



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

March 2026

Dear friends,

We will soon gather for the Church Council Retreat. I'm looking forward to connecting with all of you and working toward a future where our church thrives as a beacon of hope and sustainability.

Next month, we will gather remotely for a three-hour meeting on Thursday, April 16. While centered in God's word and prayer, our business for the meeting will focus on essential matters. You will hear brief verbal updates from the officers and the Conference of Bishops chair. We also look forward to electing two new Church Council members to fill vacancies.

From our Church Council committees, we will receive the following:

- Executive Committee: Updates on the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose and the Financial Coordinating Task Force; and a possible discussion on the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (the Executive Committee is considering the request)
- Service and Justice Committee: Information on the Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-term Global Personnel, act on the Asian and Pacific Islander Strategy, and consider a plan to address barriers to youth and young adult representation on churchwide committees
- And other committees may have updates to share with you as well.

Remember to read reports ahead of time to maximize our conversation together. The provisional schedule -- coming soon -- will give you an idea of how the meeting will flow, and the standing rules will help facilitate discussion for our online meeting. The agenda, and hopefully most of the materials, will be posted about two weeks prior to the meeting.

If you have difficulties accessing the Church Council Teams site, I encourage you to reach out to Joseph Schmidt, [Joseph.Schmidt@elca.org](mailto:Joseph.Schmidt@elca.org). I'm certain he will be happy to help you.

Your leadership is a blessing to this church. As members of the Church Council, your commitment and collaboration help ensure that we remain a connected and sustainable church, grounded in our faith in God and united in purpose to God's mission.

God's blessings,

Yehiel Curry  
Presiding Bishop

## Standing Rules for April 2026 Church Council Meeting

The following standing rules will serve to facilitate the work of the ELCA Church Council at its April 2026 meeting. Relevant portions of the ELCA Constitution and the *ELCA Church Council Governance Policy Manual (GPM)* are provided as background.

### ***Background Information:***

#### **Attendees of the Church Council Meeting**

##### *Church Council Voting Members*

**14.31.** The voting members of the Church Council shall consist of the four churchwide officers, the chair of the Conference of Bishops, and at least 32 and not more than 45 other persons elected by the Churchwide Assembly.

##### *Liaison Bishops and Advisory Members*

**14.32.01.** The Church Council shall have as liaison members nine synod bishops, each elected by the Conference of Bishops to one three-year term. One bishop shall be elected from each region.

**14.32.02.** Liaison members of the Church Council shall have voice but not vote.

**14.33.01. Advisory Members.** Categories of advisory members may be designated by the Church Council. These categories shall be set forth in continuing resolutions. Advisory members shall have voice but not vote.

**14.33.A22.** *The Church Council shall have as advisory members each president, or the designated representative of the president, of the ELCA ethnic associations, as well as a representative of ReconcilingWorks. Advisory membership of the Church Council shall be reviewed each triennium.*

##### *Visitors/Guests*

*GPM, pp. 18–19: In accordance with the Open Meetings policy, visitors are welcome to attend open sessions of meetings of the Church Council or its committees, but they do not have voice or vote. At the discretion of the chairperson and within the constraints of the agenda, the chairperson may invite comments or call upon visitors to speak.*

#### **Meeting Procedures**

**14.12.02.** The Church Council shall use parliamentary procedure in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order*, latest edition, unless otherwise ordered by the council.

**14.12.03.** Proxy and absentee voting shall not be permitted at meetings of the Church Council.

*GPM, pg. 16: In accordance with Robert's Rules of Order, the Church Council may meet in executive session, either when indicated on the agenda or upon adoption of a motion to enter executive session. Prior to beginning an executive session, the chairperson shall identify which staff members and others are invited to participate in the executive session. If actions are taken in executive session that may be publicly disclosed, the chair will report those actions when the Church Council returns to open session. If confidential minutes are taken in executive session, they will remain confidential unless authorized for public distribution by the Executive Committee.*

*GPM, p. 19: When a matter on the agenda is pending, debate and discussion ordinarily will take place among Church Council members before comments from visitors are invited.*

*GPM, p. 19: Members of the Church Council, staff, and guests share the responsibility to maintain good order and to not disrupt meetings. To assist in maintaining good order, persons in the meeting space are requested to mute electronic devices and to refrain from behavior that disrupts the meeting.*

### ***Standing Rules:***

#### *Voting Procedures*

As directed by the chair, voting will take place by using the “Raise” hand feature in Microsoft Teams or by calling for a voice vote. Voting may also take place using a separate link through a voting form or poll app. For council members who do not have access to the link, they may submit their vote electronically to a designated person.

#### *Obtaining the Floor*

In plenary sessions of the Church Council, the voting members have prior right to obtain the floor, unless the chair determines that it is in the best interests of the council to call upon a liaison bishop, an advisory member, a churchwide staff member, or another individual with voice. Voting members may indicate their intention to speak by using the “Raise” hand feature in Teams. Once a voting member has been called upon, the member should click on “Lower hand.”

#### *Speeches*

Unless otherwise determined by a majority vote of the council, all speeches during discussion shall be limited to two minutes. A signal shall be given one minute before the speaker's time ends. A second signal shall be given one minute later, and the speaker shall conclude.

After a person has spoken, the speaker will refrain from speaking again on the same motion until two other people have spoken. After four voting members have spoken in a row on the same side of the motion and if no one has raised their hand to speak on the other side of the motion, debate will automatically be considered closed and the question will move to a vote.

### *Questions of Personal Privilege*

Questions of personal privilege that are not urgent and do not relate to the council as a whole are out of order. (Questions of privilege that relate to the council as a whole include such concerns as problems with voting links, microphones, and emergencies.) Questions of privilege that relate to the council as a whole may be raised in the course of the meeting by using the “Raise” hand feature. Other requests for time in plenary for questions of personal privilege (e.g., personal announcements, comments on matters not on the agenda, reflections on the meaning of votes after they are taken) must be submitted electronically to Jodi Slattery at [Jodi.Slattery@elca.org](mailto:Jodi.Slattery@elca.org). The chair may, at the chair’s sole discretion, allow such matters to be addressed at a later time.

### *En Bloc Resolution and Deadlines*

The responses to certain churchwide assembly actions, synod council actions, and previous Church Council actions may be approved by an *en bloc* resolution. In addition, Church Council committees may place recommendations *en bloc*. *En bloc* resolutions requiring two-thirds vote of the voting members present will follow the proper voting procedures.

To call for separate consideration of an item in *en bloc* or to submit new business, a voting member must submit notification electronically to the secretary of this church ([CeCee.Mills@elca.org](mailto:CeCee.Mills@elca.org)) prior to the established deadline, Thursday, April 16, 2026, 6:30 p.m. (CDT).

### *Technical Details*

Plenary sessions will be recorded for minutes purposes only. The recordings will not be made public. Electronic recording or live-streaming of Church Council or committee meetings is not authorized without prior permission of the chairperson. Questions about technical issues should be directed to Joseph Schmidt at [Joseph.Schmidt@elca.org](mailto:Joseph.Schmidt@elca.org).

Microphones should be muted unless a person is speaking or presenting.

Church Council members, liaison bishops, and advisory members are encouraged to use video and may wish to use a virtual background or blur their background for privacy purposes. All other meeting participants are asked to turn their video off to conserve bandwidth, unless they are invited to speak or present, at which time the individual is encouraged to turn on the video.

The conversation or chat window will be disabled for the meeting. If enabled for a specific purpose, the conversation or chat window should be used solely for that purpose.

## Report from the Presiding Bishop

This report summarizes key organizational themes, initiatives and structural adjustments underway across the churchwide organization. These efforts support long-term sustainability, strengthen relationships with synods and congregations, streamline future-focused work, and cultivate a more connected and collaborative workplace.

### Themes for the Triennium

Over the next three years, we will focus on our third priority area.

Priority areas:

- A Welcoming Church: Engaging new, young and diverse people.
- A Thriving Church: Rooted in tradition and radically relevant.
- A Connected, Sustainable Church: Raising the bar together.

I am hopeful that we can become a more connected and sustainable church across our three expressions: churchwide organization, synods and congregations. These focal points will guide our work over the next triennium, through the next churchwide assembly in summer 2028.

2026 = Connection; 2027 = Sustainability; 2028 = Together

### Return to Office: Strengthening Connection Through In-person Collaboration

To advance the vision of a more connected church, staff living within a 50-mile radius will transition to working on-site **two days per week**. This expectation supports stronger relationships, improved cross-team coordination and a renewed sense of community following extended remote operations.

Key goals include:

- **Enhancing in-person collaboration** to build trust and foster organic idea-sharing.
- **Strengthening alignment with the mission**, emphasizing presence, partnership and connection in our daily work.
- **Establishing consistent rhythms of engagement** to support planning, meetings and coordinated work.
- **Reinforcing organizational culture** by rebuilding communal practices and relationships.

While flexibility remains valued, this update reflects a renewed commitment to cultivating a connected, relational work environment that better reflects our shared mission.

### Strategic Reductions and Budget Constraints

#### Staffing and Budget Adjustments

With significant financial pressures, requiring a **\$3 million budget decrease in 2026**, the organization has implemented reductions to ensure long-term sustainability. The amounts below show the breakdown of the \$3 million decrease.

- **43% of the \$3 million reduction** came from travel and administrative costs.
- **21% of the reduction** is in grants.
- **36% of the reduction** is from staffing, including position eliminations and unfilled retirements/vacancies.

These shifts were designed to align personnel and resources with core mission priorities while minimizing disruption to essential functions. We also have to prepare for a **\$6.8 million budget decrease in 2027**. Further context will be provided through updated budget data for 2025–2027 by Treasurer Lori Fedyk.

### **Mission Support**

In 2025, we budgeted for a **5%** decrease in Mission Support from the previous year because this has been the trend over the last four years. However, we saw a smaller decrease of only **2.5%** last year. This good news allows us to slightly recalibrate projected budget gaps for 2026.

Mission Support remains a collaborative partnership grounded in stewardship, clarity and shared commitment, ensuring that resources are aligned with ministry priorities and capable of supporting grants rather than backfilling deficits.

In response to the budget gap, synods that are able are encouraged to consider a **1% increase** in Mission Support for 2026 and beyond. The organization is also reinstating the Mission Support Report, discontinued in 2021, to strengthen accountability and transparency.

### **Fund for Leaders**

The Fund for Leaders staff is developing a sustainable funding model to support the significant administrative work associated with awarding scholarships—particularly for the roughly **250 synod scholarship recipients** each year. Synods participating through scholarship funds have been notified of a **new 1% administrative fee** to help address these operational costs.

The program is also refining its grantmaking structures to improve equity, accessibility and representation, including focused efforts to better attract people of color, who remain underrepresented among full-scholarship recipients.

### **Vision/Exploration Team Integration**

To strengthen alignment and be better stewards of grant funding, the Exploration (Vision) team will be working alongside the Research and Evaluation and Innovation teams on its current grant to support a unified approach to future-focused work. Historically these groups have operated in parallel, resulting in outside contracting and missed opportunities for collaboration within the Vision grant allocation.

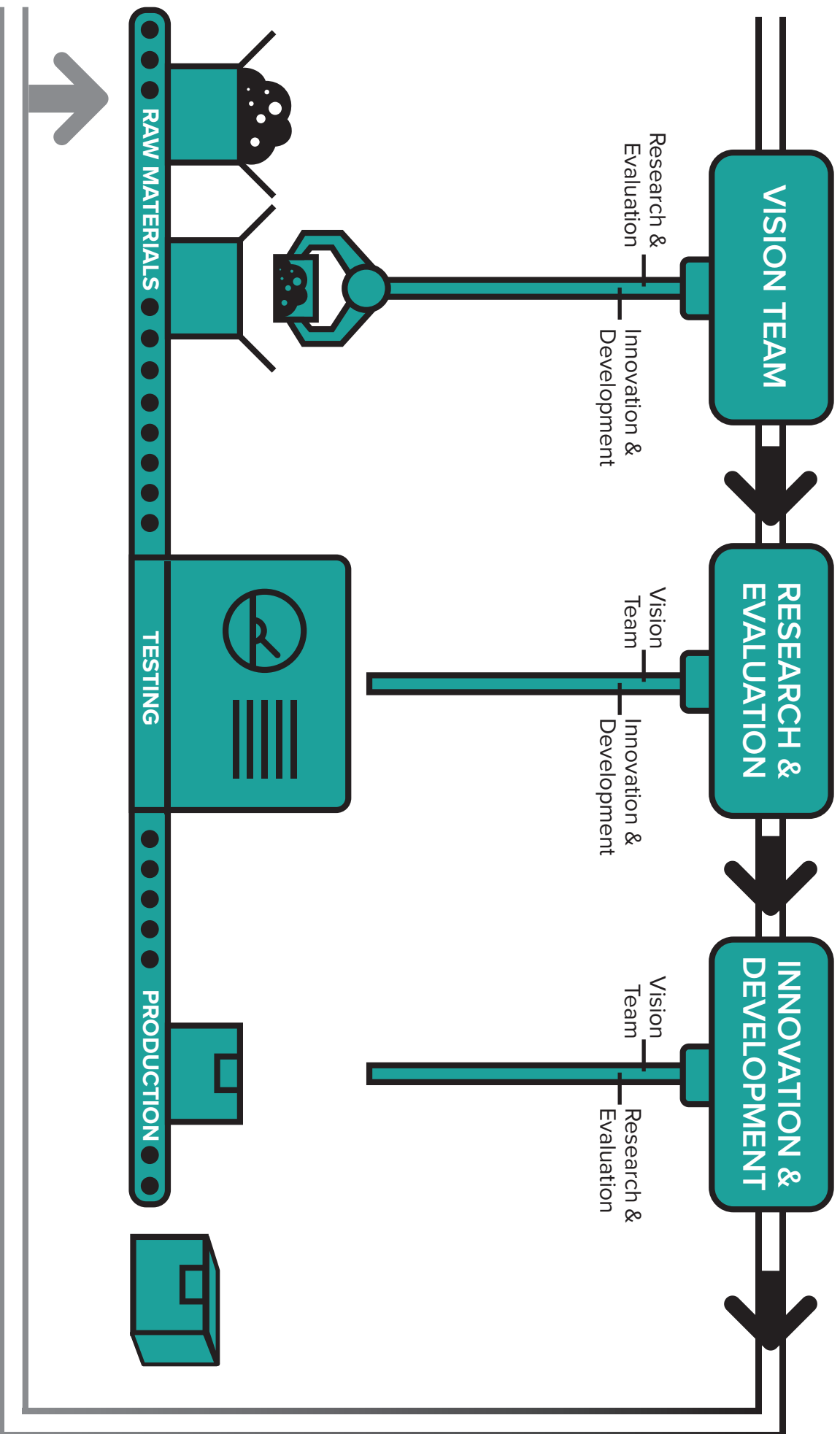
This integrated structure will:

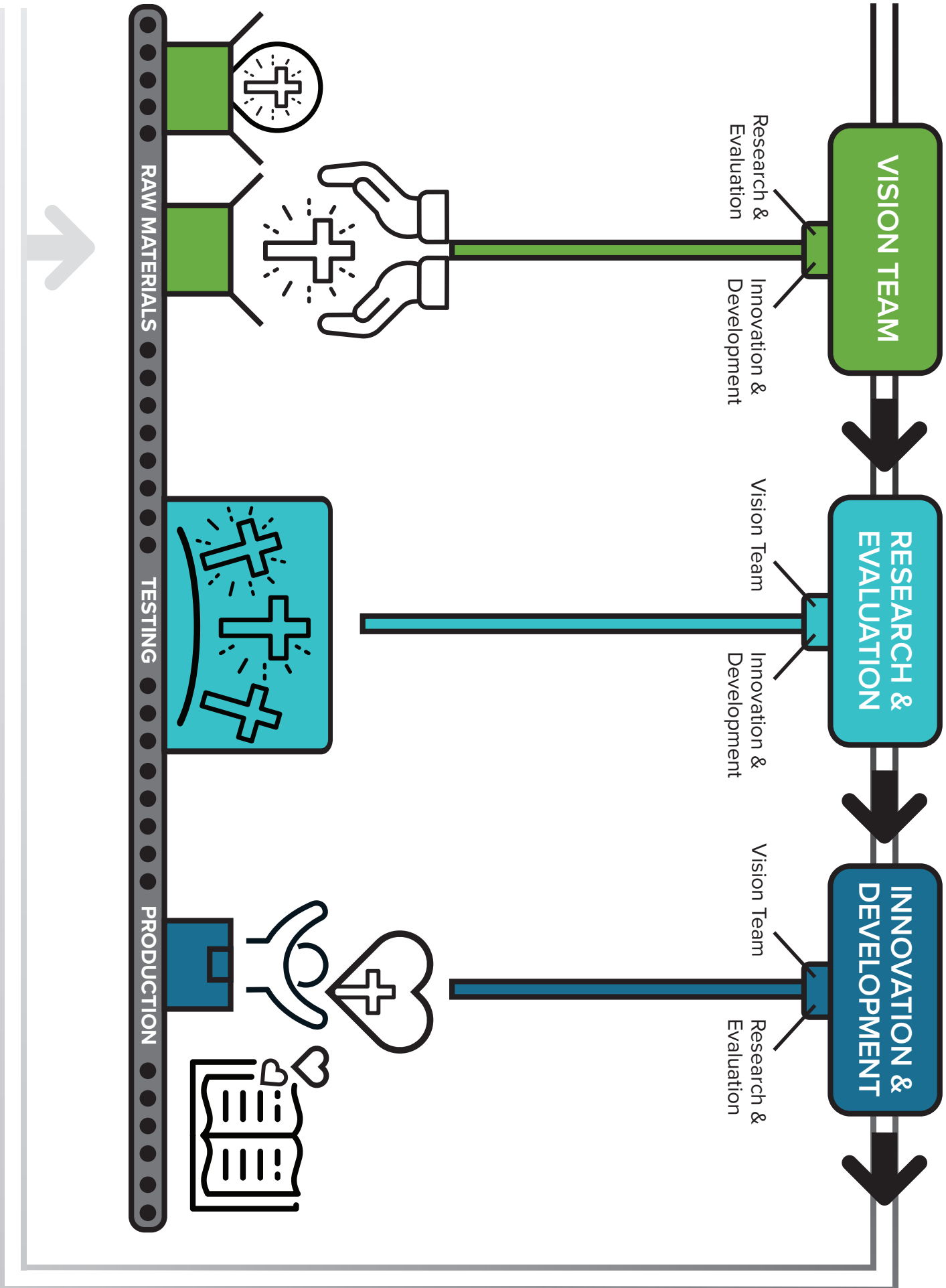
- Enhance strategic coordination.
- Reduce duplication and increase stewardship of grant funds.
- Improve communication across the three expressions of the church.
- Support a connected, streamlined, forward-looking process.

In addition, a think tank (including synod bishops, churchwide organization leaders and Church Council representatives) will guide the early phase of this work. Bishop Donna Simon and Bishop Phyllis Blair Milton have agreed to serve with the think tank, and two Church Council representatives will be invited. While the name “Vision” remains familiar, “Exploration” more accurately describes the collaborative posture of this initiative and will be used going forward.

Collectively, these initiatives reflect a broader movement toward greater cohesion, clarity and connection across the churchwide organization. By strengthening partnerships with synods, supporting diverse leadership development, aligning staffing with financial realities, integrating teams for greater collaboration and encouraging more in-person engagement, the organization is positioning itself to live more fully into its mission and vision.

Yehiel Curry  
Presiding Bishop





RAW MATERIALS

TESTING

PRODUCTION

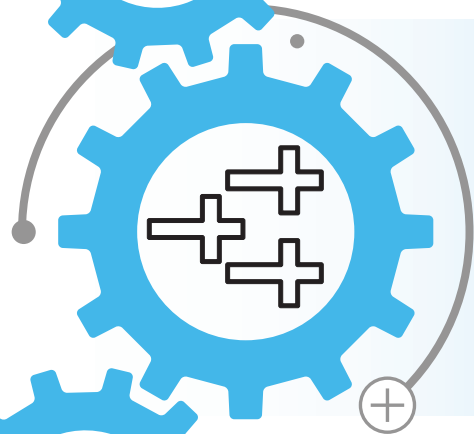
**VISION TEAM**

- Research & Evaluation
- Innovation & Development



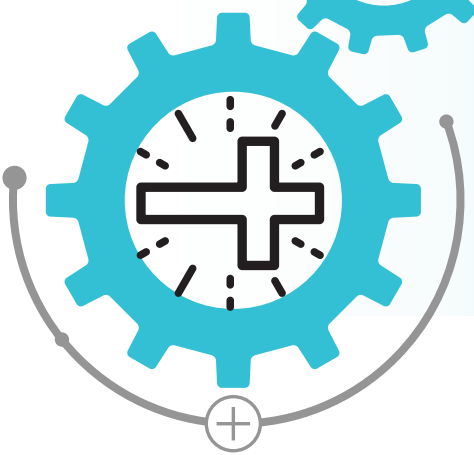
**RESEARCH & EVALUATION**

- Innovation & Development
- Vision Team



**INNOVATION & DEVELOPMENT**

- Research & Evaluation
- Vision Team



# INNOVATION AND RESEARCH/EVALUATION



## VISION TEAM



# OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP



# INNOVATION AND RESEARCH/EVALUATION

## EXPLORATION TEAM



# OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP



## 50% RESEARCHER

- Leveraging metrics and evaluation process
- Designing experiments

## PROGRAM MANAGER

- Gather
- College Grads
- Fresh Expressions
- Micro Churches

## PROGRAM MANAGER

- Lay Leader Network
- Strategy
- Horizon Internships
- New Ideas

## SHARED TIME WITH PRESIDING BISHOP ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

- Logistics
- Convening
- Reporting

## **Report from the Vice President**

Greetings! Happy Easter! I hope you have been well since we last met a month ago at the Q Center for our retreat! I want to thank the Board Development Committee for planning a fantastic retreat and challenging us to dig into our fears and the walls that we put up that make us resistant to change. Hopefully we can continue to work on those things and create a Church Council that is able to meet change and do meaningful work.

I was also really delighted to be able to get to know some of you better. We only had brief moments of connection back in the Fall. So, to be in the same room as you, eat with you, talk about life with you was wonderful to have. A council that knows each other is a council that tends to understand each other better. It is a council that listens to each other and works better together. We are stronger when we know each other. We are better when we trust each other.

There is a lot of work we are doing in our meeting over Teams. It is not ideal to do it this way. It is more difficult to look at each other in the face. It is harder to have conversations during breaks that will help explain things. Generally, we don't like doing it. But hopefully, after spending some time with each other, it may feel easier. I am always the optimist.

We will be formally welcoming two new members, who were thankfully able to join us in Illinois. We will hear from our committees. We will hear updates from the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose and the Financial Coordinating Task Force. We will see and discuss the new Asian and Pacific Islander Ministry Strategy of the ELCA (something close to my heart). We will hear updates on the Reimagined Candidacy Process. And we will discuss affirming the commitment of the ELCA to support the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action. But above all, we will be a connected church, together for the sake of the world. This is a lot of work, but it is our attempt to do God's work in the world, through our voices and actions.

I am looking forward to being the churchwide representative for the synod assemblies of Rocky Mountain Synod, St Paul Area Synod, and Eastern North Dakota Synod this Summer. I hope I will get to see some of you. One of my favorite parts of this gig is to go to synod assemblies and talk to folks all around our church. I love to hear their stories of the ways they are sharing the gospel in their neighborhoods.

In personal news, I am looking forward to next month (May) when Asher turns 6, Miriam turns 3, and I turn 46. It is also the end of another school year in Georgia, which very much pleases my wife, who is an Elementary Art Teacher, and my son, who is a Kindergartener. It is always a fun month full of celebration and fun and for the first time in a long while I actually get to spend my birthday at home.

See you soon,

Imran Siddiqui  
Vice President, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## **Report from the Secretary**

As the recently elected secretary, I continue to be surprised by the scope of the work and the quality of the Office of the Secretary (OS) team.

The Innovation unit is guiding the OS team through a process to identify our team mission and goals. This will allow us to create an action plan that maintains existing high standards while working more collaboratively. I want to encourage healthy work habits and increase consistency with supervision by offering core expectations and competencies.

### **Churchwide Assembly Follow-up**

Following a Churchwide Assembly there are unique responsibilities given to OS in addressing the memorials and resolutions that were approved as well as in caring for constitutional updates and minutes production. At this point, thanks to the leadership of Dan Eppley and the input of former staff members Deacon Sue Rothmeyer and the Rev. Keith Fry, our team is now done with the assembly minutes, which should be posted this week.

Other assembly-related work going on:

- The Task Force for Interdependence and Purpose has had three online meetings and will be meeting in person this spring. The Office of the Treasurer has provided funds from the money originally allotted to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to cover the cost of this work.
- Indian Boarding School Project (CA25.02.07): The ELCA was tasked with locating “all known records” from all predecessor bodies who were involved with Indian boarding schools. Further, it tasked this church with educating others through promoting observance days, supporting research, organizing records, digitizing records, and to finding sufficient sources of support. The Archives Team has received funding for scanning of large documents and ledgers from OT and will finish the digitization work by the end of the year.

### **OS Administration**

The new executive for Office of the Secretary administration is (soon to be Deacon) Katharyn Wheeler, who comes to us from the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod staff. She started March 16 and will be physically in the office beginning April 7. Katharyn will be ordained to the ministry of Word and Sacrament later this month. Some of the work her team has underway:

- Digitization of Roster Files: The team currently is completing a project focused on digitizing roster files for those persons who have resigned from or been removed from the roster and for whom a roster file is retained by the Office of the Secretary. The project has been in process for four years. In meeting with Archivist Cathy Lundeen, I have honored her suggestion to restrict the digitization to files for those born after 1960, since it is highly unlikely that someone older than that would seek reinstatement to the roster. This means that the project to digitize legal files will be on hold until the digitization of the roster files is complete.
- Will be working with OS Team to create a grid about records and roster files so synods will know when to mail physical files and when to digitize these files.
- Recent glitches in the system have interrupted the ability of synods to upload updates to the synod portal. Those are being addressed.
- The team is working with IT to simplify updates to records in the system.
- ECIS database: Working with individuals across the organization who are tasked with data updates. Mapping this distribution of responsibility and disseminating the results will help to

decrease the number of inquiries misdirected to the OS team. This will increase efficiency and constituent satisfaction.

### **Events / Meeting Management Team**

- Working on:
  - April 14 – 16: Return to Office event: Meals arranged.
  - July 20 – 23: All Staff Retreat at the Q center: Plans moving forward.
  - July 6-9: Rostered Ministers Gathering: In final stages of planning.
  - July 9 – 11: Associates/Assistants to Bishops Gathering that follows the RMG: Finalizing programming.
  - January 5-10, 2027: Bishops Academy: Will be in North Carolina.
- Banked airline credits are being distributed for planned trips that qualify.

### **Legal Team**

- Estimating a 4.2% increase in 2026 insurance/risk management and noting that the market is generally softening. All key insurances were renewed March 31.
- Helping social ministry organizations, outdoor ministries, campus ministries, and Separately Incorporated Ministries navigate the new IRS Group Ruling that became effective January 20, 2026. This does not significantly affect the inclusion of congregations, synods, or synod-authorized worshipping communities.
- Responding to questions around civil action, including lawsuits and other responses.
- Assisting in the discipline process of a rostered minister in the Southwest California Synod.

### **Research and Evaluation**

- Accepting overdue submissions for the annual congregation report. Congregations can still submit their reports. It is hyper-critical that congregations understand how this determines the number per synod of voting members to the Churchwide Assembly.
- Working with the Exploration (formerly Vision) Team to effectively evaluate the work and its direction.
- Recently conducted the 55<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ordination of Women report.
- Helped with offering courses for staff on “Data Literacy, Myths and Realities.”
- Working on evaluating synod-authorized ministries, a Misconduct Prevention Project, synod diversity reporting/goals, and follow up to the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery project.
- Reported to Lilly in February on the Resourceful Servants Project.
- Candidacy Survey.

### **Synod Relations**

- Preparing to enter a hiring process for executive for Synod Relations upon the June retirement of Deacon MaryAnn Schwab. We are working with HR to post and fill the position. MaryAnn will be available to help the new person get oriented.
- Systems Academy is going strong. Making plans for the June session.

This team produces a lot and creates positive engagement with people across the ELCA and beyond. Building on this tradition of service mindedness with a heart for both people and details will help us achieve Presiding Bishop’s Curry vision for connectedness.

In Christ’s Service,  
Lucille “CeCee” Mills

## **Financial Report of the ELCA Treasurer**

### FY25 Operating Results

#### Unrestricted Fund

In James 1:17, we read, “Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

The narrative below is based on unaudited results. The internal unrestricted statements and statement of ELCA World Hunger follow this narrative.

The full year 2025 unrestricted budget of the churchwide organization anticipated a loss of \$8.2 million. This loss was to be offset by the release of a designated reserve fund (about 60% of the reserve) and liquidation of certain endowments. Thanks be to God and to the faithful supporters our ministries, the churchwide organization finished the year with a loss of only \$2.5 million, driven by favorable revenue of \$4.6 million and underspending of \$1.1 million.

Mission support, which represents funds that are shared from congregations to synods and then synods to churchwide, was favorable to plan. Instead of a planned decline from prior year of 4.7%, the decline was only 2.0%, creating \$1 million of favorable revenue. 35% of our synods contributed at/or above their commitment level. We celebrate this shift in trend from the previous three years!

In addition, investment performance was positive compared to plan by \$3.5 million.

All other categories, except for unrestricted bequest income, either exceeded plan or were at 97% of plan. Bequest income continues to be soft with FY25 results being 25% below the 10-year average.

Spending was at 98.3% of the approved Church Council spending authorization.

#### ELCA World Hunger

Fiscal year 2025 was a strong year for ELCA World Hunger with \$22.8 million in receipts compared to a plan of \$21.5 million. While direct giving from individuals, congregations, and synods was slightly below plan at 98.4%, contrary to unrestricted fund bequest income, the organization received nearly \$2.8 million in World Hunger bequests in FY25. One bequest gift was in excess of \$500,000 and there were four in excess of \$100,000 each.

Spending from ELCA World Hunger was just slightly below plan (\$448,000), primarily in advocacy (Witness in Society).

The end-of-year fund balance of nearly \$6.5 million is higher than planned due primarily to bequest income. Bequest income is available for spending in the year following receipt per our policy. The ELCA teaches that world hunger is not simply a matter of food scarcity, but is rooted in issues of poverty, injustice, and unequal access to resources. As followers of Christ, we are called to respond with compassion and faithful action, working alongside communities to address these root causes and ensure all have daily bread. Our church's ministries focus on sustainable solutions, advocacy, and accompaniment, reflecting God's love and our hope for a world where no one hungers.

### 2026 Unrestricted Budget

Based on the results of FY25, individual line items in the 2026 budgeted operating revenues were modified and approved by the Budget and Finance Committee in March 2026. Total revenues did not change nor did the previously approved spending authorization. Therefore, no action is required by the Church Council. The currently approved budget includes a \$5.7 million deficit which will be supported by utilization of the designated fund, budgeted operations support.

### Financial Coordinating Task Force

In response to recommendations of the Commission for Renewed Lutheran Church, the Church Council acted to authorize the Executive Committee of Church Council to create a Financial Coordinating Task Force that will be composed of no more than eight members with financial expertise representing all three expressions of the church, including a synod bishop and at least four members from historically underrepresented communities. In addition, a member of the Budget and Finance Committee of Audit Committee will be appointed as a member. The task force is requested to : a) review existing resources of the ELCA or educational institutions that support financial management; b) explore opportunities where greater collaboration or shared processes/resources among the financial functions of the three expressions of this church may be beneficial; c) commit to sharing best practices, resources, and tools related to financial management; and d) affirm the commitment of the financial separately incorporated ministries (ELCA Foundation, Mission Investment Fund, Portico Benefit Services) to continue collaboration amongst themselves and to identify possible ways to enhance operational efficiencies, to leverage synergies, to align strategic initiatives, and to identify opportunities for cost savings and to receive a report from the financial separately incorporated ministries to the Financial Coordinating Task Force by December 2026. The task force will present a report of the work of the task force at the Spring 2027 Church Council meeting.

Applications have been received and the Executive Committee of Church Council is expected to take action to appoint the task force members at their April meeting.



## Spring 2026 Churchwide Organization Annual Report

In 2025, the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) completed a significant season of discernment, research and organizational alignment while continuing to fulfill its core responsibilities in service of the whole church. Leadership transition, the Churchwide Assembly and sustained financial pressure shaped the year, requiring disciplined focus on stewardship, constitutional responsibilities and long-term sustainability.

Throughout the year, the churchwide organization operated within tight budget constraints and declining Mission Support, necessitating careful prioritization and, at times, difficult decisions. Even within these realities, the organization sustained momentum in areas such as youth and young adult engagement, leadership formation, worship life, public witness and global accompaniment — demonstrating resilience and a shared commitment across the church.

A defining milestone was the completion of a multiyear research partnership with the Barna Group and the Fuller Youth Institute, resulting in the “Strategic Recommendations” report. Together with earlier work clarifying purpose, priorities and budget alignment, this research provided a shared and evidence-informed understanding of the church’s current realities and opportunities — particularly related to young people, leadership development and innovation. Rather than prescribing specifics, Barna and Fuller offered recommendations to help the church move forward in a faithful and strategic way.

Alongside this work, donor-funded initiatives, including those of the Vision team (now called the Exploration team), continued to support experimentation and innovation across the ELCA, allowing new approaches to ministry and leadership to be tested without adding pressure to the core operating budget. These efforts reinforce a culture of learning and adaptation, strengthening the church’s capacity to discern where future investment may be most fruitful.

The organizational alignment work outlined in prior years’ Operational Plan is now largely complete. Efforts to align purpose, priorities, budget and organizational structures — previously articulated and visualized in last year’s report — have moved from planning into practice. This progress enables a shift from alignment as a primary task toward deeper integration, evaluation and strategic focus across the organization.

The work of 2025 reflects a movement from assessment to action. With alignment largely complete and research in hand, the churchwide organization is positioned to deepen integration, strengthen accountability and focus resources strategically — supporting the ELCA’s calling to live more fully as a ***Connected and Sustainable Church***.

### **Christian Community and Leadership**

Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) focused its work in 2025 on helping the ELCA engage new leaders while strengthening the systems that support long-term vitality across congregations and ministries. CCL prioritized developing leaders equipped to respond to changing contexts; expanding pathways for participation and leadership; and embedding measurement, feedback and innovation as standard practice across the unit.

Throughout the year, CCL emphasized scalable formation models, stronger networks and cross-unit collaboration — particularly in youth and young adult engagement, candidacy, evangelism and inclusion. Work progressed across a broad portfolio, balancing foundational systems work with targeted initiatives designed to expand access, deepen engagement, and support leaders navigating complexity and change.

- Established universal goal setting across CCL, with each staff member working toward two SMART goals, reinforcing shared accountability, measurement and alignment with unit priorities.
- Launched “LeadNet,” a network that helps leaders see themselves in more places by helping them connect and collaborate online. There are currently over 100 groups that cover an array of topics and represent a variety of ministry organizations, some led by the churchwide organization and others by independent ministries affiliated with the ELCA.
- Launched the Multi-Ethnic Congregations cohort, convening 13 congregations to strengthen shared networks, identify contextual needs, and support leadership training and resource development. The first gathering was completed in 2025.
- Restarted and renamed the Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta as the Sankofa Theological Center for African Studies, with plans to offer online courses beginning in 2025–26.
- Advanced development of an ELCA Black Pedagogy through the Sankofa Theological Center for African Studies, designed to ensure every African descent candidate for ministry has access to mentorship, coursework, cohort learning and financial support. One course was offered in fall 2025, with additional courses launched in January 2026 in partnership with United Lutheran Seminary.
- Continued work to strengthen leadership flourishing and preparedness among African descent leaders serving ELCA congregations.
- Launched the first year of Curious Christian Children (Lilly-funded), hiring an associate director coordinator, convening an advisory team, developing initial criteria and training, and opening applications for a Congregational Leadership Cohort (20 to 25 congregations) to design context-specific initiatives that more fully welcome children in worship. Strengthened partnerships through the Formation Co-Op of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, which led quarterly convenings of 12 to 15 ELCA Lilly grant partners. This renewed intentional support for the LEAD Net group.
- Continued development of evangelism initiatives, including leadership resources, training and measurable outcomes; hosted an Evangelism Symposium in August 2025 with accompanying resources; and established a 2026 focus on the ethics of evangelism, including development of “missional metrics.”
- Evaluated and reengaged the Horizon Apprenticeship Program through a summer-to-yearlong pilot, increasing participation and strengthening pathways into additional leadership initiatives such as the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event, Young Adults in Global Mission, and Lutheran Outdoor Ministry. The pilot was supported through the “God’s Love Made Real” initiative.
- Led a Disability Ministry research project to establish a baseline understanding of congregational accessibility and inclusion; hosted the first webinar with 100-plus participants through Inclusive

Communities; shifted resourcing toward practical, data-informed tools grounded in DataWise and Barna/Fuller research; and established a plan for quarterly topic-based webinars.

- Developed and implemented a youth engagement strategy, including Youth Gathering investment and new “pop-up” engagement models that integrate young adults, Lutheran Outdoor Ministry camps, and children, youth and family events. The work focused on increasing Youth Gathering registrations, engaging families unable to participate traditionally, and strengthening the Youth Gathering brand across the three-year cycle.
- Launched regional young adult representatives, equipping 78 young adult leaders to support discipleship, leadership and evangelism. Strengthened coordination with directors for evangelical mission, synod youth champions, campus ministry, Gather Network Ministries, and Lutheran Outdoor Ministry, with 40-plus synods participating in the fall gathering, along with the Innovation team.
- Assessed the role and value of community organizing in achieving churchwide engagement and leadership goals, including exploration of a potential partnership with the United Methodist Church (UMC).
- Advanced planning for the 2026 Rostered Ministers Gathering, with a team in place, theme identified, location and dates set, and speakers actively being recruited. The gathering’s focus is on more connected, equipped and fulfilled clergy.
- Completed a spring 2025 candidacy draft manual, establishing high-level tactical and structural updates and identifying improved processes to meet the needs of candidates and the church. A synod training was scheduled for February 2026.
- Partnered with Information Technology on updates to the roster minister profile (RMP) and ministry site profile (MSP), aligning processes with the new community portal to better support rostered ministers, synods and congregations. Implementation was temporarily housed within IT during the system transition.
- Revised the director for evangelical mission (DEM) position description and transitioned DEMs to all churchwide staff. Hosted a spring 2025 DEM gathering with Fresh Expressions and the UMC, resulting in regional mini-grants and expanded engagement in fresh expression ministries, with 100-plus ELCA participants expected at the UMC spring 2026 conference.
- Developed recommendations for synods on best practices for synod-authorized ministers, partnering with Research and Evaluation to identify leadership gaps and opportunities; convened five synod bishops and initiated a six-month evaluation with up to 14 synods, strengthening collaboration across the churchwide organization.
- Supported Latinx 3 in developing a 2025–26 mentorship program to accompany and equip the next generation of Latinx rostered ministers and doctoral candidates.
- Continued support for Gather Network Ministries, equipping young adult leaders for small-group ministry and expanding engagement toward a goal of 2,000 young adults, including a June conference with campus ministry leaders.
- Partnered with seminaries and the churchwide organization through the Fund for Leaders to launch an ELCA leadership network using the Journi app in 2025, supporting leaders of all ages in vocational discernment.
- Supported Young Adults in Global Mission in developing new pathways for young adults of color and queer young adults, while rightsizing resources and identifying a sustainable, accessible financial model.
- Advanced the International Scholarship Program and International Camp Counselor Program, developing intercultural learning and leadership cohorts in partnership with global companion churches, ELCA institutions and camps.
- Rolled out D365, a youth and young adult devotional app.

- Received the third and final round of granting, which expanded Total Inclusion grant efforts. This included completing five inclusion visits with Lutheran Outdoor Ministry organizations and launching a self-audit tool to support inclusion of young people of color, LGBTQIA+ youth and people with disabilities.
- Developed and launched the Nurturing Faith study series in partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association to connect with younger families in schools and surrounding communities.

### **Innovation**

Innovation focused its work in 2025 on strengthening the ELCA's capacity to listen deeply, try new approaches, and design ministries and systems rooted in the lived experiences of those the church serves. The team prioritized expanding research capabilities, equipping leaders with innovation tools and methods, and supporting experimentation across congregations, synods and churchwide ministries. These efforts strengthened the ELCA's ability to respond to emerging needs, engage new audiences, and develop more human-centered approaches to ministry and leadership.

Throughout the year, Innovation emphasized building shared infrastructure, collaborative leadership capacity and research-informed decision-making. This included expanding listening efforts, stewarding innovation grants, facilitating strategic design processes and training leaders across the church. Together, these efforts increased the ELCA's ability to adapt, experiment and develop ministries aligned with the changing realities of those it seeks to serve.

- Strengthened the ELCA's ability to understand and engage new and emerging audiences by engaging 1,750 individuals through ELCA digital products, implementing the first usability feedback technology in ELCA history, and learning through homepage survey data that 1 in 7 visitors to ELCA.org identifies as new to the ELCA, reshaping digital hospitality and engagement strategies.
- Expanded innovation and experimentation across the church by funding 26 ministry experiments totaling \$237,678, including 14 Congregations Lead Initiative Experiment Grants, nine Innovation Lab Grants and three Digital Ministry Grants, supporting congregations and synods in testing new ministry models.
- Increased visibility and learning across the church by sharing 25 public stories of ministry innovation through ELCA digital channels, uplifting experimentation, and strengthening a culture of learning and adaptation.
- Led and supported 107 listening sessions across congregations, synods and churchwide ministries, including focus groups, interviews and leader conversations, representing one of the most extensive coordinated listening efforts in recent churchwide organization history.
- Expanded research capacity beyond the ELCA through investment in the User Interviews platform, providing access to a network of over 6 million research participants and enabling ethical, secure research with individuals beyond current ELCA membership to inform ministry design and outreach.
- Strengthened ecumenical research collaboration through joint projects and events, including co-hosting the AI and the Church Summit and conducting annual ecumenical research initiatives exploring ministry innovation topics such as lay-led ministry and young adult engagement.
- Built collaborative leadership capacity across the churchwide organization by certifying 85 additional staff in Facilitation Fundamentals, bringing the total to 125 trained staff, and equipping teams with shared tools and frameworks for collaborative leadership and innovation.
- Expanded innovation training and engagement across the church by reaching over 200 churchwide organization staff through innovation learning sessions and engaging over 500 ELCA leaders through Innovation cohorts, workshops, listening sessions and leadership events.
- Supported leadership development through key initiatives including the Congregations Lead Initiative cohort (59 participants), Design for Belonging Innovation Leadership Academy (100 participants), and leadership engagement events across synods and ministry networks.

