January–March 2026	Collect information from each of the 65 ELCA synods regarding their recommended funding for continuing education for both ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service. Additionally, gather data on the recommended time off for continuing education and any requirements for reporting annual continuing education activities. Once the information is compiled, analyze these findings	David Anglada and CCL- Leadership team staff member
(4) Disseminate data to the working group via a virtual meeting	Summer 2026	Share the results with the working group to discuss what was learned and begin writing recommendations to present to the Church Council	David Anglada and members of the working group
(5) Final Report	Fall 2026	Recommendations to Church Council	David Anglada and members of the working group

VOTED:

CC25.11.60g

To receive the timeline on “Increasing Continuing Education Commitments” from the Christian Community and Leadership unit and to anticipate a response at the Fall 2026 Church Council meeting; and

To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.

EN BLOC

ADJOURNMENT

Following prayer, the 121st meeting of the Church Council of the ELCA adjourned at 9:23 p.m. on Nov. 12, 2025.