



“Church Council will enable and support the work of the ELCA in a way that is consistent with the ELCA's vision and purpose by utilizing equitable decision-making processes to realize our three priority areas of being a welcoming church, a thriving church, and a connected and sustainable church.” – Vision for ELCA Church Council Meetings

March 2025

Dear Church Council members,

Grace and peace to you.

As you prepare for the April 2025 Church Council meeting, this is a brief overview of what you can anticipate for this meeting. You'll be considering several significant actions that need to be forwarded to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, including:

- Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church Report and Recommendations
- Proposed social statement titled *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All*
- Proposed editorial edits to the *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) social statement
- Archival of certain social policy resolutions
- 2026-2028 Budget Proposal
- Churchwide Assembly Rules of Organization and Procedure
- Certain bylaw amendments to the ELCA Constitution

Also, the Executive Committee will report on recommendations regarding ELCA health benefits from Portico's Benefits re-Examined team, compliance review from a joint committee of the churchwide organization and Foundation, and percentage goals to meet our ethnic and racial diversity commitments. You'll be invited to ask clarifying questions about the reports written from the vice president, secretary and Conference of Bishops chair. Committees will meet on Friday afternoon, April 4.

On Saturday, April 5, St. Olaf College Corporation Meeting will be held. During the Saturday lunch, the Advisory Members will host lunch presentations about the ministry of their association/organization.

Some action items will be *en bloc*. As you know, this allows time for strategic and generative conversations on other topics. If there is any action you do wish to discuss that is in *en bloc*, please notify Secretary Sue Rothmeyer during the Church Council meeting by Saturday, April 5 at 10 a.m. This is also the deadline for any new business you wish to add to the Church Council agenda.

You have already received the updated provisional schedule. The full agenda will be posted about two weeks prior to the meeting. If you have questions about any of the matters above, please contact Jodi Slattery, Jodi.Slattery@elca.org. The documents for the meeting will be found in the Church Council Microsoft Teams within the Files section of the "Public Current Meeting" channel. Please contact Joseph Schmidt, Joseph.Schmidt@elca.org, if you have problems accessing the Teams site.

I give thanks to God for all of you.

God's peace,

Elizabeth A. Eaton
Presiding Bishop

Report from the Presiding Bishop

“The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God’s creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world.” (ELCA Constitution 4.01.)

The day after the 2024 election I posted a video reminding us that, though there were likely significant changes to come following the presidential election, nevertheless we were going to carry on the mission of the church, the mission of the gospel. It is who we are. It is what we do.

As you read through the report of the churchwide organization you can see the many ways that this church has shown up. Budget and operational plans have been developed, the Innovation home area is ready to start its fourth cohort of congregations in the ELCA Congregations Lead Initiative (CLI). CLI works with congregations to foster cultural shifts, enhance community engagement, and inspire innovative practices in congregational life. To date, 73 congregations in 32 synods have participated. Iain Chester, executive for Innovation, leads this effort. Christian Community and Leadership has developed regional pop-up events to build momentum for the 2027 Youth Gathering and is researching the impact of growing numbers of Synod Authorized Ministers (SAMs). The Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta has finished its mission in that location and is being reborn as Sankofa, supporting BIPOC leaders with a primary focus on African descent. Sankofa will be housed at the Philadelphia campus of United Lutheran Seminary. People Solutions completed a compensation survey of the churchwide organization with an eye on pay equity. People Solutions also presented a webinar hosted by Judith Roberts, senior director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, called Day of Racial Healing. Strategic Communications has restarted the print edition of the *Living Lutheran* publishing quarterly. Strat Com has also produced several videos addressing the ELCA’s commitment to serving the most vulnerable in our communities. As you can see, we have been busy.

I want to highlight several things in the churchwide organization annual report; First Theological Discernment and Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations. The Theological Discernment team has made available the draft of the social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All.” This bears careful review. It is also incredibly timely. The rise of Christian Nationalism, the federal government’s rejection of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility efforts, threats against the judiciary, the rescinding of the Protected Areas policy among others, impact faith and civic life. Often people caution me about the separation of church and state. This proposed social statement is a much-needed tool for members and congregations to understand the Lutheran view of civic life.

Second, the editorial revision of the 2009 social statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is available for review. This addresses changes to US law and other technical changes. This will come before the Churchwide Assembly this summer.

Third, the Executive Committee will review the Lutheran/Orthodox Common Statement on the Filioque. Their action will be brought to the Church Council and pending agreement will come before the Churchwide Assembly for the formal process of reception. This might seem arcane, but it is pretty important.

Fourth, work has been completed on the orderly exchange of the diaconate. Amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* will come before the Church Council. We await action by the Episcopal Church to finalize their consultations and review.

Fifth, a proposal for a social message on theological resources for confronting white supremacy will also be under consideration.

Recent executive orders from the White House, stopping USAID, stop work orders for agencies engaged in refugee resettlement, ending US government funding for childhood anti-malaria vaccines, among others, have placed a greater burden on the Service and Justice home area. Global Refuge (formerly LIRS) reports that vetted refugees with plane tickets in hand were denied entry into the US. Global Refuge, Lutheran Services in America (LSA), and many of our social ministry agencies that work

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on refugee resettlement have had to lay off hundreds of staff. Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) and the Lutheran Deaconess Community were able to give grants to Global Refuge, and LDR also gave a grant to LSA to keep their infrastructure in place during this time. Our Witness in Society (DC) and Lutheran Office for World Community (UN) staff as well as state public policy offices are working overtime.

The ELCA and related agencies have also come under attack. We have been accused of money laundering (we're not) and human trafficking (also not). We have been told to tend to spiritual matters. These are spiritual matters. Luther's treatise, *The Freedom of a Christian*, makes it clear that through the death and resurrection of Jesus we have been redeemed and do not need to spend our time and energy trying to secure our salvation (as if we could) but now we are free to love and serve our neighbor. And our question is not "who is my neighbor?" but rather we are to answer Jesus' question, "which of these do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" (Luke 10:25-37)

Recently I convened a coalition of ecumenical and inter-religious leaders to work on a response to White House executive orders and develop strategies to serve those who are being harmed by government actions. Members include the USCCB and Catholic Charities, mainline protestants, and the National Association of Evangelicals along with the Union for Reform Judaism and the Islamic Society of North America. All of our aid and refugee resettlement work has been deeply affected. Yes, we hope to bring about change, but chiefly we want to demonstrate that our concern and work for and with the most vulnerable is spiritually motivated. All of our traditions hold the conviction that God wants abundant life for all people, and we are called to be God's servants and witnesses to that.

My thanks to you, the Church Council, for your faithful oversight, to the churchwide staff for your dedication and incredible grace under pressure, and to this church as we live out our baptismal promises "to proclaim Christ through word and deed, care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace." (ELW page 228)

Elizabeth Eaton
Presiding Bishop of the ELCA

Report from the Vice President

Greetings and Blessed Lent. It seems so long ago since we met back as Church Council in November 2024. Since then, much has occurred and we are facing a year of profound changes, inside the church as well as out (as a federal employee, you don't have to remind me).

This year we are going to have an election for a new presiding bishop and new secretary of our church. We will be voting on changes to the ELCA Constitution. We will receive the final report and recommendations of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church. We will have over 20 Bishop's elections (one of which I will be leading, for the first time). All the while, we are dealing with a rapidly changing situation in our country where immigrants and members of the LGBTQ+ community (and even us Lutherans, strangely enough) are targeted by the powerful. It's a dizzying amount of change for one year.

This is not merely a challenge, but an opportunity for us to be bold and decide on the path we wish to take. In this time of rapid change, I believe that we are called to hold fast to what the Gospel teaches us: To boldly speak out when the least of these are threatened; To reject calls for minimization, dehumanization, or illegalization of people for who they are, who they love, where they are from, how they worship, who they help, or who they are called to be; And to loudly proclaim that Jesus loves all of us.

This is a time to not only speak, but to listen. I ask you, as Church Council members, to hold space for the words and fears and anger that I know many of you are hearing among people in our congregations and synods. I, myself, sometimes get frustrated when, in their anger or fear, people seem to lash out at others in the Church for not doing enough. But it also seems normal for folks to rage on their own institutions when they feel powerless (and ironically the weakening of our institutions may have been what has led us to this point in the first place). We may not be able to answer their concerns, and we may profoundly disagree with their characterizations, but I've found the act of listening does have some (perhaps minor) healing power for some people.

Too often I think we get caught up in efficiency and productivity and measurables and other buzz words, that we don't stop to have open ended conversations. These conversations don't need to lead to a measurable end. There may be nothing to report out about them. They could end up feeling like a complete waste of time, but the mere act of listening and responding on whatever someone else wants to talk about (or yell about) seems to me to be a theological declaration that they matter. That they have equal human dignity because they are equally loved by God. And in a world which seems to be moving away from those norms, there is something powerful in just allowing that open ended space. A Holy conversation that could move in any number of directions and have people see the humanity in one another a slight bit more. And maybe that's worth a thousand 'productive' meetings.

But perhaps we can do both in our time together. There is a lot of work we are called to do as Church Council in this time of change. There are many things we must determine in our meeting, in the lead up to the Churchwide Assembly. There are many decisions we must make together. I pray we do so with listening ears and open hearts, as I believe our Lord and Savior would have us do. I look forward to seeing all of you and to engage in this Holy conversation, whether it be productive or not.

Blessings and grace,

Imran Siddiqui
Vice President, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Report from the Secretary

As I turned the calendar to January 1, I was mindful of how significant a year 2025 would be for our nation, for our church, and for me personally. When people ask me how I'm feeling about retirement, I say, "Ask me in September!" As you will read in the report ahead, the Office of the Secretary is in "full press" mode as we prepare for all that is to come in 2025!

2025 Churchwide Assembly

Presiding Bishop and Secretary Identification Process

At the end of January, voting members to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly received a letter inviting them to identify the names of up to three ministers of Word and Sacrament in this church who might be considered for election as presiding bishop. In mid-February, voting members received a similar letter inviting them to identify the names of up to three persons who might be considered for election as secretary. These names were to be submitted by March 17, 2025. Those identified have been asked to return a biographical information form if they are interested in having their names considered. Biographical forms returned by May 1 will be distributed electronically to all voting members and then will be posted online at <http://www.ELCA.org/cwa> following synod assembly season. We will not report the number of times an individual was identified, nor will we share the names of those who did not return biographical forms. The biographical information will remain available online until the Churchwide Assembly convenes on July 28, 2025 but will be taken down as soon as the assembly begins. The first ballot for either officer position will be an ecclesiastical ballot that may or may not include the names of those pre-identified by voting members.

Churchwide Assembly (CWA) Hearings

The CWA hearings on significant legislative topics will be held virtually the week or two before the Churchwide Assembly. A continuing resolution will be offered to provide for hearings to be held either prior to or during the Churchwide Assembly. The online format provides more time for voting members to become sufficiently informed regarding legislative business and other important matters before the assembly. More information on the hearings will be shared as we get closer to the assembly.

CWA Guide app

Once again, the 2025 Churchwide Assembly will use Bravura Technologies for the CWA Guide app. Voting members will be able to access the agenda, all meeting materials, submission forms, important contacts, news, social media, maps of the city, floor plans for the Phoenix Convention Center, and much more. The app is anticipated to be available in the Apple and Android app stores by the end of April. Training on the CWA Guide will be scheduled for this summer.

CWA Registration

Registration notices for synod bishops and Church Council were sent on March 10th. An orientation on how to book travel and register for the assembly was held online on March 11th. The registration form is very similar to what has been used in the past. You are asked to book your travel first before you register. If you are flying, remember that, starting May 7, 2025, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will require travelers to present a REAL ID-compliant identification for domestic flights. A REAL ID is a driver's license or state-issued ID that meets federal standards for security and identification. For more details, please visit REAL ID FAQs | Homeland Security (<https://www.dhs.gov/real-id/real-id-faqs>). Registration for all voting members will open on April 2.

Proposed CBCR Amendments and Rationale

In addition to the amendments to the ELCA constitution that have already been forwarded to the synods in preparation for the Churchwide Assembly, a few additional bylaws will be presented to the council by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee (LCRC). These include revisiting the proposed bylaws concerning rostered ministers' membership in hate groups as well as bylaws regarding exchangeability of deacons with The Episcopal Church USA. In addition, the council will be considering continuing resolutions concerning the churchwide organization, the proposed Association of Synod Vice Presidents, terms for board members of MIF, and a rule for hearings for the Churchwide Assembly.

Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

The CRLC met March 13-15 for its twelfth and final meeting. All meeting summaries are posted on ELCA.org/crlc. In mid-February, the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) sent a draft of its final report to the Conference of Bishops and the Executive Committee of the Church Council for consultation. At its March meeting, the CRLC adopted the report and recommendations with editorial license given to the Planning and Report Committee. Commission members will sign off on the final document early next week. After it undergoes copy editing, it will be sent to the Church Council and Conference of Bishops, which we anticipate will be March 27th or March 28th. The CRLC is publishing further educational materials and information to prepare the wider church to receive the CRLC's full report in advance of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Synod Assembly Season

The 2025 spring synod assembly season runs April 25-June 15. Twenty-one synods will engage the bishop election process. Of those, at least ten will elect new bishops, as 11 bishops of the 21 elections will allow their names to go forward for possible re-election. The Allegheny Synod will elect a new bishop at its fall assembly (Oct. 31-Nov. 1).

Task Force on OLFC and Specialized Ministry

The Task Force on OLFC and Specialized Ministry will be sharing the second part of its report to the Church Council at this meeting. The previous portion of the report dealt primarily with matters related to leave and interim ministry and proposed creation of a new source of call to supply ministry. Constitutional amendments related to those proposals are on their way to the Churchwide Assembly this summer.

The task force has now been considering specialized ministry, particularly as it relates to the bylaw requiring an initial three years' service in a congregation of this church for ministers of Word and Sacrament.

The task force is recommending a roster-manual-level policy change that would not require constitutional amendment, but that would allow synods greater latitude in issuing calls for certain categories of call that have been universally approved for exception by the COB over the past decade. In addition, it is proposing a protocol that would reinforce the Synod Council's role in requesting exceptions to the three-year bylaw, with the synod bishop making a recommendation to the Synod Council regarding whether or not the exception should be requested from the COB. It also became clear to the task force that there is a widespread narrative that exceptions are difficult to obtain, so clearer guidance for candidates and Candidacy Committees may help people better understand the process.

Research and Evaluation

As a team, Research and Evaluation seeks to provide expert research services to support stakeholders across the ELCA. In 2025, the team will advance a range of research projects. Some will be conducted in response to actions of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly (e.g., this church's actions regarding the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery). Others support grant-funded projects (e.g., church closures and property usage). Still others were generated by the team to address forthcoming issues (e.g., the future need for pastoral leaders; understanding Synod-Authorized Ministry; a survey of Ministers of Word and Service).

Annual Congregation Report

For the 2024 data year, the Annual Congregation Report is being delivered on a new platform. This platform will:

- Display congregations' data from their most recently submitted annual report;
- Embed popup instructions and definitions directly into the form;
- Include Form A and its instructions in English and Spanish;
- Allow congregations to update their contact information directly through Form A; and
- Through several dashboards, give synods access to congregations' data as it is submitted.

Conversations with synod bishops and staff about the Annual Congregation Report will continue this spring and summer to evaluate the changes made.

Pulse Surveys

The first year of Congregation Pulse Surveys is nearly complete. Topic-specific reports have been distributed quarterly following each survey. A complete report on vitality information provided by congregations will be available this spring.

In preparation for the second year of the Pulse Survey, Research and Evaluation will evaluate the related methodology, logistics, and communication strategy.

Synod Data Toolkits

Last fall, Research and Evaluation gathered feedback on the Synod Data Toolkits from a sample of synod bishops. In response to these conversations, in addition to the material currently included, the toolkits will now contain graphical representations of trends on key metrics, breakouts by congregation size and community context, and information about growth and decline in the synod. Although it will not be possible this year, going forward, the team intends to provide additional narrative commentary on synod trends.

The one thing I can say about retirement is the degree to which I will miss working with the dedicated staff of the Office of the Secretary. Adam, Dana, Jodi, Keith, MaryAnn, and Tom provide key leadership to their respective teams, and it's a delight to have the opportunity to collaborate with them on a regular basis. I look forward to monthly online meetings with the now "complete" staff of OS and appreciate the wit and wisdom they share in those meetings and in their daily work. I am also mindful that this will be the last time that I will have the opportunity to gather with the Church Council in our traditional meeting space at the Lutheran Center. What a joy it has been to be part of this group for the past five and a half years. Thanks for the collegiality we have shared and for the friendships that have developed. I look forward to our time together!

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer
Secretary of the ELCA

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Appendix: Churchwide Reps to Synod Assemblies

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#	SYNOD	ASSEMBLY DATES	CW REP	Location
1A	Alaska	4/25-4/27/25	Tim Brown	Joy LC, Eagle River, AK
1B	Northwest Washington - Bryan Wee	5/16-5/18/25	Nick Kiger	
1C	Southwestern Washington - Jaech	6/13-6/14/25	John Weit	
1D	Northwest Intermountain	5/3/2025 - Online	Mary Streufert	Online
1E	Oregon - Larson Caesar	5/30-6/1/25	Imran Siddiqui	
1F	Montana - Jungling	5/29-6/1/25	Sue Rothmeyer	
2A	Sierra Pacific	6/14/2025	Kristen Opalinski	Online
2B	Southwest California	5/30-5/31/25	Maryn Olson	Burbank, CA
2C	Pacifica	5/16-5/17/25	Rachel Wind	Gloria Dei LC, Dana Point, CA
2D	Grand Canyon	6/13/2025	N/A	Las Vegas
2E	Rocky Mountain	5/22-5/24/25	Mary Campbell	Albuquerque, NM
3A	Western North Dakota	5/30-6/1/25	Miguel Gomez Acosta	Minot, ND
3B	Eastern North Dakota	6/7-6/8/25	Tim Brown	Fargo, ND
3C	South Dakota - Hagmaier	5/30-5/31/25	Liz Eaton	
3D	Northwestern Minnesota - Tesch	5/30-6/1/25	Victoria Flood	
3E	Northeastern Minnesota	5/3-5/4/25	Vance Blackfox	Breezy Point, MN
3F	Southwestern Minnesota	6/6-6/7/25 hybrid	John Weit	Gustavus Adolphus and online
3G	Minneapolis Area	5/2-5/3/25	Jessica Liles	Lord of Life LC, Ramsey, MN
3H	Saint Paul Area	5/16-5/17/25	Miguel Gomez Acosta	St. Andrew's LC, Mahtomedi, MN
3I	Southeastern Minnesota - Hassanally	5/30-5/31/25	Nick Kiger	
4A	Nebraska	5/30-6/1/25	Alison Richard	Kearney, NE
4B	Central States - Candea	6/5-6/7/25	Liz Eaton	
4C	Arkansas-Oklahoma	5/2-5/4/25	Khader El Yateem	Tulsa, OK
4D	N.Texas - N. Louisiana	4/25-4/26/25	Miguel Gomez Acosta	Lubbock, TX
4E	Southwestern Texas	5/3/2025	Daniel Kirschbaum	Abiding Presence, San Antonio, TX
4F	Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast - Rinehart	5/15-5/17/25	Lori Fedyk	
5A	Metropolitan Chicago - Curry	5/30-5/31/25	John Weit	
5B	Northern Illinois	6/13-6/14/25	Rahel Williams/Becca Payne	Augustana College, Rock Island, IL
5C	Central/Southern Illinois	6/5-6/7/25	Norma Malfatti	St. John's LC, Bloomington, IL
5D	Southeastern Iowa	5/17/2025	N/A	Grand View Univ, Des Moines, IA
5E	Western Iowa - Halaas	6/13-6/14/25	Victoria Flood	
5F	Northeastern Iowa	6/6-6/7/25	Aaron Shoppa	Cedar Falls, IA
5G	Northern Great Lakes	5/15-5/17/25	John Weit	Northern Michigan Univ, Marquette, MI
5H	Northwest Synod of Wisc	4/26/2025	Imran Siddiqui	Bethany LC, Rice Lake, WI
5I	East-Central Synod of Wisc	6/7/2025	Mary Campbell	Calvary LC, Green Bay, WI
5J	Greater Milwaukee	5/30-5/31/25	Khader El Yateem	Brookfield Conf Center, Brookfield, WI
5K	South-Central Synod of Wisc	5/17/2025	Keith Fry	Madison, WI
5L	La Crosse Area	6/6-6/8/25	Maryn Olson	Westby Coon Prairie LC, Westby, WI
6A	Southeast Michigan	5/16-5/17/25	Jill Beverlin	Celebration LC, Westland, MI
6B	North/West Lower Michigan - Satterlee	5/18-5/20/25	MaryAnn Schwabe	
6C	Indiana-Kentucky	6/5-6/7/25	Amy Reumann	Union Station, Indianapolis, IN
6D	Northwestern Ohio	N/A	N/A	
6E	Northeastern Ohio	one day business only TBD	N/A	
6F	Southern Ohio - Dillahunt	6/6-6/7/25	MaryAnn Schwabe	
7A	New Jersey - Bartholomew	6/5-6/7/25	Sue Rothmeyer	
7B	New England	5/30-5/31/25	Judith Roberts	DCU Center, Worcester, MA
7C	Metropolitan New York - Egensteiner	5/2-5/3/25	Sue Rothmeyer	
7D	Upstate New York	5/30/25 or 5/31/25	Keith Fry	ONLINE
7E	Northeastern Pennsylvania	5/30-5/31/25	Tim Brown	Hybrid - Christ United LC, Stroudsburg, PA and online
7F	Southeastern Pennsylvania	5/30-5/31/25	Iain Chester	Trinity LC, Lansdale, PA
7G	Slovak Zion	N/A	N/A	
8A	Northwestern Pennsylvania - Lozano	6/13-6/14/25	Lori Fedyk	
8B	Southwestern Pennsylvania - Kusserow	5/17, 6/12-6/14/25	Sue Rothmeyer	
8C	Allegheny - Collins	10/31/25-11/1/25	TBD	
8D	Lower Susquehanna - Dunlop	6/5-6/7/25	Victoria Flood	
8E	Upper Susquehanna	6/14-6/15/25	Norma Malfatti	Susquehanna Univ
8F	Delaware-Maryland	5/30-5/31/25	Christopher Otten	Grace LC, Westminster, MD
8G	Metropolitan Washington, DC - Ortiz	6/6-6/7/25	Matthew Riegel	
8H	West Virginia-Western MD	5/31/2025	Carmelo Santos	Morgantown, WV
9A	Virginia	6/13-6/15/25	Jill Beverlin	Roanoke College, Salem, VA
9B	North Carolina - Smith	5/29-5/31/25	MaryAnn Schwabe	Greensboro, NC
9C	South Carolina	6/12-6/14/25	Amy Reumann	Columbia, SC
9D	Southeastern - Strickland	5/29-5/31/25	Lori Fedyk	
9E	Florida-Bahamas	6/12-6/14/25	Kevin Jacobson	Embassy Suites, Kissimmee, FL
9F	Caribbean	N/A	N/A	

Report of the ELCA Treasurer

FY24 Operating Results - Unrestricted

The accompanying results are preliminary and unaudited; however, no material adjustments are expected at this point, except for the establishment of a designated fund subject to the approval by the Budget and Finance Committee of Church Council.

For the year ended January 31, 2025, unrestricted revenues exceeded unrestricted expenses by \$159K. This is compared to a budgeted loss of \$149K and prior year earnings of \$2.4 million. Key areas which impacted our results were favorable investment income and underspending. Investment income was \$5.3 million over budget (including \$1.6 million of unrealized gains), while spending was 92 percent of plan, generating savings of \$5.6 million. As a result, the organization was not required to spend \$7.6 million of reserves and \$2.2 million of endowments in fiscal year 2024. While the organization has benefited in the last two fiscal years from investment returns and has increased budgeted investment revenue to combat other declines, we are mindful this is not a predictable revenue stream and that it is not prudent for the organization to budget for these higher-than-normal returns. Over \$2 million of underspending was attributable to a hiring freeze and delays in hiring, \$887K in reduced expenses for Young Adults in Global Mission and missionaries due to lower than planned participation, and \$1.2 million in purchased services.

The attached Revenue Summary shows the individual components of unrestricted revenues. Mission support was \$827K, or 2.3 percent below plan and 5.0 percent below prior year. In both 2023 and 2024, mission support represented 56 percent of unrestricted revenues. We appreciate synod's efforts to hold percentages shared constant and understand that congregations and synods have been negatively impacted by reduced giving overall.

After a soft year in 2023, direct giving rebounded in 2024 and was \$295K favorable to budget and \$1.5 million (nearly 25 percent) favorable to prior year. We are grateful. Bequest income represents another area of volatility, with 2024 unrestricted bequest income being over 20 percent below the 10-year average. Efforts to increase occupancy in the building have intensified...while rental income is on budget, this remains an opportunity. We give thanks to the continued faithfulness of the Mission Investment Fund, a separately incorporated ministry of the ELCA, for their investment in our church's growth and vitality through a \$1.5 million gift to support grants to new ministries.

The schedule of Actual Expenses vs Spending Authorization reflects actual vs. budgeted spending by unit/office. Spending percentages range from 84 percent to 101 percent.

ELCA World Hunger

2024 spending in support of hunger issues was nearly \$24.5 million, compared to \$25.0 million in 2023 (the highest spending year ever). As we celebrate 50 years of support for hunger

ministries around the world, it is with gratitude to our generous donors that over the past 10 years we have spent one quarter of a billion dollars in an effort to end hunger and hunger related issues in the world. We give thanks!

Direct giving from individuals, congregations, and synods totaled \$18.5 million in 2024, which was over 97 percent of budget. Softness in direct giving in support of World Hunger continues. Because hunger gifts are generally thousands of small dollar gifts, this could be related to declining church attendance, tradeoff between disaster response and hunger, retention of more gifts to support local hunger needs, or a combination of factors. The development team will be trying to other new approaches in 2026. Total World Hunger revenues, which include direct gifts, bequests, and endowment distributions were \$20.7 million. We were able to spend more than we raised in 2024, as a result of an accumulated fund balance carried forward from prior years.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Over \$17.4 million in revenue was received in fiscal year 2024 in support of Lutheran Disaster Response. Nearly half of this revenue was contributed in support of general disaster – an important category giving the ELCA the flexibility to be more responsive in areas and categories of disaster that may not make the national headlines or to provide support for named disasters that may require more funds than are raised in an appeal.

Fiscal year spending on disasters totaled over \$19 million, of which over \$11.5 million was spent internationally to provide support for Eastern Europe and the Middle East crises as well as disasters related to flooding, human trafficking, climate change, migrants and refugees, and earthquakes.

Joint Committee – Foundation and Churchwide Organization

In accordance with the Executive Committee action taken in October 2024, a joint committee of CWO and Foundation representatives has met twice to examine compliance with the 2017 task force report approved by the Church Council in 2017. Identification of a facilitator and coordination of schedules led to the delay in meetings. A smaller subset of the group has met more frequently to create the list of four high level issues: 1) Information Technology/Data Management; 2) Resource Development; 3) Legal; and 4) Financial. Cross functional teams have been assigned to review these issues and to recommend solutions to the joint committee. The Executive Committee granted an extension for the report to the May 6, 2025, meeting.

Financial Close and Audits

Process improvements implemented by the finance team during 2024 enabled the team to post monthly financial statements within 10 business days after the close of the month. As a result, the programmatic leaders are able to review and respond more quickly to changing conditions, if needed.

Field work for the CWO external audit of the year ended January 31, 2025, will be conducted in April. Our audit committee meeting is scheduled for June 2025. The teams continue to meet monthly in order to resolve outstanding issues. Internal audits, conducted by Forvis Mazars, are performed throughout the year with reports being shared with the audit committee two times per year.

Information Technology and Digital Solutions – 2024 Report

2024 Award Winning IT and Digital Solutions

Congratulations to the ELCA Information Technology (IT) team for being voted a Top 10 technology team (out of 248 organizations like Honeywell, Walmart, Proctor & Gamble) by their peers for the 2024 OnCon Icon Awards. This recognized IT for:

- Excellence in technical support, customer service and IT Operations
- Highly performant and secure hybrid technology infrastructure
- Integrated enterprise systems to support the operations of multiple organizations
- Robust digital solutions and web applications serving a variety of constituencies

As the World and Technology Grew, So Did the ELCA Ecology Needs

From worship services to fundraising, churches and faith-based institutions increased reliance on technology to serve and achieve their mission. A significant change was the integration of data use and knowledge into operations. By using data analytics tools, churchwide gained insights on trends to tailor programs and services. Information Technology partnered with Innovation, Synod Engagement, Development Services, Development Marketing, Strategic Communications, Finance and Home Areas to maximize technology utilization. Below are examples and benefits:

- Digital engagement and digital fundraising
 - www.elca.org was migrated to a new technology platform with a modern design and visual appearance, in preparation for a 2025 full-site and user experience refresh.
 - ExploreFaith.church website, intended for faith seekers, was launched. Other sites that were launched or migrated were [Youth Gathering](#) site and [Young Adult](#) site.
 - A new digital marketing system created efficiency in faster electronic communications development for items such as disaster response and Newsletters
 - Implemented a new online giving platform - \$1.7 MM has been processed through the Engaging Networks system. \$200K of these transactions resulted from digital wallets. We introduced the donor ability to cover credit card

expenses with over \$30K in fees covered by 69% of donors. This tool also replaced our eAdvocacy tool, saving \$8K.

- Implementation of a new Annual Congregations Report platform:
 - Enterprise survey solution in reducing other survey tool cost and needs.
 - Congregations can review previous data submissions.
 - Dashboards to monitor form submissions with automated email reminders.
 - Synod accessibility to support congregations with data entry challenges.
 - Translation of survey to Spanish.
- Financial systems
 - ELCA Contract gap analysis and business requirements for 2025 improvements.
 - User training and education
 - Supplier Remittance Advice improvements for synod payments efficiencies.
 - Home Area / Office financial management reports, budget reports including restricted and designated funds, budget variance, budget amendments, Lutheran Disaster, Cash Management Policy, Budget vs Actuals reports.
 - Integrated the Workday system to the Foundation InvestorVision portal.
 - Grants
 - User multi-factor security, and single sign-on accessibility
 - Grant theme consolidation to simplify the grant application and awards
- Synod and Congregation Engagement
 - Call Process improvements completed
 - Call Process, Rostered Minister Profile and Ministry Site Profile current tool analysis
- Analytics
 - Digital dashboards and reports created for ELCA Advocacy (over 6K actions taken) and grants (requests, type, year, amount funded)
 - Fundraising analytics reports displaying donor pipeline progress to goal, year-over-year giving trends, donor interactions and pipeline stages
- Artificial Intelligence
 - Value discovery
 - Readiness analysis,
 - Baseline organization education
 - Two initial AI policy iterations
 -
- Global gender updates to systems and records to more accurately reflect gender identity
- Integration between Microsoft Outlook and constituent database to increase fundraising efficiency

- IT Adoption and Education Specialists conducted organization wide Education Days with 13 different topics and 882 attendees, 44 live classes with more than 1015 attendees. There were 24 live training requests and 67 new hires in orientation training. Self-service training development included 15 new how-to videos.

Keeping Our Church Information Safe

Keeping ELCA systems and data secure remained a top priority. In 2024 strategic, budget neutral investments were made to migrate to cloud-based platforms. Operating in the cloud provides operational efficiencies, increased information security and improved accessibility for hybrid/remote work. Data loss prevention systems were upgraded to improve data protection. The technology systems remaining at the Lutheran Center had their current and disaster recovery databases migrated to an improved and more cost-effective platform. IT conducted regular cyber security awareness exercises throughout 2024 to keep staff trained on their security responsibilities.

A comprehensive security assessment was conducted in 2024. The assessment was based on the National Institute of Standards and Technology Cybersecurity Framework (NIST CSF). The ELCA received a score of 3 (Repeatable) on a scale of 4 (Adaptive) which indicates the churchwide organization practices are more formalized and consistently applied compared to lower tiers. The Repeatable tier indicates that an organization has established and implemented risk management practices that are regularly updated based on lessons learned and predictive indicators.

Organization Communication and Collaboration

Microsoft Teams continued to be the secure and accessible collaboration solution that is provided for all staff, enabling community and relationships, provides file sharing and other services amongst ELCA staff, teams and workgroups for internal and external audiences including COB and Church Council. Premium features were enabled to improve meeting transcription, translation, engagement and meeting recap notes.

Technical Support

The IT team continues to provide training and support for computers, website/web applications, staff onboarding & offboarding, and systems maintenance, as well as support for meetings, events, and conferences. We also provide support for several separately incorporated ministries including ELCA Foundation, Mission Investment Fund, Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in Mission. In 2024 we began to partially support the ELCA Federal Credit Union.

It is a pleasure to serve the ELCA. As a team of Office of the Treasurer professionals (Finance, Grants Management, IT and Digital Solutions, and Building Services) look to the future, we do so with a lens of pursuing opportunities to do more with less, remaining focused on our vision of a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ makes for all people and creation.

Report from the Conference of Bishops

The ELCA Conference of Bishops gathered from February 25 to March 1, 2025, for their Spring Retreat at Eaglewood Resort in Itasca, Ill. Region 6 bishops served as chaplains for the meeting, leading the assembly in deep prayer, meaningful music, and the sharing of the Word and Sacrament.

The conference focused intentional time on building relationships among colleagues, but the week still included various reports, updates, and numerous business discussions.

Topics included an update on the first call process, updates from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC), and synod diversity goal reporting. There was also a presentation from Portico Benefit Services regarding benefit services.

Other key discussions included race and gender justice, ongoing work with social statements: *Faith and Civic Life*, and *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*, and ecumenical relationships, specifically with Episcopal/Lutheran deacons.

Throughout the gathering, there were farewells to outgoing bishops (*Jaech, Egensteiner, Dunlop, Candea, Ortiz, Bartholomew, Rinehart, Smith, Halaas, Kusserow, Eaton*).



SPRING 2025 CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION ANNUAL REPORT

Overview

In 2016, the churchwide organization, the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council and others partnered to create Future Directions 2025, which articulated the priorities, purpose and goals of the church. It was meant to serve as a road map for this church's forward progress and participation in God's mission. This last year has been about continuing to align the work and budget of our home areas and offices with the stated purpose of the churchwide organization. Following a six-month process with the Budget Prioritization Task Force, we have learned that the work of the churchwide organization is indeed constitutionally driven. In 2025, the priority of the churchwide organization will be to establish success metrics for our work, so we can better understand how/where improvements can be made and how/where investments need to be increased or decreased. We will also focus on effectiveness and efficiency.

The work will continue in 2025 to align, innovate and support the purposes and research-driven learnings. The intent is to position the churchwide organization to live out its unique purpose and live more fully into the goals set forward by the Church Council in fall 2020:

- Prioritize the engagement of new, young and diverse people.
- Unite all expressions of the church (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization) into one church – together.
- Align decision-making, accountability and leadership where best suited.
- Operate in agile, flexible and speedy ways.
- Act based on data and measurable impact.
- Eliminate silos and divisions.

Budget and Operational Plan

The 2025 budget for the churchwide organization reflects the priorities and ministries that support our purpose and this church's vision. The leadership teams will be accountable to determine metrics for success for each of their identified initiatives and goals. Also, the teams will identify which initiatives/programs are no longer effective and/or efficient and will develop a plan to sunset or realign them in 2026-27. The following expectations are to be visible in the work of the organization in 2025:

- Operate with transparency, work to build trust, hold one another accountable and show clear plans toward the purpose and vision of this church.
- Increase cross-organizational communication and involvement with senior leader meetings and sharing/integration of initiatives and ideas.
- Implement the Transformation Tank model of assessment for initiatives, which includes learnings and recommendations from our Research and Evaluation team and the Barna/Fuller research findings, for the distribution of new funding.
- Create a streamlined and unified system for reporting outcomes of goals, effectiveness and efficiency, and impact.

The 2026 budget will:

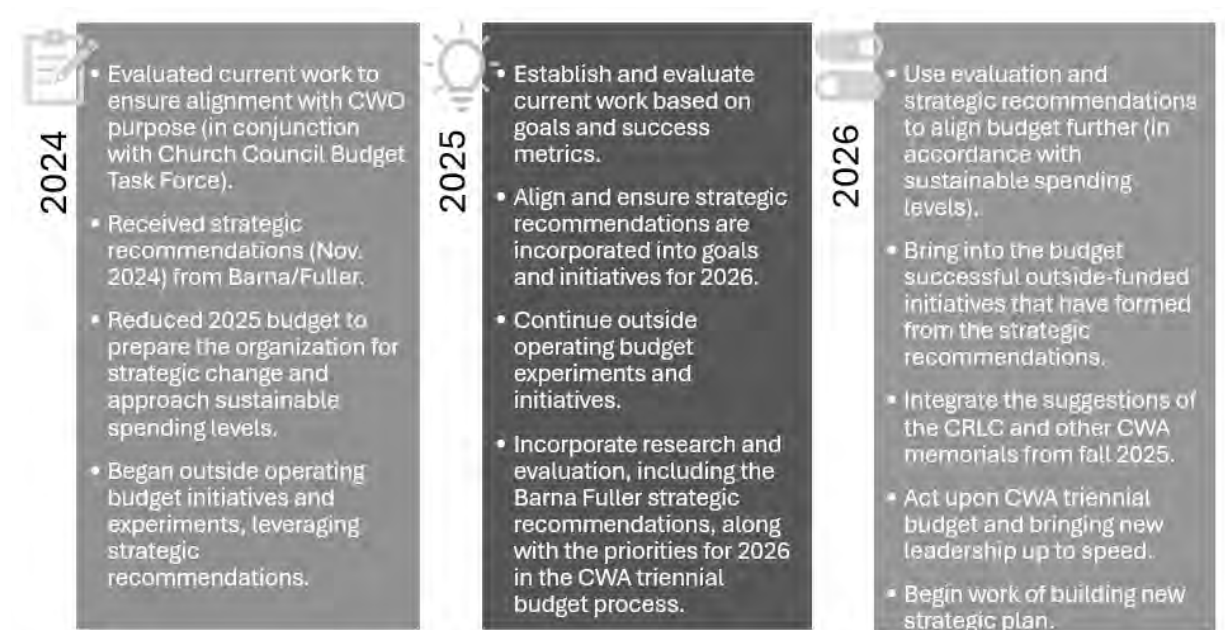
- Incorporate relevant research from the Research and Evaluation team and strategic conditions and commitments for success from the Barna/Fuller research.

- Incorporate input based on the success and/or adjustments made to 2025 initiatives and goals.
- Prepare the organization for strategic change, and approach sustainable spending levels, as begun in the 2025 budget.

The goal of the organizational plan is to achieve a sustainable spending level while ensuring that the purpose of the CWO is carried out in an effective and efficient manner. The continuing decline in Mission Support revenue challenges our ability to provide resources to the ministries of this church.

The model below is an outline of how resources should be allocated:

- Seventy percent (70%) will be allotted to organization-wide alignment and goals and will reflect historical spending, including core operations.
- Twenty percent (20%) will be allotted to strengthen existing, growing programs.
- Ten percent (10%) will be allotted for new and emerging initiatives.



CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP (CCL)

Christian Community and Leadership celebrates the resurgence of several ministries that declined or paused during the pandemic. Our ministries are guided by three goals as articulated below.

1. Equipping the ELCA to engage

- The ELCA Youth Gathering returned to New Orleans with more than 16,000 participants.
- Young adults joined the Youth Gathering for the first time.
- The Gathering Remix offered a digital retreat package.
- Going forward, the Youth Gathering will include regional pop-up events to build momentum toward the 2027 event in Minneapolis.
- Lutheran Campus Ministry Network (LuMin) reports that 25% of ministry sites have had at least one baptism in the last year.

- Horizon Apprenticeship Program, a summer program for youth of color, will be expanding to a full year.
- The U.S. military continues to invite the ELCA to send more chaplains because our denomination serves all people in a more generous way than do some other church bodies.
- More than 26 Gather communities for young adults have been launched, with 30 more in development, thanks to an investment of more than \$100,000 from the Vision team.
- In late 2024, CCL received a Lilly grant to support children's engagement in worship.

2. Building up leaders to support the ELCA's engagement

- Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) held steady in 2024, and applications for 2025 are increasing.
- The International Leadership Program provided scholarships for 164 people from 41 countries.
- ELCA Fund for Leaders launched online discernment groups, reaching 60 people.
- Candidates entranced rose by 21% over 2023.
- Synod-authorized ministers from across the church gathered for the first time as we learned more about normalizing lay leadership.
- The Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group has recommended a competency-based process and will be finalizing a draft manual in 2025.
- CCL is relaunching a program of African-descent studies, replacing the discontinued Lutheran Theological Center in Atlanta.
- ELCA Coaching continues to offer trainings (grief, support, discipleship and diversity) and expand coach matches for ELCA leaders.
- CCL continues to advance a Lilly-funded preaching ministry focused on listeners.

3. Making measurement, evaluation and innovation the standard

- Eight new-start ministries organized as congregations of the ELCA.
- Fourteen smaller grants have been awarded to fund experiments that are anchored in our congregations and focus on outreach, with significantly more funding in 2025.
- Synod-authorized outreach ministries have launched.
- CCL launched research for Disability Ministry and for Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities.
- In 2025-26, CCL will implement a program to increase and strengthen congregations defined as multiethnic.

INNOVATION

Innovation is a unit of the ELCA churchwide organization that exists to create a culture of collaboration and innovation within the churchwide organization and the broader church.

In 2024, the churchwide organization received a sustainability grant of \$477,280 to continue the work of the Congregations Lead Initiative for another three years (2025-27). This initiative has worked with congregations in 29 synods so far. It focuses on equipping congregations with tools to understand their communities, taking an iterative approach to ministry and learning from success and failure. A program evaluation, conducted this year, revealed that over the past three years of programming,

86% of participants said they would recommend participation to another ministry leader, and 66% of participants reported that their congregation now had a greater willingness to experiment and to view failure as an opportunity to learn.

At the churchwide organization, the Innovation home area works closely with colleagues to facilitate workshops, conduct user research and provide training for staff. During 2024, Innovation focused on building trust within the organization, cultivating collaboration across teams, and investing in tools and training that make it easy for the organization to listen to the communities we serve. Work included partnering on 48 projects over the year, hosting more than 200 staff at trainings and equipping 29 staff to serve as trained “facilitators” with unique skills for leading workshops and meetings, particularly in a remote environment.

Other highlights of the year included working alongside ecumenical partners to launch the first-ever AI and the Church Summit in Seattle, Wash., and publishing a research report on attitudes toward religion and faith among young-adult parents.

OPERATIONS

Development

Last year, members of this church shared abundantly, and they remain committed to the work we do as church together. It was a year of complexity, with extreme highs such as the ELCA Youth Gathering and the ELCA World Hunger 50th anniversary alongside the challenges of numerous disasters, domestic and international conflicts, and a changing political landscape. Amid all this, the church continued the work of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, empowered and equipped with the resources provided by our members. We thank you for your support in telling stories and inviting generosity in your own contexts. Below you’ll read about some of the work of the Development team last year, work that we are privileged to do alongside you.

Congregation and Synod Support

- The team equips synod and congregation leaders with resources and tools that lay a strong foundation for all types of generosity. A key focus is on ways to increase the church’s financial capacity through regular offerings and Mission Support. Team members have a wide range of skills and resources to share in the areas of effective congregational stewardship, purposeful story engagement, data analysis for strategic planning and the ways Mission Support connects us across the ELCA as we respond to God’s call to love and serve our neighbors.
- During the last few months of the year, the team had many opportunities to work with synod bishops, synod staff and synod councils (both online and on-site); participate in events with key leaders such as First Call Theological Education and Fall Theological Conferences; and continue to provide up-to-date information and relevant stories through “Mission Support Memo” and the bimonthly stewardship newsletter.
- The team has also planned for the launch of some new and newly revised resources in 2025:
 - A new video, intended to replace the aging “Where Does Your Offering Go?” video, which the team expects to be ready in time for synod assembly season.
 - A new story added each quarter to “[Stories of Faith in Action](#).”
 - A revised version of “6 Weeks on Money” for congregational use.

- FY24 Mission Support revenue shared for churchwide organization ministries was \$35,229,229. This was \$820,771, or 2.3%, short of the budgeted revenue of \$36,050,000. This makes the third year in a row in which actual revenue fell short of budgeted revenue, even as the budgeted amount was decreased for each of those years. When Mission Support revenue falls short of the budget for the churchwide organization, it means that many synods have also experienced a shortfall in their budgeted Mission Support to be received from congregations. In FY24, this was the case for 48 of the 65 synods. Within this overall context of Mission Support decreases, however, 14 synods shared higher dollar amounts in FY24 than they did in FY23. Of these 14 synods, six participated in the Synod Development Pilot Project this past year and three more engaged extensively with our Congregation and Synod Support team. Decreases in Mission Support revenue continue to put pressure on both synods and the churchwide organization to develop additional sources of revenue to fund ministry and ministry leaders.
- The team also currently engages with two multiyear projects:
 - o Synod Development Pilot Project: The team plans for the project's quarterly curriculum for 16 synods and facilitates both quarterly synod bishop cohort conversations and individual synod bishop coaching. The first year of this curriculum is now complete, and evaluation activities are being planned with Research and Evaluation in coordination with the upcoming curriculum for year two. The goals for synod and churchwide organization curriculum engagement are to:
 - Learn more about the effectiveness of current development work across the ELCA ecosystem – especially within synods.
 - Determine what effect, if any, a three-year, development-related learning curriculum has on increased development capacity within synods and across the ELCA ecosystem.
 - Strengthen the relationship between synods and the churchwide organization.
 - o Resource Hub for Church Property: This is a three-year project, scheduled to begin in FY25. Using input and guidance from across the ELCA, the Development team will create a hub for information about property usage pathways, to be used by synods and congregations; for informative, inspirational stories about other faith communities that have been innovative in their space usage; and for a forum that allows community sharing and engagement on best practices on the topic.

Annual Giving

- The Annual Giving team is composed of Development Marketing and Communications, Leadership Circle (mid-level), Mission Funding directors (major gifts), Congregational Generosity, Events and directors of giving for the Service and Justice and the Christian Community and Leadership home areas. This team is primarily responsible for fundraising to cover ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response and activities of the churchwide organization that are funded by the general operating budget, and for engaging donors and congregations in support of these programs.
- Direct generosity from synods, congregations and individuals to Where Needed Most, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response continues to be ahead on a year-over-year basis. The strong response to hurricanes Helene and Milton, in addition to the response to the California wildfires, has increased giving to Lutheran Disaster Response over previously reported results. Thank you for your partnership in this lifesaving and life-changing ministry.

- ELCA World Hunger 50th anniversary activities continued throughout 2024. The Generation Zero-Hunger initiative, aligned with the ELCA Youth Gathering, raised over \$282,000 plus a \$250,000 match, as previously reported. The World Food Day virtual event was held on Oct. 15, 2024, with over 600 registrants for the live event and over a thousand views of the recorded webinar. The event included special music by Peter Mayer and live engagement from ELCA Vice President Imran Siddiqui, Bishop Amy Current of the Southeastern Iowa Synod, and the Rev. Khader El-Yateem, executive for Service and Justice. Featured in the event were ELCA missionary Karen Anderson and ELCA World Hunger grant recipients Educación Popular en Salud (Chile) and Tapestry Farms (Davenport, Iowa). Remarks of gratitude and partnership were shared by ELCA collaborative partners including Lutheran World Relief, Bread for the World, Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran Services in America. The [event recording](#) is available to watch.
- Throughout 2024, the team continued to streamline its work to focus on the fundraising priorities of Where Needed Most, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response. This included work with an outside consultant to facilitate development of both core language to be used across our team when describing the impacts of a gift to Where Needed Most and focus areas for storytelling and inviting generosity, which include the churchwide organization's work around leadership, young-adult communities, new ministries and discipleship, and global mission.
- More team updates follow:
 - o Development Marketing and Communications – ELCA Good Gifts received a refresh in 2024 with an updated catalog and new gifts including a safe-birth gift, opportunities to support AMMPARO and ELCA missionaries, and two new bundles for donors who want to support ELCA Good Gifts at a higher dollar amount. This team continues to collaborate with the Congregation and Synod Support team in planning for updates to Mission Support and SOFIA resources during 2025.
 - o Leadership Circle (mid-level giving) – The Leadership Circle developed Advent Series devotionals, providing reflections from Presiding Bishop Eaton and ELCA missionaries for each week of Advent. The fall 2024 "Leadership Circle Newsletter" package once again featured a two-pager with updates and content specific to congregations.
 - o Major Gifts – The focus of this team has been engaging donors in year-end giving conversations and supporting individuals in planning their generosity. As of August 2024, this deployed team is fully staffed apart from Region 6, for which we anticipate posting in the second quarter. Team members generally reside within the territories they serve, which align with the ELCA regions. Reach out to the mission funding director for your region through the contact information below.

Region 1	Sharon Magnuson	Sharon.Magnuson@elca.org
Region 2	The Rev. Carmen Retzlaff	Carmen.Retzlaff@elca.org
Region 3	Emilie Bouvier	Emilie.Bouvier@elca.org
Region 4	Rosa Potts	Rosa.Potts@elca.org
Region 5	The Rev. Kevin Woestehoff	Kevin.Woestehoff@elca.org
Regions 7 & 8	The Rev. Benjamin Hogue	Benjamin.Hogue@elca.org
Regions 6 (temp) & 9	Rhonda Clay (director)	Rhonda.Clay@elca.org

- o Congregational Generosity – The role of director for Congregational Generosity was filled Jan. 7, when the Rev. Dan Rift took on a new role on the team. The director will continue to steward the generosity shared by ELCA congregations with the churchwide organization and will work closely with the Congregation and Synod Support team.
- o Events – Support was provided for the nine regional God’s Love Made Real conversations during 2024. The donor and leader immersion trip to Colombia was held in October, with 11 travelers from across the ELCA learning about the ministries of Iglesia Evangelica Luterana de Colombia, an ELCA companion. This experience has strengthened understanding of and commitment to the ELCA as well as support for this church’s global partnerships. The ELCA will offer two immersion trips in 2025, to Indonesia, May 21–June 3, and to Argentina and Chile, Nov. 7–17. Contact events@elca.org for additional information.