- Facilitated strategic design and innovation engagements across synods and ministries, including strategy development for the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod; leadership network design for companion synods; and design sprints to strengthen leadership support and ministry innovation.
- Led innovation-focused gatherings and workshops, including facilitating the Region 3 Quality of Call gathering, supporting leadership conversations related to call processes, and strengthening leadership development across synods and congregations.
- Supported the development of new ministry initiatives through design sprints and strategic facilitation, including a Transformation Tank sprint that secured a \$30,000 grant from the Carpenter Foundation to support a Queer Lutherans Gathering and expand inclusive ministry leadership.
- Strengthened innovation infrastructure and leadership alignment by developing shared tools, language and processes that enable consistent innovation practices across churchwide organization units and support collaborative ministry design.

### **Office of the Presiding Bishop: Development**

Development focused its work in 2025 on strengthening all sources of revenue, expanding the donor base, and increasing organizational capacity to support the ELCA's mission through coordinated fundraising and stewardship efforts. The team prioritized strengthening individual giving, Mission Support and designated funds while advancing systems improvements, cross-unit collaboration and donor engagement strategies that build long-term sustainability.

Work throughout the year emphasized expanding solicitations, improving donor retention and growth, strengthening synod-level development capacity, and enhancing infrastructure to support fundraising across the ELCA ecosystem. These efforts contributed to measurable gains in individual giving, increased donor engagement, and continued alignment between development work and broader churchwide priorities.

- Strengthened overall revenue performance, with Fund One reaching within 1% of its fiscal year 2025 target, supported by strong fourth-quarter performance across giving channels and increased direct gifts from individuals and congregations, which rose over 11% year-over-year, offsetting lower Holy Closure gift revenue.
- Learned that, although Mission Support revenue continued its year-over-year declining trend, the decline was much less than expected in 2025. Mission Support revenue exceeded the budget by nearly 3.0% (over \$900,000).
- Maintained strong support for ELCA World Hunger, with giving increasing 2.86% year-over-year and ending within 1.5% of the targeted revenue goal for direct gifts.
- Continued engagement and response efforts for Lutheran Disaster Response, adapting to fluctuations in disaster-related giving tied to the timing and magnitude of appeals, including support for the Southern California wildfire and Texas flood responses.
- Increased development activity and donor engagement through expanded solicitation efforts, averaging 87 individual solicitations per quarter, while growing email solicitations and strengthening direct donor outreach.
- Strengthened donor engagement strategies to increase gift size, grow the number of gifts secured, and improve overall donor growth and retention.
- Improved internal systems and cross-functional collaboration by convening a monthly Donor Stewardship Task Force, reviewing Workday designation mapping with Operations and Information Technology, and coordinating six or more executive-level development requests per quarter.
- Expanded donor engagement and stewardship by launching updated giving platforms, including transitioning Giving Pages and Good Gifts to Engaging Networks, and conducting targeted communications outside of ECIS with direct giving opportunities.
- Increased donor retention and Mission Support engagement by developing and sharing 12 new synod and churchwide Mission Support impact stories, strengthening communication of ministry outcomes and donor impact.
- Strengthened trust and collaboration across the organization by publishing quarterly transformation and institutional giving newsletters, conducting one-on-one engagement with Development and churchwide organization colleagues, and promoting inclusive storytelling that reflects the diversity of the ELCA.
- Advanced the Church Property Resource Hub (CPRH) initiative to support strategic property use and strengthen revenue sustainability by aligning church property decisions with mission and financial stewardship priorities.

- Continued implementation of the Synod Development Pilot Project (FY24-FY26), currently engaging 15 synods, to strengthen development capacity and Mission Support across the ELCA ecosystem. In each of the first two years of the project, participating synods outperformed others when comparing year-over-year increases in Mission Support sharing for churchwide ministries.
- Expanded development training and curriculum for synods (also through the Synod Development Pilot Project) by focusing on relationship-building, integrated messaging and fundraising best practices, while piloting enhanced donor data access and staffing models to support sustained development capacity at the synod level.

### **Office of the Presiding Bishop: Human Resources**

Human Resources (HR) focused its work in 2025 on strengthening the systems, practices and organizational culture that support ELCA staff and leadership. As part of this work, the function was formally restructured from People Solutions to Human Resources. This shift reflects an intentional effort to strengthen alignment, improve consistency in HR practices, and ensure the ELCA is equipped to support staff and leadership effectively in a changing environment.

Throughout the year, HR prioritized clarifying core processes, strengthening leadership development, improving compensation and benefits alignment, and building infrastructure that supports staff growth, engagement and long-term organizational sustainability. These efforts helped reinforce organizational stability, improve clarity and consistency in HR systems, and positioned the ELCA to better support staff and leaders across the churchwide organization.

- Supported leadership continuity during officer transitions, providing guidance and operational support to ensure smooth onboarding, leadership alignment and continuity of organizational priorities.
- Strengthened internal team cohesion and trust through regular team meetings and intentional efforts to cultivate communication, alignment and collaboration across HR and churchwide organization staff.
- Completed a comprehensive compensation study, strengthening the churchwide organization's ability to align compensation structures, while identifying budget considerations and next steps for implementation.
- Initiated a review of current benefits offerings to ensure alignment with staff needs and organizational priorities, with continued evaluation planned to support competitive and sustainable benefits structures.
- Maintained and evaluated the existing performance review process, gathering feedback and identifying opportunities to strengthen performance management tools and systems to better support staff development and organizational effectiveness.
- Streamlined the Training and Development Reimbursement process, improving clarity and accessibility for staff and supporting increased participation in professional development opportunities.
- Offered leadership development opportunities through the LEAD Program (Learn. Equip. Apply. Deliver.), delivering four workshops in 2025 that provided professional development resources to support staff growth across the organization.
- Advanced development of an Employee Engagement Strategy, including strengthening Employee Resource Groups and expanding opportunities for staff connection and inclusion.
- Continued development of a succession planning framework to support leadership continuity and organizational sustainability, with foundational planning underway to establish long-term processes that prepare leaders for future transitions.

### **Office of the Presiding Bishop: Strategic Communications**

In 2025, Strategic Communications focused on several major initiatives, including support for leadership transitions in the offices of the Presiding Bishop and Secretary, and expanded demands of a Churchwide Assembly that included elections for both positions. The team concentrated its efforts on mission-critical work — partnering closely with senior leaders, churchwide units and Information Technology to ensure clarity, coherence and alignment during a season of institutional visibility and change.

Milestone initiatives included the reboot of *Living Lutheran*'s print magazine, the redesign of LivingLutheran.org, co-leadership of the ELCA.org redesign and collaboration with Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry in calibrating his initial public statements. The website redesigns reflected a strategic shift toward more integrated, user-centered platforms that strengthen storytelling, accessibility and trust.

- Provided support to advance the churchwide organization's priorities, initiatives and leadership messaging across multiple platforms, including driving the communications strategy and messaging to staff about presiding bishop and secretary leadership transitions.
- Partnered with units and senior leaders to translate complex theological, strategic and organizational work into clear, accessible communications for internal and external audiences.
- Supported Churchwide Assembly-related communications, ensuring alignment across messaging, timing and audience engagement.
- Led the reboot of *Living Lutheran*'s print magazine, strengthening its editorial vision, relevance, and role as a key storytelling and formation resource for the church.
- Directed the redesign of LivingLutheran.org, improving usability, accessibility, and alignment with evolving content strategy and audience needs.
- Partnered closely with Information Technology and Innovation on the redesign of ELCA.org to support improved navigation, user experience and integration across churchwide digital platforms.
- Led communications and livestream efforts to support and broadcast the installation of Bishop Curry.
- Adapted communications strategies amid capacity constraints, prioritizing messaging and responsiveness to emerging needs.
- Supported narrative clarity around justice-oriented work (including racial justice, gender justice and theological engagement) through collaboration with programmatic partners.
- Contributed to maintaining institutional coherence, visibility and trust through disciplined messaging and collaborative communications planning.

**Office of the Presiding Bishop: Theological Discernment, Justice and Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations**

In 2025, the Theological Discernment, Justice and Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations team (TDJEIR) strengthened the church's relationship with ecumenical and inter-religious partners and the ELCA's capacity for justice-centered ministry by deepening theological grounding, expanding relational networks, and equipping leaders with accessible, practical resources while strengthening the theological, ethical, and relational foundations that support the church's justice commitments and public witness. Through milestone efforts such as the first-ever ELCA Synod Racial Justice Leaders Gathering, TDJEIR shared learning and coordinated action across synods and partners.

Collectively, this work reflects a strategy that balances stability and innovation — holding core theological and ecumenical commitments while building connective tissue among leaders navigating complex justice challenges. By centering historically underrepresented communities and emphasizing both formation and application, TDJEIR helps support the church to be more grounded, more connected, and better equipped to live its public witness with clarity and courage.

In fall 2025, the TDJEIR team restructured into two distinct executive leadership areas: **Theological Discernment**, which includes Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment, Racial Justice, and Theological Ethics, and **Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations**, which connects to Theological Discernment through shared staffing for Theological Diversity. This structure clarifies leadership alignment while strengthening coordination and collaboration across these closely connected areas of the church's theological work and public witness.

**Racial Justice**

- Convened and facilitated a gathering of nearly 50 synod racial justice leaders to support networking, shared learning and coordinated leadership across synods.
- Posted and distributed *Dismantle* in early 2025, advancing churchwide access to anti-racism theological and practical resources.
- Continued writing and distributing a regular racial justice blog and other public witness materials, sustaining engagement despite budget constraints.
- Provided a strategic presence, resourcing and engagement at key ELCA events to advance the church's commitment to becoming an anti-racist church.
- Led in-person and virtual equipping sessions for the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops to support racial justice leadership and governance.

**Gender Justice**

- Led and supported implementation of Churchwide Assembly implementing resolutions related to the social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice* in collaboration with key stakeholders.
- Provided leadership in the Lutheran World Federation's Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment efforts, including relational and interpretive work with global partners.
- Advanced the Quality of Call Initiative through strategic leadership, synod collaboration and resourcing to strengthen gender-justice practices in ministry.
- Offered education, workshops and strategic presence at major ELCA events to support gender justice formation and leadership development.

- Led equipping sessions for the ELCA Church Council and Conference of Bishops in collaboration with Racial Justice.
- Supported synod and seminary engagement, including Theological Education for Emerging Ministries contexts, to amplify gender justice theology and practice across the church.

### **Theological Ethics**

- Supported the task force and processes that led to the approval of the social statement *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
- Supported the development and approval of the ELCA social message on “Child Protection” by the Church Council at its Nov. 12, 2025, meeting.
- Supported the task force and processes that led to updates to the ELCA social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
- Published the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* as a key theological ethics resource for the whole church.
- Provided leadership and engagement within Faith & Science and Lutheran ethicists’ networks.
- Offered theological ethics support to the work of “God’s Love Made Real,” strengthening ethical reflection connected to churchwide initiatives.

### **Theological Diversity and Engagement**

- Convened an annual gathering of the ELCA Theological Roundtable, including networks of theologians from historically marginalized communities.
- Supported theological diversity across the ELCA’s theological ecology, advancing elements of the “Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.”
- Participated in National Council of Churches and World Council of Churches Faith & Order tables, including work related the impact of artificial intelligence and digital technology on vulnerable communities.
- Supported theological formation initiatives centered on justice-focused themes such as climate justice and dismantling white supremacy.

### **Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations**

- Resourced the church’s engagement with major ecumenical anniversaries, including the 60th anniversary of Vatican II and the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea.
- Supported and coordinated a robust ecumenical and inter-religious guest program for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
- Provided leadership within the National Council of Churches, including planning and implementation of the Christian Unity Gathering in October 2025.
- Equipped congregations and synods through Lutheran ecumenical and inter-religious learning initiatives and resources.
- Hosted the National Workshop on Christian Unity at the Lutheran Center in September 2025 as a national leadership development event.
- Provided leadership in Lutheran-Muslim and Lutheran-Jewish relations through participation in multiple national inter-religious dialogues.

**Office of the Presiding Bishop: Worship**

In 2025, the Worship team focused on sustaining and strengthening the church's shared worship life during a year marked by leadership transition and the intensive demands of the Churchwide Assembly. Centering its work on churchwide priorities, the team provided theological leadership, coordination and resourcing for assembly worship while continuing to support congregations and synods through adaptable, accessible liturgical materials. Through collaboration across churchwide organization units and ecumenical partners, Worship advanced practices that reflect the ELCA's commitments to inclusion, theological depth and shared participation. While assembly-related work necessarily shaped the year's focus, the team maintained disciplined attention to the foundations of worship life that sustain the church's identity, witness and common prayer.

- Supported the church's shared worship life by developing, curating and resourcing liturgical materials that are theologically grounded, accessible and adaptable across diverse contexts. This includes ongoing work related to the future of pastoral care worship resources for use in this church and weekly resources for curating the prayers of intercession in ELCA worshiping communities. Worship resource development work includes regular coordination and engagement with Augsburg Fortress, the publishing ministry of the ELCA.
- Provided leadership and coordination for 2025 Churchwide Assembly worship, including planning, collaboration across units, and alignment with the event's theological and pastoral themes.
- Planned and coordinated the installation of Bishop Curry.
- Advanced worship practices that reflect the church's commitments to inclusion, justice and broad participation, supporting language, music and ritual that engage the full body of Christ.
- Partnered with ecumenical and internal colleagues to strengthen shared worship resources and practices, ensuring coherence with Lutheran theology and the wider church's liturgical life. This work includes sharing resources related to provisional updates to the Revised Common Lectionary that respond to concerns about Anti-Jewish interpretation.
- Supported congregations, synods and churchwide leaders through worship-related consultation, guidance and resource development. This includes regular engagement with the Conference of Bishops on matters related to worship at churchwide events.
- Sustained core worship functions during a year shaped by leadership transition and assembly demands, prioritizing worship leadership and formation. This includes planning and implementing regular worship opportunities for staff of the churchwide organization.

### **Service and Justice**

Across Service and Justice (S&J) ministries, 2025 work reflects a decisive shift toward integration, youth leadership and justice-centered impact — from advisory committees and cohort models to U.N. advocacy and community-based organizing. Investments in storytelling, new media and shared leadership structures strengthen visibility and accountability while reinforcing the ELCA’s commitment to a “Connected, Sustainable Church.” Work also focused on national leadership gatherings to rapid responses to SNAP cuts, immigration enforcement and disaster displacement, demonstrating a church increasingly capable of listening first, acting together, and sustaining impact across local and global contexts. The team is deepening this church’s commitment to service and justice grounded in accompaniment, intersectionality and faithful public witness.

#### **Building Resilient Communities (BRC), ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, AMMPARO**

- Convened 120-plus leaders at the World Hunger Leadership Gathering in Columbus, Ohio, including 30 leaders under age 30 (25%), demonstrating intentional youth inclusion from planning through execution. Young adults served on the advisory committee and produced a 28-minute documentary highlighting the intersectional root causes of hunger.
- Launched the Building Resilient Leadership (BRL) Cohort immediately following the World Hunger Leadership Gathering, with over 50% of participants also attending gathering, creating an integrated leadership pipeline focused on young adult community organizing and justice-oriented leadership.
- Released the “At the Table” vacation Bible school curriculum, with an intergenerational and advocacy-forward design, including storytelling formation and a participatory advocacy activity shared with legislators.
- Advanced MERGE priorities through the World Hunger Domestic Grants (2025), with new grants addressing:
  - 19% migrant justice
  - 100% economic justice
  - 15% racial justice
  - 6% gender justice
  - 4% environmental justice
- Addressed SNAP cuts, militarized immigration and job loss, the BRC team coordinated a multilayer, integrated response with Lutheran Disaster Response and AMMPARO across 10-plus regions nationwide. This invitation for support reflected agile, relational crisis response, grounded in listening to local leaders. As ever, it applied MERGE justice principles through a preferential option for communities at the margins, centering accompaniment before, during and after disasters.
- Provided Daily Bread Grants, which scaled dramatically in response to need, with 1,000 feeding ministry requests from all 65 synods, echoing levels last seen during COVID-19. The BRC team coordinated efforts across home areas to affirmatively answer 670 feeding ministries’ needs.
- Applied MERGE justice principles through a preferential option for communities at the margins, centering accompaniment before, during and after disasters.
- Provided grants, with 2025 highlights including:
  - Storm shelters at Oaks Indian Mission (Indigenous communities)
  - Culturally appropriate food ministries for Native Hawaiian wildfire survivors
  - Joint support for Sudanese refugees and host communities in Eastern Chad
  - Environmental protection and youth well-being in Rohingya refugee camps (Bangladesh)

- Co-hosted a Community of Practice in Washington, D.C., with Witness in Society, convening 70 synod and disaster leaders for coordination, learning and federal advocacy.

### **Witness in Society**

- Sustained robust young adult engagement, including Capitol Hill advocacy, D.C.-based trainings, tailored resources for youth and young adults, and leadership opportunities.
- Expanded reach through new media and storytelling, including short-form advocacy videos and the *Here I Pod from ELCA Advocacy* podcast.
- Brought intersectional awareness to widening circles of the ELCA, including:
  - The ELCA Multiethnic & Intersectional Network Gathering
  - The Racial Justice Leaders Gathering (50-plus leaders) that focused on discipleship and advocacy amid polarization
- Engaged in state-level public policy advocacy, amplifying and deepening action and interest among synods and bishops for partnership and impact by bringing a faith voice to essential public witness opportunities.
- Thematized shifts in advocacy in the current administration for review and action by ELCA leadership and began integrating this appreciation into election engagement planning.
- Partnered closely with BRC and Lutheran Disaster Response to bring experiential voices to policy work and integrate policy education and advocacy into hunger, climate and disaster leadership gatherings.

### **Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC)**

- Strengthened internal team identity, visibility and collaboration, aligning MDCC work with the ELCA's call to be a more inclusive church.
- Advanced integrated advocacy models with Witness in Society, centering justice issues prioritized by MDCC communities.
- Provided a leadership presence and partnership across MDCC events, including ongoing formation through the "Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity" and relationship-building with internal and external partners.

### **Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC)**

- Hosted global and ELCA young adults at the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, equipping participants around Beijing+30 and advancing gender justice as a core human rights issue.
- Amplified Indigenous voices at the U.N. Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, insisting climate and biodiversity negotiations center on Indigenous rights.
- Advanced anti-racist advocacy at the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent, pressing for reparatory economics, ethical AI, and institutional transformation in church and society.

### **Global Mission/Companion Engagement**

- Launched plans for a Companion Engagement Team (24 leaders plus bishop adviser) to strengthen global relationships, shared learning and synod-level capacity for accompaniment.
- Reinforced companion church relationships as essential expressions of shared mission, aligned with the ELCA's vision for a "Connected, Sustainable Church."
- Supported international crisis response, including a \$200,000 two-year grant to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania addressing adolescent HIV care, stigma reduction, gender-based violence prevention, and advocacy following the abrupt loss of funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development.

## Report from the Conference of Bishops

Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus.

The Spring Conference of Bishops was held March 3–7 at Eaglewood Resort in Itasca.

Our theme, *Connections*, shaped our time. We were reminded that connection is not simply organizational work—it is a spiritual calling grounded in our shared life in Christ. Worship and prayer anchored our days with Eucharist, Bible study, and morning prayer, with the bishops of Region 7 serving as chaplains.

We heard updates following actions that came out of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, including continued work around creating DEIA standards for synods, which the conference affirmed will move forward under the leadership of the CCL Committee.

A significant portion of our time was devoted to a day-long conversation with seminary leaders about theological education and ministry led by the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee.

Presiding Bishop Curry shared his vision for our life together and offered a hopeful challenge to synods: as they are able, to consider increasing mission support by 1% in the coming years as a sign of our shared commitment to the whole church.

Following the many ballots of the fall meeting, it was a gift to conclude elections quickly. I was elected chair and Bishop Greg Busboom, vice chair. The three-year term begins July 1. We also give thanks for the steady leadership Bishop Felix Malpica has offered as vice chair. His term concludes June 30.

Several themes surfaced throughout the week: a renewed commitment to responsiveness and trust in our shared work, thoughtful conversation about how we speak publicly as a conference, and a desire to continue deepening our relationships across regions. Many thanks to Bishop Anne Edison-Albright and Bishop Felix Malpica.

The April 1 Zoom meeting focused on connections and public witness, with participants discussing the ELCA's advocacy work and response to current political challenges. The ELCA Witness and Society team presented updates on federal policy advocacy, including concerns about executive overreach, immigration policy, civil rights, Middle East issues, and environmental protections. Pr. Amy Reumann and her colleagues shared resources and guidance for faith communities regarding the upcoming 2026 midterm elections, emphasizing the importance of supporting election officials and promoting voter participation.

Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar provided an update on the Middle East Ready Bench, highlighting ongoing concerns in the Holy Land and plans for a young adult trip.

The group had discussion about adding an extra day to the Spring 2027 meeting at Eaglewood so we could plan a few days of true retreat. Participants were in favor of this addition, so Spring Conference of Bishops will begin on Monday March 8, 2027 and conclude on Saturday, March 13, 2027.

Bishop Deborah Hutterer  
Chair, Conference of Bishops

# **Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities**

## **Executive Director's Report**

### **2026 Annual Board Meeting**

Submitted by: Lamont A. Wells, Executive Director

Reporting Period: Calendar Year 2025 with 2026 Forward Indicators

## **Executive Summary Narrative (Faith, Strategy, and Scale)**

The 2025 reporting year represents a season of discernment, consolidation, and faithful leadership for the Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities (NECU). In a period marked by volatility across higher education—financial pressure, political polarization, and increasing scrutiny of institutional mission—NECU leaned decisively into its Lutheran vocation: to educate for the sake of the neighbor, to lead with conscience, and to hold community even amid disagreement.

NECU functioned simultaneously as theological interpreter, strategic convener, advocacy partner, and pastoral presence. This work strengthened trust across the network, reinforced Lutheran identity as a living and diverse tradition, and positioned NECU as a credible voice within the ELCA and the broader higher education ecosystem.

Moreover, NECU demonstrated renewed organizational health and stewardship, marked by full dues participation, expanded engagement from historically less-involved institutions, measurable cost savings, and increased national visibility. NECU enters 2026 not merely with momentum, but with moral clarity, institutional credibility, and shared purpose.

# Executive Overview: Scope & Scale (2025 Snapshot)

The following data points illustrate the breadth, depth, and impact of NECU's work during the reporting period.

- 28+ NECU institutions engaged across multiple convening(s), cohorts, and consultations
- 100% on-time dues collection (first time in several years with no exceptions)
- 2 key Intersections volumes published; Spring 2025 = most shared issue in journal history
- 10+ national advocacy engagements, including direct Congressional meetings
- Multiple leadership pipelines relaunched or in development (Student Affairs, new presidents' orientation, VOCARE leadership program development, future cohorts)
- Expanded partnerships across ELCA, higher education vendors, advocacy organizations, HBCUs, and global Lutheran entities

## **GOAL I: Deepen the understanding of the rich diversity of Lutheran identity at NECU institutions**

NECU's work under Goal I reflects the Lutheran conviction that identity is not static but formed through dialogue, discernment, and faithful engagement with complexity. Rather than prescribing uniform expressions of Lutheran identity, NECU supported institutions in articulating how theology shapes ethics, inclusion, academic freedom, and public witness within diverse institutional contexts.

### **Strategy 1: Expand dialogue and develop shared resources**

#### Actions

- Consulted with multiple NECU institutions to develop or refine Lutheran foundational value statements, especially around ethical engagement with external organizations (e.g., TPUSA, InterVarsity, CREW, etc.).
- Published two volumes of Intersections as a shared intellectual and theological resource.
- Negotiated monthly articles for inclusion in *The Lutheran* digital magazine
- Initiated formal conversations with Augsburg Fortress / 1517 Media to explore NECU publishing pathways for:
  - Institutional histories
  - Faculty and staff scholarship
  - Curated Lutheran higher education resources
- Revived conversations around the Association of Lutheran Teaching Theologians (ATS) across NECU institutions, ELCA seminaries, and universities with ELCA faculty. Planned a 2026 gathering for July 10, 2026 in Indianapolis, IN

## Data / Indicators

- Intersections Spring 2025: highest download and share rate in journal history
- Growing cross-institutional citation and classroom usage of *So That All May Belong*
- At least 25 institutions engaged in direct Lutheran identity consultation through NECU

## Strategy 2: Affirm DEI as core to Lutheran identity

This work is grounded in the Lutheran affirmation that human dignity flows from grace, not merit, and that diversity and inclusion are expressions of neighbor-love rather than institutional compliance.

## Actions

- Provided sustained accompaniment and (pastoral) support to NECU DEI officers and DEI-adjacent leaders, with explicit attention to emotional and vocational sustainability.
- Convened NECU DEI leaders in national spaces (e.g., NADOHE), laying groundwork for a NECU-specific DEI leadership network chapter in 2026.
- Integrated DEI commitments consistently across:
  - Publishing: the completion of *So That All May Belong*
  - Advocacy (NAICU Secretariat and ELCA Synod consultations)
  - Leadership development (workshops for ELCA Synods and Conferences on tenets of Lutheran Higher Education)
  - Institutional consultations (provided numerous feedback about DEI initiatives/validity)

## Data / Indicators

- NECU DEI presence sustained and strategically pivoted despite national rollbacks and institutional pressures
- Increased requests from presidents and boards for mission-grounded DEI guidance
- *So That All May Belong* became the most referenced NECU theological resource

## **GOAL II: Enhance Lutheran distinctiveness through increased inter-institutional collaboration**

Under Goal II, NECU leaned into the Lutheran understanding that leadership is formed in community rather than isolation, and that collaboration is an act of faithful stewardship in times of constraint.

## **Strategy 1: Increase opportunities for collaboration**

### Actions

- Reestablished the VP Student Affairs Cohort at NASPA after a multi-year lapse.
- Convened or supported cross-institutional engagement among:
  - Advancement & Admissions leaders
  - Business & Finance officers
  - Provosts and Student Success leaders
  - Chaplains
  - Theological Faculty Working Group (and mission officers)
- Began priming new NECU cohorts:
  - Athletic Directors
  - Marketing & Communications Officers
  - Information Technology Leaders
- Expanded global and civic engagement:
  - World AIDS Day program at the United Nations (NYC) with Lutheran Office of World Community including student participation (e.g., Destiny Forkpah, Muhlenberg College)
  - Strengthened Wittenberg Center (Germany) relationship
  - Augsburg Center for Global Education & Experience agenda setting
  - Reigniting relationship w/ Lutheran Washington Semester
- Deepened engagement with HBCUs, particularly in Texas, South Carolina, and the greater Northeast aligning opportunities for NECU institutional engagement
- Successful 2025 Vocation of Lutheran Higher Education Conference (VLHE) with special keynote speaker: Dr. Walter Fluker

### Data / Indicators

- 7 active professional cohorts with 3–4 additional cohorts in development
- Global engagement now spans Europe, Global South, and UN platforms
- 2025 Vocational Leadership Conference evaluations were superb

## **Strategy 2: Strengthen leadership development opportunities**

NECU's leadership formation work emphasized vocation, reflection, and ethical responsibility, shaping leaders for both institutional excellence and public service.

## Actions

- Coordinated NECU New Presidents Orientation at the ELCA Lutheran Center (Chicago) introducing the recently elected/appointed leader to the ELCA structure, met with new Presiding Bishop and ELCA Secretary.
- Continued strategic review of NECU Leadership Academy/ VOCARE Fellows Program to align with:
  - Other senior leadership programs
  - Cost-sharing opportunities
  - Greater inter-network connectivity
- Served on editorial board of NETVUE's new journal **Studies in Vocation and Calling** (launching 2026).
- Cohosted 2025 Summer President's Institute at Augsburg University-  
#relationshipbuilding
- Supported student leadership formation through 2025 NECU Student Leadership Summit with focus on civil discourse on college campuses and integrating United Nations Sustainable Goals
- Supported ordination of Grace Marcus as Deacon in the ELCA, affirming vocational leadership within NECU staff.

## Data / Indicators

- 100% participation of newly appointed NECU presidents in orientation
- 30+ students from 22 institutions engaged in NECU Student Leadership Summit with several follow up outcomes for inter-institutional collaboration
- VOCARE redesign positioned for lower per-participant cost and broader reach
- NECU leadership voice shaping national vocation discourse (NETVUE, GlobalMindED, ASHE, BMEC, NAICU, etc.)

## **GOAL III: Strengthen NECU's relationship with the ELCA**

This goal reflects NECU's vocation as a bridge between higher education and the life of the church, strengthening shared mission, advocacy, and formation across the ELCA ecosystem.

### **Strategy 1: Increase collaboration with the churchwide organization**

#### Actions

- Worked closely with ELCA Advocacy Department on federal higher-education policy:
  - Student loan policy
  - SNAP benefits
  - Education access and affordability

- Coordinated and participated in direct advocacy meetings with U.S. Senators and Representatives including:
  - Fetterman, Evans, Waters, Alsobrooks, Blunt Rochester, Thune
- Continued service on EIIA Board of Directors, supporting risk management for faith-based institutions and fighting to keep the ecumenical church related mission alive.
- Hosted and supported NECU presence at 2025 Churchwide Assembly and ELCA leadership convenings.

#### Data / Indicators

- 10+ direct federal advocacy engagements
- NECU now consistently named as ELCA's higher education partner among associated organizations
- Strengthened policy alignment with AAC&U and NAICU advocacy efforts

### **Strategy 2: Improve ties with synods and congregations**

#### Actions

- Deepened engagement with ELCA bishops serving on NECU boards and including them at the 2025 VLHE Conference.
- Initiated project with Evangelical Lutheran Education Association (ELEA) to strengthen pipelines with Lutheran primary and secondary schools within 50–100 mile radii of NECU institutions.
- Established 2026 engagement plans with:
  - WELCA
  - ELCA Deaconess Community
- Participated in numerous inaugurations, ordinations, and leadership transitions across the network.

#### Data / Indicators

- ELEA project scoped for regional pilot implementation
- ELCA/ Synod scholarship partnerships positioned to expand in 2026 funding cycle
- Increased synod-level visibility of NECU institutions

# **AREAS OF ACTION EXTENDING BEYOND (BUT SUPPORTING) THE STRATEGIC PLAN**

## **Advocacy, Public Witness & Sector Leadership**

- Supported AAC&U and NAICU during national challenges (e.g., Constructive Dialogue response).
- Represented NECU on podcasts, panels, and national forums.
- Participated in ECRHE, connecting NECU to grants, workshops, and national presentations.

## **Financial Stewardship & Operations**

- Achieved 100% dues collection, including re-engagement of historically under-participating institutions.
- Generated cost savings through:
  - Vendor negotiations
  - Meeting efficiencies
  - Website redevelopment
- Expanded shared-services conversations with higher-education vendors.

## **Governance & Network Health**

- Attended and presented at a majority of NECU institutional board meetings.
- Developed a database of prospective board leaders for NECU institutions will provide preparation orientation.
- Strengthened donor engagement and advancement coordination across the network.

## **Forward Indicators for 2026**

- Launch Lutheran identity resource repository
- Formalize new professional cohorts
- Expand domestic and global partnerships and Global South engagement
- Increase scholarship dollars and institutional reach (Rossing/ Torrison, etc.)
- Clarify NECU's differentiated value among faith-based networks
- Continue stabilizing Lutheran higher education during sector volatility

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Lamont Anthony Wells, Executive Director

Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities

# Appendix A

## Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities

### Executive Director Metric Dashboard

2026 Annual Board Meeting

Reporting Period: Calendar Year 2025 (with 2026 Forward Indicators)

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## I. Enterprise-Level Health, Stewardship, and Network Vitality

Metric Area	2025 Status	Board-Relevant Interpretation
<b>NECU Institutions Engaged</b>	<b>28+</b>	<b>Broad and sustained participation across the network</b>
Dues Collection	100% on-time	First time in several years with no exceptions; strong institutional trust
<b>Fiscal Stewardship</b>	<b>Stable / Positive</b>	<b>Cost savings achieved through vendor negotiations, meeting efficiencies, and website redevelopment</b>
Board Engagement	Majority of institutions	ED presence at institutional board meetings ensured alignment and transparency
<b>Governance Pipeline</b>	<b>Established</b>	<b>Database of prospective board leaders developed</b>

## II. Strategic Goal I Metrics

### Lutheran Identity, Diversity, and Theological Grounding

Metric Area	2025 Outcome	Evidence / Indicator
<b>Lutheran Identity Consultations</b>	<b>25+ institutions</b>	<b>Direct support for values statements and ethical discernment</b>
Intersections Publications	2 volumes	Spring 2025 = most shared issue in journal history

Metric Area	2025 Outcome	Evidence / Indicator
<b>Theological Resource Utilization</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Increased classroom, cabinet, and board usage of So That All May Belong and Rooted and Open</b>
DEI Leader Engagement	Sustained	Continued participation despite national rollbacks
<b>DEI Advisory Requests</b>	<b>Increased</b>	<b>Rising demand from presidents and boards for mission-grounded guidance</b>

NECU’s Lutheran identity work is demonstrably shaping governance, ethics, and campus culture across institutions.

### III. Strategic Goal II Metrics

#### Inter-Institutional Collaboration and Leadership Formation

Metric Area	2025 Outcome	Evidence / Indicator
Active Professional Cohorts	7	Student Affairs; Advancement; Admissions; Business & Finance; Student Success; Chaplains, Faculty
<b>New Cohorts in Development</b>	<b>3–4</b>	<b>Athletics; Marketing; IT; additional leadership groups</b>
Student Leadership Participation	30+ students / 22 institutions	NECU Student Leadership Summit
<b>Presidential Orientation</b>	<b>100% participation</b>	<b>New Presidents Orientation at ELCA Lutheran Center</b>
VOCARE Cost Efficiency	Improved	Redesign positioned for lower per-participant cost
<b>Global Engagement Sites</b>	<b>Multiple</b>	<b>UN (NYC); Wittenberg Center (Germany); Global South partnerships with Augsburg CGEE</b>

NECU is increasingly serving as the infrastructure for collaboration, reducing duplication and strengthening Lutheran distinctiveness.

## IV. Strategic Goal III Metrics

### ELCA Relationship, Advocacy, and Churchwide Engagement

Metric Area	2025 Outcome	Evidence / Indicator
Federal Advocacy Engagements	10+	Direct meetings with U.S. Senators and Representatives
<b>ELCA Advocacy Alignment</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Student loans, SNAP benefits, education access</b>
Churchwide Convenings	Multiple	Churchwide Assembly and Lutheran Center events
<b>Synod Engagement</b>	<b>Expanded</b>	<b>Increased visibility; bishops serving on NECU boards</b>
ELEA Pipeline Project	Scoped	Regional pilot (50–100 mile radius) planned
<b>Scholarship Partnerships</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>WELCA and Deaconess Community engagement for 2026</b>

NECU is functioning as the ELCA’s primary higher education partner, translating church values into public policy and educational practice.

## V. Extended Impact Metrics

(Beyond Strategic Plan but Mission-Aligned)

Area	2025 Status	Impact
<b>National Higher Education Advocacy</b>	<b>Active</b>	<b>AAC&amp;U, NAICU, Constructive Dialogue response</b>
Sector Leadership	Visible	Podcasts, panels, ECRHE participation
<b>HBCU Partnerships</b>	<b>Expanding</b>	<b>Texas, South Carolina, Northeast</b>
Vendor Partnerships	Growing	Cost savings and shared-services potential
<b>Donor Engagement</b>	<b>Strengthened</b>	<b>ED participation and advancement guidance</b>

NECU enters 2026 as a theologically grounded, financially stable, and strategically indispensable network—strengthening Lutheran higher education through collaboration, advocacy, and faithful leadership.

## **American Indian Alaska Native Lutheran Association, Inc. (AIANLA) Report**

**Date:** Feb 20, 11 am -12:15 PM CST

**Called by:** Incorporator/President Joan Conroy

**Purpose:** Discussion on appointing an Interim President until a formal election can be held

### **Present:**

- Joan Conroy
- Kelly Sherman-Conroy
- Larry Thilie

### **Absent:**

- Manuel Retamotza

### **Summary of Discussion**

The meeting was convened to determine next steps for AIANLA and the appointment of an Interim President.

Joan Conroy shared that she spoke by phone with Manuel Retamotza during the week of February 9. Manuel agreed that appointing an Interim President is appropriate at this time. He suggested Brenda Blackhawk as another potential individual for consideration.

It was noted that, under the current AIANLA bylaws, Brenda Blackhawk is not eligible to serve on the board. Any change to allow her participation would require future discussion and legal amendment to the bylaws.

The group agreed Joan Conroy will speak with Patterson Yazzie about stepping into the Interim President role. It was also discussed that Patterson should be supported by someone with long-standing knowledge of AIANLA's history. Larry Thilie or another elder familiar with the organization to help guide and mentor Patterson in this role.

Kelly Sherman-Conroy has been asked to continue assisting the organization by keeping meeting notes.

### **Next Steps**

- Joan Conroy will contact Patterson Yazzie regarding serving as Interim President.
- Larry Thilie or another elder to provide mentorship and historical guidance for Patterson.
- Future discussion and planning will continue at the next meeting to prepare for the upcoming AIANLA gathering.

### **Next Meeting**

Purpose: To outline the agenda and plan for the upcoming AIANLA meeting and help Patterson move into his role.

**Minutes prepared by:** Kelly Sherman-Conroy

**Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy**

*Anpétu wašté mitákuyepi!*

*Good day my relatives!*

*SUMMARY ADDITION:*

Follow up to the meeting:

Pr. Joann contacted Patterson Yazzie to inquire if he was interested in serving as the Association Interim President on February 26, 2026. Patterson was agreeable to serve as Interim President.

The next meeting that was scheduled was on 3/16/26. The purpose of the meeting is to outline the agenda and plan for upcoming AIANLA meeting and to help Patterson move into his role to lead this planning.

The meeting had to be postponed and a new date pending.

Rev. Wanda Frenchmen, Program Assistant/Consultant Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations Interim, has proposed to meet with American Indian Alaska Lutheran Association Officers and the Service and Justice Executive Director and the Sr. Director, the Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities to resurrect and plan a new beginning for the Association.

Updates should be forthcoming as a meeting date is agreed upon.

The Reverend Joan A. Conroy,  
AIANLA Incorporator/President  
3/31/2026

### **Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH) Report**

**Salam Radio Station:** We are very pleased to report that on March 23, 2026, we joined in spirit with our brother Pastor Charbel Zgheib in celebrating the Grand Opening of Salam Radio Station, the first Arabic Christian Ecumenical Online Media Platform in the United States, headquartered in Staten Island, NY. Pastor Charbel leads Salam Arabic Church, our ELCA Arabic language ministry in Brooklyn, NY. He is also treasurer of ALAMEH. In a time marked by division, fragmentation, and noise, Salam Radio Station emerges as a deliberate act of unity; a shared ecumenical voice bringing together Arab Christians across denominations, cultures, and generations to proclaim faith, hope, dignity, truth, and peace. As Pastor Charbel has noted, “This is more than a media launch; it is the beginning of a common witness and a platform rooted in faith, responsibility, and community.” We are extremely grateful to Pastor Charbel for the creative planning, persistence, and hard work which has gone into this ministry.

**ELCA Advocacy Alert re Beit Sahour**” The members of ALAMEH wish to express our gratitude to the ELCA for its advocacy statement related to the village of Beit Sahour in Palestine’s West Bank. (Beit Sahour lies close to Bethlehem and has been traditionally regarded as the location of the fields where shepherds heard the angels sing at the birth of Jesus.) Beit Sahour residents benefit greatly from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Beit Sahour, and its adjoined Lutheran school (The Evangelical Lutheran School of Beit Sahour), which serve all members of its community—Christian and Muslim—through high-quality K-12 education, community service programming, and support of the local scout troupe. The ELCA statement called us to advocate for justice and peace in Beit Sahour with prayer and writing to federal legislators. In Beit Sahour, new Israeli illegal settlement construction threatens the safety and well-being of residents, including our Christian siblings and the ELCA’s partner ministries. The ELCA statement urges us, as followers of Christ, to love our neighbors and work for justice, responding to such situations with prayer, advocacy, and accompaniment. This reflects our baptismal call to care for others and the world God made, and to stand against injustice and dispossession. Since the statement, attacks on Palestinians and destruction of their homes and properties by illegal settlers under the protection of the Israeli Defense Forces has unfortunately expanded.

**Celebrating the Ordination of Pastor Adham Al-Araj:** The Rev. Adham Al-Araj, who came to the United States under the auspices of ALAMEH’s work with the ELCA to study at Lutheran seminaries, was ordained in December 2025 to serve as pastor of Bethlehem Arabic Lutheran Church in San Diego, a new ministry for Arabic-speaking Lutherans. This reflects the ELCA’s commitment to inclusivity and support for persons of Arab and Middle Eastern heritage. The ELCA noted, “His ordination is celebrated as a sign of God’s grace and the ELCA’s ongoing work for justice and peace, especially for Palestinian and Arab communities.”

**Celebrating the Installation of the Rev. Imad Mousa Haddad as bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL):** We join with our siblings in the ELCJHL to celebrate the recent installation of Bishop Imad Haddad in Jerusalem as the fifth bishop of their church. We express our gratitude for the many ELCA bishops, including Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, who attended, along with the presiding bishops of many of our ecumenical partners and the head of the Lutheran World Federation. Their presence was an important sign of support for the embattled church in the Holy Land.

**ALAMEH Board's Statement on the US and Israeli War in Iran and the Middle East:** Following is the statement promulgated by the Board of ALAMEH at the start of the US and Israeli War in Iran and the Middle East:

**A Statement on the Current Situation in the Middle East  
From the Board of ALAMEH**

The Board of the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage (ALAMEH) denounces the decision of the governments of the United States and Israel to wage war on Iran. This war is unjust, unnecessary, and catastrophic. In only a matter of days, it has unleashed more death, fear, displacement, and destruction across the Middle East, adding to the unbearable suffering already endured by the peoples of our region.

We grieve that once again civilians are paying the highest price. Iran's retaliatory attacks have brought death and destruction to Arab countries. Under the cover of war with Iran, Israel has expanded its attacks into Lebanon and Syria, bringing further death and devastation to civilian communities. At the same time, the horrors in Gaza continue, where Palestinians have already endured unspeakable loss, mass displacement, and the destruction of homes, hospitals, schools, and entire neighborhoods. In the West Bank, Palestinians continue to face Israeli harassment, dispossession, unjustified imprisonment, and violence. Under protection of the Israeli military, illegal Israeli settlers are attacking Palestinians on their own land and destroying their homes, crops and olive trees. We reject the lie that such brutality will ever lead to peace.

As Arab and Middle Eastern Lutherans, we speak from the pain of a region that has been ravaged too long by war, occupation, and militarism, with the perpetrators enjoying impunity. We affirm that the God revealed in Jesus Christ does not sanction the destruction of human life or the crushing of entire peoples. Our faith calls us not to silence, but to truth-telling; not to indifference, but to solidarity; not to war, but to justice and peace.

We stand in steadfast solidarity with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and with all Christians in the region who continue to bear witness to the Gospel amid war, occupation, and despair. We give thanks for their steadfastness, their courage, their faith, and their unrelenting call for justice, dignity, and peace.

We mourn with all who are grieving across Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and throughout the Middle East. We pray for the wounded, the displaced, the imprisoned, and the traumatized. We call upon the members of the ELCA, and all people of faith and conscience, to raise their voices and demand an immediate end to this war, an end to harassment of Palestinians in the West Bank and to the devastation in Gaza, with a return to diplomacy and international law. The teachings of Jesus do not permit us to be neutral in the face of such suffering. Our calling is to seek justice, defend life, and pursue peace for all.

Members of the Board of ALAMEH, 13 March 2026

## ReconcilingWorks Report

### Who We Are

Since 1974, ReconcilingWorks: Lutherans for Full Participation has advocated for the full welcome, inclusion, celebration, and equity of LGBTQIA+ Lutherans in all aspects of the life of their church, congregations, and community.

ReconcilingWorks accompanies congregations, synods, and leaders across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) to deepen practices of inclusion, justice, and belonging. As an independent nonprofit, this work is sustained through the generosity of individuals, congregations, grants, and program resources.

### Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program

Since 1983, the Reconciling in Christ (RIC) Program has served as a public witness of welcome, inclusion, celebration, and advocacy for people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions.

Each ministry context is unique, and ReconcilingWorks continues to expand tools, training, and accompaniment to support communities in living into this work authentically and sustainably.

### New & Expanded Resources (Since October 2025)

#### Community Care Resources

ReconcilingWorks launched a **Community Care resource hub** to equip individuals and congregations with practical, faith-rooted tools for navigating care, resilience, and mutual support in challenging times.

Resources include:

- Devotional journal materials
- Community care worksheets and prompts
- Tools for loving neighbors through action and reflection

<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/community-care/>

#### Relocation & Safety Preparation Support

In response to the evolving social and legislative landscape impacting LGBTQIA+ people, ReconcilingWorks has developed resources in partnership with Bishops Brenda Bos, Bryan Penman, and Donna Simon to support **rostered leaders and families discerning relocation for safety and wellbeing**.

These tools help individuals and communities:

- Prepare for conversations with synod leadership
- Identify needs and support systems
- Navigate transitions with care and clarity

This work reflects a growing need for **pastoral, practical, and systemic support** within the life of the church.

<https://www.reconcilingworks.org/relocation-prep/>

#### By the Numbers (Spring 2026)

- Nearly **1,200 Reconciling in Christ partners**, representing approximately **14% of the ELCA**
- Nearly **300 congregations actively in discernment** toward becoming RIC
- Continued growth in engagement through **trainings, cohorts, and resource utilization**

#### What We're Learning

- Lasting transformation happens when **relationships, education, and public commitments align**
- **Lay leadership is essential** for sustained cultural change within congregations

- Communities are seeking **practical tools for care, safety, and advocacy** in real time
- Synod and churchwide partnership remain critical to scaling this work

### **How the Church Council Can Support**

1. **Center LGBTQIA+ inclusion as core to the church's identity and witness**
  - Publicly affirm and integrate this work across churchwide communications and initiatives
2. **Amplify new resources for community care and safety**
  - Share and normalize the use of Community Care and Relocation Preparation resources
3. **Strengthen synod-level support systems**
  - Encourage synods to develop clear processes for accompaniment, especially in times of crisis or transition

ReconcilingWorks remains deeply committed to walking alongside this church as it continues to grow into a more just, inclusive, and loving body.

Advisory Member Contact: ReconcilingWorks — *Aubrey Thonvold, Executive Director*

Email: <mailto:aubreyt@reconcilingworks.org> | Web: [reconcilingworks.org](https://reconcilingworks.org)

Social: [@ReconcilingWorks](#)

## White Lutherans for Racial Justice Association Report

### I. Overview and Purpose

White Lutherans for Racial Justice is one of the six ELCA Ethnic Associations, committed to dismantling white supremacy within the ELCA and partnering across the church toward collective liberation, repair, and belonging. We report to Jen DeLeon, Director of Racial Justice. Our mission is to work to dismantle white supremacy in the ELCA and our world, engage in the lifelong work of anti-racism and authentic diversity through education, accountability, community, and spiritual formation in alignment with the ELCA's Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity and the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommendations.

From the wisdom of Rev. Yolanda in "See Me Believe Me," it is our job as white bodied people to make our churches, and the ELCA a safe(r) place. We exist to learn, teach, support, offer resources, and amplify voices of the global majority.

### II. Highlights Since the Previous Report (November 2025)

- **Board and Leadership Development:** Link to our [Board bios](#). Two new board members have joined us: [David Scherer](#) and Melody Stachour. Kinna Kemp is no longer on the Board as her term ended. We are planning our Board retreat for sometime this Spring online. We approved bylaw ratifications at our January 2026 Assembly. We are building processes and procedures for how we function so the work can be handed off to anyone at any time.
- **Programs and Initiatives:** We are working in collaboration with ELCA Racial Justice and Jen DeLeon on future webinars related to the Strategy for Authentic Diversity grants.
- **Collaborations and Partnerships:** In January, we hosted our online Assembly with over 150 registrations (4 bishops). Our goal was 130 people. We had 100 people engaged online each of the two days include greetings and reports from Bishop Curry, Secretary Mills, Rev. Khader EL-Yateem, the ELCA Advocacy Office, and Organizing for Mission. Each of the other Ethnic Associations brought a greeting to our assembly. This was a wonderful way to hear how we can be in support and collaboration with them. We are excited about this momentum. We currently have about 200 members since we opened up membership in January 2025. You are invited to [join our membership](#) and be connected with us!
- [2025 Annual Report](#) DRAFT

### III. Priorities for the Next Six Months

- Continue capacity-building and leadership development within White Lutherans for Racial Justice. Growing members, increasing opportunities to be connected and find community.
- Deepen partnership with other Ethnic Associations and the ELCA Racial Justice office.
- Support implementation of CRLC and DEIA Audit recommendations at the synodical and congregational level.
- Board retreat planning and planning for our next in-person Assembly.

#### **IV. Gratitude and Invitation**

We give thanks for the support of the Church Council and our sibling Ethnic Associations. We invite ongoing partnership, prayer, and financial commitment as we work toward a more just, liberated, and beloved ELCA.

#### **V. Action Steps (We invite your action in these ways....)**

1. Connect with our [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/EDLA4RJ): <https://www.facebook.com/EDLA4RJ>
2. Connect with the other [ELCA Ethnic Association websites and facebook pages](https://www.elca.org/how-we-serve/elca-in-society/mdcc):  
<https://www.elca.org/how-we-serve/elca-in-society/mdcc>
3. Sign up for our [email list](https://www.whitelutheransforracialjustice.org/): <https://www.whitelutheransforracialjustice.org/>

#### **Submitted by:**

Desta Goehner, President, White Lutherans for Racial Justice

[www.WhiteLutheransForRacialJustice.org](http://www.WhiteLutheransForRacialJustice.org)

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## **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Core Investment Policy**

### **Applicability**

The investments subject to this policy are those related to all funds administered by the Office of the Treasurer in excess of ongoing daily operating needs of the churchwide organization (the "Portfolio"). The Portfolio is expected to maintain a long-term base of approximately \$50 million in restricted and designated funds, while also accommodating seasonal fluctuations in receipts and distributions. The Portfolio will be invested with the objective of preserving and growing purchasing power over time while maintaining sufficient liquidity to meet anticipated and unanticipated cash needs. This policy does not apply to investments of the churchwide organization held on our behalf by the ELCA Foundation.

### **Investment Objectives**

The investment objectives of the portfolio are as follows:

- Maintain purchasing power of portfolio assets over time: To achieve this goal, the Portfolio will be invested in a portfolio of equity and fixed income securities with the objective of earning a total return over time that exceeds the overall level of inflation and fees assessed to the Portfolio.
- Liquidity: To maintain sufficient liquidity in the majority of the Portfolio to provide for all anticipated withdrawals and transfers and to invest in issues with sufficient marketability to provide for unexpected withdrawals.
- Rate of Return: To generate investment returns that exceed the broad-based benchmarks stated below and to grow the investment Portfolio over time.

To meet these objectives, the Portfolio will be invested in a manner that emphasizes total return; that is, the aggregate return from capital appreciation and dividend/interest income.

### **Performance Comparison**

Primary Benchmark: The total Portfolio seeks to exceed the return of the following blended benchmark over a market cycle:

Liquidity Sleeve:

- 20% Bloomberg Short Government/Corporate Index (I09388 on Bloomberg)

Fixed Income Sleeve:

- 30% Bloomberg 1-5 Government/Credit Index (LD04STAT on Bloomberg)

Low Volatility Equity Sleeve:

- 50% MSCI USA Minimum Volatility (USD) Index

**Strategic Asset Allocation**

The long-term target asset mix for the portfolio is 20% liquidity, 30% fixed income and 50% low volatility equity. The acceptable ranges for the allocation of the Portfolio assets among the various asset classes are as follows:

	Strategic	High	Low
Total Low Volatility Equity	50%	55%	40%
Total Fixed Income	30%	40%	25%
Total Liquidity	20%	30%	15%

**Independent Investment Manager & Custodian**

An Investment Manager not affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will be appointed to manage the account subject to the guidelines herein. The Investment Manager will be reviewed periodically by the Budget and Finance Committee of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to ensure adherence to this Investment Policy Statement.

Similarly, a custodian bank not affiliated with the Investment Manager or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be appointed for the purposes of safekeeping of assets, trade processing and asset servicing of the portfolio. The independent custodian shall provide the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America with portfolio summary statements no less frequently than quarterly to show values for each asset and all transactions affecting assets within the portfolio, including additions and withdrawals.

This deliberate separation of duties between the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Investment Manager and the Custodian bank provides important protection of your investment portfolio against misappropriation, insolvency, misuse, theft, and/or loss.

## **Investment Guidelines**

### **Liquidity Sleeve of the Portfolio:**

#### **I. Duration and Maturity:**

- a. The Liquidity Sleeve will have a weighted average duration that ranges between 75% and 120% of the average duration of the Index, over an average market cycle, as calculated by the investment manager.
- b. The maximum maturity of any specific holding is 37 months from the date of purchase (i.e., trade date) to put date, maturity, or average life.
  - i. For purposes of calculating the maturity of a floating rate instrument, the maturity will be measured to the next reset date, if the underlying index resets on a regular predetermined interval.
  - ii. For purposes of the above, securities with put rights exercisable within 3 years will be deemed to have a maturity equal to the put date.

#### **II. Quality:**

- a. Bonds and other fixed-income obligations will be limited to obligations rated, at the time of purchase, equivalent to investment grade “Baa3/BBB rating category” or higher by at least two of the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.
- b. Commercial paper and other short-term securities will be limited to obligations rated, at the time of purchase, equivalent to second tier (A2, P2, F2) or higher by at least two of the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.
- c. The average credit quality of the Liquidity Sleeve on a weighted value basis will be equivalent to “AA” or higher based on the rating assigned to each security in the account at the time of purchase.
- d. The aggregate of second tier commercial paper and investment grade “Baa3/BBB rating category” securities will not exceed 20% of the total market value of the portfolio at the time of purchase

#### **III. Sector and Security Diversification:**

- a. Except for the securities described in Sections IV A and IV H, which may be purchased without limits, no more than 5% of the portfolio market value, (10% for mutual funds due to their inherent diversification) at the time of purchase, will be invested in any specific issue.

- b. No more than 65% of the portfolio value, at the time of purchase, will be invested in the aggregate value of security types listed in the eligible security section below, other than those described in Sections IV A, C and H.
- c. Repurchase agreements with any one counterparty may not exceed 20% of the portfolio value.

#### **IV. Eligible Securities:**

Subject to any applicable restrictions set forth above, eligible securities will include:

- a. Direct obligations issued or guaranteed by the U.S. Government, its agencies, instrumentalities or sponsored enterprises and repurchase agreements collateralized by such obligations.
- b. Domestic corporate obligations and dollar denominated foreign corporate, foreign government and supranational obligations.
- c. Short-term instruments, including but not limited to adjustable rate preferred, time deposits, commercial paper, certificates of deposit, bankers acceptances and floating rate notes, provided they meet the above restrictions.
- d. Mortgage-backed securities, (including CMO's – Collateralized Mortgage Obligations – and CMBS – Commercial Mortgage Backed Securities) issued by agencies or sponsored enterprises of the U.S. Government.
- e. Mortgage-backed securities (including CMO's and CMBS) issued by non-agency, private label entities.
- f. Asset-backed securities.
- g. Taxable municipal bonds.
- h. Money market funds with daily liquidity

Investments may be in the form of individual securities, mutual funds, exchange traded funds, private funds or separately managed accounts.

#### **Fixed Income Portion of Portfolio:**

- I.** Duration and Maturity: The core investment account will have a weighted average duration that normally ranges between 75% and 120% of the average duration of the Index, over an average market cycle, as calculated by the investment manager.
- II.** Maximum maturity of any specific holding will not exceed 7 years from the date of purchase (i.e., trade date) to put date, maturity, or average life.

For purposes of calculating the maturity of a floating rate instrument, the maturity will be measured to the next reset date, if the underlying index resets on a regular predetermined interval.

- a. For purposes of the above, securities with put rights exercisable within 10 years will be deemed to have a maturity equal to the put date.

### **III. Quality:**

- a. Bonds and other fixed-income obligations will be limited to obligations rated, at the time of purchase, equivalent to investment grade “Baa3/BBB rating category” or higher by at least two of the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.
- b. Commercial paper and other short-term securities will be limited to obligations rated, at the time of purchase, equivalent to second tier (A2, P2, F2) or higher by at least two of the nationally recognized statistical rating organizations.
- c. The average credit quality of the core investment account on a weighted value basis will be equivalent to “AA rating category” or higher based on the rating assigned to each security in the account at the time of purchase.
- d. The aggregate of second tier commercial paper and investment grade “Baa3/BBB rating category” securities will not exceed 20% of the total market value of the portfolio at the time of purchase.

### **IV. Sector and Security Diversification:**

- a. Except for the securities described in Sections IV A and IV I, which may be purchased without limits, no more than 5% of the portfolio market value (10% for mutual funds due to their inherent diversification) at the time of purchase, will be invested in any specific issue.
- b. No more than 65% of the portfolio value, at the time of purchase, will be invested in the aggregate value of security types listed in the eligible security section below, other than those described in Sections IV B, D and I.
- c. Repurchase agreements with any one counterparty may not exceed 20% of the portfolio value.

### **V. Eligible Securities:**

Subject to any applicable restrictions set forth above, eligible securities will include:

- a. Any security that, at the time of purchase, is a component of the Merrill Lynch 1-5 Government/Corporate (BBB rated and above) Index, the Merrill Lynch 1-3

- Year US Corporate & Government Index (BBB rated and above) and the Russell 1000 Index.
- b. Direct obligations issued or guaranteed by the U.S. Government, its agencies, instrumentalities or sponsored enterprises and repurchase agreements collateralized by such obligations.
  - c. Domestic corporate obligations and dollar denominated foreign corporate, foreign government and supranational obligations.
  - d. Short-term instruments, including but not limited to adjustable rate preferreds, time deposits, commercial paper, certificates of deposit, bankers acceptances and floating rate notes, provided they meet the above restrictions.
  - e. Mortgage-backed securities, (including CMO's - Collateralized Mortgage Obligations - and CMBS - Commercial Mortgage Backed Securities) issued by agencies or sponsored enterprises of the U.S. Government.
  - f. Mortgage-backed securities (including CMO's and CMBS) issued by non-agency, private label entities.
  - g. Asset-backed securities.
  - h. Taxable municipal bonds
  - i. Money market funds with daily liquidity

**Equity Portion of Portfolio:**

- I. Securities of U.S. companies: common stocks, convertible preferred stocks, convertible fixed income securities, real estate investment trusts and depository receipts.
- II. Domestic equity investments shall be well diversified among economic sectors, industry groups and individual securities.
- III. No more than 5% of the Portfolio's total assets, at the time of purchase, shall be invested in the equity of a single corporation, unless said corporation comprises more than 5% of the representative benchmark, in which case investment at time of purchase shall not exceed 2% more than the allocation in the benchmark.
- IV. Shares of open-end investment companies (mutual funds), ETFs and private funds which are consistent with the guidelines stated above are allowed.
- V. Constraints and Prohibited Investments.
- VI. Socially Responsible Investing: The core investment account is required to pursue its investment objectives subject to criteria of social responsibility that are consistent with the values of the ELCA. Each year the social criteria list will be provided to the investment manager for screening. The manager will be required to divest as soon as practical, consistent with prudent investment management, any portfolio securities issued

by companies on the social criteria lists. Investments in commingled funds/Exchange Traded Funds/mutual funds are not subject to socially responsible investing.

- VII.** Prohibited Investments: The core investment account may not invest in: non-U.S. dollar denominated securities; commodities or commodity contracts; call or put options of any kind; cryptocurrencies or digital assets of any kind; derivatives for speculative purposes - no margin or any speculative derivatives; short sales of securities; or direct real estate or other real assets.
- VIII.** Liquidity requirements for the core investment account will be communicated to the investment managers in writing from time to time by the ELCA.

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**ELCA SERVICE AND JUSTICE UNIT  
TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SUPPORT FOR  
LONG-TERM GLOBAL PERSONNEL**

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ELCA SERVICE AND JUSTICE UNIT

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF SUPPORT FOR LONG-TERM GLOBAL PERSONNEL

### PREFACE

- A. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Service and Justice staff (hereinafter called “ELCA Service and Justice”) are responsible for recommending ELCA global personnel policies to the ELCA Church Council for adoption. These policies, which govern long-term global personnel (hereafter called “personnel, missionary, or mission personnel”), are shared during missionary orientation and are in the ELCA Service and Justice “Personnel Policies and Expectations” document.
- B. The ELCA Service and Justice (Global Service) staff implement and support provisions for all personnel and, if changes are recommended, direct them to the ELCA Church Council for approval and adoption.
- C. Revisions to this document may be made by recommendation of Global Service to the Church Council at any time and may affect personnel provisions and benefits. Long-term personnel will be provided with copies of this document and informed of future revisions. Long-term personnel must review this document thoroughly, be familiar with its contents, and adhere to them.
- D. The Director of the Global Service team is responsible for ensuring the consistent and equitable administration of these terms and conditions of support and may approve exceptions in specific circumstances, in consultation with finance and human resources, as deemed appropriate.
- E. This document does not create, imply, or express a promise of ELCA Service and Justice for any person’s continued appointment or employment. Both ELCA Service and Justice and long-term personnel have the right to terminate their appointment or employment at any time.

### 1.0 FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Compensation and benefits are intended to provide a reasonable and adequate level of support. The support system is not based on a wage or salary system related to job content, productivity, or market conditions. Total support includes a base salary plus other allowances and support provisions as outlined in this document. Components are built into the support system to compensate for the differences between living in the United States and an international setting. Some support provisions are designed to assist with expenses and are not intended to pay all the costs incurred.

The ELCA Service and Justice support system is based on the following:

#### 1.1 Adequacy

The level of support is intended to provide resources to enable reasonable and healthy living conditions. ELCA Service and Justice will also consider the needs of personnel upon return to the United States.

#### 1.2 Vocational and Professional Equity

Support provisions are not affected by the quantity, type, or intensity of the specific tasks and

responsibilities undertaken, or by the personnel's education, status, or professional standing. There is no parallel relationship between ELCA Service and Justice's support provisions and U.S. market-based salary and benefits.

### **1.3 Global Equity**

ELCA Service and Justice seeks to provide equitable support for all personnel regardless of their country of service. Support provisions are adjusted to reflect the cost of goods and services in the country served and in-country income tax liabilities.

### **1.4 ELCA Churchwide Support**

Financial support for long-term personnel is based upon churchwide organization commitments through the ELCA Service and Justice budget. To foster healthy relationships and ensure support for compensation and benefits, all long-term personnel shall participate in the missionary sponsorship program.

### **1.5 Training Opportunities**

ELCA training on sexual harassment is mandatory. Other training opportunities offered by the Churchwide organization or ministries may be mandatory.

## **2.0 TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT**

### **2.1 Employment**

ELCA Service and Justice employs personnel following their appointment to a pattern of service. This service is intended to provide continuity in strategic mission programs and ministries.

Employment begins with an orientation program or as otherwise specified, in the appointment action issued through the ELCA Service and Justice and continues through reintegration. Unless in conflict with the provisions of this document, personnel shall comply with all applicable ELCA policies for the full duration of their employment, including, but not limited to, the ELCA personnel policies. Personnel are also required to meet and model the standards and expectations for ELCA Service and Justice personnel described in this document, "Personnel Policies and Expectations," "Security Policies and Guidelines," and any other official ELCA Service and Justice documents as developed to support the work of ELCA Service and Justice personnel.

ELCA Service and Justice will determine the missionary's specific assignment in mutual consultation with companion churches or agencies. The assignment parameters, including work schedules, will be developed in cooperation with the local supervisor and/or the companion church or agency.

### **2.2 Length of a Term of Service**

The length of a term of service is outlined in the missionary's appointment action letter. The term of service begins with the corresponding service appointment date. Subsequent terms are determined in consultation with the missionary, ELCA Service and Justice, and the companion church or partner.

### **2.3 Review and Evaluation**

Review shall be an ongoing process between personnel and the ELCA Service and Justice. The area program desk is specifically responsible for evaluating and assessing the ongoing ministry and the missionary's service.

#### *a. Annual Review*

The area program desk will conduct an annual review with all personnel to facilitate conversations

regarding work assignments, expectations, and planning. Where possible, the local supervisor or others related to the work will participate in the review.

*b. Three-Year Review*

Appointments shall be reviewed in the third year of every term of service to evaluate the continuation of the assignment and the missionary's service. ELCA Service and Justice, the companion church or partner, and the missionary will be involved in the three-year review process. The area program desk will communicate the structure of this review and evaluation.

Based on the three-year review, ELCA Service and Justice will determine future directions of the appointment.

*c. Other Reviews and Assessments*

ELCA Service and Justice may evaluate continued employment when there is a change in assignment, mission priorities, or personal status. ELCA Service and Justice may also evaluate employment status in cases where personal or work-related issues adversely impact the ministry, or at the sole discretion of ELCA Service and Justice.

ELCA Service and Justice may use professional assessments and evaluation tools to assist in this evaluation. The area program desk may conduct an evaluation at any time, but it will generally be conducted during the home assignment. In such cases, continued employment shall be conditional upon complying with the requests and upon an evaluation by ELCA Service and Justice, among other relevant factors.

**2.4 Resignation Protocol**

When discerning an end to service, personnel should consult with the area program desk and the leadership of the companion church or partner before making any decision. This permits an opportunity to discuss work and family issues and possible alternative arrangements as may be applicable. If the missionary decides to resign, they must provide 90 calendar days' advance notice to the ELCA Service and Justice Unit for planning considerations. If the notice of resignation is not provided to the ELCA Service and Justice Unit prior to 90 calendar days of the end of service date, the End-of-service Support provisions will be determined at the discretion of ELCA Service and Justice Unit. End-of-service Support provisions are detailed in "12.0 End-of-service Support."

**2.5 Closure of Service**

ELCA Service and Justice reserves the right to terminate personnel employment at any time. ELCA Service and Justice will give personnel written notice specifying an effective termination date. End-of-service Support provisions are detailed in "12.0 End-of-service Support."

**2.6 Types of Long-term Employment**

*a. Assigned Appointment*

The salary, compensation, benefits, and support are based upon one person filling an Assigned Appointment.

*b. Assigned/Associate Appointment*

If the person filling an Assigned Appointment is married or in a civil partnership, the spouse will apply for an Associate Appointment. The procedure follows the usual candidacy evaluation and call process. The description of responsibilities for an associate appointment will be decided upon in consultation with the area program director and shared with Global Service. The Associate Appointment will end at the same time as the Assigned Appointment.

The base salary for a couple in an Assigned /Associate Appointment is equivalent to 145% of the base salary for an Assigned Appointment. The couple elects to receive this support in one of the following three ways:

- The person in the Assigned Appointment receives 100% of the base salary, and the Associate Appointment receives an additional 45%. Thus, both people are employed, have a job record, have a Social Security record, and have individual membership in Portico Benefit Services.
- The person serving in the Assigned Appointment receives the ‘full’ 145% of the base salary. In this case, the person serving in the Associate Appointment does not maintain a separate job record, Social Security record, pension account, or eligibility for disability benefits.
- The 145% base salary may be split equally between the person in the Assigned Appointment and the Associate Appointment (72.5% of base for each person).

For all three options of salary support distribution, see “2.9 Outside Employment” and “4.4 Support from Other Sources” related to outside employment.

*c. Assigned/Accompanying Appointment*

An Accompanying Appointment is a service category assigned by ELCA Service and Justice to an individual who accompanies an assigned missionary. The accompanying individual will receive benefits under the assigned missionary. The benefits include medical, dental, travel, and visa expenses. Those in an accompanying appointment will not receive salary or pension contributions. No specific responsibilities will be assigned.

*d. Full-time Team Appointment*

When a couple fills two Assigned Appointments, both are supported in a Full-Time Team Appointment. The base salary for each individual is 83.5% of the base salary for the Assigned Appointment. Both appointments will have a separate position description.

*e. Part-time Team Appointment*

A Part-Time Team Appointment may be designated when a couple mutually fills an Assigned Appointment. The salary designation options are identical to those that apply to the Assigned/Associate Appointment, as described in “2.6.b. Types of Long-term Employment.” Each position will have a separate position description.

**2.7 Pension Contributions for Types of Long-term Employment** (See “2.6 Terms and Conditions of Support”).

The defined compensation for payment of the pension contribution will be the base salary plus 30% of the base salary added for housing. ELCA Service and Justice will make the required employer contribution and any supplemental contributions it designates. The current pension contribution rates are:

- a. Assigned Appointment: 14.5%.
- b. Assigned/Associate Appointments:
  1. Paid to the Assigned and the Associate missionary (100/45 split): 14.5%.
  2. Paid in the name of the Assigned missionary: 12.25%.
    - i. The pension contribution rate is set at 12.25% to compensate for a higher Social Security payout upon retirement due to the higher combined salary paid in the name of the Assigned missionary compared to a split in the salary paid to both the Assigned missionary and the Associate missionary.
  3. Paid to the Assigned and the Associate missionary (72.5/72.5 split): 14.5%.
- c. Full-time Team appointments: 14.5%
- d. Part-time Team Appointments: (See 2.7.b.1, 2.7.b.2, and 2.7.b.3 above)

## **2.8 Marriage/Civil Partnership During Appointment**

The appointment of a spouse or civil partner will be decided in consultation with the ELCA Global Mission Team.

- If the spouse or civil partner is also a long-term, assigned missionary with the ELCA, both appointments automatically revert to a Full-time Team appointment as of the marriage date or civil partnership in the same country of service; see “2.6 Types of Long-term Employment.”
- Aetna International guidelines state that the spouse or civil partner is eligible for medical coverage even if not considered an ELCA Service and Justice missionary. Global Personnel are responsible for working directly with Aetna International to ensure proper procedure and documentation.
- If children are involved in the marriage or civil partnership, Aetna International considers them eligible for coverage if they are dependents of the ELCA Service and Justice missionary. Global Personnel are responsible for working directly with Aetna International to ensure proper procedure and documentation.
- ELCA Service and Justice will provide the following benefits for the spouse or civil partner (even if they are not considered a missionary): couple-level benefits for home assignment and end of service, including shipping, home assignment housing, and air travel.
- ELCA Service and Justice does not assume other financial responsibilities for a non-Associate spouse or civil partner (e.g., in-country visa, work permit, or local transportation).
- ELCA Service and Justice will provide the following benefits for dependent children of the spouse or civil partner living full-time with the ELCA Service and Justice missionary: education, home assignment, and end-of-service travel. These benefits will be provided according to the provisions outlined in this document: Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-Term Mission Personnel.
- If the spouse or civil partner desires an Associate Appointment, the regular candidate process will apply. This includes application, interview, and appointment.
- If the spouse or civil partner receives an Associate Appointment and is not considered eligible for employment in the U.S. (based on Citizenship and Immigration Services regulations), combined support for the Assigned/Associate Appointment will be paid in the assigned person's name. Refer to “2.9 Outside Employment” if spouse is considering outside employment.
- Personnel are responsible for any U.S. visa or immigration status processes and/or fees, including during home assignment and end of service.

## **2.9 Outside Employment**

Personnel serving in an Assigned or Full-time Team Appointment are prohibited from seeking employment outside their ELCA Service and Justice appointment without written express permission from the area program desk. Personnel report any outside income to ELCA Service and Justice annually.

Personnel serving in an Associate Appointment may seek outside employment in consultation with the area program desk. These personnel also report this income to the ELCA-Service and Justice within 30 days. ELCA Service and Justice salary support for the Associate Appointment may be affected by income from other sources, as stated in “4.4 Support from Other Sources.” This also applies to Associate salary support paid in the name of the Assigned Appointment.

## **3.0 ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPORTING**

This section further elaborates on missionary accountability as stated in “Personnel Policies and Expectations.”

### **3.1 Personnel in Positions of Leadership**

Personnel shall not assume positions of elected leadership in companion churches or agencies or serve as a director of significant programs or institutions of the companion church unless authorized in writing by

ELCA Service and Justice and after consultation with the companion church or partner. (See “Personnel Policies and Expectations,” section 4.2).

Personnel who have management or administrative responsibility on behalf of ELCA Service and Justice and their funds must account for such funds in coordination with the assigned finance team.

### **3.2 Personal Gifts**

To avoid the appearance of impropriety, personnel are strictly prohibited from soliciting or requesting gifts from individuals or organizations they may encounter through their work as Mission Personnel. Personnel may accept and retain unsolicited one-time, infrequent, cash or in-kind gifts from non-family member individuals or organizations they may encounter through their work as Mission Personnel, when those gifts total no more than \$75 and are given as part of a special event or seasonal holiday. Cash or in-kind gifts of this kind that exceed \$75 in value should be reported to the ELCA Development Team for approval, before acceptance, as practicable. If approved, personnel will receive a written approval memorandum documenting the decision. However, personnel may also be asked to remit or return unapproved gifts and should be prepared for this possibility when deciding whether to accept such a gift. In the case of gifts from individuals or organizations that personnel encounter through their mission work, when cash or in-kind gifts exceed \$150 in total from any single source (individual or organization), in a single calendar year, all subsequent gifts, regardless of cash or in-kind value, must be reviewed and approved by the ELCA Development Team.

There is no reporting requirement or acceptance limit for gifts from family members or private individuals with whom the recipient has a pre-existing personal relationship, when those individuals have no nexus or connection with the ELCA or the personnel’s mission work, nor are they seeking one (e.g., a prospective vendor). However, accepting any gift from any source that would reflect unfavorably on the ELCA, a companion church, or a partner is highly discouraged. Mission Personnel are strongly advised to avoid gifts that could raise questions of impropriety, considering the context and relationship with the recipient, the ELCA, companion church, or partner. When in doubt, personnel are encouraged to ask the ELCA Development Team for advice and use their best discretion.

Honoraria are considered income, not gifts, and must be reported as such. According to IRS regulations, cash or non-cash gifts of any amount received by personnel from non-family members are considered earned income and must be reported. Any gifts retained by personnel will be processed by the ELCA, and reported as income on W-2 statements, but will not be factored into pension contributions. Employees may also participate in reasonable, normal relationship-building activities such as meals, entertainment events, and similar activities. An employee must report such participation to their supervisor.

Notwithstanding any of the above, personnel may not accept gifts of any kind from outside vendors doing business with or seeking to do business with the companion church, the ELCA, or members of ELCA congregations.

### **3.3 Reporting to Area Program Desk**

Global personnel are appointed by the ELCA and are accountable to the ELCA. This relationship of accountability and support occurs through the ELCA Service and Justice, primarily with the Area Program Desk and with the Global Service and Finance teams. As representatives of the ELCA, global personnel serve in a manner congruent with the ELCA Service and Justice’s stated practice of mission through the accompaniment model.

### **3.4 Reporting to ELCA Synod**

Rostered personnel must follow the expectations and requirements of the ELCA and their synod of

roster. They are required to submit an annual rostered leader's report. Lay personnel are encouraged to provide their synod with an annual written report. ELCA Service and Justice encourages personnel to maintain regular contact with their synod, including, if possible, attendance at synod assemblies and visits to the synod office while on home assignment.

### **3.5 Reporting to Local Supervisor**

Personnel are expected to conform to the evaluation and reporting requirements requested by their local supervisors, if applicable. If not, see "3.3 Reporting to Area Program Desk."

## **4.0 SALARY SUPPORT AND ADJUSTMENTS**

The ELCA Office of the Treasurer staff will support the Service and Justice Unit by reviewing the annual salary schedule and the associated allocation requests. All salary figures referenced in this document constitute taxable income.

### **4.1 Goods and Services Differential**

A goods and services differential (GSD) provides equitable support among high-cost and low-cost countries of service. An outside firm computes the appropriate adjustments for a given country. This GSD adjustment may be positive or negative and applies only while personnel are in the country of service. A full description of the GSD adjustment is available on request.

#### *a. Countries with positive GSD*

GSD will not be adjusted if personnel are outside their country of service for 30 days or less on work-related travel or vacation. The differential will be adjusted starting on the 31st day outside the country of service.

In the following instances, GSD is adjusted effective immediately upon the missionary's departure from the country of service: home assignment, vacation in conjunction with a home assignment, reintegration, medical, personal, sabbatical, or extended leave.

#### *b. Countries with negative GSD*

If personnel are outside their country of service for any reason, GSD is adjusted effective immediately with the missionary's departure from their assigned country of service.

### **4.2 Income Tax**

All salary paid by the ELCA is considered taxable income. Foreign income taxes assessed on ELCA-paid salary will be withheld as a deduction from the employee's base salary. Income taxes levied by the country of service on salary provided by ELCA Service and Justice are reimbursable expenses. ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse foreign income taxes only on the salary it has paid. Any foreign taxes levied by the country of service on outside income earned by a spouse in an Associate Appointment are the spouse's personal responsibility. In accordance with federal law, personnel are required to file annual U.S. income tax returns. The ELCA Office of the Treasurer cannot provide individual tax advice, and personnel are responsible for any personal U.S. tax liability.

### **4.3 Social Security**

Social Security taxes are computed based on taxable income. Lay personnel who are U.S. citizens must participate in the U.S. Social Security program. ELCA Service and Justice will pay the employer's share of the Social Security program. ELCA Service and Justice will determine a Social Security offset allowance, which will be added to the gross salary for rostered ministers. Ordained personnel who are U.S. citizens are personally responsible for paying any required Social Security contributions. Social Security Offset Allowance is considered taxable income.

#### **4.4 Support from Other Sources**

##### *a. Assigned, Part-time and Full-time Team Appointments*

Any cash received regularly from sources other than ELCA Service and Justice is considered outside income and is to be reported to ELCA Service and Justice. This includes regular cash gifts from individuals or congregations.

In some circumstances, the local church or institution may provide salary support or other cash provisions directly to ELCA personnel. Such support is considered part of the ELCA Service and Justice compensation package and must be reported to ELCA Service and Justice, which will adjust its compensation to account for this local support.

##### *b. Associate Appointments*

Those serving in Associate Appointments who have outside employment can retain income from that employment. However, the Associate Appointment's ELCA Service and Justice salary continues in full only until the total income (ELCA Service and Justice salary plus outside income) equals that of the Assigned Appointment, adjusted by GSD. As income from other sources increases, ELCA Service and Justice will reduce its salary support for the associate on a sliding scale. The associate must report this income to the ELCA Service and Justice within 30 days. ELCA Service and Justice support is reduced once the combined total Associate income (regular Associate support plus outside income) exceeds the regular Assigned ELCA Service and Justice support. Even if direct salary support is no longer provided for personnel in an Associate Appointment, all other support benefits remain subject to "Policies and Expectations."

### **5.0 PERSONAL SUPPORT**

#### **5.1 Pension and Other Benefits Plan**

ELCA Service and Justice provides a comprehensive range of benefits through membership in Portico Benefit Services. This includes the administration of pensions, primary medical coverage, disability benefits, and more. Personnel are encouraged to be fully aware of the resources available through Portico Benefit Services.

ELCA Service and Justice long-term personnel are enrolled in Portico Benefit Services (medical and pension programs), which will treat ELCA Service and Justice as the employer for their purposes. ELCA Service and Justice may sponsor rostered and lay missionaries.

Portico Benefit Services provides a detailed description of the program. Personnel are responsible for communicating directly with Portico regarding investment elections, changes, updates, or their membership status.

#### **5.2 Medical Insurance**

Aetna International covers long-term and letter of agreement personnel through Portico Benefit Services. Medical claims must be directed to the insurance provider, not ELCA Service and Justice.

#### **5.3 Return Benefit Allowance**

The Return Benefit Allowance assists personnel in reintegrating into the U.S. at the end of service with ELCA Service and Justice.

At the beginning of their service, personnel may elect to receive this benefit as an addition to their monthly pay instead of as contributions to an ELCA Mission Investment Fund as part of a one-time election. Personnel will not be able to modify this election once it is made. This benefit does not apply to a spouse or civil partner who is not under appointment as an Associate. ELCA Service and Justice

will not pay this allowance on their behalf.

The amount of the Return Benefit Allowance is:

- a. \$1,250 per year for an Assigned Appointment.
- b. \$750 per year for an Associate Appointment.
- c. \$1000 per individual per year for Full-time Team or Part-time Team appointments.
- d. An individual in an accompanying appointment is not eligible to receive this benefit.

These funds will be automatically deposited monthly in an account set up in the employee missionary's name with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. They may be withdrawn at the end of one's service with the ELCA Service and Justice. Contributions to the Return Benefit Allowance are not provided during the period of reintegration.

#### **5.4 Children's Savings Plan**

The children's savings plan is designed to assist with the costs of a child's post-secondary education or transition to independent living. This benefit applies to each biological or legally adopted child. It begins at the start of the employment period if there are eligible children or at the time of birth or legal adoption of a child during the employment period. At the time of birth or legal adoption, the parent must contact Global Service for official Mission Investment Fund (MIF) forms. The allowance will be deposited in an account bearing the parent or parents' name and invested in an account set up by ELCA Service and Justice with the ELCA Mission Investment Fund. ELCA Service and Justice will contribute a monthly allowance of \$50 per child to a Children's Savings Plan account. The monthly benefit terminates when the child reaches the age of 18 or the parent's employment concludes, whichever occurs first. At that time, the parent(s) may withdraw the funds to assist with further education costs or other purposes.

#### **5.5 Student Loan Assistance**

Long-term personnel may apply for assistance toward personal monthly student loan obligations. This benefit applies to the monthly payment of post-secondary education loans contracted prior to service with ELCA Service and Justice. An application for this benefit includes:

- a. Evidence of debt and a copy of the repayment schedule
- b. Evidence that the debt is a legally contracted student loan (personal loans do not qualify)
- c. A statement of any other repayment assistance being provided.
- d. A statement that the loan(s) incurred was/were intended for education-related expenses and included no other personal liabilities (such as a car loan, credit card debt, or other personal debt).

For purposes of this program, ELCA Service and Justice reserves the right to reject any loan that it determines does not qualify under these criteria at its sole discretion. The student loan assistance benefit provides 50% of the monthly obligation, up to a maximum benefit of \$150 per month.

#### **5.6 Additional Insurance**

Portico Benefit Services offers both basic and voluntary supplemental life insurance benefits. The basic life insurance benefit is provided at no cost to personnel and includes an Accidental Death and Dismemberment (AD&D) benefit. The voluntary supplemental life insurance benefit is available through payroll deduction. Personnel are responsible for any additional life, disability, property, or other insurance.

### **6.0 ONBOARDING AND PRE-DEPLOYMENT SUPPORT**

#### **6.1 Mission Preparation Program**

ELCA Service and Justice provides orientation and preparation for new personnel. Participation is

required unless ELCA Service and Justice determines that participation is impossible. ELCA Service and Justice will cover the costs related to orientation and preparation.

## **6.2 Language Training**

Language training is provided when ELCA Service and Justice deem it necessary. Decisions around initial language training is made in consultation between Global Service, the area program desk, and mission personnel. While in service, the area program desk can grant additional language study at its discretion, in consultation with Global Service. Global Service and the area program desk must preapprove language study.

## **6.3 Passport and Visa Fees**

ELCA Service and Justice reimburses personnel for visa fees for work-related travel in their countries of service, but personnel are responsible for any passport fees.

### *a. Regional Representatives*

For regional representatives, expenses related to adding additional passport pages and a new passport (if additional pages are not an option) may be submitted for reimbursement.