Development Services

- The Development Services team manages the data in ECIS (the constituent-relation management system for the ELCA), processes over 100,000 gifts per year and manages the ELCA call center and e-store. The team also works closely with Development colleagues to provide lists and analysis to identify the best prospects for giving.
- As of mid-February, more than 160,000 gifts had been received for ELCA ministries in FY24, with almost 50% of those gifts received in the fourth quarter (November 2024–January 2025). The team works hard to minimize delays in processing those gifts, but due to the disproportionately large number of gifts in December, combined with some significant disaster-giving appeals, there have been some delays in processing gifts around year-end. The team is reviewing and evaluating some ways to avoid this situation in the future.
- The Development Services team, working with Information Technology and with Development Marketing and Communications, continues to deploy the new online marketing and donation platform Engaging Networks. The organization received over 13,000 gifts on Engaging Networks in FY24 and will continue to expand its use to replace all existing online platforms, including the online Good Gifts catalog.
- The ELCA call center is concluding another busy year for the team; operators answered more than 10,000 calls, responded to over 3,000 constituent emails and helped facilitate 2,000-plus resource center orders. The fall 2024 hurricanes and the wildfires in California this January drastically increased the number of donation calls for Lutheran Disaster Response.

Transformation and Institutional Giving

- The Transformation and Institutional Giving team works alongside program colleagues to seek foundation grants and nurture institutional relationships in support of churchwide organization ministry opportunities – both established and transformative. The team also provides guidance and resources to the churchwide organization’s Vision and Strategy teams and equips colleagues across the whole ELCA ecosystem.
- The team submitted proposals to a broad range of private and family foundations in FY24, receiving more than 50 positive decisions that total over \$5 million, including transformational gifts for youth ministry, congregational innovation and a church property resource hub.

- The team helped develop and launch the Transformation Tank, a process at the churchwide organization to invite exciting program ideas and match them with potential income sources including churchwide organization funding, donors and foundations.

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Ecumenical Dialogues

The 25th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was marked on Oct. 31, 2024, with a [joint letter](#) from Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Roman Catholic Bishop Denis J. Madden. The U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue continues to meet on the topic of the ministry of episkopé. The U.S. dialogue celebrates 60 years in 2025.

Following critical engagement on the topic of “ecclesiology” in 2024, the fourth meeting of the resumed ELCA-Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) dialogue took place in February 2025 on the theme “Confessing the Faith: Considering Nicaea 1700.” This year marks the 1,700th anniversary of the first ecumenical council of Nicaea, which led to the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

Work is ongoing to uplift and support reception of the Lutheran-Orthodox International Commission’s “Lutheran-Orthodox Common Statement on the Filioque,” adopted by the Lutheran World Federation Council in June 2024. A study guide and formation opportunities will be published in spring 2025.

Full Communion

Following the reception by both the ELCA and The Episcopal Church of “Proposal for the Exchangeability of the Diaconate” in 2023 and 2024 respectively, work continued throughout 2024 to update the “orderly exchange” document (which guides both churches on the principles and practicalities of exchangeability) to reflect this development. The ELCA Conference of Bishops affirmed the updates in early 2025, and related changes to the bylaws will be proposed to the Church Council. Once TEC has completed its consultation/review processes, implementation can begin.

Conciliar Ecumenism

Bishop Eaton is serving as chair of the board of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC), completing her term in 2025. Kathryn Lohre, executive for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations and Theological Discernment, is chairing the NCC’s 75th anniversary committee, responsible for a series of events to span 2024-26.

The Rev. Carmelo Santos, director for theological diversity and engagement, represents the ELCA at the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission and the NCC’s Faith & Order Convening Table, where he contributed chapters for their volumes *Confronting Racism and White Supremacy in the US: Twenty-First-Century Theological Perspectives* (Friendship Press, 2024) and *Contemporary Perspectives on Nicaea* (forthcoming in 2025). He also represents the ELCA at the Reformed Church in America Commission on Theology.

Inter-Religious Relations

The 30th anniversary of “A Declaration of the ELCA to the Jewish Community” was commemorated at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago in October 2024. Bishop Eaton participated in an interfaith service of remembrance and commitment in observance of Kristallnacht, and sat on a panel with Rabbi

Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, that was moderated by Prof. Esther Menn, who chairs the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations.

The ELCA participates in the annual meetings of five national interreligious dialogues – with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs – co-convened by the NCC, and Lohre moderates the Reference Group on Interreligious Dialogue and Communications of the World Council of Churches. The ELCA also provides leadership as a co-founder of the Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign: Standing with American Muslims, Advancing American Ideals, now in its 15th year.

Theological Discernment

Theological Diversity and Engagement (TDE)

Theological Diversity and Engagement provided opportunities for leaders across the ecology of the ELCA to engage in theological reflection with attention to the diversity of contexts and the polyphonic interpretations of Lutheran theology that enrich the ELCA. For example, TDE has provided monetary assistance for theologians from minority communities to participate in theological conferences and Santos is participating in an ongoing collaboration with the Innovation home area on theological dimensions of artificial intelligence and the church.

In 2024, there were significant developments in implementing the Spanish curriculum on faith and climate justice, in cooperation with Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary's Center for Climate Justice and Faith, and in developing a bilingual (English-Spanish) online theological journal from a Lutheran Latiné context.

Theological Ethics

ELCA social teaching and policy govern the institutional life, witness and teaching of the ELCA while providing frameworks for discernment and guidance for its members. The staff of Theological Ethics lead the development of this social teaching and serve to foster education, interpretation and communication in their use in the ELCA as a community of moral discernment.

The work of the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Civic Life and Faith is now complete; the task force has achieved unanimous sign-off on the proposed social statement *Faith and Civic Life: For the Well-being of All*. That proposed statement is a notable revision of a draft that was posted for public comment from January through September 2024. Protocol calls for review this spring by bishops and Church Council and then action by the council to recommend, or not, but the ultimate decision for approval depends on a 66% vote by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly (CWA).

A task force to lead reconsideration on two aspects of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (as authorized by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly) has been at work since June 2024. As charged by the CWA, they have achieved unanimous sign-off on the first reconsideration, a set of proposed edits that update *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. This editorial update is focused on terminology around marriage and family for "same-gender and gender-nonconforming couples in light of current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of same." Those proposed edits are being handled in the same way as for the proposed statement *Faith and Civic Life*. In September, this task force will turn its attention to the second reconsideration, guided by the directive to reconsider "the church's current concept of the four positions of bound conscience," with a focus on pages 19-21.

A social message on [gun-related violence and trauma](#) was adopted at the April 2024 Church Council meeting. The council also authorized development of a social message on child protection and maltreatment, which is [now underway](#). A draft will be posted from late March to the end of June; a proposed message will be considered at the Church Council meeting in November.

Theological Ethics supports the ELCA as a community of moral discernment in numerous ways, some of which occur regularly. The Lutheran Ethicists' Network meets annually each January. The 2025 gathering addressed the topic of polarization whereas the January 2026 meeting will cover the topic of artificial intelligence. [Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#) publishes six issues a year; recent or pending issues cover topics such as vocation in the end times, the ethics of child-rearing, and Christian Nationalism.

Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment (GJWE)

Gender Justice and Racial Justice collaborate consistently to support learning, formation and action with the ELCA Church Council, the Conference of Bishops and directors for evangelical mission. GJWE also supports new staff members through orientations and regularly collaborates with and offers learning opportunities to churchwide organization colleagues. GJWE is working with Research and Evaluation on a report related to the 55th anniversary of the decision to ordain women.

Implementing Resolution 17, related to the social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call for Action*, calls for the Church Council to coordinate public confession for the sins of patriarchy and sexism and for a churchwide day of confession and repentance for the sins of patriarchy. GJWE staff are supporting an ad hoc committee of the Church Council to create a service of lament and repentance for the sins of patriarchy and sexism at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, and to launch a booklet of prayers and reflections from contributors across the church. These resources are intended for use in worshipping communities in 2025 and 2026.

Implementing Resolution 8 calls on the churchwide organization, the Conference of Bishops and synods to use inclusive and expansive language for God. [Language for God: A Lutheran Perspective](#) (Fortress Press, 2021), written by Mary J. Streufert, director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment, is now available to support this effort. Streufert is leading workshops on this with various partners across the church.

With Mary E. Lowe, professor of religion and philosophy at Augsburg University in Minneapolis, Streufert co-authored a new book, completed in 2024 and titled *ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Faith, Sexism, and Justice* (Fortress Press, 2025). They are co-teaching regularly across the church to support continued education about the church's social teaching.

For a few years, Gender Justice has been working with the Quality of Call Initiative on distributing grants across the ELCA to support efforts in this church to address sexism and patriarchy and to improve the quality of call experienced by women who are rostered ministers. Though this work is formally coming to a close, 32 synods that are now part of collaborative grants (longer-term change efforts) and about 10 small groups have received pop-up grants (shorter-term change efforts). We now have tools for synods to improve family and parental leaves, and reports and guides on how to improve prevention of and responses to sexual harassment. A detailed report on this work will go to the Church Council in spring 2025.

GJWE has been a key partner in the Lutheran World Federation postassembly global planning process with regard to gender justice and women's empowerment across the global communion, and in 2025 with regional coordinators.

GJWE continues to collaborate with Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary and others to expand support for the ELCA Womanist Theology Initiative and women of color with doctoral degrees as teaching theologians of the church.

Racial Justice

In 2024, Racial Justice has focused on developing educational resources that condemn white supremacy while strengthening collaboration with synod racial justice leaders. These efforts ensure a more coordinated and impactful approach to dismantling racism within the ELCA. The team continues to lead and support racial justice initiatives across the church, working alongside synods and ecumenical partners through an intersectional lens. By fostering education and engagement, the team aims to equip church leaders and communities with the tools needed to address systemic racism.

Racial Justice has hosted educational sessions for key ELCA groups, including the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council, Young Adults in Global Mission, summer missionaries, and directors for evangelical mission. These sessions provide crucial learning opportunities and strengthen racial justice efforts across the church. We also collaborate with Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities:

- African Descent Ministries: Participated in the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent and continued work on Season of Jubilee gatherings (a report on this work is forthcoming).
- Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations: Co-led the Day of Mourning learning event for the fourth consecutive year and supported the Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders program, co-teaching a class at their last session.
- White Lutherans for Racial Justice: Led an educational session that included a visit to the Legacy Museum and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, deepening the understanding of historical and present-day racial injustices. Co-hosted webinars on how to host an anti-racist film screening and a webinar on the 1966 documentary *A Time for Burning*.
- Collaborated with area desk directors to lift community voices in the Racial Justice blog. This year, we developed "Dismantle," a Lenten devotional aimed at addressing white supremacy through theological reflection and action. We also strengthened synod racial justice leadership by regularly convening leaders for shared learning and collaboration. Additionally, we expanded racial justice education for directors for evangelical mission, ensuring that anti-racism work remains integral to their ministry. Through these initiatives, we remain committed to equipping the church to confront systemic racism and build a more just and inclusive faith community.

People Solutions

People Solutions partnered with Gallagher Consulting Group to conduct a comprehensive compensation study. The report was completed and shared with the administrative team in early 2025. Though we have effectively adhered to our compensation model, we will be adjusting the current model to maintain our compensation philosophy as it relates to the current market.

Leadership Development

Leadership Development introduced a comprehensive learning and development program called Learn Equip Apply Deliver (L.E.A.D.). The L.E.A.D. program is designed to provide learning and development opportunities in alignment with our ELCA values and competencies to enhance knowledge, skills and abilities; increase information sharing, collaboration and synergies; and reduce redundancies across the ELCA.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA)

DEIA staff led, developed and coordinated the ELCA's participation in activities for the National Day of Racial Healing. The National Day of Racial Healing – an annual observance that follows Martin Luther King Jr. Day – is hosted by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation as part of its Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation efforts. Employees participated in this virtual ELCA day of education, which was designed to raise awareness of the need for racial healing and to encourage actions that will build common ground for a more just and inclusive church and society. (For more on DEIA, see the separate report prepared for this Church Council meeting.)

Strategic Communications

Rebuilding the ELCA's Digital Footprint

Strategic Communications is working closely with Information Technology and the independent consulting firm Salient Global to redesign [ELCA.org](https://www.elca.org). This will reposition the ELCA as a digital leader among peer churches, with a website that refocuses the ELCA's brand by reducing microsites, highlights our unique identity and makes it easier to find resources and content. Simultaneously, this same ELCA think tank is redesigning [LivingLutheran.org](https://www.livinglutheran.org) as a more user-focused and localized storytelling experience. A third project in the works is a communicators' collaborative that will live in the ELCA.org ecosystem and equip synod and congregational communicators and leaders with resources, information and a platform for dialogue that will streamline communications across the three expressions of our church. The goal is to launch all three platforms by late summer.

Living Lutheran Returns to Print

After more than a year as an exclusively digital publication, *Living Lutheran* has just returned as a print publication. The first issue recently arrived in mailboxes, and new issues will be delivered to subscribers quarterly. Each issue (spring, summer, fall and winter) will feature stories of God's people living their faith, along with the latest updates from the ELCA and its partners in ministry. [Subscriptions are available](#) for individuals, and group plans are offered for congregations.

Worship

The Office of the Presiding Bishop is responsible for leading the worship life of this church. The Worship team carries out this task, which includes overseeing development and review of worship resources to assist worshipping communities in deepening faith and building community around the means of grace; introducing and interpreting worship resources throughout this church; and advising the presiding bishop, churchwide organization and Conference of Bishops on matters related to worship and sacramental practice.

The Worship team supports the development of “[For What Shall We Pray?](#)”, a weekly post on the [ELCA worship blog](#) to help worship planners appropriately contextualize the Prayers of Intercession in worship each week. In addition to developing worship resources for churchwide initiatives such as “God’s work. Our hands.” and other timely needs, the Worship team began in 2024 to develop “Affirmation of a Name,” a rite to surround with prayer and blessings the transition an individual makes by claiming a new name. This rite is projected to be available in mid-2025, following the liturgical and theological review process.

The work of worship resource development in the ELCA includes regular collaboration with Augsburg Fortress Publishers, the publishing ministry of the ELCA. In 2024, this working group initiated a project to consider the need for pastoral care worship resources. A consultation helped strategize the path forward, and that work will continue in this next triennium. The joint working group continues to educate this church about the *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* supplement [All Creation Sings](#).

The Worship team supports the development of ethnic- and language-specific resources. In collaboration with Augsburg Fortress Publishers, it has made available a growing number of Spanish worship resources to complement *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*. A 2024 grant supported the work of [translation and contextualization of worship resources in Arabic](#) that are compatible with the core resources of the ELCA and The Episcopal Church.

The churchwide organization connects with Lutheran and ecumenical partners in a shared mission to support and care for the church’s worship and song. This includes the work of the [Consultation on Common Texts](#) with recent special attention to [anti-Jewish interpretations in the lectionary](#). A global initiative to consider an [annual church festival](#) related to creation included input from ELCA scholars. The [Association of Lutheran Church Musicians](#) is a close partner of the Worship team in nurturing and equipping musicians to serve and lead the church’s song.

Education about worship and sacramental practice includes consultation and workshops with the Conference of Bishops, invitations to participate in synod and congregational educational settings, and responses to questions from pastors, deacons and members of congregations and worshipping communities. The Worship team hosted an interactive educational space at the 2024 Youth Gathering. A [post on the ELCA Worship blog](#) shares how this experience impacted youth and encouraged worship leadership in their own contexts.

In addition to supporting the worship lives of congregations and synods, the Worship team is responsible for planning and facilitating worship for the churchwide staff and for churchwide meetings and events. This includes worship at churchwide assemblies, rostered minister gatherings, and meetings of the Church Council and Conference of Bishops. Technology upgrades to the Lutheran Center Chapel in 2024 support hybrid worship opportunities for staff, meetings and events.

SERVICE AND JUSTICE

Four months into the new U.S. presidential administration, rapid change is impacting the world in which we live. There are many challenges and opportunities before us. Service and Justice teams have been working across this church in meaningful, impactful and realistic ways: on Capitol Hill and with

members and congregations, global companions, the Lutheran World Federation, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran World Relief, Global Refuge, Church World Service, and ecumenical and interfaith partners.

The new presidential executive orders hit the center of our work and mission as the churchwide home area called to foster and facilitate the ELCA's engagement in service and to promote efforts to call and act for justice.

"It remains an experience of incomparable value that we have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcasts, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed and reviled, in short from the perspective of the sufferer."

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters and Papers from Prison

Witness in Society

The Witness in Society team leads the ELCA's advocacy in the public sphere, advancing justice and shining a light on peace and dignity.

The 2024 election year invited extra effort to provide timely [resources and support](#) for congregations and leaders conducting nonpartisan election engagement in a climate of political unrest and polarization. Autumn Byers, a young adult who [served as a polling place greeter](#) at her congregation, expressed enthusiasm for public witness: "I love that this is something we do with and for our neighbors. It shows that our church isn't just open to the community but is an active part of it."

Witness in Society staff are active with ELCA colleagues and partners in leading faithful responses to the rapidly developing [impact of executive actions](#) from President Donald Trump that are jolting government agencies and the people who intersect with related vital supports. The team is discerning and advocating in the rapidly evolving, complex climate and [voicing ELCA priorities](#) through centering the experience of impacted communities and ELCA social teachings with policymakers, and resourcing ELCA leaders and partners as they adjust to rippling developments domestically and globally.

Expanding interest in ELCA advocacy networks continues at state and federal levels. Witness in Society is responding across the ELCA ecosystem with advocacy support for bishops, training, and opportunities for public witness, including the new weekly podcast "Here I Pod From ELCA Advocacy." Providing the church with resources on depolarization and on countering [Christian Nationalism](#) continues as core work.

Advocacy for the [Farm Bill](#) in 2024 included webinars, trainings, lobbying events and listening sessions on hunger, farming and rural issues across the church. On Oct. 26, a delegation of bishops, rostered ministers and hunger leaders from across Pennsylvania assembled in Washington, D.C., to meet with federal representatives to advance the upcoming [Farm Bill](#).



Youth and young adults consistently tell us that advocacy for justice is a core expression of their faith. At the 2024 Youth Gathering, participants added hundreds of individual pieces to a giant puzzle, illustrating important issues in their lives.

Young-adult initiatives in 2024 included the Young Adult Advocacy Immersion in D.C. and New York on climate advocacy, the Young Adult Immigration Advocacy Immersion in partnership with Global Refuge, an Isaiah 58:12 Fellowship in racial justice, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women cohort, and building leadership for vocations in public witness through the Hunger Advocacy Fellowship Program.



Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC)

The Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities team advocates on behalf of diverse communities and cultures and historically underrepresented groups to the wider church and society.

In 2024, MDCC continued to partner with Christian Community and Leadership in new-start development. Intentional collaboration has begun with advocacy colleagues concerning public policy priorities, and ongoing support is provided to ethnic associations.

Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries (AME) is expanding with a new ministry in San Diego, Calif., and five seminarians who, upon completing their theological studies and training, will serve AME communities across North America. Salam Radio Station has launched in New York, and in response to the crisis in Gaza, the AME team launched the Interfaith Emotional and Spiritual Care Project. The Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage elected Ryan Lahurd as its new president at its 14th biennial assembly in Chicago last fall.



African Descent Ministries (ADM) completed its second cycle of the New Start Cohort experiment. Racial Justice and hosted additional listening and survey sessions in 2024 for the Season of Jubilee project. This year, ADM will offer tangible next steps toward the ELCA's approach to reinvestment in African-descent communities. This year's Reclaim gathering in New Orleans, RECLAIM; Genetic, Kinetic, Prophetic, will celebrate the intergenerational wisdom of people of African descent.

African National Ministries (ANM) identified 110 youth to participate in the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering. The ANM Mission Developers Training curriculum is in its sixth year of use, and the feedback has been positive. The number of African nationals enrolled in ELCA seminaries has increased. In 2024, ANM had 14 seminarians and five graduates. Intentional work is happening with African Descent Ministries and the African Descent Lutheran Association to strengthen partnerships.

Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries and Asian leaders in the Saint Paul Area and Minneapolis synods hosted the ELCA's first-ever synodical Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month event last May. More than 75 people gathered in person and joined online to learn and share about the joys and challenges of the API community. The call to action was to become more visible through active citizenship, sharing stories, dispelling the "model minority" myth and building deeper relationships with one another and allies. In partnership with AMMPARO and the Pacifica Synod, Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries brought together rostered and lay leaders from Chinese-specific congregations and new starts for a southern border immersion to learn and deepen advocacy for immigrants.

Building Resilient Communities

ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response are ministries deeply rooted in the identity of the ELCA and the mission to which God calls this church. Together, for decades, these ministries have accompanied communities where God is at work through congregations, synods, social ministry organizations, companions and other partners, building a just world where all are fed and bringing hope, healing and renewal to people whose lives have been disrupted by disasters.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR)

Through chaos and suffering, Lutheran Disaster Response is present. Ukraine. Gaza and the West Bank. Sudan. Hurricanes. Wildfires. Drought. Tornadoes. Floods. Over the past year, a new disaster occurred somewhere in the world every two to three days on average. Disasters and crises keep happening with increasing frequency and intensity due to the impacts of climate change. LDR is how the church comes together to care for and walk with God's people in need wherever they are, for as long as it takes. LDR is flexible and responsive; the staff respond in real time to accompany companion churches, synods and partners on the ground – first through the immediate crisis and then on the community's chosen path forward to recovery and renewal.

In practice, this means that Lutheran Disaster Response provided more than 140 grants during FY24 across the ELCA and around the world, totaling more than \$19 million. During FY24, LDR grants supported disaster response, recovery and preparedness work in 36 U.S. states and territories, primarily through synods, and 55 countries outside the U.S. As we recognize the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, you can read about LDR's response in the *Living Lutheran* story "Finding 'humanity and kindness.'"

Following Hurricane Helene, LDR provided a grant to the Virginia Synod so farmers in western Virginia could replace hay destroyed by the hurricane; this meant they could feed their livestock through the winter rather than sell off their herds. Another grant, to the North Carolina Synod, is supporting a volunteer coordinator to work alongside disaster case management teams, construction coordination teams and volunteer teams to support rebuilding projects over the coming months and years. And LDR is supporting the ongoing recovery from Hurricane Maria and subsequent storms in Puerto Rico through local partner Techos Pa' Mi Gente ("Roofs for My People"); it recently celebrated repairing its 100th roof and has no plans to slow down.

LDR has worked closely with the Middle East and North Africa desk to respond to the situation in the Holy Land since Oct. 7, 2023. Emergency funding for Augusta Victoria Hospital (through the Lutheran World Federation) provided housing and food for patients from Gaza so they could complete their medical treatment. Grants to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, an ELCA companion, meant the church's schools did not need to turn away students who couldn't pay their tuition fees and parents were not forced to choose between feeding their children and providing for their education. The needs of the Palestinian people are great and will continue.



In addition to accompanying partners with grants and technical assistance, Lutheran Disaster Response continues to nurture its Community of Practice, which brings together disaster professionals and volunteers actively engaged in disaster work in synods, social ministry organizations, Indigenous organizations and community-based groups from across the ELCA ecology. Quarterly regional calls and a [catalog](#) of free trainings provide spaces for learning, collaboration and mutual support. The annual LDR Community of Practice Gathering will be held in the Washington, D.C., area, Oct. 21-23, and will include advocacy visits on the Hill, which are being organized in coordination with the Witness in Society team.

Recent and continuing changes in federal and international funding mean that LDR's commitment to collaborating whenever possible in support of communities' recovery is even more critical now.

ELCA World Hunger

ELCA World Hunger reaches communities in need. Nearly 1 in 10 people worldwide – 733 million – are hungry, and the number is growing. Amid these needs, the World Hunger program and related budgets faced significant budget corrections at the end of 2024 to "rightsize" their funding commitments and programming as we move into the future. As part of the process, current projects and initiatives were evaluated in light of funding capacities. The work was approached with intentionality, care and concern for our partners, companions and those we serve. Three staff positions within the Building Resilient Communities (BRC) team were eliminated.

Along with the reduction in staff positions, the initiatives programs in both ELCA World Hunger and LDR were concluded. These programs focused on new, innovative ideas and approaches and were not core programs of either LDR or World Hunger. Ending the initiatives programs allowed ELCA World

Hunger and LDR to focus more tightly on the priorities of humanitarian assistance and sustainable development. There were no reductions to core domestic hunger grants or programs. The international programs were impacted, their grants reduced by up to 10%.

This is a critical time for the ELCA's accompaniment of vulnerable people on the move and many who live in fear. The [AMMPARO](#) team has facilitated seven webinars focused on care for migrants, with hundreds of participants from fall 2024 to the present. "[Know Your Rights](#)" and other resources found on the [AMMPARO blog](#) provide up-to-date information for congregations, members and partners, helping them to understand the current climate for migrants and refugees and to advocate for just and humane policies for newcomers.

At the ELCA Youth Gathering last summer, the World Hunger Education and Networking team immersed thousands of youth in an interactive learning journey through the lens of our domestic and international partners, helping bring the work to life and empowering the youth to take the message home. The newest World Hunger VBS curriculum, "[At the Table](#)," engages youth in intergenerational conversations. Based on requests from World Hunger leaders to connect and learn together on best practices and ideas, the Education and Networks team invested in an engagement platform, Rallyhood, to connect passionate volunteers with message sharing, file management, shared calendars and more. A soft launch is scheduled for this spring, and a larger rollout will follow at the "Do. Love. Move." World Hunger Leadership Gathering in Columbus, Ohio, Sept. 18-21.

Global Mission

Through the ELCA Companion Synod Program, the [Global Mission](#) team engages in relationships of accompaniment across our 65 synods, with companion churches in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. Supported by the churchwide organization, companion synod leaders engage in communication, strategic planning, resource sharing, mutual ministries and contextual celebrations.

As participants in the recent India companion synod consultation shared, these relationships remind us that we are not alone in our joys and sufferings and can find strength in being church together. Those delegates who attended the installation of their new companion bishops in Namibia heard firsthand accounts of the impact of our government's recent decisions on our companions' lives. Delegates proclaimed a renewed responsibility to be advocates in their own contexts. A companion church leader from Hungary reflected that only through relationships of accompaniment can we begin to understand one another. Through that understanding, we remove the barriers of fear and hatred that often separate us.



In 2024, the Global Mission team recruited 16 new missionaries to serve in eight countries, adding to the diverse voices and experiences of our global mission engagement. In the [Global Mission directory](#), you can see photos of the 110-plus missionaries serving on our behalf in 35 countries, a testament to our global reach. Currently we are recruiting for 20 new missionary positions. The ELCA continues to promote its commitment to this accompaniment expression of service to Lutheran churches and their ministries through exchange of ELCA mission personnel.

Almost three years ago, the Global Mission team met with professors from five ELCA seminaries to strengthen relationships. As a result, Luther Seminary and the Global Mission team have collaborated on two J-Term trips to Central America, the second taking place last year. Students described the experience as “life-transforming.” Their insights and reflections on the ELCA’s long-standing relationships with Lutheran churches of the communion, as well as the educational realities around migration and the ELCA’s role in addressing the roots of migration, are invaluable. The lessons from this trip, shaped by feedback, are pivotal to understanding the role and mission of the church in today’s shifting landscape.



From Jan. 31 to Feb. 4, the Service and Justice administration team co-convoked a consultation to strengthen our shared witness with the Lutheran World Federation. Members of the Service and Justice home area met with Lutheran World Federation colleagues at the LWF Communion Office in Geneva, Switzerland. The consultation reaffirmed a deep commitment to collaboration and a shared vision for a thriving, global Lutheran communion. We met to align our work, strengthen relationships and strategically partner to address the challenges of these times in humanitarian work and to expand theological education and Lutheran identity.



COMMON STATEMENT ON THE FILIOQUE

The Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue Between the Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church

We, representatives of The Lutheran World Federation and the Orthodox Church, have come together in a spirit of love and Christian communion to discuss the Church-dividing issue of the procession of the Holy Spirit. We both affirm the full divinity and personhood of the Holy Spirit, which was expressed in different ways in the eastern and the western traditions. We know that the Filioque was inserted in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Latin Church in response to the heresy of Arianism centuries after the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed's composition. The Eastern Church has always protested this insertion. As part of the Latin tradition, the reformers inherited the Creed with the Filioque and did not consider it problematic. Valuing this old and most venerable ecumenical Christian text, we suggest that the translation of the Greek original (without the Filioque) be used in the hope that this will contribute to the healing of age-old divisions between our communities and enable us to confess together the faith of the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is a doctrinal statement used in the liturgy. The people of God pray the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and in that prayer their faith is shaped by the Triune God. Renewed focus on the original wording of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may encourage renewed theological reflection on the Trinity and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Moreover, we both affirm that in our Trinitarian doctrine the Father is the cause (αἰτίος) of the generation of the Son and of the procession of the Spirit. The Orthodox understand that the Filioque was often meant to underline the relationship between the Son and the Spirit and the Lutherans are aware that in the Orthodox tradition the Spirit is sometimes conceived as proceeding (ἐκπορευόμενον) through the Son. We are also aware that there are other ways to indicate the relationship of the Son and the Spirit. We hope that the exploration of the formula "through the Son" used by Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, and Tarasius of Constantinople and relevant views by Gregory of Cyprus and Gregory Palamas, might facilitate our common effort to reach further agreement regarding the procession of the Holy Spirit.

27 May 2024

Progress Report from the Educational Debt Task Force

At its Spring 2022 meeting, the Executive Committee of the ELCA Church Council voted to form the Educational Debt Task Force (EC22.03.12). The task force is currently in its research phase, which has three main objectives:

- Better understand the breadth and depth of the experience and impact of educational debt among ELCA candidates and rostered ministers;
- Gather information about what programs already exist to assist rostered ministers to reduce their educational debt; and
- Resource existing and forming programs, task forces and study committees, actively considering their research needs.

Originally, the task force had intended to conclude its work with a final report at the Spring 2025 meeting of the Church Council; however, over the past six months, several factors at broad and narrow levels have slowed the progress of the task force.

- Since its first gathering, the task force had invested significant time and energy into learning about the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which serves to cancel borrowers' balance on Direct Loans after certain requirements are met. Additional education and promotion of PSLF were to be part of the task force's final recommendations. However, decisions made at the federal level about this program have left its future unsettled. As a result, the task force needed to revise some of its thinking about the promotion of PSLF.
- Several members of the task force stepped down due to increased personal and professional responsibilities. These members were Nathan Block, Bishop Yehiel Curry, and the Rev. Carlton Rodgers. To take the place of these members, the proposal is that Bishop Meggan Manlove and the Rev. Shelley Cunningham be appointed to the task force. (Biographies are provided in a separate document.)
- Staff support for the task force was limited. Adam DeHoek, who has served to convene the task force, onboarded a renewed Research and Evaluation team at the churchwide organization. This process took considerable time; as such, capacity to support the task force was limited.

Due to these issues, the task force requests that its final report be delivered at the November 2025 meeting of the Church Council. To meet this goal, the task force intends to execute the following plan:

- By the end of April, ELCA Research and Evaluation will prepare a research report of the findings from the quantitative survey of ELCA rostered ministers which was conducted in 2024.
- In May, after this report has been drafted, members of the task force will each write commentaries, offering their perspective on the key takeaways and how they envision using the information in their own work.
- In June, the task force will hold an in-person meeting to review the commentaries and develop recommendations to the Church Council and other key stakeholder groups.
- A final report, including these recommendations, will be prepared and submitted to the Church Council.

The Educational Debt Task Force envisions continuing the work of communicating its findings and developing resources into early 2026.

April 3, 2025

To: Executive Committee of the Church Council

From: The Joint Committee of the Churchwide Organization and the ELCA Foundation

Represented by its Lead Team:

Presiding Bishop, Elizabeth Eaton

Treasurer, Lori Fedyk

ELCA Foundation Board Chair, Ingrid Stafford

ELCA Foundation Interim President & CEO, Annette Shoemaker

Re: Status Report on October 2024 EC Request

Background

In October 2024, the Executive Committee of the Church Council requested that the ELCA Foundation (FO) and the ELCA Churchwide Organization (CWO) undertake the following:

EC ACTION:

To approve the formation of a joint committee, consisting of representation from the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (dba ELCA Foundation) and the ELCA churchwide organization to review compliance with the action taken by the ELCA Church Council, CC17.11.21, which states, “To approve the proposed governance structure and organizational structures by functions as outlined in the “Report of the Task Force on the Structure and Governance of the ELCA Foundation;”

To request a final report and recommendations from this joint committee to be presented to the ELCA Church Council no later than the April 2025 meeting; and

To request the ELCA Foundation cease activity on the implementation of HubSpot, a customer relationship management system, until such time that the report and recommendations from the joint committee is received.

Work Completed to Date

- ❖ The Joint Committee was formed with representatives from CWO and the FO:
 - o CWO: Bishop Eaton, Treasurer Fedyk, Cherrish Holland (CC), Mitch McCartney (CC), Rachel Wind (ED for Development), Jon Eggen (Development)
 - o FO: Ingrid Stafford, Board; Annette Shoemaker, Int. President/CEO; Eric Brudos, Board; Kathleen Reed, Board; Jason Watt (VP, Development), Amanda Gonterman (CFO)
- ❖ A Facilitator was engaged: Pastor Michael Burk, former Bishop of SE Iowa Synod
- ❖ A “lead” team was designated: Bishop Eaton, Lori Fedyk, Ingrid Stafford, Annette Shoemaker
- ❖ The lead team has met 4 times with Bishop Burk (to date), and the full Joint Committee has met 2 times.
- ❖ Using the 2017 Task Force Report to the Church Council as a guide, the Joint Committee and Lead Team have conducted self-assessments regarding compliance with constitutional requirements (inclusive of Chapters 15 & 17 provisions) and used the risk framework in this report to identify where risks have been materially mitigated and where risks remain.

- ❖ There is a consensus that the Foundation follows the core corporate responsibilities outlined in Chapter 17 which delineate mission, scope, fiduciary, legal and governance responsibilities. This will be documented in a final report to the Church Council.
- ❖ There is also an understanding that there are functional risk areas, identified in the 2017 report, where mutual risks remain. The Joint Committee has integrated observations from CWO and FO that identify specific issues within these areas and make recommendations for further evaluation by CWO and FO staff with expertise in each respective area. The work groups will provide additional analysis and options for consideration by the full Joint Committee and Lead Team.
- ❖ The risk areas are:
 - Data Management
 - Resource Development
 - Financial
 - Legal
- ❖ Each of these risk areas have varying requirements to enable closer alignment of CWO and FO goals. Elements may include policy changes, procedural changes, business agreements, increased communication or coordination, and continued mutual respect for each organization's autonomy and inter-dependencies.
- ❖ We have assigned a due date of April 23 for the work groups to return specific observations and options to the Joint Committee, with the goal of providing a full report to the Executive Committee of Church Council at its May 6 meeting.
- ❖ It is very likely recommendations will be agreed upon, but complete implementation will require more time.
- ❖ We regret that we were not able to fully complete these mutual deliberations by this April council meeting, however much progress has been made in understanding the mutual challenges and perspectives of each organization.
- ❖ We are fully aligned in love for this Church, in all its expressions, and a deep belief that there is great opportunity in working together to strengthen the resources available for the ministries and leadership of this Church.

To: Bishop Eaton

Cc: ELCA Church Council, The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

From: Annette Shoemaker, Eva Roby, and Chris Johnson

Date: February 7, 2025

Subject: Response to the Proposal for a Financial Coordinating Committee

Dear Bishop Eaton,

Thank you for sharing the draft from Members of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) on their recommendations for a Financial Coordinating Committee (FCC).

We appreciate the Commission's thoughtful work in assessing the financial structure of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the recommendation to establish a Financial Coordinating Committee (FCC). As the leaders of the ELCA Foundation, Mission Investment Fund (MIF), and Portico Benefit Services, we welcome the opportunity to engage in conversations about strengthening financial stewardship and coordination within the ELCA.

As separately incorporated entities that serve as the financial arms of the ELCA, we recognize that our roles differ significantly from those of congregations, synods, and other church ministries. While we are deeply rooted in the ELCA's mission, our work as financial institutions involves distinct regulatory, operational, and fiduciary responsibilities that require a nuanced approach. Unlike congregations and synods, which primarily rely on mission-based fundraising and offerings, our institutions manage assets, investments, benefits, and financial services that operate under a different set of financial and legal considerations.

We also recognize the stated objective of the proposed FCC is to coordinate the governance and/or operations of financially related, separately incorporated ministries.

- While we fully support efforts to enhance financial efficiency and collaboration, it is important to acknowledge the complexities of such an endeavor.
- Each of our organizations - ELCA Foundation, MIF, and Portico - operates under distinct regulatory frameworks, including federal and state oversight governing banking, investment management, pension administration, and fiduciary responsibilities.
- These regulations impose specific financial reporting, risk management, and compliance requirements that make operational consolidation difficult and, in some cases, impractical.

Furthermore, each entity has a fiduciary duty to its stakeholders - whether investors, retirees, or donors - that necessitates governance structures aligned with our distinct financial missions. While we believe in leveraging opportunities to share administrative resources where appropriate, a fully integrated governance or operational model could introduce compliance risks and inefficiencies that may ultimately be counterproductive.

That said, we remain fully committed to collaboration and to identifying additional ways to work together in areas where it makes sense. We are committed to actively engaging in joint initiatives, including:

- **Enhancing operational efficiencies** by exploring shared services, administrative coordination, and resource pooling where appropriate.
- **Leveraging synergies among financial institutions** serving the ELCA to strengthen investment management, financial stewardship, and outreach.
- **Aligning strategic initiatives** through regular meetings to ensure our business practices, marketing efforts, and outreach programs are complementary and effective.
- **Identifying opportunities for cost savings** by reviewing the structures of our organizations and finding ways to share resources while maintaining our independent fiduciary responsibilities.

Given the complexity of financial oversight and the existing collaborative efforts among MIF, Portico, and the ELCA Foundation, we respectfully suggest that the FCC consider focusing its assessment on areas within the ELCA where financial coordination is most needed. Our organizations already operate under well-defined governance structures with regulatory oversight, and we are actively working together to achieve economies of scale, align strategies, and support the financial health of the church.

Rather than incorporating separately incorporated financial institutions into the FCC's broader scope, we believe the Commission may find it more effective to begin by assessing financial coordination opportunities within congregations, synods, and other ministries where financial management and resource-sharing present greater challenges.

That said, be assured we remain open to dialogue and look forward to sharing insights from our existing collaborative efforts to help inform the FCC's work. We appreciate the Commission's leadership in this important initiative and look forward to supporting the ELCA's long-term financial sustainability in ways that reflect the distinct roles and responsibilities of all its financial entities.

Sincerely,

Annette C. Shoemaker
President & CEO, ELCA Foundation

Eva M. Roby
President & CEO, Mission Investment Fund

Christopher T. Johnson
President & CEO, Portico Benefit Services

The Eve of the Transfiguration of Our Lord, 2025

Dear Members of the CRLC,

The Conference of Bishops of the ELCA gives thanks for your commitment to the work of the Commission as your work comes to an end. This task has been multifaceted and complex, and the insights gained will guide our church in its continued mission to proclaim the gospel.

As the Commission states in its report to us, “Tension lies in the need to clearly define the purpose of this church, to ensure governance and resources are appropriately aligned.” We had hoped that, for the sake of the church, there would have been a clearer focus on the purpose statements of this church that could then lead to changes in structure and governance which would be less technical and more adaptive. Some recommendations do not adequately address the tension you state, the adaptive challenges we face, nor the Assembly's original mandate for the CRLC.

Our specific concerns include:

- *Recommendation 1:* The size and number of synods must be addressed, but we believe we must first clarify how we define the church's purpose and how synods fulfill that purpose, as outlined in the original memorial.
- *Recommendation 2:* While we acknowledge the challenges regarding the church's understanding and support of deacons, we believe this issue falls outside the original mandate of the Commission.
- *Recommendation 3:* While we fully support efforts to enhance financial efficiency and collaboration, it is our understanding that the proposed Commission needs additional consultation with the ministries involved, due to the complexities of such work.
- *Recommendation 4:* We appreciate the attention to congregational governance and management and suggest a review of existing resources before establishing a new task force.
- *Recommendation 5.1:* While we recognize the work on the disciplinary process and its impact on people of color, we recommend checking the status of the work of the task force which explored ombudsmanship before finalizing this recommendation.
- *Recommendation 9:* We have concerns about certain changes, which we will address with the Church Council.
- *Recommendation 11:* We support empowering lay leaders but note that the cost implications for the churchwide budget need further exploration, and changes to the model constitution for synods must be clarified.

We have no comment on Recommendations 6-8, and 10; we support Recommendation 5.2.

We read in your report a desire for more efficiency and less bureaucracy. Yet, as we read your recommendations as a whole, we are concerned that they will increase bureaucracy, cost, and further silo ministries across this church.

We give thanks for the insights gained through this process and acknowledge that much remains to be learned. We trust that solutions to our challenges exist, but they have not yet been fully revealed by the Holy Spirit. We pray for a continued openness to the Spirit's guidance as we move forward in proclaiming the good news of Jesus. As we walk together into the future, we do so with the cross of Christ at our center and the continued promises of hope that come in the resurrection.

Again, we thank you for your faithful and persistent engagement in the work.

Fellow Council Members,

As I was reviewing files this evening, I noticed we have both the Final Report of the CRLC and the Feedback from the Conference of Bishops. The Conference of Bishops Feedback was based on a prior draft of the report, and one of the final revisions of the Commission's report was to be more intentional about the ordering of the final recommendations. So, the numbering in the COB Feedback doesn't correspond to the numbering of the CRLC Report. Below is a table you can use to decode the Conference of Bishops feedback. Also note that the CRLC modified some of its recommendations in light of the feedback from Conference of Bishops.

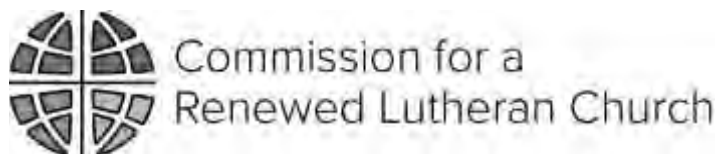
Conference of Bishops Letter	Final CRLC Report
Recommendation 1 – This corresponded to a task force specific to synod structures	Somewhat like “step 2” of Recommendation 3. Portions of original “Recommendation 1” appear as Appendix 3 of the Final CRLC Report.
Recommendation 2	Recommendation 6
Recommendation 3	Recommendation 4
Recommendation 4	Recommendation 5
Recommendation 5.1	First part of Recommendation 2
Recommendation 9	Recommendation 11
Recommendation 11	Recommendation 9
No comment on Recommendations 6, 7, 8, and 10	Recommendations 13, 12, 10, and 8
Recommendation 5.2	Second part of Recommendation 2

As additional context, there are two recommendations that appear in the Final CRLC Report that are not mentioned in the Conference of Bishops feedback:

- Recommendation 1 pertaining to action on dismantling racism is a new recommendation that was finalized in the CRLC's last meeting and did not go to the Conference of Bishops for their feedback.
- Recommendation 7 pertaining to continuing resolution changes in light of the DEIA Audit was acted upon in large part by the Church Council in November.

I look forward to being with you all later this week to discuss these and many other topics.

Thanks,
Dave Lenz



Date: 26 March 2025

To: The 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly
From: The Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon Schwartz, Co-Chairs
Subject: Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

The 2022 Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly passed the following:

“To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.”

Subsequently, a commission of 34 individuals was assembled that represented the diversity of ELCA membership in age, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, education, economic status, ability, geographic location, and experience. We are lay and rostered leaders. We are experienced in campus, global, camp, nonprofit, stewardship, and congregational ministry, among others. We are united in deep love for God's people, commitment to a Lutheran theological understanding of Scripture, faith, grace, salvation through Christ and glory to God alone, and proactive desire for an ELCA that understands and integrates best practices to address the faithful expression of a timeless Church in a current context.

Beginning in July 2023 and concluding in March 2025, the CRLC gathered, united in a strategy that involved education around the constitutional structure and governance of the ELCA and the historical, cultural, and logistical motivation behind its development. A season of listening engaged synods and congregations across the country as well as gatherings of synod vice presidents, the ELCA Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, the ELCA Youth Gathering, the ELCA ethnic associations and Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities, ELCA churchwide organization staff, and leaders from ELCA-affiliated organizations and ecumenical partners, among others. Independently evaluated findings repeatedly called for paths of renewal that included increased accessibility and accountability, a firm commitment to equity and justice across all three expressions of the ELCA, empowerment of lay leadership, and deepened relationships with areas of innovation and faith formation beyond the three expressions, among other potential areas of reform and renewal.

40 Attached are the findings and recommendations of the CRLC, following prayerful discernment
41 and diligent striving grounded in our seasons of learning and engaging. We have attempted to
42 provide thoughtful and thorough rationale, alongside additional information to help provide the
43 context and history of the commission's efforts and time together, recognizing that the
44 Commission for a New Lutheran Church, which we were modeled after, was a more than six-
45 year effort, and that much work, gathering of voices, assessment of needs and realities, and
46 prayerful discernment remains before us. The CRLC acknowledges that renewal for this church
47 mirrors the daily renewal we each have available to us through our baptism. The determination,
48 hope, and love we receive through our Savior, Jesus Christ, guides us and leads us through these
49 infinite cycles of reformation.

50 We commend this report to you as a guide for your reflection and action in determining the path
51 forward for the ELCA.

52
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Executive Summary:

Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

The Imperative for Renewal and Reformation

In the life of the Church, renewal is not merely an administrative task but a Spirit-led response to God’s continuous call for discernment and reformation. As a community rooted in faith, guided by Scripture, and committed to living out the gospel, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) understands renewal as an essential, ongoing process. This process is deeply embedded in our theological and organizational framework as reflected in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, which articulates how we organize ourselves to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, share the sacraments, reach out to our neighbors with good news, and express God’s love in the world.

Each expression of this church—the churchwide organization, synods, and congregations—is held together in a relationship of interdependence, encouraging responsiveness to contextual needs. This interdependence reflects our dedication to listening anew to the Holy Spirit and reevaluating how our structures, practices, and missions align with God’s calling in a rapidly changing world.

The clarion call for the church to be “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”—a church always being reformed—underpins our ongoing discernment. This call reminds us that reform and renewal are not isolated historical events but continuous imperatives, driving us toward greater faithfulness and vibrancy in our witness and service. We commend this church for its commitment to revisit and renew these guiding documents. In faithfully engaging this work, we live more fully into our vision of a world transformed by God’s grace and love in Christ for all people and creation.

The Purpose and Scope of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) was convened in response to a directive from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA, following receipt of ten similar synod memorials. Composed of 34 members of the ELCA from diverse backgrounds, the CRLC was tasked with evaluating and addressing this church’s purpose, structure, and future direction. The CRLC conducted extensive consultations across the three expressions and with related institutions, organizations, and ministries to gather diverse insights and perspectives. Amid many expectations for the outcomes of its work, members of the CRLC navigated these alongside the ongoing work of different task forces, committees, and working groups addressing various church opportunities. Throughout this time, we called ourselves to the text of the action that resulted in the establishment of the CRLC:

2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action

“...To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its

findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.” [CA22.01.06]

We recognize that the work conducted by the CRLC may inspire a number of responses. Some will say that we have gone too far, while others will say not far enough. We offer this work as part of the ongoing efforts of this church to more fully live out the mission of sharing the love of God for all. We encourage this church to continue discernment and taking action related to our purpose, mission, structure and longing for the love and equality of all people.

Methodology

Over the last two years, the commission has endeavored to ground its work deeply in the understanding of our theology and Lutheran heritage. As we engaged with Scripture, history, and our shared Lutheran culture, the CRLC implemented a broad engagement strategy involving surveys and listening sessions across the ELCA. These sessions included diverse groups such as laity, rostered leaders, youth and young adults, and historically marginalized communities. This inclusive process aimed to gather comprehensive feedback on the existing church structure and assess its alignment with both contemporary and future needs.

Throughout the work of this commission, we have maintained regular consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council of the ELCA, ensuring that our efforts resonate with broader church leadership. We extend our gratitude to the multitude of voices that have enriched this process through their input, shared resources, and prayers.

It is crucial to highlight that our commission has sustained a dedicated focus on our fundamental commitment to dismantling racism, a mandate clearly articulated by the Churchwide Assembly. In our pursuit to cultivate an anti-racist church, we have expanded our awareness to address other forms of exclusion within this church. We encourage all ELCA Lutherans to actively embody their faith by advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. This call to action reaches beyond our formal governance and organizational structures, urging each individual to honor the dignity of every person, particularly those marginalized, akin to the Samaritans among us.

Key Findings

The commission’s key findings can be found in the Observations section of this report and represent the breadth of issues facing the ELCA today. Most of these issues need further reflection as the church considers structural and governance reform:

Governance and Structural Matters

The commission noted the many ways our current governance models across the ELCA vary in their reflection of and service to the diversity of its membership.

Administrative Opportunities

The commission acknowledges the variety in administrative management, coordination of services, and opportunities for effectiveness in the way that each of the expressions carries out its purpose and ministry.

163 ***Interdependence of this Church***

164 Throughout our discussions, the commission identified how changes in our structure,
165 governance, and ministries would be impacted by the interdependence of the three expressions of
166 this church. Our call for ongoing discernment and careful consideration is a direct result of our
167 shared ministries and connection within the three expressions as well as related institutions and
168 other ministries connected to this church.

169 ***Commitment to the Dignity of All People***

170 Throughout its history the ELCA has articulated a commitment to respect the dignity of all
171 individuals. This is evidenced in various declarations, apologies, and social statements. We
172 acknowledge this church has not always succeeded in honoring the inherent value of all people.
173 The pursuit of inclusion is ongoing; this church must continually endeavor to recognize and
174 prevent harm.

175 **Recommendations**

176 The CRLC could not and did not attempt to address every issue with a specific recommendation.
177 However, several recommendations have been advanced across a few strategic themes:

178 ***Governance and Structural Considerations***

179 These recommendations focus on enhancing governance clarity, accountability, and operational
180 efficiency through revisions to governing documents and procedures. Key actions include the
181 establishment of task forces dedicated to examining interdependence and purpose, financial
182 coordination, and the simplification of the process for amending church documents.

183 ***Strategic Initiatives for Long-Term Impact***

184 These recommendations underscore the importance of strategic planning with a concentrated
185 effort on dismantling racism and deeply integrating diversity and equity principles consistent
186 with Lutheran theology into this church's activities and policies. The recommendations call for
187 both immediate and long-term actions, potentially including constitutional changes to support
188 these goals.