## **6.4 Pre-Service Medical Exam and Psychological Evaluation**

Personnel must undergo a pre-service medical exam and submit documentation to be reimbursed for any costs of the ELCA Service and Justice medical protocol not covered by insurance. Personnel are responsible for any additional medical services or testing. Personnel must submit examination results, including medical clearance for the proposed service, to ELCA Service and Justice prior to departure for the country of service. A psychological evaluation is required for all long-term personnel. Personnel will provide authorization to share their psychological evaluation with Global Service.

## **6.5 Travel to the Country of Service**

ELCA Service and Justice will provide direct travel at the most economical rate from the missionary's principal U.S. residence to the country of service. Personnel must plan through ELCA Service and Justice; personal travel plans will not be reimbursed.

## **6.6 Relocation Allowance**

ELCA Service and Justice will grant personnel an allowance for relocation costs. Personnel are encouraged to purchase household goods in the country of service, but relocation funds may be used to ship personal effects to the country of service. If a missionary chooses to transport personal items, they have sole responsibility for the arrangement and payment of any baggage fees, shipment or air freight, insurance, customs charges, or in-country transportation and delivery charges. Personnel will be responsible for any costs over the amount ELCA Service and Justice provides.

The relocation allowance provided at the start of service is as follows:

- a. Single: \$2,000
- b. Couple: \$3,500
- c. Family: \$3,500 plus \$500 per dependent child.

## **6.7 Storage of Personal Effects**

ELCA Service and Justice will assist missionaries with up to \$75 per month for eight years with appropriate documentation. Expenses above \$75 are the responsibility of the missionary. ELCA Service and Justice is not liable for any stored items.

## **7.0 IN-SERVICE SUPPORT**

### **7.1 Housing**

ELCA Service and Justice is responsible for arranging housing in the country of service. Personnel who choose not to accept the housing provided acknowledge that any support for alternative housing is subject exclusively to ELCA Service and Justice's determination. ELCA Service and Justice assumes no liability for the consequences of personal housing decisions other than as expressly stated in this document.

ELCA Service and Justice will provide no cash assistance or reimbursement for U.S. housing prior to the missionary's initial departure to their country of service.

If property insurance is required as part of a rental agreement, then personnel must document such a requirement (e.g., with a copy of the lease agreement or a letter from their landlord) for the cost to be reimbursed. Absent such documentation, these expenses may not be reimbursable. Any insurance covering the value of personal items in the rental unit is considered a personal expense. ELCA Service and Justice "self-insures" any furnishings it purchases, meaning that it will replace any item that has been damaged, destroyed, stolen, etc., rather than purchase property insurance.

### **7.2 Furnishings**

ELCA Service and Justice provides support for basic household furnishings. Assistance with furnishings is related to the following:

- a. Kitchen/Dining Room: stove, refrigerator, table, and six chairs
- b. Living Room: sofa, two easy chairs, two end tables or coffee tables, two lamps, a desk and chair, bookcase, fans or heaters as necessitated by the climate
- c. Bedroom: bed, dresser, nightstand, lamp (adjusted by number of family members)
- d. Other: washing machine

If the housing option lacks the items listed above or essential built-in equipment (e.g., closets, sinks, ceiling lights, water heater, generator, etc.), personnel should report this to the area program desk and provide a cost estimate for approval before purchasing any repairing/replacement item(s). Any items purchased without the written approval of the area program desk and global service may not be reimbursed. Personnel are responsible for other home furnishings or purchases to outfit the household.

Any home furnishings provided at the time of arrival or acquired and/or reimbursed by the ELCA during the assignment, shall normally remain in the residence and may not be removed by personnel without the express approval of ELCA Service and Justice.

### **7.3 Utilities and Services**

While the missionary is in the country of service, ELCA Service and Justice will provide assistance with utilities and services including:

- a. Electricity, gas, water, sewage, and garbage disposal will be reimbursed at 70% of the total expense.
- b. Eligible expenses for home internet service, one telephone (landline), and up to two cell phones, excluding hardware, will be reimbursed at 70% of the total cost. Personnel are responsible for any additional expenses. ELCA Service and Justice does not reimburse cell phone costs for children. If services are bundled together, the area program desk will determine the appropriate level of reimbursement.
- c. ELCA Service and Justice will pay 100% of the installation cost of reimbursed utilities.
- d. If a required deposit gets credited to the utility account, ELCA Service and Justice will cover 70% of that deposit, and the missionary will cover the remaining 30%. If the deposit is held for the duration of service and then refunded, ELCA Service and Justice will pay the entirety of that deposit if it is refunded to ELCA Service and Justice at the end of the missionary's

service.

- f. ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse the rental cost of a post office box, if needed, and in consultation with the area program desk.
- g. Personnel are responsible for any hardware or software used for telephone, cell phone, or internet.

#### **7.4 Microsoft Office Home Use and ELCA Email**

All ELCA Service and Justice personnel are eligible to install Office 365 apps at no cost on work or personal devices. This program enables personnel to get licensed copies of most Microsoft Office desktop applications for their computers. Contact the area program desk for more information.

Personnel will be issued an ELCA email address and are expected to use it solely for business-related communications. All personnel are required to use this designated ELCA email account.

#### **7.5 Technology for Regional Representatives and Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) Country Coordinators**

Regional Representatives and YAGM Country Coordinators may purchase a cell phone, computer (including antivirus protection), printer, and printer ink and be reimbursed in consultation with the area program desk if that device is exclusively for office use and essential to the work. Personnel are encouraged to purchase these items in the most economical and feasible manner. ELCA Service and Justice will not assist personnel in purchasing and/or maintaining personal cell phones, computers, or printers.

#### **7.6 Transportation**

The area program desk will determine the transportation required for and appropriate to the work assignment. This determination will be based on local transportation, leasing options, vehicles provided by Service and Justice, and personal vehicles. Personnel who will be driving in the local context must comply with local driving laws and regulations.

##### *a. Local Transportation*

ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse the entirety of public transportation costs for work-related travel or 70% of a monthly or annual transit pass. In the case of rideshares and taxis, 100% of the work-related travel will be reimbursed. Proper documentation should be submitted for reimbursement.

##### *b. Leasing vehicles Local transportation*

The missionary will research options for leasing a vehicle in the country of service. If this is an option, the missionary will consult with the area program desk and Global Service.

##### *c. Vehicles provided by ELCA Service and Justice*

When either ELCA Service and Justice has already provided a vehicle in the country of service or deems it necessary to provide a vehicle for personnel, the area program desk will work with the personnel to assign a vehicle. Any transportation provided by the ELCA or a companion church body may be used only in accordance with a separate Vehicle Use Agreement, which shall govern the conditions and responsibilities of such use.

If missionary personnel have been assigned a vehicle provided by ELCA Service and Justice, ELCA Service and Justice will provide for its care and maintenance, including gas, oil changes, minor repairs, documentation, insurance, and licensing/registration fees. Personnel must contact the area program desk to authorize any repairs that are over \$500.

In consultation with the area program desk, personnel are responsible for securing and maintaining insurance and licensing/registration for the vehicle provided by ELCA Service and Justice assigned to them and providing such information to ELCA Service and Justice when requested.

Personnel may use the vehicle provided by ELCA Service and Justice for (non-reimbursable) personal travel but must document personal mileage (in either miles or kilometers) in their vehicle log, and submit this mileage as part of their personal expenses. Personal use includes, but is not limited to, personal visits, shopping trips, eating out, extracurricular activities for children, church attendance (if not work-related), etc.

If the missionary does not complete a vehicle log for the vehicle provided by ELCA Service and Justice, they will be responsible for 30% of the vehicle's basic care and maintenance costs (gas, oil changes, etc.), with ELCA Service and Justice to reimburse the remaining 70%.

*d. Personal vehicles.*

If a missionary purchases a personal vehicle, ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse work-related travel if miles/kilometers are documented in a vehicle log and submitted as a work-related expense. Personnel are responsible for all other vehicle costs.

*e. Driver's license in the country of service.*

If ELCA Service and Justice has provided personnel with a vehicle, it will reimburse the cost of a driver's license in the country of service. If ELCA Service and Justice have not provided a vehicle and use of a borrowed vehicle is not required for the assignment, personnel will be responsible for the cost of a driver's license in the country of service.

## **7.7 Vacation / Holidays**

ELCA Service and Justice provides an annual vacation. The amount of vacation leave in the first calendar year of service will be determined based on the hiring date. Following the first calendar year of service, all personnel will receive four weeks of vacation per year. After the first term of service, personnel will receive five weeks of vacation per year. All vacation must be taken in conversation with and approval from the area program director. Personnel may not carry over unused vacation days. Extended school vacations or breaks are not considered additional vacation time.

Paid holidays will be granted in accordance with national holidays in the country of service. ELCA Service and Justice grants salaried personnel two days paid leave for Christmas and two days paid leave for Easter, if these are not provided locally. Personnel must consult with their local supervisor prior to taking these holidays.

## **7.8 Notification of Travel**

To maintain personnel safety and security, ELCA Service and Justice requires prior notice of any travel outside the assignment location. Personnel must provide detailed travel information to the area program desk at least 10 business days before the first date of any travel. In case of emergency travel, personnel must communicate the detailed travel information to the area program desk immediately. For overnight travel, including work-related travel or vacation, personnel must provide travel details (place, length of stay, contact information, etc.) to the area program desk and a local contact person. For travel outside the country of service, personnel must provide prior notification to the area program desk, including itinerary, length of stay, and contact information.

## **7.9 Travel Arrangements**

Personnel must make their initial travel plans from the U.S. to their country of service in consultation with Global Service and the ELCA-designated travel agency.

In consultation with the area program desk, personnel can make travel arrangements back to their U.S. residence at the completion of their service, their home assignment, or any other travel provided and approved by ELCA Service and Justice, in one of two ways: (1) Book the return flight through the ELCA-

designated travel agency, or (2) work with a local travel agent in the country of service.

If personnel choose the second option, they must still contact the travel agency for an airfare quote before asking the area program desk to approve travel. Personnel will be reimbursed for the least expensive option of the two quotes. For end-of-service or home assignment travel, ELCA Service and Justice will provide only for the direct, most economical travel to the personnel's U.S. residence. If personnel make additional stops on the way back, the travel agency must issue a direct airfare quote so that the area program desk can determine reimbursement. Personnel are responsible for any additional costs.

To pay ticket costs, personnel can either request an advance from the area program desk or submit the expense for reimbursement on their next logistics report. The report must have documentation of the charges and confirmation of a fare quote from the travel agency.

### **7.10 Children's Education**

Global Service will consult with the area program desk and personnel about opportunities for children's education in the country of service. The area program desk will review with the personnel options for children's education for primary and secondary school. ELCA Service and Justice will provide education assistance toward the costs of one year of kindergarten (child must be age 5 or older), followed by primary and secondary education. Biologically or legally adopted children of personnel are eligible for education assistance. All such assistance is taxable income. The missionary's contribution toward these costs will vary with the variety of schooling scenarios.

Further information is available on request.

*a. Local international school.*

When the personnel's children attend a local school in the country of service, ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse the costs of tuition, required textbooks, and transportation to and from the local school for regular study, up to an amount it predetermines. All other school-related costs are the responsibility of personnel and are not reimbursable. Personnel must pay any reimbursable costs related to their children's education.

*b. Homeschooling.*

In consultation with Global Service, the area program desk must approve proposed costs for homeschooling or correspondence courses for primary and/or secondary school annually. ELCA Service and Justice can advance funds or provide reimbursement but cannot pay education costs directly to the school.

*c. If the options stated above are not feasible, additional education support for missionary children can be explored.*

If the missionary secures prior approval from Global Service, it will reimburse 70% of the cost (not including travel) of any education testing and/or consultations for children, up to a maximum of \$300 annually. If personnel need additional educational support for their child, they should consult ELCA Service and Justice. Global Service will determine any additional support on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the area program desk.

### **7.11 College-Age Children's Shipping Allowance**

Upon specific request, ELCA Service and Justice will provide personnel with a one-time allowance of \$500. This allowance is granted when a child completes secondary school and intends to ship their personal effects back to the U.S. or other applicable location.

### **7.12 College-Age Children's Travel**

When a child of personnel completes secondary school, ELCA Service and Justice will provide them with a one-way ticket from the country of service to the U.S. or other applicable location. However, this travel must be arranged in consultation with and upon prior approval from the area program desk.

Upon request, ELCA Service and Justice will provide college-age children living outside the country of service with up to two direct round-trip airfare tickets to the personnel's country of service over the course of a four-year college education period. Travel must be made in consultation with and upon prior approval from the area program desk.

### **7.13 Dependent Children Remaining in the U.S.**

If personnel are divorced and have dependent children from that relationship who will remain in the U.S. during their period of service, the following provisions may apply, depending on the divorce decree:

- a. Upon submission of appropriate documentation regarding parental responsibility, ELCA Service and Justice will provide medical coverage under the family plan through Aetna International.
- b. Upon submission of appropriate documentation regarding visitation arrangements, ELCA Service and Justice will provide two direct round-trip air tickets for dependent children to visit their parent(s) in the country of service during their secondary school period. No assistance will be provided for an accompanying guardian.
- c. Upon submission of appropriate documentation regarding parental responsibility to assist with postsecondary education costs/support, ELCA Service and Justice will provide personnel with the Children's Saving Plan.

### **7.14 Vaccines Required for Country of Service**

In consultation with the area program desk, ELCA Service and Justice will cover the portion of costs not covered by Aetna International for vaccines required for the country of service.

#### *a. Malaria Prophylaxis.*

If personnel are serving in a malaria-endemic area, ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse the costs of malaria prophylaxis. The area program desk will have input into what areas require such medication. Personnel should first submit the cost of malaria medication to Aetna International. This also applies to personnel traveling to a malaria-endemic area as part of their work assignment.

### **7.15 Bank Fees**

ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse bank fees up to \$50 per month in consultation with the area program desk and Global Service.

#### *a. Young Adult in Global Mission Country Coordinators*

For personnel who manage Young Adult in Global Mission program budgets and when various cash withdrawals are needed, the ELCA will provide additional support. The amount of support will be determined in consultation with the area program desk, the leadership of the Young Adult in Global Mission program, and Global Service.

#### *b. Excessive, regular, bank fees*

If regular bank fees in the country of service are consistently higher than \$75 per month, the ELCA will reimburse bank fees at a rate of 70%. Before requesting this reimbursement, missionaries need to be in communication with area program desks for additional information.

## **8.0 PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT**

### **8.1 Missionary Conference**

Personnel are expected to participate in the Missionary Conference. Exceptions are made through the area program desk and in consultation with Global Service.

### **8.2 Exit Interviews**

Personnel will have an exit interview at the end of their service. Global Service and area program desks will communicate the schedule and structure of these conversations to personnel in advance.

### **8.3 Continuing Education and Sabbatical**

After two years of service, long-term personnel may request assistance toward continuing education, a study program by which they may develop and enhance their knowledge, acquire new skills, and grow toward more effective service. Personnel should submit requests for continuing education to the area program desk. ELCA Service and Justice will endeavor to provide equity across regions, gender identities, and ministries. If ELCA Service and Justice approves the study, it will reimburse 70% of the approved costs. Program guidelines are available upon request.

A missionary is eligible to request a sabbatical leave after six years of full-time employment with ELCA Service and Justice. Subsequent requests may be considered at six-year intervals. A sabbatical leave is a period of six weeks, during which full salary and benefits would be continued. During the time of sabbatical leave, travel, lodging away from home, and other logistics are a personal responsibility. Requests for sabbatical leave, including the proposed plan for professional development, must be submitted to the area program desk, in consultation with Global Service for approval. Requests for sabbatical leave must be submitted for approval at least 6 months prior to the proposed start date of the sabbatical. The granting of sabbatical leave will normally be contingent upon the employee's commitment to a minimum of six months of continued service following the conclusion of the leave.

### **8.4 Professional Qualifications**

Personnel are expected to maintain the required licenses and professional memberships determined to be needed for the appointment and may request assistance with the cost. ELCA Service and Justice will assist with all costs related up to 70%.

## **9.0 HOME ASSIGNMENT**

### **9.1 Purpose**

Personnel will engage in home assignment in the U.S., up to a period of eight weeks, to coincide with the Missionary Conference. In consultation with the Development team, sponsoring congregations, and the area program desk, personnel will determine their home assignments prior to their departure from their country of service. Home assignments activities include visiting sponsoring congregations, participating in the Missionary Conference, obtaining medical checkups, consulting with ELCA Service and Justice staff, presenting workshops, and other assignments as appropriate. The Development team and area program desk will provide personnel with information on such activities prior to the home assignment.

### **9.2 Vacation During a Home Assignment Year**

Personnel may use all or part of their vacation time, in conjunction with home assignment, in consultation with the area program desk.

### **9.3 Travel**

ELCA Service and Justice provides personnel with the most economical and direct round-trip travel to one U.S. location from the country of service. Personnel must arrange travel through the ELCA-designated travel agency or, if using an outside agency, submit a request for reimbursement that includes the airfare

quote from the ELCA-designated travel agency; ELCA Service and Justice will reimburse the lower of the two fares.

The area program desk will arrange travel to and from the Missionary Conference. In coordination with sponsoring congregations, personnel will be responsible for any additional travel during home assignments.

#### **9.4 Medical Exam**

Personnel, in the year of home assignment, must undergo a physical examination based on ELCA Service and Justice guidelines. This examination may be completed either in their country of service or in the United States. Personnel are responsible for any additional medical services or testing.

To continue serving, personnel must submit examination results and medical clearance from the physician to Global Service prior to the conclusion of home assignment.

#### **9.5 Housing Assistance**

Personnel are eligible for housing assistance while on home assignment in the U.S. This provision is intended to assist with lodging expenses, not necessarily to cover all costs incurred. The amount will be prorated depending on the start and end dates for the home assignment.

Housing assistance during home assignment:

- a. Single: \$600/month
- b. Couple: \$700/month
- c. Family: \$800/month

#### **9.6 Transportation Assistance in the U.S.**

Personnel are eligible for transportation assistance while on home assignment in the U.S. This provision is intended to assist with local travel expenses, not to cover all costs incurred. The amount will be prorated depending on the start and end dates for the home assignment. Transportation assistance during home assignments is \$500 per month.

### **10.0 MISSION TO THE ELCA**

As noted in “Personal Policies and Expectations,” personnel share the gifts and witness of companion churches with the ELCA and provide an essential channel of communication through which the ELCA is enriched and challenged by the global church. This work is done in cooperation with the Development team. All long-term personnel participate in the missionary sponsorship program and maintain contact with sponsors through regular correspondence, newsletters, and visits.

### **11.0 SUPPORT IN EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES**

#### **11.1 Short-term Personal Leave**

After consultation and approval, ELCA Service and Justice may grant personnel up to one month of unpaid leave for personal reasons. During this period, no salary or benefits will be provided to the missionary except for continued enrollment in Portico Benefit Services.

#### **11.2 Extended Absence**

Upon prior consultation with ELCA Service and Justice, personnel may request an extended absence for personal reasons, including care and support for a spouse or child on extended medical leave. ELCA Service and Justice may approve an absence not exceeding six months.

The first part of the extended absence is designated as home assignment, vacation, and/or other ELCA Service and Justice assignments. ELCA Service and Justice will work with personnel to determine

appropriate activities during this period. Upon the missionary's completion of the home assignment, remaining vacation time, or other ELCA Service and Justice assignments, ELCA Service and Justice will determine their salary and benefits for the remainder of the extended absence.

Following an extended absence, the ELCA Service and Justice may not be able to guarantee an individual's continued employment in either the current assignment or an alternative assignment.

### **11.3 Medical Leave**

ELCA Service and Justice may grant medical leave to personnel who are unable to continue in their assignment due to sickness or disability. Travel to the U.S. may be provided upon request with medical documentation. ELCA Service and Justice will provide travel for an accompanying spouse or other person if this is deemed medically necessary. This benefit can be granted even if not medically necessary when such assistance is requested in advance and approved by the area program director and Global Service.

Personnel on medical leave will receive their full salary and benefits for up to three months. If personnel anticipate that their medical condition will prevent them from working for longer than three months, they should inquire with Portico Benefit Services and/or the Social Security Administration about disability benefits.

If the missionary cannot return to service after three months, their salary support will be reduced by the amount of disability income provided by Portico Benefit Services and Social Security. Reduced salary and full benefits will continue for three more months or until the missionary can resume service, whichever comes first. ELCA Service and Justice cannot guarantee the individual's continued employment following extended medical leave, either in the current assignment or in a new appointment.

### **11.4 Maternity and Paternity Leave**

Eight consecutive weeks of paid maternity and paternity leave are available to new parents following the birth of their child. If the expectant parent's physician determines that it is medically necessary to stop working prior to the anticipated delivery date, the expectant parent will be permitted to use vacation time to cover the absence, and medical leave may then be applicable.

#### *a. Adoptive leave*

Personnel who adopt a child can collect eight consecutive weeks of paid adoptive leave following the child's birth or adoption in the country of service or the U.S. The adoptive leave benefit must be taken at the time of birth or adoption; it cannot be carried over or "held" for a later time. An adopted child will receive health benefits when Global Service has received approved copies of the required legal documents in English.

### **11.5 Emergency Medical Evacuation**

ELCA Service and Justice will cover evacuation to the U.S. or another country for emergency medical care as recommended by medical personnel in the country of service. If a child must be evacuated, ELCA Service and Justice will provide travel support for one parent to accompany the child.

### **11.6 Bereavement Travel and Compassionate Leave**

ELCA Service and Justice will support round-trip travel for one missionary in the event of the critical illness or death of a direct family member, while ill or at the time of death. Travel will be arranged in coordination with the area program desk and Global Service.

The compassionate leave encompasses up to 10 business days. Compassionate leave may be granted without support for bereavement travel benefits.

### **11.7 Crisis Situations**

ELCA Service and Justice takes seriously the risks personnel face in their service. The “Security Policies and Crisis Response Plan,” provided under separate cover, explains how to prepare for and respond to crises of various kinds involving personnel, their families, ELCA Service and Justice staff, and/or ELCA facilities/assets. (See “Personnel Policies and Expectations,” section 9.0).

### **11.8 Death of Personnel**

In consultation with the U.S. embassy, ELCA Service and Justice will provide for the transportation of a missionary’s remains to the U.S. at their family’s request when such repatriation is possible. The deceased’s family should consult the area program desk before making any arrangements. The area program desk will also determine the continued employment and/or reintegration of a surviving spouse and/or family members.

### **11.9 Mental Health Issues**

Mental health treatment for personnel and their children is covered under Aetna International benefits for behavioral health; personnel arrange treatment and submit bills to Aetna directly. Global Service can assist with communication. Personnel are responsible for their travel to the U.S. for care and treatment unless they can provide documentation from a medical professional in the country of service, in which case ELCA Service and Justice can work with personnel under provisions for “medical leave” (See “Terms and Conditions,” section 11.3). Personnel should be aware that such leave could result in a revised home assignment schedule.

### **11.10 Wellness Care and Counseling**

Personnel are advised to contact Aetna International or Portico Benefits for wellness care and counseling.

#### *a. Aetna International*

Aetna provides an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) that can be accessed by contacting Aetna International directly. Aetna will work with personnel to determine what type of care is needed and how communication with a counselor will occur. Aetna will provide up to five sessions without billing. After five sessions, care would continue under the regular benefits plan (see plan summary for details).

#### *b. Other Global Service Wellness Care*

Personnel can request additional potential contacts from care providers and counselors from Global Service.

### **11.11 Lost or Stolen Property**

If property or cash is lost or stolen, the missionary should report to the area program desk. The ELCA Service and Justice will replace all ELCA property that was lost or stolen. If the lost or stolen property or cash belongs to the missionary, the ELCA Service and Justice will not provide reimbursement, which is a personal expense.

### **12.0 END OF SERVICE SUPPORT**

End of service support is provided when personnel retire or resign at the end of the agreement term or if employment is concluded due to program completion, reordered priorities, budgetary considerations, or other programmatic reasons. If the missionary resigns prior to the end of their agreement term or if the ELCA Service and Justice terminates employment for any reason other than stated above, the ELCA Service and Justice will determine end of service support provisions. Some support provisions may be affected if personnel choose to remain in their country of service or to relocate to another country outside of the U.S.

### **12.1 Reintegration**

Reintegration provides an extended time for re-entry and transition to the U.S. Reintegration begins upon departure from the country of service or upon the conclusion of the mission assignment, whichever comes first. The length of reintegration is calculated at one month per year of service, up to a maximum of six months or until comparable compensatory employment is reached, whichever occurs first.

Reintegration could end earlier for one spouse than for the other, depending on their employment. In the case of a couple in an Assigned/Associate Appointment where the Associate has been otherwise employed during service (thus forfeiting their Associate salary), during reintegration to the U.S., the Assigned person's salary will be increased by 45% to compensate for this without having to reemploy the Associate. Missionary sponsorship activities are determined during reintegration in consultation with the Development team.

### **12.2 Missionary Sponsorship**

In consultation with the Development team, all personnel sponsored during service are expected to communicate with their sponsors at the conclusion of service. This communication helps to encourage the sponsors to continue their commitment to missionary sponsorship. In addition, sponsored personnel should designate time during their reintegration for visits to sponsoring congregations. Personnel should consult with the ELCA Development team to determine a priority for these visits.

### **12.3 Support Provisions During Reintegration**

Support provisions continue during reintegration for personnel who have completed at least 12 months of service. These include base salary (not adjusted by GSD), membership in Portico Benefit Services, and housing support calculated at 30% of base salary.

### **12.4 End of Service Return Benefit Allowance**

See *Terms and Conditions of Support 5.3*

### **12.5 Return Travel**

ELCA Service and Justice will provide personnel with direct travel from their country of service to their principal U.S. residence at the most economical rate. Travel arrangements are made through the travel agency in consultation with the area program desk; personal travel plans are not reimbursable.

### **12.6 End of Service Relocation Allowance**

Upon completion of service, personnel will receive a cash allowance to assist with their relocation. If personnel choose to transport personal items, they are responsible for arranging and paying baggage fees, shipment or air freight, insurance, customs charges, and in-country transportation and delivery charges. Personnel will be responsible for all costs over the amount provided by ELCA Service and Justice.

The relocation allowance provided at the end of service is:

- a. Single: \$2,000.
- b. Couple: \$3,500.
- c. Family: \$3,500 plus \$500 per dependent child.

For personnel who have completed at least 12 years of continuous service with ELCA Service and Justice, the allowances are:

- a. Single: \$3,000.
- b. Couple: \$5,000.
- c. Family: \$5,000 plus \$500 per dependent child.

### **12.7 Post-Service Medical Exam**

During reintegration, ELCA Service and Justice will assist with the physical exam costs that are not covered by insurance, up to \$600 for personnel 18 years of age and older, and \$250 for those under 18 years of age. Personnel are responsible for additional medical services and testing beyond ELCA Service and Justice guidelines. They must submit receipts and an Explanation of Benefits (EOB) from the insurer for reimbursement.

### **13.0 PERSONNEL FILES**

Files are maintained on all personnel who serve with ELCA Service and Justice. When service is completed, personnel files are reviewed, and materials are sent to the ELCA Archives.

### **14.0 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES AND INVESTIGATIONS**

“Grievance” is defined here as a disagreement with ELCA Service and Justice staff’s decision to interpret any provision of this document or with the manner in which ELCA Service and Justice staff have implemented any such provision. Disagreement with the policies or provisions themselves does not constitute a “grievance” as defined in this section.

Global Service should be informed immediately of misconduct allegations by personnel or toward them. Global Service will assume the lead in communication and/or investigation. Area program directors should not take any action or communicate with those involved except as directed by Global Service.

Personnel should bring grievances to the area program director and/or the director for Global Service first. Every effort should be made to resolve the issue through consultation and conversation. If a problem cannot be resolved, the missionary may file a written grievance with the senior director for Global Mission. The written grievance should provide sufficient details to identify the matter being grieved or appealed clearly, state the reasons why the missionary believes the action or decision was not warranted, and specify a remedy. It should be dated and signed by the missionary. The senior director for Global Mission will respond to the written grievance within 30 days of receiving it. The senior director for Global Mission will also inform the executive director for ELCA Service and Justice, the senior director for ELCA Service and Justice operations, and Human Resources.

If the grievance is still unresolved, the missionary will have 30 days to submit a dated and signed written request to the executive director for ELCA Service and Justice, Human Resources, and a representative from the ELCA General Counsel’s office. The grievance committee will make the final determination, and ELCA Human Resources will inform the missionary of the disposition in writing.

Dear Siblings in Christ,

*For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11*

Greetings in the name of Christ, whose road to the cross we follow in our Lenten Journey!

It is with gratitude and humility that I share with you, the ELCA Church Council, the Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Ministry Strategy (2026-2030), for your affirmation, recognition, support, and solidarity.

In 2024 and 2025, we held listening sessions attended by our very diverse community and then gathered feedback on the draft. We shared our stories of the gifts we celebrate and nurture, challenges we courageously face and address, and the hopes that we fervently pray for in words and actions. These stories captured the essence of this API Ministry Strategy:

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***A deep love for the church, a hunger for belonging, and a call for change***

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The API communities and leaders seek to meet the current needs of ministries that have changed so much, which are no longer captured by the first API Ministry Strategy which was received and approved at the 2001 Churchwide Assembly. As the fastest growing ethnic group in the country in recent years, there are so many and great opportunities for us as a church to truly participate in God's reign of healing, belonging and transformation.

I look forward to your warm reception and strong support and solidarity.

In Christ,

Rev. Teresita "Tita" Valeriano  
Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries, Program Director  
Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities  
Service and Justice

**Asian and Pacific Islander Ministry Strategy (2026-2030)**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
**Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities**  
**Service and Justice Unit**

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*A deep love for the church, a hunger for belonging, and a call for change*

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### **Foreword and Acknowledgement**

Paul writes to the Ephesians, “So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God.” (Ephesians 2:19 NRSVUE) As a community that includes many generations of families with deep roots in the U.S., as well as new immigrants, the Asians and Pacific Islanders (API) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) have enriched and blessed this church and this country with all of what they generously have given, shared, and cultivated for mission and ministry.

The API community longed to envision a more holistic embodiment of their mission and ministry for the sake of the whole church. The first API Ministry Strategic Plan that was approved at 2001 Churchwide Assembly no longer addresses API’s current challenges in ministry and daily life. We now need new creativity in mission endeavors and deeper commitment to accompany our ever-growing diversity and numbers of API people in our neighborhoods. Therefore, this new strategic plan responds to the changing world, embodies our faithful discipleship, and raises our collective courageous voice to call the whole church to join us.

We are deeply grateful to the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders – Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (AAPI-ELCA) for its continued support, participation, partnership, contributions and collaborations. None of this would be possible without our listening sessions’ participants, facilitators, and scribes. The API Ministry Strategic Planning Core Listening Team gleaned from all the stories, gifts, challenges and hopes shared to create this plan: Rev. Ryan Lun, Rev. Sunitha Mortha, Dr. Kao Nou Moua, Rev. Robert Waworuntu, Rev. Dr. Edmond Yee as adviser, Rev Margrethe Kleiber, as facilitator, and Rev. Teresita “Tita” Valeriano as convener. We are also grateful to ELCA Service and Justice and the ELCA Innovation and Ideas for their support, guidance and resources.

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***For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Jeremiah 29:11 NRSVUE***

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## **Our Journey to New Vision**

In 2024 and 2025, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) Asian Pacific Islander (API) Ministries led a series of listening sessions across generations, regions, languages, and roles. We gathered stories, wisdom, and hopes from API lay leaders, youth, young adults, elders, and clergy. What we heard was powerful: a deep love for the church, a hunger for belonging, and a call for change.

Participants, who were aware of all the meaningful contributions already made by our many API rostered and lay leaders, named both the beauty and the complexity of their identities. They spoke of faith and resilience, as well as the ongoing struggles of systemic exclusion and structural inequities both in church and society that diminish our visibility and creates cultural and structural barriers towards full participation. Their call was for not mere incremental adjustments or attention. They dreamed of a church where API voices shape theology, communities, leadership, and mission.

This strategic plan is rooted in that listening. It reflects the distinctiveness and diversity of API experiences, and calls the wider ELCA into deeper partnership, transformation, and justice. The strategic plan is composed of four major themes to guide our plans for the future with creativity and resourcefulness. Each major theme has recommendations and key actions meant to be tools for individuals (lay and rostered), congregations, synods, and churchwide to increase and strengthen the congregational ministries to serve the church, neighborhoods and the world with Christ's grace and justice as a faithful response to our baptismal call.

## **Introduction: Rooted and Transformed**

*"We want to worship in a way that holds both our ancestors and our children." — Hmong and Lao Listening Session*

This strategic plan for API ministries within the ELCA begins by acknowledging the complexity of the term “Asian and Pacific Islander.” The term API encompasses a range of ethnicities, languages, cultures, migration histories, and lived experiences. From Native Hawaiians to South Asians, from recent refugees to transracial adoptees to multigenerational families that have lived in the US for over a century, this umbrella term can obscure as much as it reveals. The US Census uses API as a category to organize demographic data, and the term API has also proven useful in uniting our communities for political and social advocacy. In the broader US context, the Asian community is the fastest-growing population, reflecting dynamic patterns of migration, family formation, and cultural adaptation. The Pacific Islander community has an even higher percentage of their population increase. Within the ELCA, there are an estimated 169,261<sup>1</sup> people who self-identified as API. More recent estimates are forthcoming, and this plan remains responsive to continued demographic shifts. These individuals represent heritages and experiences that span across the globe and across generations: foreign-born and US-born, immigrants and refugees, transracial adoptees, and mixed-race and multiracial families. Many API members of the ELCA worship in over 75 API ethnic-specific congregations, mission starts, and Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities (SAWCs), and many more are in more than 2,500 white or multicultural ELCA congregations. There are more than 30 Asian languages spoken in worship and ministries around the country.

## **I. Communities and Leadership**

*“My pastor wore all the hats—preacher, janitor, youth director, immigration advocate.” — Indonesian Listening Session*

*“I’ve been serving without a call for years because the system didn’t know where to place someone like me.” — Pan-Asian Listening Session*

*“Lay leadership is a pillar in the Asian community ministry.” Thai Listening Session*

*“We hope that more Lahu will know Jesus Christ.” Lahu Listening Session*

We believe the Holy Spirit is at work among us and throughout our multicultural, multiracial, and multi-generational communities. Our congregations are joyful and faith-filled spaces, where we celebrate our histories, languages, and cultures. And yet, our API

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<sup>1</sup> This number is the 2023 forecasted number from the Asian Pacific Islander Participants in the ELCA: 2009-2018 Projections to 2040 report from the ELCA Office of Presiding Bishop: Planning, Research, and Evaluation. The 2028 forecasted number is 15,553.

communities and lay and rostered leaders experience institutional racism, tokenism, and structural barriers against participating in decision-making. To grow and sustain API congregations and ministries, the church must develop culturally-informed candidacy pathways that honor the unique callings of API leaders and invest in advocacy and education that equips our people for meaningful and faithful leadership and bold witness.

***We envision robust and growing API congregations and SAWCs, equitably equipped with resources to sustain thriving ministries; API lay and rostered leaders who are engaged, connected, and well-supported in mind, body, spirit, and community; and stronger partnerships with transpacific, ecumenical, interfaith, non-API congregations to develop strategies to support API members.***

#### Recommendations and Key Actions:

1. Engage in existing decision-making processes of churchwide units and offices regarding candidacy and call and mobility processes, including continued consultations with synod and churchwide staff by 2026.
2. Strategize synodical advocacy for API rostered leaders in the call and mobility process by 2026.
3. Improve communication pathways so that API leaders are informed on synodical and churchwide processes by 2027.
4. Provide education and training to API lay and rostered leaders in advocacy for equity with particular attention to strengthening leadership among youth and young adults, elders, women, and members from underrepresented ethnic groups like the Mara, Lahu, Thai and Tongan by 2027.
5. Strengthen lay leadership training on evangelism that incorporates the specific language, cultural and pedagogical considerations of the varied API communities, by 2027.
6. Collaborate with Lutheran Campus Ministry Network (LuMin) and Asian campus ministries and youth/young adult ministries to create second-generation leadership cohorts rooted in cultural identity and public witness by 2028.
7. Launch a pilot mentorship and coaching and networking initiative in three synods, pairing API seminarians and lay leaders with experienced mentors and coaches across cultural contexts by 2029.
8. Revise, improve, and develop specific strategies for new mission starts and existing SAWCs with a focus on multicultural, multiracial, and multilingual congregations; second generation API individuals; and communities with immigrant backgrounds by 2030.

9. Develop intentional partnerships with and among transpacific partners, synods, non-API congregations with significant API members to affirm and celebrate API identities, cultures, and belonging by 2030.

## II. Theology

*“My theology is shaped by my mother’s prayers and our refugee story. That’s sacred, too.”*  
— *Pan-Asian Listening Session*

Our cultural contexts and histories are gifts and sources of revelation about our relationship with God. For too long, our API communities have experienced Euro-American Lutheran theology as an oppressive tool for colonization and missionary work. We also recognize that theological education has often excluded API voices. This plan commits to co-developing pathways with seminaries to elevate contextual theology in academic and congregational spaces. We seek to reclaim a theology through an anti-colonial and culturally-grounded lens that honors and affirms our communities’ sacred worth. With the growing body of work from API scholars and theologians, and the deep spiritual resources of our communities, we know API theology emerges from lived and embodied experiences, migration, memory, and resilience, offering vital insight for the whole church.

***We envision a multi-center API theology, emerging from our many origins, languages, and cultures, that meets the spiritual and everyday needs of our communities.***

Recommendations and Key Actions:

1. Engage current API theologians, scholars, and lay leaders to identify spiritual and everyday needs of API communities by 2026.
2. Partner with at least two ELCA seminaries in the United States to integrate API justice theology into curricula and field education by 2027.
3. Publish more culturally-informed materials and resources on theology for both academic and congregational settings by 2030.
4. Develop strategic distribution of materials and resources, including audio and video, to seminaries, scholars, and congregations by 2030.
5. Create a video series or podcast platform featuring API theologians and storytellers for congregational use by 2030.
6. Translate future and current publications including *Luther’s Small Catechism: An Exploration of the Christian Faith in Asian Contexts and Cultures* and *On Being*

*Lutheran*, and other key theological essays, into various languages, local contexts, and devotional formats for small group study by 2030.

### III. Justice

*“Sometimes it feels like we’re fighting to be seen in a church that says it’s already inclusive.” — South Asian Listening Session*

*“I didn’t know I could be queer and Asian and Christian until I found this church.” — Pan-Asian International Session*

Our commitment to justice is both a calling and a communal act of faithfulness. We acknowledge API leaders and communities who/which have labored faithfully in the work of justice and the long history of resistance within the church and wider communities. And yet, we also recognize the pervasiveness and persistence of systemic racism that marginalizes us, divides us, and intentionally overlooks us and our stories. Additionally, many of us with intersecting identities related to age, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, ability, and immigration status are further harmed, made invisible, and under-resourced in our own communities and throughout the church. These inequities include gaps in the candidacy and call and mobility processes that include longer wait for first call and subsequent calls and salary below guidelines for compensation and benefits, and limited understanding of the unique and varied API histories and experiences. There are community tensions and unresolved challenges relating to gender, gender expression, women empowerment, economic class, migration, and ecological/environmental justice work and intergenerational conflict that remain unfinished in our own communities.

***We envision a just church where API individuals and communities experience radical belonging within and beyond our own communities; this radical belonging draws strength from our diverse identities and experiences, actively challenges the narratives that diminish us, and works in solidarity with broader movements for justice throughout the church and across all communities.***

Recommendation and Key Actions:

1. Conduct a churchwide equity audit on the candidacy and mobility experiences of API leaders with recommendations for reform by September 2027.
2. Strengthen and create new events to educate the church about API communities, our resilience and growth, and the concerns of API communities by 2027.

3. Strategize and collaborate with other leaders from the ELCA Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities on key processes and protocols such as candidacy, call and mobility, just compensation, etc., and strategize to grow lay leaders by 2027.
4. Call on the church to offer a public confession and communal lament for its complicity in anti-Asian racism and erasure, accompanied by repentance and repair by 2028 at the Churchwide Assembly.
5. Develop culturally-informed materials about gender justice, gender expression, racial solidarity, and economic justice by 2029.

#### **IV. Cultures and Connections**

*“Our culture teaches us to serve without being seen. That’s beautiful, but it also means we’re left out of decision-making.” — Filipino Listening Session*

*“I don’t see myself in the liturgy. Not just the language, but the rhythm, the tone—it feels foreign.” — Pan-Asian Young Adult Session*

*“We need partners for resources and support to connect intergenerationally with our youth and children so together we navigate our faith journey intersecting with our cultures and identities.” — Tongan Listening Session*

*“We must affirm and strengthen Asian identity and sense of belonging.” — Chinese Listening Session*

Our strength as API communities lies in the richness of our many cultures and the deeply multigenerational and intergenerational relationships that bind us across land, place, and time. We yearn for intentional spaces that foster pan-API connections, where cultural pride is welcomed, celebrated, and honored. This hunger for relationships is systemically hindered by communication barriers, fragmented engagement, and oftentimes transactional relationships with the church. We seek connections with one another and the church rooted in mutual respect, accompaniment, and shared mission. It is very important that sufficient financial support be given to strengthen our connections with one another and celebrate our cultural gifts that contribute to the local and wider ministries.

***We envision an API community, united in Christ, that embraces multiplicity as a source of collective strength and wisdom to embody a powerful witness that connects and transforms the church and the world.***

Recommendation and Key Actions:

1. Create and implement communication strategies, including social media, that meaningfully engage API ELCA members, lay and rostered, within API specific and non-API specific congregations and ministries by 2026.
2. Develop new opportunities for transpacific relations and partnership theological reflections on shared concerns and ministry challenges, resources development for ministry, leadership development, and theological education by 2027.
3. Strengthen pan-API engagement through establishing regional or synodical API cohorts and special interests groups for peer learning, networking, worship collaboration, and strategic planning around language, leadership, and justice by 2028.
4. Develop a relational organizing and story-based leadership toolkit contextualized for API congregational and lay leaders by 2028.
5. Support equitable access to grants and financial and scholarship resources to cultivate next generation of API leaders throughout all expressions of the church: churchwide, synod and congregations by 2029.
6. Develop and distribute worship resources that reflect diversity and multilingual and cultural needs of API communities by 2029.

### **Stakeholders, Partners and Collaborators**

We look forward to the following partners and collaborators in the implementation and fulfilment of these visions and key actions:

- AAPI-ELCA
- Asian and Pacific Islander-specific congregations and communities and their respective lay and rostered leaders
- Asian and Pacific Islander members and rostered leaders in non-API specific or white or multicultural congregations
- Service and Justice Unit and relevant offices of Building Resilient Communities, Witness in Society, AMMPARO, Global Mission, Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC)
- Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries, Service and Justice Unit, MDCC
- Christian Communities and Leadership Unit and relevant offices of New Ministry Development and Evangelism, Director for Evangelical Mission Relations, Lay Schools Network, Youth and Young Adult, Campus Ministry, Coach Network, Community Organizing
- ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary
- ELCA Innovation and Ideas

- ELCA 65 synods
- ELCA Seminaries and Schools
- ELCA Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Racial Justice
- ELCA Development Team
- Ecumenical Full Communion Partners

## **Update on Public Discourse about Palestine-Israel**

*[D3: CA25.01.06cc]*

As directed by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, ELCA Service and Justice through the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Desk has begun the process to form a team which will review, assess, and offer recommendations regarding the [2005 Strategy for Engagement in Palestine and Israel](#). This review committee will include stakeholders and representatives connected to the ELCA engagement related to Palestine and Israel.

This process requires thorough review and must be done with intentionality. The timeline of this process must be flexible to complete this important work. The goal is for this review committee to be formed this year (2026).

### **Proposed Amendments-Continuing Resolutions**

#### **14.41.F~~2226~~. Audit Committee**

*An Audit Committee—composed of five to seven members appointed by the Budget and Finance Committee and approved by the Church Council for two-year, renewable terms—shall assist the Budget and Finance Committee and the Church Council in fulfilling oversight of the churchwide organization’s accounting and financial reporting, internal control systems, and audit functions, consistent with its responsibilities as specified in the charter recommended by the Audit Committee, reviewed by the Budget and Finance Committee, and approved by the Church Council. A minimum of two members of the Audit Committee shall be members of the Budget and Finance Committee. The chair of the Audit Committee shall be a member of the Budget and Finance Committee and shall be appointed by the chair of the Budget and Finance Committee. In consultation with the executive for administration, the Audit Committee approves the selection of and dismissal of the internal auditors.*

## Synod Constitutions

### CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

#### **Recommended:**

**To ratify the following amendments to the constitution of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod (8H):**

- S7.24.** Ministers under call on the rosters of this synod shall remain as members of the Synod Assembly so long as they remain under call and so long as their names appear on the rosters of this synod. Lay members of the Synod Assembly representing congregations shall continue as such until replaced by the election of new members or until they have been disqualified by termination of membership. Normally, congregations will hold elections prior to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly. Lay voting members elected by their congregations shall continue to serve until their resignation from the Synod Assembly, replacement by their congregation, or disqualification by suspension or termination of voting membership in their congregation. Other lay voting members shall continue to serve until the opening of the next regular synod assembly.
- S7.30.** This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council to grant an interim pastor not otherwise enfranchised the privilege of voice in the Synod Assembly during the period of that minister's service as an interim pastor of a congregation of this synod.
- S9.11.** The Synod Council shall establish a process to elect or appoint representatives to the steering committee of its region.
- S10.09.** A majority of the members, excluding the youth member, of the Synod Council shall constitute a quorum.

## **Amendments to Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies**

### 2.13.2. Personal Data Changes

Employees must promptly enter into the HR and payroll self-service portal any changes to their legal name, home mailing address, email address, telephone numbers, emergency contacts, and similar data. Employees who are considering moving to a new address are to send written notice and be in conversation with their supervisor, executive/officer/president, and Human Resources prior to their move to determine any potential impact on continued employment.

### 4.1. Core Hours

Employees are to organize their work schedules within the limits of specified hours, subject to approval of their unit/office. Full-time employees will normally work an eight-hour period (part-time employees, pro-rated hours) between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday. It is expected that employees are online working and accessible during the hours of 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Central Time (referred to as “collaborative hours”) as part of their regular core hours schedule. The hours of operation may change. Also, an employee’s hours may vary depending on particular assigned duties or flexibility of schedule approved by their supervisor during any given day.

The needs of the job must be given appropriate priority. Staff members are expected to be flexible in the accommodation of workplace needs and work earlier or later when necessary.

### 6.7. Jury or Witness Duty

An employee required to serve on a jury or appear as a witness will continue to receive their normal pay during the period of such service and may retain payments made by the court associated with such service. Employees needing to request paid time off for jury duty should are required to contact Human Resources with reasonable notice and submit appropriate summons documentation.

Update on Candidacy Reimagined – Launch Phase

Susan Candea, Project Manager

February 23, 2026

The Candidacy Leadership Development working group began meeting in March of 2022 to identify challenges to the current candidacy process, listen to stakeholders, and begin to imagine a new candidacy process that:

- Was rigorous and flexible, as well as clear, informative, and understandable
- Recognized and valued all paths to ministry leadership
- Was theologically and Biblically sound
- Involved the participation of all three expressions of the church
- Removed barriers for underrepresented groups

Ten synods - Sierra Pacific, Minneapolis, Southwest Minnesota, Southwestern Texas, East Central Wisconsin, Indiana-Kentucky, Southeast Pennsylvania, Lower Susquehanna, Florida-Bahamas and Northwestern Washington – were chosen to launch this reimagined candidacy process, following a manual designed for the launch. Representatives from these synods along with seminary faculty and staff from all the ELCA seminaries attended a training event on February 10-11, 2026.

The key changes in the reimagined process are:

- **Competency based** approach to ensure that all candidates, regardless of their educational path, such as MDiv, MA, certificate, or other alternative routes, meet consistent standards for effective ministry. Candidates will submit artifacts (evidence statements) to their portfolio for ongoing assessment throughout their candidacy process. A candidate must be deemed competent in all core competency areas to be approved for rostered ministry.
- Addition of the role of an **accompanier** (which is non-evaluative) who is an active companion to the candidate to provide prayer, encouragement, and witness to the candidate's journey through candidacy.
- Rather than a single midpoint endorsement, each candidate will engage in an **annual review** to provide a structured opportunity for reflection, review, and possible updates to the candidate's plan. If there are serious concerns about candidate's continuation in the process, a formal review process is initiated.
- The role of the seminaries is shifted from having a faculty member on the synod candidacy committee and providing Form D at the end of the candidate's education time, to providing **ongoing, annual formative assessments**, primarily focused on the learning competencies.

Throughout the launch period (approximately 18 months), there will be quarterly check-ins with the launch synods, as well as surveys (designed by the Research and Evaluation team at the ELCA) for all the partners in the process. The learnings from these check-ins and surveys will be used to adapt the process and update the manual prior to submitting it to the Conference of Bishops for their review and the Church Council for their approval.

## **Response to Memorial Categorized as C2: Update Social Statement on Abortion**

*Northern Illinois Synod (5B) [2023]*

*WHEREAS, the 1991 Social Statement on Abortion (SSoA) may have been adequate for its time allowing for and addressing diversity of perspectives; and*

*WHEREAS, SSoA does not directly address more current medical perspectives; and*

*WHEREAS, SSoA does not address the historical ecclesiastical understanding of when human life begins; and*

*WHEREAS, SSoA does not address the broader understanding of 'family' – regarding sexual orientation and 21st century family units; and*

*WHEREAS, SSoA might consider expanding on how to right the injustices regarding life before and after birth – namely such things as pre-natal care, a living wage, family leave, social networks to support children and their families; and*

*WHEREAS, SSoA might consider expanding the extenuating circumstances that may call for an abortion in the light of more recent social conditions; therefore, be it*

*RESOLVED, that the Northern Illinois Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America memorializes the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to revise, update, or create a new Social Statement on Abortion; and be it further*

*RESOLVED, this process should include the partnership of clergy, deacons, and lay people who have or have had uteruses as well as medical professionals, including genetic counselors, perinatologist/maternal fetal medicine doctors, NICU providers, fetal palliative care providers, and OBGYNs of our synods and congregations.*

*Church Council Action [CC25.10.33]*

*To re-affirm the theological and ethical teachings of the social statement on Abortion and its study guide because of its attention to complexity and nuance and its continued use in discernment and conversation;*

*To encourage study of recent resources such as the book *ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Abortion* by Caryn D. Riswold (Augsburg Fortress, 2024) that analyzes the foundations and contemporary applications of this social statement;*

*To refer the memorial to churchwide organization staff members of Theological Ethics and Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment to develop additional study resources to address the concerns expressed in this memorial;*

*To decline at this time the request to update, revise, or create a new social statement on Abortion; and*

*To direct that the ELCA Church Council authorize the development of a social policy resolution that applies the ELCA statement on Abortion to the challenging personal struggles and pastoral issues brought about because some social conditions have changed since 1991.*

*Response from Ryan Cumming, Director of Theological Ethics in the Office of the Presiding Bishop*

Social policy resolutions refer to actions, other than social statements or messages, of a churchwide assembly or Church Council that establish specific policy-related directives on matters of social concern. Social policy resolutions shall rely on or be consistent with the teachings of this church expressed in statements and messages ([Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns, 2018](#)). The concern for a new social policy resolution (SPR) is expressed by the Churchwide Assembly as a request. As a next step, the Director of Theological Ethics will consult with leadership groups within the church to assess and provide recommendations to Church Council about the timing and type of social teaching document. Church Council then makes the decisions for authorization in their role of oversight in the ELCA.

There are two types of SPRs – standard and descriptive. Standard SPRs are generally brief, such as those listed here:

- <https://resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/endorsement-of-the-earth-charter-spr19/>
- <https://resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/suicide-prevention-research-spr16/>

Descriptive SPRs are more elaborate. The following is an example of a descriptive SPR:

- <https://resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/legal-gambling-sponsorship-spr07/>

The request in CC25.10.33 is for a descriptive SPR.

**Considerations:**

Due to limited staff capacity (and church capacity), social teaching development is managed carefully. Standard SPRs generally have a short timeline, while descriptive SPRs require a longer timeline for development – approximately 3-6 months.

The Theological Ethics team generally provides study guides after the adoption of each social statement and some social messages. These educational resources are typically developed in consultation with task force members, subject-matter experts, and educators. The action reaffirms the study guide developed for the *Abortion* (1991) social statement, as well as other subsequent resources, such as the recent book by Caryn D. Riswold, which is aimed at a general audience. It directs to Theological Ethics and Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment consideration of future needed resources.

**Timeline:**

The Director of Theological Ethics will bring to the November 2026 Church Council meeting a proposed draft of a descriptive SPR responding to the concerns in this memorial. This will allow sufficient time for consultation by Theological Discernment on the content of the SPR. The Director of Theological Ethics will also bring to the November 2026 Church Council meeting a recommendation related to resources in this request, developed in consultation with a diverse group of stakeholders and experts.

**FSIC ACTION**

**Recommended: *To recommend approval by the Church Council of this en bloc action***

**To receive the assessment and anticipated timeline from the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop for developing a social policy resolution regarding abortion and additional study resources;**

**To request the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop begin development on a descriptive social policy resolution on the issue of abortion to be presented to the November 2026 Church Council meeting;**

**To direct the Theological Discernment team to bring a recommendation concerning additional resources related to the *Abortion* (1991) social statement to the November 2026 Church Council meeting; and**

**To request that the secretary of this church notify the synod of this action.**

## **Response to Memorial Categorized as C8: Social Message on Rural Life and Ministry**

*Montana Synod (1F) [2025]*

*WHEREAS, nearly one-third of ELCA congregations minister in rural and remote communities; and  
WHEREAS, the U.S. Census marks a significant population movement from rural to urban communities indicating challenges for rural congregations to maintain membership and giving; and  
WHEREAS, rural communities face significant inequities in health, education, and economic opportunity when compared to urban communities; and  
WHEREAS, the ELCA has not produced materials for theological reflection on the challenges facing and gifts provided by rural communities since its inception; and  
WHEREAS, rural and remote congregations offer models of innovation and adaptation to economic and sociological constraints for ministry; therefore, be it  
RESOLVED, that the Montana Synod memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to commission a study and the production of a social message on the challenges facing rural and remote communities and gifts provided by ministry in rural and remote contexts; furthermore, be it  
RESOLVED, that Montana Synod memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to encourage and equip synods and member congregations to dedicate a time of study on rural and remote issues and rural ministry; and be it further  
RESOLVED that this message reflect the diversity of rural communities across geographic regions to include consideration of remote communities and sovereign tribal nations.*

*Church Council Action [CC25.10.34]*

*...To direct Theological Discernment staff in the ELCA churchwide organization to review the request for a new social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations and bring a recommendation to the ELCA Church Council no later than the Spring 2026 meeting on what means should be authorized to address the questions involved. ...*

*Response from Ryan Cumming, Director of Theological Ethics in the Office of the Presiding Bishop*

The concern for development or reconsideration of a social message is expressed by the Churchwide Assembly (CWA) as a request. As the next step, the Director of Theological Ethics will consult with leadership groups, such as a committee of the Conference of Bishops, to assess and provide recommendations to Church Council about the timing and kind of development process, in consideration of other pending requests and in consultation with stakeholders. Church Council makes those decisions in their role of oversight of the ELCA. This request for a social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations was received as a request from the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

As the original memorial noted, nearly one-third of ELCA congregations minister in rural and remote communities. These congregations offer models of innovation and adaptation to economic and sociological constraints for ministry. However, these congregations and communities face a multitude of challenges named in the original memorial, including significant inequities in health, education, and economic opportunity.

Some prior ELCA social teaching notes some of these challenges. The social statement *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (2003) calls for priority in addressing rural health inequities. Social policy resolutions on “Family Farms” (CA95.05.44) and “Economic Crisis in Rural America” (CA99.03.09) call for prayer, advocacy, and education in the face of economic uncertainty and crisis. A 2001 social policy resolution on “The Family Farm” (CA01.05.21) echoes these earlier documents and calls for support of rural congregations and ministries.

These references are sporadic, however, and typically deficit-based. The result is a gap in social teaching on the challenges and promise of rural life.

**Considerations:**

Social messages “address the contemporary situation in light of the prophetic and compassionate traditions of the Scriptures,” are “narrower in scope and complexity or of less controversy than social statements,” and “expand theological and pastoral address and analysis” of contemporary issues ([Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns, 2018](#)). Given the nature of the topic of rural and remote ministry, a social message would be the most appropriate vehicle for addressing the needs identified in this memorial. However, social messages address social issues. Such a social message, thus, would address the context in which rural ministry happens, rather than congregational ministry more narrowly.

Due to limited staff capacity (and church capacity), social teaching development is managed carefully. The current practice is to develop or reconsider one social message per year, alongside one social statement development (a five-year process.) In 2026, the church will already be engaged in reconsideration of the social message on “Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment.”

**Timeline:**

The Director of Theological Ethics will bring to the November 2026 Church Council meeting a recommendation about which of the pending requests should be authorized for 2027. The request for a social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations will either be accepted and authorized for the 2027-2028 cycle or will remain in the pool of requests for future evaluation. If this request is left as pending, Theological Discernment will maintain a list of individuals who have expressed interest in aiding the process as consultants and of individuals whose expertise is a significant gift to the church’s discernment of this social teaching.

**Budgeted Resources:**

Development of a new social message would cost approximately \$10,000-15,000. This would include compensation and potential travel for a contract writer as well as costs related to design, editing, translation, and printing.

**FSIC ACTION**

**Recommended: *To recommend approval by the Church Council of this en bloc action***

**To defer the question of development of a social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations until the November 2026 Church Council meeting in order to allow for a careful and thorough assessment of that request along with continued assessment of the other pending requests. This assessment will include input from relevant leadership circles as well as the availability of staff capacity, and finances; and**

**To request that the secretary of this church notify the synod of this action.**



World Council  
of Churches

# Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2034)

Moving Together in Ecological Metanoia for Transformation

*"The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it"*  
(Psalm 24:1)

*"But the Earth will be desolate because of its  
inhabitants, for the fruit of their doings"*  
(Micah 7:13)

*"Bear fruit worthy of repentance"*  
(Matthew 3:8)



ECUMENICAL DECADE OF  
CLIMATE JUSTICE  
ACTION  
2025-2034

## A Call Rooted in Faith

The Earth groans under the weight of exploitation, and vulnerable communities bear the heaviest burdens of a crisis they did not cause. Yet our faith proclaims good news for all creation!

The **Ecumenical Decade of Climate Justice Action (2025–2034)** is a bold invitation from the World Council of Churches and ecumenical partners worldwide: a pilgrimage of repentance, renewal, and action to confront the climate emergency with courage, hope, and love.

### Why This Decade?

The climate crisis is not only an environmental emergency – it is a spiritual and moral crisis.

- Rising temperatures, floods, fires, and droughts are destroying lives and livelihoods.
- Injustice deepens as the poorest and most marginalized suffer most.
- Greed and consumerism corrode creation and community alike.

As churches and faith communities, we have both moral authority and global presence. Now is the time to lead – by repenting of complicity, resisting ecological sin, and reclaiming our vocation as caretakers of God’s creation.

This Decade is our shared response: a call to ecological metanoia – a turning of hearts, communities, and systems toward life.

### What the Decade Is About

The Decade is not just a campaign or a project. It is a spiritual pilgrimage and a prophetic movement of churches worldwide.

- **Spiritual Journey:** Lament, repent, and renew discipleship rooted in care for creation.
- **Prophetic Witness:** Speak truth to power, challenge injustice, and advocate for systemic change.
- **Practical Action:** Transition churches to renewable energy, build resilience in communities, and support adaptation and biodiversity.
- **Living Witness:** Become sanctuaries of sustainability, centres of resilience, and voices of hope.

Together, we proclaim: **System change, not climate change!**



Photo: Simon Chambers/ACT



ECUMENICAL DECADE OF  
CLIMATE JUSTICE  
ACTION  
2025-2034



Photo: Marcelo Schmeidler/WCC



Photo: WCC



Photo: Paul Jeffrey/WCC

## Our Vision for 2034

By the close of this Decade, we envision:

- **Churches Leading by Example:** Eco-sanctuaries, climate-centred worship, and pensions invested in life
- **Policy Breakthroughs:** Ecocide recognized as a crime, fossil fuel phase-out underway, climate finance, justice and reparations advanced
- **Resilient Communities:** Indigenous, youth, women, and frontline communities shaping solutions
- **An Economy of Life:** Alternatives to extractive capitalism rooted in equity, justice, and sustainability

## How We Will Journey

The Decade will move forward through six concrete pathways:

1. **Transform Theology and Worship** – eco-theologies, creation liturgies, and spiritual disciplines.
2. **Promote Holistic Analysis** – connecting climate with justice, economics, race, and gender
3. **Equip Faith Communities** – toolkits, trainings, and climate chaplains
4. **Mobilize Collective Action** – pilgrimages, days of action, and global campaigns
5. **Advocate for Systemic Change** – prophetic witness in courts, policies, and public spaces
6. **Invest in Grassroots Solutions** – funding local adaptation, biodiversity protection, and renewable energy

## Who Is Involved

This is a whole-church, whole-world journey:

- **WCC member churches** and global ecumenical partners leading locally and globally.
- **Regional and national ecumenical bodies** contextualizing action.
- **Denominations and seminaries** shaping theology and discipleship.
- **Interfaith partners** joining in shared action.
- **Youth, women, Indigenous peoples, migrants, and emerging leaders** at the heart of vision and leadership WCC member churches leading locally and globally.

## An Invitation to Hope in Action

We stand at a crossroads. Continuing with business as usual condemns future generations to despair. But with repentance and courage, we can journey together toward renewal.

This Decade is our Exodus from greed and destruction, and our pilgrimage toward life abundant. Guided by the Spirit, we act in faith, knowing that in Christ all things are being made new (Revelation 21:5).

## Join Us

Together we commit:

- To repent and transform
- To stand with the vulnerable
- To transition from fossil fuels to renewable, life-giving energy
- To advocate for systemic change
- To embody the Economy of Life
- To renew the church's witness
- To walk together in hope



Will you join this prophetic pilgrimage of climate justice action?

To learn more about the Decade or to share a faith-rooted climate justice action, visit

<https://oikoumene.org/what-we-do/care-for-creation-and-climate-justice/ecumenical-decade-of-climate-justice-action>

*Together, in love,  
we speak truth and care for creation.*

*Together, in faith,  
we journey together for transformation.*

*Together, in action,  
we build hope for the future.*

O God, Creator of the universe and of all that lives and breathes,  
bless every effort and every search,  
every struggle and every pain that seeks to restore the harmony  
and beauty of your Creation.  
Renew the face of the Earth,  
so that every human being may live in peace and justice,  
fruits of your Spirit of love.  
Blow with your Spirit of life on your creation and all humanity.  
Amen.

*(“A Prayer for Creation,” Community of Grandchamp)*



**ECUMENICAL DECADE OF  
CLIMATE JUSTICE  
ACTION  
2025-2034**

## **Progress Report on Development of Study Resources Related to Social Teaching on White Supremacy**

*Church Council Action [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.*

*Response from Ryan Cumming, Director of Theological Ethics in the Office of the Presiding Bishop*

### **Background:**

This Church Council action was taken in response to the assessment of a request for a social message on white supremacy prepared by the Director of Theological Ethics for the Church Council in October 2025. This request came to Church Council in response to a recommendation for development of a “theological statement” on white supremacy in “How Strategic and Authentic Is Our Diversity: A Call for Confession, Reflection, and Healing Action” (adopted by the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.) In response to that request, the Church Council acted to direct development of study resources on the topic. The request for a social message remains pending.

### **Progress:**

The work in response to CC25.11.58 has been done in collaboration between staff for Theological Ethics, Racial Justice, and Theological Diversity within the Office of the Presiding Bishop (OB). This work has involved three steps thus far:

- 1) *Assessment of Existing Social Teaching:* Theological Ethics reviewed social teachings for relevant insights. The ELCA has condemned white supremacy, including racist rhetoric and ideologies, in the 2019 social policy resolution “Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric” (adopted by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly.) The social statement *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* (1993) provides theological framing and commitment to ground this work, and the recent social statement *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* (2025) extends prior social teaching to condemn white supremacy and critique it within the context of Christian nationalism more broadly.
- 2) *Assessment of Existing Resources on White Supremacy:* In February 2026, the director of Theological Ethics met with the Racial Justice Manager to assess currently-available resources on white supremacy. This assessment identified a need for more resources that specifically address white supremacy (in contrast to resources that are more properly categorized as “anti-racism.”) While several pastoral messages and social teachings address white supremacy, the assessment identified only two educational resources from the churchwide organization that are specific to white supremacy, including most recently “Dismantle: An Anti-White Supremacy Lenten Devotional” published by Racial Justice (OB) in 2025.
- 3) *Evaluation of Needs:* The directors of Theological Ethics and Theological Diversity and Engagement identified two overarching needs related to this work. First, there is a need for discernment and conversation to generate theological-ethical insights that can serve as foundations for possible future social teaching. This is one intended result of an extended period of study suggested by the assessment of the social message request provided to Church Council in Fall 2025. Second, there is a need for resources that engage ELCA members in study of white supremacy.

**Next Steps:**

Theological Ethics, Racial Justice, and Theological Diversity met in March 2026 to discuss a possible consultation or colloquium that could serve both of the needs named above. This would involve inviting a small group of selected experts and stakeholders, reflecting ELCA representational principles, to an in-person event collaboratively planned and hosted by the three OB teams. This idea is still in development, but it would potentially involve invitees hearing presentations from one another and engaging in dialogue with each other about the presentations. It also could involve asking the invitees to identify possible study resources on white supremacy for ELCA members. Such a consultation or colloquium would generate theological-ethical insights grounded in Lutheran ethics and ideas for potential future resources. Records of the proceedings could be published in the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*. Staff of the three teams involved will continue to be in collaborative discernment of three key questions: 1) Is this the most appropriate format for this discernment? 2) What would be the potential outcomes? And 3) What criteria would guide decisions about participants?

**Budgeted Resources:**

One significant challenge to implementing this idea and to development of more resources is funding. An in-person consultation/colloquium involving 8-10 people could cost between \$10,000 and \$15,000. Part of the ongoing discernment of work toward this Church Council action is identifying potential funding sources to supplement the budgets of the churchwide teams involved.

## Church Council Member Synod Visit Report

**Note:** Information submitted on this form will be prepared for viewing by Church Council, liaison bishops and resource staff. **Confidential information should be submitted on a separate file which will be shared with Office of the Presiding Bishop and Synod Relations staff as appropriate.**

Name: Joel Miller  
Synod Visited: LaCrosse Area Synod  
Visit Date: 02/07/2026  
Purpose of Visit: Annual Synod Council Retreat (in person at synod office)

1. What are the joys and opportunities happening within the Synod?

This annual practice of Synod Council Retreat helps the Council re-center on its Mission/Vision/Values and discern a focus for the coming year, rooted in our ELCA teachings. The leadership in the Synod is strong, and the members of the Council were very engaged and worked efficiently and productively while doing this work. They have a strong relationship with each other, probably due to relatively close proximity and the opportunity to meet in person regularly.

2. How did the visit deepen the relationship between the Synod and the Churchwide Organization? What, if anything, should be shared with the Church Council and/or Churchwide Organization?

It was good to maintain open lines of communication between me and the Council and to work alongside them in the work of the retreat. I was also able to share our meeting summaries from our recent meetings, and I hope this helps to show them what is happening at the Churchwide level of the church. The Synod was intentionally using church teaching documents to frame the discussion of their work, and all the work was very Godly and for the benefit of all. This was a very restorative and meaningful time for me and for them as a Synod Council. Thank you to the ELCA for having such comprehensive and accessible documents for us to use!

**Completed report and e-mail it to [joseph.schmidt@elca.org](mailto:joseph.schmidt@elca.org)**

## Church Council Member Synod Visit Report

**Note:** Information submitted on this form will be prepared for viewing by Church Council, liaison bishops and resource staff. **Confidential information should be submitted on a separate file which will be shared with Office of the Presiding Bishop and Synod Relations staff as appropriate.**

Name: Joel Miller  
Synod Visited: Southeast Minnesota Synod  
Visit Date: January 25, 2026  
Purpose of Visit: Mount Olive Church Adult Education Hour

1. What are the joys and opportunities happening within the Synod?  
They have a thriving adult education hour and fellowship hour between services. They are very civic minded and an active church in current societal and political affairs. There were about 40 participants in this forum.

2. How did the visit deepen the relationship between the Synod and the Churchwide Organization? What, if anything, should be shared with the Church Council and/or Churchwide Organization?

I was able to share meeting summaries from our last two meetings to keep them up to speed on current events at Churchwide. I was also able to explain what Church Council is and the general work of our group and our committees. This helped everyone understand our interrelatedness more. One member wanted me to advocate for everyone to watch the “Racial Day of Healing” program from the ELCA. Others were glad to hear of our advocacy and charity work and others wanted to advocate for aggressive churchwide statements and action relating to climate change and the environment. I accidentally mentioned the “racism” training and task force and was corrected that it should be “anti-racism training” and I stood corrected. Overall, it was an emotional visit, in the wake of ICE shootings and activity in the State of Minnesota and there seemed to be a pall over the day.

**Completed report and e-mail it to [joseph.schmidt@elca.org](mailto:joseph.schmidt@elca.org)**

*En Bloc* Items

**I. Budget and Finance Committee**

**A. Revisions to Resolutions Regarding Authority to Act in Financial Matters**

In April 2024, the Church Council adopted CC24.04.09a regarding the Appointment of Assistant Officers. A revision is being proposed to update the appointments. The proposed revisions are as follows:

**1. Appointment of Assistant Officers**

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**RESOLVED**, that for the sole purpose of executing, when necessary, documents approved and authorized in accordance with actions of the Church Council, the following are hereby appointed as assistant treasurers of this corporation: Santiago Padilla, Annette Roman, and Stephanie Ulba to serve until replaced or removed by subsequent appointments, with such subsequent appointments to be based upon the nomination and recommendation of the Treasurer;

**RESOLVED**, that for the sole purpose of executing or attesting, when necessary, documents approved and authorized in accordance with actions of the Church Council, the following are hereby appointed as assistant secretaries of this corporation: Thomas A. Cunniff, Norman K. Fry, Katharyn L. Wheeler and Paul K. Irwin to serve until replaced or removed by subsequent appointments, with such subsequent appointments to be based upon the nomination and recommendation of the Secretary.

**RESOLVED**, that prior resolutions adopted by this Council, including CC24.04.09a and the prior actions identified in CC15.04.31b, are hereby rescinded and replaced by this action.

**B. Investment Policies**

In November 2024, the Church Council approved changes to certain investment policies. Office of the Treasurer recommends a revision to the [Core Investment Policy Statement](#).

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**To approve the revised ELCA Core Investment Policy Statement dated March 19, 2026.**

**II. Committee on Appeals**

**A. Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings**

The Committee on Appeals is responsible for recommending rules of procedure for the performance of its duties. The rules shall become effective when ratified by the Church Council as stated in constitutional provision 20.21.

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church [recommended](#) amending bylaw 20.22.04. and following adoption of that amended bylaw, to amend Rule D2 of the “[Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings Against Rostered Ministers and Congregations of the ELCA](#).” The CRLC’s rationale for the amendments were to provide for “equal cost-sharing between the churchwide organization and the synods of professional expenses related to misconduct investigations.” (Response of the Church Council to the Recommendations in the Report of the CRLC and the Report of the CRLC, p. 53). The 2025 Churchwide Assembly adopted the amended bylaw at its assembly [CA25.04.14].

The Committee on Appeals designated a working group to discuss the proposed text amending Rule D2. The working group subsequently suggested several revisions. Text highlighted in yellow represents the CRLC's original proposal, while green highlights indicate the working group's revisions. After consideration, the committee approved the final text as indicated below.

**D. Consultation: The Process Before Charges Are Brought by the Synod Bishop**

- ...
- D2. In addition to, or in lieu of, a consultation panel or an advisory panel, a synod bishop may utilize the assistance of one of the synod bishop's assistants or other staff persons or any other individual appointed by the synod bishop for this purpose. In addition, a bishop may request investigatory assistance under 20.22.04., which may include, but is not limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized professional services.
- a. Any contractors providing services in such investigations will work under the supervision of the general counsel or synod attorney at the discretion of the synod bishop.
  - b. The result of such investigation shall typically be the preparation of a written report delivered to the general counsel and to the synod bishop requesting the investigation and the supervising attorney. The synod bishop may dispense with the requirement of a written report, however, if, in their sole discretion, it is in the best interest of those involved.
  - c. The synod bishop need not follow or disclose the contents of the report or any recommendations contained therein.

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To ratify the amendments to the “Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings against Rostered Ministers and Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”; and  
To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.

**B. “Accountability within the ELCA” Recommendation 2.2 from the CRLC**

At its April 2025 meeting, the Church Council requested that the Committee on Appeals “develop resources to help synods identify candidates with the appropriate spiritual gifts and demonstrated competencies in working with varied ethnic backgrounds to serve on synod consultation committees, referring, as appropriate, to the considerations outlined in the rationale of “Accountability within the ELCA;” consult with the Conference of Bishops on such resources; and present a report by the Fall 2026 meeting of the Church Council;” (CC25.04.06; [Response of the Church Council to the Recommendations in the Report of the CRLC and the Report of the CRLC](#), p. 3)

A working group of the Committee on Appeals drafted two documents: [Guidance for the Formation of Synod Consultation Committees in the ELCA](#) and [A Rubric for Selecting Synod Consultation Committee Members](#). The Conference of Bishops has received these resources. The committee has approved the two documents.

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To affirm the use of the following resources to help synods identify candidates to serve on consultation committees: [Guidance for the Formation of Synod Consultation Committees in the ELCA](#) and [A Rubric for Selecting Synod Consultation Committee Members](#).

**III. Executive Committee**

**A. Revised Committee Charters**

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

**To approve the revised committee charters; and  
To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.**

**IV. Legal and Constitutional Review Committee**

**A. Synod Constitution Amendments**

Provision 10.12 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* stipulates: “Each synod shall have a constitution, which shall become effective upon ratification by the Church Council. Amendments thereto shall be subject to like ratification...”

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

**To ratify the following amendments to the constitution of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod (8H):**

**S7.24.** Ministers under call on the rosters of this synod shall remain as members of the Synod Assembly so long as they remain under call and so long as their names appear on the rosters of this synod. ~~Lay members of the Synod Assembly representing congregations shall continue as such until replaced by the election of new members or until they have been disqualified by termination of membership. Normally, congregations will hold elections prior to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly. Lay voting members elected by their congregations shall continue to serve until their resignation from the Synod Assembly, replacement by their congregation, or disqualification by suspension or termination of voting membership in their congregation. Other lay voting members shall continue to serve until the opening of the next regular synod assembly.~~

**S7.30.** This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council to grant an interim pastor not otherwise enfranchised the privilege of voice in the Synod Assembly during the period of that minister’s service as an interim pastor of a congregation of this synod.

**S9.11.** The Synod Council shall establish a process to elect or appoint representatives to the steering committee of its region.

**S10.09.** A majority of the members, excluding the youth member, of the Synod Council shall constitute a quorum.

**B. Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies**

A few revisions are being proposed for the Personnel Policies of the Churchwide Organization related to sections 2.13.2. (Personal Data Changes), 4.1. (Core Hours), and 6.7. (Jury or Witness Duty). The updated Personnel Policies reflecting the proposed changes and revisions can be found [here](#).

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

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

**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.

**C. Proposed continuing resolution amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America***

The Office of the Secretary recommends a proposed amendment to a continuing resolution in the ELCA Constitution related to the Audit Committee.

The proposed amendment will be found in “[Proposed Amendments-Continuing Resolutions](#)” in the Public Current Meeting channel under the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee folder. The process for continuing resolutions is specified in Chapter 22 of the ELCA Constitution. A two-thirds vote of the Church Council is required for adoption.

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC] [Two-thirds approval required]**

**Recommended:**

**To adopt the amendment to 14.41.F22. in the *Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as described in “Proposed Amendments – Continuing Resolutions.”**

**V. Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee**

**A. Deferment of rural life and ministry social message**

At its October 2025 meeting, the Church Council adopted a memorial directing the Theological Discernment staff to “review the request for a new social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations” and bring a recommendation to the Spring 2026 meeting [CC25.10.34].

The staff is [recommending deferment](#) at this time to allow for an assessment of this request along with continued assessments of other pending requests.

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**To defer the question of development of a social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations until the November 2026 Church Council meeting in order to allow for a careful and thorough assessment of that request along with continued assessment of the other pending requests. This assessment will include input from relevant leadership circles as well as the availability of staff capacity, and finances; and**

**To request that the secretary of this church notify the synod of this action.**

**B. Timeline on development of abortion SPR and study resources**

At its October 2025 meeting, the Church Council adopted a memorial regarding the development of a social policy resolution that applies the *Abortion* (1991) statement to the challenging personal struggles and pastoral issues brought about because some social conditions have changed since its adoption. The action also referred the memorial to the Theological Ethics and Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment staff “to develop additional study resources to address the concerns expressed in this memorial” [CC25.10.33].

The Theological Discernment team reviewed the topic and provided a [timeline response](#) for its further consideration.

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**To receive the assessment and anticipated timeline from the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop for developing a social policy resolution regarding abortion and additional study resources;**

**To request the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop begin development on a descriptive social policy resolution on the issue of abortion to be presented to the November 2026 Church Council meeting;**

**To direct the Theological Discernment team to bring a recommendation concerning additional resources related to the *Abortion* (1991) social statement to the November 2026 Church Council meeting; and**

**To request that the secretary of this church notify the synod of this action.**

## **VI. Service and Justice Committee**

### **A. Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-Term Global Personnel**

Church Council is responsible for reviewing the “Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-Term Global Personnel” document. The Service and Justice unit, in consultation with legal counsel, human resources, Office of the Treasurer and the Service and Justice Administration, has codified several amendments and is recommending a revised policy for long-term mission personnel. The revised policy can be found [here](#).

## **CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

### **Recommended:**

**To approve the updated “Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-Term Global Personnel” policy.**

## **VII. Christian Community and Leadership Committee**

## **VIII. Other Items**

### **A. Approval of the Minutes**

The minutes of the Church Council meeting on [Oct. 2-3, 2025](#) and [Nov. 12, 2025](#) have been provided to council members electronically on Church Council Microsoft Teams.

The minutes of the council’s Executive Committee meetings on [Oct 1-3, 2025](#), [Nov. 4, 2025](#), [Dec. 16, 2025](#), [Jan. 22, 2026](#), [Feb. 10, 2026](#), and [March 19, 2026](#), have been provided electronically to members on Church Council Teams.

Please provide any notations or typographical errors in the distributed text of the minutes in writing to the executive for Office of the Secretary administration ([Katharyn.Wheeler@elca.org](mailto:Katharyn.Wheeler@elca.org)).

Proper corrections will be entered into the protocol copies of the minutes. Such corrections need not be raised in the plenary session in connection with the approval of the minutes.

## **CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

### **Recommended:**

**To approve the minutes of the Oct. 2-3, 2025 and Nov. 12, 2025 meetings of the Church Council; and  
To ratify actions of the council’s Executive Committee as indicated in the minutes of the Oct. 1-3, 2025, Nov. 4, 2025, Dec. 16, 2025, Jan. 22, 2026, Feb. 10, 2026, and March 19, 2026, meetings.**

### **B. Church Council Nominations and Elections**

Pursuant to 14.22. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the Church Council is to elect nominees to a vacancy on a board or committee of the churchwide organization. Biographical information is provided in [Biographies](#).

## **CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

### **Recommended:**

**To re-elect to the board of trustees of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to a second four-year term beginning October 1, 2026 and ending September 30, 2030: Mr. Anthony Peter Johnston**

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To elect to the board of trustees of Luther Seminary to a term beginning July 1, 2026 and ending June 30, 2030: Ms. Julie Van Cleave

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To elect to the advisory council of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University to a term beginning June 1, 2026 and ending May 31, 2030: Ms. Cindy Moss and the Rev. Brian Stamm; and

To elect to the advisory council of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University to a term beginning June 1, 2026 and ending May 31, 2028: the Rev. Rachel Connelly.

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To elect Ms. Cherrish Holland to the Mission Investment Fund board of trustees for a term expiring in 2028.

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

To appoint to the board of directors of Mosaic, Inc. with a three-year term expiring in 2028: Ms. Mercy Ndosi-Shoo.

## Church Council

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### Ms. Denise Beumer

**Synod of Congregation:** Florida-Bahamas Synod, Elca (9E)  
**Congregation:** St John Lutheran Church (ID: 01746) - Winter Park, Florida  
**Birthdate:** 10/11/1952      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** Black/African American/African Descent  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

#### **Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

1000 S. Orlando Ave  
B21  
Maitland, FL 32751 United States

#### **Telephone:**

Preferred: 4077827662 (Cell)

#### **Email:**

dbeumer1000@gmail.com (Home)

#### **Educational Institutions:**

University of Phoenix (Date not specified.): Bachelor Of Science In Business Admin

#### **Employment:**

Vice President / Branch Operations (02/01/2005 - 08/01/2017)  
BB &T Bank- Retired  
Maitland, FL

#### **Previous Employment:**

BB &T Bank (2005-2017)  
SunTrust Bank (1984-2005)

#### **Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Vice President and Board member of Florida WELCA (2017-2025)  
Trained as anti-racism team (Just Love), Florida Bahamas Synod (2020-2025)  
Elected to the Florida Bahamas Synod Consultation Committee (2023-2026)

#### **What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

I feel a clear calling from God to serve in mission through the Churchwide Council. I bring a deep love for people and a passion for serving. With years of management experience in the private sector, I've learned to collaborate effectively, honor individuals and work together as a team toward a shared purpose.

#### **If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

As an African-American member of St. John Lutheran church this have given me a unique perspective to our faith community and the world at large.

**Reference:** Rev. Tom Lyberg    **Phone:**5672086342    **E-mail:**PastorTom@mysj.org

**Relationship:** Congregation Pastor

3/2/2026 3:29:03 PM

Church Council

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**Dr. Jeffrey Dennis Akerson**

**Synod of Congregation:** Nebraska Synod, ELCA (4A)  
**Congregation:** Immanuel Lutheran Church (ID: 03287) - Bellevue, Nebraska  
**Birthdate:** 03/02/1958      **Gender:** Man  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

**Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

2509 Lynnwood Drove  
Bellevue, NE 68123 United States

**Telephone:**

Preferred: 4028890437 (Cell)

**Email:**

jdamdpc@gmail.com (Home)

**Educational Institutions:**

University of Nebraska (1976-1980): Associate Degree In The Sciences  
University of Nebraska Medical Center (1980-1984): Doctor Of Medicine

**Employment:**

Assistant Professor, Chief Medical Officer Bellevue Medical Center (07/01/2014 - Present )  
University of Nebraska Medical Center  
Omaha, NE

**Previous Employment:**

Bellevue Family Practitce (2010-2014)  
Sidney Medical Associates (1987-2010)

**Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Church Council President, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Bellevue, NE (2011-2015)  
NE Synod video production on "Being a Spiritual Council " (2004-2004)  
ELCA Committee on Discipline (2022-2028)

**What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

As a lifelong member of the Lutheran community and a dedicated servant of Christ, I am honored and excited to be considered for the Churchwide Council. Called to church leadership over 25 years ago and actively involved in our church at both local and synodical levels, I bring experience, passion, and commitment to this position. Throughout my journey within the ELCA, I have served in various capacities, including church council, Sunday School and men's group leader, worship leader, active participant on boards and committees, leadership of long-range planning teams, and conductor of church council retreats across the Nebraska Synod. These experiences have deepened my understanding of the diverse needs and aspirations of our congregations and have inspired me to advocate for unity, justice, and compassion within our denomination. With God's grace and guidance, I am confident that we can continue to proclaim the Gospel, nurture discipleship, and bear witness to God's redeeming love.