189 ***Respecting the Dignity of All People***

190 Proposals under this theme aim to mirror God's call to love your neighbor. Recommendations
191 include steps that can be taken for immediate action as well as the development of educational
192 resources and support systems to empower all church members, particularly those from
193 historically underrepresented groups.

194 **Conclusion**

195 The CRLC's findings and recommendations are framed to guide the ELCA towards a more
196 inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused future. These recommendations, rooted in a vision
197 of continuous transformation, are offered with the hope that their adoption will empower the
198 three expressions of this church to better serve our diverse membership. By embracing these
199 ongoing changes, we align ourselves more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This
200 process fosters a church that is not only adaptable and accountable but also fully equipped to

201 meet the challenges of our time while remaining steadfast in our theological convictions. Our
202 enduring commitment to reformation and renewal underscores our role in God's world,
203 reminding us that our efforts are not solely for the church's benefit but are crucial for the broader
204 realization of God's kingdom on earth. This is an everlasting endeavor. While the work of the
205 commission concludes, we encourage the church to continue in its efforts for renewal in all
206 matters.

207

208 Process and Work of the Commission

209 Origin and Formation

210 The August 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten synods titled
211 “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA.” These memorials included common themes related
212 to an overall decline in membership and numbers of congregations since the ELCA was created
213 in 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA’s governing documents to meet new challenges, the desire
214 for a “well-governed, connected, and sustainable church,” and the need to dismantle racism and
215 acknowledge this church’s complicity in related trauma and harm. The Commission for a New
216 Lutheran Church (CNLC) toiled for several years during the 1980s, eventually leading to the
217 creation of the ELCA. The establishment of the CRLC marked the first major review of the
218 governance and polity of the denomination since its creation.

219 The following resolution, as amended, was adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly by a 738-
220 72 vote:

221 **“To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed**
222 **Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all**
223 **three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of**
224 **Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose**
225 **for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational**
226 **structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive**
227 **to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings**
228 **and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a**
229 **possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special**
230 **meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.”** [CA22.01.06]

231 The ELCA Church Council was charged with establishing the CRLC. Since there was no
232 precedent for such an entity, it was the Church Council’s responsibility to determine the size and
233 selection of the commission membership. In April 2023, the Church Council appointed 34
234 individuals to the commission and appointed two members as co-chairs. The commission
235 membership represented broadly diverse perspectives across the ELCA’s three expressions; the
236 churchwide organization, synods, and congregations, and beyond. The members of the CRLC all
237 served in a volunteer role. While supported by resource staff, the CRLC did not have full-time
238 dedicated staff support or engage any significant consulting efforts.

239 The Work Begins

240 The first meeting of the CRLC was held in July 2023 at the ELCA churchwide organization
241 offices in Chicago, nearly a full year after the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. This meeting focused
242 on grounding the work of the commission in Scripture, introducing the members to each other,
243 and understanding the concerns and hopes that led to the formation of the CRLC. One of the first
244 tasks the commission undertook was to speak with key leaders from each of the synods that had
245 adopted the memorials that led to the creation of the commission to better understand their
246 motivation. Major themes of these conversations included:

- 247 1. Structural concerns and the need to “right-size” this church.

2. Racial and economic disparities impacting the candidacy process and management of rostered leaders.
3. Overwhelming passage of the memorials at the synod level indicating a broad appetite for change in this church and a sense of urgency.
4. The need to commit to being an anti-racist institution and related examination of our governing documents.
5. Concern for accountability and results in the broader church and a desire for the commission to recommend tangible action steps for consideration.
6. Collaboration with our full communion partners for theological education and mission work should be encouraged.
7. Maintain congregational independence to choose their calls.
8. A growing focus on concerns about transparency, accountability, and governance.

Achieving a common understanding of the commission's task was an early challenge among the members of the commission.

Individuals worked together to share their interpretation and the ways it might inform the commission's collective work. Significant time was spent reviewing and then unpacking the charge given to the CRLC by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. In particular, the development of the language of our "shared commitment to dismantle racism" in the memorial was noted. In our third meeting, CRLC3, the members thoroughly discussed the memorial, "Restructure the Governance of the ELCA" and its mandate. After much discussion, the commission voted to approve the mandate focus as follows:

1. "shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church" [churchwide organization, synod, congregation]
2. [shall reconsider] "the principles of its organizational structure"
3. [shall reconsider] "all matters pertaining thereunto" [as it relates to governance]
4. "being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism" [as it relates to governance]

In addition to seeking a common understanding of the mandate, an early task of the commission was to clarify the timeline of activities and associated milestones. There were two such major milestones identified. First, any recommendations for constitutional changes to be considered for adoption at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly were to be provided to the Church Council prior to its November 2024 meeting. Second, the CRLC final report needed to be provided to the Church Council in the early spring of 2025 so that it could be included in the packet of materials distributed to voting members of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The CRLC recognized the tight timeline and structured its work accordingly. The timeline proved to be a distinct challenge, as it required the early prioritization of recommendations for constitutional changes, resulting in a limited capacity in early meetings for conversations of a more transformative and generative nature. The timeline prescribed by this church's current governing documents proved to be a repeated challenge to the commission's work.

Learning, Listening and Consulting

Early in our time together it became clear that not everyone was starting from the same place of understanding of the operation of the denomination, its formation, the constitution, or its history. Meetings in 2023 focused heavily on creating a foundation of understanding among members

regarding the polity and current governance structures of the ELCA as well as a brief overview of this church's ecclesiology. The commission was blessed with a diverse membership with a variety of skills, gifts, and experiences. Several members of the commission invested in the creation of resources to provide all CRLC members with a better understanding of ELCA governance, polity, and ecclesiology. In addition to CRLC members, resource persons and other churchwide organization subject-matter experts, especially those whose work focuses on racial equity, were essential to building a common understanding and foundation. At every full commission meeting and almost every committee meeting, resource persons were available and in attendance to answer questions, provide feedback, and serve as a conduit to the churchwide organization. The CRLC understood that it was not only necessary to have a strong grounding in the past, but also necessary to have exposure to current on-going efforts within the church and requested a list of such efforts from the churchwide organization. Presentations to the CRLC were provided by staff involved in the Vision Team and the God's Love Made Real initiative. It was a challenge to identify and engage with the wide variety of ongoing efforts due to the limited time available and the peripheral nexus of some of the efforts with the work of the CRLC. This multifaceted engagement offered vital insights into the current and future needs of this church.

To inform its work, the CRLC engaged in an extensive listening process, both formal and informal. The formal efforts included online surveys of ELCA members (both laity and rostered ministers), with special surveys of youth and historically marginalized communities. Additionally, listening sessions were held across the denomination, hosted by CRLC members. Informal listening was a constant source of feedback for each CRLC member as they personally, and in some cases professionally, engaged with others.

The memorial creating the CRLC directed the commission to be in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council. The presiding bishop and the secretary of the ELCA, members of both the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, served as resource persons. The Conference of Bishops was represented on the CRLC by two bishops. One commission member was a member of the Church Council. Additionally, resource persons from the Church Council included the chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and the treasurer of the ELCA.

Written materials as well as in-person presentations were provided to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council. Verbal and written feedback was received from both bodies. This wide-ranging engagement provided invaluable perspectives, fostering a collaborative approach as the CRLC prepared its findings and recommendations for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The CRLC also engaged in consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders including rostered ministers, ethnic associations, synod vice-presidents, members of the ELCA Larger Church Conference, and others.

Committee Work and Focus

In late 2023, at the third meeting of the CRLC, seven committees were chartered. There were four committees focused on a particular aspect of the commission's mandate and three primarily operational committees. The initial focus for all the committees was the first timeline milestone of identifying any recommendations for constitutional changes to be provided to the Church Council prior to its November 2024 meeting. This timeline allowed for such changes to be available for possible consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Following that meeting, the CRLC’s focus shifted to the milestone of generating a final report with findings and recommendations to be presented to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The emphasis shifted to examination of fundamental issues such as the interdependence of the three expressions, subsidiarity, and the flow of funds within the denomination. In late 2024, in response to feedback from consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council and in line with this shifted emphasis the Setting the Table committee was formed. Additionally, the Who Are We Committee and Why and What Committee were combined into the 3-4 Committee. These two committees had an overlap in focus and the formation of this new committee allowed for emphasis on interdependence and purpose statements. The committees worked tirelessly as they identified and debated substantive issues and performed operational tasks. Committees met on their own schedule and were provided with agenda time on full CRLC meetings to provide status reports, seek feedback, and make recommendations. The work of each committee ebbed and flowed depending on the specific work of that committee.

Following are the committees and their associated purposes as stated in their charters:

All Ears Committee

The All Ears Committee exists to collect data from a wide range of constituents, through both live listening sessions and electronic surveys, in order to inform the work of the CRLC. Additionally, this committee will serve as a liaison to other data collections groups in the ELCA, particularly Future Church. Finally, this committee will oversee data analysis and present a report of its findings to the CRLC.

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee exists to share the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, providing transparency for the commission’s actions to the wider ELCA. The committee will inform the wider ELCA of the commission’s purpose and the commission’s progress towards our mandate goals.

Dismantling Racism Committee

The Dismantling Racism Committee will provide oversight of the entire work of the CRLC to ensure it is viewed through an intersectional lens of dismantling racism.

How We Are Governed Committee

The “How We Are Governed” Committee exists to reconsider the organizational structure and governance of the ELCA, being particularly attuned to dismantling racism, and to provide recommendations for the future governance of this church, including potential modifications to governing documents.

Planning and Report Committee

The Planning and Report Committee exists to ensure project management, coordinate resources and provide for a final report to be presented to the Church Council in April of 2025 in preparation for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Who Are We Committee

The Who Are We Committee exists to examine the historical definitions of this church, how it is lived out today, and how to visualize it for the future. Following the completion of that work, the committee will then consider the question of whether the denomination name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” will be changed.

376 ***Why and What Committee***

377 The Why and What Committee exists to review the purpose statements for the three
378 expressions of this church as set forth in their constitutions and to make recommendations
379 concerning changes to those statements.

380 ***3-4 Committee***

381 The 3-4 Committee combines the purposes of the Who Are We Committee and the Why and
382 What Committee with a special focus on the interdependence among the three expressions of
383 the church and their purpose statements.

384 ***Setting the Table Committee***

385 The Setting the Table Committee's purpose is to draft a document listing the presenting
386 issues facing this church that the CRLC identified through its listening efforts.

387 **Challenges**

388 The work of the CRLC faced a variety of challenges, including logistical, structural, and
389 environmental. The fact that the ELCA had not created such an entity since its inception nearly
390 two generations ago meant there was no template. The most analogous entity was the original
391 Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC). Yet the tasks were significantly different:
392 creating a new denomination versus examining an existing denomination's governance and
393 structure. The CNLC performed its work over the greater part of a decade. The CRLC was
394 limited to less than two years of actual meeting time. This meant that a process for responding to
395 the mandate was created in tandem with the actual work of responding to the mandate. A lack of
396 precedent in process was a notable challenge.

397 The size and diversity of the CRLC was both a challenge and a strength. There was strength in
398 the wide variety of gifts, experiences, and perspectives of the members. There was also a
399 challenge in engaging and ensuring that all members had an opportunity to fully participate in a
400 group of 34 people.

401 The CRLC was composed entirely of volunteers. Thus, the membership was confined to those
402 who had the time and means to do the work. This reality is indicative of a larger systemic
403 challenge across the structure and leadership of this church, inherently limiting the full
404 participation of the diversity represented in this church.

405 An additional and significant challenge was the wording of the mandate. There were a variety of
406 interpretations of the memorial language, with some arguing for a narrow scope and others
407 seeking a broad interpretation. The CRLC voted on an understanding of the mandate in our third
408 meeting.

409 However, there still exist varying opinions of the mandate across the spectrum of people and
410 groups within the ELCA. This challenge consumed valuable time and energy of the CRLC
411 members and supporting resource persons.

412 The CRLC was intentionally created to consist of members from all three expressions of the
413 ELCA as well as related institutions, organizations, and ministries. Logistically, the CRLC was
414 created by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and established by the ELCA Church Council. It
415 was important that the CRLC not appear to be driven in its work by any particular expression of
416 this church. In some cases, this led to a lack of awareness of or confusion regarding already

existing projects and activities in the broader church. It was a challenge for the CRLC members to be knowledgeable of such efforts and their potential nexus with the CRLC.

From a timeline perspective, the CRLC was always challenged. The first CRLC meeting was in the third quarter of 2023. The CRLC held two additional meetings in 2023 and primarily used them to coalesce, build understanding, and agree on the mandate. The current process for amending the church's governing documents, especially the constitution, is time consuming and lengthy. Potential changes needed to be presented to the Fall 2024 Church Council with prior consultation with the Conference of Bishops in September 2024. Proposed specific constitutional changes along with conceptual work on revised purpose statements were reviewed by the COB at their Fall 2024 meeting. Subsequent versions were submitted to the Church Council. Once the deadline for proposed changes to the constitutions had passed the CRLC took a deeper look at the presenting issues facing the ELCA. In an ideal world this deeper dive would have occurred before any specific recommendations were presented; however, primarily due to the timeline, this did not occur.

432 Survey and Listening Sessions Summary

433 The following pages present a snapshot of the results from the listening sessions, the General
434 Survey, the Ethnic Associations Survey, the 25 Years and Under Survey, and the Youth Survey.
435 Additionally, cross-tabulations are displayed for the results of the General Survey by age, race,
436 gender and education. Along with a demographic breakdown of the respondents, the snapshot
437 highlights the most frequent responses of participants in the listening sessions and surveys and
438 qualitative responses where noted.

439 The survey questions include:

440 **Listening Sessions:**

441 What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current constitutional language?
442 What does a renewed church look like to you? What are your hopes for the ELCA?
443 What elements of the Statement of Purpose do you believe are vital to the ELCA, and what
444 do you believe should be modified?
445 Are there ways in which the ELCA could be better structured to support the three
446 expressions of the church for the sake of the gospel in the world?
447 Describe a time/situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA
448 supported the flourishing of the gospel in your context, and/or describe a time/situation
449 where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA inhibited the flourishing of
450 the gospel in your context.

451 452 **General and Ethnic Associations Surveys:**

453 Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose are vital to the ELCA's
454 future?
455 Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose need to be modified?
456 Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose are vital for the ELCA's future?
457 Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose need to be modified?
458 Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose are vital to the
459 ELCA's future?
460 Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose need to be
461 modified?
462 The ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide organization)
463 help to promote racial diversity.

464 465 **25 Years and Under and Youth Surveys:**

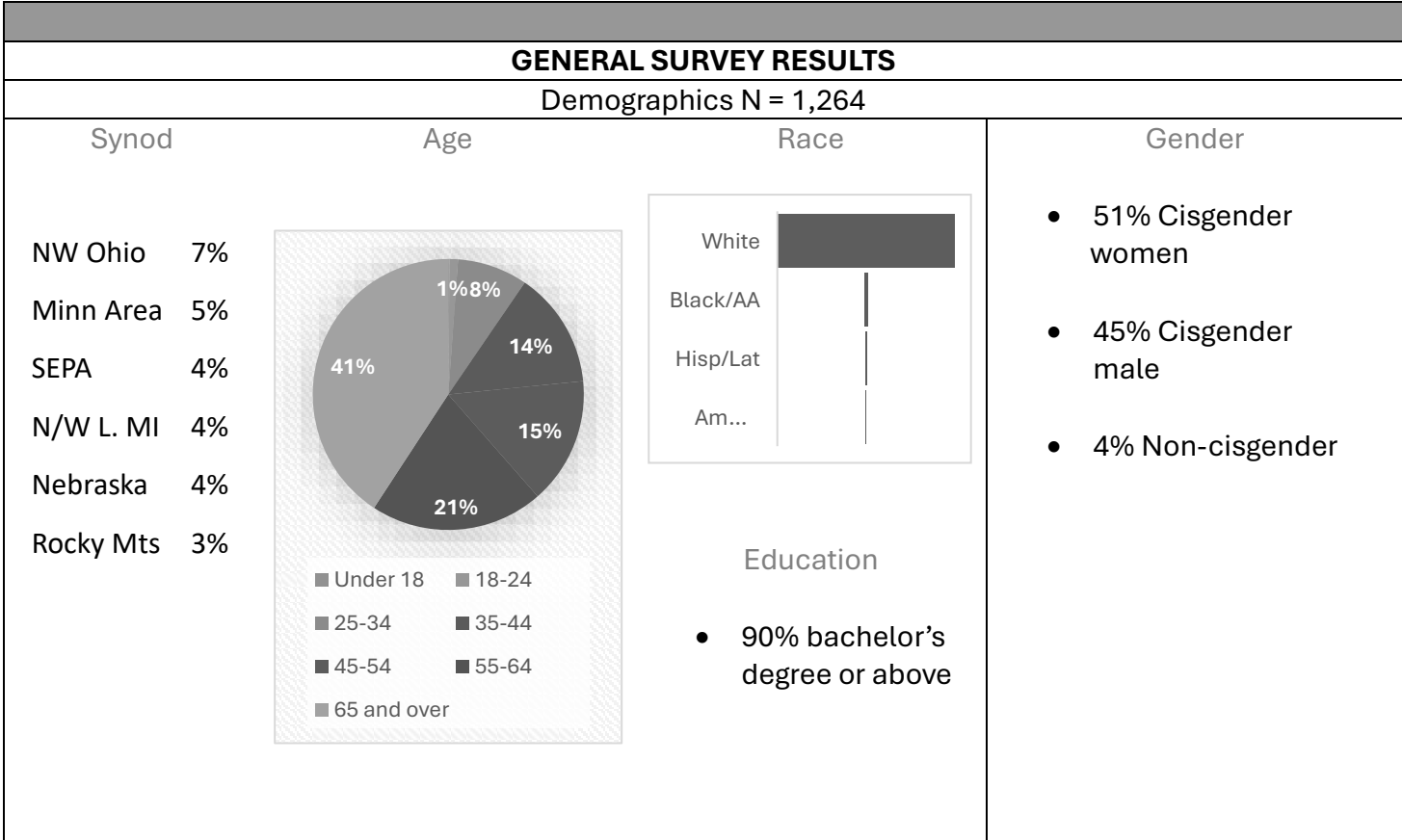
466
467 Does the ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide
468 organization) help promote racial diversity?
469 Identify the most important things about the ELCA that will encourage them to remain in
470 the church in the future.

471
472 Responses for each question in the General Survey are arranged by general results and cross-
473 tabulations. For example, the responses to question 1 (congregation purpose, that which is vital

474 and that which should be modified) contain the most frequent survey responses plus the most
 475 frequent survey responses from cross-tabulations for age, race, gender and most frequent
 476 responses.
 477
 478 Please note the following abbreviations: NA = Not Available, BIPOC = Black, Indigenous and
 479 People of Color, CT = Cross Tabulation, NW = Northwestern, Minn = Minneapolis, SEPA =
 480 Southeastern Pennsylvania, N/W L. MI = North/West Lower Michigan, and Mts. = Mountains.
 481

CRLC Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church		SNAPSHOT OF THE LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEY RESULTS	
Understanding the Scope of Research Findings			
Caveat: It is important for readers to recognize that the research observations and survey responses included in this report reflect the perspectives of those who participated and <u>do not</u> represent the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) community. While this data has been valuable in informing the CLRC’s discussions and decision-making processes, we acknowledge that it is not a statistically representative sample. As such, the findings should be interpreted as informative observations rather than predictive of broader trends within the ELCA. We encourage readers to view these responses and data as one part of a larger conversation rather than definitive conclusions about our church as a whole.			
LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS			
Demographics N = 1,285+			
# Attendees		Setting: In-person vs. Zoom	
67 Listening Sessions → •1,285+ attendees		1,285+ Attendees 63% 37% In-Person Zoom	
		• Rostered ministers • Retired ministers • Synod councils • Congregations • Young adults • LGBTQIA+ • People with disabilities • Deacons • Exec. Directors of related institutions, etc.	
Key Themes			
Purpose:		While some respondents saw the congregation-centered approach as a strength and that the existing purpose statements were clear and well-defined, other participants expressed dissatisfaction with how the current language fails to resonate with diverse communities or reflect modern values and concerns, e.g., inclusivity and relevance.	
Organization Structure:		The congregation-centered nature of the ELCA was frequently mentioned as a strength, with a focus on local congregations being a vital part of the church’s	

	identity. However, there was also a call for better alignment and support from the churchwide and synod levels to the congregational level.
Dismantling Racism:	A recurring theme was the desire for the ELCA to be more inclusive, welcoming diverse communities and ensuring that all voices are heard and represented. Participants also emphasized the need for the church to stay relevant in contemporary society by addressing current social issues and adapting to changing cultural contexts.



Responses to each question are arranged by General Survey results and cross-tabulations.

Key

(A) = General Survey Results, (B) = CT by Age, (C) = CT by Race, (D) = CT by Gender, and (E) = CT by Education

Q1 Purpose Statement — Congregation		
Key	Vital	Modify
A	“Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered.”	“Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation’s ministry and the ministry of the synod and the churchwide organization.”
B	“Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.”	“Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered.”

C	“Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.”	“Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry.”
D	“Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered.”	“Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization.”
E	“Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily life and in their congregation.”	“Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered.”

Q2 Purpose Statement — Synod

Key	Vital	Modify
A	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”
B	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.”
C	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”
D	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”
E	“Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”

Q3 Purpose Statement — Churchwide

Key	Vital	Modify
A	“Provide resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve, and witness in their ministry in daily life.”	“Determine and implement policy for this church’s relationship to governments.”
B	“Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.”	“Establish and reflect this church’s ecumenical stance and its relationship to other churches and direct this church’s policy for relationship with persons of other faiths.”
C	“Witness to the Word of God in Christ by united efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, responding to human need, caring for the sick and suffering, working for justice and peace, and providing guidance to members on social matters.”	“Provide for a comprehensive financial support system for this church’s mission and for the administration of financial resources necessary for fulfillment of the particular responsibilities of the churchwide organization.”
D	“Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.”	“Provide for the rostered ministers for this church.”
E	“Support and establish policy for this church’s mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.”	“Support and establish policy for this church’s mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.”

Q4 Promotes Racial Diversity

Key	Strongly Disagree + Disagreed	Strongly Agree + Agreed	Neutral
A	N = 498 or 36.5%	N = 301 or 22.1%	N = 437 or 32%
B	35-64 year olds	18-24 year olds	NA
C	10.3% Whites 21.8% BIPOC	NA	NA

D	65.9% Non-cisgender 40.6% Cisgender women 33.9% Cisgender male	NA	NA
E	NA	Bachelor's degree Professional degree Master's degree	NA
Qualitative Data Results			
Organization Structure		Dismantling Racism	Other
Recognize the distinct needs of metropolitan and rural congregations.		Distribute resources more equably.	Improve diversity and organizational structure.

483

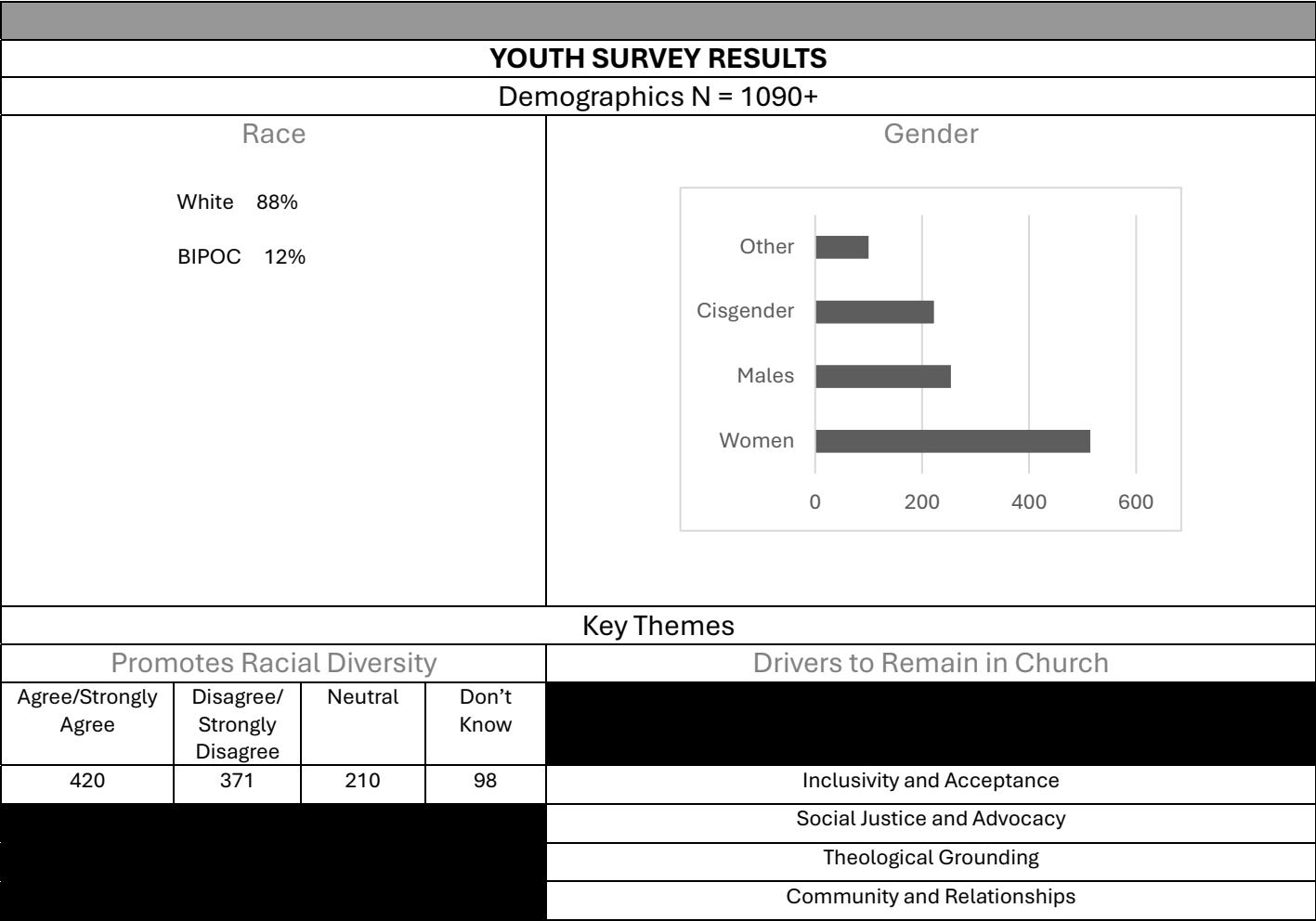
ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS RESULTS		
Demographics N=9		
Geographic Dist.	Age	Gender
Southwestern Texas11% Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast11% Southeast Michigan11% Metropolitan New York11% Caribbean56%		- Male34% - Woman33% - Queer11% - Cisgender22% Education - Master’s degree45% - Bachelor’s degree22%
Key Themes		
	Vital	Modify
Q1 Congregation Purpose Statement	“Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.” (N=9)	“Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.” (N=5)

Q2 Synod Purpose Statement	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.” (N=6)		“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.” (N=6)
Q3 Churchwide Purpose Statement	“Foster interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to implement the mission of this whole church.” (N=5)		“Oversee and establish policy for this church’s relationship to seminaries, colleges, universities, schools, and other education endeavors, and provide support as appropriate.” (N=4)
	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/DKN
Q4 Promote Racial Diversity	NA	N = 5	N = 3 / 1
Info Accessible in Spanish	N = 1	N = 5	N = 3
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 7 (press releases and leadership spaces)		
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 6 (information/national assembly et.al.)		

484

Organizational Structure Changes				Dismantling Racism			
“Flexibility and process streamlining (policy statements), e.g., shifting the focus from institutional policies to people and ministries.”				“Create a Latino Synod.”			
“Decentralization of power and opening the church to external solutions rather than internal ones.”				“Let the Latino community make decisions for themselves.”			
25 YEARS AND UNDER RESULTS							
Demographics N=360							
Age		Race			Gender		
Under 18 years = 28% 18–25 years = 72%		Legend: ■ White ■ Other 13% 87%			200 150 100 50 0 Women Man Cisgender Other		
Key Themes							
Promotes Racial Diversity (N= 364)				Drivers to Remain in Church			
Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Don't Know				
N = 256	N = 49	N = 37	N = 22	Inclusivity and Acceptance			
				Community and Fellowship			
				Youth Engagement and Activities			
				Social Justice and Advocacy			

485



486

487 The following QR Code will lead you to an in-depth video overview of the survey results.

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493 Observations

494 The following represent the findings of the CRLC. The Church currently is navigating
495 unprecedented challenges, both internally and externally. The findings outlined below have
496 emerged from our listening and survey sessions, as well as the ongoing work of the commission.
497 Our activities and focus have been guided by the Church's mission as stated in Chapter 4.01 of
498 the ELCA Constitution, which defines the Church as "a people created by God in Christ,
499 empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and
500 sanctifying activity in the world." In order to fulfill this mission fully we seek to use the
501 following to inform this church of what it means to be welcoming to all of God's children.

502 Identified Areas of Need

503 1. Structural Concerns and Governance

504 **1.1 The Tension:** This church is a ministry: All power in the Church belongs to our Lord
505 Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under his rule and
506 authority. [ELCA constitution 3.01]. It is also a non-profit organization, legally
507 registered in the state of Minnesota [Article 2, Article 5]. For the sake of good
508 stewardship, we utilize governance processes across the three expressions that blend
509 non-profit structures with ecclesiastical structures. Through our listening we have
510 found areas in all three expressions of the church where the governance structures are
511 not serving the purpose of this church, nor are we modeling good stewardship of the
512 tasks and resources entrusted to us, the people. Tension also lies in the need to clearly
513 define the purpose of this church, to ensure governance and resources are appropriately
514 aligned.

515 **1.2 Challenges in Governance Model:** The current governance models in all three
516 expressions have weaknesses. Leadership recruitment, leadership diversity, and
517 intentional and meaningful representation in many synods and congregations are
518 currently highly dependent on passive inbound application, versus a blend of intentional
519 recruitment and open and welcoming invitation. Additionally, there is a wide variance
520 in the implementation of governance practices across congregations and synods which
521 result in unintentional inequities.

522 In both the synod and churchwide expressions, executive power—encompassing the
523 authority to govern and administer—is fully vested in the bishop [13.31, S8.12]. All
524 other elected officials, including the single constitutionally required lay leader, are
525 directed by the bishop. The staff, led by the bishop, have the full responsibility to
526 manage and lead the organization.

527 There are notably wide differences in the implementation of governance practice across
528 the 65 synods, leadership recruiting and election practices, frequency of meeting, term-
529 limit variations, and volunteer turn-over, all of which have an impact on the
530 effectiveness of governance. This variety, while reflecting in part the context of each
531 synod, provides a challenge for the persons, related institutions, organizations and
532 ministries who may have to adjust to these varied circumstances.

Additionally, the current practice of allocating seats on national boards and councils based on a rotation among all synods is not a representative method for such allocations and limits this church's ability to improve diversity and inclusion. Any consideration of representation should ensure a balance of representation from synods while not prohibiting the abilities of people to serve this church.

1.3 Challenges in Administration and Management: Throughout the ELCA's existence, it has been challenging to effectively coordinate leadership across the three expressions of this church. Born in part out of the varied practices of the over 130 predecessor bodies to the ELCA, this disconnect challenges the ability of the ELCA to function as a unified body, creating wide variations in governance, policy application, ministry practices, and resource allocation. Examples of this include pastoral roles on congregation councils and application of policies and rules by bishops.

The current structure has enabled inconsistent practices that challenge the unity and purpose of the ELCA. More clearly delineated roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and strategic oversight, help ensure that the ELCA's leadership structures reflect its theological commitments and operational needs.

These issues are directly connected to the flow-of-funds issues mentioned below.

1.4 Interdependency and funding models: The interdependency of the three expressions has been challenged throughout the ELCA's existence by the tension between the funding model (congregation to synod to churchwide organization) and the inaccurate subsidiary perception of many local leaders that churchwide organization controls synods, which in turn control congregations. This lends itself to misaligned expectations of responsibility across each expression and hampers generosity in today's philanthropic environment.

Currently, congregations collect funds which are then shared with the synod, which in turn shares it with the churchwide organization expression. This model can be impacted by feelings of alienation and disaffection at various points in time.

As the landscape of the local congregation has changed, the capacity or desire to share resources across the three expressions has also changed. This is in part due to a governance structure that depends highly on the historic governance, program, and staffing models of this church which require resources locally for facilities, staff, and program.

Additionally, national trends in charitable giving impact our model. The days of unquestioned giving to the trusted institution, church or otherwise, are gone. Today's congregation and donors have the capacity to respond to the call to be good stewards by determining where resources make the most impact.

1.5 A Misperception of Authority: The current model of governance and the authorities of the congregation, synod, and churchwide organization expressions have existed in tension since the creation of the ELCA. Historic differences in governing practices between the three merging church bodies still exist today, specifically at the congregational level.

Our current governing documents, in reference to one church in three interdependent expressions, state in ELCA 5.01.c. that the governance of this church is one in which all three expressions are “interdependently...sharing responsibility in God’s mission.” It goes on to state that “whenever possible, the entity most directly affected by a decision shall be the principal party responsible for decision and implementation, with the other entities facilitating and assisting.”

Many perceive or expect that decisions and authority solely lie with the churchwide organization and synod expressions as they would in a “diocesan” model of governance.

1.6 Role Clarification Across Expressions: Feedback from surveys and listening sessions highlights the need for clearer role definitions among the three expressions. This includes distinct yet interdependent roles to enhance both accountability and autonomy, thereby fostering a unified mission. This need for clarification stems from unaddressed issues in the formation of the ELCA and the “dynamic of dissonance” between the hierarchical and congregational models of governance that were present in the varied approaches of the predecessor church bodies.

1.7 Balancing Authority with Accountability: A recurring challenge identified by the CRLC is achieving clear, consistent authority across church expressions while upholding accountability. The tension between autonomy and accountability for congregations has been present since the inception of this church. Likewise, authority and accountability are also in tension for rostered ministers serving congregations and bishops giving leadership to synods. Proposed structural adjustments must aim to clarify roles and enhance oversight. Further, current accountability structures must be reviewed to consider their practicality, speed, and equitable application.

1.8 Needed Adaptability and Structuring for Today: Many of the structures of this church within each expression were built in a time of larger participation. Today, the ELCA is reducing in membership by about 110,000 people per year. In this reality, congregations are forced at a ground level to change structures to match the realities of reduced membership. They are experiencing closures, mergers, and re-imaginings. (134 ELCA congregations closed or disaffiliated in 2023.–[ELCA Form A Summary of Congregational Statistics 12/31/23])

Similarly, structural and operational changes have been made in the synod and churchwide organization expressions. However, for all three expressions often the response has been to do the same work or more with fewer resources, which is inequitable to those doing the work. There is an urgent need to step back and consider fundamental purpose, and strategically structure for that core purpose. The three expressions must have the flexibility to size and structure in order to meet the missional needs of the church in their context.

The speed of adaptation required in today’s context demands crystal clarity of purpose, and governing documents and practices that allow for responsive and adaptive change while protecting core values. There is often a conflict between the desire for rapid change and the prescribed processes of discernment.

For example, one reason presented by some of the synods who sent memorials to the Churchwide Assembly in 2022 that called for creation of the CRLC was to address the number of synods. The original number was a compromise between the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). However, the current division of 65 synods no longer provides appropriate representation or good stewardship of resources.

Congregational Distribution

- **Top 5 Largest Synods (by congregations):** Synods 3D, 8D, 4A, 3F, and 7E collectively have 1,131 congregations.
- **Smallest 16 Synods (by congregations):** Synods 7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 8G, 5L, 8A, 5G, 2D, 1C, 1D, 4D, 1B, 4F, and 2C together have a total of 1,104 congregations.
- **Comparison:** The largest single synod, 7E, alone hosts 240 congregations, while the combined total for the six smallest synods (7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 8G) is only 259 congregations.

Active Participant Distribution

- **Largest Synod (by active participants):** Synod 3G has 96,792 active participants.
- **Smallest 13 Synods (by active participants):** Synods 7G, 9F, 8H, 4C, 1A, 8A, 8E, 8C, 5G, 4D, 1D, 1F, and 1C together have a total of 92,983 active participants.

In some cases, synods may need to merge, in others split. Current governing documents require approval of the Churchwide Assembly to make this happen, which can prove cumbersome.

Current governance structures require funding at a level that is no longer available, due to the reduction in size of this church. Ministries at the margins, such as those coming from our ethnic-specific tables, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, and service learning ministries are underfunded. Critical evaluation of priorities is necessary to ensure the essential work of this church is funded and following its mission.

1.9 Governance Adaptations: As previously stated, the CRLC has identified the need for governance updates to enhance adaptability and streamline responsibilities across the churchwide organization, synod and congregation expressions. These updates aim to establish a more cohesive, mission-oriented framework.

As is often the case with organizations, our current systems tend to default to preserving the status quo. Given this reality, it is essential to evaluate roles and structures from an organizational perspective, separate from the individuals currently occupying those roles or the existing systems. This approach allows us to focus on what will be necessary to meet future needs effectively.

1.10. Representation: Vital and important areas of our church’s engagement in the world, such as social ministry organizations, campus ministries, outdoor ministries, non-traditional worshipping communities, and other ministries—often served by non-rostered professionals—lack formal recognition within the current structures. These ministries, which provide significant diversity and outreach, are asking for greater connection, a strength that is currently underutilized. Formal recognition might include institutional access to voice and vote in formal settings, addressing these gaps in representation in the current three expressions. Recognition of these ministries not represented by the three expressions would move us toward being a more equitable and inclusive church.

1.11 Lay Leadership: Lay leadership has played a vital role in the ELCA and continues to grow in prominence today. Ensuring a balance of voices requires intentionality in how both lay and rostered leaders are equipped and empowered to contribute to the decision-making processes of this church.

The 40% maximum allocation for rostered ministers and the 60% minimum allocation for lay participants in synod and churchwide assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units provides a structural framework for representation. This allocation ensures that those called to pastoral and diaconal leadership—who are often deeply engaged in the theological and practical concerns of this church—have a meaningful voice, while affirming the critical role of lay leaders in this church’s mission. However, challenges arise when we assume that simply meeting these numerical requirements guarantees equitable lay representation. Lay participation is often shaped by factors such as access to resources, time, and opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary for meaningful engagement in governance.

Representation must go beyond mere numbers; it must include people—both rostered and lay leaders—who are well-prepared to thoughtfully and faithfully engage in this church’s mission and governance. This involves identifying individuals who can offer diverse perspectives while addressing the complexities and opportunities facing the church today.

By fostering robust collaboration between rostered and lay leaders, we honor the significant Lutheran emphasis on the ministry of the baptized and create a decision-making body that reflects the fullness of the church’s gifts.

1.12. Program Adaptability: Survey data indicates that younger congregants prioritize flexible governance that fosters youth engagement and inclusive community practices. Congregations excelling in intergenerational ministry demonstrate adaptability, programmatic diversity, and a willingness to evolve in response to changing needs. These practices bridge generational divides, foster collaborative leadership, and share spiritual growth.

1.13 Global Lutheran Communion and Ecumenical Relationships: The ELCA is not a church on its own. It is part of the global Lutheran communion. The ELCA plays an important role in partnership and mutual support with the Lutheran World Federation and many of its member churches. Furthermore, the ELCA is actively engaged ecumenically, with several full communion relationships with other denominations and

with ecumenical and interfaith dialogues. This all needs to be kept in mind as the purposes and structures of this church are considered.

2. Commitment to the Dignity of All People

2.1 Biblical Grounding: The core principles of the Lutheran understanding of the work of the Triune God undergird the ELCA support for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policies and education. Creation stories tell of the goodness of the majestic diversity that flows from God’s creative and sustaining power. (Genesis 1, 2.) Jesus lived out God’s call to respond to the needs of anyone who is marginalized and unjustly treated. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit signaled the divine intention for the Church to be inclusive of all peoples and languages by making the disciples able to communicate in the plurality of languages of their world (Acts 2:4). Paul explains in his letter to the Corinthians that within the diversity of the body of Christ some priority is given to those whom society despises or marginalizes: (1 Cor. 12:22).

2.2 Lutheran Heritage: Martin Luther championed the freedom and responsibility of Christians within the community. The Lutheran Confessions (Book of Concord) hold the government and the Church responsible for the well-being of vulnerable members of the community. Furthermore, from the beginning of the Reformation the Lutheran tradition highlighted the need of diversity of languages and cultures (i.e., the vernacular) in the proclamation of the Word and in the worship life of the Christian community (Luther’s *An Open Letter on Translating* 1530 and also *Preface to The German Mass* and *Order of Divine Service* 1526).

From the perspective of Lutheran ecclesiology, the Church is not merely an organization but an *ekklesia*—the people called, gathered and enlightened by God (Small Catechism, Article 3). This calling is not for the Church to perpetuate its own existence but to bear witness (with words and actions) to the saving work of Jesus Christ, heralding the imminent realization of God’s realm. As such, the Church as a human organization is transient, its ultimate purpose fulfilled in serving God’s purpose toward the well-being of all. The proclamation of the law and the gospel is central to this witness. God’s law (first use) compels us toward the enactment of justice, which demands denouncing evil and injustice. The second use of God’s law calls to repentance for both systemic sin and individual sins, including racism and patriarchy (ELCA Social Statements *Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* and *Faith, Sexism and Justice*). The good news of Jesus Christ (gospel) sets us free to seek (and delight in) the well-being of all people in the unique individuality in which God has created each one of us.

Moreover, the ELCA teaches that, “Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society” (ELCA Social Statement *Church in Society, A Lutheran Perspective*) That is, as people justified by grace through faith, Lutherans are called to live out their faith in society by working toward a more just and inclusive world. This includes challenging systemic inequalities and ensuring that all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, or sexuality, are valued equally as part of God’s creation.

The impetus for DEIA initiatives is deeply biblical, belongs to the best of the Lutheran heritage, and to the essence of the Church, that is, of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28). The implementation of DEIA principles within this church's governance and educational practices addresses current challenges in both Church and society and leverages them as opportunities to witness and live out both God's law toward justice and the gospel's embrace of all people.

2.3 DEIA Policies and Training: The DEIA audit process was not initiated by the CRLC; however, we have received its findings and they have informed our work. This audit has recommended updated governance and personnel policies, DEIA training for leaders, and the inclusion of DEIA principles in theological education. These changes are seen as foundational to aligning church practices with the ELCA's commitment to justice and inclusivity. Many of the challenges listed in the structural and governance section of identified challenges are disproportionately affecting the ethnic-specific ministries and historically marginalized groups of this church. All needed evolutions of the governance practices should consider both the theology and methodology necessary to truly bring everyone to the table.

2.4 Youth and Inclusivity: Youth respondents from the 2024 National Youth Gathering, expressed strong support for the ELCA's inclusivity regarding ethnicity, gender identity, and LGBTQIA+ rights. Many respondents reported social justice and advocacy as being essential to this church's mission, and there was widespread support for DEIA as a core value important to young members .

3. Identity and Purpose Statements

3.1 Updating Purpose Statements: Revisions to the Statements of Purpose in the ELCA Constitutions are needed to better reflect the ELCA's mission in contemporary contexts and in light of existing resources. These updates must aim to ensure clarity in the roles of each expression, with a renewed focus and clarity on this church's core mission, informed by the commission's discernment about the essential and ancillary works of the Church.

Analysis of the laity and general population surveys reveals varied perceptions of the ELCA's mission. Respondents call for this church to articulate its mission in ways that are clear, concise, and understandable to all, particularly around themes of social justice, peace, and inclusion, specifically as it relates to the proclamation of the core Lutheran proclamation of the gospel as the justification by grace through faith that is for everyone equally.

3.1.1 The commission had significant debate and consideration of the current Statements of Purpose for each of the expressions of this church. We recognize that, while there may be changes needed in the operational execution of the purposes for each expression, the commission has not taken action to recommend changes to our Statements of Purpose, given the need for ongoing discernment and inclusion of other voices.

4. Theological and Ecclesiological Foundations

4.1 Ecclesiology: Concern has been expressed that the ELCA ecclesiology needs to be better understood across this church, both in its current and predecessor forms, in order to align any proposed changes with both theology and practical matters.

4.2 Faith Formation and Mission: Youth and lay respondents express a desire for the ELCA to be deeply engaged in spiritual formation, emphasizing faith in daily life, community, and outreach. This includes support for youth-focused and intergenerational ministry and proposals for curriculum updates that emphasize active discipleship and faith sharing.

5. Congregational Health and Vitality

Congregational Ministry: Congregational ministry across the ELCA reflects both enduring strengths and significant challenges. Many congregations are seen as trusted, welcoming communities that foster deep relationships and prioritize local service, particularly in areas such as food insecurity and community outreach. These congregations emphasize a sense of family, offering spaces for intergenerational connection and support. However, survey data and listening sessions reveal growing disparities in resources and programming between urban and rural congregations, and between large and small churches. There is also a recognized need across the ELCA for greater adaptability, with many members calling for governance structures that allow congregations to respond to their unique contexts. Despite high levels of openness to change, particularly among younger members, implementing substantial reforms remains a challenge. As a result, while ELCA congregations are deeply committed to their communities, many recognize the need for new strategies to engage younger generations, diversify leadership, and build a more inclusive church.

6. Vocational Leadership:

The current structures, governance process, and operational patterns of interconnectivity between communities, congregations, synods, and churchwide organization are highly dependent on rostered leadership. Rostered leadership shortages in certain regions, congregational capacity to afford rostered leadership, and call and ordination processes are all challenging the current operational practices.

Additional challenges include inconsistencies in all expressions of this church in call practices, including but not limited to, the varied recognition of those in specialized calls, assignment and approval of first call placements. These inconsistencies disproportionately affect our LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC leaders.

We note that a more flexible understanding of call and vocational preparation will likely be required for the future of this church. The boundaries of that flexibility must be clear and enforced equivalently. Changes to such processes should include diverse voices and experiences at the table.

815 7. Community and Relationship Building Across Expressions

816 7.1 **Enhanced Communication and Resource Sharing:** Listening sessions have
817 identified the need for more effective communication and collaboration among
818 congregations, synods, and churchwide leaders. The world has moved to an expectation
819 of faster and more transparent communication. Historical models of slow response
820 allow gaps which are filled by others and leave space for conflict, when clear timely
821 responses could reduce the opportunity for conflict. This strategic shift in
822 communication strategy is essential to support the ELCA's commitment to being an
823 anti-racist church, ensuring that gaps do not lead to misunderstandings or conflicts that
824 undermine this mission.

825 Suggested improvements arising from our listening include better resource-sharing
826 platforms and consistent engagement channels to support unified and localized mission
827 work. This is notably dependent on participants engaging in whatever channels and
828 platforms are available.

829 7.2 **Community Integration and Inclusivity:** The importance of community, belonging,
830 and relationships is a consistent theme among laity and youth. Youth respondents
831 particularly value intergenerational bonds and a sense of family within congregations,
832 suggesting that these connections are crucial to this church's long-term vitality.

833 8. Perspectives in the Pew and Pulpit

834 8.1 **Openness and Urgency to Change:** While most ELCA congregations report openness
835 to change, the CRLC notes a need for greater urgency and willingness to act in all
836 expressions of this church. Lay and rostered leaders indicate a readiness to adapt but
837 recognize a gap in implementing substantial changes. Current structures will not be
838 supportable financially and may struggle to have sufficient volunteer and professional
839 leadership in the near future.

840 8.2 **Diversity of Perspective:** While the members of this church ostensibly share
841 commitments to God's Word and the historic Lutheran confessions, they are not of one
842 mind about many issues, including race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexuality. As this
843 church expresses its voice in the world through leadership in the churchwide
844 organization and synodical expressions and through Churchwide Assembly actions,
845 often the membership of this church does not feel involved and may not agree with the
846 statements made. Indeed, members of this church may not agree with one another. This
847 impacts the funding models of this church, but the financial concern should not drive
848 the voice of this church. While parts of this tension may be unavoidable, governance,
849 structural, and operational changes may ease this tension.

850 9. Practical Concerns

851 **Timing and Structural Constraints of the CRLC:** The notable speed of decline of
852 the traditional membership model places an urgency on this work. The very structures

853 we are considering themselves are a hindrance to timing. From its inception, the CRLC
854 was challenged by time available to do the work we have been called to.

855 Further, the structure and timeline of the CRLC, fully dependent on volunteers who
856 have the time and means to do the work, is indicative of the larger systemic challenges
857 across the structure and leadership of the church, inherently limiting the full
858 participation of the diversity represented in this church.

859 The continuation of this work and implementation of recommendations will be
860 impacted by the elections of a presiding bishop and secretary by the 2025 Churchwide
861 Assembly. Future work on these matters will require comprehensive coordination with
862 other efforts of this church.
863

864 Recommendations

865 The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends several items for adoption or
866 action by various bodies within the church. The recommendations, their status, and rationale are
867 set forth below.

868 Recommendations 1-6 are addressed to the Churchwide Assembly or the Church Council as
869 appropriate, based on the determination of the CRLC as to which body is the appropriate
870 authority to implement the recommendation.

871 Recommendations 1 and 2 call for action on changes to governing documents, policies, and
872 procedures to improve accountability within the church, with particular intentionality around
873 dismantling racism.

- 874 1. Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism
- 875 2. Accountability within the ELCA

876 Recommendations 3-5 call for the creation of task forces to continue the work on issues of
877 importance identified by the CRLC that the commission did not have time to complete between
878 convening in July 2023 and preparing this final report in April 2025.

- 879 3. Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose
- 880 4. Financial Coordinating Task Force
- 881 5. Task Force to Develop Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance
- 882 Toolkit and Orientation Program

883 Recommendation 6 calls for various policies and resources to clarify and uplift the ministry of
884 ministers of Word and Service in the future life of this church.