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

**Reference:** Rev. Edgar Schambach      **Phone:**4028417551      **E-mail:**edgarandbetty@msn.com

**Relationship:** He is a former pastor

2/14/2025 1:07:36 PM

## Mission Investment Fund Board of Trustees

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### Ms. Cherrish Anne Holland

**Synod of Congregation:** Southwestern Minnesota Synod, ELCA (3F)  
**Congregation:** Peace Lutheran Church (ID: 12169) - New London, Minnesota  
**Birthdate:** 02/01/1971      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

#### **Preferred Mailing Address: (Work)**

679 W River Drive  
New London, MN 56273 United States

#### **Telephone:**

Preferred: 3208944580 (Cell)

#### **Email:**

cherrish.holland@gmail.com (Home)

#### **Educational Institutions:**

Gustavus Adolphus College (1989-1993): Bachelor In Social Work

#### **Employment:**

Major Gifts Officer (07/08/1996 - Present)  
Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota  
St Paul, MN

#### **Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

ELCA Churchwide Council (2019-2025)  
ELCA Education Debt Task Force (2022-2025)  
ELCA Interdependence & Purpose Task Force (2025-2028)

#### **What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

I continue to sense God nudging me into new forms of service in the ELCA, stretching how my gifts can support the church's mission. I would bring to the MIF Board of Trustees experience on the ELCA Churchwide Council, including serving as Chair of Budget & Finance and on the Executive Committee. My 8 years of service on the New London–Spicer School Board strengthened my skills in listening, strategic planning, and financial oversight. I have a passion for equipping lay leaders across the ELCA and understand the church's wider impact through 30 years with Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. My work in financial counseling and now major gifts at LSS of MN make me comfortable fostering conversations about money. I also bring experience as a congregational President, Treasurer, and Stewardship Committee leader. I am highly relational, deeply committed to the ELCA, and excited about its future.

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

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**Other committee or board**  
**Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago**

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**Mr. Anthony Peter Johnston**

**Synod of Congregation:** Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA (5A)  
**Congregation:** Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church (ID: 30469) - Chicago, Illinois  
**Birthdate:** 05/03/1964      **Gender:** Man  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

**Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

9950 S. Prospect Ave.

1

Chicago, IL 60643 United States

**Residential Mailing Address:**

9950 South Prospect Avenue

Chicago, IL 60643 United States

**Telephone:**

Preferred: 3128379001 (Cell)

**Email:**

tjohnston@ccctu.org (Work)

**Educational Institutions:**

(Date not specified.):

**Employment:**

President (11/15/2015 - 06/14/2029)

Cook County College Teachers U

Chicago, IL

**Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Congregational Council (2009-2015)

Adult Education Teacher (2008-2015)

Reconciling in Christ Committee (2011-2013)

**What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

I believe the Kingdom of God is within all of us and I seek to act accordingly.

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

**Reference:** Tony Johnston    **Phone:**3128379001    **E-mail:**tjohnston@ccctu.org

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**Other committee or board**  
**Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary**

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**Dr. Cindy H Moss**

**Synod of Congregation:** North Carolina Synod, ELCA (9B)  
**Congregation:** Christ Lutheran Church (ID: 04178) - Charlotte, North Carolina  
**Birthdate:** 03/23/1959      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

**Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

109 Cove Pointe  
Mount Holly, NC 28120 United States

**Residential Mailing Address:**

109 Cove Pointe  
Mount Holly, NC 28120 United States

**Telephone:**

Preferred: 7044584450 (Cell)

Alternate: 7044584450 (Cell)

**Email:**

STEMboss1@gmail.com (Home)

**Educational Institutions:**

UNC Chapel Hill (1977-1981): Bachelor Of Science  
Syracuse University (1984-1987): Master Of Arts In Teaching  
Curtin Institute of Technology (1997-2003): Doctor Of Philosophy

**Employment:**

CEO/Chief consultant (08/25/2020 - 03/24/2026)

Cindy Moss STEMboss LLC

Mount Holly, NC

**Previous Employment:**

Defined Learning (2021-2024)

Discovery Education (2012-2020)

**Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Member of Spirit Song-contemporary choir (2000-2026)

Christ Lutheran Orchestra (1998-2027)

Adult leader-The Experience high school touring choir (1999-2016)

**What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

I only weighed 3 pounds and 2 ounces when I was born in 2858, and doctors did not expect me to live very long. I have always felt that God has a purpose for me and that has carried through my work as an educator and business person. In my volunteer service I have been active in music and youth groups, as well as having served on Church Councils

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

**Reference:** Mark Glaeset      **Phone:** 7047638049      **E-mail:** markwglaeset@gmail.com

**Relationship:** He is the person with whom I made initial contact at church and worked together for 20 years

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## Other committee or board

### Mosaic, Inc.

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#### Ms. Mercy Ndoshi-Shoo

**Synod of Congregation:** Nebraska Synod, ELCA (4A)  
**Congregation:** St Michael Lutheran Church (ID: 07606) - Omaha, Nebraska  
**Birthdate:** 08/15/1978      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** Black/African American/African Descent  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

#### **Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

8125 N 173rd Street  
Bennington, NE 68007 United States

#### **Residential Mailing Address:**

8125 N 173rd Street  
Bennington, NE 68007 United States

#### **Telephone:**

Preferred: 4025989232 (Cell)

#### **Email:**

mercy.ndosi@valmont.com (Work)

#### **Educational Institutions:**

Bellevue University (2006-2010): Master Of Business Administration  
Bellevue University (2001-2004): Bachelor Of Business Admin

#### **Employment:**

Internal Auditor (12/06/2020 - Present )  
Valmont Industries Inc  
Omaha, Ne

#### **Previous Employment:**

Emmanuel Communities (2019-2020)  
NTT Inc formally Solutionary Inc (2012-2019)

#### **Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Council member St Michael Luth church (2014-2015)  
Treasurer of the board-Compass Ministries (2021-2024)  
Lutheran School Of Theology Chicago-Board of Director (2024-)

#### **What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

MOSAIC plays a vital role in my country Tanzania serving kids and families that had been forgotten and shamed. God has called us to serve one another through the gifts we have been graced by him. I have the call to serve MOSAIC with the gifts that God has graciously given me of time and talent. As an auditor I have a huge role making sure families are getting served graciously and with care and as child of God it is my responsibility to serve this great organization as part of the body of Christ.

#### **If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

As a foreigner and a woman of color, I can offer diverse ways to connect with God and share my personal faith journal.

**Reference:** Pastor Tim Koester      **Phone:**4024932871      **E-mail:**pastortim@saintmichaellutheran.org

**Relationship:** St Michael Lutheran Senior Pastor

12/11/2025 1:15:03 PM

**Other committee or board**  
**Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary**

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**The Rev. Rachel Leah Connelly**

**Synod of Congregation:** South Carolina Synod, ELCA (9C)  
**Congregation:** St John Evangelical Lutheran Church (ID: 05662) - Walhalla, South Carolina  
**Birthdate:** 03/17/1963      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Synod of Roster:** 9C      **Leader Key:**  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

**Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

995 White Cut Road  
WALHALLA, SC 29691 United States

**Residential Mailing Address:**

995 White Cut Rd  
Walhalla, SC 29691 United States

**Telephone:**

Preferred: 9105150897 (Cell)

**Email:**

stjohnspastorrachel@gmail.com (Work)

**Educational Institutions:**

Newberry College (1981-1985): Bachelor Of Science  
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (1986-1990): Master Of Divinity  
Luther Seminary (2009-2014): Doctor Of Divinity

**Employment:**

Senior Pastor (12/01/2017 - Present )  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Walhalla, SC

**Previous Employment:**

Water of Life Lutheran Church, Wilmington (Joint Ministry with Covenant Moravian 2012-2017) (2000-2017)  
Good Shepherd Lutheran, Goldsboro, NC (1990-2000)

**Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary Advisory Board (2023-2026)  
Lenoir Rhyne University Board of Trustees (2017-2023)  
ELCA Church Council (2007-2013)

**What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

In this time of great change and opportunity across the Church and Seminary Education, I feel God has prepared me to continue on the LTSS Advisory Council serving as the Chair. In 2012, I was on ELCA Church Council and voted for merger of LTSS with Lenoir-Rhyne University--a momentous vote for LTSS and all ELCA seminaries. More recently I shared in the strategic process and difficult decision to move LTSS to LRU's campus, seeking to steward theological education and the cultivation of leaders for public ministry into the future. Led by God's Spirit, my leadership style is relational, collaborative, and vision-oriented. Gifts/Experience: 35 years Parish Ministry; 10 years Internship Supervisor; Strong Missional Leader; Commitment to Justice and Diversity; Experienced in Adaptive Change; Love for Jesus, God's People and World; Rooted in Scripture, Lutheran Faith and Theology; Ecumenical Collaboration/Leadership; Knowledge of the ELCA and greater church; Passionate Spirituality.

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

**Alternate Committee Nominations:**

1. Nominating Committee

**Reference:** Bishop Ginny Aebischer **Phone:**8037278917 **E-mail:**ginny@scsynod.com

**Relationship:** She is my Bishop and Colleague

**Other committee or board**  
**Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary**

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**The Rev. Brian James Stamm**

**Synod of Congregation:** Virginia Synod, ELCA (9A)  
**Congregation:** St Michael Lutheran Church (ID: 07747) - Virginia Beach, Virginia  
**Birthdate:** 02/17/1964      **Gender:** Man  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Synod of Roster:** 9B      **Leader Key:** L020606  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

**Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

1100 Jamaica Ave.  
Chesapeake, VA 23322 United States

**Telephone:**

Preferred: 9192190194 (Cell)

**Email:**

bjstamm64@gmail.com (Home)

**Educational Institutions:**

Thiel College (1983-1987): Bachelor Of Arts  
The Lutheran Theo. Seminary Gettysburg (1987-1991): Master Of Divinity  
The Lutheran Theo. Seminary Philadelphia (2002-2006): Doctor Of Ministry

**Employment:**

Navy Wounded Warrior Program - Non-Medical Care Manager (05/22/2025 - Present )  
U. S. Navy  
Norfolk, VA

**Previous Employment:**

U.S. Navy Chaplain (1994-2024)  
Calvary Lutheran Church, Spencer, NC (1991-1994)

**Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Calvary Lutheran Church, Spencer, NC (1991-1994)  
Supply pastor - Virginia Synod (2011-)  
Teacher (Sunday Sch.) - St. Michael Lutheran Church, Virginia Beach, VA (2011-)

**What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

God has called me as a Navy chaplain to work in very diverse populations to bring people together and to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be a Godly presence in the most dangerous and challenging places, and to bring an ecumenical and multifaith ministry to those are in great need of spiritual support; the women and men of our armed forces. There is no more diverse community in our nation than the U.S. military where people of every background need to work together for a common goal. As a Navy senior executive leader, I have experience in this type of synergistic leadership that I would like to bring as a seminary board member. I have also developed skills in strategic planning and organization that I would like to bring to the Advisory Board of The Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary.

**If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

The military life is very physical and demanding on body, mind and sometime the soul. I am a disabled veteran like many who leave the military after decades of service. While none of these disabilities are extremely limiting, they do allow me to have a deeper appreciation for the challenges disabled people face. I would use this perspective to explore how accommodations can be made and how the gifts of disabled people can be celebrated for the benefit of all and in the advancement of ministry.

**Alternate Committee Nominations:**

1. Church Council
2. Committee on Discipline
3. Committee on Appeals

**Reference:** The Rev. Brian Riddle    **Phone:**7248159375    **E-mail:**pastorbrian@stmichaelvb.org

**Relationship:** parish pastor and colleague

## Other committee or board Luther Seminary

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### Ms. Julie Van Cleave

**Synod of Congregation:** Greater Milwaukee Synod, ELCA (5J)  
**Congregation:** Mount Carmel Lutheran Church (ID: 14741) - Milwaukee, Wisconsin  
**Birthdate:** 04/01/1959      **Gender:** Woman  
**Primary Language:** English      **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White  
**Willing to serve:** Yes

#### **Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)**

4935 Home Stretch Drive  
Waunakee, WI 53597 United States

#### **Telephone:**

Preferred: 2622274179 (Cell)

#### **Email:**

1julievc@gmail.com (Home)

#### **Educational Institutions:**

University of Wisconsin - Madison (Date not specified.): Bachelor Of Business Admin  
University of Wisconsin - Madison (Date not specified.): Master Of Business Administration  
Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) (Date not specified.):

#### **Employment:**

Chief Investment Officer (06/01/2013 - 06/30/2020)  
University of Wisconsin  
Madison, WI

#### **Previous Employment:**

University of Wisconsin Foundation (2013-2020)

#### **Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:**

Mt. Carmel Lutheran Church – Milwaukee

#### **What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?**

I believe in the importance of lifting up and supporting the work done in our ELCA congregations. These are places where people go to live and serve as Christians in the name of God. Congregations need the support of organizations such as their synod, seminaries, and service organizations. They often need financial support to help support new...

#### **If you identify as a member of one of the historically underrepresented groups, we invite you to share how you might offer a useful perspective to leadership in this church.**

**Reference:** Robin Steinke      **Phone:** 6516413215      **E-mail:** rsteinke001@luthersem.edu

**Relationship:** Serve as an At-large member on the Luther Seminary Investment Committee since 2022

2/18/2026 2:04:24 PM

## Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions

### 1. Confession of Faith in Our Time

*Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.02.06x]*

To receive with gratitude the memorials on “A Confession of Faith for Our Time” from the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin and on “Theological Imagination and ELCA Public Witness” from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod;

To reaffirm the ELCA’s official Confession of Faith as described in this church’s constitution and the use of ELCA social teaching as speaking for the ELCA in its public witness, and as a guide to moral deliberation among members about societal issues and challenges;

To consider action taken by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly on the recommended proposed social statement, *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* as the response to these memorials, since it addresses many of the concerns it lifted up, such as authoritarianism, political idolatry, deceptive speech, and Christian Nationalism;

To request that the Office of the Presiding Bishop consider the concerns expressed in these memorials in future social writing processes and social teaching resources;

To refer the memorials’ concerns to the Theological Discernment, Justice, and Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations teams in the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Witness in Society Team for assessment and a report to the Church Council by its Spring 2026 meeting;

To encourage ELCA congregations, rostered ministers, and lay leaders to utilize social teaching, preaching resources, and ecumenical and interreligious partnerships to publicly resist political violence, voter suppression, racial scapegoating, and any use of faith to justify autocracy; and

To encourage ELCA bishops and synods to create spaces for discernment, lament, and repentance for the church’s complicity in systems of political idolatry, and to accompany congregations seeking to rediscover their prophetic vocation in this time.

#### *Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop and Witness in Society Team (April 2026)*

The spirit of the memorial on “Confession of Faith in Our Time” speaks to upheaval in the nation and is taut with the grief and fear of many in this church and in this country. The memorial’s intent clearly is aimed at serving God and neighbor for the sake of Christ through bold proclamation and a faith active in love. It expresses the conviction that public witness to God’s love, justice, and peace is required for this church to meet the moment. The ELCA has spoken and acted in ways commensurate with these concerns, including through public statements from former Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and current Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry.

Memorials are received from synods to the Churchwide Assembly as requests. The synod memorials forwarded to the Churchwide Assembly call for several actions, centrally, the adoption of “A Confession of Faith for Our Time” or “a theological and public statement in opposition to authoritarianism.” Chapter 2 of the ELCA’s Constitution specifies what confessions of faith this church affirms, naming specifically three creeds and the confessional writings in the *Book of Concord*. Elsewhere it is clear that contemporary ELCA writings of the type called for by these memorials are grounded in ELCA social teaching.

Social teaching governs the institutional life of the ELCA and this church’s public witness and messaging. To be clear, such documents are “not new creeds or confessions” ([“Policies and Procedures of the ELCA Addressing Social Concerns”](#), p. 11). Moreover, the ELCA Constitution reserves to the ELCA as a community of moral deliberation the creation of official documents through a process of widespread discernment. This includes all theological statements or declarations of this church. Synods, then, are encouraged to bring memorials calling for the development of such documents to this whole church, rather than presenting a document to be considered or adopted by a Churchwide Assembly.

While we believe that it is not through our own efforts to follow Jesus’ life that we are redeemed, we confess and trust that God works in and through us to love as Jesus Christ loves in word and action. What we do in the public sphere is shaped by what we believe and confess as Lutheran Christians about God’s law and the gospel. “The gospel does not overthrow the secular government, public order, and marriage but instead intends that a person keep all this as a true order of God and demonstrate in these walks of life

Christan love and true good works according to each person's calling; Christians, therefore, are obliged to be subject to political authority and to obey its commands and laws in all that may be done without sin. But if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5[:29])" (Augsburg Confession, XVI, German text, Kolb and Wengert, pp. 48, 50). In fact, it is God's will that Christians do good works. (See Articles VI and XX.)

**Considerations:**

In this time, the ELCA has and continues to make declarations about U.S. civic life because of its confession that Jesus Christ is Lord and its teaching "that the God who justifies expects all people to do justice" (*Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, p. 3). This church has indicated repeatedly that there are certain proceedings and decisions of the current administration that are contrary to God's intention for the well-being of all since they dramatically harm rather than serve neighbors, especially the oppressed and vulnerable. This church also notes the harm caused to the common good through disregard of constitutional limits on executive power at the expense of other branches of government, nongovernmental institutions and individual rights. The concerns expressed and the urgency felt in these memorials are palpable and certainly speak for others besides those who crafted and supported them in synod assembly.

Many of the concerns named are addressed in existing social teaching or public messaging, and a significant number of others are front-and-center in the recently adopted social statement, *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* (2025). In the social statement, the ELCA repudiates Christian nationalism as a distortion of the gospel (Art. 38), provides a theological analysis of power, declares as sin dominating uses of political power, and affirms the calling of the church to participate in civic life for the good of the neighbor, grounded in the scriptures and the Lutheran confessions. The social statement also provides extensive analysis and teaching on deceptive and hateful speech (Art. 41 and 42), freedom of religion, and voter suppression (Art. 44).

A study guide written in collaboration between Theological Ethics and Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania (LAMPa) is available [online](#).

As a social statement of the ELCA, *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* (2025) will provide grounding teaching and policy direction for future social teachings, public messages, and advocacy within the church. Thus, the analysis of concerns in the social statement will continue to shape the teaching and policy of the ELCA.

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**To receive the response on "Confession of Faith in Our Time" from the Office of the Presiding Bishop Theological Discernment team and Service and Justice unit Witness in Society team;**

**To encourage study and use of the social statement on *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* (2025) in teaching, preaching, and moral discernment in this church; and**

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

**2. Motion J: AI in the Church**

*Submitted by: William Platnick [Upstate New York, 7D]*

Whereas, we believe that "God created humankind in [God's] image" (Genesis 1:27) and that every human being bears the *imago Dei*, endowed with intrinsic dignity, creativity, and moral responsibility;

Whereas, the ELCA's social message *Faith, Science and Technology: Environment, Medicine, and Genetics* reminds us that "God works through human creativity," and calls the church to exercise wise stewardship of all God-given gifts;

Whereas, artificial intelligence (AI)—broadly defined as computer systems capable of tasks once thought to require human intelligence—has seen rapid advances in areas such as language processing, decision-making, and pattern recognition, with profound implications for work, relationships, worship, and public life;

Whereas, AI raises urgent ethical and theological questions around human dignity, agency, bias, privacy, justice, the nature of vocation, and the safe deployment of powerful new tools—especially for those most vulnerable to technological displacement or surveillance;

Whereas, AI-driven automation threatens to displace workers across industries, exacerbating economic inequity and calling the church to stand in solidarity with those affected;

Whereas, congregations, rostered leaders, and church institutions increasingly encounter AI-driven tools in pastoral care, education, administration, and global mission, yet lack consistent frameworks to discern where such tools may augment human ministry—and where they risk undermining the Gospel and human flourishing;

Whereas, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly has called for ongoing socio-ethical reflection on emerging technologies and directs its Division for Church in Society to resource this church in engaging public policy, advocacy, and education;

Therefore, be it resolved, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

1. Affirms that human beings alone—created by God, redeemed in Christ, and guided by the Holy Spirit—remain the ultimate bearers of moral responsibility; no AI system can replace the vocation, compassion, or discernment entrusted to God’s people.
2. Directs the ELCA Division for Church in Society, in partnership with the ELCA Advocacy Office and the seminary network, to develop and publish by March 2026:
  - A concise “AI and Faith” study guide for small groups and adult forums, with discussion questions rooted in Lutheran theology.
  - Ethical and Safe-Use Guidelines for AI in worship planning, pastoral care tools, educational settings, administrative functions, and social ministry programs—emphasizing transparency, accountability, data privacy, bias mitigation, and safeguards against unintended harm.
3. Encourages all ELCA councils (congregational, synod, and churchwide) to utilize the following Values Framework—originally adopted by the PC(USA) 226th General Assembly—in order to interpret and apply the Ethical and Safe-Use Guidelines (see 2) as they arise in new or unanticipated contexts, while more comprehensive policy is under development:
  - a. Recognize the fundamental, inherent dignity of every human.
  - b. Ensure no human or human community is subjected to harm at any stage in the AI lifecycle, and mitigate disruptive impacts.
  - c. Acknowledge AI’s potential to assist at every stage of the human life cycle.
  - d. Insist on preservation, promotion, and expansion of fundamental freedoms and rights for individuals and communities in AI-assisted contexts.
  - e. Implement environmental and ecosystem safeguards to ensure the flourishing of creation.
  - f. Foster participative and enabling roles for all actors, in building peaceful and just societies.
  - g. Promote peace, inclusivity, justice, equity, and interconnectedness throughout the AI lifecycle.
  - h. Commit to engaging AI’s broader implications in a theologically responsible manner.
4. Encourages ELCA seminaries and partner institutions to establish or expand interdisciplinary courses and research initiatives at the intersection of theology, ethics, computer science, and social justice—preparing future rostered ministers and church professionals to navigate AI’s challenges faithfully and safely.
5. Urges the ELCA to:
  - Advocate, with ecumenical and interfaith partners, for public policies that protect workers displaced by automation, uphold data privacy, prohibit lethal autonomous weapons, and promote responsible innovation.
  - Partner with global companion churches to ensure AI-enabled tools (e.g., translation, health diagnostics, educational platforms) advance the gospel, human well-being, and equitable access, rather than entrench existing inequities.
6. Requests that by the 2028 Churchwide Assembly, the Church Council report on progress made, lessons learned, and recommend any further actions needed to ensure ELCA ministries remain rooted in the Gospel, responsive—and safe—in an age of rapid technological change and ecological challenge.

*Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.06.30]*

To refer the “Resolution on Artificial Intelligence in the Church” to the Office of the Presiding Bishop (Theological Discernment) and to the Service and Justice unit (Advocacy), in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer (Information Technology), and to request a progress report to the Church Council.

*Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice unit (April 2026)*

This report is intended to inform the Church Council of activities related specifically to engaging Artificial Intelligence within or tethered to the Churchwide Organization (CWO). A fair portion of the activity described was underway prior to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly's adoption of Motion J.<sup>1</sup> However, this report responds to Churchwide Assembly Motion J and provides the occasion to articulate all CWO work being done now or anticipated in the near future.

Rapid and widespread developments in AI are widely acknowledged, and in the judgment of the Theological Discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, these developments require this church's sustained attention. A key underlying concern of this progress report is if and how this church will engage developments in AI with *sustained* attention as this technology increasingly infuses civic life. This church has overarching principles of social teaching that are applicable. Foremost among these teachings, this church urges any powerful new technology to be guided by a just and wise use that respects and promotes the community of life under God (*Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility* [2011], p. 15.)

Six areas of CWO activity are overviewed briefly. The six areas are:

- I. Information Technology's attention to how and which AI tools will be used within the CWO structure.
- II. The CWO's Data Governance interunit team's development of User Guidelines.
- III. Corporate Social Responsibility's (Service and Justice unit) preparation of an issue paper, adopted by Church Council, October 2025.
- IV. Projects anticipated by Theological Ethics (Theological Discernment, OB)
- V. The ELCA Consulting Group on AI and the Church, convened by the Theological Ethics desk.
- VI. The AI and the Church Summit, an ecumenical effort in which the ELCA participates; the Summit is related to the AI and Faith Network. The Innovation unit of CWO serves as liaison with this project.

## **I. Information Technology**

IT staff have spent significant time this past year building structures, practices, and value guidance for CWO staff use of AI with a focus on human-centeredness while seeking to enable greater work efficiency. The full report from Jonathan Beyer (Executive Director, IT and Digital Solutions) can be found [here](#), but it should be noted that a new section on AI has been added to the CWO's official policies.

## **II. Data Governance**

The AI data governance interunit team is developing an AI ethical use policy for the CWO to guide staff and programs in adapting to an AI-infused workplace and public space. The parameters set forth will provide a framework for evaluating CWO's emerging and expanding use of the technology in ways that enable safe and wise practices. For example, there will be an emphasis on restricting AI's use so that it does not replace human creativity and influence. In another example, the guidelines will implement safeguards against illusions, poorly crafted reports, or any public content that hasn't undergone human review at key stages. Additionally, environmental and economic factors will be considered. These guidelines are consciously grounded in ELCA theological principles. A draft policy should be ready for

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<sup>1</sup> *Motion J* (CA25.06.30, adopted [584-15]): The resolution refers to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Theological Discernment, Service and Justice and ELCA Witness in Society, in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer and Information Technology, consideration of the ethics and morality surrounding AI, including creating safeguards both in privacy and usage, as well as to develop a "faith and AI" study guide, among other steps, to try to keep up with the rapidly-evolving technology.

review by the Data Governance Team in April 2026, which hopes to submit in May to the CWO Administrative Team for their consideration.

### **III. Corporate Social Responsibility**

In October 2025, the Church Council approved an [Issue Paper on Artificial Intelligence](#) (CC25.10.42) prepared by Witness in Society's desk for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and developed in consultation with Theological Ethics. (CSR issue papers lay out ways that ELCA social teaching are to be used to support interaction with corporations, whether through dialogues or filing shareholder resolutions. Issue papers foreground ethical concerns and relevant ELCA social teachings, without directing specific actions. These papers may be used by other actors, but Portico, in particular, uses them as the basis for its interactions with corporations.) This AI issue paper provides guidance for ethical questions and reflections by individuals and groups across the ELCA's three expressions.

### **IV. Theological Ethics**

The Theological Ethics desk annually holds a gathering of Lutheran ethicists with an open invitation to anyone interested in the particular topic. This gathering is the primary event of the Lutheran Ethicists' Network, which supports the work of Theological Ethics. The topic for the January 6-7, 2027, Gathering is AI, and it will provide one important occasion sponsored by Theological Ethics for leadership conversation. Typically, papers and conversations from the Gathering then are published in the subsequent issue of the [Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#), with discussion questions that make the materials more widely useful. The Theological Ethics desk is considering other projects and is providing lead responsibility for the ELCA Consulting Group (see below, V.) and its contributions.

### **V. The ELCA Consulting Group on AI and the Church**

This new ELCA consulting group is an ad hoc gathering of ELCA members convened by staff of the Theological Ethics desk. The intent is an informal and fluid gathering of specialists to help the ELCA engage questions about AI across its ecology. The criteria for invitation include ELCA representational principles and a diversity of perspectives. Participants bring callings of expertise and connection from each of the three expressions of this church—CWO, synod, and congregations. Members are committed to sharing their various expertise and experience to foster the use of moral-value frameworks of justice and practical wisdom as guided by ELCA theological and ethical principles.<sup>2</sup> The group has met online bi-monthly since November 2025 to identify priorities. In March and April 2026, working groups will be set up to contribute toward education resource development, AI governance and policies, development of resources with theological, ethical and social analysis, and long-range recommendations. A resource information clearinghouse for the ELCA is also being discussed.

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<sup>2</sup> “The ELCA consulting group is a volunteer ad hoc group of ELCA members convened by staff of the Theological Ethics desk to serve as an informal and fluid set of consultants to aid our church as it engages Artificial Intelligence. They are committed to sharing their various expertise and experience to foster the use of moral value frameworks of justice and practical wisdom that respect and promote the community of life under God as we engage artificial intelligence across the ELCA ecology. The intent is to foster theological judgment, ethical values, useful guidelines, and practical innovation. This work is focused on the ELCA ecology as a whole but remains mindful of how this church must contribute to a Church Catholic and a society increasingly infused by the various kinds of AI. The group's activities and involvement will vary, but the overall purpose is guided by Motion J from the ELCA CWA 2025 as a consulting group that aids coordination of activity and information and serves as a clearing house for cross fertilization.” (Working Charter of the ELCA Consulting Group on AI and the Church)

## VI. AI and Church Ecumenical Summit

The AI and the Church Summit is an ecumenical effort under the umbrella of the [AI and Faith network](#). There have been two summits—2024 in Seattle and 2025 in Minneapolis. A third is being planned with hopes of several more. The CWO Innovation unit has a seat on the planning team and has supported participation by selected staff and ELCA members. The Summits have involved theological and ethical presentations and futurist simulations as well as generating ecumenical working groups that are to prepare publications and resources. The Summit currently involves selected staff and members from the ELCA, The Episcopal Church, USA; United Methodist Church; and Presbyterian Church (USA) with hopes for additional denominational partners. The ELCA is seen as the bridge among these participants because of this church's Communion agreements and official ongoing conversations with each of these denominations. (It is not the case that the other three denominations have the same agreements or formal conversations with each other.)

### **CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

#### **Recommended:**

**To receive the progress report on the “Resolution on Artificial Intelligence in the Church” from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice unit and to anticipate a final response be presented to the Church Council by its Spring 2027 meeting;**

**To re-affirm this church's belief that “the use of any technology should be subject to moral assessment” and the moral imperative “to respect and promote the community of life through the exercise of justice and wisdom” in the assessment or use of technology (*Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility* [2011], p. 8 and 3);**

**To commend the activity underway by the churchwide organization; and**

**To encourage this church in all its expressions to learn about developments in Artificial Intelligence, to “pray for God's guidance” and to be guided by “wisdom, humility and courage in deliberation, decision-making and action” (*Genetics, Faith, and Responsibility* [2011], p. 35).**

### **3. Immigration Detention**

#### *Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06a]*

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Southwest California Synod and the Pacifica Synod on ceasing the use of private for-profit companies for immigration detention;

To reaffirm this church's commitment to the AMMPARO strategy to accompany migrants and advocate for recognition and respect for their human dignity including through the protection of their human rights;

To affirm this church's ongoing screening out of private prison companies from social purpose funds and look for engagement opportunities with private prison companies;

To request that the Service and Justice unit identify and act on opportunities for this church to publicly call for an end to the U.S. government practice of contracting out the management of U.S. immigration detention centers to private for-profit companies; and

To request that the Service and Justice unit provide a report on the implementation of this work to the Church Council at its Spring 2026 meeting.

#### *Response from the Service and Justice unit (April 2026)*

The Service and Justice unit, through the Witness in Society team and the AMMPARO strategy, continues to advocate for an end to the U.S. government practice of contracting out the management of U.S. immigration detention centers to private for-profit companies by raising awareness about the harms and violation of rights of private detention and how this practice contradicts social teaching on immigration, human rights, criminal justice, and sufficient, sustainable livelihoods.

The Service and Justice unit has identified the following opportunities for public engagement and anticipates continuing this work.

- Witness in Society and AMMPARO staff developed an educational resource that covers the history and current practice of private immigration detention, scheduled to be released and promoted in Spring 2026. This resource includes an accompanying Bible study and action guide for individuals and congregations.
- AMMPARO joined the Free Families coalition, which is focused on ending the practice of child and family detention. Nearly all children and families who are in detention are held in for-profit detention centers. Action as part of this coalition includes virtual rallies, sharing of educational resources and webinars, and joint advocacy outreach via sign-on letters.
- Witness in Society advocacy staff drafted public messaging opposing abuse in detention facilities, including through an ecumenical letter led by Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry, sign-on letters and public statements. Staff reinforced these requests via meetings with the offices of members of Congress.
- ELCA-affiliated State Public Policy Offices have supported local and state-level work to oppose the construction and operation of new privately-run detention facilities across the U.S.
- The ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility team confirmed with Portico Benefit Services that its funds screen out private prison companies from all funds, not just social purpose funds. This is a positive advancement; it also precludes shareholder advocacy with private prison companies because ELCA has no investments in these companies.

The Service and Justice unit will remain attentive to opportunities to publicly call for an end to the practice of for-profit immigration detention. FY27 appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security and legislation concerning oversight of detention facilities are two avenues to continue this advocacy work.

### **CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

#### **Recommended:**

**To receive the response on “Immigration Detention” from the Service and Justice unit;**

**To commend the Service and Justice unit for its public engagement in advocating an end to the U.S. government practice of contracting out the management of U.S. immigration detention centers to private for-profit companies; and**

**To request that the secretary inform the synods of this action.**

#### **4. Review of ELCA Investments and Procurement**

*Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.02.06t]*

To reaffirm this church’s commitment to using the tools of corporate social responsibility to call corporations to treat people fairly and with dignity and create sustainable communities through the screening of social purpose funds through social criteria investment screens; and

To direct the Service and Justice unit and ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team to provide guidance in regard to current concerns and advice on best practices to encourage responsible and just corporate behavior and provide to the ELCA Church Council a summary of findings and options for action.

*Response from Service and Justice unit, Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team (October 2025)*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the ELCA uses the tools of screening of investments, shareholder advocacy, and community investing to work with corporations, calling them to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities. The CSR program is guided by staff in the ELCA’s Service and Justice unit and a team of advisors with experience in CSR or expertise in the topic at hand. The team meets regularly to discuss drafts of documents and possible topics for CSR work. The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* places CSR oversight with the Church Council, which “may direct the churchwide organization to exercise the corporate social responsibility of this church by filing shareholder resolutions, casting proxy ballots, and taking other actions as it deems appropriate” (14.21.14.).

ELCA CSR staff consult the CSR Review Team regularly on the topics of screening, shareholder advocacy, and boycotts, with the goal of supporting Portico Benefit Services in its endeavor to encourage responsible corporate behavior.

ELCA CSR does not determine procurement on the part of the ELCA; however, CSR has cooperated with ELCA IT on its AI policies, and IT has consulted with CSR on its buying guides.

At the October 2025 and the January 2026 meetings of the CSR Review Team, the group will consider whether additional resources are needed to fulfill this directive from the Churchwide Assembly and report back to the Church Council in the spring of 2026.

Additional costs, if any, would be related to any resources recommended by the CSR Review Team, or would be related to publicizing of current resources such as the shareholder advocacy issue papers and ELCA consumer purchasing guides.

*Church Council Action [CC25.10.43g]*

To receive the timeline on “Review of ELCA Investments and Procurement” from the Service and Justice unit and to anticipate a response at the Spring 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

*Response from the Service and Justice unit, Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team (April 2026)*

**Individuals**

Shareholder advocacy, which is a direct route to engagement with corporations over their behavior, is not something that is limited to institutional investors. Individuals can take action based on understanding how shareholder advocacy works.

- **Outcome:** ELCA CSR will produce a resource along the lines of the PCUSA advocacy [toolkit](#) to help guide individuals in their own investments and shareholder advocacy.

**Consumers**

ELCA CSR has already written purchasing guides to encourage thoughtful consumer purchasing. Given that corporations depend upon consumers, this is one way to influence corporate behavior.

- **Outcome:** ELCA CSR will look for ways to publicize the consumer purchasing guides and make them more visible, whether through social media or blog posts.

**Institutional investment**

An impactful way to encourage responsible and just behavior by corporations is through shareholder advocacy, screening out investments in corporations that violate social criteria investment screens, and positive investing in socially responsible ways. Portico Benefit Services engages in all of these, and insofar as they invest with Portico, the ELCA Foundation also encourages responsible and just corporate behavior.

- **Outcome:** ELCA CSR will present to Church Council on the work of Portico and ELCA CSR.
- **Outcome:** ELCA CSR will work with Portico and other ELCA institutional partners to encourage investment in Portico’s socially responsible funds.
- **Outcome:** Church Council can consider whether shareholder advocacy on specific issues is warranted\*

Guidance in regard to current concerns would be ever-evolving. The current administration has engaged in undermining shareholder rights from every angle in an unprecedented way.

- **Outcome:** ELCA CSR will give an annual update to the CSR Review Team that can be shared with Church Council on current concerns in shareholder advocacy.

\* The Church Council may explore direct engagement in shareholder advocacy in order to advance ELCA commitments to advocating for dignity, justice, and equity for all people, as described in the ELCA Constitution.

The ELCA Constitution contains the following bylaw:

- 14.21.14. The Church Council may direct the churchwide organization to exercise the corporate social responsibility of this church by filing shareholder resolutions, casting proxy ballots, and taking other actions as it deems appropriate.

In order to engage a corporation as a shareholder, which is required to file a shareholder resolution or cast a proxy ballot, the Church Council would have to cooperate with one of the ELCA's separately incorporated ministries.

Following are some avenues that have been considered in the past for engaging in corporate social responsibility on behalf of the ELCA:

- Communicating directly with specific corporations around ELCA social teaching as the ELCA Church Council;
- Requesting Portico Benefit Services or the ELCA Foundation to file specific shareholder resolutions or vote a specific way on a shareholder resolution; and
- Requesting use of endowed stock to engage specific corporations directly around ELCA social teaching.

*It should be noted that the Church Council can make requests of both separately incorporated ministries but cannot compel them. Both organizations are financial fiduciaries, which implies a specific set of responsibilities.*

#### **CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

##### **Recommended:**

**To receive the response on “Review of ELCA Investments and Procurement” from the Service and Justice unit;**

**To commend the guidance and best practices from ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility to encourage responsible and just corporate behavior and affirm the outcomes identified in its response; and**

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

#### **5. Stand for Palestinian Rights and End to Occupation of Palestine**

*Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.03.13]*

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Witness in Society Advocacy Team, to write to the President and Vice President of the United States, the Secretary of State, and the majority and minority leaders of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives calling on the U.S. government:

- to recognize and work to end the genocide against the Palestinian people, to halt military assistance to Israel used to devastate Gaza, and to investigate the use of U.S. military aid to Israel to ensure compliance with U.S. and international human rights law;
- to redouble its efforts to end human rights violations in Gaza and the West Bank, focusing on the most egregious and ongoing violations, including: indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing of Gaza resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of children, women, and men; deprivation of adequate access to drinking water, food, medical care, and electricity; destruction of buildings—including hospitals, places of worship, homes, and schools—and the destruction of electricity, sewerage, and water infrastructure essential for survival; and, the detention of hostages and political prisoners;
- to recognize Palestine as a sovereign state, and support Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, and

- to reject proposals to remove Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, to address the catastrophic living conditions that could force Palestinians to leave, and to work to end the rampant settler violence and vandalism against Palestinians in the West Bank;

*Response from Service and Justice unit (October 2025)*

The Witness in Society Team will prioritize these focus points for public policy advocacy and action:

1. Write letter from the presiding bishop to the White House as instructed (completed, August 2025).
2. Opposing unrestricted military aid to Israel
3. U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334
4. Upholding of Human Rights Law
5. U.S. government recognition of Palestinian Statehood in coordination with Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC)
6. Protection of 1967 Borders and Territorial Integrity
7. Opposition to Settler Violence
8. Amplification of Palestinian Voices
9. Opposition to displacement/forcible transfer of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank
10. Continued support of financial security of Augusta Victoria Hospital
11. Review and consider the ELCA's interfaith advocacy relationships—especially within the Jewish community—that would ensure values alignment of partnerships with the ELCA's updated position on Israel-Palestine

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Team will engage these awareness focus points:

1. Education around U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334
2. History and significance of international definitions of military occupation and genocide
3. Education around displacement and forcible transfer
4. Distinction between Jewish siblings and the government of Israel
5. Palestinian sovereignty
6. Accompaniment relationships with ELCA partners in Palestine/Israel
7. Building relationship and shared understanding of Palestine-Israel context with WCC statement on Gaza as baseline

The MENA Team will engage these accompaniment focus points:

1. Amplification of Palestinian Voices
2. Meeting with ELCJHL stakeholders and ALAMEH (Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage) to present resolution and hear feedback
3. Ensuring ongoing financial support to ELCJHL and local partners—March 2026

A final report to Church Council will be brought to its April 2026 meeting. There is no anticipated budgetary impact as the work will be done as part of existing staff portfolios.

*Church Council Action [CC25.10.43n]*

To receive the response on “Stand for Palestinian Rights and End to Occupation of Palestine” from the Service and Justice unit;

To request a final response at the April 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

*Response from the Service and Justice unit (April 2026)*

The Witness in Society Team engagement on advocacy focus points are as follows:

1. *Wrote letter from the Presiding Bishop to the White House as instructed (completed, August 2025):* Witness in Society Team (WiS), in coordination with the MENA Desk, worked to support former Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton in drafting a letter to the White House addressing key points directed within CA25.03.13 and imploring the US Government to use all of its available leverage with the Israeli Government to end the genocide in Gaza, in addition to five additional requests designed to support peace in the Holy Land, provide humanitarian aid into Gaza, and end the war. A copy of the letter can be found [here](#).