- 885 6. Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and Service

886 Recommendations 7-12 call for specific changes to the ELCA's governing documents, and they
887 are listed here in the order in which they appear in our governing documents:

- 888 7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Changes to Governing Documents
- 889 and Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups
- 890 8. Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's Relationship with other Organizations
- 891 9. Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents
- 892 10. Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of Misconduct
- 893 11. Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing Documents
- 894 12. Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution Mandatory

895 Because the normal course for amendments to the ELCA's constitution and bylaws to be adopted
896 by the Churchwide Assembly involves the Church Council recommending those changes at its
897 November meeting preceding the assembly, recommendations 7-12 were all presented to the
898 Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The council has already adopted the
899 recommended continuing resolutions relating to the DEIA Audit (Recommendation 7), as
900 continuing resolutions may be adopted by the Church Council without a vote of the Churchwide
901 Assembly. Other recommended changes await further work before they can be implemented

902 (e.g., the change to the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings in Recommendation 10 would
903 not be adopted unless the corresponding bylaw is adopted by the Churchwide
904 Assembly). Specific details of the status of each of these governing document changes appear
905 after the text of the Recommendation below.

906 Finally, the Church Council referred a question concerning the name of the ELCA to the CRLC
907 in its action CC22.11.34.cc. This is the only item specifically referred to the CRLC outside of its
908 original mandate. Recommendation 13 contains the CRLC's response to this Church Council
909 action.

910 13. ELCA Name Change

911

912

913 **Recommendation 1: Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism**

914 *(Related to Observations 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)*

915 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends that the ELCA Church**
916 **Council immediately begin identifying and acting upon mutual accountability measures**
917 **and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive**
918 **centering of dismantling racism within the denomination. These measures and incentives**
919 **shall be guided by the recommendations outlined in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and**
920 **Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.**

921 **To ensure timely action, all constitution and bylaw amendments needed for the**
922 **development and implementation of these accountability measures and compliance**
923 **incentives must be developed and advanced in time for consideration by the 2028**
924 **Churchwide Assembly. If by that time such measures and incentives have not been**
925 **adequately identified or enacted, we recommend the ELCA Church Council call for a**
926 **special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to evaluate and enact necessary constitutional**
927 **revisions that will enable and advance the ELCA's commitment to anti-racism work.**

928
929 *Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-*
930 *6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

931
932 ***Rationale:***

933 The Commission was charged with being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to
934 dismantle racism. As a commission we took this directive to include this church's commitment to
935 the dignity of all people; a commitment which is strongly rooted in Lutheran theology. (See
936 *Observation 2.2.*)

937 The CRLC recognizes that there is racism within this church, and we further recognize that there
938 exists within this church various forms of discrimination against other historically
939 underrepresented groups as well. While the CRLC's mandate was specific to the charge of
940 dismantling racism, we encourage the Church Council's to expand the work beyond dismantling
941 racism to include dismantling discrimination against all historically underrepresented groups.

942 This church at its inception committed to goals around diversity [ELCA 5.01.A24. and
943 following], and there has been significant frustration at the slow progress toward becoming a
944 truly welcoming church and realizing authentic diversity that recognizes the dignity of all human
945 beings.

946 In recent years significant effort has been undertaken in the completion of a Diversity, Equity,
947 Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the creation of a Strategy Toward Authentic
948 Diversity, but action to implement the outcomes of this work has not permeated the church.

949 The commission believes this work can wait no longer. This work is sufficiently important that it
950 could necessitate a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to fundamentally address the
951 way our governing documents impede this work. However, the commission believes a concerted
952 effort should be made to advance this issue before and to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.
953 Specific measures should be presented to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly to center this work,

954 and if sufficient actions cannot be identified and developed for that assembly, then it is the
955 recommendation of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church that a special meeting of
956 the Churchwide Assembly should be called for revision to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and*
957 *Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA.*

958 While much that needs to be done to accomplish this work may be centered in our constitution
959 and bylaws, which can only be amended by the Churchwide Assembly, the commission
960 encourages the Church Council to act on continuing resolutions and policies that can advance
961 this work before the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.
962

Recommendation 2: Accountability within the ELCA

(Related to Observation 1.7)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends:

- 1. That the Church Council adopt a resolution instructing the Office of the Secretary to explore collaboration with our full-communion partners to develop processes for conflict resolution within the church that are endorsed by, but independent of, the churchwide organization, and ensuring that they are responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups.**
- 2. That the Church Council adopt a resolution directing the Committee on Appeals to develop resources to help synods both (a) identify candidates to serve on Consultation Committees with the appropriate spiritual gifts and demonstrated competencies in working with varied ethnic backgrounds and (b) train them in conflict resolution.**

Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Rationale:

In other actions, the CRLC has recommended changes to improve synod bishops' access to professional investigatory services under supervision of the ELCA's general counsel through cost sharing between the synod and the churchwide organization. The CRLC has also brought forward recommendations concerning standardized training for congregation council members. Other questions persist about accountability and how it is achieved in our church's governance system. There is the recurring challenge of achieving clear, consistent authority across church expressions while upholding accountability. Noting the timeless tension between autonomy and accountability, the CRLC sees that current accountability structures must be reviewed to consider their practicality, speed, and equitable application." (*Observation 1.7*)

A fundamental issue related to accountability systems in the Church, as well as the rest of society, is that people want others to be accountable more than they want to be held accountable themselves. Systems of accountability normally require parties to cede a portion of their authority to a system that may determine that some action they took crossed a boundary, norm, or rule and that there needs to be a "consequence" to that. Such consequences, broadly speaking, could include an apology, a repentance, or a change in behavior, not just some form of punishment. When an existing system is told that a new system of accountability should be considered for the good of the whole, the existing system often resists.

Accountability systems in our church primarily are governed by Chapter 20 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* and related documents, including Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline and the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings. These documents spell out a formal disciplinary process that has robust due process rights for the accused and can culminate in serious sanctions against the accused. That full disciplinary process is used in an exceptionally small number of cases. Prior to the disciplinary process, these matters must be

referred to Consultation. The Consultation system does not have the ability to take formal action against a person in our church, and it “endeavors to resolve the controversy through recommendations that are pastoral and therapeutic and which, if accepted by the parties and others concerned would eliminate the necessity for [disciplinary] proceedings” [Rule D12 of the *Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings*]. This Consultation process is intended to help achieve one of the Grounding Values articulated in *Definitions and Guidelines*, namely “the understanding that, following misconduct, the desired outcome is restoration of right relationships with God and with one another. This church embraces disciplinary processes which may include elements of counseling, admonition, and correction with the objective of healing and reconciliation.”

A. Causes for Concern: Drawing from the listening sessions and the experiences of members of the CRLC, the CRLC identified that current accountability structures do not promptly resolve the various types of misconduct or harm to relationships that can come from interactions of members, rostered leaders, congregations, synods, bishops, and the churchwide organization. The CRLC identified the following issues with current systems:

1. Formal processes for accountability outlined in the constitutions of the ELCA are cumbersome.

First, formal processes for accountability (consultation or discipline) can only be initiated by a limited group of people. That is, there is no mechanism for an individual who feels he or she has been wronged by a part of our church (i.e., by a bishop, a rostered leader, or a congregation) to initiate a process that could lead to a third party helping to hold that person or congregation accountable.

Further, current disciplinary processes appropriately focus on due process and protecting the rights of the accused, but this causes the processes to require a substantial investment of time, energy, and financial resources. These formal disciplinary processes seem more appropriate to actions that border on criminal activity (e.g., certain types of sexual or financial misconduct) and less appropriate for other forms of relational violations (e.g., lying or misleading others, apparently discriminatory words or actions, actions contrary to this church’s teachings). Thus, there is a gap in response for concerns raised that do not rise to the level of disciplinable offenses.

Consultation panels, while carrying fewer procedural formalities, are still a significant investment of time and energy by the bishop and others involved in the process.

2. Current processes are too binary.

There is a clear process for matters of discipline but no process or guidance for dealing with matters that may not rise to the level of discipline, yet still require accountability. (For example, requiring rostered ministers to complete boundaries training or requiring congregations or synods to file certain reports. These are expectations with no process for holding those who do not meet them accountable and limited to no consequences for failure to meet these expectations.) Formal disciplinary processes that could lead to significant consequences for rostered ministers should have significant protections built in, but a streamlined process oriented toward reconciliation and restoration could serve well for various forms of relational violations.

1044 **3. Relationships can be confused.**

1045 Often the one leading a process of accountability is also one who has authority or
1046 influence over the person in another sphere. (For example, a synod bishop may need to
1047 hold a rostered minister accountable but is also charged with that rostered minister's
1048 pastoral care. While there are workarounds to specific situations [e.g., the bishop can
1049 appoint an alternate person for pastoral care] the problem itself goes beyond those
1050 specific remedies.) Further, the synod bishop, or in the case of member discipline the
1051 synod vice president, often acts as both the "prosecutor" in disciplinary matters while
1052 also having a significant role in convening the adjudicatory body that will hear the case.

1053 **B. Possible Ways Forward:** The identification of the above issues has led to the following
1054 considerations regarding possible ways forward:

1055 **1. The role of an ombudsperson.**

1056 How might a neutral third party be able to participate in systems of accountability that are
1057 not disciplinary? How would the neutrality of this person be assured? The CRLC
1058 recognizes both the merits of this possibility and the need for strongly articulated
1059 expectations and understanding of the role's independence and bounds of
1060 influence/authority. A role like this might function either (a) similarly to the first level of
1061 complaints to the local Bar Association about attorney misconduct, with an "intake"
1062 process to determine which complaints appear to have sufficient merit to warrant further
1063 investigation; or (b) a person who can hear the concern and serve as an advocate to help
1064 guide the person making the complaint on options and appropriate next steps to take to
1065 navigate ELCA systems to bring a resolution to the concern.

1066 The CRLC is aware of work that is ongoing concerning the creation of the position of a
1067 racial justice ombudsperson as supported by the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline
1068 Process for Rostered Ministers of Color. Such a position is still under consideration by
1069 the churchwide organization's Administrative Team in consultation with the Conference
1070 of Bishops. The considerations of the CRLC in this section are similar to, but broader
1071 than, the ombudsperson position considered in that proposal. The ombudsperson
1072 contemplated here could and should be a resource for concerns of the kind articulated in
1073 the racial justice ombudsperson proposal, which is why it is important that this position
1074 be responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups. However, the
1075 ombudsperson contemplated by the CRLC could also be a resource for individuals
1076 harmed by a broader range of misconduct. Further, the CRLC believes it is important that
1077 this role have some measure of independence from the churchwide organization, which is
1078 why we believe collaboration with full-communion partners is appropriate.

1079 **2. An independent adjudicatory body.**

1080 Could there be some kind of neutral adjudicatory body or deployed network of
1081 individuals with conflict-resolution skills who could be called upon to assist with disputes
1082 early on? Often, by the time a matter has reached a formal Consultation panel, the rifts
1083 are deep enough that reconciliation is not possible and the logical next step is, for
1084 example, resignation of the affected rostered leader. Perhaps having a resource of

1085 individuals trained in conflict resolution accessible earlier in the process could lead to
1086 reconciliation before the situation is too far gone.

1087 If other full-communion partners were willing to participate, such dispute resolution
1088 specialists could be drawn from several denominations, giving them more credibility as a
1089 neutral party seeking mutually agreeable resolution. If this kind of structure were
1090 adopted, perhaps it makes more sense for the ombudsperson to function as in option (a)
1091 above, serving as the filter to help determine which concerns are significant enough to
1092 warrant access to the dispute resolution body. We believe there could be enough appetite
1093 for and benefit to a system that collaborates across denominations that it is appropriate
1094 for the Church Council to direct the churchwide organization to explore such
1095 possibilities.

1096 **3. Preventive Training.**

1097 In what ways can the denomination provide standardized trainings for congregation,
1098 synod, and Church Council leaders? The CRLC recommends training to make
1099 Consultation Committees more properly selected for the gifts needed for the role and
1100 more trained and effective in dispute resolution.

1101 **4. Change in Terms.**

1102 When is it appropriate to use the language of discipline and when might “softer”
1103 language concerning accountability and reconciliation be more beneficial? Speaking and
1104 thinking more in terms of “conflict resolution” may be beneficial to shift the mindset of
1105 this church toward the values of reconciliation and restoration on which our systems are
1106 based.

1107

1108 Recommendation 3: Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose

1109 *(Related to Observations 3, 3.1, 3.1.1., 5, 6,8.1)*

1110 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:**

1111 **The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) establish the**
1112 **Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose to operate with the scope of work outlined**
1113 **below.**

1114 *Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-*
1115 *6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1116

1117 **Rationale:**

1118 In 2022, the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) was tasked with reevaluating
1119 the purpose statements of the three expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the
1120 churchwide organization—with a focus on our commitment to dismantling racism. The
1121 complexity of this task has revealed that additional expertise and time are necessary to
1122 thoroughly address these critical issues.

1123 **Scope of Work:**

1124 The primary charge of the TFIP will be to:

1125 **1. Clarify Purpose Statements.**

- 1126
 - Assess the adequacy and clarity of the purpose statements in the ELCA Constitution,
1127 the *Constitution for Synods*, and the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, building
1128 on the foundational work of the CRLC.
 - Address the role and function of synods in relation to congregations and the
1129 churchwide organization, clarifying governance structures to ensure they support this
1130 church's mission.
1131

1132 **2. Analyze Structural Interdependence:**

- 1133
 - Assess how current governance structures support or hinder the fulfillment of this
1134 church's mission.
 - Explore opportunities to improve engagement, transparency, and effectiveness in
1135 governance.
1136

1137 **3. Promote Justice and Equity:**

- 1138
 - Investigate how governance structures might perpetuate systemic inequalities and
1139 recommend changes to promote inclusion and equity.
 - Define and codify the core values of this church in its governance documents to
1140 ensure they are upheld across all expressions of this church.
1141

1142 **Deliverables:**

1143 In the course of its work, the task force will present a report to the Church Council with its
1144 findings, including but not limited to:

- 1145 • Recommendations, if appropriate, for constitutional revisions related to purpose
1146 statements.
- 1147 • A comprehensive analysis of the current governance structures, highlighting
1148 strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
- 1149 • A framework of guiding principles for governance that aligns with this church's
1150 mission and values.
- 1151 • Recommendations based on their findings, related to structural adjustments, or
1152 alternative governance structures.
- 1153 • A framework for a strategic implementation plan related to any proposed changes,
1154 possibly across multiple Churchwide Assembly cycles.

1155 **Membership and Composition:**

1156 The TFIP should consist of no more than twelve members, including at least five from the CRLC
1157 to maintain continuity. The task force should also incorporate new members, especially from
1158 historically underrepresented groups within the ELCA, to bring diverse perspectives to the table.
1159 Additionally, membership should include representation from related institutions and other
1160 ministries and individuals with expertise in church governance, history, and constitutional law.

1161 **Resources:**

1162 The TFIP will have access to all research, work product and findings of the CRLC. Specifically,
1163 we call the task force's attention to *Appendix Three: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod*
1164 *Purpose and Structure* for consideration when undertaking its work.
1165

1166 Recommendation 4: Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTC)

1167 *(Related to Observations 1.3, 1.4)*

1168 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the ELCA**
1169 **Church Council take action, or recommend that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly take**
1170 **action, to create a Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTF) as described below.**

1171 *Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-*
1172 *6, 2025.*

1173 ***Rationale:***

1174 In an effort to most effectively and efficiently access, utilize, and manage financial resources
1175 across all entities within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a holistic
1176 perspective is needed. The current financial management and funding models for the ELCA
1177 denomination are disparate at best and have not evolved with societal shifts in financial
1178 management and funding. The current system is built in silos at different organizational levels
1179 and lacks coherence. There are four areas of focus that need to be addressed: revenues,
1180 expenditures, asset management, and overall financial management.

1181 The flow of revenues involves any method of accessing funds to support both ongoing mission
1182 needs as well as one-time fundraising activities. These needs occur within every single ELCA
1183 entity, from the local congregation, through the synod, to the churchwide organization, and in the
1184 related institutions, organizations, and ministries (RIOMs). Much of the denominational funding
1185 still occurs through the collection plate. Stewardship materials and fundraising tools and
1186 techniques should continue to be provided, and a repository of best practices made available to
1187 support such revenues. However, methods of donation and donor reasoning have significantly
1188 evolved since the creation of the ELCA. The trend over the last few decades has been towards
1189 donors desiring more visibility of, if not control of, the use of donations. There are certainly
1190 stewardship resources available, but how well is this coordinated? There is some lament that the
1191 ELCA has an older demographic profile, but the silver lining is there are per capita more funds
1192 potentially available for donation. For the synods and churchwide organization, significant
1193 amounts of their revenues emanate from the congregations. The model for how these funds flow
1194 is outdated. A holistic view of all potential revenues should be taken to both maximize revenues
1195 and stabilize funding streams for predictability and sustainability.

1196 Expenditures across all entities within the ELCA should always be tied to the purpose of the
1197 entity as budgeted within the context of a strategic plan. It is a core function of every governing
1198 body to ensure the development and implementation of a strategic plan. This plan is needed to
1199 ensure expenditures are allocated according to the organization's priorities. The tie between
1200 expenditures and strategic plans needs to be visible and shared. For example, the priority may be
1201 to address underfunded pastoral leadership, which especially affects non-white, non-male
1202 rostered ministers. Pastoral compensation is likely the major expenditure for most congregations.
1203 Just as with revenues, there need to be modern resources and best practices information made
1204 available to all entities related to expenditures. In addition, due to the multi-entity nature of the
1205 ELCA, priorities are wide-ranging and sometimes competing between entities. There needs to be

1206 a forum where discussion can occur to surface such issues and allow the various entities to better
1207 understand the actions of others and to identify potential areas of synergy.

1208 Asset management across congregations, synods, other entities, separately incorporated
1209 ministries (SIMs), and the churchwide organization are not well coordinated. At the local level
1210 there are many asset pools that could benefit from being included in a larger asset pool.
1211 Decreased expenses, better risk management, and access to professional investment services are
1212 some of the benefits. At the national level, there are silos of assets managed by disparate entities
1213 and governed by typically non-communicating boards. The same types of benefits that exist at
1214 the local level can also be found at the national level with better coordination.

1215 Financial management within the ELCA takes many forms. For members, the ELCA Federal
1216 Credit Union may be a vehicle of financial management. For most smaller congregations,
1217 financial management is an ongoing challenge. It is incumbent on the ELCA to provide financial
1218 management tools and best practices that offer support to such entities. The landscape of options
1219 has dramatically increased in the past two decades. For example, the ELCA could identify or
1220 even offer an outsourced financial management service for such entities. In the synod and
1221 churchwide organization expressions, financial management is fractured. Opportunities should
1222 be examined for how the sharing or pooling of systems and expertise or even commonality of
1223 charts of accounts might occur. Another aspect of financial management is financial reporting. It
1224 would also be valuable to see a summary level of financial reporting at the denominational level.
1225 It is always important to offer transparency into the finances of every entity. The need for
1226 financial audits exists for every entity. Again, sharing experiences and audit practices would be
1227 valuable.

1228 To meet these coordination needs and opportunities, an ELCA Financial Coordinating Task
1229 Force (FCTF) should be created under the auspices of the Churchwide Assembly. Membership
1230 of the FCTF should reflect the variety of entities in the ELCA. Therefore, each of the following
1231 entities would appoint one member: Portico Benefit Services, the Mission Investment Fund, and
1232 the ELCA Foundation. The ELCA treasurer would be an *ex officio* member. In addition, the
1233 ELCA Church Council would appoint one of its own members and two members of the ELCA
1234 who are financial experts or investment professionals. The Conference of Bishops would appoint
1235 a synod treasurer, the ELCA Larger Church Conference would appoint one member, and a small
1236 congregation treasurer would be appointed. Notwithstanding any other provision of the *ELCA*
1237 *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*, financial expertise shall be the determining
1238 factor in all of these appointments. Financially-related separately incorporated ministries of the
1239 ELCA and the Office of the Treasurer shall provide staff support and funding for the FCTF.

1240 The purpose of the FCTF is to provide a forum for all entities within the ELCA to communicate
1241 and share best practices, resources, and tools related to financial management. In addition, the
1242 FCTF should develop a comprehensive financial strategic plan for the denomination. This plan
1243 would acknowledge the wide range of entities that form the ELCA and their roles in financial
1244 management. The plan should provide recommendations that clarify and improve revenue
1245 streams, target expenditures, coordinate asset management and in general, improve financial
1246 management across the ELCA.

1247 Specifically, the FCTF shall develop the denominational plan by October 2026. In addition, the
1248 FCTF shall provide a recommendation by March 2027 of how to coordinate the governance
1249 and/or operations of the financially-related separately incorporated ministries and any other

1250 financially-related national level entity in an effort to reduce costs, share administration, and
1251 increase their value to the members and entities of the ELCA, while still ensuring appropriate
1252 liability protections. The FCTF shall report its activities to the ELCA Church Council and
1253 provide a report with findings and recommendations to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

1254 No changes are recommended to the *ELCA Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* at
1255 this time.

1256

1257 Recommendation 5: Creation of a Task Force to Develop a Comprehensive
1258 Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit and Orientation Program

1259 *(Related to Observations 1.6, 1.7, 1.11, 5, 6)*

1260 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:**

1261 **The Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA to establish a task force**
1262 **dedicated to developing a comprehensive congregational management and governance**
1263 **toolkit. This toolkit will integrate and enhance existing resources while tailoring additional**
1264 **tools to meet the diverse needs of all ELCA congregations. Additionally, the task force will**
1265 **design an orientation program framework for new congregation council members that**
1266 **synods can voluntarily implement to ensure these leaders are well-prepared for their roles.**

1267 *Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1268

1269 **Rationale:**

1270 In the ELCA, our congregations face varied challenges and opportunities necessitating a unified
1271 yet adaptable resource for effective management and governance. Recognizing that there are
1272 some existing resources that align with the goal of this proposal, this toolkit and orientation
1273 program should standardize and consolidate those resources, identify existing best practices and
1274 result in the development of new resources while accommodating the unique contexts of our
1275 congregations, ranging from small, rural parishes to large, urban communities.

1276 **Task Force Composition:**

1277 The task force will consist of representatives from:

- 1278 • Small congregations
1279 • Large congregations
1280 • Synods
1281 • Churchwide organization
1282 • Conference of Bishops
1283 • Synod vice presidents

1284 This diverse group will ensure that the toolkit and orientation program incorporate a broad range
1285 of perspectives and meet the varied needs of our congregations. This group should be comprised
1286 in alignment with the stated representational goals of this church.

1287 **Objectives:**

1288 **1. Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit**
1289 **that includes:**

- 1290 • Guidelines on congregation council roles and responsibilities.
1291 • Financial management and reporting best practices.
1292 • Strategic planning and mission alignment resources.

- 1293 • Conflict resolution and community engagement tools.
 - 1294 • Compliance guidelines for legal and ethical standards.
 - 1295 • Property management and utilization guidelines.
 - 1296 • Customizable templates and checklists for church operations.
 - 1297 • Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives to
 - 1298 ensure they permeate all aspects of congregation life.
- 1299 The task force should make an effort to review existing resources and incorporate current or
- 1300 revised versions of those resources in this toolkit.

1301 **2. Create an Orientation Program Framework for New Congregation Council**

1302 **Members that:**

- 1303 • Provides an overview of ELCA structures and governance.
- 1304 • Offers training on the legal and fiduciary duties of council members.
- 1305 • Includes leadership and spiritual development modules.
- 1306 • Teaches skills for effective communication and conflict resolution.
- 1307 • Uses case studies for practical learning and application.
- 1308 • Educates congregational leaders about existing resources for continuous support and
- 1309 development.
- 1310 • Provides guidance to participants on local congregation lay leadership succession
- 1311 planning for congregation council and other leadership roles, with an aspiration
- 1312 toward our representational goals as a denomination.
- 1313 • Promotes collaboration across ELCA churchwide expressions to foster a unified
- 1314 approach to church management.

1315 The framework is designed by the task force, with the adaptation and execution owned by each

1316 synod, allowing for tailoring to meet local needs and contexts.

1317 **Implementation Timeline:**

- 1318 • **Quarter 1:** Formation of the task force and initial scope and objective meetings
- 1319 • **Quarter 2-4:** Research existing resources and development phase for the toolkit and
- 1320 orientation program
- 1321 • **Quarter 4-6:** Pilot testing in selected synods
- 1322 • **Quarter 7-8:** Evaluation and revisions based on feedback
- 1323 • **Quarter 9:** Official rollout and distribution to all synods

1324 **Budget:**

1325 A comprehensive budget will be allocated for task force meetings, resource development, pilot

1326 testing, and dissemination of the toolkit and orientation program.

1327 **Conclusion:**

1328 This initiative aims to significantly enhance governance effectiveness across our denomination.
1329 By equipping new council members with essential tools and knowledge, and ensuring DEIA
1330 principles are embedded in all church activities, we can strengthen congregational leadership and
1331 foster healthier, more inclusive church communities.

1332

1333 Recommendation 6: Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and
1334 Service

1335 *(Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 5)*

1336 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the**
1337 **Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA, in consultation with the**
1338 **Conference of Bishops, to complete the following:**

1339 **1. Establish Standards and Processes for Congregation Calls for Deacons, with Annual**
1340 **Reporting and Oversight:** Establish a policy to require synods to report regularly to the
1341 churchwide organization on their call processes for deacons. Creating a “repository” for
1342 this information would hopefully encourage consistency and help identify best practices.

1343 **2. Define Baseline Compensation Guidelines**

1344 • **Minimum Compensation and Benefits:** Establish a policy to require synods to set
1345 compensation guidelines for deacons serving congregations. Deacons serving in non-
1346 congregational roles are varied and compensation guidelines are not easy to discern,
1347 but guidelines for deacons serving congregations should be easier to develop. These
1348 guidelines may be different from the guidelines for ministers of Word and Sacrament;
1349 however, careful attention should be given in their development, especially where the
1350 roster of deacons is primarily made up of people from marginalized groups.

1351 • **Housing Allowance Equivalence:** Church Council should direct the Office of the
1352 Secretary, or the appropriate churchwide unit, to undertake a review of tax law
1353 changes and determine whether changes to the description of the ministry of deacons
1354 are appropriate to enable them to take advantage of housing allowances allowed by
1355 the tax code. Churchwide organization legal staff should develop a “frequently asked
1356 questions” resource to explain the ELCA’s current legal understanding of this issue.

1357 **3. Clarify Role and Sacramental Authority**

1358 • **Uniform Guidelines for Bishops and Synods:** Ask the Conference of Bishops to
1359 convene a table to develop guidelines to be followed across this church when
1360 interpreting deacons’ roles in worship leadership, including the ability of deacons to
1361 administer sacraments. Such guidelines would reduce interpretive disparities.

1362 **4. Implementation Through Education and Training**

1363 • **Education for Congregation and Synod Leaders:** The Church Council should direct
1364 the appropriate churchwide unit or office to develop educational materials and
1365 resources for bishops, synod staff, and congregations about the theology and practice
1366 of Word and Service ministry.

1367 • **Transparency and Communication:** Encourage congregations and synods to educate
1368 congregations and their members about the role of deacons, emphasizing their
1369 contributions to this church’s mission and ministry.

1370 *Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-*
1371 *6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1372 **Rationale:**

1373 **Introduction:** The Commission for a New Lutheran Church did not resolve all the issues
1374 surrounding the role of deacons in the new denomination. In recent years, the ELCA has taken
1375 significant steps to unify and clarify the roles of its rostered leaders. In 2016, a major structural
1376 transition consolidated several lay rosters into a single roster of ministers of Word and Service,
1377 commonly known as deacons. While this move was intended to streamline leadership structures
1378 and provide a clearer understanding of ministry roles, practical challenges remain. Deacons often
1379 experience inconsistencies in how they are called, compensated, and empowered for ministry.
1380 These discrepancies can arise from synodical autonomy, varying local interpretations, and the
1381 relative newness of the unified roster. The CRLC sees three key issues facing deacons—uneven
1382 treatment across synods, compensation inequities, and ambiguity regarding sacramental
1383 authority—and proposes possible ways to address them.

1384 **Background:** The ELCA’s governance structure is threefold: churchwide organization, synods,
1385 and congregations. The ELCA Constitution, alongside bylaws and continuing resolutions,
1386 establishes broad frameworks for rostered ministries. Synods, however, maintain significant
1387 latitude in implementing these frameworks, leading to variation in practice. The role of deacons,
1388 as detailed in the ELCA Constitution (notably in Chapter 7 and its related bylaws), is to equip the
1389 baptized for ministry in daily life, serve this church’s mission in the world, and support
1390 congregations through teaching, advocacy, and service. Yet, the practical realization of this
1391 vision differs widely from one place to another, depending in large measure upon the theological
1392 understanding and interpretation of a synod bishop.

1393 **Key Issues:**

1394 **1. Inconsistent Treatment Across Synods:** Deacons encounter varying levels of
1395 recognition, authority, and support, depending on the synod in which they serve. Call
1396 processes lack uniformity, with some synods offering well-structured and transparent
1397 procedures while others rely on *ad hoc* practices. While this may also be true of call
1398 processes of ministers of Word and Sacrament, the impact on deacons (who are a
1399 minority in number and whose role is more widely misunderstood by congregations) is
1400 significant. As a result, deacons in certain synods may struggle to find opportunities for
1401 service or encounter a lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities.

1402 **2. Compensation and Benefits Inequities:** While ministers of Word and Sacrament often
1403 benefit from long-standing compensation guidelines and more standardized financial
1404 packages, deacons serving congregations frequently operate within less-established
1405 frameworks. This can lead to significant disparities in salary, housing allowances, and
1406 benefits. In some settings, deacons are undervalued financially despite their theological
1407 training and leadership responsibilities. Although some synods produce compensation
1408 guidelines for deacons, the absence of those guidelines for deacons serving in
1409 congregations results in a patchwork of standards.

1410 **3. Ambiguity in Sacramental Authority and Role Definition:** The constitution delineates
1411 the distinct ministries of Word and Service and Word and Sacrament, but the parameters

1412 for when and how deacons may administer sacraments are unclear in practice.
1413 Determining whether deacons may administer Holy Communion or Baptism in special
1414 circumstances often falls to the discretion of individual bishops. The inconsistency in the
1415 ability of deacons across the church to administer sacraments is said to be a theological
1416 issue on which bishops hold differing views. The resulting inconsistent interpretations
1417 can cause confusion and hinder the full integration of deacons' gifts into the life of this
1418 church. One practical outcome can be that some deacons find they are granted authority
1419 by a synod bishop to administer sacraments; but upon a change in bishop, find that they
1420 no longer can.

1421 While there are many issues on which the church is not of one mind, this difference in
1422 views harms both the persons God has called to serve, as well as those who would
1423 otherwise benefit from their service. It should be noted that bishops and pastors varied in
1424 the use of the means of grace during COVID, and in current times—a theological view
1425 that the church has actually spoken about but apparently allows for varied
1426 implementation and does not enforce.

1427 The mandate to the CRLC included reconsidering purpose and the organizational structures of
1428 the denomination and ensuring attention to commitments such as dismantling racism. One
1429 purpose of this church is to raise up leaders and deacons as part of that leadership structure. This
1430 recommendation aligns with the mandate by aiming to standardize and improve structures
1431 surrounding the roles of deacons, who often include individuals from, and those who serve,
1432 marginalized groups. By addressing the practical challenges deacons face—such as inconsistent
1433 call processes, varied compensation, and ambiguous roles—the ELCA can better live out its
1434 commitment to justice and equity. Moreover, these changes will strengthen this church's mission
1435 by ensuring that all rostered ministers, regardless of their role, are supported and valued,
1436 enhancing this church's ability to serve its diverse communities effectively.

1437 The ELCA's move to consolidate "lay rosters" into a single roster of ministers of Word and
1438 Service was a significant step toward recognizing the diversity and breadth of leadership in the
1439 church. Yet, the current constitutional framework does not fully ensure consistent treatment,
1440 adequate compensation, or a clear role definition for deacons. By taking additional steps outlined
1441 here, including establishing explicit guidelines for sacramental authority, the ELCA can
1442 strengthen its governance structures. Such clarifications will empower deacons to serve more
1443 effectively, foster greater equity and clarity, and affirm this church's commitment to nurturing all
1444 forms of ministry for the sake of the gospel.

1445

Recommendation 7: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related
Changes to Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically
Underrepresented Groups

(Related to Observations 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 5)

**The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024
Church Council meeting:**

Adopt new continuing resolutions 5.01.G24., 5.01.H24., 5.01.I24., and 5.01.J24., adopt new
required synod bylaw †S6.04.02., and modify bylaw 12.41.11. as follows:

5.01.H24. *This church is dedicated to fostering a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that honors the diversity of God's creation so that as many people as possible have the opportunity to participate fully in the life and work of this church. None of the definitions in Chapter 5 shall be construed as limiting this church's commitment to inclusive participation in its life and work. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility shall have the following meaning:*

- a. **Diversity** *is a reality rooted in the variety found in the body of Christ: the wide range of communities and identities related to race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, age, background, ability, socio-economic status, culture, and perspective.*
- b. **Equity** *means fair treatment of people according to their needs. The principle of equity takes into account that due to poverty, sexism, racism, and other factors individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do.*
- c. **Inclusion** *means the proactive and meaningful engagement of diverse individuals in all aspects of church life, especially indecision-making processes and leadership roles, creating a church culture of welcome, respect, and value for unique perspectives and abilities.*
- d. **Accessibility** *means aspiring to develop and maintain this church's physical infrastructure, information, communication technology, programs, and services to maximize participation in the life of this church.*

5.01.I24. *This church commits to working to intentionally lift up voices from historically underrepresented groups in its assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units. While specific identities are listed below, this church recognizes that humans have multiple aspects of their identities that are tied to systemic privilege and oppression that shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, historically underrepresented groups shall be understood to include the following:*

- 1487 a. Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than
1488 English;
1489 b. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual
1490 orientations;
1491 c. Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income;
1492 d. Persons living with disabilities;
1493 e. Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens.

1494 **5.01.J24.** For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms above
1495 shall have the following meanings:

- 1496 a. **Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other**
1497 **than English** means African American, African Caribbean, African
1498 Descent, African National, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian,
1499 Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Latin(-o, -a, -é, -x),
1500 Hispanic, American Indian, Indigenous, and Alaska Native people, as
1501 well as multi- and bi-racial people.
1502 b. **Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual**
1503 **orientations** means individuals who identify beyond the sex and
1504 gender binary, individuals whose gender identity may be fluid, and
1505 individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,
1506 intersex, asexual, or other sex, gender, and sexual identities that are
1507 more complex than sex, gender, and
1508 c. **Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income** means
1509 individuals whose economic circumstances inhibit their ability to meet
1510 basic living needs according to their societal context and standards.
1511 d. **Persons living with disabilities** means individuals who have physical,
1512 mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder their full
1513 participation in church life.
1514 e. **Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens** needs no
1515 additional clarifying definition.

1516 **5.01.K24.** It is the goal of this church that at least 10 percent of the voting members
1517 of the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, and churchwide boards
1518 and committees be members of historically underrepresented groups in
1519 addition to the required 10 percent representation of persons of color
1520 and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in 5.01.e.
1521 The Church Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.

1522 **12.41.11.** In addition, each synod shall elect one additional voting member who is a
1523 youth or young adult at the time of the election ~~and~~, one additional voting
1524 member who is a person of color or a person whose primary language is
1525 other than English, and one additional voting member who is a member of
1526 a historically underrepresented group. The Church Council may allocate
1527 up to 10 additional voting members [...]

1528 **†S6.04.02.** It is the goal of this synod that at least 10 percent of the voting members of
1529 the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, committees, and organizational units
1530 of this synod be members of historically underrepresented groups, in

1531 addition to the 10% representation of persons of color in †S6.04. The
1532 Synod Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.

1533 *Status: Continuing resolutions 5.01.G24, 5.01.H24, 5.01.I24, and 5.01.J24 (as amended) were*
1534 *adopted by the Church Council and are now part of the ELCA's governing documents. The*
1535 *proposed amendments to bylaw 12.41.11 and to required synod bylaw †S6.04.02 have been*
1536 *recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, though the*
1537 *change to bylaw 12.41.11 has been included along with other recommended changes to that*
1538 *bylaw from the Office of the Secretary.*

1539 ***Rationale:***

1540 This set of changes is designed to implement many of the recommendations of the Diversity,
1541 Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility audit of our church's governing documents that was
1542 completed as a result of a memorial that came before the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. The audit
1543 recommended various changes to the governing documents, and members of the CRLC worked
1544 in conjunction with members of the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review
1545 Committee, which oversaw the work of the audit, to approve language to be recommended to the
1546 Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly to implement the concepts of some of the audit's
1547 recommendations, while using language more consistent with the ELCA's theology and social
1548 teachings.

1549 The proposed changes to the governing documents have the effect of including definitions of
1550 diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the governing documents that can be used
1551 throughout the work of this church. In addition, they introduce the concept of "historically
1552 underrepresented groups," which are identified in 5.01.I24. and defined in 5.01.J24. The
1553 definition of "persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English" is
1554 largely the definition that previously existed as 5.01.C21., with some updates.

1555 The definition of historically underrepresented groups is used in 5.01.K24. and †S6.04.02. to
1556 state a goal, but not a requirement, that in addition to the requirement that 10% of the
1557 composition of assemblies, Church Council, synod councils, and boards and committees be
1558 persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, there is a goal that
1559 another 10% of such bodies will be from historically underrepresented groups. This language is
1560 modeled on the 10% goal for youth and young adult members. Further, the proposed change to
1561 12.41.11. allows each synod that otherwise complies with the representational principles of
1562 12.41.11. to bring one additional voting member from a historically underrepresented group to
1563 the Churchwide Assembly, in addition to the already permitted additional voting members who
1564 are persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English and youth and
1565 young adults.

1566

1567 Recommendation 8: Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's
1568 Relationship with Other Organizations

1569 *(Related to Observation 1.10)*

1570 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024**
1571 **Church Council meeting:**

1572 Amend constitutional provisions 8.20. and 8.23. and bylaw 8.23.01. as follows:

1573 **8.20. RELATIONSHIP WITH INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND**
1574 **AGENCIESMINISTRIES**

1575 **8.23. Institutions, Organizations, and AgenciesMinistries. This church shall**
1576 **seek to meet human needs through encouragement of its people to**
1577 **individual and corporate action, and through establishing, developing,**
1578 **recognizing, and supporting institutions, organizations, and**
1579 **agenciesministries that minister to people in their spiritual and**
1580 **temporal needs.**

1581 **8.23.01. ~~Social ministry~~Related institutions, organizations, and ministries may**
1582 **affiliate with this church through criteria and policies developed by the**
1583 **appropriate churchwide unit ~~and through membership in Lutheran~~**
1584 **~~Services in America.~~**

1585 *Status: This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the*
1586 *2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1587 ***Rationale:***

1588 The changes to this provision are designed to emphasize the importance of the many and varied
1589 entities that work alongside this church in meeting human need, as well as to broaden the
1590 understanding of the many ways in which this work may be carried out. Only the revisions to
1591 provisions 8.20. and 8.23. originally came from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran
1592 Church, and the recommended changes to bylaw 8.23.01. were added by the Office of the
1593 Secretary as the natural consequence to the proposed changes in 8.23.

1594

1595

Recommendation 9: Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents

(Related to Observation 1.11)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends to the Church Council:

Adopt the following continuing resolution:

10.31.B25. Association of Synod Vice Presidents *The Association of Synod Vice Presidents*

- shall be composed of the vice presidents of the synods. The churchwide vice president shall be a member of the association with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the Association with voice but not vote.*
- a. *The association shall provide for orientation, continuing education, collaboration, and leadership development for synod vice presidents.*
 - b. *The association shall meet at least annually. In years in which churchwide assemblies are held, the association meeting may occur in conjunction with the assembly.*
 - c. *The association shall provide opportunities for worship, spiritual renewal, and leadership development for those elected to the office of vice president of a synod. To fulfill these responsibilities, the association shall:*
 - 1. *Be a forum in which goals, objectives, and strategies may be developed and shared concerning lay leadership for the synods;*
 - 2. *Offer programs for orientation and continuing education for vice presidents;*
 - 3. *Assist the vice presidents in their role as synod council chairs by being a resource for training and guidance in the governance of this church;*
 - 4. *Assist the vice presidents in their role as collaborative leaders with bishops in fostering the work of the synods; and*
 - 5. *Provide advice and counsel when requested by the Church Council or other church leaders.*
 - d. *The association may establish committees as its members may determine to assist in fulfillment of the Association's responsibilities. The Association shall elect a chair and vice chair, each of whom shall serve a term of three years.*
 - e. *Staff services for meetings of the association shall be provided by the Office of the Secretary. The executive for synod relations shall coordinate and support the operation of the association.*

Status: An earlier version of this recommendation was presented to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The Church Council declined to adopt it as presented, and members of the CRLC and the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee worked through potential revisions to the proposal. This revised proposal has been recommended to the Church Council for action at its April 3-6, 2025, meeting.

1637 ***Rationale:***

1638 In an effort to recognize, lift up and further develop the highest elected lay leaders in this church,
1639 a proposal to create an Association of Synod Vice Presidents is offered. The Association would
1640 allow for a more intentionally organized orientation, education and training of these leaders. The
1641 Association would elect its own chair and vice-chair to lead its efforts. The Association would
1642 meet at least annually.

1643 There is no such formal gathering of the highest elected lay leaders in the church presently
1644 recognized in the governing documents. To the extent synod vice presidents gather (currently by
1645 Zoom meetings scheduled monthly), it is at their own initiative.

1646

1647 Recommendation 10: Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of
1648 Misconduct

1649 (Related to Observations 1.7, 6)

1650 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024**
1651 **Church Council meeting:**

1652 Amend bylaw 20.22.04. and amend Rule D2 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings as
1653 follows:

1654 **20.22.04.** When there are indications that a cause for discipline may exist, the
1655 bishop of the synod may request, and the general counsel of this church
1656 shall make available, resources for investigation into the facts surrounding
1657 the alleged misconduct that gives rise to the potential cause for discipline.
1658 Such resources may include, but are not limited to, contracting for
1659 investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic
1660 accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized
1661 professional services. The cost of such investigation shall generally be
1662 borne one-half by the churchwide organization and one-half by the synod
1663 of the bishop requesting such investigation. Procedural details relating to
1664 such investigations shall be set forth in the Rules Governing Disciplinary
1665 Proceedings. ~~and b~~ Before charges are made, efforts shall be made by the
1666 bishop of the synod to resolve the situation by consultation; for assistance
1667 in these efforts, the bishop may utilize either a consultation panel or an
1668 advisory panel as herein provided:

1669 **Rule D2** In addition to, or in lieu of, a consultation panel or an advisory panel, a
1670 synod bishop may utilize the assistance of one of the synod bishop's
1671 assistants or other staff persons or any other individual appointed by the
1672 synod bishop for this purpose. In addition, a bishop may request
1673 investigatory assistance under 20.22.04., which may include, but is not
1674 limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged
1675 sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct,
1676 or other specialized professional services.
1677 a. Any contractors providing services in such investigations will work under the
1678 supervision of the general counsel.
1679 b. The result of such investigation shall be the preparation of a written report
1680 delivered to the general counsel and to the bishop requesting the
1681 investigation.

1682 *Status: The recommended change to 20.22.04 has been recommended by the Church Council for*
1683 *adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. If the recommended change to 20.22.04. is adopted,*
1684 *the Committee on Appeals will be asked to recommend a change to Rule D2 in accordance with*
1685 *this recommendation to present to the Church Council for approval.*

1686 ***Rationale:***

1687 These amendments provide for equal cost-sharing between the churchwide organization and the
1688 synods of professional expenses related to misconduct investigations.

1689

1690 Recommendation 11: Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing
1691 Documents

1692 *(Related to Observations 1.8, 1.9, 7.1)*

1693 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024**
1694 **Church Council meeting:**

1695 Amend provision 22.11., concerning amendments to the ELCA Constitution, and 22.21.
1696 concerning amendments to the ELCA bylaws as follows:

1697 **22.11. This constitution may be amended only through either of the**
1698 **following procedures:**
1699 **a. The Church Council may propose an amendment, with an official**
1700 **notice to be sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next**
1701 **~~regular~~ meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. The adoption of**
1702 **such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the**
1703 **members of the next ~~regular~~ meeting of the Churchwide Assembly**
1704 **present and voting.**
1705 **b. An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more members of the**
1706 **Churchwide Assembly. The proposed amendment shall be**
1707 **referred to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its**
1708 **recommendation, following which it shall come before the**
1709 **assembly. If such an amendment is approved by a two-thirds vote**
1710 **of members present and voting, such an amendment shall become**
1711 **effective only if ~~adopted~~ ratified unchanged by a two-thirds vote of**
1712 **the members present and voting at the next ~~regular~~ Churchwide**
1713 **Assembly or a subsequent two-thirds vote of the members of the**
1714 **Church Council taken within 12 months of adoption by the**
1715 **Churchwide Assembly.**

1716 **22.21. Bylaws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or**
1717 **amended at any ~~regular~~ meeting of the Churchwide Assembly when**
1718 **presented in writing by the Church Council or by at least 15 members**
1719 **of the assembly. An amendment proposed by at least 15 members of**
1720 **the assembly shall immediately be submitted to the Committee of**
1721 **Reference and Counsel for its recommendation. An amendment may**
1722 **not be placed before the assembly for action sooner than the day**
1723 **following its presentation to the assembly unless it has been presented**
1724 **in writing by the Church Council and sent with an official notice to**
1725 **the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the**
1726 **Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the members present and**
1727 **voting shall be necessary for adoption.**

1728 *Status: This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the*
1729 *2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1730 ***Rationale:***

1731 Currently, constitutional provisions and bylaws may only be changed by the Church Council
1732 providing notice of proposed changes at least six months before the Churchwide Assembly and
1733 adoption by the assembly or by action on the floor of the assembly that is ratified by the next
1734 regular Churchwide Assembly. The change to 22.11.a. would allow for the possibility of a
1735 special assembly amending the Constitution in a single step, following recommendation of
1736 amendments proposed by the Church Council.

1737 The changes to 22.11.b. would allow amendments introduced on the floor of the Churchwide
1738 Assembly to be ratified unchanged by a 2/3 vote of the Church Council within 12 months of the
1739 assembly, instead of waiting three years for the next Churchwide Assembly.

1740 The change to 22.21. would allow for bylaw amendments by a special assembly, not only by a
1741 regular assembly.
1742

1743 Recommendation 12: Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution
1744 Mandatory

1745 *(Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9)*

1746 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024**
1747 **Church Council meeting:**

1748 To make the following provisions that are currently required in the *Constitution for Synods* now
1749 non-required:

- 1750 • †S9.02. concerning requirement of majority vote in Synod Assembly elections
1751 other than for bishop
- 1752 • †S10.01. concerning composition of the Synod Council
- 1753 • †S11.04. concerning the synod's Mutual Ministry Committee
- 1754 • †S15.01. concerning the synod's fiscal year
- 1755 • †S15.12. concerning the synod's budget

1756 *Status: The Church Council has recommended that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly make †S9.02.*
1757 *and †S11.04. non-required provisions. The Church Council has declined to recommend the*
1758 *remainder of this recommendation.*

1759 ***Rationale:***

1760 Certain provisions in the *Constitution for Synods* are marked with a “dagger” symbol indicating
1761 that they are required provisions that automatically are to be incorporated into each synod's
1762 constitution without change by the synod secretary when they are adopted by the Churchwide
1763 Assembly. Such provisions leave no room for a synod to organize its business in any varied way.
1764 A subcommittee of members of the CRLC involved in synod leadership reviewed the required
1765 provisions and the CRLC adopted their recommendations that certain provisions be left in the
1766 *Constitution for Synods* but no longer be marked as required provisions.

1767

1768 **Recommendation 13: ELCA Name Change**

1769 *(Specifically referred to the CRLC by the Church Council in CC22.11.34.cc)*

1770 **The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) declined to make a**
1771 **recommendation about whether the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**
1772 **(ELCA) should be changed.**

1773 *Status: This decision was transmitted to the November 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church*
1774 *Council.*

1775 ***Rationale:***

1776 In 2022, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a resolution leading to the creation of the
1777 Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) and giving the CRLC its mandate. The
1778 ELCA Church Council later asked the CRLC to consider an additional question, whether the
1779 name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” should continue to be utilized for this church
1780 body.

1781 The CRLC engaged in significant discussion of a possible change of name. As the members of
1782 the CRLC considered this issue, the conversations highlighted a range of opinions about the
1783 significance of the term “evangelical” and the larger implications that any new name might
1784 create.

1785 In the end, no consensus emerged among members of the CRLC as to whether the name
1786 “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” should be changed.

1787 Some participants maintain that the term “evangelical” has shifted significantly in meaning in the
1788 present day and may hinder the proclamation of the gospel, due to its associations with more
1789 conservative forms of Christianity and even, in some quarters, with Christian nationalism.
1790 Eliminating the term “evangelical,” they believe, would avoid these initial negative perceptions
1791 and indicate a more welcoming stance.

1792 Others, however, support maintaining the term “evangelical” because of its deep scriptural and
1793 theological roots (the term comes from the Greek word for “gospel” and literally means, “good
1794 news”), and argue that to eliminate the term “evangelical” would actually diminish this church’s
1795 core identity and mission. The term also connects the ELCA with the global Lutheran
1796 communion: The majority of Lutheran World Federation member churches have “Evangelical”
1797 in their names.

1798 While the CRLC did not come to consensus on this matter, it makes the following observations:

- 1799 • The CRLC believes that this question reflects larger issues of identity. Changing the
1800 name alone will not address deeper issues within the denomination and may in fact
1801 lead to unintended consequences for various groups.
- 1802 • If a change of name is to be considered, the commission recommends engaging a
1803 broader range of voices in deeper conversation about this church’s core identity
1804 before making final recommendations.

- 1805
- 1806
- 1807
- If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA is kept, the CRLC would recommend an effort to lean more intentionally into our understanding and definition of what it means to be “evangelical,” and that new branding might assist with this emphasis.
- 1808
- If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA were to be changed, a possible approach might be to consider retaining the legal name of the ELCA, while creating a new name under which it would be known (“Doing Business As” (DBA)).
- 1809
- 1810
- 1811 Overall, the CRLC acknowledges the complexities surrounding the term “evangelical” and its
- 1812 implications for this church’s identity, emphasizing that thoughtful dialogue and understanding
- 1813 are essential before any decisions are made on this significant matter.
- 1814

1815 Issues for Continued Reflection

1816 The section entitled “Issues for Continued Reflection” identifies a wide array of matters that the
1817 CRLC heard or became aware of in the course of its work. At a macro level, it is important to
1818 remember that the CRLC was *not* tasked with addressing every problem or issue raised, no
1819 matter the asserted merit. Its mandate, as the commission defined it, was significant, but not
1820 boundless. The committee structure it established enabled robust discussions and ideas to surface
1821 in smaller groups. Defining the presenting issues was a key part of each committee’s work.
1822 Committees lifted up various proposals to the full CRLC, not all of which were deemed ready for
1823 recommendation. Still, the CRLC wishes to preserve some of these concepts in an effort to
1824 provide possibilities for future reflection in the unending work of meaningful reformation, as
1825 prompted by the Holy Spirit.