2. *Opposing unrestricted military aid to Israel:* WiS team, in coordination with numerous interfaith and humanitarian aid organizations and various coalitions, continues to support and advocate for specific legislative mechanisms which oppose unrestricted military aid to the State of Israel, including advocacy and support for the “[Block the Bombs Act](#)” and other previous legislation such as the [Senate Joint Resolutions of Disapproval](#) (JRDs), which were designed to block US weapons transfers to the State of Israel. WiS will continue to support future JRDs and other legislation designed to oppose unrestricted military aid to the State of Israel.
3. *UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334:* WiS continues to support and advocate for any legislative mechanisms that support and reaffirm the US Government’s [commitment to the creation of a Palestinian State](#), living side by side in peace, with the State of Israel. WiS will continue to coordinate with the MENA Desk and the Sumud initiative in furthering internal ELCA education and awareness of these United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions and how they help to underpin Palestinian sovereignty rights.
4. *Upholding of Human Rights Law:* WiS will continue to support, advocate and push for US legislation designed to uplift human rights law and more broadly, international law, with the purpose and aim of protecting civilians in conflict and ensuring sovereign states (the US included) abide by international law. In the past this has taken the form of advocating for and supporting certain US Congressional and Executive Branch oversight mechanisms, such as a “[national security memorandum 20](#)” which was supposed to help determine if US arms transfers were in violation of section 620I of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961.
5. *US government recognition of Palestinian Statehood in coordination with LOWC:* As mentioned in focus point #3, WiS continues to support and advocate for any legislative mechanisms that support and reaffirm the US Government’s commitment to the creation of the Palestinian State, and will continue to coordinate with LOWC (Lutheran Office for World Community) as opportunities within the UN system (UN Security Council and/or General Assembly or affiliated organs) arise to support and reaffirm Palestinian Statehood and right to sovereignty.
6. *Protection of 1967 Borders and Territorial Integrity:* As mentioned in focus point #3, WiS continues to support and advocate for any legislative mechanisms that support and reaffirm the US Government’s commitment to the creation of the Palestinian State.
7. *Opposition to Settler Violence:* WiS continues to support and advocate for legislative and executive branch mechanisms that penalize, enact punitive measures designed to pursue settlers who engage in violence, and disincentivize the State of Israel to continue its policy of allowing said settler violence to continue without any legal consequences. This includes support for an [Executive Branch sanctions designation](#) by the previous administration for specific settlers identified as committing violence. WiS is currently supporting and advocating for several bills and resolutions designed to counter settler violence including: 1) [H.Res.1092](#) 2) [H.R.3045](#) 3) [S.2667](#) and 4) [S.2672](#)
8. *Amplification of Palestinian Voices:* WiS continues in coordination with the MENA Desk and the Sumud initiative to support and host Palestinian voices from the ELCJHL and other affiliated organizations in Washington DC as part of an ongoing advocacy and engagement campaign to ensure Congress hears directly from the Palestinian community itself. In 2025, this campaign resulted in WiS supporting one delegation from the LWF/AVH, two delegations from ELCJHL pastors and affiliated ELCJHL ministries, one delegation from local ELCA staff based in Palestine, and one delegation from an ELCJHL affiliated NGO. Collectively, these advocacy engagements resulted in 40 meetings with congressional offices, two meetings with the US Department of State, and several education and awareness engagements with ELCA congregations in Washington DC.
9. *Opposition to displacement/forcible transfer of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank:* Embedded in all WiS advocacy is a commitment to the right of the Palestinian people to their homeland and the international legal frameworks that forbid displacement and forcible transfer of

a civilian population away from their homes. WiS will continue to support and advocate for any future legislative mechanism or Executive Branch mechanism that supports and reinforces opposition to the displacement and/or forcible transfer of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank.

10. *Continued support for financial security of Augusta Victoria Hospital:* WiS devotes consistent time and energy to supporting the financial security of the Augusta Victoria Hospital, through engagement and advocacy in the appropriations process. This included working with congressional offices to support funding and reporting language in the FY26 appropriations bill designed to direct the US Department of State to support new funding to AVH, as Congress has done on a bipartisan basis in the past. WiS continues to work on adding funding and reporting language into the upcoming FY27 appropriations bills in support of AVH and continues to coordinate with LWF and AVH on joint advocacy priorities, including the resumption of the EJHN medical corridor and funding for AVH.
11. *Review and consider the ELCA's interfaith advocacy relationships – especially within the Jewish community- that would ensure values alignment of partnerships with the ELCA's updated position on Israel-Palestine:* WiS continues to evaluate and determine the best path forward in terms of identifying interfaith relationships as apply to advocacy on the issue of Israel-Palestine. WiS staff recently attended the J Street Conference to understand potential partnerships in the Jewish community that would align well with the ELCA's updated positions on Israel-Palestine, and worked with the Churches for Middle East Peace to support a closed door session between representatives of various denominations and leaders of the Standing Together movement, which now has US chapters around the country. WiS hopes to engage in meaningful advocacy work with new interfaith partners moving forward.

Middle East North Africa (MENA) Team engagement on awareness focus points are as follows:

Service and Justice unit through the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Desk, including ELCA Sumud: for Justice in Palestine and Israel, has begun engaging the focus points listed below through awareness-raising work. Below are each of the predetermined focus points as directed by CA25.03.13, and the activities, resources, or events facilitated by ELCA Service and Justice's MENA Desk, which respond to these foci. Each of these foci reflects points of the CA25.03.13 Social Policy Resolution (SPR) that direct ELCA Service and Justice's ministry and engagement with the Church. If the engagement points are highlighted, they contain a live link which can be followed to view the corresponding resource, event, or subject matter.

1. Education around UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334
  - a. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. In January 2026, the MENA Desk coordinated a Solidarity and Accompaniment visit to the Holy Land for newly elected synod bishops, as well as the ELCA Presiding Bishop, to build meaningful relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and its leaders to raise awareness, including discussing the significance of UN Security Council Resolutions and their impact on the dignity and rights of Palestinians, and about the daily realities on the ground.
  - b. [CA25.03.13 Social Policy Resolution \(SPR\) Resource](#)
    - i. The MENA Desk created a Resolution Resource about CA25.03.13 SPR Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine. This resource is designed to offer accessible details and information regarding the CA25.03.13 SPR passed by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. This resource serves to connect lay leaders, rostered

- ministers, and bishops to the content of the SPR and the impact it can have on ministry.
2. History and significance of international definitions of military occupation and genocide
    - a. Webinar with Bishop Imad Haddad, Rev. Munther, and Rev. Ashraf, November 2025
      - i. [Recording here](#)
    - b. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
      - i. Explained in point 1a.
    - c. CA25.03.13 SPR Resource
      - i. Explained in point 1b.
  3. Education around displacement and forcible transfer
    - a. ELCA Sumud "Get to Know the ELCJHL" Webinar series, November 2025
      - i. [Recordings here](#)
    - b. MENA Desk facilitated Latin American Church Leaders visit to ELCJHL, November 2025
      - i. In November 2025, Desk Director Rev. Gabi Aelabouni of the ELCA MENA Desk facilitated a visit of thirteen bishops and pastors from Latin American ELCA Church Partners led by Paulina Dasse, ELCA Senior Director for Companion Engagement and Global Personnel, and Rev. Jaime Dubon, director of the ELCA Latin American and Caribbean Desk, to visit and accompany the ELCJHL.
    - c. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
      - i. Explained in point 1a.
    - d. [ELCA Sumud Advent Series, December 2025](#)
    - e. [ELCA Sumud Children's Christmas Book, 2025](#)
    - f. "Faith and Occupation" Webinar, February 2026
      - i. Bishop Jen Nagel, Minneapolis Area Synod, and Rami Khader who works with youth detained by occupation forces in Bethlehem, Palestine, spoke about faith and occupation in their contexts for an hour-long webinar attended by 150 participants.
    - g. Sumud Video Educational Resource, 2026
      - i. The MENA Desk's ELCA Sumud initiative is working with a local filmmaker in Bethlehem to create a six-video series which will cover important historical context of Palestine and Israel from the 1930s to present day. This resource will offer an in-depth introduction from Christian Palestinian voices in the Holy Land, including many voices from the ELCJHL. This resource is set to be available Spring 2026.
    - h. CA25.03.13 SPR Resource
      - i. Explained in point 1b.
  4. Distinction between Jewish siblings and government of Israel
    - a. Sumud Webinar Series, November 2025
      - i. [Recordings here](#)
    - b. Sumud Presentation Southeastern Synod, October 2025
      - i. In October 2025, ELCA Sumud Program Director Maddi Froiland presented about Sumud, including the ELCA's longstanding distinction between this church's Jewish siblings and the government of Israel.
    - c. Sumud Presentation Rocky Mountain Synod, December 2025
      - i. In December 2025, MENA Desk Director Rev. Gabi Aelabouni and Sumud Program Director Maddi Froiland presented the work of the MENA Desk and ELCA Sumud to the Rocky Mountain Synod Sumud group, which covered the clear distinction between Jewish siblings and the government of Israel.
    - d. Sumud Video Educational Resource, 2026

- i. Explained in point 3g.
  - e. Bishop Holy Land Video Resource (created January 2026, plan for release April 2026)
    - i. ELCA synodical bishops reflect on their discussions and experiences in the Holy Land with partners from the ELCJHL in short, 2-minute videos, which ELCA Sumud will publish at the conclusion of the 2026 Lent season. These videos address topics including distinction between the nation-state of Israel, the biblical “Israel”, and our Jewish siblings, as well as important topics of accompaniment, solidarity, working for justice, and relationship with our siblings in Palestine.
  - f. CA25.03.13 SPR Resource
    - i. Explained in point 1b.
- 5. Education about Palestinian sovereignty
  - a. Sumud Video Resource, 2026
    - i. Explained in point 3g.
  - b. CA25.03.13 SPR Resource
    - i. Explained in point 1b.
- 6. Accompaniment of ELCA partners in Palestine/Israel and the relationship
  - a. Sumud Webinar Series, November 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3a.
  - b. Sumud Advent Series, December 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3d.
  - c. MENA Desk Solidarity Visit, November 2025
    - i. Explained in point 3b.
  - d. Bishop’s Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. Explained in point 1a.
- 7. Building relationship and shared understanding of Palestine-Israel context with WCC statement on Gaza as baseline
  - a. Sumud Webinar Series, November 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3a.
  - b. Sumud Advent Series, December 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3d.
  - c. Sumud Christmas Children’s Book, December 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3e.
  - d. Sumud Presentations Southeastern Synod, Rocky Mountain Synod, Fall 2026
    - i. Explained in point 4c.
  - e. [Sumud Newsletters](#), October 2025, January 2026
  - f. [Sumud Action Alert](#), December 2025
  - g. [Sumud Action Alert](#), February 2026
  - h. MENA Desk Solidarity Visit, November 2025
    - i. Explained in point 3b.
  - i. Bishop’s Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. Explained in point 1a.

Middle East North Africa Team engagement of accompaniment focus points are as follows:

Service and Justice unit, through the Middle East North Africa Team, including ELCA Sumud, has begun engaging the focus points listed below through its accompaniment work. Below are each of the predetermined focus points as directed by CA25.03.13, and the activities, resources, or events facilitated by ELCA Service and Justice’s MENA Desk, which respond to these foci. If the engagement points are highlighted, they contain a live link which can be followed to view the corresponding resource, event, or subject matter.

1. Amplification of Palestinian Voices
  - a. MENA Desk Solidarity Visit, November 2025
    - i. Explained in point 3.
  - b. MENA Desk Bishops Solidarity Visit, January 2026
    - i. Explained in point 1.
  - c. Sumud Webinar Series, November 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3.
  - d. Sumud Advent Series, December 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3.
  - e. Sumud Christmas Children's Book, December 2025
    - i. Linked in point 3.
2. Meeting with ELCJHL stakeholders to present resolution and hear feedback
  - a. ELCA MENA Desk met with Bishop Dr. Imad Haddad to lift up the CA25.03.13 SPR and heard his feedback. This is an ongoing conversation between the ELCA and the ELCJHL as part of their church-to-church relationship as daily realities on the ground in Palestine and Israel continue to change.
3. Meeting with Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle East Heritage (ALAMEH) stakeholders to present resolution and hear feedback
  - a. Pastor Khader Khalila met with ALAMEH and presented the resolution for their feedback.
  - b. Official minutes from this review meeting are linked [here](#).
  - c. Notable points of feedback include:
    - i. Need for youth/young adult engagement about the Palestine and Israel justice context
    - ii. Interest in Arab and Middle East Community (AMEC) representation in Jewish-Muslim-Christian ELCA relationships
    - iii. Interest in AMEC representation in ELCA Advocacy to Congress
4. Ensuring ongoing financial support to ELCJHL and local partners, March 2026
  - a. The ELCA is committed to the work and the ministry of the indigenous Christian community through the ELCJHL. Part of this ELCA priority is to support their work through financial means. This has continued from August 2025 until the present day.

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

**To receive the final report on “Stand for Palestinian Rights and End to Occupation of Palestine” from the Service and Justice unit;**

**To thank the Middle East North Africa team and the Witness in Society team in the Service and Justice unit for their deep commitment and ongoing engagement of awareness, accompaniment and advocacy; and**

**To request that the secretary inform the synods of this action.**

**6. Justice for Palestinians and Israelis**

*Church Council Action [CC25.10.35]*

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Justice for Palestinians and Israelis” from the Metropolitan Chicago Synod;

To reaffirm this church's commitment, set forth in the social statement *For Peace in God's World* (1995), to serve as a reconciling presence, including through promoting respect for human rights, particularly for “groups most susceptible to violations, especially all minorities, women, and children”:

To lament the trauma experienced by Palestinians and Israelis and encourage congregations to recognize and respond to the need to confess shared responsibility for the suffering;

To reaffirm this church's sense of urgency for ongoing advocacy, awareness, and accompaniment through the Sumud initiative;

To request that the Service and Justice unit, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop, implement the recommendations in the memorial for continuing accompaniment, awareness-raising, and advocacy efforts to end the Israeli occupation in Palestine, to stop the unconditional supply of weapons and military aid to Israel, and to support and participate fully in the restoration of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip; and

To request that the Service and Justice unit provide a report to the Church Council at its Spring 2026 meeting.

*Response from the Service and Justice unit (April 2026)*

The Service and Justice unit, through the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Desk including ELCA Sumud: for Justice in Palestine and Israel, and ELCA Witness in Society, has begun engaging the focus points listed below as directed by the Church Council (CC25.10.35), and the activities, resources, or events facilitated by ELCA Service and Justice's MENA Desk or ELCA Witness in Society that respond to these foci. Each of these foci reflects points of the CC25.10.13 Social Policy Resolution (SPR) which direct ELCA Service and Justice's ministry and engagement with the church. If the engagement points are highlighted, they contain a live link which can be followed to view the corresponding resource, event, or subject matter.

1. Reaffirm ELCA commitment as set forth in *For Peace in God's World* (1995), to serve as a reconciling presence, including through promoting respect for human rights, particularly for "groups most susceptible to violations, especially all minorities, women, and children"
  - a. [Presiding Bishop's Letter to U.S. President](#)
    - i. Witness in Society (WiS) in coordination with the MENA Desk worked to support the Presiding Bishop in drafting a letter to the White House imploring the US Government to use all of its available leverage with the Israeli Government to end the genocide in Gaza, in addition to 5 additional requests designed to support peace in the Holy Land, provide humanitarian aid into Gaza, and end the war.
  - b. [CA25.03.13 Social Policy Resolution \(SPR\) Resource](#)
    - i. The MENA Team created a Resolution Resource about CA25.03.13 SPR Toward Ending the Occupation of Palestine. This resource is designed to offer accessible details and information regarding the CA25.03.13 SPR passed by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. This resource serves to connect lay leaders, rostered ministers, and bishops to the content of the SPR and the impact it can have on ministry.
  - c. ELCA Sumud "Get to Know the ELCJHL" Webinar series, November 2025
    - i. [Recordings here](#)
  - d. MENA Desk facilitated Latin American Church Leaders visit to ELCJHL, November 2025
    - i. In November 2025, Desk Director Rev. Gabi Aelabouni of the ELCA Middle East North Africa (MENA) Desk facilitated a visit of thirteen bishops and pastors from Latin American ELCA Church Partners led by Paulina Dasse, ELCA Senior Director for Companion Engagement and Global Personnel, and Rev. Jaime Dubon, director of the ELCA Latin American and Caribbean Desk, to visit and accompany the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL).
  - e. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. In January 2026, the MENA Desk coordinated a Solidarity and Accompaniment visit to the Holy Land for newly elected synodical bishops, as well as the ELCA Presiding Bishop, to build meaningful relationship with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and its leaders to raise awareness, including discussing the significance of U.N. Security Council Resolutions and

their impact on the dignity and rights of Palestinians, and about the daily realities on the ground.

- f. [ELCA Sumud Advent Series](#), December 2025
  - g. [ELCA Sumud Children's Christmas Book](#), 2025
  - h. [ELCA Advocacy Action Alert "Express Opposition to Threat of New Yatziv Settlement to Christians in Palestine"](#)
  - i. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert "Block the Bombs"](#)
  - j. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert in favor of War Powers Act SJ Res 118](#)
  - k. "Faith and Occupation" Webinar, February 2026
    - i. Bishop Jen Nagel of the Minneapolis Area Synod and Rami Khader who works with youth detained by occupation forces in Bethlehem, Palestine, spoke about faith and occupation in their contexts for an hour-long webinar attended by 150 participants.
  - l. Sumud Video Educational Resource, 2026
    - i. The ELCA MENA Desk's ELCA Sumud initiative is working with a local filmmaker in Bethlehem to create a six-video series which will cover important historical context of Palestine and Israel from the 1930s to present day. This resource will offer an in-depth introduction from Christian Palestinian voices in the Holy Land, including many voices from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land. This resource is set to be available Spring 2026.
  - m. [ELCA 2026 Lenten Series "Body of Christ"](#)
2. Lament the trauma experienced by Palestinians and Israelis and encourage congregations to recognize and respond to the need to confess shared responsibility for the suffering
- a. ELCA Sumud "Get to Know the ELCJHL" Webinar
    - i. Explained in point 1c
  - b. MENA Desk facilitated Latin American Church Leaders visit to ELCJHL, November 2025
    - i. Explained in point 1d
  - c. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. Explained in point 1e
  - d. [ELCA Sumud Advent Series](#), December 2025
  - e. [ELCA Sumud Children's Christmas Book](#), 2025
  - f. [ELCA Advocacy Action Alert "Express Opposition to Threat of New Yatziv Settlement to Christians in Palestine"](#)
  - g. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert "Block the Bombs"](#)
  - h. Sumud Video Educational Resource, 2026
    - i. Explained in point 1l
  - i. [ELCA 2026 Lenten Series "Body of Christ"](#)
3. Reaffirm ELCA's sense of urgency for ongoing advocacy, awareness, and accompaniment through the Sumud initiative.
- a. Presiding Bishop's Letter to U.S. President
    - i. Explained in 1a
  - b. [CA25.03.13 Social Policy Resolution \(SPR\) Resource](#)
    - i. Explained in 1b
  - c. ELCA Sumud "Get to Know the ELCJHL" Webinar series, November 2025
    - i. Explained in 1c
  - d. MENA Desk facilitated Latin American Church Leaders visit to ELCJHL, November 2025
    - i. Explained in 1d
  - e. Bishop's Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. Explained in 1e

- f. [ELCA Sumud Advent Series, December 2025](#)
  - g. [ELCA Sumud Children’s Christmas Book, 2025](#)
  - h. [ELCA Advocacy Action Alert “Express Opposition to Threat of New Yatziv Settlement to Christians in Palestine”](#)
  - i. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert “Block the Bombs”](#)
  - j. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert in favor of War Powers Act SJ Res 118](#)
  - k. “Faith and Occupation” Webinar, February 2026
    - i. Explained in 1k
  - l. Sumud Video Educational Resource 2026
    - i. Explained in 1i
  - m. [ELCA 2026 Lenten Series “Body of Christ”](#)
4. Continue accompaniment, awareness-raising, and advocacy efforts to end Israeli occupation in Palestine, to stop the unconditional supply of weapons and military aid to Israel, and to support and participate fully in the restoration of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip
- a. Presiding Bishop’s Letter to U.S. President
    - i. Explained in 1a
  - b. [CA25.03.13 Social Policy Resolution \(SPR\) Resource](#)
    - i. Explained in 1b
  - c. ELCA Sumud “Get to Know the ELCJHL” Webinar series, November 2025
    - i. Explained in 1c
  - d. MENA Desk facilitated Latin American Church Leaders visit to ELCJHL, November 2025
    - i. Explained in 1d
  - e. Bishop’s Solidarity and Accompaniment Visit to the ELCJHL, January 2026
    - i. Explained in 1e
  - f. [ELCA Sumud Advent Series, December 2025](#)
  - g. [ELCA Sumud Children’s Christmas Book, 2025](#)
  - h. [ELCA Advocacy Action Alert “Express Opposition to Threat of New Yatziv Settlement to Christians in Palestine”](#)
  - i. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert “Block the Bombs”](#)
  - j. [ELCA Sumud Action Alert in favor of War Powers Act SJ Res 118](#)
  - k. “Faith and Occupation” Webinar February 2026
    - i. Explained in 1k
  - l. Sumud Video Educational Resource 2026
    - i. Explained in 1i
  - m. [ELCA 2026 Lenten Series “Body of Christ”](#)

**CC ACTION** [EN BLOC]

**Recommended:**

- To receive the report on “Justice for Palestinians and Israelis” from the Service and Justice unit;**
- To commend the Service and Justice unit for its effective implementation of the memorial’s recommendations in the memorial as well as its continued accompaniment, awareness-raising, and advocacy efforts; and**
- To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.**

**7. Mission Development Process**

*Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.10]*

- To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Delaware-Maryland Synod;
- To refer this memorial to the Congregational Vitality Training and Development team in the Christian

Community and Leadership home area to establish a working group in partnership with the appropriate leaders in the Delaware-Maryland Synod to study and refine current ELCA guidelines and systems for appointments, calls, funds, and support mechanisms for mission developers and new ministries; and

To request that the working group consult with and provide regular reports to the Church Council beginning by Fall 2023 to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled.

*Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2022)*

The ELCA Christian Community and Leadership home area Congregational Vitality Training and Development Team leaders have contacted Delaware-Maryland Synod staff to create a working group in partnership with Delaware-Maryland Synod leaders who composed this memorial. The Rev. Sandra Chrostowski, senior director, Congregational Vitality, and New Ministry Training and Development, and the Rev. Ruben Duran, senior advisor for New Ministry Development, have been appointed as conveners of this working group which will identify partners across this church for consultation and collaboration with the goal of scheduling an online meeting during the first quarter of 2023.

This working group will study and refine current ELCA guidelines and systems in place for appointments, calls, funding, and support mechanisms for mission developers and new ministries. The working group will also provide regular reports, beginning at the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting, to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled.

*Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.q]*

To receive the progress report on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a progress report on the work by the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting; and

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

*Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2023)*

In the beginning of 2023, there was a leadership transition and team realignment. Late in June the new senior director was hired. With a new senior director came new priorities, one of which was to gain understanding of the grants and grants processes. An audit of the New Starts grants began in July and is nearing completion, then a team will evaluate and redesign the granting process. This team will be made of current Directors for Evangelical Mission, including the Rev. Alejandro Mejia of Delaware-Maryland Synod. The new grants process is scheduled to start next fiscal year. More will be reported by the next spring Church Council meeting.

*Church Council Action [CC23.11.20o]*

To receive the response on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a progress report on the work by the Spring 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

*Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (April 2024)*

Audit of New Starts grants was finished at the beginning of November 2023. On Nov. 10, the audit results were presented to the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) Committee of the Church Council. Recruitment of team members was delayed due to the rolling out of the information so it could be shared with the Conference of Bishops (COB). On Feb. 8, 2024, the CCL Committee of the COB was briefed about the audit results and then shared with the whole COB.

On Feb. 22, 2024, the audit results were shared with the Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs). Once that was complete DEMs were identified who would be invited to be a part of the Grants Restructure Team. Those who accepted the invitation were the Rev. Alejandro Mejia (Delaware-Maryland Synod), Mr. Joey Ager (Southwestern Washington Synod), the Rev. Herb Shao (Northwest Washington Synod), Mr. Branden Dupree (Metropolitan New York Synod), the Rev. Rebel Hurd (Northwestern Minnesota Synod), the Rev. Matt Short (Greater Milwaukee Synod), and the Rev. Miguel F. Gomez-Acosta (CCL). Two bishops will be invited into the conversations but have yet to be identified. All team members have agreed to meet in fiscal year 2024 to have final results for fiscal year 2025.

*Church Council Action [CC24.04.09d]*

To receive the response on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a final report by the Spring 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

*Response from the Christian Community and Leadership unit (April 2026)*

In June 2025, CCL formed a task force comprising DEMs and New Ministry Development and Evangelism staff designed to respond directly to Delaware-Maryland Synod’s memorial adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly [CA22.01.10]. This task force evolved from the grant restructuring working group. In 2025, this task force determined that supporting mission developments requires accompanying the lay leadership teams of new ministries, not only the appointed leader, and it revised annual CCL documents accordingly. In winter 2025, the task force invited three recent mission developers to join the task force. This task force will deliver a final report to Church Council with recommendations by October 31, 2026.

Below is a summary of this task force’s upcoming work and preliminary recommendations.

- The task force will conduct needs assessment and resource gathering surveys of SAWC (Synod Authorized Worshiping Community) and SAOM (Synod Authorized Outdoor Ministry) leaders and DEMs to revise the content of CCL’s mission leadership training workshops and provide more robust resource support outside of training events.
- By December 31, 2026, this task force will work with S&J to develop and distribute a standardized Listening and Learning Engagement Resource Toolkit designed to support DEMs and bishops in culturally responsive engagement with SAWCs and SAOMs, to be piloted in at least two synods in 2027. The objective is to develop a deeper understanding of the unique identity, community values, and leadership model of each ministry.
- The task force recommends coach training for DEMs with a clear expected outcome articulated.
- The task force is thinking about recommending an independent study of cases where ELCA policies and/or procedures have led to mistrust and abuse in SAWCs to identify which policies to change.

The task force members are as follows:

Rev. Miguel Gómez-Acosta, Senior Director, New Ministry Development and Evangelism

Rev. Guillermo Arboleda, Program Manager, New Starts

Rev. Emily Wiles, Manager, New Ministry Development and Evangelism

Rev. Alejandro Mejia, DEM, Delaware-Maryland Synod

Rev. Judy Brennan, DEM, Northwest Washington Synod

Rev. Jonathan Vehar, DEM, South Dakota Synod

Rev. Jenny Kim, Light of Grace Korean Ministry, Southwest Washington Synod

Rev. Shantiria Cuthbertson, Emmaus, North Carolina Synod

Rev. Patty Avila, Assistant to the Bishop, Metropolitan New York Synod

**CC ACTION [EN BLOC]**

**Recommended:**

**To receive the response on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership unit and to anticipate a final report from the Mission Development Support Task Force to be presented to the November 2026 Church Council meeting; and**

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

# 2025 Information Technology Artificial Intelligence

## Churchwide Organization Update

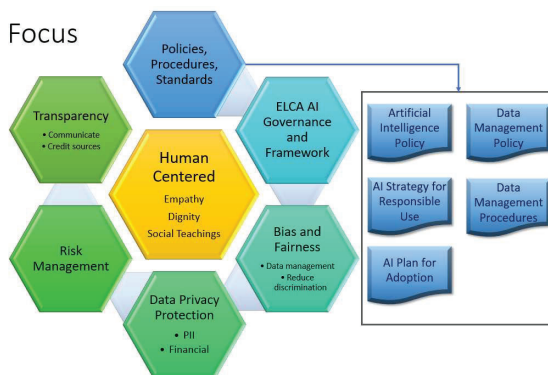
The ELCA Churchwide organization (CWO) Information Technology & Digital Solutions (ITDS) team built structures, practices, and guiding frameworks that advanced the needs called out in Motion J by focusing on human-centeredness before considering and in utilization of AI tools.

### 1. Implementing a Values Driven Framework for AI Use

The churchwide organization adopted an AI framework emphasizing human centeredness, self worth, harm mitigation, rights protection, environmental impact assessment, inclusion, and theological responsibility. IT has started the implementation of the framework:

- **AI Principles and Guardrails** developed and outlined in organizational policy emphasized inclusivity, accessibility, and a balance between technological capabilities and careful review.
- The **ELCA AI Focus** diagram below being used to guide AI work at the churchwide organization highlights transparency, risk management, people focused content, data protection, and environmental awareness.

ELCA AI Focus



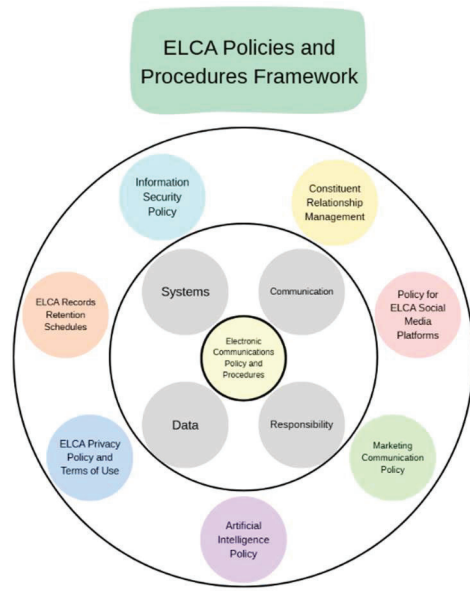
### 2. Upholding Human Moral Responsibility and Human-Centered Principles

ITDS has emphasized that AI is a tool operating in a responsible, human centered framework—not a replacement for people to review AI outputs, relationships or faith informed judgment. AI will support Bishop Curry’s vision of *relational, compassionate, intentional engagement* across the church. AI has been presented as a means of strengthening connection and improving productivity and efficiency, not replacing advancing ministries.

### 3. Developing Ethical, Safe Use, and Theologically Grounded Resources

ITDS made significant progress in 2025:

- **Established the Artificial Intelligence & Data Governance Committee (AIDGC)**  
The AIDGC functions as the advisory body overseeing people, processes, data, and technology associated with AI use. It has been tasked with ensuring fairness, transparency, privacy, accountability, nondiscrimination, and theological considerations in churchwide organization AI work.
- **Updated Policies and Procedures**  
**ELCA Policies & Procedures** have been strengthened to address communication, responsibility, system governance, privacy, retention, and data policies—all of which supports safe AI use. Multiple ELCA policies were augmented to provide governance for churchwide organization use of AI.



- **AI 101 Training and Microsoft Copilot Education**

The IT Adoption & Education team utilized [Law of Diffusion of Innovation](#) for AI training. By personally working with staff early adopters (ELCA executives and senior directors), the rate of AI adoption was influenced by factors of perceived benefits, understood risks, compatibility, ease of use, ability to try, and visibility of results. The AI training topics included responsible use, discernment of appropriate AI tasks, comprehending and protecting against bias, security in the use of AI tools, and best-practice prompting.

In 2025, ITDS conducted broader AI training with the same approach: *inclusivity, accessibility, human values, and aligning ethical, legal, environmental, and theological considerations*. This alignment showed that the CWO’s approach was to operationalize moral-responsibility into AI practice, training, and decision frameworks.

January 2026 AI training for staff brought xx staff to to learn together. AI Bias training begins in April.

- **AI Center of Excellence and Champions Program**

The AI Center of Excellence and Champions Program intend to build internal awareness, expertise, adoption, fosters peer collaboration, and enable staff to understand, practice and demonstrate responsible AI use in their ministry.

## 5. Create Productivity & Efficiency for Identified CWO Use Cases

- Instituted AI solutions for adding efficiency to operational tasks such as drafting communications, agendas, meeting notes, action items, creating summary reports, data analysis, call routing, and editing documents.
- Leverage AI machine learning within enterprise systems for insights and analysis to inform our work
- Delivered [enhanced website search](#) features for external constituents to engage with the information resources made available by the churchwide organization
- Research and find information in files stores for quick retrieval, such as worship practices, policies and procedures, programmatic files, and leadership materials
- Leverage AI coding assistants to decrease development times and allow staff to focus on complex tasks and alignment to organizational / staff needs.

# **Guidance for the Formation of Synod Consultation Committees in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

The purpose of the resources that follow is to assist synod nominating committees in identifying individuals gifted for the vital ministry of consultation. These tools may also serve individuals who are discerning whether they are being called to this work. We invite all who engage these materials to do so prayerfully, trusting that God calls and equips leaders to serve the church for the sake of repentance, reconciliation, justice, and peace.

As God's people gathered in the community of the church, we are called to "make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2). Yet we confess that because of human sin, we do not always live out this calling faithfully. Even within the church, relationships are wounded, trust is broken, and conflict arises. At the same time, we live by God's promise that grace is greater than our failure and that reconciliation is possible through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Grounded in the gospel and guided by the Holy Spirit, the church acknowledges the reality of conflict but faces it truthfully and faithfully. Following the teaching of Jesus (Matthew 18:15–17) and the apostolic call to resolve disputes within the community of faith (1 Corinthians 6:1–8), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has committed itself to practices of accountability, reconciliation, and mutual care as essential marks of Christian community. (ELCA Constitution 20.16).

The primary pastoral office entrusted with fostering reconciliation at the synod level of the church is the office of bishop. Called to a ministry of oversight and unity, synod bishops receive concerns from ministers, congregations, and members of the church and exercise their teaching and pastoral responsibility to address those concerns in ways that strengthens the unity of the church. (Constitutions for Synods 8.12.h). At times, the complexities of conflict require the wisdom, experience, and shared discernment of additional leaders. In such circumstances, the synod bishop may call upon the ministry of the Synod Consultation Committee.

Consultation Committees are elected by the synod assembly and are composed of both ordained and lay persons. (Model Constitution for Synods S11.02). These committees serve as trusted partners to the synod bishop by listening carefully, examining situations prayerfully, and offering counsel shaped by Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the church's constitutional commitments.

The synod bishop may request the assistance of a Consultation Committee in situations such as:

- Offering guidance and referrals when conflict arises within a congregation;
- Assisting in the restoration of the relationship between a minister and a congregation through pastoral counsel and restorative processes;
- Assisting the synod bishop in investigation of a complaint or controversy involving an ordained minister;
- Recommending whether the synod bishop take any action, which may include initiation of disciplinary charges regarding an ordained minister; and
- Carrying out other responsibilities as outlined in Chapter 20 of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

The materials that follow are designed to identify Synod Consultation Committee members and to prepare them for that ministry.

Creating a rubric for selecting individuals to be a member of a synod consultation committee is a great way to ensure a fair and thorough selection process. The following tool can be utilized in two ways:

1. Use as a set of qualities you are looking for in potential consultation committee members or share with interested parties to have them assess the qualities required prior to putting their name forward for election.
2. If you have multiple interested individuals, or to ensure objectivity in choosing candidates for the ballot; use this tool to assess their qualities to put the strongest candidates forward, and to advise other interested individuals on areas in which they may want to improve or gain more experience. One possible ranking framework is: **1 = Developing** – The quality is emerging; limited experience or understanding; **2 = Proficient** – Demonstrates the quality with some relevant experience; generally reliable; **3 = Exemplary** – Clearly demonstrates the quality with strong experience and consistent application. Rate each candidate and advance high scorer(s) to the ballot.

### Synod Consultation Committee Selection Rubric

Qualities	Descriptions
<b>Commitment to the Church</b>	Demonstrates a deep and active engagement with the life and mission of the church. This includes regular participation in worship and congregational activities, support for the church's values and teachings, and a willingness to contribute time, talent, and resources to advance its ministries. Candidates should show a history of involvement in church initiatives, volunteer service, or leadership roles that reflect loyalty, responsibility, and a desire to strengthen the faith community.
<b>Experience with Matters Requiring Confidentiality</b>	Possesses experience handling sensitive information with discretion, such as personnel matters, call committees, or search committees. Demonstrates trustworthiness and the ability to maintain confidentiality in complex or high-stakes situations.

<b>Qualities</b>	<b>Descriptions</b>
<b>Leadership Experience Outside the Church</b>	<p>Has experience managing people or projects, resolving conflicts, or navigating crises, showing the ability to remain calm, fair, and solution-focused under pressure.</p>
<b>Experience in Matters Requiring Teamwork, Collaboration, and Consultation</b>	<p>Has a proven record of working effectively in teams, fostering collaboration, and providing guidance or mentorship. Demonstrates respect for diverse perspectives and the ability to build consensus.</p>
<b>Problem-Solving Skills and Independent Thinking</b>	<p>Shows strong analytical and critical thinking abilities. Can assess complex situations, identify root causes of conflicts, and develop practical solutions independently while considering the broader impact on the community. Demonstrates good judgment.</p>
<b>Willingness to Serve</b>	<p>Exhibits readiness and capacity to commit to the responsibilities of the role, including attending meetings, completing tasks, and engaging fully in the process. Demonstrates reliability and flexibility in scheduling.</p>
<b>Commitment to Diversity</b>	<p>Values and actively supports diversity, equity, and inclusion within the church and broader community. Demonstrates openness to different cultural, theological, and personal perspectives and works to create an environment where all voices are heard and respected.</p>

## **Publishing House of the ELCA (Augsburg Fortress Publishers) Report**

*Submitted by Tim Blevins, President and CEO*

The activities of Augsburg Fortress Publishers (AFP) complement the goals of the ELCA churchwide organization. We join in seeking a common purpose: to activate each of us to invite more people into the way of Jesus and discover together community, justice, and love. This summary highlights recent activities in our two publishing areas, Congregational Resources and Books, and in the ministry as a whole, toward the pursuit of this vision.

### ***Congregational Resources***

Through our Augsburg Fortress and Sparkhouse resources, we remain focused on and dedicated to helping congregations thrive.

- In January we published a second edition of *See Me, Believe Me: An Updated Guide to Deepen Allyship with Congregational Leaders of Color* by Rev. Dr. Yolanda Denson-Byers. It features a new chapter reflecting on the election and leadership of ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry and includes excerpts from the author's interview with him. A downloadable discussion guide is available at [augzburgfortress.org](http://augzburgfortress.org).
- Also in January, we were thrilled to connect with children, youth, and family ministry leaders at the ELCA Youth Ministry Network's annual **Extravaganza**, held in St. Louis. Hundreds of people visited our booth where they received a preview of our new confirmation program to be published in June: **Lutheran Yes!** The first 10-session unit focuses on Lutheran worship.
- Our **2026 Lenten devotional**, *Love Outpoured*, featured first-rate contributors and was accompanied by an array of free downloadable resources to assist midweek Lenten worship such as worship plans, sermon prompts, hymn and anthem suggestions, bulletin inserts, and slides. Did your congregation order pocket-size and large print copies for its members this year?
- A joint **Worship Resource Development Working Group** comprised of worship editorial and program staff from Augsburg Fortress and the ELCA meets monthly online and twice yearly in person to coordinate and develop ongoing worship resources for this church. Current focuses are pastoral care resources, inclusive language for God in the Revised Common Lectionary readings, an ecumenical Feast of Creation, and resources for the US Semiquincentennial in July 2026.
- We published a fifth title in our **For the Sake of the World** series: *ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Peace*, by Lutheran ethicist William Rodríguez. This ongoing series invites us to consider how ELCA social statements and social messages can guide our faith and deepen our moral discernment regarding today's complex ethical issues.

### ***Books***

Fortress Press, long a vital part of this church's publishing efforts, seeks to advance scholarship and resource church leaders both in the ELCA and beyond. Our consumer book imprints, Broadleaf Books (youth and adult) and Beaming Books (children), offer avenues by which we extend our mission beyond the church and higher education to the broader society. As we plan for new titles, we consistently seek to expand contributions by authors who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. This sampling of published titles from the last six months illustrates the range of subjects and authors in these categories.

FORTRESS PRESS ([fortresspress.com](http://fortresspress.com))

*That Divine and Most Excellent Gift: Martin Luther, Music, and the Arts.* Mark P. Bangert; ed. Martin A. Seltz.

*Power and the Powers.* Walter Brueggemann; ed. Conrad L. Kanagy.

*The Freedom of a Christian: Luther Study Edition* (rev., expanded). Martin Luther; ed. Mark D. Tranvik.

Fortress Commentary on the Bible. Multiple contributors. *Mark; Isaiah; 1 and 2 Kings; 1 and 2 Corinthians.*

*Love in a Time of Climate Change: Honoring Creation, Establishing Justice* (rev. ed). Sharon Delgado.

BROADLEAF BOOKS (broadleafbooks.com)

*Dangerous Songs: The Psalms and a Gloriously Disrupted Life.* Richard Bruxvoort Colligan.

*The Green Funeral: Honoring the Environment While Beautifying Funeral Practices.* Multiple contributors.

*The Way of the Desert Elders: How the Wisdom of Ancient Christians Sustains Us Today.* Lisa Colón DeLay

*Serving Up Scripture: How to Interpret the Bible for Yourself and Others.* Jennifer Garcia Bashaw and Aaron Higashi.

*Ancestors: Those Who Bless Us, Curse Us, and Hold Us.* William H. Lamar IV.

BEAMING BOOKS (beamingbooks.com)

*We Remember Your Baptism.* Meta Herrick Carlson and Clara Anganuzzi.

*The Love that Made You.* Grace Semler Baldrige and Fran Alvarez.

*Sparrow's Easter Garden.* Roger Hutchison and Ag Jatkowska.

*I Love My People: A Child's Celebration of Black Culture.* Kim Singleton and Kim Holt.

Also of note:

We partnered with the churchwide organization to plan and offer an online event for the National Day of Racial Healing on January 20. All AFP employees were strongly encouraged to attend. Six of our authors and contributors were featured presenters or speakers, including Bp. Felix Javier Malpica, Rev. Dr. Jia Starr Brown, Rev. Elle Dowd, Rev. Tuhina Verma Rasche, Rev. Jenny Sung, and Joe Davis.

### ***Organizational Matters***

As a Minneapolis-based ministry, AFP felt the impacts of Operation Metro Surge. Some employees participated in protest actions against the immigration operations conducted by ICE and Border Patrol, while others reported direct impacts of the government's anti-immigrant actions in their communities. We gathered as colleagues to lament the environment of fear and trauma in our city, which included an acknowledgment of the deaths of Renee Good and Alex Pretti.

As an organization we continue to lean into our mission which we see as increasingly critical at this troubling time in our nation's life together: to deepen faith, nourish the spirit, and enrich the life of the Christian church, the communities it serves, and the wider society.

Two long-term employees retired in January and March, respectively. Michael Moore served the organization for 20 years, most recently as our rights management specialist. And Eileen Engebretson, production designer, has been with AFP since *before* the formation of the ELCA in 1988! We are profoundly grateful for Michael's and Eileen's many years of service to AFP and to the church.

AFP is in the midst of a transition to a new President and CEO in the wake of my announced retirement. Andrew DeYoung, President and CEO-elect, is taking on additional responsibility in close coordination with me and with the AFP leadership team, in preparation for the official handover on September 1, 2026.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at [blevinst@augzburgfortress.org](mailto:blevinst@augzburgfortress.org).