1826 Dismantling Racism

1827 As we have completed our work, the commission has taken a variety of actions, as outlined in
1828 this report, in an effort to respond to God’s call for radical inclusion. Even with these
1829 recommendations, the commission recognizes that the work of full inclusion of all of God’s
1830 beloved children in the life and leadership in the church is never truly finished. This work is not
1831 just personal; it is also institutional and systemic. One example of this is the misuse of the
1832 categories of law and gospel, whereby the gospel message of grace and forgiveness is twisted to
1833 perpetuate systems of oppression and bondage.

1834 As a church rooted in diverse origins, we call ourselves to remember the story of Pentecost. In
1835 Acts, people speaking many languages were gathered. The Holy Spirit appears and enables them
1836 to hear each other in their own languages about the great deeds God has done. Filled with the
1837 Spirit (and not wine!), and eventually listening to Peter, they were baptized and began the
1838 fellowship that we today would call “church.” The miracle of Pentecost calls us forth and
1839 inspires our diverse selves to live in community. Today, we continue to remind each other that
1840 God intends our diversity to be a celebrated part of our lives together as children of God.

1841 The commission knows that the work of dismantling racism continues in various ways in the
1842 church. The ELCA’s ethnic associations, its Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities,
1843 Racial Justice unit, and other task forces and committees strive to identify, name, and correct
1844 racist elements of this church, but they alone are not responsible for the act of justice, equity and
1845 reconciliation. It is valuable and often life-saving work. But that work is often under-resourced,
1846 siloed, and is invisible to the wider church. Synods vary widely in their resourcing and efforts to
1847 make progress in meeting the diversity goals this church has established for itself.

1848 The work to dismantle racism is ongoing work. Overt and subtle forms of racism must be
1849 identified, named and challenged in our congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization
1850 expression.

1851 While there are institutional and systemic realities within this church that allow for and
1852 perpetuate racism, this commission also recognizes the need for transformation within and
1853 among the people in our pews. To continue to become an anti-racist church, this church must pay
1854 attention to both systemic racism and the necessary Spirit-empowered and inspired

1855 transformation of individual hearts and minds. It will take a commitment of all members of the
1856 ELCA to learn, repent, and grow in living into the fullness of God's wildly diverse community.
1857 Like the persons gathered at Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit inspire our efforts to really see, hear
1858 and value each other as God's beloved children.

1859 Governance Matters

1860 The Governance Committee discussed an array of structural and governance related challenges
1861 and possible options for change.

1862 Governing Boards/Administration

1863 The Governance Committee noted that governing boards are generally weak in all three
1864 expressions, due in part to the lack of experience, training, and understanding of some lay
1865 people, and the inherent imbalance of power between laypersons and rostered ministers.
1866 Governing boards in this church mix their roles as "boards of directors" vs. "interim legislative
1867 authority," sometimes resulting in confusion and inconsistency. The infrequency of meetings,
1868 particularly in the synod and churchwide organization expressions, often caused by financial and
1869 logistical concerns, limits a council's ability to govern as effectively as other non-profit boards
1870 do. These councils are very dependent on staff, which makes it hard to hold staff accountable.

1871 The idea of separating the "board of directors" function from the legislative/policy authority was
1872 explored. Such a separation allows for a more nimble governance structure. In the churchwide
1873 organization expression, a very large Church Council which only meets twice a year makes it
1874 very dependent on staff and often blurs the line between interim legislative and business
1875 functions. While an Executive Committee meets at least monthly, communication gaps were
1876 identified as a particular shortcoming in allowing the Church Council to be most effective.

1877 A proposal to revise the Church Council was discussed by the committee, and the CRLC sent
1878 this concept to the Conference of Bishops (COB) and the Church Council as part of the
1879 consultation process. In summary, it would have streamlined the council so it could focus on its
1880 "interim legislative authority" and would have established a more robust Executive Committee.
1881 The Executive Committee would function more like the "board of directors" of a non-profit.
1882 Council members would serve 6-year terms, with eligibility to serve two terms. A lay "Church
1883 Council chair" would be elected by the Churchwide Assembly (akin to the current vice
1884 president). The proposal did not draw discussion at either the COB or the Church Council,
1885 largely, it seems, due to at least one other proposal forwarded to them. Still, because it would
1886 take time to transition any change to the council structure, further reflection on clarifying its
1887 scope of responsibilities and optimizing its ability to fulfill them effectively is worthy of further
1888 reflection.

1889 At the same time, the CRLC forwarded a proposed change to the executive structure of the
1890 churchwide office. At the executive level, the Governance Committee/CRLC suggested
1891 clarifying the scope of the role of the presiding bishop. In brief summary, it would center the
1892 ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and theological leadership of the denomination in the role of the
1893 presiding bishop. The presiding bishop would still be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. A
1894 chief executive officer (CEO) position would be created and hired by and be accountable to the
1895 Church Council. This would be in lieu of and different from the current executive for

1896 administration position, which reports to the presiding bishop. Persons to fill the offices of
1897 secretary and treasurer would be recommended by the CEO to the Church Council, which would
1898 select those offices. Duties and committee assignments would be allocated between the Office of
1899 the Presiding Bishop and the CEO. (The treasurer is already selected by the council; the
1900 secretary presently is elected by the Churchwide Assembly).

1901 The proposal to revise the executive structure received questions and much criticism from
1902 current officers, the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council. Without responding to the
1903 questions or making revisions to the proposal, the Governance Committee acknowledged that
1904 this restructuring (which would not have altered the process for election of officers by the 2025
1905 Assembly) would be a significant change and a very heavy lift. And while the goal of finding a
1906 more streamlined, responsive, and effective governance structure remains, the Governance
1907 Committee recommended to the CRLC that it take up other governance matters, and not pursue
1908 the matter further at this juncture. The CRLC considers it a matter for further reflection.

1909 Rostered Ministries Matters, including Pay Inequity

1910 Broadly speaking, how this church employs and compensates rostered ministers surfaced during
1911 listening sessions and affects the governance structure of the denomination. The CRLC is aware
1912 of pay inequity in and between worshipping communities, especially as it affects persons of
1913 color, differing abilities, different genders and sexual orientations, and mission developers.
1914 Paying rostered ministers by congregations may also foster a concern that a rostered leader is
1915 beholden to the largest checkbook (e.g., “preaching the Beatitudes or lifting up systemic racism
1916 may cost me my job.”)

1917 All solutions are not structural. Some may require policy changes. In addition, there is work
1918 being done elsewhere in the church on parts of this issue (e.g., the Quality of Call Initiative and
1919 the work around matters relating to First Call). We did not seek to influence or impede that work
1920 and commend efforts to tackle these matters in meaningful ways while engaging the persons
1921 most affected.

1922 In a “big-picture” sense, the Governance Committee discussed a new model of having rostered
1923 leaders employed by a third-party entity that would handle all payroll, benefits, and HR matters
1924 for persons called to a congregation. It also discussed setting up a fund, modeled after the Fund
1925 for Leaders, that would help deal with inequities. Settings such as rural congregations, those in
1926 economically-challenged areas, as well as strategic outreach ministries and non-congregational
1927 faith formation communities that are vibrant but may never be “self-sustaining,” could benefit
1928 from this fund. These and other ideas all have pros and cons, and the legal questions that arise
1929 would need to be thought through. This issue is also tied to the funding and financial issues
1930 identified by the CRLC. While we believe this to be a governance structure issue in part, further
1931 comprehensive work on these matters seems called for at this point. The work of the
1932 recommended Financial Coordinating Task Force, as well as that of the Ongoing Work to
1933 Understand Synod Purpose and Structure may lay some of the necessary groundwork. Continued
1934 reflection on the impact of pay disparity on the health and vibrancy of leaders and congregations
1935 is suggested.

1936 **Related Institutions, Organizations, and Ministries (RIOMs):**

1937 The commission sought to lift up the role of institutions, organizations, and ministries that are, or
1938 seek to be, related to the ELCA. Work related to this is included in recommendations that were
1939 recommended by the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting for adoption at the 2025
1940 Churchwide Assembly.

1941 In addition, the commission believes that there is work to be done along these lines:

- 1942 • Institutions, organizations, and ministries may relate to this church through criteria and
1943 policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit. Depending on the circumstances,
1944 such relationships may with the congregations, synods, or churchwide organization
1945 expression.
- 1946 • The appropriate churchwide unit should maintain a directory of the related institutions,
1947 organizations, and ministries.
- 1948 • This church recognizes the importance of “faith formation ministries,” such as campus
1949 and outdoor ministries, for the vitality, resilience, and future of this church. This church
1950 should be strategic in supporting the staffing and budget of such ministries, as well as in
1951 providing for accountability for those rostered ministers and others who are called for
1952 leadership in such ministries.
- 1953

1954 Conclusion

1955 Empowered by the hopeful message of the resurrection, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
1956 America (ELCA) is called to recognize its imperfections and actively engage in both individual
1957 and collective renewal.

1958 This report, while highlighting areas for potential renewal, also honors the vital, life-affirming
1959 work undertaken by communities across the ELCA. These communities exemplify the Spirit's
1960 transformative power through worship, service, advocacy, and discipleship, illustrating that
1961 renewal encompasses more than structural change—it is about continuous transformation that
1962 embraces inclusivity and collaboration.

1963 The CRLC's recommendations are designed to steer the ELCA toward a future that is more
1964 inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused. By adopting these changes, we enable all three
1965 expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—to better
1966 serve our diverse membership and align more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This
1967 ongoing process not only makes our church more adaptable and accountable but also equips us to
1968 meet contemporary challenges while remaining firm in our theological convictions.

1969 As we consider these recommendations, we recognize the range of responses they may elicit.
1970 Some in our community will see these recommendations as a pathway to a stronger, more
1971 faithful church, while others might view them as unsettling or insufficient. We embrace this
1972 diversity of perspectives and commit to a process of faithful deliberation, rooted in prayer,
1973 humility, and open dialogue.

1974 Inspired by Psalm 51:10-12, "*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit*
1975 *within me,*" we seek a renewal of heart and spirit, ensuring that our actions reflect our
1976 commitment to God's mission. We urge this church to integrate proactive reflection and renewal
1977 into the fabric of our daily lives, understanding that the work of renewal is not a once-in-a-
1978 generation task but an ideal we strive for each day. This work is not finished and should not end
1979 with this commission. This ongoing commitment to reformation and renewal is a testament to
1980 our role in God's world, emphasizing that our efforts extend beyond the church to touch the
1981 broader expanse of God's kingdom on earth.

1982 In all we do, we trust in God's continual guidance and inspiration, leading us toward ever more
1983 faithful and effective expressions of our shared mission.
1984

1985 Acknowledgments

1986 The CRLC wishes to acknowledge the many people and entities that supported, contributed to,
1987 and prayed for us during our sojourn. We are thankful for the ten synods that submitted
1988 memorials, catalyzed by the work of Bishop Jim Dunlop, to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly and
1989 to that body for their understanding and action in creating the CRLC. We thank the ELCA
1990 Church Council, especially the Executive Committee, for establishing the CRLC, a difficult task
1991 since there was no template. We thank the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council for
1992 their counsel as they provided guidance and feedback.

1993 The CRLC was privileged to have Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Secretary Sue
1994 Rothmeyer accompany us as resource persons on our journey. Other resource persons included:
1995 Lori Fedyk, ELCA treasurer; Kevin Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review
1996 Committee of the ELCA Church Council; Judith Roberts, ELCA senior director for Diversity,
1997 Equity, & Inclusion; Jennifer DeLeon, ELCA director for Racial Justice; the Rev. Nicolette
1998 Peñaranda, program director for ELCA African Descent Ministries; Tom Cunniff, ELCA general
1999 counsel; and Presiding Bishop *pro tempore* Michael Burk. The Rev. Alejandro Mejía provided a
2000 valuable link as the representative of the ELCA ethnic associations. National Bishop Susan
2001 Johnson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, provided spiritual grounding and facilitation
2002 for the early meetings of the commission.

2003 We also extend gratitude to our Office of the Secretary staff support, including the Rev. Keith
2004 Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration; Dan Eppley, manager for official
2005 documentation; our technical support, Joseph Schmidt, administrative services coordinator; and
2006 our hospitality team for CRLC meetings, Dana Adams, director, meeting management; Christina
2007 Ptack, meetings and events manager; and Rosa Pérez, meeting planner.

2008 A special thank you goes to Jodi Slattery, ELCA executive for governance and the primary
2009 support person for the CRLC, for her gentle guidance and tireless support.

2010 The CRLC is indebted to every member of the commission for their volunteer time and effort.
2011 Each one of them loves the ELCA. Finally, we acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit who
2012 moved through and among the commission, thanks be to God!

2013

2014 **A Prayer for the Church's Renewal**

2015 **God of resurrection and renewal,**

2016 You have called Your Church into being, not for its own sake, but to bear witness to Your
2017 creative, redeeming, and sanctifying work in the world. We give thanks for the faithfulness of
2018 those who have carried this mission before us, and we pray for the wisdom and courage to carry
2019 it forward with integrity and boldness.

2020 *Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.*

2021 Where we have clung to structures that no longer serve Your mission, give us the courage to
2022 reimagine. Where we have been slow to act, stir us to faithful urgency. Where voices have been
2023 silenced, open our ears to hear the full breadth of Your people's wisdom.

2024 As we reflect on the findings and recommendations of this report, we acknowledge that there
2025 will be differing responses: affirmation, concern, hope, hesitation, and even opposition. In the
2026 midst of these varied perspectives, bind us together in the unity of Christ. Give us patience to
2027 listen deeply, humility to learn from one another, and faith to trust that You are working in and
2028 through this process.

2029 *Do not cast us away from Your presence, but guide us with Your Holy Spirit.*

2030 May Your Spirit lead us into the hard work of transformation, binding us together as one Church
2031 in the midst of change, disagreement, and discernment. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation,
2032 that we may embrace this renewal not as a burden but as a gift—an opportunity to more fully
2033 reflect Your justice, mercy, and love.

2034 We give thanks for the congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries that are already
2035 engaged in life-giving and sustaining work to renew this church. Through their faithfulness in
2036 worship, service, and mission, we see the Spirit's movement and the power of Your grace at
2037 work. Strengthen them in their calling and inspire us to walk alongside them, that together we
2038 may be a church continually renewed by Your love.

2039 *Send us forth with willing hearts, strengthened by Your grace and emboldened by Your call.*

2040 We entrust the future of this church to You, knowing that You are already at work making all
2041 things new.

2042 **In the name of Jesus Christ, our hope and our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

2043

Signature Page

2044

2045

2046 Below is the Signature Page, which includes the names of the chairs followed by members who
2047 have given their full consent, listed alphabetically for clarity. For those providing partial consent,
2048 their names are listed alphabetically along with specific sections from which they have
2049 expressed dissent, as exemplified by "[Name] provided partial consent and expressed dissent
2050 from Section [X] of the report." It is important to note that commission members who have
2051 dissented entirely from the report are not listed below.
2052

2053 THE REV. CARLA CHRISTOPHER (Co-Chair)
2054 Lower Susquehanna Synod [8D] — St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church
2055

2056 LEON SCHWARTZ (Co-Chair)
2057 Southeastern Iowa Synod [5D] — St. Paul Lutheran Church
2058

2059 Alexandra Mack
2060 New Jersey Synod [7A] — Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
2061

2062 Antoine Cummins
2063 Pacifica Synod [2C] — Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church
2064

2065 Anthony Ormsbee-Hale
2066 Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod [4D] — Messiah Lutheran Church
2067

2068 The Rev. Charlene Giuliani
2069 Greater Milwaukee Synod [5J] — Incarnation Lutheran Church
2070

2071 Cheryl Stuart
2072 Florida-Bahamas Synod [9E] — St. Stephen Lutheran Church
2073

2074 Deacon Dallas Shealy
2075 South Carolina Synod [9C] — Summer Memorial Lutheran
2076

2077 David Lenz
2078 Northeastern Ohio Synod [6E] — Messiah Lutheran Church
2079

2080 Deacon Don Corson, Ph.D.
2081 Southwestern Washington Synod [1C] — Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
2082

2083 The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman
2084 Southeast Michigan Synod [6A] — Lord of Light Lutheran Church
2085

2086 Evan Moilan Jr.
2087 Southwestern Texas Synod [4E] — Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
2088
2089

2090 Felecia Boone
2091 Minneapolis Area Synod [3G] — Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church
2092
2093 The Rev. Gail Hagerty
2094 Western North Dakota Synod [3A] — Heart River Lutheran Church
2095
2096 The Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Ph.D.
2097 Northeastern Iowa Synod [5F] — St. John's Lutheran Church
2098
2099 Linda Timmons
2100 Nebraska Synod [4A] — St. Thomas Lutheran Church
2101
2102 Melody Stachour
2103 Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod [8G] — St. Matthew's
2104
2105 Michael Chan, Ph.D.
2106 Northwestern Minnesota Synod [3D] — Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
2107
2108 Ralston Deffenbaugh
2109 Rocky Mountain Synod [2E] — Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church
2110
2111 Roberto Lara-Aranda
2112 Metropolitan New York Synod [7C] — Saint Peter's Church, Manhattan
2113
2114 Ryan Johnson
2115 Western Iowa Synod [5E] — Our Saviors Lutheran Church
2116
2117 Ruth Ellen Howard
2118 Central States Synod [4B] — St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church
2119
2120 Sarah Morris
2121 Grand Canyon Synod [2D] — Our Savior's Lutheran Church
2122
2123 The Rev. Sean Avery
2124 Alaska Synod [1A] — Joy Lutheran Church
2125
2126 Stacy Kitahata
2127 Northwest Washington Synod [1B] — Immanuel Lutheran Church
2128
2129 Susan McArver, Ph.D.
2130 South Carolina Synod [9C] — Incarnation Lutheran Church
2131
2132 Thelma Jacks
2133 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod [7F] — Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church
2134
2135 Thomas Madden
2136 Upstate New York Synod [7D] — Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word
2137
2138

2139 The Rev. Tiffany Chaney
2140 Southeastern Synod [9D] — Gathered by Grace
2141
2142 The Rev. Adam Sornchai
2143 Northwestern Ohio Synod [9D] — St. John Lutheran Church (Windfall)
2144 Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Recommendation 4 and Recommendation
2145 11b of the report.
2146
2147 Laurel Muhly-Alexander
2148 West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod [8H] — St. Mark's Lutheran Church
2149 Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Recommendations 1, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13;
2150 Governing Boards/Administration

2151 Bishop Regina Hassanally
2152 Southeastern Minnesota Synod [3I] — St. John's Lutheran
2153 Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Observations: 1.2 (in part), 1.3 (in part) 5
2154 (in part) and Recommendation 4 (in part).

2155 Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.
2156 North/West Lower Michigan Synod [6B] — Immanuel Lutheran Church
2157 Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Observations

2158 **Appendix**

2159 **CRLC Committees**

2160 **Origin and Formation of the CRLC**

2161 **Reference Material for Synod Evaluation**

2162

2163 **Appendix 1: CRLC Committees**

2164 In late 2023, during the third meeting of the CRLC, seven committees were established. Four of
2165 these were tasked with addressing specific aspects of the Commission's mandate, while three
2166 served operational functions. Initially, all committees focused on the urgent goal of proposing
2167 any necessary constitutional amendments to the Church Council by November 2024, to ensure
2168 consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. After achieving this milestone, the CRLC's
2169 attention turned to preparing a final report, outlining key findings and recommendations for
2170 presentation to the 2025 assembly. This phase involved deep dives into critical issues such as the
2171 interdependence of this church's three expressions, the principle of subsidiarity, and the
2172 denomination's financial flow.

2173 Following consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council—and aligning
2174 with the revised focus—late 2024 saw the formation of the Setting the Table Committee .
2175 Additionally, the Who Are We and Why and What Committees were merged to form the “3-4
2176 Committee,” addressing overlapping areas concerning interdependence and purpose. This
2177 restructuring enabled more streamlined and focused discussions on these fundamental topics.

2178 The committees operated autonomously, setting their schedules and contributing to full CRLC
2179 meetings by presenting updates, soliciting feedback, and submitting recommendations.
2180 Following are descriptions of each committee's purpose (taken from their charters) and a listing
2181 of the members of each committee.

2182 **All Ears Committee**

2183 The All Ears Committee exists to collect data from a wide range of constituents, through both
2184 live listening sessions and electronic surveys, in order to inform the work of the CRLC.
2185 Additionally, this committee will serve as a liaison to other data collections groups in the ELCA,
2186 particularly Future Church. Finally, this committee will oversee data analysis and present a
2187 report of its findings to the CRLC.

2188 ***CRLC Membership:***

The Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnson Largen, <i>chair</i>	Michael Chan, Ph.D.
Susan McArver, Ph.D.	Sarah Morris
Ryan Johnson	Roberto Lara Aranda

Thelma Jacks

The Rev. Carla Christopher, *CRLC co-chair, ex officio*

Resource person:

Sean Zimny, *contract researcher*

Communications Committee

The Communications Committee exists to share the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, providing transparency for the commission's actions to the wider ELCA. The committee will inform the wider ELCA of the commission's purpose and the commission's progress towards our mandate goals.

CRLC Membership:

Alexandra Mack, *chair*

The Rev. Gail Hagerty

Laurel Muhly-Alexander

Ryan Johnson

The Rev. Tiffany Chaney

The Rev. Carla Christopher, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource person:

Candice Buchbinder, *ELCA public relations manager*

Dismantling Racism Committee

The Dismantling Racism Committee will provide oversight of the entire work of the CRLC to ensure it is viewed through an intersectional lens of dismantling racism.

CRLC Membership:

Melody Stachour, *chair*

Antoine Cummins

Stacy Kitahata

Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.

Alexandra Mack

The Rev. Tiffany Chaney

The Rev. Char Guiliani

Felecia Boone

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman

Ruth Ellen Howard

Linda Timmons

The Rev. Carla Christopherson, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource persons:

Judith Roberts, *ELCA senior director,*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Jennifer De Leon, *ELCA director, Racial*

Justice

How We Are Governed Committee

The How We Are Governed Committee exists to reconsider the organizational structure and governance of the ELCA, being particularly attuned to dismantling racism, and to provide recommendations for the future governance of this church, including potential modifications to governing documents.

CRLC Membership:

Cheryl Stuart, *chair*

Sarah Morris

The Rev. Sean Avery

Bishop Regina Hassanally

Anthony Ormsbee-Hale
Deacon Dallas Shealy
David Lenz
Thomas Madden
Melody Stachour
Evan Moilan
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource persons:
Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*
Tom Cunniff, *ELCA general counsel*
Paul Irwin, *ELCA associate general counsel*
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

Planning and Report Committee

The Planning and Report Committee exists to ensure project management, coordinate resources, and provide for a final report to be presented to the Church Council in April 2025 in preparation for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

CRLC Membership:

Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, *chair*
Evan Moilan
David Lenz
Antoine Cummins
Cheryl Stuart
Thelma Jacks
Bishop Regina Hassanally

Ralston Deffenbaugh
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource person:
Jodi Slattery, *ELCA executive for governance*

Who Are We Committee

The Who Are We Committee exists to examine the historical definitions of this church, how it is lived out today, and how to visualize it for the future. Following the completion of that work, then the committee will consider the question of whether the denomination name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” will be changed.

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Adam Sornchai *chair*
Laurel Muhly-Alexander
Susan McArver, Ph.D.
The Rev. Char Guiliani
Thomas Madden
Deacon Dallas Shealy
Bishop Matthew Riegel
Linda Timmons

Michael Chan, Ph.D.
Ralston Deffenbaugh
Don Corson
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource person:
The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, *ELCA presiding bishop*

Why and What Committee

The Why and What Committee exists to review the purpose statements for the three expressions of this church as set forth in their constitutions and to make recommendations concerning changes to those statements.

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, *chair*
Felecia Boone
Stacy Kitahata
The Rev. Sean Avery
The Rev. Gail Hagerty
Ruth Ellen Howard
Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.
Bishop Matthew Riegel
The Rev. Adam Sornchai

Deacon Don Corson
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource persons:

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

3-4 Committee

The 3-4 Committee combines the purposes of the Who Are We Committee and the Why and What Committee with a special focus on the interdependence between the three expressions of this church and their purpose statements.

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Adam Sornchai, *chair*
Laurel Muhly-Alexander
Susan McArver, Ph.D.
The Rev. Char Guiliani
Thomas Madden
Deacon Dallas Shealy
Bishop Matthew Riegel
Linda Timmons
Michael Chan, Ph.D.
Ralston Deffenbaugh
Deacon Don Corson
Roberto Lara Aranda
The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman
Felecia Boone

Stacy Kitahata
The Rev. Sean Avery
The Rev. Gail Hagerty
Ruth Ellen Howard
Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Resource persons:

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, *ELCA presiding bishop*
Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

Setting the Table Committee

The Setting the Table Committee's purpose is to draft a document listing the presenting issues facing this church that the CRLC identified through its listening efforts.

CRLC Membership:

Evan Moilan, *chair*
Linda Timmons
Ruth Ellen Howard
Antoine Cummins
Anthony Ormsbee-Hale

Ralston Deffenbaugh
Don Corson
Alexandra Mack
Carla Christopherson, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

Appendix 2: Origin and Formation of the Commission

2189 The August 8-12, 2022, Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten
2190 synods concerning the topic “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA.”

2191 The recitals to the memorials included common themes regarding an overall decline in
2192 membership and numbers of congregations since 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA’s governing
2193 documents to meet new challenges, the desire for a “well-governed, connected, and sustainable
2194 church” and the need to dismantle racism and acknowledge the church’s complicity in related
2195 trauma and harm.

2196 In its pre-assembly report, the Memorials Committee recommended to the assembly the
2197 following action in response to these memorials:

2198 ***To refer the memorials to the Church Council for further deliberation and definition,***
2199 ***specifically to determine the goals and boundaries of any proposed changes to the***
2200 ***constitution, especially those related to Chapters 4 and 5; the need for a Commission***
2201 ***for a Renewed Lutheran Church; and the need and scope of any proposed***
2202 ***reconstituting convention, with recommendations to be presented to the 2025***
2203 ***Churchwide Assembly.***

2204 In its supplemental report of Tuesday August 9, 2022, the Memorials Committee proposed to
2205 amend the above resolution by substituting:

2206 ***To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran***
2207 ***Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that,***
2208 ***working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall***
2209 ***reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the***
2210 ***principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being***
2211 ***particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present***
2212 ***its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for***
2213 ***a reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the***
2214 ***Churchwide Assembly.***

2215 This recommendation was placed on the floor of the assembly on Tuesday afternoon. There was
2216 one amendment offered on the floor, to insert the word “possible” in front of “reconstituting
2217 convention” in the second-to-last line above, which was adopted by a 748-36 vote. The following
2218 resolution, as amended, was adopted by the assembly by a 738-72 vote:

2219 ***To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran***
2220 ***Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that,***
2221 ***working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall***
2222 ***reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the***
2223 ***principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being***
2224 ***particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present***
2225 ***its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for***
2226 ***a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting***
2227 ***of the Churchwide Assembly.***

With the adoption of this resolution by the assembly, it was the Church Council's responsibility to determine the size and selection of the commission. The Church Council's first meeting after the 2022 Churchwide Assembly was its regularly scheduled fall meeting, which was held in-person at the churchwide offices on November 10-13, 2022. Prior to that meeting, the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and Executive Committee had considered possible timelines for the Council's work in establishing the commission and the work of the commission itself. It was noted by the Executive Committee that the assembly action calling for the creation of the commission placed relatively few constraints on the commission's work. Accordingly, it would be appropriate to preserve significant freedom for the commission to pursue pertinent matters while also trying to avoid having the commission duplicate work already delegated to other parts of the churchwide organization by the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed timeline from the Executive Committee called for discussion of the parameters of creating the commission at the November 2022 Church Council meeting, with a nomination process early in 2023 and the Church Council formally appointing members to the commission around March or April 2023.

The Church Council's initial discussion of the creation of the commission was led by Mr. Kevin Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, on Saturday, November 12, 2022. The conversation focused on three questions:

1. What are council members' hopes for the commission?
2. What should be the size of the commission? and
3. What is the most appropriate way to select the members of the commission?

The Executive Committee took the feedback it received in that discussion to its 7:30 a.m. meeting on Sunday, November 13, to formulate the general sense of the council into a more specific recommendation for the size of the commission and the process for appointing members to it. The Executive Committee's recommendation, with minor stylistic amendments made by the Church Council, was adopted in the council's final plenary session of the meeting as follows:

To establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consisting of no more than 35 voting members, directing the Executive Committee of the Church Council to initiate the process of forming the commission, fulfilling the responsibilities of the Church Council related to nominations in accordance with 14.41.01.c., and receiving nominations to fill positions allocated in the following manner:

- ***Three voting members from each region for a total of 27, two of whom will be selected from nominations received by each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee and one of whom will be received through an open nomination process;***
- ***Each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee will be invited to submit two potential nominees;***
- ***Up to eight at-large voting members will be selected from either the synod nominations or the open nomination process;***

To populate the commission according to the representational principles of this church, requiring that at least 25% of the commission be persons of color/primary language other than English; and striving for at least 20% of members to be youth/young adults;

2271 ***To request the nomination process be completed prior to the April 2023 Church***
2272 ***Council meeting, presenting a slate of nominees to the Church Council for action; and***
2273 ***To invite this church to join us in prayer as this church embarks on this process of***
2274 ***renewal.***

2275 In addition to the original scope of the Commission’s mandate as provided in CA22.01.06, the
2276 Church Council at its November 2022 meeting also referred one specific item of business to the
2277 commission: a resolution from Southwest California Synod Council calling to discontinue the
2278 use of the word “evangelical” in the name of our denomination. The council adopted the
2279 following:

2280 ***To request the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consider the question***
2281 ***of whether the denomination name, “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,”***
2282 ***should be changed; [and]***
2283 ***To anticipate a recommendation when the commission presents its findings for the***
2284 ***2025 Churchwide Assembly;***

2285 The Office of the Secretary would take the responsibility for communicating information about
2286 the size and proposed composition of the commission and the nominating process to the synods.
2287 The Office of the Secretary also developed nomination forms and a nomination website to be
2288 available by early January 2023. The nominations were to be open until early March, with the
2289 Executive Committee of the Church Council operating as the nominating committee to review
2290 the nominees. The Church Council was scheduled for an in-person retreat, not a formal business
2291 meeting, in March 2023 in Bloomington, Minnesota. At the retreat, the Church Council would
2292 hear an update on the Executive Committee’s work on reviewing nominations to the
2293 commission, and the council would vote to appoint members to the commission at its April 2023
2294 business meeting to be held online.

2295 As of the March 2023 Church Council retreat, the synod councils or synod executive committees
2296 had identified 108 nominees to the commission. Additionally, more than 380 nominees had been
2297 received through the open nomination process for a total of more than 400 unique nominations.
2298 Of the commission members, 18 (two from each region) were to be selected from the synod
2299 nominee pool, and an additional 9-17 could be selected from either the open nominee process or
2300 the synod nominee pool.

2301 At the Church Council retreat, it was also reported that The Rev. Susan Johnson, national bishop
2302 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, would serve as a process facilitator/consultant for
2303 the commission and that the first, mandatory, in-person meeting of the commission would be
2304 held July 13-15, 2023, at the churchwide offices.

2305 The Church Council’s Executive Committee worked extensively on reviewing the nomination
2306 forms and interviewing potential nominees throughout March and April to develop a slate of
2307 candidates that matched the representational principles of this church¹ the specific demographic
2308 parameters of CC22.11.37, and considering other items such as economic, theological, and
2309 political diversity of potential commission members.

2310 The Church Council met in a business session online April 20, 2023. Significant actions of the
2311 April 2023 Church Council meeting to the work of the commission included the appointment of
2312 the members of the commission:

To appoint the following members to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church: Mr. Roberto Lara Aranda, the Rev. Sean Avery, Ms. Felecia Boone, Mr. Michael J. Chan, the Rev. Tiffany Chaney, Mr. Don Corson, Mr. Antoine Cummins, the Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, the Rev. Charlene Guiliani, the Rev. Gail Hagerty, Bishop Regina Hassanally (at-large), the Rev. Douglas A. Hill, Mx. Ruth Ellen Howard, Ms. Thelma Pruitt Jacks, Mr. Ryan Johnson (at-large), Ms. Stacy D. Kitahata, the Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Mr. David M. Lenz (at-large), Ms. Alexandra Mack, Mr. Thomas Madden (at-large), Ms. Susan Wilds McArver, Ms. Candy McCorkle, Mr. Evan Moilan (at-large), Ms. Sarah E. Morris, Ms. Laurel Muhly-Alexander, Mr. Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, Bishop Matthew Riegel (at-large), Mr. Leon Schwartz, Deacon Dallas Shealy (at-large), the Rev. Adam Sornchai, Ms. Melody Stachour, Ms. Cheryl Stuart, Ms. Loni Taylor (at-large), Ms. Linda M. Timmons, and the Rev. Carla Christopher Wilson; and
To authorize the Executive Committee to appoint members as necessary if a vacancy occurs.

The council also established a budget for the commission's work:

To approve the establishment of a Church Council designated fund, entitled Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, in the amount of \$300,000, to be used to cover the costs of meetings and other resources.¹

A few days after the announcement of the appointment of members to the CRLC, it was learned that the Rev. Douglas A. Hill would not be able to attend the first in-person meeting of the commission. He was accordingly unable to serve. The Executive Committee appointed Mr. Ralston Deffenbaugh in his place to fill the vacancy created.

At its May 2023 meeting, the Executive Committee voted to (a) invite members of the commission to indicate interest in serving as a co-chair of the commission through completion of a form that would allow members to describe their interest in serving as co-chair and to describe the gifts, skills, and abilities they felt they would bring to the position of co-chair and (b) authorize the Executive Committee to review the forms and appoint co-chairs for the commission. As of the June 2023 Executive Committee meeting, there were seven individuals who had completed the form indicating interest in serving as a co-chair. After review of those applications, the Executive Committee appointed the Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon Schwartz to serve as co-chairs.

While not formally members of the commission, the commission has benefitted greatly from the perspectives and insights of the following resource persons:

- The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop
- The Rev. Michael Burk, presiding bishop *pro tempore*
- Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, secretary
- Lori Fedyk, treasurer
- Judith Roberts, senior director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Jackie Baumhover, director for strategy in the Office of the Presiding Bishop
- Vance Blackfox, director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations
- Jennifer DeLeon, director for Racial Justice

- 2355 • The Rev. Nicollette Peñaranda, program director for African Descent Ministries
2356 • Desta Goehner, president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
2357 • Shari Seifert, past president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
2358 • Kevin Anderson, chair of the Church Council’s Legal and Constitutional Review
2359 Committee
2360 • Thomas Cunniff, general counsel for the ELCA
2361 • Paul Irwin, associate general counsel for the ELCA

2362 One of the first tasks the commission undertook was to speak with key leaders from each of the
2363 synods that sent the memorials that led to the creation of the commission to see what had
2364 motivated their synods to bring the memorials forward. Major themes of these conversations
2365 included:

- 2366 1. Structural concerns and the need to right-size the church;
2367 2. Racial and economic disparities impacting the candidacy process and management of
2368 rostered leaders;
2369 3. Overwhelming passage of the memorials at the synod level indicating a broad
2370 appetite for change in the church and a sense of urgency;
2371 4. The need to commit to being an anti-racist institution and related examination of our
2372 governing documents.
2373 5. Concern for accountability and results in the broader church and a desire for the
2374 Commission to recommend tangible action steps for consideration;
2375 6. Collaboration with our full communion partners for theological education and
2376 mission work should be encouraged;
2377 7. Maintain congregational independence to choose their calls;
2378 8. A growing focus on concerns about transparency, accountability, and governance.

2379 In October 2023, Loni Taylor resigned from the commission. She was one of two current
2380 members of the Church Council, and was the only American Indian/Indigenous member of the
2381 commission. At its December 2023 meeting, the commission approved two resolutions
2382 concerning membership of the commission. First, it requested that the Executive Committee of
2383 the Church Council appoint a member to the commission to replace her to maintain
2384 representation from an Indigenous perspective. In a separate resolution, the commission
2385 petitioned the Church Council to appoint two additional members, including one who would be
2386 Arab/Middle Eastern and one who would be of African National descent. Mr. David Lenz, the
2387 only remaining member of the commission who was also a member of the Church Council was
2388 invited to appear at the Executive Committee meeting on December 12, 2023, to discuss these
2389 two resolutions. The Executive Committee considered its response to these resolutions, including
2390 the need for additional Church Council representation on the commission due to the mandate to
2391 represent all expressions of the church, the need for diverse representation, and whether the
2392 commission’s work was too far along to introduce new members.

2393 Ultimately, in its January 17, 2024, meeting, the Executive Committee encouraged the
2394 commission “to seek, identify, and hear all of the voices and perspectives that are necessary and
2395 helpful for its work, but decline[d] to appoint a replacement member to the commission or to
2396 petition the Church Council to expand the membership.
2397
2398

2399 Appendix 3: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod Purpose and Structure

2400 During the work of the commission, we had extensive discussions regarding the number,
2401 purpose, and structure of synods. We recognize the complexity of this issue and ongoing
2402 discussions regarding their purpose. This commission, acting on feedback from the Conference
2403 of Bishops, believes that work should be completed to determine any possible revisions to the
2404 purpose statements pertaining to synods and other expressions of this church. Based upon the
2405 work of the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose, when the Church Council initiates
2406 action relating to the synods, carefully considering the impact of its recommendations on
2407 minority and marginalized communities, ensuring intentional inclusion of diverse perspectives
2408 throughout its work, we commend the following for consideration:

2409 Objectives

- 2410 1. **Optimize the Number of Synods:** Assess whether the current number of synods
2411 optimally supports efficient governance, effective ministry delivery, and resource
2412 utilization.
- 2413 2. **Establish Routine Evaluation Protocols for Synods:** Create a standardized process to
2414 routinely assess the performance and effectiveness of synods that synods would adapt
2415 into a strategic plan.
- 2416 3. **Improve Regional Cooperation:** Make recommendations to enhance collaboration
2417 among synods within regions to optimize resource sharing and ministry efforts.

2418 Evaluation Criteria

2419 The expanded evaluation criteria will include an assessment of the number and structure of
2420 synods and regions, alongside other key areas including, but not limited to, the following:

2421 1. Optimize the Number of Synods

- 2422 • **Membership Density:** Measure the number of congregations and members per synod
2423 to assess whether the synod is too large or small for effective governance.
- 2424 • **Geographic Efficiency:** Evaluate the geographic size of each synod to determine
2425 logistical efficiency in terms of travel times for synod events and bishop visitations.
- 2426 • **Cost Efficiency:** Analyze the cost implications of maintaining each synod, including
2427 administrative costs, to determine financial sustainability.

2428 2. Establish Routine Evaluation Protocols for Synods

- 2429 • **Synod Engagement Metrics:** Develop metrics such as participation rates in synod
2430 assemblies, training sessions, and regional activities to gauge active engagement.
- 2431 • **Synod Health Metrics:** Create metrics that track financial health, leadership stability,
2432 mission outreach effectiveness, congregation vitality, commitment to anti-racism and
2433 social justice work.

- 2434
- 2435
- 2436
- **Feedback and Satisfaction Scores:** Regularly collect feedback from congregations on synod support, using standardized surveys to measure satisfaction and areas for improvement.

2437

3. Improve Regional Cooperation

- 2438
- 2439
- 2440
- **Resource Sharing Effectiveness:** Track the number and quality of shared resources among synods (e.g., training programs, administrative tools, ministry materials) and the perceived effectiveness of these shared resources.
- 2441
- **Joint Initiatives and Programs:** Monitor the development and outcomes of regional initiatives to enhance cooperative ministry efforts, such as joint mission trips, shared clergy training, and combined outreach programs.
- 2442
- 2443
- **Communication Frequency and Quality:** Evaluate the frequency and quality of communications between synods, including regular updates, collaborative meetings, and shared strategic planning sessions.
- 2444
- 2445
- 2446

2447

4. General Criteria for All Objectives

- 2448
- **Change Readiness and Adaptability:** Measure how ready and able synods are to adapt to proposed changes or new structures, including staff and leadership training in change management.
- 2449
- 2450
- **Leadership Development:** Track the development programs for synod leadership to ensure there is a focus on growing skilled leaders who can manage change and foster collaboration.
- 2451
- 2452
- 2453

2454

Evaluation Process

- 2455
1. **Evaluation Cycle:** Implement a comprehensive evaluation framework with specific emphasis on structural efficiency alongside other performance metrics.
- 2456
2. **Alignment with ELCA Values:** The evaluation process for the ELCA synods should be conducted in a manner that is deeply aligned with the church's core values. These include forgiveness and reconciliation, dignity, compassion and justice, inclusion and diversity, courage and openness to change, and faithful stewardship of God's creation and gifts.
- 2457
- 2458
- 2459
- 2460
3. **Structured Feedback and Adjustment Mechanism:** Establish continuous feedback mechanisms to allow for real-time adjustments and strategic alignments, with a special focus on the structural aspects of synods and regions.
- 2461
- 2462
- 2463

2464

Implementation Phases

2465

2466

The outline below may be adjusted by the council as deemed necessary and the information listed below is meant to serve as an initial framework.

2467

2468

Phase 1: Develop and implement the expanded evaluation framework, initiate detailed structural assessments, and begin collecting data.

2469

2470

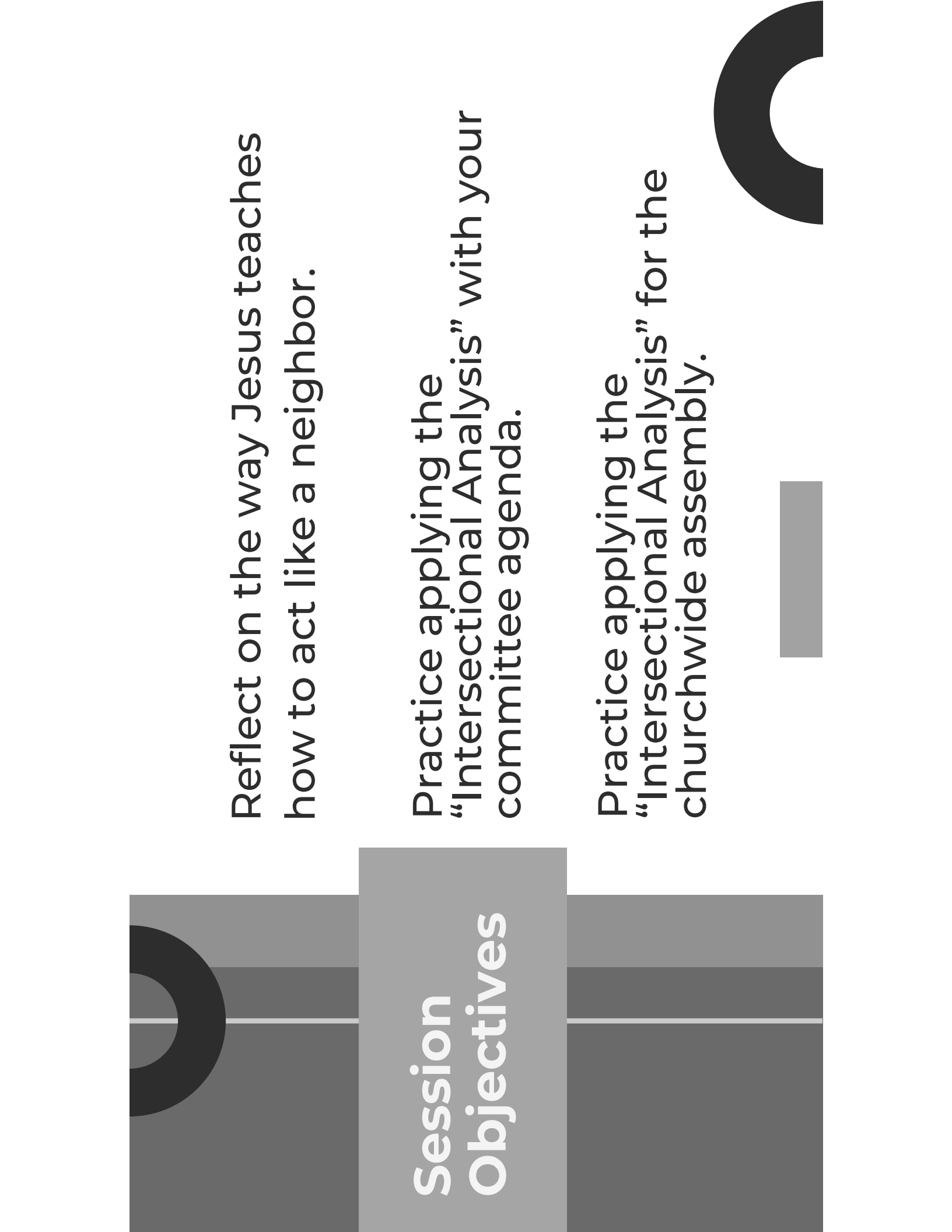
Phase 2: Continue assessments with a mid-cycle review focusing on structural efficiency and its impact on mission effectiveness.

2471 **Phase 3:** Complete final assessments and prepare comprehensive evaluation reports,
2472 including recommendations for potential structural, policy and/or constitutional changes.

Church Council Meeting

Racial Justice & Gender Justice
April 4, 2025



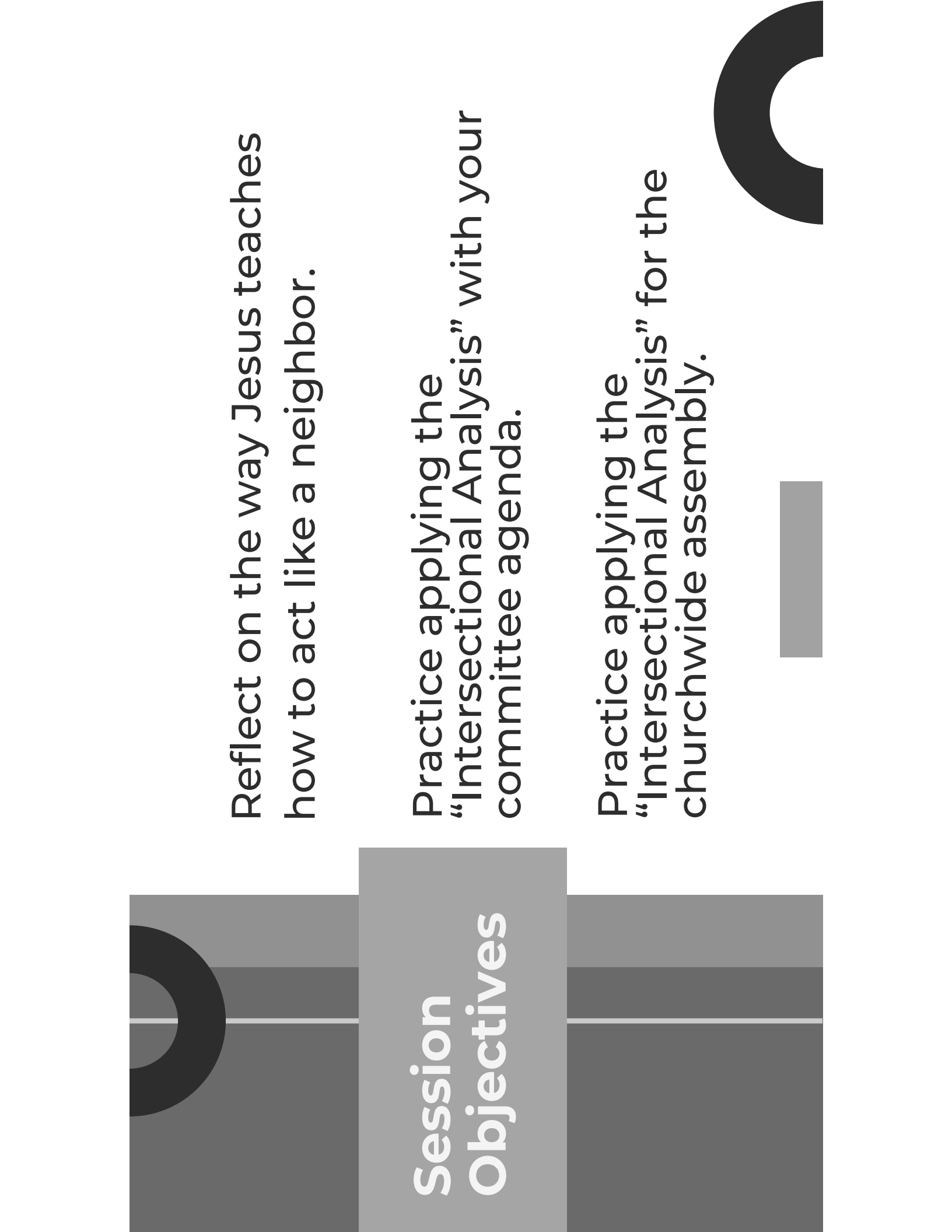


Session Objectives

Reflect on the way Jesus teaches
how to act like a neighbor.

Practice applying the
“Intersectional Analysis” with your
committee agenda.

Practice applying the
“Intersectional Analysis” for the
churchwide assembly.



How are we working Together?

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R

RESPONSIBILITY

Take Responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others.

E

EMPATHETIC

Use Empathetic listening.

S

SENSITIVE

Be Sensitive to differences in communication styles.

P

PONDER

Ponder what you hear and feel before you speak.

E

EXAMINE

Examine your own assumptions and perceptions.

C

CONFIDENTIALITY

Keep Confidentiality.

T

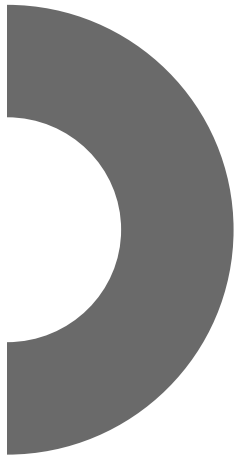
TRUST

Trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong.