## AUGSBURG FORTRESS PUBLISHERS DIGEST OF BOARD ACTIONS

**Submitted by:** Tim Blevins, President and CEO

**Date of Board Meeting(s):** November 6-7, 2025

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**Category 1:** *(Policies with an impact beyond the ministry, which require Church Council approval.)*

None

**Category 2:** *(Policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the ministry or to the specific mandate of the ministry.)*

- Voted that the Board of Trustees of Augsburg Fortress Publishers, the Publishing House of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America elects Jenifer Ward to serve as secretary for a three-year term. (PH.25.11.05)
- Voted that the Board Development Committee recommends to the full Board of Trustees of Augsburg Fortress Publishers, the Publishing House of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, that the following board members be elected to serve as members of the Audit and Finance Committee, the Board Development Committee and the Environmental Insights for Strategic Responsiveness Ad Hoc Committee:
  1. Audit and Finance Committee: Stacy Chavis, Shauna Hannan, John Oprande
  2. Board Development Committee: David Hope-Tringali, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, Adam White
  3. Environmental Insights for Strategic Responsiveness Ad Hoc Committee: Michael Chan, Brook Selassie, Shelly Talcott, Jenifer Ward (PH.25.11.06)

**Category 3:** *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

None

## **ELCA Foundation**

*Submitted by Annette C. Shoemaker, Interim President and CEO*

### **Overview**

Since our last report to Church Council, the Foundation has been busy outlining phase two of our strategic plan, recruiting new gift planners, and working on our branding refresh. It has also been a time of travel, meetings and attending to the business of the ELCA. The Foundation has met with Bishop Curry, Treasurer Fedyk and Executive for Development, Rachel Wind, to discuss new ways to strengthen the Foundation's relationship with the Churchwide Organization.

During January, the regional gift planners met in Carefree, Arizona for their traditional winter gathering. We were pleased to have consultant Victoria Raymont assist with meeting planning and hosting – ensuring our strategic plan was woven throughout the meeting framework. During our time together, gift planners also shared best practices in helping congregations become sustainable long into the future. Josh Kerney, Director, Gift Planning, has taken on the responsibility for hiring vacant gift planner positions and engaged a recruiting firm to support those efforts. This partnership has significantly increased applicant volume and interview activity, putting us on track to fill all open gift planner roles in 2026.

We were excited to partner with Global Refuge in 2025 to conduct a survey assessing interest in potential planned gifts. This initiative identified previously unknown existing gifts as well as prospective donors considering future planned commitments, with more than a dozen new gifts being realized. A second survey will be launched in 2026, and we look forward to securing additional planned gifts as a result.

The Foundation/CWO joint work group, as well as two sub-groups, Development and IT, continued to meet over the winter. The Development sub-group has concluded its work with a report outlining the collaborative items accomplished together. Discussions continue to make progress for the data transfer to HubSpot.

Looking at the current stats: Total assets under management are \$1.467 billion at year-end — an increase of approximately 21.3% year over year. The Ministry Growth Fund continued to show strong signs of growth with a solid year for deposits, with total new deposits during the year of \$120.4 million. Withdrawals for the year were at \$25.1 million. Distributions to ministry from realized gifts accelerated during the fourth quarter of the year, helping us to finish with a level that is on par with recent years. In total, \$26.8 million was paid out to beneficiaries — including \$6.4 million to churchwide programs. When this is added to the quarterly distributions made from the Ministry Growth Fund, over \$71.6 million was distributed to ministry throughout the year.

Total gifts and managed assets for planned giving developed during the year exceeded the results seen in 2024 — \$80 million versus \$66.2 million. The second phase of the strategic plan has been presented to the board for ratification. Sharp focus will be placed on target audiences, priority gift types and partnership expansion to reach more prospective donors and increase gifts that can be put to work immediately.

**ELCA Foundation Digest of Board Actions**  
**Date of Board Meeting: September 19, 2025**

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.25.09.01 To adopt the agenda as presented and grant the chair the authority to call items out of sequence as may be necessary.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.25.09.02 To approve the June 27, 2025, meeting minutes, as presented.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.25.09.03 To approve the ELCA Foundation's 2026 committee assignments, as presented.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.25.09.04 To approve the 2026 officers of the ELCA Foundation Board of Trustees and members of the Executive Committee, as presented.

**ELCA Foundation Digest of Board Actions**  
**Date of Board Meeting: March 20, 2026**

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.01 To adopt the agenda as presented and grant the chair the authority to call items out of sequence as may be necessary.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.02 To approve the September 19, 2025, meeting minutes, as presented.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.03 To approve the transfer of \$850,000 from the ELCA Foundation's undesignated account into the Operation Reserve Fund.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.04 To adopt the AI Policy.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.05 To adopt the updated Marketing and Development Committee Charter.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.06 To approve the following as members at large of the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees of the ELCA Foundation, with term dates of 01/01/2026 – 12/31/2027: Eric Brudos and Eric Golberg.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.07 To approve the following as members at large of the Investment Committee of the Board of Trustees of the ELCA Foundation, with term dates of 03/20/2026 – 12/31/2028: Stephen Bennett and Dave Keil.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.08 To approve the following as a member at large of the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees of the ELCA Foundation, with a term date of 03/20/2026 – 12/31/2028: Marty Uhle.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.09 To approve the Foundation's updated 2026 committee assignments.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.10 To approve the updated Strategic Asset Allocation and Investment Policy Statement for the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust's Ministry Growth Fund.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.26.03.11 To approve the Charitable Trusts updated Strategic Asset Allocation, Investment Policy Statement, and Investment Manager Guidelines, contingent upon completion of legal review by Foundation's outside counsel, if staff determines a legal review is required.

## **Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA Report**

*Submitted by: Eva M. Roby, President and CEO*

The Mission Investment Fund concluded 2025 with continued financial strength and operational stability while navigating a challenging macroeconomic environment marked by elevated interest rates and persistent margin compression.

As the financial ministry serving congregations and related organizations across the church, MIF remains focused on stewarding resources in a way that supports long-term mission impact. Despite these pressures, MIF preserved its financial strength and made disciplined strategic decisions to safeguard long-term mission capacity.

In addition, we continued our impact through successfully completing our key strategic initiatives for the year:

### *Complete Modernization System Implementation*

In 2025, MIF successfully completed the final phase of its multi-year modernization initiative, including the launch of a new core banking system and more than ten supporting systems across digital banking, payments, lending, and customer relationship management. These systems are stable, fully operational, and now serve as the foundation for future growth. Staff adoption has been strong, with post-implementation surveys indicating high confidence in the new technology environment. This milestone significantly strengthens MIF's operational readiness and scalability.

### *Initiate MIF and ELCA Federal Credit Union integrations for the Alliance*

During 2025, MIF advanced preparatory work toward integration with the ELCA Federal Credit Union. Following the completion of our modernization efforts, we re-evaluated the level of investment required to move forward with the Alliance. As a result, MIF leadership made a careful and deliberate decision to slow the pace of alliance development while preserving the long-term vision. This approach allows us to protect our financial position while continuing to advance the long-term vision for the Alliance in a measured and sustainable way.

### *Grow and Diversify the Loan Portfolio*

While overall loan growth in 2025 was modest, the organization made meaningful investments in infrastructure to support future expansion. In 2026, emphasis will shift from capacity building to conversion of these initiatives into measurable, diversified portfolio growth while maintaining credit quality.

### *Continue Our Tradition of Strength and Stability*

MIF remains financially strong, with an equity ratio of 27.4%—above regulatory requirements and industry benchmarks. Our loan portfolio continues to be of high quality, with stable delinquency ratios; all key performance ratios also remain within target ranges. These results reflect a resilient financial foundation and position us to responsibly manage ongoing market uncertainty.

Looking to the year ahead, MIF will begin the process of developing its next strategic plan – which will be a transitional one covering 2027–2028. For 2026, key priorities include strengthening Alliance foundations, advancing sustainable growth strategies for loans and deposits, and continuing MIF's long-standing tradition of financial strength and stability.

Eva M. Roby  
President & CEO

**MIF DIGEST OF BOARD ACTIONS**

**Submitted by:** Eva M. Roby

**Date of Board Meeting(s):** March 19, 2026

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**Category 1:** *(Policies with an impact beyond the unit, which require Church Council approval.)*

None

**Category 2:** *(Policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the unit or to the specific mandate of the unit.)*

- Elected committee members
- Approved the audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2025

**Category 3:** *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

None

# UPDATE FROM PORTICO BENEFIT SERVICES

March 2026



## Executive Summary: ELCA Church Council

Submitted by Chris Johnson  
President and CEO

Easter greetings! At Portico, as we pause to reflect and renew for midweek devotions this season, we are dwelling on the ways Christ provides a firm foundation even when the landscape seems ever shifting. Amidst change in the church, the community, and our world, we are committed to our calling to be a steady presence as we serve our members faithfully with benefits that help provide peace of mind.

### IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT

- Portico's response to recent immigration enforcement activities included outreach to members reminding them of benefit support, principal signatory on a shareholder letter to Target leadership, and additional communication via [website](#), [video](#), and social media. We are also exploring additional mental and behavioral health resources based on available funding.

### SERVING MORE IN THE ELCA

- At last October's COB meeting, I made a direct request of the bishops: help Portico connect with ELCA colleges, universities, and social ministry organizations they are affiliated with. As a direct result, we are now in conversation with three new opportunities: [Luther College](#), [Concordia College](#), and [Pacific Lutheran University](#).
- Growth in the Flexible Benefits Program (FBP ~ which serves colleges, universities, and faith-based social ministry organizations) is essential to sustain the Traditional Benefits Program (TBP). Overall covered lives in the ELCA Health Plan grew by 1% from Jan. 1, 2025 (27,369) to Jan. 1, 2026 (27,641), driven by a 24% rise in FBP participation, which more than offset modest declines in the TBP (-4.3%) and MAPD program (-4.1%).

### ELCA HEALTH PLAN SUSTAINABILITY UPDATE

- The benefits changes implemented on Jan. 1 achieved their intended goal: keeping 2026 employer contribution rate increases in the single digits while offering greater flexibility for members. However, higher-than-expected health care claims and prescription drug costs throughout the fourth quarter are putting pressure on those gains. Guided by the ELCA's Philosophy of Benefits and our responsibility as faithful stewards, we are carefully reviewing our options.
- To support this work, we have convened a cross-functional team to examine cost trends and identify responsible adjustments that help maintain the strength of the ELCA Health Plan.

### ADVOCACY FOR THE CLERGY ACT

- The bipartisan Clergy Act would offer pastors a one-time, voluntary opportunity to re-enter Social Security and Medicare, offering a clearer, more equitable path to long-term financial stability for those who opted out early in ministry. Through Portico's Board seat on the Church Alliance, we are actively urging lawmakers to advance a solution that would restore affected individuals' ability to contribute and receive prorated benefits in retirement.



## ELCA Connections

### Lutheran Services in America (LSA) CEO Summit, Feb. 1 – 4

- A key opportunity to connect with more than 100 social ministry organization CEOs, representing current and potential participants in the Flexible Benefits Program (FBP).

### CBA Awarded \$30 Million Lilly Hub Grant

- The Church Benefits Association will use this grant to support comprehensive clergy wellness via individual denominational programs.
- We are currently developing a proposal that would enhance mental and emotional wellness ministries.

### Changes in the Portico Office

To accelerate innovation and fuel growth, we're investing in capabilities, including:

- In November, we welcomed Laura Weiglein, who heads up our Product Group. Laura brings deep experience in health care strategy and product innovation, with a heart for people and a head for practical, efficient, results-driven plan design.
- We are searching for additional staff focusing on business development, with ambitious goals to keep expanding the FBP pool.
- We are transitioning to a three-day-per-week in-office model later this summer, designed to strengthen collaboration, innovation, and culture.

### Upcoming Events

- Synod Assemblies
- Larger Church Conference, May 4 – 7
- Rostered Ministers Gathering and Assistant to the Bishop Gathering, July 6 – 11
- Portico Board of Trustees Meeting, July 29 – 31

PORTICO + You  
It all adds up.

**ANNUAL ENROLLMENT RESULTS & JAN. 1 BENEFIT CHANGES**

- Medicare Advantage Prescription Drug: 2,100 members moved from Humana to the new UnitedHealthcare & Express Scripts option; of these, 1,600 reside in MN, ND, and SD, where UnitedHealthcare is the only option.
- ELCA-Primary Health: 12,414 covered lives; 89.8% elected a Select option (57.5% Select Copay, 32.3% Select HDHP)
- New EAP Provider for ELCA-Primary Members: Spring Health, a partner of 98point6 by Transcarent, replaced Carelon and Learn to Live. We chose Spring Health for their robust telehealth (virtual mental health appointments available within 48 hours; 24/7 crisis support via phone) in addition to a national network of in-person providers. Six therapy sessions and six coaching sessions are available with the option to continue seeing a preferred Spring Health therapist through ELCA-Primary health benefits (subject to copays, deductibles, and/or coinsurance).
- We worked closely with our health vendor partners to resolve January ID card issues affecting a portion of members and addressed key concerns related to the transition from Further to HealthEquity, helping members avoid unexpected fees and manage their FSA and HSA accounts with confidence. In addition, we are facilitating integration between HealthEquity and the ELCA Federal Credit Union to enable direct reimbursement deposits for credit union members.

**YEAR-END MARKET UPDATE**

- The fourth quarter of 2025 resulted in strong market performance, in part due to the Federal Reserve pivot toward more monetary easing. This was in direct response to a cooling labor market and inflation that trended down toward the 2.7% range. Equity markets posted modest but constructive gains in the final stretch of the year. The S&P 500 closed the year with a 17.9% return, marking three consecutive years of returns greater than 15%. Non-U.S. stocks did even better, delivering an astounding 32% for the year. Investment-grade bonds also had a 7.3% return for the year.
- The US stock market has been down so far this year and energy prices are up due to the conflict in the Middle East. Investors have increasing concerns about economic growth in the US and around the world. The first quarter reports will be released mid-April.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEE NOMINEE SOUGHT**

- Following her election at last summer’s Churchwide Assembly, Trustee Elizabeth Wagner subsequently resigned from the board. Because the position was filled but vacated prior to the completion of the term, we are seeking potential candidates from the Western United States with experience in health care, technology, or investments to be appointed as her replacement. Link to the application → [Board Member | Portico Benefit Services | LinkedIn](#)

**Key Metrics as of Dec. 31, 2025: Satisfaction & Sustainability**

Description	Target	2025	Definition & Relevance
Traditional Benefits Program Member Net Promotor Score (NPS)	40	50	<i>Net Promotor Score (NPS) is an industry measurement to gauge overall satisfaction. Despite a significant health plan change, year-over-year NPS remained steady. Q4 delivered the strongest results of the year, driven largely by retiree satisfaction ratings. Targeted communication and connection efforts remain critical to sustaining relationships with members under age 65.</i>
Traditional Benefits Program Employer NPS	40	48	This score increased from 45 to 50 in Q4. Key employer concerns include affordability, portal navigation, and billing statement design. Like our members, employers also had to adapt to new health plan design as they made Annual Enrollment elections.
Retirement Plan Expense Ratio (in basis points ~ bps)	74	49.7	<i>Retirement plan expense ratio is an industry metric that measures the effectiveness in managing expenses associated with a retirement plan. Actual expense ratio ended lower than budget estimate of 53.4 bps.</i>
Participating Annuity Funded Ratio	> 1.0	1.087	<i>The Funded Ratio is a critical measurement to determine the financial health of the Annuity Trust and whether assets can meet committed liabilities. The 2026 annual adjustment of +4.5% was determined based on the 9/30/2025 funded ratio.</i>
Health Plan Expense Ratio (%)	< 12%	9.9%	<i>This ratio measures the costs associated with managing a health plan; it helps in assessing the efficiency and sustainability of the plan. A lower expense ratio indicates more efficient plan management which leads to better cost control. Although this result is higher than our budget estimates — due to increased administrative expenses reflective of Benefits reExamined work and Flexible Benefits Program growth — it is within acceptable range according to benchmark.</i>

## SIM DIGEST OF BOARD ACTIONS

**Name of SIM: Portico Benefit Services**

**Submitted by:** Christopher Johnson, CEO

**Date of Board Meeting(s):** N/A

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**Category 1:** *(Policies with an impact beyond the unit, which require Church Council approval.)*

- None

**Category 2:** *(Policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the unit or to the specific mandate of the unit.)*

- None

**Category 3:** *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

- None



## **Women of the ELCA Report and Digest of Board Actions**

*Submitted by Jennifer Hockenbery, Interim Executive Director*

The work of the churchwide staff of Women of the ELCA is to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. This includes nurturing their faith through Bible Study, educational resources, and fellowship events as well as providing education about the needs of the world and opportunities to serve those needs.

Over the last six months, WELCA has made significant strides on implementing its strategic plan.

Connecting to new women: \*We have seen an increase in individual participants who join via the Belong button on our website. \*We have updated A Place for You and shared with the presidents of our synodical women's organization. \*We have hosted learning opportunities on how to begin and energize new units. \*Our Campus Ambassadors program has won grants giving nearly \$60,000 for promoting Women of the ELCA activities to college students and creating intergenerational opportunities for mentoring to girls, college students, and older women in established WELCA units. \*Our Lutheran Volunteer Corp fellow has been instrumental in helping with this initiative, planning servant events, and supporting our ministry as a whole. \*We connected with United Women in Faith to attend the Faithful Resistance March in Washington D.C. in February. \*We are partnering with Minnesota and North Dakota synods to support Bliss International Schools in India.

Creating new resources: \*We have created a Racial Justice Newsletter and begun monthly forums on this topic. \*Speakers gave a presentation on supporting our leaders of color using the book "See Me, Believe Me" with our board members and with all our SWO presidents. \*A presentation was created on 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusivity and why it matters for our SWO presidents. \*A webinar on Fact and Fiction was given in January to over 200 participants, a webinar on Prayer, Nonviolent Protest, and Craftivism was given in January to over 100 participants. \*Just Prayers was released and sent to donors. Copies can be purchased at the Gather website. \*We held live Pray Without Ceasing sessions throughout Advent.

Complementing existing resources: \*Women of the ELCA paid off almost the whole of its 2023 and 2024 debt to the ELCA in January 2026. \*Our successful SALT (sharing abundance love and thanks) campaign allowed us to finish the 2025 financial year with no new debt. \*Our Katie's Fund Campaign ended 2025 having raised over \$900,000 in gifts and pledges.

Continuing our existing ministries and programs: \*We continue our popular and award-winning publications Bold Connections, Café, and Gather. \*A live Thankoffering Service was held at Wartburg College. \*We gave \$20,000 in Katie's Fund grants in the fall and \$25,000 in the spring. \*Our grant and scholarship platform moved to Grantmaker is now more accessible to applicants. \*The Churchwide Board attends SWO conventions and will hold the 2026 Triennial Convention by Zoom in July.

April 16, 2026

Women of the ELCA Report and Digest of Board Actions

Page 2 of 5

Celebrating our vibrant community: The agenda for the 2026 Triennial Gathering July 16-19, 2026 in Des Moines, Iowa is designed to uplift, inspire, and enrich the lives of participants as they are held in loving community. Our theme, "I am worthy," continues our work to encourage offering love, grace, and justice to others by reminding women that they too are deserving of this love, grace, and justice because of Jesus' love for us. Learn more at [WELCATG.org](http://WELCATG.org)

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "JH", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr. Jennifer Hockenbery  
Interim Executive Director of Women of the ELCA

**WOMEN OF THE ELCA DIGEST OF BOARD ACTIONS**

**Submitted by:** Jennifer Hockenbery, Interim Executive Director

**Date of Board Meeting(s):** October 17-19, 2025 and January 11, 2026

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**Category 1:** *(Policies with an impact beyond the ministry, which require Church Council approval.)*

None

**Category 2:** *(Policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the ministry or to the specific mandate of the ministry.)*

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.86] (Stewardship Development)

Moved to approve the updated Stewardship Policy

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.88]

Move to continue to invest the Women of the ELCA Endowments with the ELCA Foundation.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION [EB/WO 2026.01.91] (Executive Committee)

Motion to approve en bloc recommendations #I to VI

- I. Based on the agreement establishing the Trosin Endowment, the 4% distribution should go to Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls instead of Where Needed Most.
- II. The Ruth Petrie Memorial Fund 4% distribution should be directed to Where Needed Most instead of Grants
- III. The Schmeider Endowment 4% distribution should be directed to Where Needed Most instead of Leadership Scholarship.
- IV. Based on agreement establishing the Knudstrop Endowment, the Norma Zack Curry Endowment, and the Lombardi Endowment, the 4% distribution should go to Scholarships instead of Where Needed Most.
- V. The 2% distribution of the following funds should go into an account marked Global Missions. The funds in the Global Missions account would then be given to Global Missions to distribute to missionaries. Funds: Africa Missionaries; Africa General Fund; China General Fund; Global Missionary Fund; India General; India Missionaries; Japan General. Then 2% distribution of the funds should go to Where Needed Most to cover staff time.
- VI. The 2% distribution from the following endowments be reinvested in the endowment instead of going to Where Needed Most and then once a year, staff of Women of the ELCA would work with staff in Service and Justice to distribute the funds. Endowments: Africa Hospital Work; Africa New Curran Hospital Liberia; Africa Lutheran Training Institution; India HS; India Higher Education. Then 2% distribution of the funds should go to Where Needed Most to cover staff time.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION [EB/WO 2026.01.92] (Executive Committee)

Motion to approve recommendation #7.

The \$38,918.00 amount of the debt payback that was to come from designed lines for Advocacy Grass Roots, Church Council Meeting, and LWT Name Change be taken from funds available in the Betty Morgan Endowment. This fund has a total of \$240,411.10 available.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION [EB/WO 2026.01.93] (Executive Committee)

Motion to approve recommendation #8.

The Budget and Finance Committee recommends clarifying the role of the Gift and Endowment Taskforce is to understand the purpose and intent of the endowments, review the Endowment Distributions, maintain records of the Endowments, review gifts to the endowments, and make recommendations on any spending of endowment funds beyond the annual distributions. The taskforce will consist of 1 member from the current board; 2 non-board members; the CWO Board President; and the CWO Board Treasurer. The Executive Director will be an ex-officio member.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION [EB/WO 2026.01.94] (Executive Committee)

Motion to approve recommendation #9.

The Budget and Finance Committee presents the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year budget for the board's consideration as presented.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ACTION [EB/WO 2026.01.97]

Motion to accept the audit report for Fiscal Year 2024

**Category 3:** (Other procedures and board actions.)

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.83] (Constitution Review Committee)

Move to approve the following additional proposed constitution changes *en bloc*:

- a. **CWO Constitution Article IV, Section 1, Item 3**, "For purposes of organization, units established at seminaries, colleges, and campus ministries are treated as congregational units and would thus not require authorization by the Churchwide Executive Board."
- b. **CWO Constitution Article VIII, Section 1, Item 4**, "Units from seminaries, colleges, and campus ministries do not need authorization from the Churchwide Executive Board."
- c. **SWO Constitution Article VI, Section 5, Item 4a**, "~~Committee of the Report of the President, Convener(s), Coordinators(s), or Co-Chairs.~~" Then renumbering the rest of Item 4.
- d. **SWO Constitution Article VI, Section 2, Item 1**, "Voting members of a convention shall be the elected officers or SWO leaders and board members of the synodical women's organization and one up to two voting members from each unit on the roll of this synodical women's organization."
- e. **SWO Constitution Article VI, Section 4, Item 6**, "All elections should be by ballot. If an election is unopposed, then the election can be by hand or green/red card vote."
- f. **SWO Constitution Article VI, Section 6, Item 6**, "All elections should be by ballot. A rank-order process established by the Churchwide Women's Organization Executive Board shall be used. If an election is unopposed, then the election can be by hand or green/red card vote."

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.85] (Constitution Review Committee)

Moves to deny the changes to the SWO Constitutions received for proposed amendment:

**Minneapolis**

**Northeast Iowa**

**Eastern North Dakota**

**Northern Illinois** (received after the September 15 deadline)

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.87] (Executive Committee)

The executive committee recommends the churchwide executive board adopt the following updates to the Executive Board member participation in synodical and unit expressions of the Women of the ELCA (see attached, pp. 2-3) “Serving on a convention committee (including, but not limited to, resolutions, elections, minutes, nominations, planning team) or serving as parliamentarian are positions of leadership appropriate advisory roles.” Remove this bullet point, “Serving as a voting member to the synodical convention is a position of leadership and prohibited by Article XIV, Section 3, Item 7 (No board member shall hold two positions of leadership simultaneously in a synodical women’s organization and/or the churchwide women’s organization)” and remove “other than being a voting member to the Synodical Convention” from the last paragraph.

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.88] (Executive Committee)

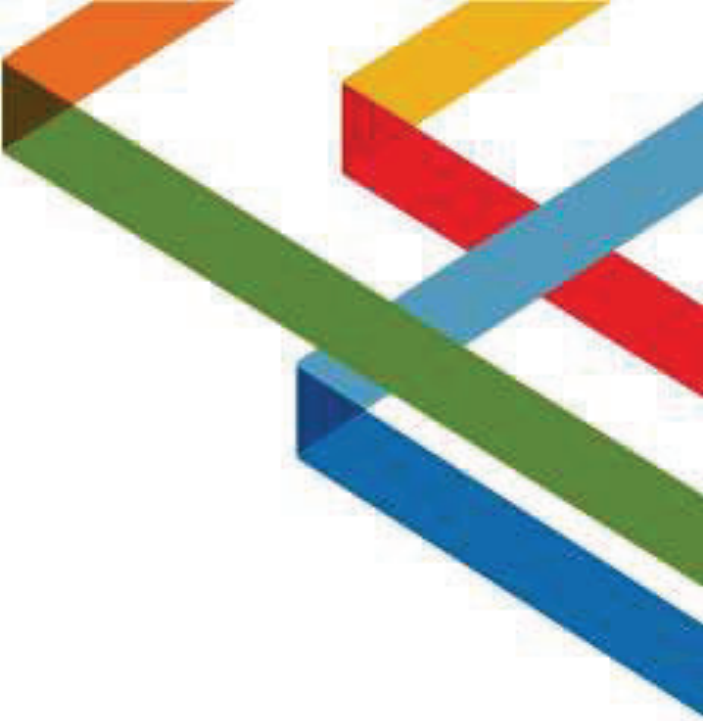
The executive committee recommends the adoption of the Rank Order Process for the Thirteenth Triennial Convention (see Exhibit N-b).

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.89] (Executive Committee)

Move to approve the Proposed Rules of Procedure as presented in Exhibit N-g.

EXECUTIVE BOARD ACTION [EB/WO 2025.10.89] (Executive Committee)

Move to approve the Proposed Agenda as presented in Exhibit N-f.



# **ELCA Churchwide Organization**

## **Church Council**

### **Spring 2026 Report**



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America

# **Financial Results**

## *as of January 31, 2026*



# Unrestricted Fund Results thru 1/31/2026

(in \$000s)	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	2024 Actual
<b>Total Revenues</b>	\$60,957	\$56,600	\$62,080
<b>Release from Restriction</b>	<u>820</u>	<u>595</u>	<u>555</u>
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<u>(64,260)</u>	<u>(65,375)</u>	<u>(62,476)</u>
<b>Net Expenses over Revenues</b>	(\$2,483)	(\$8,180)	\$159

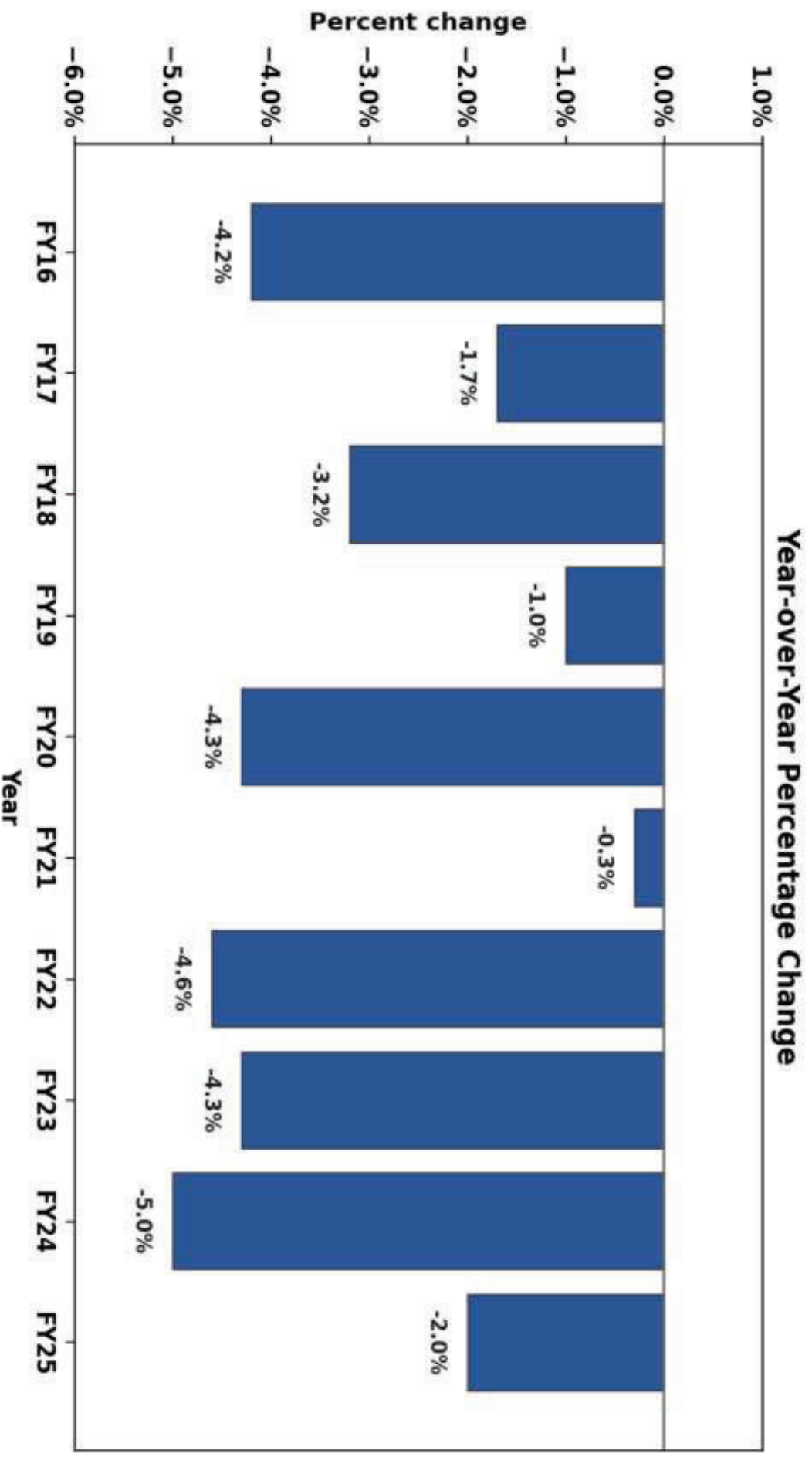
Note: The FY25 actual will be reduced to zero after utilization of a designated fund, Budgeted

## Unrestricted Revenues – 1/31/26

Revenue Category (in 000s)	2025 Actual	2025 Budget	2024 Actual
Mission Support	\$34,514	\$33,550	\$35,226
Direct Gifts	7,870	8,000	7,845
Investment Income	7,523	4,000	8,120
Bequest & Trust	2,719	3,000	2,822
Endowment	3,942	3,600	3,940
Rent	1,040	1,050	1,045
SLA/Other	1,849	1,900	1,582
Mission Investment Fund	<u>1,500</u>	<u>1,500</u>	<u>1,500</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$60,957</b>	<b>\$56,600</b>	<b>\$62,080</b>

# Mission Support Year to Year Percentage

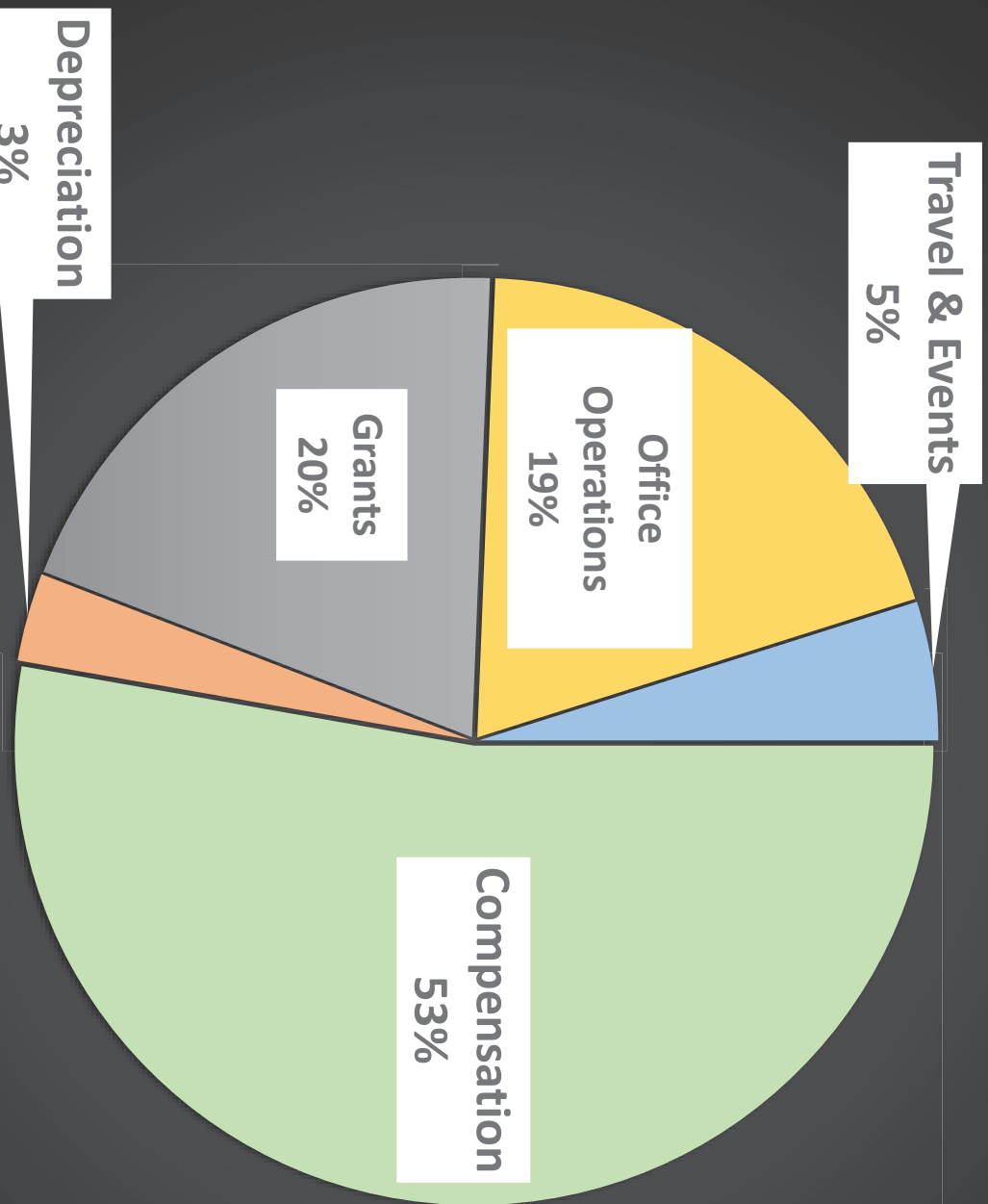
## FY16 thru FY25



## Expenses Continued – 1/31/26

Expenses (in 000s)	2025	2025
	Actual	Budget
Total Operating Expenses	\$62,450	\$65,375
<i>Nonrecurring Expenses:</i>		
Churchwide Assembly Overage	936	
International Legal Settlement	332	
Severance	291	
Rostered Ministers Gathering	<u>250</u>	
	1,810	
Total Expenses	\$64,260	\$65,375

# Expenditures by Nature



Regular expenses were 96% of budgeted spending

## FY26 Revenue Budget Revisions

Increased Mission Support	\$1,150,000
Decreased Bequest Income	(491,000)
Increased Endowment Distributions	100,000
Increased Utilization of Designated Funds – Budgeted Operations Support	1,741,000
Decreased Endowment Withdrawals	<u>(2,500,000)</u>
Net Change in Revenue	\$0

*There is no change in the Approved Spending Authorization.*

# Portals for Synods and Leaders

- New platform with an enhanced experience and online interface
- Features:
  - Electronic forms submission
  - Mobile and tablet friendly
  - Single sign-on (with multi-factor authentication for security)
  - Integration to CWO systems for information accuracy
- Synod Financial Portal Launch
  - 42 synods onboarded for monthly remittance
  - Streamlined process for submitting data
  - Training materials and white glove service is available
- Call Process Portal (*coming soon*)
  - Updated Rostered Minister Profile (RMP) content on a more modern, flexible and secure environment
  - Digital signatures
  - Improved experience for Synod Call Process Administrators

# Stay Tuned!!!

Fund for Leaders –

Request for approval to utilize endowment funds for administration of the Fund for Leaders program

Will require a unanimous written consent or special meeting.

Hopefully within the next month



*Your partnership and prayers are  
essential in helping us to become a more  
connected church!*

*Thank You!!!*



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

# Budget & Finance Committee

## April 2026



# BFC only Action Items

Met in person on Friday, March 20

## Topics Discussed

- Received report on FY25 results, which were used to make adjustments to the FY26 revenue budget. Approved these changes but no action required by CC since spending authorization remains unchanged.

WELCOMING



## En Bloc Items

- Approved replacement of Keith Fry with Katharyn Wheeler as Assistant Secretary in Authority to Act in Financial Matters
- Received presentation from Columbia Threadneedle, our outsourced investment management partner since Columbia Threadneedle (CT) since 2021. Approved recommended changes to the Core Investment Policy (see next slide)

These recommendations from *Budget & Finance Committee* are *en bloc* actions for Church Council approval.

Action will come later in meeting.



# Background on Change to Investment Policy Statement

- CT did a review of our projected spending compared to our current asset allocation study.
- Current two investment policies: Operating investments and Core investments
- Consolidated into one policy, providing additional flexibility to more aggressively invest excess cash. Continuing with low volatility equity fund to reduce risk.
- Long term target allocation for CT-managed portfolio is 20% cash, 30% fixed income, and 50% low volatility equity.

WELCOMING



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**Thank You to the Budget and Finance  
Committee for your time during the retreat  
and to Church Council for your support.**





# ELCA Church Council Service & Justice Committee

Spring 2026



## Service and Justice Committee

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Mr. Iván A Pérez '28 (chair)

Ms. Kristy Henriksen '28

Rev. Alvaro Nova '31

Ms. Deidre Hayes '31

Ms. Deborah “Deb” Nyquist '31

Rev. Ralph Dunkin '31

Mr. Ryan LaHurd, Advisory Member

Ms. Joan Conroy, Advisory Member

Rev. Joy Mortensen-Wiebe, Liaison Bishop

Rev. Craig Schweitzer, Liaison Bishop

Rev. Khader El-Yateem, Executive Director

Rev. Barbara Lund, Senior Director, Operations

*You have been given freedom: not freedom to do wrong, but freedom to love and serve each other. – Galatians 5:13*

## Service and Justice Action

---

### *Recommended:*

To affirm the new Asian and Pacific Islander Ministry Strategy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;

To express solidarity and deep gratitude for the ministries of the ELCA with the Asian and Pacific Islander community and for the Asians and Pacific Islanders of the ELCA who have enriched and blessed this church with all they generously have given, shared, and cultivated for mission and ministry; and

To commend the ELCA to accompany the Asian and Pacific Islander congregations and to utilize this new strategic plan in responding to a changing world and embodying this church's faithful discipleship.

*You have been given freedom: not freedom to do wrong, but freedom to love and serve each other. – Galatians 5:13*

# Service and Justice Action

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## Plan to address barriers for youth and young adult participation

### *Recommended:*

To defer the presentation of a plan that addresses implementation of ELCA continuing resolution 5.01.E25. until the November 2026 Church Council meeting.

### Timeline

- ▶ Apr 2026 Working Group formed
- ▶ Spring/Summer 2026 Draft plan is created
- ▶ Nov 2026 Initial draft presented
  
- ▶ Working Group -
  - Ben Caseley, Rindra Josoa, Olivia Martin-Call
  - Jillian Stierwalt, Emma Witt, Iván A Pérez

*You have been given freedom: not freedom to do wrong, but freedom to love and serve each other. – Galatians 5:13*

## Service and Justice Action

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[EN BLOC]

*Recommended:*

To approve the updated “Terms and Conditions of Support for Long-Term Global Personnel” policy.

*You have been given freedom: not freedom to do wrong, but freedom to love and serve each other. – Galatians 5:13*

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# Legal & Constitutional Review Committee Report

*April 16, 2026*



# En Bloc Business

- Proposed revisions to the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod Constitution
- Proposed amendments to the HR Policy Manual
- Proposed amendment to 14.41.F22 – Audit Committee  
*(two-thirds vote required)*



## Pending Business (CWA '25)

- Motion A, Motion B, Historically Underrepresented Groups
- Motion C – Ratification of Constitutional Amendments Offered at a Churchwide Assembly

WELCOMING



# New Business

- Synodically-Authorized Worshipping Communities
- Proposals Offered by the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose (2027)

WELCOMING



QUESTIONS?

WELCOMING



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# Legal & Constitutional Review Committee



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# **Christian Community and Leadership: Candidacy Update**

# Candidacy Re-Imagined Update

- March 2022: Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group began its work
- Through research and listening to stakeholders, goals of new process are:
  - Was rigorous and flexible, as well as clear, informative, and understandable
  - Recognized and valued all paths to ministry leadership
  - Was theologically and Biblically sound
  - Involved the participation of all three expressions of the church
- Removed barriers for underrepresented groups

WELCOMING



# Launch Synods identified

- 10 synods selected to implement the reimagined process:
  - Sierra Pacific
  - Minneapolis
  - Southwest Minnesota
  - Southwestern Texas
  - East Central Wisconsin
  - Indiana-Kentucky
  - Southeast Pennsylvania
  - Lower Susquehanna
  - Florida-Bahamas
  - Northwestern Washington
- Training event held February 10–11, 2026 with synod representatives and ELCA seminary faculty/staff

WELCOMING



# Candidacy Re-Imagined Update

## Key changes to the process:

- Competency-based model with consistent ministry standards across all educational paths
- Portfolio with artifacts used for ongoing assessment
- Accompanier role added (non-evaluative; focused on prayer, encouragement, and companionship)
- Annual reviews replace single midpoint endorsement
- Seminars provide ongoing formative assessments rather than committee membership or final Form D

## Launch evaluation and adaptation:

- 18-month launch period with quarterly check-ins and partner surveys
- Feedback used to refine the process and manual
- Final version submitted to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council for review and approval