Resource:

The KI Tool Kit

Kaleidoscope
INSTITUTE



Reflect on the way Jesus
teaches how to act like a
neighbor

Read Luke 10:25-37



Journal and share

Reflect and Journal

1. Where do you detect individuals and systems at play?
2. What do the individuals and the systems do? Why?
3. How does Jesus define being a neighbor?

Share

Share your response with a neighbor.

Highlights in the Story

SYSTEMS

COMPASSION

NEIGHBOR

Article 5: “Our focus as Lutheran Christians on Jesus Christ affects how this church understands the call to do justice. Because we are freed in Christ for others, we are able to respond to God’s call to love our neighbor as ourselves. In society, neighbor love takes the form of neighbor justice.”

(Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action, 2-3)

“A humanity enslaved to sin has been set free; a Church has been gathered in freedom. Cultural differences still matter, but they can be seen for what God intends—blessings rather than means of enslavement” (p. 1).

(Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture, pg. 1)



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Gender Justice / Racial Justice

This tool will help you prioritize marginalized communities when creating a program, developing a budget or making an institutional decision.

By doing so, we can ensure these often overlooked communities are considered from the start.

Why are these questions important?

Research shows that to make decisions and plan in ways that align with your beliefs, it is important to take into consideration information that might be outside your experience or usual sources of information.

How to use this tool:

Answer the following questions to ensure that people from marginalized communities are intentionally included in program design and budgeting, and not unintentionally excluded or cut during revisions.

Tip: You can have your team fill this out as individuals and then come together to see if everyone is in alignment.

What are we evaluating today?

TAKE INVENTORY

How does this decision affect a community? Positive + | Negative - | Neutral 0

COMMUNITY	+	-	O	In what way?
Age (Elders, Youth, Children)	☐	☐	☐	

CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Adapted from *Countering Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tonya Olson, ChangeWork, 2001.

Antidotes to Self-Denial: A Pathway to Social Responsibility, 2000

Perfectionism • a tendency to expect much of oneself • a sense of guilt or shame if one does not live up to one's own standards • a tendency to be self-critical • ANTIDOTES: recognize a person's worth as a human being, not as a performer; accept one's limitations; understand that perfectionism is a self-imposed barrier to growth	Progress Is Bigger, More • associating self-worth with productivity and success • trying to do more than one is capable of • trying to do more than one wants to do • ANTIDOTES: learn to be content with what one has; understand that progress is a process, not a goal; recognize that progress is a journey, not a destination	Prejudice/Hatred • a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience • a feeling of hostility or dislike toward a person or group of people • a feeling of superiority over a person or group of people • ANTIDOTES: learn to see people as individuals, not as members of a group; understand that prejudice is a learned behavior; recognize that prejudice is a barrier to growth	Either/Or Thinking • a tendency to see things in black and white • a tendency to see things in terms of "either/or" • a tendency to see things in terms of "all or nothing" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in shades of gray; understand that there are many possibilities; recognize that there are many ways to do things	Future Headlines • a tendency to see things in terms of "what will happen" • a tendency to see things in terms of "what might happen" • a tendency to see things in terms of "what should happen" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in terms of "what is happening"; understand that the future is uncertain; recognize that the future is not a destination	Fear of Open Conflict • a tendency to avoid conflict • a tendency to avoid confrontation • a tendency to avoid disagreement • ANTIDOTES: learn to see conflict as a natural part of life; understand that conflict is a process, not a goal; recognize that conflict is a journey, not a destination	Individualism • a tendency to see things in terms of "me" • a tendency to see things in terms of "my" • a tendency to see things in terms of "mine" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in terms of "we"; understand that individualism is a learned behavior; recognize that individualism is a barrier to growth	Quantity Over Quality • a tendency to see things in terms of "how many" • a tendency to see things in terms of "how much" • a tendency to see things in terms of "how fast" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in terms of "how good"; understand that quantity is a learned behavior; recognize that quantity is a barrier to growth	Written Word Worship • a tendency to see things in terms of "what is written" • a tendency to see things in terms of "what is said" • a tendency to see things in terms of "what is thought" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in terms of "what is felt"; understand that the written word is a learned behavior; recognize that the written word is a barrier to growth	Only One Right Way • a tendency to see things in terms of "the only way" • a tendency to see things in terms of "the right way" • a tendency to see things in terms of "the best way" • ANTIDOTES: learn to see things in terms of "many ways"; understand that the only one right way is a learned behavior; recognize that the only one right way is a barrier to growth
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**Patriarchy
is a system,
not a person.**

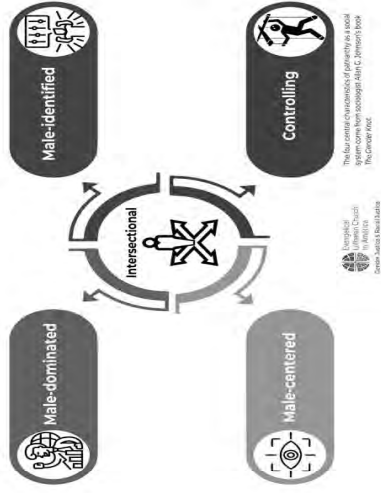
Patriarchy is a social system in which we are all enmeshed. The word patriarchy is used in sociology to describe how a group of people interact.

Patriarchy is evident in a wide range of contexts, including societies, religions, religious communities, families, and educational systems.

is analysis does not mean that males are bad and that females are good. From a Lutheran perspective, using these words to name what is harmful as sin is part of being a theologian of the cross.

Using common vocabulary helps us as a community of faith. (See Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action, pp. 4-27-38.)

*A theologian of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theologian of the cross calls the thing what it actually is."
(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* 31:40).



The four central characteristics of patriarchy as a social system come from sociologist Allan G. Johnson's book *The Gender Knot*.

1) Practice applying the “Intersectional Analysis” with your committee agenda.

- Read through it on your own.

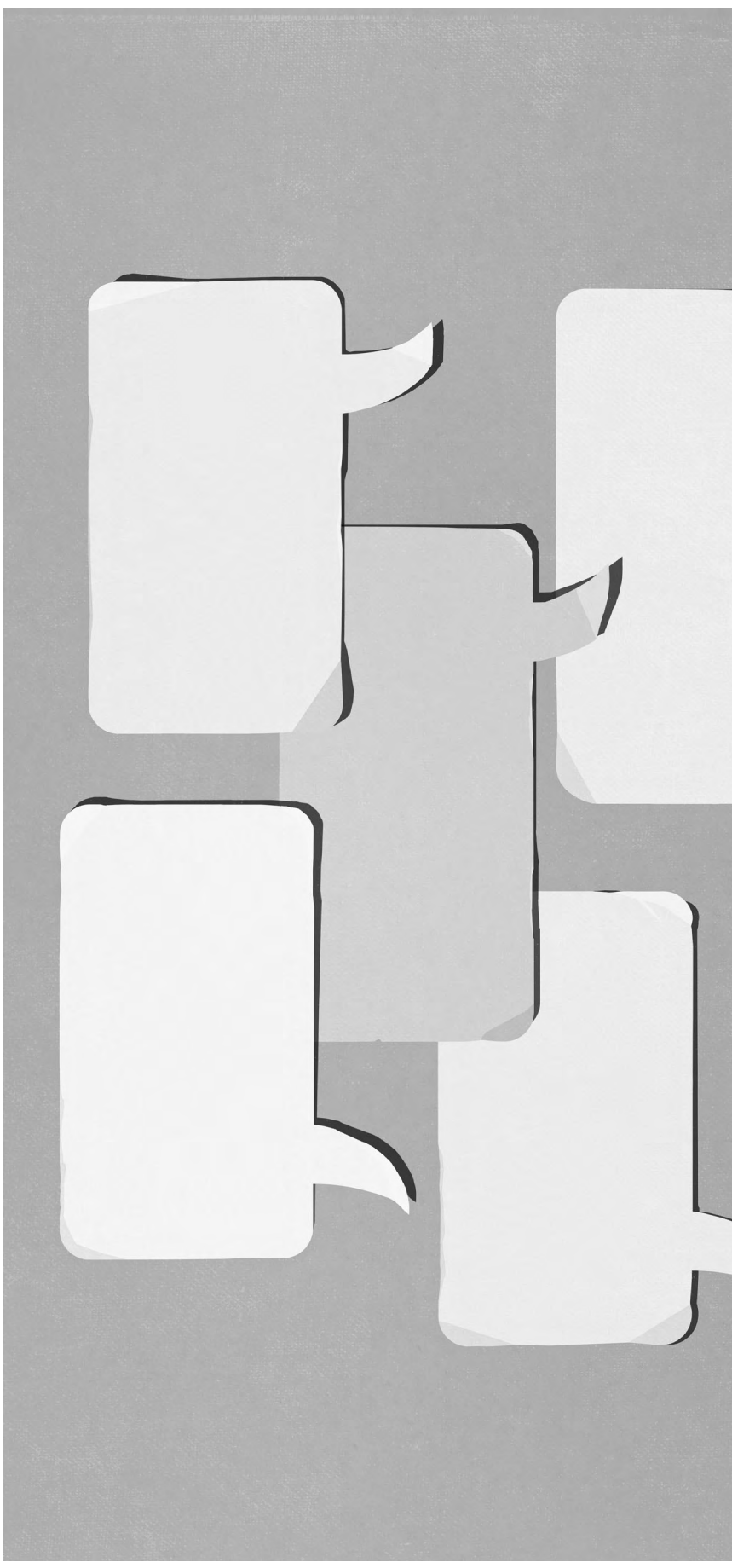
- Ask questions for clarity as needed.

2) Apply

- Evaluate how your committee’s agenda and decisions will affect different communities. (Use p. 1.)

- Evaluate how it will reinforce racial justice and gender justice. (Use p. 2 and 2 characteristics tools.)

Report what is helpful for all to know



1) Practice applying the “Intersectional Analysis” for the churchwide assembly.

Identify potential responses from the floor to items at the assembly.

Choose someone to practice with.

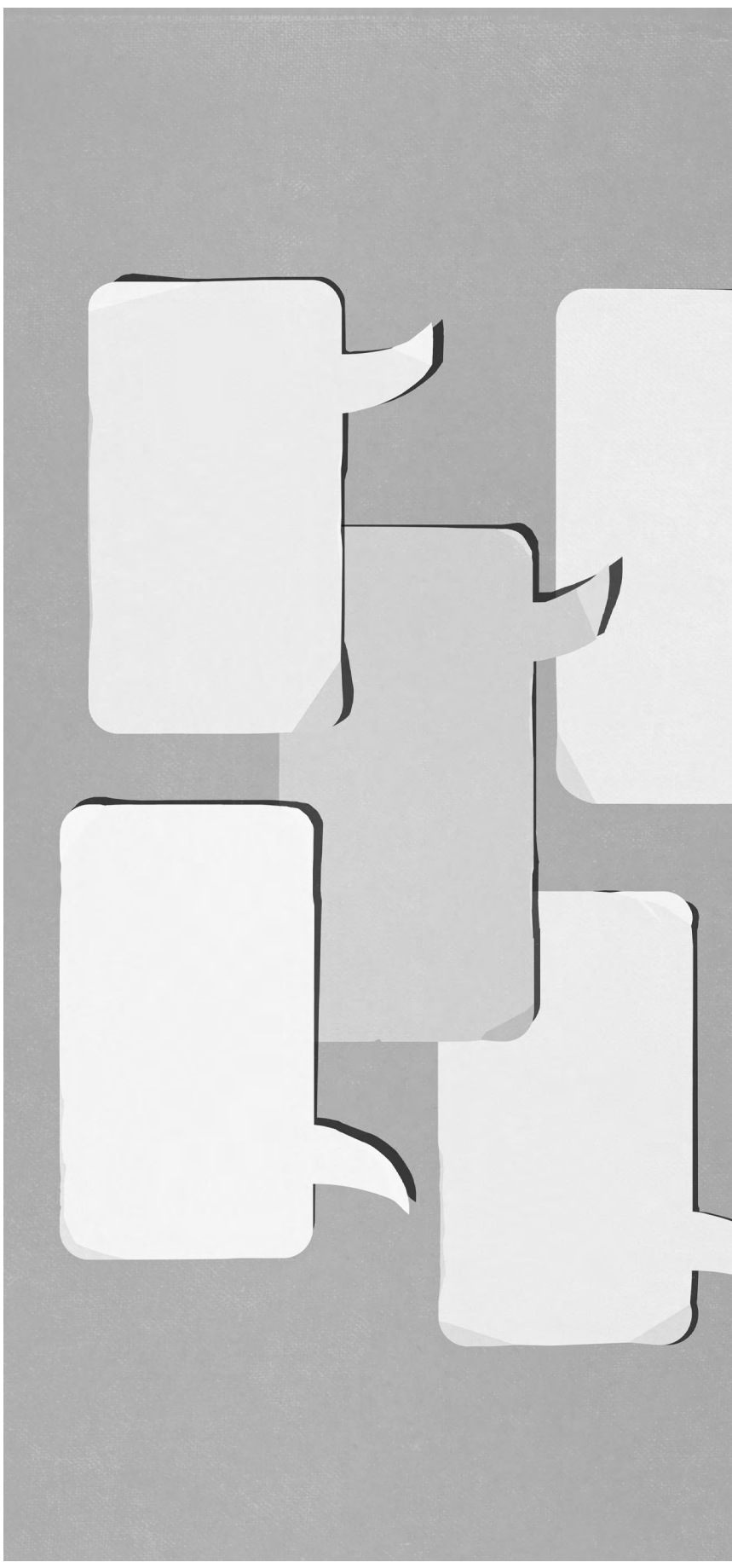
Evaluate and practice what you will say using the tool.

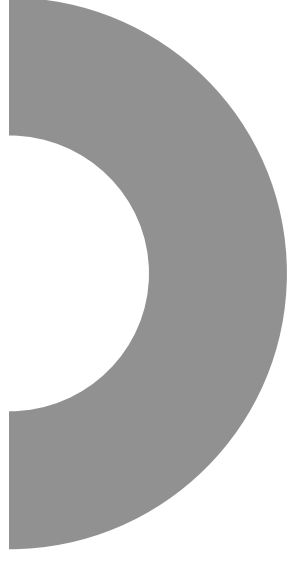
Example: A resolution to change all churchwide assemblies to self-pay for voting members

2. Apply

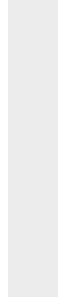
- Evaluate how the resolution or memorial will affect different communities of people. (Use page 1.)
- Evaluate how it will reinforce racial justice and gender justice. (Use page 2 and 2 characteristics tools.)

Report what is helpful for all to know



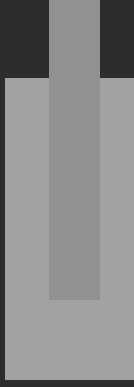


cloisir



Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,² through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.



CHARACTERISTICS OF WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE

Adapted from "white supremacy culture" by Tema Okun, dRworks, www.dismantlingracism.org

Perfectionism

- Little appreciation expressed for others' work
- Criticism more common
- Criticism of person or their work *in their absence* even more common
- Mistakes seen as personal failings
- **ANTIDOTES:** Develop a culture of appreciation; develop a learning organization, where it's expected that everyone makes mistakes and those mistakes offer opportunities for learning

Sense of Urgency

- Continued sense of little time that undermines inclusivity, and/or democratic and thoughtful decision-making
- This sacrifices potential allies in favor of quick or highly visible results
- Reinforced by funding proposals that promise (and funders that expect) too much for too little
- **ANTIDOTES:** Realistic workplans; leadership that understands that things take longer than anyone expects; discuss and plan for what it means to set goals of inclusivity and diversity, particularly in terms of time; write realistic funding proposals

Defensiveness

- Organization and energy focused on preventing abuse and protecting those in power
- Criticism of those with power viewed as inappropriate
- Difficult to raise new or challenging ideas
- Energy devoted to avoiding hurt feelings and working around defensive people
- **ANTIDOTES:** Understand how defensiveness is linked to fear (of losing power, face, comfort, privilege); name defensiveness as a problem when it is one

Quantity Over Quality

- Measurable things are most valued
- Little value attached to process
- Discomfort with emotion and feelings
- **ANTIDOTES:** Include process goals in planning; develop a values statement about how work will be done in the organization; develop methods for measuring process; recognize when you need to get off the agenda to address people's feelings and underlying concerns

Worship of the Written Word

- Those with strong documentation and writing skills are more highly valued, even in orgs where ability to relate to others is key
- The org doesn't value other ways in which information gets shared
- **ANTIDOTES:** Analyze other ways people get and share information; come up with alternative ways to document what is happening; work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization; make sure anything written can be clearly understood (is jargon-free)

Only One Right Way

- Belief there is one right way to do things and that people will learn and adopt it
- When they do not, then something is wrong with *them*
- **ANTIDOTES:** Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal; notice and name behavior when folks/groups push "one right way"; acknowledge you have a lot to learn from community partners' way of doing; be willing to adapt; never assume you/the organization knows what's best for others

Paternalism

- Decision-making clear to those with power; unclear to those without it
- Those with power feel capable of making decisions for and in the interests of those without power
- Those with power don't view as important or necessary understanding the views/experience of those for whom they decide
- **ANTIDOTES:** Ensure transparency about decision-making; include people affected by decisions in the process

Either/Or Thinking

- Things are either/or, good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us
- No sense that things can be both/and
- Results in oversimplifying complex things
- Increases sense of urgency that we must do this or that, without time to consider a middle way
- **ANTIDOTES:** When people use 'either/or' language, push for more than two alternatives; when people simplify complex issues, encourage deeper analysis; with urgent decisions, make sure people have time to think creatively

Power Hoarding

- Little value around sharing power
- Those with power feel threatened when change is suggested & experience this as a judgement of them
- They also assume they have everyone's best interests at heart, and that those wanting change are ill-informed, emotional, or inexperienced
- **ANTIDOTES:** Include power-sharing in your org's values statement; discuss that good leaders develop the power and skills of others; understand that change is inevitable and that challenges to leadership can be productive and healthy

Fear of Open Conflict

- People in power try to ignore or run from conflict
- When someone raises an "issue," response is to blame that person rather than look at the issue
- Emphasis on being polite, so raising difficult issues is being impolite, rude, or out-of-line
- **ANTIDOTES:** Role play ways to handle conflict before it happens; distinguish between politeness and raising hard issues; once a conflict is resolved, reflect on how it was resolved and/or might have been handled differently

Individualism

- Little experience or comfort working as part of a team
- People feel responsible for solving problems alone
- Accountability goes up and down, not sideways to peers or those whom the organization serves
- Desire for individual recognition and credit
- Competition valued over collaboration
- **ANTIDOTES:** Include teamwork in your org values statement; make sure that credit is given to all those who participate in an effort, not just the leaders; practice group (not individual) accountability; use meetings to solve problems, not just report activities

I'm the Only One

- Connected to individualism, the belief that if something is going to get done right, *I* have to do it
- Little or no ability to delegate work to others
- **ANTIDOTES:** Evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals

Progress is Bigger, More

- Observed in systems of accountability and success measurement
- Progress is an org that expands (adds staff, projects, etc.) or serves more people (regardless of quality of service)
- Gives no value, not even negative value, to the costs of this so-called progress
- **ANTIDOTES:** Ask how actions today will affect people seven generations from now; ensure that any cost/benefit analysis includes *all* costs, not just financial ones; ask those you work with and for to evaluate your/org performance

Objectivity

- Belief that objectivity is possible
- That emotions should not play a role in decision-making or group processes
- Requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring those who think in other ways
- Impatience with any thinking that does not appear logical
- **ANTIDOTES:** Realize that everybody's perspective is shaped by their worldview; realize this means you, too; push yourself to sit with discomfort when people express themselves in ways unfamiliar to you; assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand it

Right to Comfort

- Belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort
- Scapegoating those who cause discomfort
- Equating individual acts of unfairness against white people with systemic racism that targets people of color
- **ANTIDOTES:** Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning; don't take everything personally

WE CAN DO BETTER!

ANTIDOTES QUICK-START GUIDE

- **Create a culture of appreciation:** publicly express gratitude for people's work and contributions
- **Choose integrity** and actively refuse to participate in gossip
- **Foster a culture of learning** where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities
- **Understand that defensiveness is linked to fear** (of losing power, face, privilege, comfort)
- **Identify other antidotes already in place** within the organization and seek ways to highlight and build upon them

Go to <http://bit.ly/WSCposter> to access to an editable and printable copy of this poster for your own use.

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Patriarchy is a system, not a person.

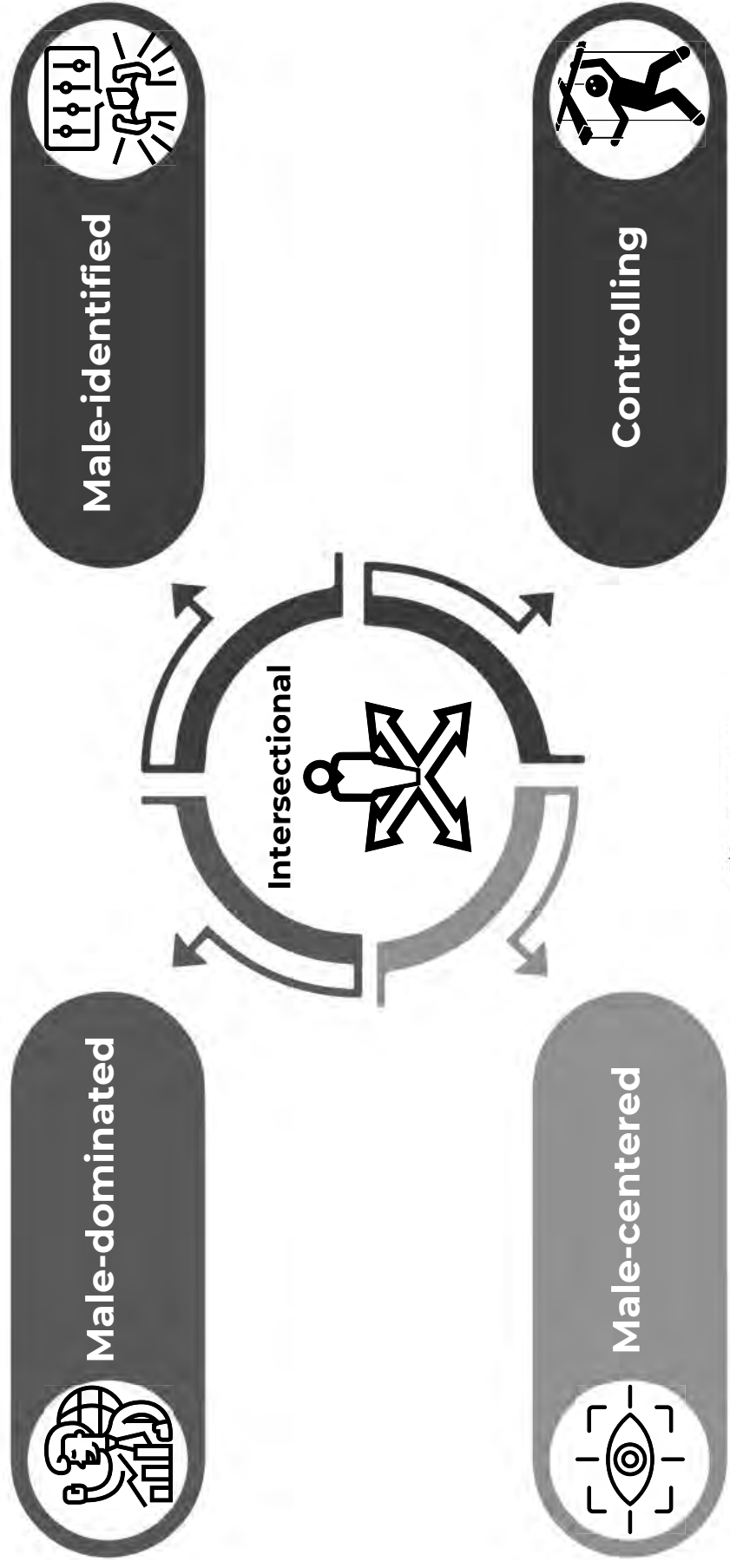
Patriarchy is a social system in which we are all enmeshed. The word patriarchy is used in sociology to describe how a group of people interacts.

Patriarchy is evident in a wide range of contexts, including societies, religions, religious communities, families, and educational systems.

This analysis does not mean that males are bad and that females are good. From a Lutheran perspective, using these words to name what is harmful as sin is part of being a theologian of the cross.

Using common vocabulary helps us as a community of faith. (See *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*, pp. 4, 27-38.)

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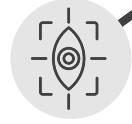
Male-identified

What is perceived or identified as "good" is identified with men.



Male-centered

Society's gaze is focused on what men do and what they see.



Male-dominated

What is perceived or identified as "good" is largely ruled or taken by men.



Controlling

Uses force and coercion to control individuals and groups.



Misogynistic

Perpetuates implicit or explicit hatred of females and what is considered feminine.



Hierarchical

Overvalues males. Undervalues females.



Commodifying

Takes ideas, bodies, and labor of people not male as male property.



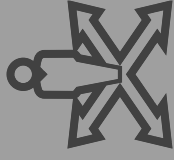
Sexist

Emphasizes and supports male privilege. Discriminatory against females and people who are queer.



Intersectional

intersecting both in personal identities and in systems of oppression within societies.



Silencing

Keeps the rules of patriarchy going. Is often a result of the fear patriarchy produces.



Exploitative

Operates through the exploitation of female labor and female personhood.



Homophobic & Transphobic

Cultivates and relies on the hatred and fear of people who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, asexual, or queer.



Heterosexist

Focuses on and privileges relationships, romance, social structures, and social rewards in individuals and family systems that are based on the primary relationship between a man and a woman.



Rageful

Produces anger against people who go against patriarchy.



Binaristic

Portrays sex and gender in either/or categories: male/female or man/woman.



Violent

Produces fear and keeps people in line with the ideals of patriarchy.



Gender Justice & Racial Justice

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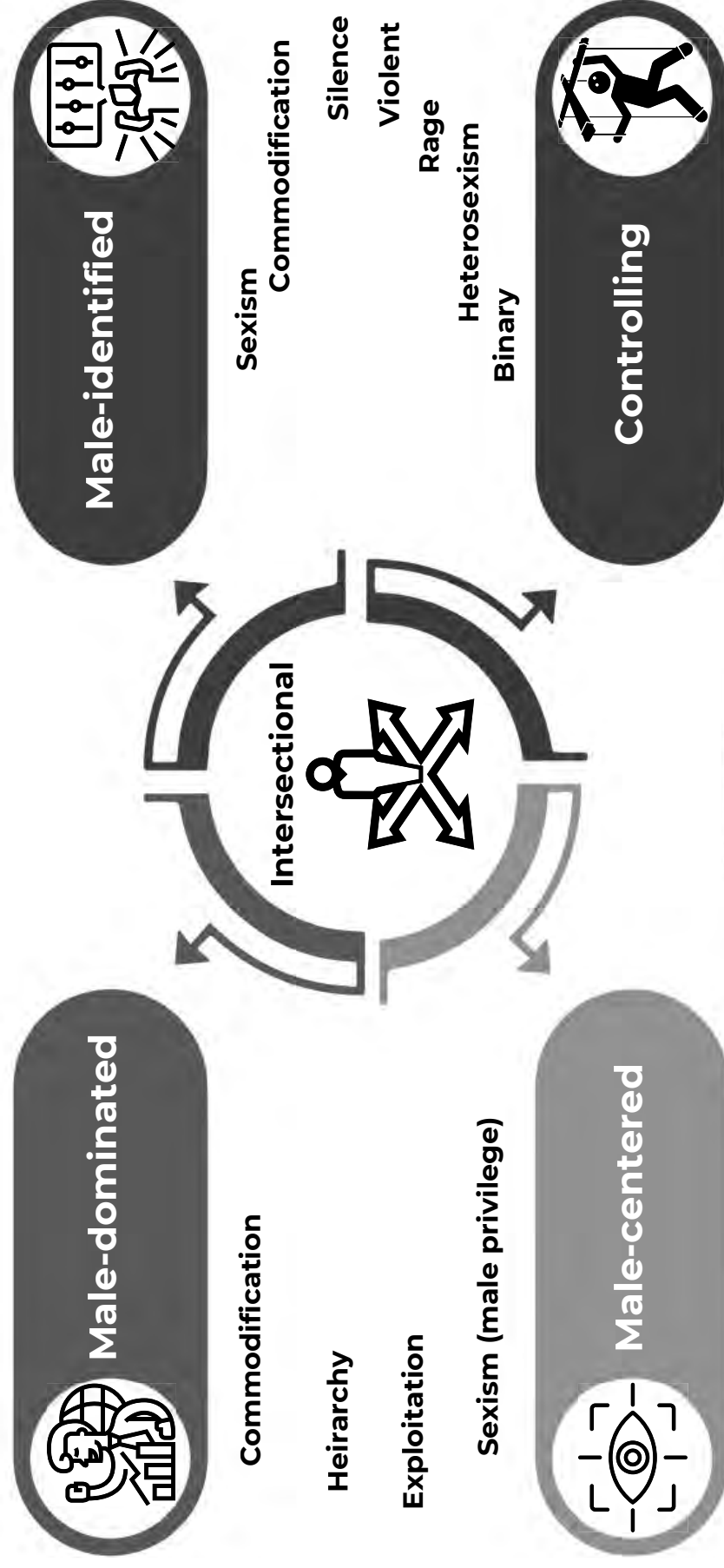
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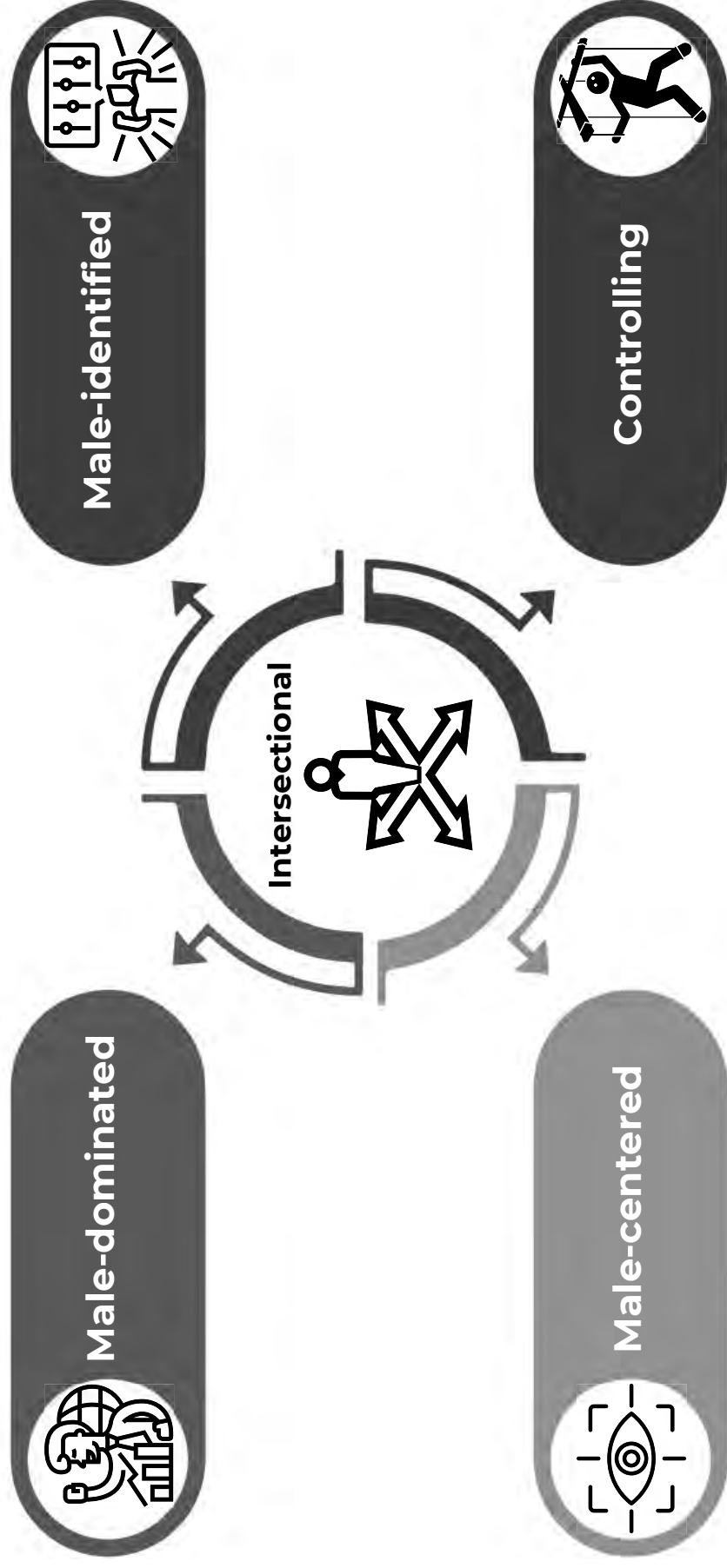
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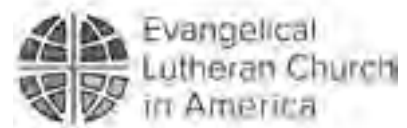
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Intersectional Analysis for Programs, Budgets, and Decisions



Gender Justice | Racial Justice

This tool will help you prioritize marginalized communities when creating a program, developing a budget or making an institutional decision.

By doing so, we can ensure these often overlooked communities are considered from the start.

Why are these questions important?

Research shows that to make decisions and plan in ways that align with your beliefs, it is important to take into consideration information that might be outside your experience or usual sources of information.

How to use this tool:

Answer the following questions to ensure that people from marginalized communities are intentionally included in program design and budgeting, and not unintentionally excluded or cut during revisions.

Tip: You can have your team fill this out as individuals and then come together to see if everyone is in alignment.

What are we evaluating today?

TAKE INVENTORY

How does this decision affect a community? Positive + | Neutral O | Negative -

COMMUNITY	+	O	-	In what way?
Elders	☐	☐	☐	
Youth	☐	☐	☐	
Children	☐	☐	☐	
BIPOC* People	☐	☐	☐	
Differently Abled People (Visual and Audio Impairments, Mobility Impairments, Learning Impairments)	☐	☐	☐	
Men	☐	☐	☐	
LGBTQIA+*	☐	☐	☐	
Women	☐	☐	☐	
People of lower socio-economic access & means (such as wage earners and low-paying jobs)	☐	☐	☐	
Other marginalized communities*	☐	☐	☐	

Will this proposal eliminate or reduce programs, services, or access to communities or groups of people that are already marginalized? If yes, check all that apply.

COMMUNITY	Y	N	In what way?
Elders	☐	☐	
Youth	☐	☐	
Children	☐	☐	
BIPOC* People	☐	☐	
Differently Abled People (Visual and Audio Impairments, Mobility Impairments, Learning Impairments)	☐	☐	
Men	☐	☐	
LGBTQIA+*	☐	☐	
Women	☐	☐	
People of lower socio-economic access & means (such as wage earners and low-paying jobs)	☐	☐	
Other marginalized communities*	☐	☐	

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

See characteristics handouts

Does this reinforce white supremacy*? If so, how?

Does this reinforce patriarchy*? If so, how?

EXERCISE

Name a social teaching that supports your proposal:

SOCIAL STATEMENTS

1. [Abortion | Aborto \(1991\)](#)
2. [Caring for creation | Medio ambiente \(1993\)](#)
3. [Church in society | Iglesia en la sociedad \(1991\)](#)
4. [The church and criminal justice | La iglesia y la justicia penal \(2013\)](#)
5. [The death penalty | Pena de Muerte \(1991\)](#)
6. [Economic life | Vida economica \(1999\)](#)
7. [Education | Educación \(2007\)](#)
8. [Genetics \(2011\)](#)
9. [Health and health care | Salud y asistencia sanitaria \(2003\)](#)
10. [Human sexuality | La sexualidad humana \(2009\)](#)
11. [Peace | Por la paz \(1995\)](#)
12. [Race, ethnicity and culture | Raza, etnicidad y cultura \(1993\)](#)
13. [Sexism | Sexismo \(2019\)](#)

SOCIAL MESSAGES

1. [Climate | Clima \(2023\)](#)
2. [Government | Gobierno \(2020\)](#)
3. [Human Rights | Los derechos humanos \(2017\)](#)
4. [Gender-based Violence | La violencia de género \(2015\)](#)
5. [Mental Illness | Las enfermedades mentales \(2012\)](#)
6. [People Living with Disabilities | Personas discapacidades \(2010\)](#)
7. [Terrorism | Terrorismo \(2004\)](#)
8. [Commercial Sexual Exploitation | Explotación sexual \(2001\)](#)
9. [Suicide Prevention | Suicidio \(1999\)](#)
10. [Immigration | Inmigración \(1998\)](#)
11. [Sexuality: Common Convictions | La sexualidad \(1996\)](#)
12. [Community Violence | Violencia comunidad \(1994\)](#)
13. [End of Life Decisions | Final de la vida \(1992\)](#)
14. [Homelessness | Gente sin vivienda \(1990\)](#)
15. [Israeli/Palestinian Conflict \(1989\)](#)
16. [AIDS | El SIDA \(1988\)](#)

In what way?

Will the proposal **increase, expand or create** programs, services, or access to communities or groups of people that are already marginalized? Yes ☐ No ☐
If yes, check all that apply.

COMMUNITY	I	E	C	In what way?
Elders	☐	☐	☐	
Youth	☐	☐	☐	
Children	☐	☐	☐	
BIPOC* People	☐	☐	☐	
Differently Abled People (Visual and Audio Impairments, Mobility Impairments, Learning Impairments)	☐	☐	☐	
Men	☐	☐	☐	
LGBTQIA+*	☐	☐	☐	
Women	☐	☐	☐	
People of lower socio-economic access & means (such as wage earners and low-paying jobs)	☐	☐	☐	
Other marginalized communities*	☐	☐	☐	

Will this proposal hinder or shut out leadership from communities or groups of people that are already marginalized? Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes, check all that apply.

COMMUNITY	Y	N	In what way?
Elders	☐	☐	
Youth	☐	☐	
Children	☐	☐	
BIPOC* People	☐	☐	
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People of lower socio-economic access & means (such as wage earners and low-paying jobs)	☐	☐	
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Will this proposal create or include access by leadership to communities or groups of people that are already marginalized: Yes ☐ No ☐ If yes check all that apply.

COMMUNITY	Y	N	In what way?
Elders	☐	☐	
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How will this proposal come with adequate, sustainable resources (funding, staff, equipping) to address inequalities? List all that apply:

Funding	Staff	Equipping

In what other ways will this proposal come with adequate, sustainable resources?

Will this proposal provide provisions to ensure successful and fair participation by stakeholders? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes, check all that apply:

☐

Development

☐

Implementation

☐

Evaluation

Elaborate:

In what other ways will this proposal provide provisions to ensure successful and fair participation by stakeholders?

What, if any, modifications does this proposal need to achieve equity and inclusion and to reflect gender justice and racial justice commitments of this church?

Gender Justice Definition	Racial Justice Definition
Gender justice is a goal to make sure people do not experience discrimination or oppression based on sex, gender, and/or sexuality. It is both individual and systemic. <u>(See Faith, Sexism, and Justice, 14, 21, 76.)</u>	Confronting racism to ensure fairness and dignity for all, recognizing our shared humanity in Christ. Rooted in our faith, it involves embracing diversity, dismantling racist structures, and working toward a more just and inclusive church and society. <u>(See Freed in Christ Pages 5 and 6)</u>

EVALUATION

1. Where did we land?
2. What do we need to figure out?
3. What additions, subtractions or edits are needed in our proposal to be equitable and intentional?
4. Was there anything that surprised you?

DEFINITIONS & ACRONYMS

BIPOC - Acronym for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color

Gender Justice - Gender justice is a goal to make sure people do not experience discrimination or oppression based on sex, gender, and/or sexuality. It is both individual and systemic. *(See Faith, Sexism, and Justice, 14, 21, 76.)*

LGBTQIA+ - Acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and more.

Marginalized Communities - Marginalized communities refer to communities, peoples, populations, and the individuals within these that historically and today experience discrimination, exclusion, or erasure due to complex social and religious factors based usually on race, ethnicity, class, sex, gender, sexuality, ability, age, etc.

These populations experience the effects of unequal power relationships across economic, political, social, religious, and cultural dimensions.

Patriarchy - is a social system that is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. This analysis does not mean that males are bad and that females are good. Patriarchy as a social system operates with the threat of violence to control people who are female-identified or identify as women, girls, or queer. We are all enmeshed in patriarchy. *(See Faith, Sexism, and Justice, See p. 4.)*

“A patriarchal worldview and way of life grants male privilege. Sexism is the reinforcement of male privilege, which leads to discrimination” *(See Faith, Sexism, and Justice, See p. 4.)*

Racial Justice - Confronting racism to ensure fairness and dignity for all, recognizing our shared humanity in Christ. Rooted in our faith, it involves embracing diversity, dismantling racist structures, and working toward a more just and inclusive church and society. *(See Freed in Christ Pages 5 and 6)*

White supremacy - Through colonization and slavery, the United States of America helped to create and embrace a system of valuing and devaluing people based on skin color and ethnic identity. The name for this system is white supremacy. This system deliberately subjugated people of color and Indigenous people for the purpose of material, political, and social advantage. White supremacy creates, sustains and protects a culture that structurally and ideologically privileges whiteness in virtually all facets of society. Racism is the continuing legacy of white supremacy. It is counter to the Gospel, anathema to core tenets of all major religions and people of good will. Racism is a sin that we must confess and seek to dismantle in our own lives and institutions.

(Language adapted from the following sources: the Presbyterian Mission Racial Equity & Women's Intercultural Ministries & The Episcopal Church Resources internal document)



STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR THE



Strategic Commitments

Presented by



Part of God's Love Made Real

FEBRUARY 2025

*“I am about to do a new
thing; now it springs forth;
do you not perceive it? I
will make a way in the
wilderness and rivers in
the desert.”*

— ISAIAH 43:19



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the ELCA is amid a multi-decade decline of baptized members, the next decade presents a rare opportunity for action backed by concrete support — a season the ELCA may not experience again. This report offers Barna and Fuller’s recommendations on strategic commitments that must be embodied in the future of the ELCA, which can inform how and where the ELCA focuses its time, energy and resources to make the most of this unique window and realize its vision to reflect God’s love in the world. Based on more than two years of journeying with the ELCA, we’re filled with hope and enthusiasm and truly believe the best days of the ELCA can be ahead.

We’re also sobered by the challenges, barriers and pain that keep ministries from functioning at their full potential. Further, we’re aware that the Church in the U.S. is currently in a season of decline and transformation, and the methods and structures that have gotten the ELCA to this point are not likely to move the ELCA into the future.

Our work began with many questions, including: What is the current state of the ELCA? Why is it facing some of its current challenges? Where does God seem to be leading? How might the ELCA respond and draft clear plans and strategies? Barna approaches these questions as one of the leading research organizations focused on faith and culture, with widespread trust among church leaders. Fuller is one of the largest and most influential multid denominational seminaries in the world, and our Leadership Formation Division has deep expertise related to young people (including the Fuller Youth Institute), as well as church leadership, adaptive change and intercultural competence.

We’ve found that one’s perspective on the ELCA largely depends on the role or seat that person is in, and what part of the ELCA they are focused on. Judging simply by baptized membership, number of congregations and total resources, the ELCA has significant reasons for concern following several years of downward trends. Meanwhile, for an 80-year-old who has been at the same relatively stable congregation for most of their life, the ELCA is a source of consistency, support and social connection that helps them draw closer to God. A seasoned rostered minister may see the fracturing of various social and political perspectives in their congregation and have serious concerns about the larger ELCA systems and structures — yet find themselves clear in their calling and relatively healthy in terms of their well-being and job satisfaction. A younger leader, particularly someone who is a person of color, may find it difficult to innovate in

and belong to an ELCA congregation that shares their values and convictions. A college student seeking a campus ministry experience may see the ELCA as one of the only Christian ministries that is fully inclusive and affirming of those who identify as LGBTQIA+. There is no simple picture of the beauty, diversity and complexity of the ELCA.

Given this complexity, we designed several activities and forms of data collection that have resulted in these strategic recommendations. These include review of a wide set of current and historical documents from the Churchwide Organization; ongoing discussions with core project team members and advisory teams; discovery calls with identified stakeholders; conversations with bishops and Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton; presentations to synodical leaders, Church Council and other bodies; in-person and virtual listening sessions with over 24 groups; three quantitative surveys led by Barna among rostered leaders, laity and the general population; review of training processes for synod-authorized ministers; interviews with leaders testing an approach to competency-based theological education; and 29 qualitative interviews with representatives of key themes from the survey data. The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. In some places, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.

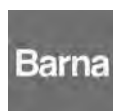


The pages that follow will begin with an overview of how this report fits into the ELCA overall, as part of the work of God's Love Made Real. Then we'll offer an overview of national realities that shape the ELCA's ministry today (which set our strategic recommendations within the wider context of themes and trends in the U.S. that shape churches, religion and faith). Key challenges, as well as assets and opportunities of the ELCA, are also provided to offer context for the strategic recommendations. The heart of the report is provided in the strategic recommendations, which identify five commitments that must be embodied for the ELCA to realize its vision and key priorities. While we are confident efforts in the five commitments will strengthen ministry efforts in the ELCA, there are wider situational and structural conditions of the ELCA that also must be addressed for the ELCA to move forward. We have provided additional details on these structural recommendations to relevant stakeholders in the Churchwide Organization. Finally, this report concludes with details on how the project was carried out, including specific sources informing the conclusions and a project timeline.

Based on the breadth of data we've collected from many different sources, we believe there are several paths and strategies for the ELCA that are relatively clear and actionable. Rather than wish that circumstances were different or wonder what else might be coming in the future, we urge ELCA leaders and stakeholders to act swiftly and decisively on the recommendations we have made. If you do, we believe there is great reason for hope that the ELCA's best days can be ahead. That said, we also believe the ELCA faces a steep incline to accomplish these recommendations and will need to be diligent, courageous and willing to take risks and make some bold moves — all while staying closely attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

As you read, we invite you to keep an open mind and to test what you read alongside your experience and where you believe God is leading the next season of the ELCA. There will be time to reflect, dialogue and act. Take confidence in following Jesus, the greatest change leader who ever lived. As Christians, members of the ELCA do well to honor Jesus' ongoing invitation to follow him, embrace change and live his way — toward the fulfillment of the ELCA's vision: "a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation."

Grateful to be part of the ELCA's journey,



CONTEXT FOR THIS WORK

The ELCA is guided by the vision of “a world experiencing the difference God’s grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.”

The phrase “God’s Love Made Real” is shorthand for this vision statement. The strategic recommendations in this report are part of how the ELCA is working toward this vision and how the Churchwide Organization is doing its part in the world to make the gospel message of God’s love more widely known. It’s one of many other strategies that are in place across the wider ELCA.

The recommendations that follow are connected to the current purpose and priorities of the ELCA.

The purpose of the ELCA is to: “Activate each of us so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.”

The priority areas of the ELCA are:

1. **A Welcoming Church:** Engaging new, young and diverse people

“Your young ... shall see visions, and your old ... shall dream dreams.” — Acts 2:17

2. **A Thriving Church:** Rooted in tradition and radically relevant

“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? ... You are the light of the world.”
— Matthew 5:13–14

3. **A Connected, Sustainable Church:** Raising the bar together

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.” — John 15:5

What might the future of the ELCA look like if it were more fully reflecting God’s love in the world? Several perspectives might give us a glimpse.

The book of Revelation paints a picture of people from every nation, tribe, people and language who stand before God in worship (Revelation 7:9), as well as the reality that God will dwell with the people, wiping every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain (Revelation 21:3-4). The ELCA has a unique role to play in carrying out the important ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:11-21).

Structurally and organizationally, it might mean that the ELCA no longer experiences numeric decline of baptized members, but grows in the number of people who are disciples of Jesus and the number of congregations that are vibrant and vital.

When we asked nearly 1,000 ELCA rostered leaders what they think the future of the ELCA will look like, their most common responses were that the ELCA would be marked by the grace and love of Jesus Christ, centered on the cross and the gospel, welcoming and inclusive of all people, and defined by justice, advocacy and service.

Several future-oriented and hope-filled quotes about the future of the ELCA stood out across this project, including:

- “Our current church buildings would be functioning more like community centers. Our pastoral care and other offerings would be hyper-locally focused and relevant to people in each community.”
- “We would lean even more into the aspects of Lutheranism that make us unique, including our strong the-

ology of the cross and emphasis on the grace of Jesus Christ. People who engage with ELCA churches would know that they are valued and accepted, and there is nothing they can do to separate them from the love of God.”

- “Our world has too much hurt and hate. Lutheran churches must help those who experience them to know they are not freed because of the good work we do, but because of the good work Jesus has already done for us. We offer an incredible message of liberation.”
- “Our metrics will have changed — no longer just butts in seats, but toward things like injustices addressed and lives transformed. We would focus even more on engaging in community and love of neighbor.”
- “We would ... invite others into the joy of the love of Jesus. I believe that if we focused primarily on that, the rest would probably take care of itself.”

Presently, the ELCA is one of the largest Christian denominations in the U.S., with nearly 3 million members and about 8,500 congregations. The ELCA has a rich history, tracing its roots to the reformer Martin Luther. Much might be possible through the strengthened collective efforts of those across the ELCA to reflect God’s love in the world.

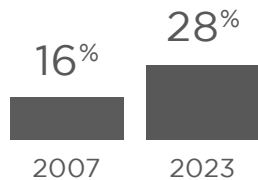
NATIONAL REALITIES THAT SHAPE THE ELCA'S MINISTRY TODAY

As the ELCA seeks to realize its vision, any strategic recommendations must take into account the broader landscape of life and faith in the United States. Following are several key features of the current religious realities in which the ELCA operates, and some statistics that illustrate these factors.

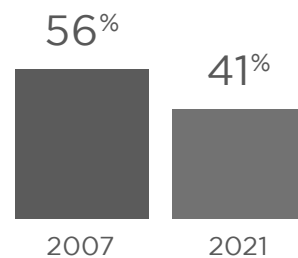
U.S. Adults' Faith Affiliation Is Declining

The number of U.S. adults who are religiously unaffiliated has climbed steadily and currently stands at 28 percent of the U.S. population. Younger generations are more likely than older adults to fall into this group.

% of U.S. adults who are
atheist, agnostic or
"nothing in particular"¹



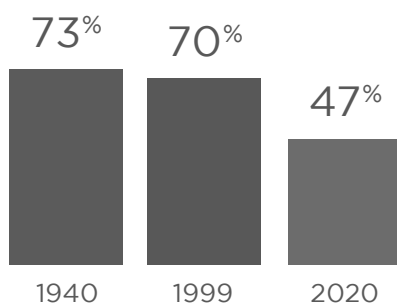
% of U.S. adults who say
religion is "very important"
in their lives ²



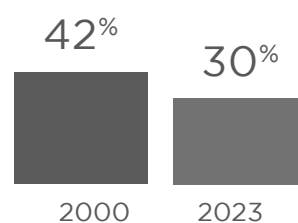
Church Attendance Is Down & Congregations Are Shrinking

Beyond the ELCA, many other Mainline denominations' membership has declined by 20 percent or more between 2010 and 2020, including American Baptist Churches USA, the Episcopal Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, Presbyterian Church USA, United Church of Christ and United Methodist Church.³

% of U.S. adults who are
church members⁴



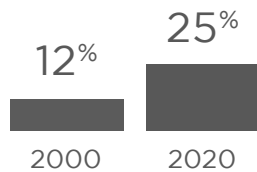
% of U.S. adults
who attend religious
services weekly⁵



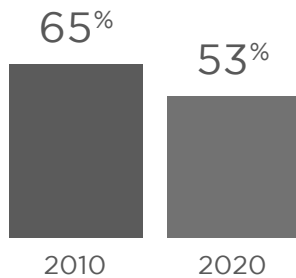
Racial & Ethnic Diversity Is Increasing, Including in Churches

Based on projections around birth rates and immigration in the U.S., Pew Research estimates that by 2055, the U.S. will have no majority racial or ethnic group. Pew also estimates that Hispanic and Asian populations will grow much more rapidly than the white or Black population.⁶

% of faith communities identified as multiracial (20%+ of the congregation from a non-majority racial or ethnic group)⁷



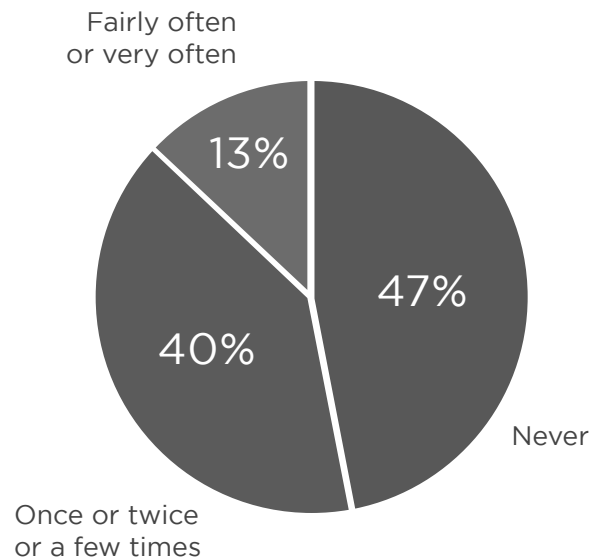
% of U.S. population under 18 years old categorized as "white alone"⁸



Clergy Contentment Is Fluctuating

Religious leaders who are younger, female, part-time, bivocational or in more challenging congregations (e.g., financially challenged, less willing to change) are more likely to consider leaving pastoral ministry.⁹ In Barna's research on pastoral burnout, pastors' top reasons for considering quitting ministry include immense stress, loneliness and political divisions.¹⁰

% of religious leaders who have seriously considered leaving pastoral ministry (2023)



Generational Patterns & Preferences Are Drastically Changing

Millennials and Gen Z engage with life milestones, work, technology, family, religion and more in very different ways than Gen X, Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation.¹¹

Median Age for Getting Married¹²

1970		2022	
Women	Men	Women	Men
21	23	28	30

Median Age for Women Having First Child¹³

1970	2000	2019
21	25	30

Taken together, the data points to significant challenges as well as significant opportunities for the ELCA. There are challenges because fewer people in the U.S. today identify as Christian or are likely to attend church, compared to recent decades. Clergy are expressing higher rates of burnout and lower contentment with their work. Younger people's major life decisions and engagement with institutions look very different than previous generations', leading to a need for new forms of ministry. Many of these realities can make the future of the ELCA seem bleak.

However, these realities also present many opportunities the ELCA can grasp. Some denominations and traditions, as well as many churches, are experiencing significant growth in the midst of these challenges. People still find Jesus compelling, and people are in need of both grace and truth, demonstrated by a loving Christian community.

One of the widest recent studies on U.S. churches over the last two decades¹⁴ has found that congregations that are growing and spiritually vital are also more likely to:

- Have strong leadership that fits well with the participants.
- Have a clear and compelling mission.
- Be innovative and open to change.
- Be active in the local community.
- Have more vibrant worship that is thought-provoking and stimulating.
- Have a community of participants that represents a diversity of ages, genders, races and other differences.
- Be good at incorporating new people.
- Have significant lay involvement, including contributing financially and volunteering.
- Live out their faith commitments in everyday life and tell others about the congregation.

KEY FEATURES OF THE ELCA TODAY: CHALLENGES

As we have engaged with the ELCA since 2022, we have gathered many insights on the ELCA's current features and realities. Following are several challenges that we believe warrant the greatest consideration as the ELCA seeks to move toward its vision, which specifically inform the recommendations to come in the report. These challenges are presented in no particular order.

1. **Decline in Membership:** The ELCA has declined in terms of baptized membership from 4,272,688 members in 2010 to 2,904,686 members in 2022.
2. **Decline in Resources:** Following a decline in baptized members, the ELCA is also facing a decline in the financial resources available to carry out ministry. This contributes to a sense of scarcity, as well as a lack of time and space to innovate.
3. **Challenges Identifying Clear Priorities and Executing Strategies:** In our experience with ELCA leaders, we found that a desire to be respectful of and support all perspectives often led to a struggle to set a shorter list of actionable priorities. Further, our review of recent historical documents for the ELCA revealed no shortage of clear strategic plans. However, it was less clear that the ELCA has been able to stick with and see through those past strategic plans.
4. **Complex Governance, Hierarchical Systems and Multiple Initiatives:** In our efforts to understand decision-making in the ELCA, there was often no one person who could say yes, but several people who had the ability to say no. In an open-ended question to hundreds of rostered leaders about what must be changed in the ELCA, one of the top responses was to reduce or eliminate ELCA bureaucracy and hierarchy. Respondents' descriptions of the ELCA revealed the complexity of the present ELCA.

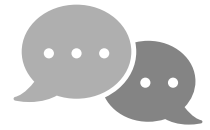
KEY FEATURES OF THE ELCA TODAY: ASSETS & OPPORTUNITIES

While the ELCA faces great challenges, we have also observed substantial assets and opportunities. These assets and opportunities also specifically inform the recommendations that follow in the report. In no particular order, they include:

- 1. Clear and Abundant Signs of Hope and Possibility:** Our work with the ELCA has revealed dozens, even hundreds, of leaders and ministries in the ELCA who are bright spots, illuminating the way forward. They give us hope that the best days of the ELCA can be ahead. While the number of baptized members in the ELCA is decreasing, we anticipate many other markers such as service efforts in the wider community, donations to worthy causes and other forms of engagement beyond membership actually paint the picture of a denomination in the midst of a renewal, not a decline.
- 2. Rich, Accessible, Conversational, Justice-Oriented, Grace-Filled Theology:** The ELCA has strong theological and historical foundations, tracing its beliefs to Martin Luther's efforts to reform the Church in the 16th century. The focus on being saved by God's grace and God's grace alone, as well as God's unconditional love in light of the cross, provide the ELCA with a relevant and much-needed gospel message for today's world. This has uniquely positioned the ELCA to engage in many forms of ministry, including ministry with the LGBTQIA+ community. Combined with the fact that the ELCA is deeply self-aware and recognizes its present challenges, a grace-filled posture could position the ELCA to respond very well in this moment.
- 3. Deep Resources, Significant Donors and Committed Leaders:** In light of its history and significant systems and structures, the ELCA has abundant resources that could be utilized in terms of real estate and property ownership. Many generous donors who value the Lutheran tradition and church have significant capacity to make transformational gifts (nationally and locally). Thousands of leaders (rostered and lay leaders) are committed to the ELCA and to seeing it succeed. The next one or two decades

present a rare opportunity for action backed by concrete support — a season the ELCA may not experience again.

4. **Extensive Camps, Campus Ministry and Youth Ministry Expertise:** In most conversations we had with leaders about areas of potential in the ELCA, camps, campus ministries and many youth ministry efforts were named (including the Youth Gathering). When we spoke to many of these leaders, however, they felt undervalued and under-resourced.
5. **Building on Clear Need and Existing Momentum:** One of the difficult aspects of any change effort is establishing the initial need for change. We find the ELCA is already self-reflective (sometimes to a fault), asking good questions and making initial movements and efforts toward change. By using our recommendations to view current challenges and barriers in new ways, as well as making better use of existing resources, there is opportunity for both evolutionary and revolutionary transformation.



● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

You'll see quotes throughout the report from people we heard from in this project, who are diverse in social location and role within the ELCA.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●





STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS:

ELCA Commitments That Must Be Embodied

In our review of all of the data over recent years, Barna and Fuller came to the conclusion there are strategic commitments that must be embodied across the ELCA. These commitments need to be translated into strategic goals and plans for action, and we offer some of those initial directions here. We call them “commitments” because we believe the ELCA already has good *intentions* or *ideas* in these areas — but the intentions and ideas are not translating into a new culture for the ELCA.

While the commitments that must be embodied represent practical, tangible and actionable areas of work, those commitments will not ultimately be successful if there is no progress made on some wider structural and systemic conditions of the ELCA. We have provided additional detail on these structural recommendations for the Church-wide Organization to the relevant stakeholders. We offer all of the commitments in light of the national realities that shape the ministry of the ELCA today, as well as the ELCA’s challenges, assets, and opportunities.

In no particular order, the five commitments that must be embodied are:

- **Commitment #1:** Cultivate congregations that are warmer, more inviting and more invitational in nature.
- **Commitment #2:** Enhance ELCA-wide efforts to nurture and strengthen faith and spiritual formation.
- **Commitment #3:** Tangibly and significantly incorporate and empower young people in all levels of the Church’s life.
- **Commitment #4:** Provide greater empowerment, equipping and tools for lay leaders to carry out the work of ministry and be the Church in the world today.
- **Commitment #5:** Rethink, refocus and reorganize the ELCA’s educational systems and structures to serve the current (and rapidly changing) needs of the ELCA.

Each commitment will be explained further on the following pages.



Throughout the suggested strategies and activities in this report, we will refer to inspiring or exemplary congregations and ministries. To learn from their stories and gain inspiration to embody each of the five commitments, visit [ELCA.org/GLMR](https://elca.org/GLMR).



COMMITMENT #1:

Cultivate congregations that are warmer, more inviting and more invitational in nature.

What it means: Once someone becomes connected with an ELCA church, data suggests that they have a very positive experience. But too few people are aware of the ELCA overall or the uniqueness and value of local ELCA churches specifically. One reason is that many ELCA members feel uncomfortable with evangelizing or inviting others to church. The outcome is that ELCA communities can become somewhat insular or private. Many people reiterated that while the ELCA has good intentions to be warm and inclusive, too many congregations have a disconnect between word and action. A warm congregation is one in which there is a sense of welcome, belonging and acceptance. Invitational means members of congregations intentionally encourage others they know to participate in worship or other activities of their congregation. Often the ability to be warm and inviting flows from a posture of listening, empathy and understanding. An example that was shared during our listening project was that, on a Sunday morning, many ELCA members have no problem saying hello to a new visitor or offering them a cup of coffee — but those same members don't often do a good job inviting someone to fellowship after the service or asking the person what brought them to worship in the first place.

Why it is recommended: We heard from many project participants that while some new people visit ELCA congregations, those congregations lack the warmth and invitational culture to compel visitors to return or continue to engage. The ELCA could have the healthiest, strongest churches in the world, but without more people knowing about them, no new people will attend or join. This is analogous to owning or eating at the best restaurant in town, but never advertising

Commitment #1 | Key Data Points

The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. Here, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.

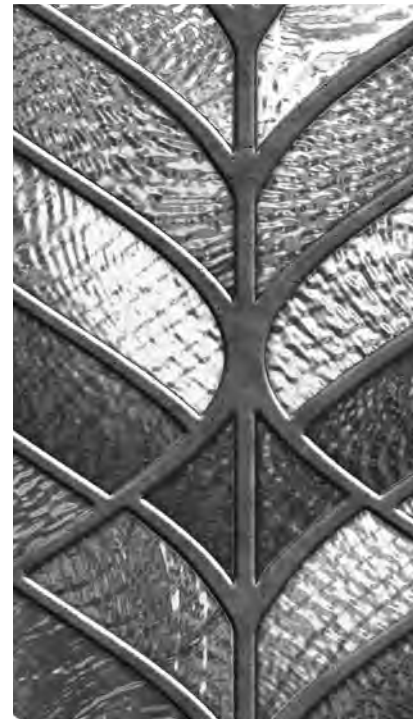
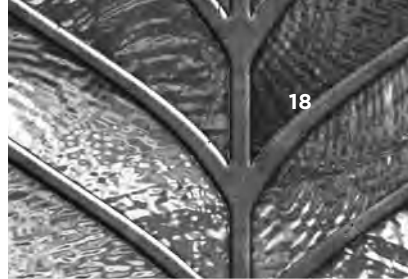
 Laypeople who are younger or are people of color struggle to see their churches as warm communities. Meanwhile, they are less inclined than older or white laypeople to see their churches as effective at being a welcoming place for persons of color, the LGBTQIA+ community and marginalized people groups.

 While ELCA laypeople generally give their churches high marks when it comes to fueling a warm community, there is room for improvement. Less than half of laity feel their church integrates newcomers well (46% say this is “completely” or “very true”).

for it or inviting someone to it because you don't want to be too pushy. This lack of warmth and invitation, particularly to new people who are younger and more diverse, was mentioned throughout the project. On the flip side, many interview participants mentioned that congregations that develop an outward, missional focus of care for the surrounding community naturally become more warm and welcoming. Warm and inviting churches don't wait for people to come to church, but demonstrate hospitality by showing they care about people and their wider community, then move from care to understanding and inclusion. As the ELCA engages this commitment, it must ask, "Who are our congregations designed to welcome, include and integrate?" Specifically, congregations should ask (and potentially get outside perspective on) if they are warm and inviting to people of color, those who are disabled and other marginalized groups. As ELCA congregations ask these questions, many in the extensive listening sessions expressed a lack of training in how to create more inclusive and welcoming environments.

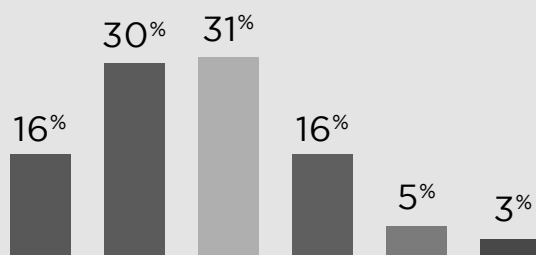
Suggested strategies and activities:

1. **Develop and provide widespread evangelism training for rostered leaders and ELCA members in a way that is natural for and fits ELCA theology and culture.** This could be done alongside Directors of Evangelical Mission (DEMs), churchwide staff who are embraced by each synod to serve local needs for tools and counsel. The training should likely have a strong focus on listening and developing greater empathy, as well as training people how to invite others in a way that is organic. We encountered some exemplary local congregations and campus ministries who said they were effective in training people to invite the people they meet to church and to be more welcoming to visitors when they do come. One interview participant explained their church does



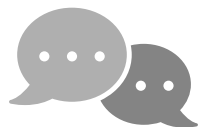
"Our church integrates newcomers well"

● Completely true ● Very true ● Moderately true
● Slightly true ● Not true at all ● Not sure



n=10,282 ELCA laypeople

IN LISTENING SESSIONS WITH A CROSS-SECTION OF HUNDREDS OF ELCA LEADERS, A TOP RECOMMENDATION THAT EMERGED WAS TO PRIORITIZE MOVING DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DEI) GOALS TOWARD ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION.



“Isn’t it great when you get to invite someone home?”

“Welcome brings peace. If you are welcome and you belong in a space, you tend to feel at peace there. And if you feel marginalized in a space, you’re not going to feel peace there. Really, at its core, hospitality is about peace.”

“‘All are welcome’ is lovely, but people won’t know they are welcome unless you have named them in the invitation.”



role-play activities to help their members become comfortable inviting new people. Another participant recommended, “We need to create a resource to equip people to talk about their faith in a way that doesn’t feel like it’s from 1982. Most ELCA pastors I know are bad at that. Instead of defining ourselves by what we’re not or what we’re against, we need to define ourselves by what we’re for.” Such training could be refined and offered as a national resource for the ELCA. **As will be a theme throughout our recommendations, we anticipate one of the most effective means for distributing high-quality, contextualized training will be through an online learning platform. This training can also be offered through national and synodical training events, as well as DEMs providing training in each local congregation.**

2. **Lean into existing strengths of inclusion and being welcoming to those who are LGBTQIA+ (following ELCA policies and social statements), and invest more effort and resources in supporting ministries that do this well to expand and replicate those ministries.** This is one significant characteristic of ELCA congregations and ministries in the wider landscape; many campus ministry leaders we interviewed expressed they were one of the only (and sometimes the only) LGBTQIA+ affirming Christian group on campus. One college student we spoke to expressed that they participate in the ministry and invite others because “there’s such a high level of safety here.” Gather several ELCA leaders who are strong in this work and develop a curriculum or



The data reveals that strong integration of newcomers is positively associated with church qualities like being a safe place for marginalized people, trusting and supporting younger and diverse leaders and being committed to racial equity and justice.



The top reason nonchurchgoers might be encouraged to continue attending a church is if they felt welcomed and accepted, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds.

What Encourages Church Visitors to Return? Nonchurchgoers’ Top 5 Responses

Please read the following statement and check all the answers that apply: “I would continue attending a church I visited if ...”

28%

I felt welcomed and accepted, regardless of my background or beliefs

21%

I found people who I could see myself becoming friends with

20%

I thought the pastor’s teaching was helpful and practical

19%

It had a supportive community of people

17%

The church fostered a sense of authentic belonging

n=1,439 U.S. adults who have not attended church in the last six months; 35% selected “none of the above.”

set of ministry recommendations that any church can use. The curriculum would target lay leaders and could be disseminated as a small-group or Bible study, or as a 101-level course on a digital training platform. The ministry recommendations would be targeted to rostered leaders at national and synodical training events or also through the digital training platform. We recognize (and heard) there is uneven reception among ELCA congregations and members about their openness to LGBTQIA+ ministries, and recommend that the ELCA move toward greater alignment on this topic (while recognizing divergent positions of conscience).

3. **Provide training for churches and leaders to focus more on creating relationships and other spaces of trust outside of worship services.** These ministries are more likely to be an entry point for new, younger and more diverse attendees. We recommend the ELCA (perhaps in partnership with seminaries) create stronger continuing education and nondegree digital forms of training on this topic. Such training would focus on how ministries can better offer true hospitality — particularly to those who feel excluded or marginalized. This could include expansion of small-group ministries or other venues that allow personal relationships to be developed, including gathering around meals. It could also include training on how rostered leaders could begin to view and utilize their building as a resource for their community by partnering with local nonprofits and co-hosting community events. There are several exemplary congregations in the ELCA who demonstrate these values well and embody them through specific practices. Curate the lessons and best practices from these congregations and share them widely throughout the ELCA (perhaps starting with some of the ministries profiled on ELCA.org/GLMR). Sharing them would go beyond broadcasting information or telling inspiring stories to developing competency-based training delivered in-person or on an accessible online platform.
4. **Develop a scalable model where ELCA congregations provide hospitality and create reciprocal partnership with immigrant communities and churches.** In our research, we spoke with a few congregations in the ELCA that already do this work well. Several advisors in interviews identified this as a natural strength that builds on



“We are not [being warm] just so more people will come and join us. We’re working to establish in our ministry the culture that we want to be curious about people because God is curious about people.”

“We need to accompany folks. We need to receive, as well as give. It’s reciprocal — and all about relationships. That’s what God does with us.”



In your church:

Implement an intentional welcome strategy

Don’t just rely on friendly greeters — establish structured follow-ups with church visitors, such as handwritten notes, phone calls or small welcome gifts. Consider ways to make your space more physically and culturally accessible to both guests and members (e.g., name tags with pronouns, inclusive liturgy or dietary accommodations).

the ELCA's orientation toward service and justice, and our experience with other networks and traditions outside the ELCA identifies this as an area of opportunity. One interview participant stated, "I view this as more about hospitality. Hospitality is being willing to hear and receive feedback and become more accommodating to other people." While the ELCA has not seen significant growth in ethnic diversity of its baptized membership through its established ministries and congregations, leaning on the ELCA's desire to love neighbors and support those in need might be naturally expressed by partnering with Christians who are entering this country and many communities with a robust faith.

5. **Support congregations in conducting a "language audit" to ensure that their language is clear, understandable and welcoming to newcomers.** This might include making sure the language isn't overly dense, doesn't lean heavily on "insider terminology" and is aligned with ELCA social teachings and policy. Language shouldn't be off-putting to those who are of different abilities, identify as LGBTQIA+ or are from various generations, racial and ethnic backgrounds. This might include language in terms of choice of vocabulary, but also to be more multilingual. Several leaders we interviewed noted they became aware that their messaging was confusing or off-putting to newcomers, and made intentional shifts over a period of time through more understandable and hospitable vocabulary. These shifts included paying attention to what is communicated through physical signs and space, websites (if applicable), written materials and other language that offered "first impressions" to newcomers.



COMMITMENT #2:

Enhance ELCA-wide efforts to nurture and strengthen faith and spiritual formation.

What it means: The core of the Christian faith and Lutheran tradition is not simply about being a member of a church but experiencing God's grace and love in Christ. While grace is a gift received by faith, Lutherans believe that, in response to God's love, people are set free to live out of gratitude and love. Scripture encourages Christians to become mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:13), display the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and be formed into the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18). While ELCA congregations can offer a number of helpful and important ministries, none is more important than the Church's efforts to help people become stronger in their faith in Christ and deepen their discipleship.

Why it is recommended: National data outside of the ELCA is clear that healthy and growing congregations include congregants who are spiritually vital and have a strong faith. At present, however, many church members seem to possess a faith that might be described as half-hearted or going through the motions. While church membership nationally across traditions is on the decline, research continues to affirm strong interest in spirituality and a desire to find meaning and purpose. Within the ELCA, the research conducted for Barna's surveys shows laity report low levels of engagement in spiritual practices, and many young people share their frustration with ELCA churches that do not seem to embody the example of Jesus. Simply put, the more ELCA congregations and congregants tangibly embody the grace and love of Jesus, the more vibrant and vital those congregations will be — and the more attractive they will be to new, young and diverse people.

Commitment #2 | Key Data Points

The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. Here, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.



A little over 70 percent of ELCA laypeople say it's completely or very true their churches have relevant preaching and encourage them to live out their faith every day. Programming like worship and Sunday school is often considered foundational ministry activity.



From our perspective, one area of weakness for ELCA churches is training people to regularly engage in spiritual practices, such as prayer and reading the Bible. Just 39 percent of laity say it is "completely" or "very true" that their church accomplishes this.



“You have to engage young people’s questions. They have deep interests that they’ll share — if we’ll listen. ... I don’t treat young people like they’re stupid, and I don’t short them on theology.”

“Prioritizing people’s mental and spiritual health needs must be way more important than churches just running a program.”



Suggested strategies and activities:

1. **Provide national-level training for rostered leaders on encouraging spiritual practices and other forms for deepening spiritual formation of congregants.** Similar to our recommendation in the first commitment, we believe this could be best deployed through development of an online training platform that offers competency-based training for rostered and lay leaders, as well as developing synodical training for rostered leaders. While there are dozens of spiritual practices, some specific historical practices we heard mentioned include prayer, reading scripture, engaging in service and justice efforts, forgiveness and keeping Sabbath. Given the ELCA has already developed a *Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity*, several insights from that report might be implemented, including consideration for how trauma-informed practices and training might be incorporated. Incorporating trauma-informed approaches can help the ELCA better respond and offer grace and healing in light of the very real brokenness, division and hurt that exists in the world. We are not aware of a widely used Lutheran discipleship curriculum, and if it is not available, we recommend it be developed by the Churchwide Organization and made available to Sunday school classes, small groups and Bible studies in the ELCA.
2. **Explore and elevate approaches to spiritual formation that extend outside of worship services or are less Sunday-focused.** Many exemplary leaders in the ELCA already offer creative approaches that reflect the needs and interests of their community. Some leaders we interviewed highlighted that new approaches emerged when they lis-

Why Would a Nonchurchgoer Consider Attending Church? Top 5 Responses

Please read the following statement and check all the answers that apply: “I might consider going to a Christian church if ...”



Small-group ministry and discipleship courses, according to laypeople, are impactful. Among rostered leaders, however, these areas are rarely noted as a primary focus for resource allocation.



“Seeking a deeper sense of spirituality” is one of the top reasons nonchurchgoers might consider going to church.

24%

I wanted to find peace in my life

20%

I was seeking a deeper sense of purpose

20%

I was seeking a deeper sense of spirituality

19%

I needed help / support to cope with something difficult

19%

I wanted to reconnect with my Christian roots

n=1,439 U.S. adults who have not attended church in the last six months; 33% selected “none of the above.”

tened carefully to people in their faith community, asked what they wanted to learn and created opportunities for people to try new things. One campus ministry leader explained she hasn't abandoned traditional Bible reading, but incorporates art to make it more creative and allow people to engage in new ways. We recommend the ELCA develop resources (and provide tangible ministry stories, ideas and examples) for rostered leaders to incorporate the arts into Bible reading. Another recommended approach is to develop several cohorts that include a few leaders and congregations that are already exemplary in this area (such as having effective small-group ministries) and including 10–15 congregations that need to grow in this area, creating the space and interactions for these congregations to learn and grow together.

3. **Heighten approaches to faith formation that are action-oriented and lean into the ELCA's strengths of being focused on justice and love of neighbor.** Create a curriculum or set of resources that helps ELCA congregations tie social justice efforts more clearly to spiritual practices and spiritual growth. These resources would be provided to both rostered leaders and key lay leaders through an online training platform, synodical training for rostered leaders and material for small-group or Bible study groups. Many ELCA congregations naturally are externally focused, and that can be a catalyst for faith formation. An example of this might be that some people are naturally generous with their finances, but do not have firsthand experience with those who are unhoused, are in poverty or have other tangible needs. Designing church ministries that allow more participants to be active and hands-on in their local neighborhood or in another community or culture can be a catalyst toward spiritual growth.
4. **Drawing from the qualitative interviews Fuller and Barna conducted for this work, identify a set of best practices and creative ideas on new forms of discipleship.** Many ELCA congregations already excel here, but the ideas need to be articulated practically and shared more broadly in a way that gains traction and drives action. For example, a few congregations mentioned they are experimenting with changes to confirmation by



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“[The students] that end up going to [our campus] Bible study are mostly our Lutheran students. They mostly feel like they don’t know anything about the Bible at all, which is helpful feedback for the Church. We also teach them to articulate their faith. What do they believe? Why is that important to them?”

“Many people have experienced the Bible being used in a harmful manner. While our preaching needs to be biblical, we need to dig deeper into the Bible and read specific passages from a different perspective.”

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

giving young people more agency and leadership opportunities, and they’re seeing positive results. While the Churchwide Organization shares a significant amount of information, we see this as an opportunity to move from an “information-based approach” (where people are made aware, but may not experience change) to a “formation-based approach” (where people are both aware and experience change). We recommend the ELCA develop stronger and clearer national standards for non-degreed training and competencies needed of rostered leaders and lay leaders, delivered in formats that support progress in those standards.



In your church:

Nurture environments for faith conversations

Create opportunities for interactive faith discussions, which might involve small-group storytelling, journaling or time during liturgy for dialogue. Consider the spirit, soul *and* body — perhaps by hosting gatherings in environments beyond the sanctuary (particularly outdoors!) or engaging tactile spiritual practices like breath work or artistic expression.



COMMITMENT #3:

Tangibly and significantly incorporate and empower young people in all levels of the Church's life.

What it means: Teenagers, young adults and families with young children in the ELCA need to be more highly prioritized. This includes the ELCA's ability to listen to and learn from them, as well as engage them in positions of leadership and authority. This shift is needed at every level: local church and ministry, synod and Churchwide Organization. Making young people a priority means that they are considered and elevated in terms of resource allocation, focus, attention, decision making, systems and structures. The ELCA does not need to take an "either / or" approach to choosing between a focus on younger generations or older generations. Instead, the ELCA can pursue an intergenerational approach to ministry that places younger people alongside older generations for relational support, mentoring and reciprocal learning.

Why it is recommended: Young people need not be one of the ELCA's biggest challenges; they can instead be one of its greatest opportunities and can fuel innovation and growth. Engagement of this age group, reinforced by ongoing intentionality, listening and support, was a glaring gap called out in nearly every form of data collection we employed. This is such a weakness — and such a significant opportunity — that we believe even small efforts here, executed consistently and across the whole ELCA, hold outsized potential to move the ELCA forward. As the ELCA seeks to be more vibrant and vital for the future, it must recognize that it will not have a future unless it better engages younger generations.

Commitment #3 | Key Data Points

The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. Here, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.



On a scale of 1 to 5
(5 being a positive score),
both rostered leaders and laity
rate the church's ability to
empathize with young people
at less than a 3.

Empathize with today's
young people

Prioritize today's young
people

Rostered
Leaders

Laity

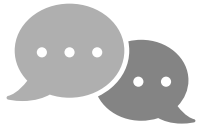
2.59

2.86

2.53

2.86

n=875 ELCA rostered leaders; n=10,282 ELCA laypeople. Average score per category, on a scale of 1 to 5. Each category includes 5 relevant questions.



“I want [the kids] to say, ‘At my church, I was the assistant minister on some Sundays. I also helped count money, I served communion and did numerous other things.’ I hope the church would allow them to get plugged in at whatever age or level.”



Suggested strategies and activities:

1. **There is currently a shortage of ministry and program offerings in ELCA congregations designed for or focused specifically on teenagers, young adults or families with young children.** More ministries for this age group need to be identified, launched and supported. This could take a variety of forms, either coordinated by the Churchwide Organization, synods or local congregations. One step in making this happen is redirecting some budget at all levels toward ministry with young people. For teenagers, the ELCA Youth Ministry Network provides a variety of resources and training opportunities. For young adults, low-hanging fruit would include expanding the Gather Network in more synods, as well as involving young adults in increased leadership of a congregation’s mission and service efforts.
2. **Train rostered leaders (not just youth leaders), as well as lay leaders in the ELCA, in current best practices for how to engage and respond to this younger generation.** This will need to include national-level training on understanding and empowering young people, including how to step into their world, listen to them, and recruit and train other adults to invest in them relationally. Fuller and Barna have several industry-leading resources and trainings that may be helpful here. Our research reveals that a pastor’s willingness to make changes in this area is particularly important for local churches to make

**IN LISTENING SESSIONS
WITH A CROSS-SECTION OF
HUNDREDS OF ELCA LEADERS,
A TOP RECOMMENDATION THAT
EMERGED WAS TO INVEST IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH, YOUNG
ADULTS AND YOUNG FAMILIES,
BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF ELCA
CONGREGATIONS.**



Congregations in urban locations, diverse churches and larger churches tend to receive better assessments from laypeople when it comes to prioritizing young people and families.



Younger leaders in the ELCA are significantly more likely than their older peers to be feeling emotionally and mentally exhausted, lonely, unequipped and inadequate. They are also more likely to report burnout, stress and feeling held back due to their identity.

progress. Pastors may also need supportive training in leading change. We recommend young people be part of and help lead the training.

3. **Utilize the Growing Young Assessment tool to conduct an audit across all levels of the ELCA, including local congregations and synods.** This could start with one pilot group of five to 10 congregations that engage the assessment and, through coaching, make tangible next steps over a 6- to 12-month period. Based on the results, make tangible shifts such that young people are one of the top five priorities of ELCA time, energy, focus and funding.
4. **Increase investments in camp and campus ministries.** We regularly heard that young people simply aren't centered within the ministries, practices, structures and funding of the ELCA. Yet much of the data we collected across this project identified that many of the camps and campus ministries are bright spots. In particular, when rostered leaders were asked, "If you were given \$1 million to help the ELCA more effectively engage new, young and diverse people and had one year to spend it, where would you invest it?" the top response category by far was camps and campus ministries. These efforts should be carried out with a specific focus on how to identify future leaders for the ELCA. We believe these efforts can and will have a disproportionate contribution to feeding a pipeline of seminary students and rostered leaders.



"We're still kind of stuck culturally in the place that's like, 'It's enough to just have young people in the room and then the real adults will make the decisions.' And there's not this idea that they have something truly indispensable and meaningful to offer."

"The young people in my church didn't care much about church until I showed up to their swim meet, play or other activities. Then I asked them to bring that area of passion into the church."



 At least half of ELCA laypeople say it's "not at all true" or just "slightly true" that their church "makes young people a primary focus," "has enough volunteers or staff members who minister to young people" or "has a thoughtful approach to our ministry to people in their twenties."

"Our church ..."
% of ELCA laypeople who say this is "slightly true" or "not at all true"



n=10,282 ELCA laypeople

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

“Centering young people in the work we do isn’t a fringe priority — it’s a central priority ... You need to realize young adults may come with challenges or problems. They need a space where they won’t feel judged.”

“You need to go to the places where [people in their 20s and 30s] are: protests, calling out injustices. You can’t just have your doors open and ask them to come to you; [you] need to go out and engage.”

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

5. **Every office and ministry of the Churchwide Organization, every synodical leadership team and every local congregation should identify a list of young people they are mentoring and investing in and with whom they are sharing the keys of leadership.** We regularly heard that many young people in the ELCA are capable but do not feel they have been given a shot or appropriately empowered. A larger culture shift is required within the denomination, and that culture shift will take place through thousands of leaders and hundreds of offices and ministries identifying young people to tangibly empower. We recognize this larger culture shift will be a long-term pursuit and may be a significant jump from where ELCA congregations and leaders are currently. While there are challenges to implementation, this could be launched through a smaller initial pilot of 10 Churchwide Organization staff, 10 synodical bishops and / or 10 senior pastors who commit to this value for one year. Pre- and post-testing can be done with the Growing Young Assessment to measure progress. We believe the more seasoned leaders will experience better innovation, ideation and fresh thinking, and the younger leaders will have greater satisfaction in their roles and desire to grow in their roles as a result of the mentoring and support. Another early attempt that is more easily actionable might be identifying five churches with thriving youth ministries or young adult ministries and pairing those congregations with congregations that seek to grow in this area so they can experience first steps toward mentoring and coaching.

6. **Pursue greater effectiveness with people of color and those who identify as LGBTQIA+ through a stronger focus on listening to, learning from and tangibly empowering these young people with resources and decision-making ability.** Younger generations are more racially and ethnically diverse than older generations, and younger generations are more likely than older generations to identify as LGBTQIA+. A focus on young people will thus necessarily increase the focus on greater racial and ethnic diversity and those who identify as LGBTQIA+. In our interviews with young adults who are people of color and / or identify as LGBTQIA+, many told us that if ELCA leaders are willing to truly listen to what today’s young people need, the denomination will

likely develop natural capacities of empathy, mutuality and belonging, which will also make the Church more effective in ministry with people of color and those who identify as LGBTQIA+. We wonder if further investigation should be had regarding the needs of congregations and synods in regard to LGBTQIA+ ministries. Reconciling Works could be a partner for congregations in this effort.



In your church:

Give young people a place and purpose

For some of your youngest attendees, a “pray-ground” (where children can participate in worship and play together at the same time) might be a space where they can feel like they belong at your church. As children grow up, empower the emerging generation with meaningful responsibilities — which starts with asking them how they want to contribute and empowering them in their gifts and interests. There might also be existing opportunities, from reading scripture to having a voice on the church council.



COMMITMENT #4:

Provide greater empowerment, equipping and tools for lay leaders to carry out the work of ministry and be the Church in the world today.

What it means: Too many ELCA lay people and churches seem to view rostered leaders as the “professionals” who carry out the work of ministry. Based on ELCA theology and polity, however, there is a *priesthood of believers* who are meant to carry out the life and work of the church. These leaders, most of whom do not view themselves as vocational ministers, need to be empowered and trained to lead ELCA churches into the future. This does not take away from the work of ordained and rostered leaders, but instead shifts their role to one of carrying out specialized tasks, then equipping and empowering other people for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12) to build up the body of Christ.

Why it is recommended: In light of challenges, including declining resources and fewer rostered leaders, the ELCA’s best resource that can fuel the future of the Church is its capable and faithful lay leaders. However, too often these leaders are sitting on the sidelines. They must be identified, rallied, motivated and trained to do the work of the Church. This will require a larger mindset and culture shift, as well as specific and tangible actions like those we recommend. The data we collected and conversations we had revealed the significant but underutilized potential of lay people. Even in the data we reviewed regarding synod-authorized ministers (SAMs), many bishops or other leaders seemed to view SAMs or other types of lay leaders as a last resort if a full-time rostered minister could not be identified. Given a decrease in available resources and rostered leaders, this expectation and model is not sustainable.

Commitment #4 | Key Data Points

The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. Here, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.



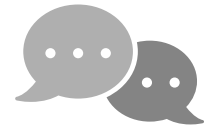
Openness to new ways of doing ministry is consistently correlated with other positive church attributes, like integrating newcomers well, taking Jesus’ message seriously or being good neighbors.



Responses from ELCA laity suggest churches are not often asking young people to participate in making important decisions or equipping young people with the skills they need to lead ministries. About two in five (41%) say it’s “not at all true” or only “slightly true” that their churches do this.

Suggested strategies and activities:

1. **Create national-level training for lay leaders that can be adopted and / or contextualized by synods and local congregations.** While we heard much more about training standards and offerings for seminary students and rostered leaders, we heard very little about lay-leader training standards, pathways or platforms. This might also include the Churchwide Organization identifying several ministries and congregations that are exemplary in their engagement of lay leaders and developing a set of best practices and other recommendations for congregations to boost lay leadership. How this is developed might depend on the seminaries' appetite to engage in this work. Most seminaries have placed the greatest emphasis on providing degree-based training. Luther Seminary, as one positive example, seems to be engaging more nondegree and lifelong learning. If the ELCA seminaries can't provide sufficient lay-leader training, we recommend the Churchwide Organization develop an online training platform that can provide this training. FULLER Equip (fullerequip.com) provides digital courses, certificates and other learning experiences to lay leaders, and could serve as a resource or example.
2. **Develop a clear pathway of competency-based theological education that begins with lay leaders and ends with full-time rostered leaders.** Given the well-established congregational model in the ELCA, as well as standards and qualifications of rostered leaders, it makes sense that more ELCA effort has historically gone to structures and systems that support the training of rostered leaders. However, we believe the ELCA would benefit from a mapping exercise that takes the current competencies



“Without lay leaders, our church would have closed years ago — and now we’re thriving.”

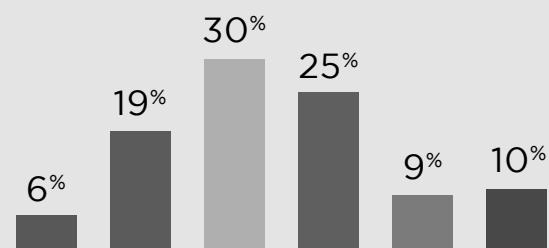
“Part of resourcing laity is ending this hierarchy between them and ordained people.”



 Only about one in four ELCA laity feel their church has many people who are willing to contribute to making changes (25% say this is “completely” or “very true”).

“Our church has many people who are willing to contribute to making changes”

● Completely true ● Very true ● Moderately true
● Slightly true ● Not at all true ● Not sure



n=10,282 ELCA laypeople



“In the ELCA, there is an expectation that a trained, full-time pastor will carry out the work of ministry. This disincentivizes lay leadership.”

“We can’t just give other people their purpose. We need to journey with them and commit to grow together.”



being considered for rostered leaders and explores what competencies might be needed and possible for lay leaders who have less time to give to their role. This exercise is likely to illuminate various forms of training and leadership development that do not currently exist. While the ELCA’s current work with SAMs has explored competencies that may be helpful for SAMs, we recommend taking it one step further to other lay leaders in congregations who are not going through the full SAM training process. Fuller and Barna’s experience with lay leaders reveals low-hanging fruit for competencies that could be developed now (without further listening, research or mapping work), including how to lead a small group, how to be an effective elder or board member, how to listen and discern needs in a local community and additional topics we can recommend.

3. **Launch an incubator or accelerator program that helps congregations launch new ministries that are led by lay people.** Begin with a pilot of 15 congregations, which each identify two to three lay leaders, and walk through a 10-month process of assisting them with the needed training and launch. The current model of operating ELCA congregations and recruiting, training and placing full-time rostered leaders is expensive and likely not financially sustainable. Developing leaner, less expensive and lay-led ministries increases the ELCA’s ability to respond and adapt to a shifting landscape. Several ELCA ministries and leaders we interviewed were exemplary in this regard and often credited their strong volunteer training programs. We are not recommending starting new worshipping communities; rather, we recommend focusing on ministries like small-group gatherings and Bible studies that engage groups of 5–20 people. Another example might be deploying the abundance of older members who are part of the ELCA. Many in this group are increasingly entering retirement age and may have extra time, to launch community-based ministries such as adopting local schools to provide volunteer education and mentoring.

IN LISTENING SESSIONS WITH A CROSS-SECTION OF HUNDREDS OF ELCA LEADERS, A TOP THEME THAT EMERGED WAS TO INCREASE TRUST BY EMPOWERING LAY LEADERS AND LOCAL CONGREGANTS.

These older members could be appropriately trained and equipped to engage this work through the training methods we've identified throughout this report.

4. **Develop a digital training platform that can train and assist congregations in developing stronger volunteer training.** This could be done either through the Churchwide Organization or in partnership with one or more of the ELCA seminaries. We recommend these efforts be part of the required training provided to SAMs and rostered leaders during their seminary education, rather than something congregations opt into. Fuller already provides such a training platform and could partner or advise in the development of the ELCA's efforts. Additionally, we believe that, given the ELCA's large proportion of white and / or older members, tangible training will need to be provided on how to welcome new, younger and more diverse people.
5. **Commission the development of stronger theological foundations on the importance of lay leadership, perhaps through a few white papers.** The ELCA emphasizes doing things in good order and making decisions that flow from theological commitments. We suspect, however, that the current practices of the ELCA that prioritize rostered leaders stem from under-developed theology about leadership and the role of lay leaders (or at least the practical outworking of the ELCA's theology of leadership in action). A few of the ELCA's professors, colleges, universities or seminaries might be able to guide the development of such teachings and documents. This is likely to include theological and practical implications for developing a flatter organizational structure in ELCA congregations. The goal of such theological work is to drive the tangible result of more lay leaders engaged in and equipped for the work of ministry. While many rostered leaders express a sense of being overwhelmed or tired, and many younger lay people and other lay people express a desire for increased purpose and meaningful responsibility, the equipping of lay leaders is not yet at the level needed for the ELCA's future. Theological work is one step toward tangible action.



"There's an old paradigm that, as clergy, I am supposed to have all the answers. Or that I'm the Swiss Army knife who is the tool for everything.

But I need to be the keeper of the story and the tradition. One of the most important things I can do is to give permission to others."



In your church:

Emphasize personal gifts within a team model

Focus on identifying and growing people's strengths rather than simply filling gaps in empty roles. Consider deploying ministry teams with term limits and clear expectations (within specific areas like finances, operations, vision and so on) to make leadership participation an approachable and evolving opportunity.

COMMITMENT #5:

Rethink, refocus and reorganize the ELCA's educational systems and structures to serve the current (and rapidly changing) needs of the ELCA.

What it means: The former understanding of ELCA seminaries was that they provided extensive training to full-time rostered leaders who were ordained, called and served in a congregation. Often these leaders were equipped with the skills they needed during their years in seminary and received occasional continuing education along the way. A new understanding of ELCA seminaries and educational systems needs to focus on equipping all of the people of God in the ELCA to be more effective in building the Church and carrying out the work to which God has called them. This new understanding also needs to include a reskilling of many rostered leaders who completed seminary one or more decades ago and are finding they do not have the new, complex skills and competencies needed to navigate today's fast-changing world. Taking this approach will yield new forms of training that reflect the changing landscape of our world and how people today (especially new, younger and more diverse people) are engaging with faith and ministries.

Why it is recommended: The ELCA is in the midst of its most significant shifts since its founding, facing a decrease in church attendance, an increase in virtual or digital means of church engagement, and the declining importance of religion in people's lives. These shifts mirror those affecting other Christian denominations, theological education broadly and U.S. culture overall. The ELCA has a major opportunity to update the

Commitment #5 | Key Data Points

The recommendations presented in this report are drawn from analysis across multiple methods and inputs. Here, data points are provided to illuminate specific insights.



ELCA rostered leaders report healthy vocational well-being. More than nine in 10 say they frequently or sometimes feel “confident in my ministry calling,” “motivated to become a better leader,” “energized by ministry work” and “well-supported by those I work with.”

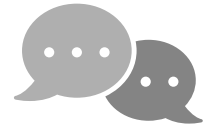


However, there are also signs of fatigue. Looking at those who select “frequently” or “sometimes,” three-quarters of rostered leaders feel “emotionally or mentally exhausted” (76%). About two-thirds feel “lonely or isolated from others” (65%) or “unequipped for the challenges I am facing” (62%). About half (49%) feel “inadequate for my ministry calling.”

skills of its key leaders, as well as equip lay leaders and others to carry out the work of ministry. The data we've reviewed and the feedback we've heard from leaders indicate the current approach to education in the ELCA is not sufficiently comprehensive, relevant or adaptive.

Suggested strategies and activities:

1. **In addition to the current competencies being developed for rostered leaders and SAMs, consider developing additional training that is needed immediately for the continuing education of rostered leaders and training of lay leaders.** We recommend standards for this training be developed by the Churchwide Organization and synods and delivered through an online training platform, at in-person training gatherings of rostered leaders and / or through curriculum that can be utilized in congregations with small groups or Bible study groups. This should include growing intercultural competence, understanding and empowering young people, being more welcoming and invitational, understanding context, listening well, grant writing and raising money, managing change and engaging in productive conflict. Growing in these competencies would likely be strengthened through an apprenticeship or mentoring model, where leaders who are skilled in an area coach or walk with leaders who are less skilled.
2. **Launch or partner with an existing organization to provide digital courses, microcredentials and certificates for high-quality, accessible training.** Several areas in the ELCA have already begun efforts to develop relevant digital platforms (during our review of the SAMs documents, ELCA



"The one-size-fits-all approach to candidacy, rostering, first call, even resources available is not cutting it anymore."

"Twenty-six colleges and universities are a source of strength for our Church that is barely tapped. There's a lot of evidence that students who do engage with the various initiatives to explore their faith on campus are a source for seminarians. We need them as a pipeline for leaders."



Senior rostered leaders (ages 60+) tend to have more confidence, satisfaction and energy than younger leaders.



The top issues that rostered leaders say negatively impact their ability to lead are political divisions and the emotional impact of the stress of their role. Leaders in urban congregations emphasize a lack of professional support, while leaders in rural areas are more likely to be affected by isolation.

**IN LISTENING SESSIONS
WITH A CROSS-SECTION OF
HUNDREDS OF ELCA LEADERS, A
TOP THEME THAT EMERGED WAS TO
DEVELOP SYSTEMS TO EDUCATE AND
RESOURCE ROSTERED LEADERS.**



“In the ELCA, being Brown is a challenge. If you look at our list of those being called to pastor congregations, those not being called are overwhelmingly people of color or LGBTQIA+. We train and educate them, but don’t call them.”

“[Our values go] back to Martin Luther’s confession: There is no place in which you are not called. ... Being truly called sometimes is really messy and not fun. It comes out of a deep understanding and a deep commitment to grace and vocation.”



groups identified included Northern Rockies Institute of Theology, SELECT courses, Luther Seminary’s Faith + Lead and others), and other ministries and organizations outside the ELCA can provide guidance (such as Candler Foundry, Duke Divinity+ and FULLER Equip). A first step in this area might be convening representatives from each of the ELCA seminaries to strategize what is currently available, what is planned in the next two to three years and where there are remaining gaps. One or two of the seminaries might be able to lead the way in developing this training, or the current resources of one of the seminaries that is currently focused on providing degrees could be repurposed to focus more on lay-leader and nondegreed training.

3. **We strongly recommend that the Churchwide Organization play more of a guiding and coordinating role in developing SAM training and standards.** Our interviews and audit revealed that too many synods are reinventing the SAMs process, leading to duplication of resources and inefficiency. Building on a convening of synod leaders to explore possibilities with SAMs, the ELCA should determine national standards and accompanying resources. This might include the Churchwide Organization identifying bright spots and early innovators whose approach can be scaled or replicated.
4. **Invest in more embodied and experiential forms of engagement and learning (such as apprenticeship-based models or service-learning and field education).** Several people in our interviews expressed that the ELCA tends to emphasize cognitive and intellectual forms of training. This disproportionate focus can produce leaders who are not well-rounded or as resilient as needed in the daily realities of ministry. Over-intellectualized lessons may also struggle to engage or be meaningful for younger people, those who are neurodivergent or other more praxis-oriented leaders.



In your church:

Invest in practical ministry training

Seek out (or provide) training for yourself and lay leaders in areas like change management, conflict resolution, active listening, understanding younger generations, trauma-informed principles and cultural competency. Take inventory of existing skills represented by your team which could be better shared or utilized, including helpful expertise that, on the surface, doesn’t seem explicitly about ministry.

NEXT STEPS

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We hope it has offered you helpful perspectives, generated fresh ideas, suggested paths forward and even raised new questions.

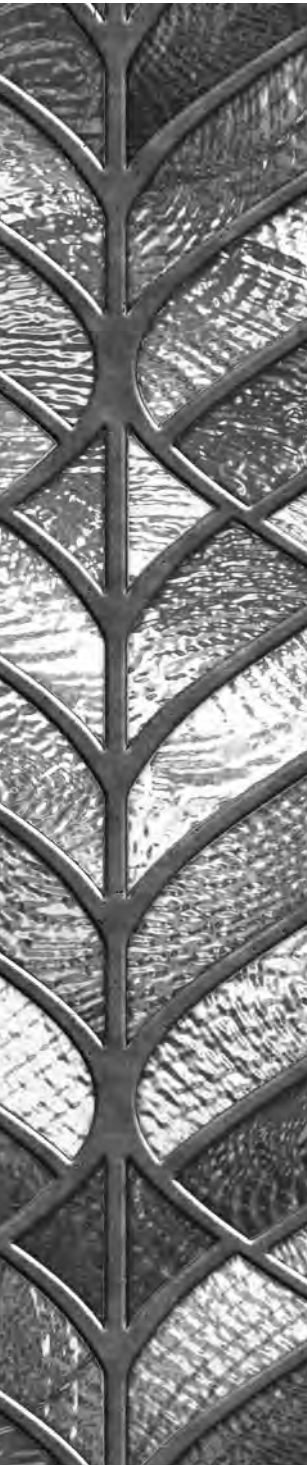
It has been a significant undertaking to listen, learn, brainstorm, discuss and plan over the recent years that led to these recommendations. Key leaders at various levels of the ELCA will be reviewing this report, including the strategic recommendations embodied in the commitments. While we are confident efforts in the five commitments will strengthen ministry efforts in the ELCA, there are wider situational and structural conditions of the ELCA that also must be addressed for the ELCA to move forward. We have provided additional details on these structural recommendations to relevant stakeholders in the Churchwide Organization. Much is already in motion, and many more activities are yet to be catalyzed and launched.

While there are significant challenges to overcome, as well as significant opportunities to pursue, we are incredibly hopeful about the ELCA and believe that its best days can truly be ahead. We will certainly put our best efforts into next steps, and are grateful we follow a God of new life who shines light that darkness cannot overcome and offers wholeness, restoration and reconciliation.

In response to this document, we certainly invite you to pray for wisdom on the next steps. If you would like to provide feedback, please send questions and comments to info@ELCA.org.

You can continue to engage with work that supports God's Love Made Real, including bonus content and stories about bright spots in the ELCA, at ELCA.org/GLMR.





STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS PROCESS & SOURCES OF INPUT

Barna and Fuller designed a project with multiple sources of input and data that would provide a well-rounded and accurate picture of the ELCA. Recommendations included in the strategic recommendations reflect consistent themes we heard from multiple sources, including group listening sessions, project planning meetings, one-on-one qualitative interviews, national quantitative surveys of both the ELCA and the general population, review of historical and project documents, and much more.

Project Timeline:

Barna and Fuller's work on this project began in September 2022 with a goal of helping the ELCA gain greater clarity and develop strategies to assist in fulfilling the ELCA's vision and key priorities. Various dates and milestones of the project are outlined below, which have led to the strategic recommendations in this report.

Fall 2022

Initial Discovery: The Barna and Fuller teams began hosting discovery interviews and several in-person sessions with a variety of leaders across the ELCA to better understand the denominational context and goals for this work. This led to the development of an ELCA Transformation Team, recruitment of a Multigenerational Advisory Group and a report of short-term recommendations, ideas and other insights to calibrate next steps.

Winter and Spring 2023

Research Design: Several in-person and virtual project sessions were conducted to begin to test hypotheses, design the quantitative survey instruments and refine project goals.

Summer and Fall 2023

Surveys and Listening Sessions: Quantitative surveys went live with rostered leaders, laity and the general population beginning in July 2023. In addition, group listening sessions were hosted in person and virtually to solicit qualitative feedback on the needs, ideas and experiences of diverse groups across the ELCA.

Winter 2024

Data Interpretation: Barna began to report on the data collected from the quantitative surveys, and the findings were reviewed by dozens of leaders across the ELCA. Based on the questions identified during this review and interpretation process, the data was revisited and additional analyses were conducted.

Spring and Summer 2024

Ongoing Research and Listening: Based on additional questions that emerged from the data collected to date, Fuller conducted additional individual and group qualitative interviews to gain greater insight on identified project themes. Additional data was gathered and analyzed related to the training of SAMs and competency-based theological education.

Fall 2024

Synthesis and Reporting: All project data and insights gathered since September 2022 were analyzed, synthesized and translated into themes and actionable recommendations contained in this report. This process included internal review by the Barna and Fuller teams, as well as multiple rounds of review and iteration with an external research company and ELCA leaders.

Sources Informing the Strategic Recommendations:

The information contained in this report is not the result of any one survey, meeting, interview or perspective. The project was designed to draw the best contributions and methods from several different sources and adapt these insights into a robust set of recommendations. Following are the wide range of sources of information that contributed to the recommendations in this report.

- Review of background documents and other project information provided by the ELCA at the start of the project. This included internal data gathered by the ELCA, as well as past strategic plans and recommendations provided by other agencies and advisors.

- Ongoing discussions with core project team members and selected advisors, as well as a Multigenerational Advisory Team and Transformation Team, who provided insight along the way. Approximately 27 people participated in these teams and provided feedback on documents and at in-person project meetings.
- Initial discovery calls with 13 ELCA stakeholders (including young people, lay leaders, staff from the churchwide office, pastors and scholars, many of whom represent diverse perspectives and backgrounds).
- A one-day meeting with the Bishop's Advisory Council and several conversations with the ELCA Presiding Bishop.
- Presentations and feedback from synod gatherings and Church Council.
- Listening sessions conducted with 24 different groups (representing 450 people total), lasting around 60 minutes each (with some groups having multiple sessions). These groups included: COB - Conference of Bishops; A2B - Assistants to Bishops; DEMs - Directors of Evangelical Mission; Indigenous Ministry Communities and Partners; Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities; Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities Chaplains; Lutheran Services in America; CWO - Churchwide Organization; CWO Home Areas (IT, Service and Justice, Christian Community and Leadership, Synod Communicators and Strategic Communications); four sessions with synod leaders and pastors; Lutheran Outdoor Ministries; Lutheran Campus Ministry Board Meeting; Young Adult Transitions Retreat; Youth Summit.
- Three quantitative surveys executed by Barna. The ELCA oversaw inviting survey participation. The laity survey had 10,891 survey participants and was conducted July 17, 2023–January 2, 2024. The rostered minister survey had 875 participants and was conducted July 17, 2023–January 2, 2024. The general population survey had 2,472 participants and was conducted October 16–25, 2023. Sample sizes sometimes vary throughout the report due to data cleaning. The results from these surveys were discussed and evaluated at several rounds of meetings with ELCA stakeholders to include a community of interpreters.
- Review of SAM training processes for all ELCA synods. This resulted in a 111-page report.
- Interviews with 10 leaders identified by the ELCA's Candidacy Working Group to test and improve the quality of an approach to competency-based education. These interviews lasted 30–60 minutes.

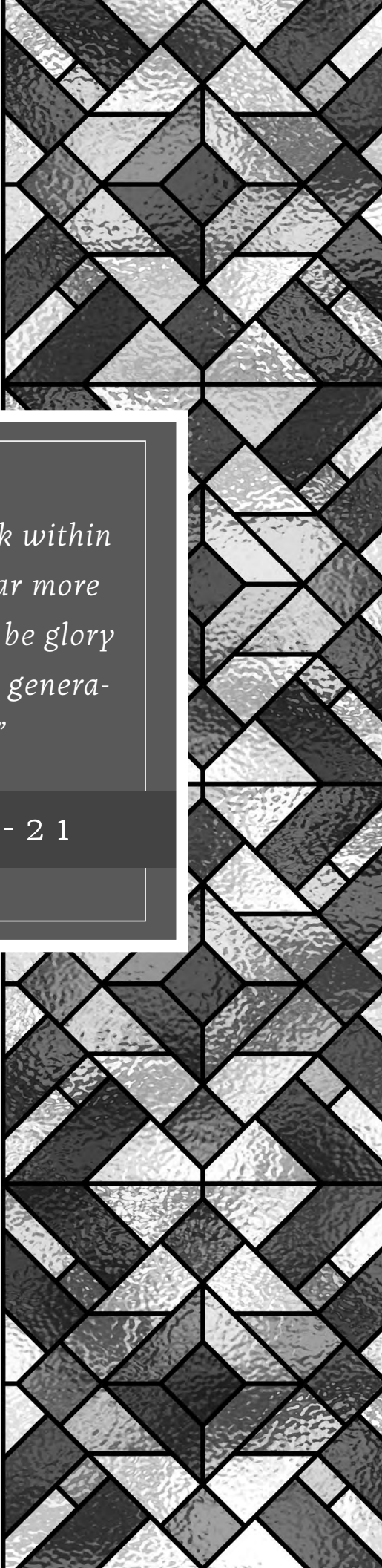
- Twenty-nine qualitative interviews, each lasting approximately 60–90 minutes, with individuals and groups who were identified by ELCA leadership as exemplary or informative around key areas of insight. Many of these conversations focused on leaders or ministries, referred to as “bright spots,” in the ELCA and can provide recommended paths forward for other leaders and churches.

A team of advisors across all levels of the Church were involved in the research and discussions that led to these recommendations. This diverse group of nominated leaders spanned the denomination, representing the depth and breadth of God's people. They volunteered their time to share insights and stories, provide feedback and guidance and contribute their voice on behalf of those faithfully stewarding God's vision on the ground.



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“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.”

— E P H E S I A N S 3 : 2 0 - 2 1

ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, Office of the Presiding Bishop
Staff Report to Church Council
September 16, 2024 – March 17, 2025

Ecumenical Relations

Ecumenical Dialogues

The third in-person meeting of the 13th round of the **US Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue** met at St.



Mary's Seminary and University, in Baltimore, October 16-19. The theological conversations included a review of previous dialogues and presentations on the understanding of the ministry in the Lutheran Confessions, the biblical and historical backgrounds of the ministry of episcopé, and the relationship between the Catholic process of synodality and the role of the bishop. The Rev. Russ McDougall was welcomed as the new United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Executive for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs. Prior to joining the USCCB, Father McDougall served as rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. The dialogue is co-chaired by Bishop Patricia Lull and Catholic Bishop Denis J. Madden.

On October 31, Bishop Eaton and Bishop Denis Madden issued [a joint letter](#) on the occasion of the **25th anniversary year of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ)**. Their letter reflected on the continued significance of the JDDJ for our life together anticipating **this year's 60th anniversary of U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue**. In addition, the Lutheran World Federation published a [special liturgy](#) and [looked back at progress](#) since the signing of the JDDJ.

The **Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)-ELCA dialogue** met February 20-22 on the topic of "Confessing the Faith: Considering Nicaea 1700," grounded in common worship and prayer. Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos and Prof. Kris Culp (CCDOC) offered presentations on the topic – "The Roles of Creeds and Confession in the Lutheran Tradition: Creeds as Mirrors and Skins, Not Walls and Armor" and "Where to Start and Other Ecumenical Questions", respectively – which informed the discussion. It was agreed that next steps in the dialogue should focus on continuing theological discussions while exploring new and concrete ways to support relationships at the congregational and mid-judicatory levels. For a summary of the meeting, see: [Disciples and Lutherans Deepen Ecumenical Dialogue and Explore New Pathways for Partnership – Disciples CUIIM](#). Sadly, Rev. Dr. Mark Toulouse, a member of the Disciples' dialogue team, died the week after the meeting. An "[In Memoriam](#)" was published on behalf of the dialogue.

You will remember that last year, **the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint International Commission** (dialogue) issued a [Lutheran-Orthodox Common Statement on the Filioque](#), adopted by the LWF Council in June 2024. In consultation with LWF Associate General Secretary for Ecumenical



Relations Dirk Lange, we are in the process of developing a study guide for ELCA rostered ministers and lay people to explore this common statement during Nicaea 1700 and beyond, which will be published in early April. Rev. Dr. Jonathan Linman (LEIRN - Grand Canyon Synod) is the primary author. **A formation opportunity for bishops was held on zoom on March 18** with

featuring presentations from Lutheran World Federation Associate General Secretary for Ecumenical Relations Rev. Dr. Dirk Lange of the LWF and Bishop Emeritus Don McCoid, former long-time co-chair of the Joint International Commission on Theological Dialogue between the LWF and the Orthodox Church. Subsequent opportunities for LEIRN reps, rostered ministers, and others who are interested will be announced throughout the year. There are also plans for the Joint Statement to be lifted up during the Churchwide Assembly. Stay tuned.

Full Communion

Following ELCA actions in 2023, in summer of 2024, The Episcopal Church General Convention



adopted “A Proposal for the Exchangeability of the Diaconate” as an interpretation of Called to Common Mission. The **Lutheran Episcopal Coordinating Committee** completed its work on the Orderly Exchange document when it met at the Lutheran Center last October. The committee also celebrated ELCA Deacon Mitzi Budde as she entered retirement and expressed its gratitude for her 16 years of service on LECC.

The review of the **Orderly Exchange** document by ELCA’s legal counsel and TEC’s chancellor has been ongoing; the work has been completed on the ELCA side and is reflected in the proposed changes to CBCR. In early March, the ELCA Conference of Bishops affirmed the updated Orderly Exchange document by consensus. The next step is for it to go to the TEC Bishops’ Ecclesiology Committee for review. *The exchangeability of deacons will be possible when the Orderly Exchange work is completed, with necessary reviews on both sides.*

Multi-Lateral & Conciliar Ecumenism

The **National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA** (NCC) held its annual Christian Unity



Gathering (CUG) in Nashville, October 15-18. The statement **“God’s Sacred Earth: A Renewed Commitment”** emerged as a recommitment echoing the 2004 statement “God’s Earth Is Sacred.” The CUG served as a book launch for the NCC’s most recent publication, [Confronting Racism and White Supremacy in the US: Twenty-first Century Theological Perspectives](#), which includes a chapter by the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, “Lutheran Theological Resources to Confront White Supremacy” and

another by the Rev. Dr. Michael Reid Trice, “The Wages of Sin and Systemic Racism in the US.” The gathering also served as a springboard toward 2025, the NCC’s 75th anniversary. Bishop Eaton currently serves as chair of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and Kathryn Lohre chairs the 75th anniversary committee.

Following Kathryn Lohre’s participation in the National Council of the Churches in Korea’s (NCKK) 100th anniversary in Seoul in September, and in consultation with Rev. Franklin Ishida, the ELCA joined other ecumenical partners in expressing **solidarity with the NCKK and the people of South Korea** following President Yoon Suk Yeol’s failed attempt to impose martial law in December.

[Bishop Eaton sent a letter of support](#) to Rev. Kim Jong-Saeng, general secretary of the NCKK. Similar letters were sent from other ecumenical partners, including the [National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA](#) and the [World Council of Churches](#).

The 2024 **Christian Churches Together (CCT) Forum** took place October 8-11 in Memphis under



the theme “Come, Holy Spirit: Renew, Restore, and Reconcile.” Participants visited major sites of the Civil Rights Movement as the basis for theological reflection. The entire week was framed by the ongoing work of repentance and racial reconciliation and our Christian call to justice in the life of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Suzanne Dillahunt serves on the Steering Committee. She was joined at this Forum by

Bishop Kevin Strickland, then-LEIRN President Rev. Mari Larson, and Kristen Opalinski.

In partnership with the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (Felm), the ELCA welcomed partners



from nine countries to take part in a workshop titled “Peace and Public Witness: Countering the Rise of Religious Nationalism.” Held October 20-25 in DC and at the [United Lutheran Seminary](#) campus in Gettysburg, the workshop focused on the role of advocacy in countering religious extremism and tribalism around the world. The workshop forms part of **Branches of Peace** (*Rauhan Oksat* in Finnish), a multiyear initiative led by Felm, working alongside global partners to [examine theologies of peace and reconciliation in practice](#). The U.S.-based workshop surveyed

the rise of Christian nationalism in the US context while drawing connections to examples of religious extremism and tribalism found in Europe, Africa, South America and the Middle East. Previous workshops were held in Finland and Colombia; the location for 2025 is TBD.

An [international conference](#) organized by the **World Council of Churches (WCC)** November 5-7



marked the beginning of a year of activities commemorating 1700th anniversary. Titled “**Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council’s Ecumenical Significance Today**,” [six keynote addresses and more than 40 papers were presented](#) during the conference, including “The Significance of the Creed in Lutheranism for

Identity and Ecumenism” by the Rev. Dr. Ashley Hall, an ELCA pastor and an associate professor and chair of the theology department at Creighton University in Omaha. The conference launches the WCC’s Ecumenical Year 2025, which will culminate in the Sixth World Conference on Faith and Order in October, to be held near Alexandria, Egypt, on the theme “Where Now for Visible Unity?”

This year all Christians will celebrate Easter and Pentecost on the same dates (April 20 and June 8 respectively) as the Easter calendars of Eastern and Western Christianity coincide. Attempts to establish a common date for Easter began with the Council of Nicaea in the year 325. Both Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis have expressed their desire for a unified date for Easter.

The **2024 National Workshop on Christian Unity** (NWCU) met November 18-20 at the Lutheran



Center in Chicago under the theme, “Hear What the Spirit Is Saying to the Churches,” with a renewed focus on networking and practical ecumenism. Bishop Eaton participated in a panel discussion on the promises and challenges facing the church in this moment. The Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, ELCA director for the Middle East and North Africa, took part in a seminar on the situation in the Holy Land, and Kristen

Opalinski took part in a seminar on racism and Christian nationalism. The annual meeting of the **Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network** took place. A decision was made to invite Kristen Opalinski to provide staff leadership of the Network as we continue to explore new opportunities and models. The 2025 NWCU will return to the Lutheran Center.

Inter-Religious Relations

Inter-Religious Relations



In September 2024 the **Shoulder to Shoulder Campaign** published a “[Faith-Rooted Primer for Understanding & Addressing Bigotry in the US Amid the Violence in Israel-Palestine](#)” as a resource to equip religious and interfaith leaders to respond effectively, thoughtfully, and responsibly to such bigotry. “This resource offers insights and recommendations for understanding and addressing bigotry targeting Muslims, Jews, and Arabs and Palestinians (who are often Christian), both in this moment and going forward.”

On December 10, following the Executive Committee 2025 planning retreat, a special public event was held to honor Dr. Sayyid and Dr. Raffia Syeed for the ethic of pluralism they have propagated in their lives and work over many decades. (He was the founder of ISNA, and the hub for Muslim relations when Shoulder to Shoulder was formed.) Shoulder to Shoulder premiered a



new short film titled, “[Planting Seeds for Pluralism in America](#).” Kathryn serves on the Executive Committee; Carmelo Santos is on the Steering Committee and participated in the public event.

Please participate in the [Shoulder to Shoulder annual Ramadan Campaign](#) (February 28–March 30). The Campaign held its annual interfaith iftar in Virginia on March 11 – a remarkable bridge-building event in a week when US Green Card holder Mahmoud Khalil was detained, and when the Muslim Ban 2.0 was anticipated.

Global faith leaders gathered in New York, September 22-23 ahead of the **United Nations Summit**



of the Future, to highlight the urgent need to address the root causes of conflict globally. The ELCA and the Lutheran World Federation, through the Lutheran Office for World Community, partnered with Religions for Peace, Finn Church Aid, and the African Council of Religious Leaders to hold [a panel discussion on the role faith actors play in promoting](#)

[transformative peace](#). The panel was moderated by Kristen Opalinski, and included the Rev. Dr. Anne Burghardt, LWF General Secretary, Dr. Francis Kuria, Secretary General of Religions for Peace, and Rev. Khader EL-Yateem, ELCA Executive Director, S&J. Dr. Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, was the keynote on the unique role faith-based institutions and religious actors can play in fostering social cohesion.

In a [video message](#) on October 1, Bishop Eaton offered prayers for peace, healing and justice for all



people amid the **ongoing war in the Middle East**. “We grieve this violence and loss of life with all people of the Holy Land — and with the Palestinian community of the ELCA, our Jewish and Muslim neighbors, and all who live in fear, pain and anguish. We believe the presence and love of God in Jesus Christ can always be found in the places of the cross. Wherever violence, injustice and death seem to have the last word, God is there and has not abandoned the people.”

2024 marked the **30th anniversary of “[A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community](#),”** which was first adopted in



1994 and revised and reaffirmed in 2021. As part of the anniversary’s commemoration, Bishop Eaton took part in this year’s [Interfaith Service of Remembrance and Commitment in Observance of Kristallnacht](#) on November 11, held at the [Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago](#). The service was followed by [a luncheon and panel discussion](#) featuring Professor Esther Menn, chair of the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish

Relations; Rabbi Rick Jacobs, President of the Union for Reform Judaism; and Bishop Eaton. The conversation included how to deepen and expand the commitments articulated in the Declaration. To support synod work to live into these commitments, we commend to you two additional resources: the ELCA’s “[Preaching and Teaching ‘With Love and Respect for The Jewish People,’](#)” and the LWF’s “[Hope for the Future: A Study Document for Renewing Jewish-Christian Relations](#).”

The **World Council of Churches (WCC) Reference Group for Interreligious Dialogue** and



Cooperation convened at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva on December 2 for its [first in-person meeting](#). Kathryn Lohre was appointed to serve as co-moderator, along with Dr. Elias Halabi, who represents the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The group discussed its objectives and engaged in strategic planning within the framework of its mandate, which

aligns with the call of the WCC 11th Assembly to act together in a Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity from 2023 to 2030. The reference group is made up of 18 members from around the world with knowledge and experience in different religions. The reference group is called to contribute to theological reflection on Christian self-understanding in the context of global religious diversity, and to assist common learning and formation so that it might build capacity for inter-religious engagement, especially for young people but also for ministers, theologians and people of other faiths and of goodwill.

The **ELCA Consultative Panels on Lutheran-Jewish and Lutheran-Muslim Relations** met at the



Lutheran Center January 23-24. Each group met separately on the first day to survey its unique challenges and opportunities. Both groups met together on the second day to review and celebrate the work of each panel, examine shared challenges, including the current situation in the Holy Land, and discuss areas of shared commitment for possible future work together. Bishop Eaton met

with the group on Friday and presented each member with a gift in commemoration of their work.

Interfaith Summit in Response to Executive Orders

Two weeks ago, Bishop Eaton convened a summit of ecumenical and inter-religious partners – including service providers working directly with affected populations and leaders of several related Christian, Jewish, and Muslim denominations which had come under attack – in response to the EOs related to immigration and refugee resettlement. The Summit currently includes the ELCA, Global Refuge, Lutheran Services in America, The Episcopal Church, Episcopal Migration Ministries, the USCCB, Catholic Charities USA, Church World Service, the Islamic Society of North America, Islamic Relief USA, the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, the Union for Reform Judaism, HIAS, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, World Relief, and the National Association for Evangelicals. The Summit meets weekly for the foreseeable future to share information and strategize. This was mentioned in Bishop Eaton’s recently [video](#). The coalition issued on statement on March 7 entitled, “[Interfaith Solidarity Statement on Refugees and Immigrants](#).” The weekly meetings continue.

Inter-Religious Dialogues

The ELCA participates in the National Council of Churches’ inter-religious dialogues with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and Sikhs. During this period, the dialogue Jews took place.

The **National Jewish-Christian Dialogue** continued its work in November, meeting at Hebrew College and the College of the Holy Cross in Boston. The group discussed the current political realities in the US, the war in Gaza, engaged in reviewing two case studies (one text, one file) developed by Harvard's Pluralism Project, and visited the on-campus Mikveh, Mayyim Hayyim. The next meeting is scheduled for April in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania. The dialogue is co-convened by the National Council of Synagogues and the National Council of Churches.



Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations Staff, Office of the Presiding Bishop

Kristen Opalinski, Manager, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Carmelo Santos, Director, Theological Diversity and Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Kathryn Lohre, Executive, Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment

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Implementing Resolution 17 ELCA Church Council *ad hoc* committee

Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee

April 4, 2025

Mary Streufert, Director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment

*Faith, Sexism,
and Justice: A
Call to Action,*
Implementing
Resolution
#17

“Resolved:

17. To direct the ELCA Church Council to establish a process for public repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy and sexism, and establish a churchwide day of confession and repentance no later than the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.”



For what is
this *ad hoc*
committee
responsible?

“Guide a process for public repentance
and a churchwide day of confession and
repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy
and sexism.”



Who is on
the
committee?

Tracey Beasley, Chair

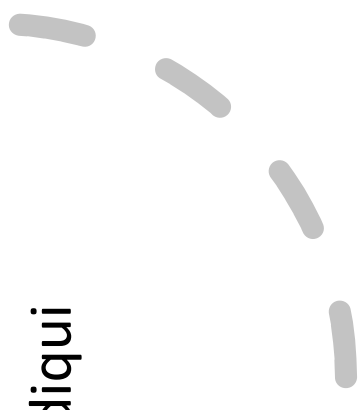
Tara Lynn

Iván Perez

Ann Svenningsen (former task force member)

Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld (former task force member)

Advisor, Vice-president Imran Siddiqui



Which staff
members are
supporting
this work?

Director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment,

Mary J. Streufert

Heather Dean

Executive for Worship,

John Weit

Program Manager, Worship Resource Development,

Jennifer Baker-Trinity

Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations and
Theological Discernment,

Kathryn Lohre



Why are we
confessing
and
repenting for
the sins of
patriarchy
and sexism?

1. An act of faith
2. Social situation
3. Ecclesial situation

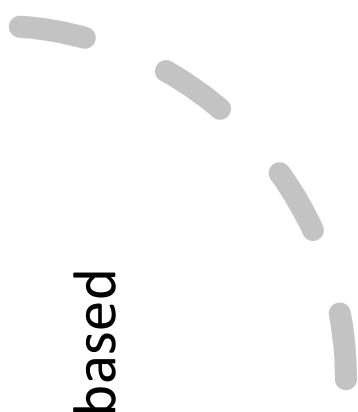


What is
happening at
the
assembly?

- Friday Evening Prayer
- Two books
- Interactive alcove

Also, World Council of Churches Thursdays in
Black* initiative tapestry and interpretive
materials

*to end sexual and gender-based
violence in our communities



Implementing Resolution 17 Related to *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*

What is implementing resolution 17?

After adopting the ELCA social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*, the 2019 assembly called various actors throughout the ELCA and the world to take action. One such act was a resolution to call the whole ELCA to confess and repent of the sins of patriarchy and sexism. It reads: “Resolved: To direct the ELCA Church Council to establish a process for public repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy and sexism and establish a churchwide day of confession and repentance no later than the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly” (*Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, p. 83). Because there were other commitments for public acts during the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly, it was deemed wise to wait until the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Who is working on the confession and repentance called for in implementing resolution 17?

Beginning in 2021, initial planning was the responsibility of Tracey Beasley (ELCA Church Council advisor for Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment) and Sonja Wolfe (former ELCA Church Council chair of Program and Services). An *ad hoc* committee of the ELCA Church Council was seated in 2022: Tracey Beasley (chair), Tara Lynn, Iván Perez (ELCA Church Council) and Rev. Ann Svennungsen and Rev. Viviane Thomas-Breitfeld (former social statement task force members). Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary staff members support the committee’s work.

What will happen at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly?

Confession and repentance are not the same thing as a public apology. Rather, this church *together* will participate in an order of confession and repentance within the evening prayer service on Friday at the 2025 assembly. The assembly will act as the whole people of God to confess, repent, and ask God for forgiveness for our trespasses against others because everyone participates in social and religious systems of patriarchy. All of us sin and are sinned against. Elements of the service are written by ELCA pastors and deacons, in collaboration with the *ad hoc* committee named above.

To support assembly voting members with resources for contemplation, interpretation, and engagement, the committee authorized a booklet that includes poetry, art, prayers, devotions, vignettes, reflections, and excerpts from ELCA social teaching and policy. It is authored by multiple contributors across this church. Augsburg Fortress Press will provide a copy of the book *ReEngaging ELCA Social Teaching on Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, part of a series of short books on each of the ELCA social statements. To support dialogue and relationships, the committee is sponsoring a space for conversation and resources.

What is a churchwide day of confession and repentance?

Implementing resolution 17 calls the whole church to confession and repentance. All ELCA worshipping communities are encouraged to participate in similar rites regularly in forthcoming years.

What does *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* say?

The 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* as social teaching and policy of this church. In this social statement, this church affirms the scriptural witness to God’s desire that all creation flourish and have abundant life and underscores trust in God’s ongoing new creation in Christ. Further, in this social statement this church remembers that the body of Christ is diverse, should care for all members of the body, and is unified in its diversity through Jesus Christ. The statement names specific ways sin 1) diminishes and blocks flourishing and abundant life; 2) can interrupt trust in God’s promise of new creation; and 3) foils unity in diversity in the body of Christ. Anchored in the certainty that Christians are justified by grace through faith in Christ, the statement further declares that patriarchy (a system that overvalues what is male or masculine and undervalues all others) is a root of

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CHURCH COUNCIL

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Page 2 of 2

much pain and sorrow for individuals and groups of people. The social statement declares patriarchy is sinful because it harms God's beloved creation. Even amid sin and the pain and sorrow it causes, this church trusts God's promise to set Christians free to love and serve neighbors with neighbor justice, the form love takes in society. Christian love, the statement concludes, includes gender justice—the commitments and efforts to support flourishing for all people of all sexes and genders.

Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All

Notes for CC plenary:

1) This is the text prepared for CC action.

2) It includes FSI Committee recommended corrections (different from the text of March 21) as found at line 628 & 848f

3) The footnotes in this corrected proposed statement will be converted to endnotes upon adoption by the Churchwide Assembly, per standard format in ELCA social teaching documents. They are left in footnote format at this point for easy reference.

An Annotated Guide to Content

Introduction

Article 1 The familiar words of the Lord's Prayer "Your will be done on earth as in heaven" remind Christians that, blessed by divine love, God is at work in caring for all creation and calls us to strive to understand and join that work. This social statement provides a comprehensive Lutheran view of civic life toward that purpose. *The following annotations do not summarize each article, but provide a reference to the article's content.* [Page #s & links will be provided for easy access to each article]

Section I. Foundational Teaching: God Acts For the Well-being of All Through Civic Life

Article 2 The Scriptures teach that all power arises from God and that God's purpose is *shalom*, the well-being of all creation. For human beings, this means all our activity is accountable to God's power and purpose, and no earthly power should replace God as the aim of our trust and worship. [Page xx & link]

Article 3 From the first chapters of Genesis onward, the Scriptures make clear that all human beings bear the image of God, which includes being social and political creatures. For civic life, this means that all people are called to participate in God's work of fostering the well-being of creation through social and political communities. [Page xx & link]

Article 4 The Scriptures teach that human sin warps the image of God that every human bears. Human sin includes distorting God's gift of society through individual practices, institutions, and systems, so that they are not used for the common good of all neighbors. [Page xx & link]

Article 5 Lutherans teach that, as God comes to us, humans come to know both their sin and God's many, many gifts. What does this mean for us as Christians? God's response to sin includes the gifts of Law (God's directives) and Gospel (God's grace revealed in Christ), which are both strategies God uses to seek the well-being of humanity and all creation. [Page xx & link]

Article 6 People of faith approach the present world with trust in God and, at the same time, with measured realism and humility about human effort to create a just society. God's people live in the "now, but not yet" of God's reign and know that no person, community, or society is without sin. For civic life, this means that Christians are called to both engage in bringing about a better world and to be vigilant in regard to any earthly arrangement. [Page xx & link]

Article 7 Christians and Christian church structures, too, are subject to sin and, too often, have failed to prioritize efforts toward the common social good. For our participation in civic life at this time, this means Christ's church should acknowledge the need to repent for the harm caused by past and present action or inaction and strive to take appropriate actions today. Such accountability is an important condition of striving toward the common good and the well-being of creation. [Page xx & link]

Article 8 God provides an abundance of human capacities such as reason, imagination, experience, and emotion for use toward seeking healthy civic life. We are to use these through communal discernment to determine what will further the well-being of society here and now. [Page xx & link]

Article 9 The gifts of God for the good of civic life are available to all people, and the Scriptures accordingly instruct all to do justice and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6:8). Christians do not have privileged knowledge about civic life but rely on good reasoning and welcome the good ideas and contributions of all people that seek to bring about well-being in society. [Page xx & link]

Section II. God Calls All People to Robust Civic Participation

Article 10 Civic life includes all activities and institutions enabling life in public community, from the local neighborhood to the international. Our church affirms that anyone contributing to a community's well-being through civic participation is using gifts provided by God, knowingly or not. The ELCA celebrates the many ways that God calls people into lives of service for the good of the community. [Page xx & link]

Article 11 The ELCA affirms that civic service is a valued and dignified way to carry out God's calling. This means that the public's default stance toward those engaged in public service should be one of respect but also that civic leaders and officials are accountable for the ways they fail to use their work for the good of all. [Page xx & link]

Article 12 The church's worshiping assemblies are rooted in Word and Sacrament. Worship, from gathering to sending, prepares and encourages us to join God's activity in civic life. [Page xx & link]

Article 13 Religious traditions can offer gifts of vision and compassion sorely needed in contemporary civic life but can also be unproductively divisive, even damaging. This means that religious people must discern carefully when and how best to engage in civic life to promote justice and reconciliation. [Page xx & link]

Article 14 Our church teaches that there is no person for whom Christ did not die and that in baptism Christians are made one people in Christ. This means that we should seek to create Christian communities of moral discernment even when, and especially when, we have disagreements. [Page xx & link]

Article 15 The ELCA has a long-standing commitment to engage civic life through its members, congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and church-related institutions. Foundational aspects of what that means were addressed initially in the social statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (1991). [Page xx & link]

Article 16 The Scriptures teach that following Jesus includes a prophetic dimension, holding up a vision of well-being. This means Christians are to act in civic life for the benefit of the neighbor, especially our marginalized or oppressed neighbors. We should evaluate actions and policies according to whether they best serve the needs of these neighbors; it is a guide to determining the common good. [Page xx & link]

Article 17 The varied forms of advocacy discussed in this article, including faith-based organizing, can play a transformative role in a polarized political world by bringing people together in discernment and action for the common good. [Page xx & link]

Article 18 The Lutheran tradition teaches that God creates humans as political beings and that political authority is, in principle, God's gift. This church believes that political decisions must be guided by well-considered ethics. "Politics," properly understood, describes negotiating how the benefits, burdens, rights, and responsibilities of living in a society are shared. Politics and ethics are necessarily related. Ethics discerns; politics implements. [Page xx & link]

Article 19 Jesus was not political in the sense of affiliation with a particular political party. At the same time, when Christians affirm that "Jesus is Lord, it is a political as well as theological claim. (Romans 10:8&9) This affirmation pulls Christians into civic and political life in order to love and to serve neighbor justice that entails political dimensions. It also means that Christians cannot give their prime loyalty to any government, nation, civic order or individuals. [Page xx & link]

Article 20 Baptism includes a commitment to participation in civic life. The public role of rostered ministers in the church produces unique opportunities and challenges for their civic leadership and participation. This article provides guiding reflections as they seek to live out their calling. [Page xx,link]

Section III. Assessing the U.S. Constitutional Form of Government

Article 21 The Lutheran Confessions teach that governmental authority is an instrument of God to help order social benefits and respond to human sin. Yet political authority is permeated by sin. This means that Lutherans ought to live with an edginess about all government and its actions. This stance values government and cooperates when appropriate, while denouncing and resisting the misuse of political authority when needed. [Page xx & link]

Article 22 The recognition of God's power seeking the good of society is central to the Lutheran tradition. This church teaches that any use of power can be assessed by whether it amplifies God's purpose for people and groups. This view provides a standard by which all power can be evaluated and is quite different from the usual political model of power. [Page xx & link]

Article 23 The criterion of God's power and its purpose leads to additional criteria for assessing government action, including a presumption in favor of mutual self-determination. This concept has little in common with an ideology of "individualism." [Page xx & link]

Article 24 In the United States, the Constitution is the fundamental framework of political authority and expresses the aspirations for government in this country. This means that the values expressed in the Constitution itself can be used to assess whether governments (federal, state, and local) serve social well-being. [Page xx & link]

Article 25 The most radical feature of the Constitution is its first three words: "we the people." This phrase indicates an intention for mutual self-determination, though originally that preference was largely limited to property-owning white males. Over time, Constitutional amendments have expanded the right of mutual self-determination through voting. [Page xx & link]

Article 26 This social statement identifies both theological and Constitutional criteria to assess government authority and its activity. This article describes several specific applications of those criteria and specific questions to help assess governmental policies, laws, and regulations. [Page xx & link]

Article 27 The Constitution forbids religious tests for U.S. officeholders, and the First Amendment to the Constitution is neutral toward religion. This means the Constitution favors a choice of religion for each individual in public life. [Page xx & link]

Article 28 [revised] The U.S. sovereign is "we the people." This means that the U.S. governing structure and authority is not fundamentally Christian in origin, structure, or intent. The sovereign is not "we the Christians."

Section IV. Religion and the First Amendment

Article 29 The First Amendment begins with two clauses: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion (known as the Establishment Clause), or prohibiting the free exercise thereof (known as the Free Exercise Clause)." Part IV examines these clauses, their relationship and meaning for civic life today. [Page xx & link]

Article 30 The Establishment Clause imposes limits on government's involvement with religion. Government's authority extends only to secular matters, not to people's relationships with the sacred. This means that government may neither promote one religion's view nor make decisions for religious institutions that are explicitly religious. [Page xx & link]

Article 31 The Establishment and Free Exercise clauses work together to promote religious diversity. This means that each religious community can gather and worship as it chooses and that each community and its members can engage with public life on an equal basis with all others. [Page xx & link]

Article 32 "Free exercise" of religion has never been interpreted by the courts as an absolute right. When religiously motivated conduct conflicts with civil law and regulation, this church affirms that government should try to accommodate religious practices as long as doing so does not damage important public interests or burden the rights of others. [Page xx & link]

Article 33 The Establishment Clause applies to the government’s conduct in relation to religious institutions. The First Amendment does not discourage, much less prohibit, religious individuals or communities from participating in public life. [Page xx & link]

Section V. Constructive Relationships Between Religious Organizations and Political Authority

Article 34 What does the ELCA believe to be the constructive relationship between religious institutions and political authority? The ELCA reaffirms concepts expressed in its Constitution: that the church should “work with civil authorities” while “maintaining institutional separation ... in a relation of functional interaction.” [Page xx & link]

Article 35 “Work with civil authorities” is a consequence both of faith’s recognition that God is at work in civic life and of the sovereignty of the people as expressed in the U.S. Constitution. It means that the church and church-related organizations should work with governmental and other civic agents to address the needs of society and creation, which the U.S. Constitution describes as promoting the general welfare. [Page xx & link]

Article 36 “Maintaining institutional separation of church and state” means that the distinctive integrities of both government and religious institutions should be preserved. The “relation of functional interaction” means religious bodies have a responsibility for a critical engagement with government that may affirm or may challenge government policies and practices. [Page xx & link]

Article 37 This view of a critical engagement with government commends specific criteria for assessing programs and services to maintain a healthy relationship between religious bodies and political authorities that serves society’s well-being. [Page xx & link]

Article 38 The ELCA affirms healthy forms of patriotism. It opposes unhealthy, distorted forms of patriotism that divide a country and endanger it, including religious nationalisms. At this time, Christian Nationalism is the dominant form as it seeks to fuse selected Christian ideas with a comprehensive cultural framework, and crosses the line into idolatry. It also seeks to subvert the U.S. Constitutional sovereignty of “we the people.” [Page xx & link]

Section VI. Selected Contemporary Concerns in Civic Life

Article 39 Section VI addresses contemporary issues in civic life that are guided by the insights of sections I through V. These articles do not revisit questions about civic life that the ELCA has already addressed in existing social statements and messages. [Page xx & link]

Article 40 Hyperpartisan polarization, now increasing in the United States, is exceedingly harmful to our social fabric, especially vulnerable people. The ELCA calls all people to insist on and to practice respectful engagement. [Page xx & link]

Article 41 All civic leaders, and especially elected officials, bear a responsibility to model constructive civic leadership for the good of all. They are leaders of public thought with the responsibility to foster constructive discourse that enables reasoned moral discernment toward solutions. They succeed in their roles when they renounce personal attacks, misleading statement, and inflammatory discourse. [Page xx & link]

Article 42 Constructive civic life today depends on clearly distinguishing between fact and falsehoods, which range from exaggerations to outright lies. Media organizations have a responsibility to root out falsehoods they provide or host. Media users have responsibility to assess for accuracy what they receive from media (including social media). [Page xx & link]

Article 43 Money has become an outsize influence in U.S. elections and political processes. The ELCA recognizes the legitimacy of political contributions as a demonstration of donor commitment. The ELCA also advocates for transparency and limits on the size of contributions and gifts. These are vital to ensuring that all voices are heard and thereby strengthen democracy. New legislation is needed for this purpose. [Page xx & link]

Article 44 Governmental policies can harm or promote the well-being of society and creation. Public servants, citizens, and residents have duties to ensure that government remains true to its purpose of fostering civic well-being. This statement identifies principles for, and questions to be asked of laws, regulations, and policies toward that end. [Page xx & link]

Article 45 The U.S. government's relationships with the nation's unincorporated territories and with the District of Columbia are complex and problematic. These problems stem, significantly, from a legacy of colonialism and issues of economic exploitation, lack of self-determination, and racism. The principle of mutual self-determination requires listening as a first step toward justice and healing. [Page xx & link]

Article 46 The ELCA laments the past and continuing mistreatment of American Indian, Alaska Native People and Native Hawaiians, which often has included explicitly Christian justification. This social statement calls for increased advocacy toward tribal sovereignty, self-determination, just policy for treaty rights, and the exercise of religious liberty. [Page xx & link]

Article 47 Comprehensive civics education is critical to healthy civic life. The ELCA calls for a renewed emphasis on civic education that includes a full rendering of the United States' successes and failures, abuses and aspirations. [Page xx & link]

Article 48 The ELCA urges vigorous civic engagement for the public good as a responsibility of all U.S. residents *and* as one of our Christian callings. [Page xx & link]

Conclusion

Article 49 May God's Word and Sacraments empower all people in this church to seek the well-being of the neighbor through active and faithful participation in civic life. [Page xx & link]

A social statement on

Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All

Terms underlined in the text are defined in the glossary.

Introduction

Article 1 We are to pray daily as Jesus taught, saying, “Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). What does this mean? The Lutheran catechisms teach that daily bread means “everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our lives such as food, drink, ... upright and faithful rulers, good government ... good friends, faithful neighbors and the like.”¹

These words also teach us that the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creates and seeks the well-being of creation, including human society. Christians believe that this God calls people of faith to take responsibility for the good of all through civic participation. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

This social statement sets forth the ELCA’s teaching about how disciples and this church may faithfully speak and act in civic life. While existing ELCA social statements and messages address specialized elements of social life,² this statement addresses the broad responsibility for seeking the good of all through civic participation. It sketches a vision of a just and robust civic life dedicated to the well-being of all and gives special attention to the relationship of faith and political authority.

The statement’s six sections draw from the Scriptures, from the wellspring of Lutheran theological themes, and from contemporary social science. Sections I and II clarify theological themes and the calling to civic participation. Sections III and IV consider the meaning and significance of the founding documents of the United States from a perspective of faith. Section V sketches the elements in a constructive relationship of religious organizations and political authority, whereas Section VI speaks to selected contemporary topics.

I. Foundational Teaching: God Acts For the Well-being of All Through Civic Life

Article 2 The Scriptures tell us that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1) and reveal God’s tender care for all creation (Psalm 145:15). In the Scriptures, the Hebrew word shalom³ epitomizes the rich fullness of that loving aim of the Creator for all creation. *Shalom* describes God’s intention in creation for an abundance of peace, well-being, goodness, truth, beauty, justice, freedom, joy,

¹ The Small Catechism, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 357; hereafter referred to as “BC 2000.”

² ELCA social teaching documents can be found at elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements. In particular, see the 2020 social message “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy;” hereafter “Government and Civic Engagement.”

³ Christians should take seriously the comprehensive vision embedded in this fundamental biblical term and what it means for our calling. The term itself also has a long, rich history as a central concept within Judaism, where its usage and emphasis sometimes differs, and from which Christians can learn. The two religious communities can explore together how best to understand the biblical concept and, on this basis, to find ways to work together to advance the divine intention for humans and for the entire created world.

wholesomeness, and love, all woven together. This social statement is undergirded by that biblical term, but in the context of civic life it employs other terms such as “the well-being of all” or “the common good” because they are earthly measures toward God’s intention.

The ELCA witnesses to the Holy Trinity in the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit whose power is expressed in offering abundant life now and eternally. We teach that God is all-powerful in that only God is the source of *all* power. God’s power alone brings forth and sustains the universe, redeems the sinner, and promises creation’s ultimate fulfillment.

In God’s activity toward the well-being of all, we encounter a use of power that is unlike many human practices of power (Matthew 20:25-26). God is sovereign, but God’s sovereignty gives power to creatures rather than depriving them of it. In contrast to the usual political “zero-sum” understanding of power, God gives freely, sharing abundantly without loss. God’s sovereign power produces human power; it does not diminish it. However, humans are given their power in order to serve God, creation, and their fellow humans. (Articles xx, 22)

God’s power is often hidden from human view and experienced in varied and surprising ways that can be beautiful or painful. Sometimes God’s power is experienced as disruption and judgment. It is experienced as the tearing down of human structures and of misplaced values (Jeremiah 6:14).

This is described by Martin Luther’s teaching about the struggles of faith and the “theology of the cross.” Whereas human beings expect domination, God’s power appears in weakness (1 Corinthians 1:25). When we are overly confident, God unsettles our presumptions. In the light of faith, we are empowered to see the future of God’s fulfillment, and we see that God’s purpose and power always move toward the divine promise of the well-being of all people.

At the end of the Lord’s Prayer, we affirm that “the power, the honor and the glory are yours.” Not ours! When Christians forget that all power belongs to God and God’s purpose, they risk creating idols. These include wealth, country, race, party, gender, class, and ideology. God’s power in Jesus Christ redirects forgiven ones from such idolatry and reshapes the way we use the power entrusted to us.

This church bears witness to God’s purpose and power in the world. We teach that human civic activity and political power are sustained by divine power and can be evaluated ethically God intends that humans use, increase, and share such power so that human structures and systems serve the well-being of all with good order and justice.⁴

Article 3 The Scriptures teach that God creates human beings in God’s image, in the *imago dei* (Genesis 1:27). This image is God’s gift, which means that every human being has inherent dignity, agency and a vocation to share God’s work toward the well-being of creation.⁵ From the beginning, the Scriptures depict the human vocation as a shared activity in tending gardens, tilling soil, and building communities. These activities require cooperation, conversation, and social coordination.

Even the narrative of the fall (Genesis 3-4) shows the value of social and political life. Sin is depicted as moving from honesty and care into fear and disobedience, no longer trusting God or one another. This

⁴ The Augsburg Confession, XVI, BC 2000, 48.

⁵ See further explanation in the ELCA social statement *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2011), 10, www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements.

church celebrates that God creates human beings as relational beings who live in social and political communities.

The Christian faith sees God's power and purpose specifically revealed in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. There is no neighbor, no enemy, no politician for whom Christ did not die. The Christian practice of baptism affirms this ongoing work of Christ and its connection to the human vocation. This church teaches that "the gifts of the Spirit form and transform the people of God for discipleship in daily life."⁶ The baptismal liturgy includes commitments to "care for others and the world God made, and to work for justice and peace."⁷

Correctly understood as a calling to serve the well-being of all, human vocation does not invite arrogance or misplaced pride, nor does it represent one's domination of others. This vocation is lived out in the basic structures of social life as places of responsibility. Lutheran theology has referred to these places of responsibility by various terms such as "three estates," "orderings," and "mandates." The point is that God acts through the basic structures of government, church, family, and economy, and that humans have varied responsibilities in each.

All people depend upon these social structures of communal life because they provide scaffolds for or sites for growth and responsibility. Because these are dynamic, the precise form, arrangement, and values vary across time and place, and they are open to ongoing revision and change.

Within these places of responsibility the Lutheran tradition speaks of all humans as serving in civic life as "channels of God's work."⁸ God intends that humans should use their knowledge, wisdom, and power to foster the common good. When that is done by institutions through policies and regulations, or by individuals in acts of caring, humans are fulfilling their vocation to serve God's activity in the world.

Article 4 God's intention for joyous well-being is too often not enacted or experienced in the world. Many religious traditions discuss this human brokenness and disorder. The Lutheran tradition speaks of sin in various ways but fundamentally understands sin to be the condition of human existence in which we fail to love and trust God above all else. Martin Luther understood sin to be an excessive focus on the self at the expense of the neighbor.⁹ Human sin distorts a right relationship with God and others, damaging the well-being that God intends for all creation.

The pervasiveness and complexity of sin that damages human well-being must be recognized. Sin is present in our constant unwillingness to accept our human vocation to serve as creatures created by God. Sin can also take the insidious form of self-denial and a lack of self-love. This happens when, for example, a person diminishes their own contributions to human life or denies that they possess the ability, dignity, and value of any human being created in God's image.

⁶ *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 4, www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements.

⁷ "Affirmation of Baptism" in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 236; hereafter referred to as "ELW."

⁸ The traditional Lutheran term for this was "masks of God" but today that term suggests duplicity and passivity.

⁹ Luther refers to sin in many ways but often as an excessive concern with the self at the expense of the neighbor. He describes the human condition as *homo in curvatus in se* (being turned in on oneself). See, for example, Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 25., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956), 345.

Sin is expressed both personally and collectively, which means that social and political institutions are bound in sin just as individuals are. There are a great many examples of this in civic life.

It is sin when the power in social structures, such as government, is distorted so that it is not used for the common good of neighbors and creation (Matthew 22:36-40). For instance, the individual domination of one person by another became multiplied in the social structure of slavery, which was supported by laws, policies, religious beliefs, and cultural practices in the United States. Such systemic sins are particularly horrendous because the things done and left undone dramatically deepen the oppression of other people.

It is sin when civic or political power is used at the expense of others. One group's self-interest cannot justify denying the humanity or dignity of others. The need for order does not justify subjugation, denial of power, marginalization, or tyranny. The need for government cannot justify the idolatrous worship of a nation.

It also is sin when human beings completely avoid civic life and thereby do not work to serve neighbor justice through it.

At the same time, it is sin when we support leaders who put their own power and self-interest above the needs of their constituents. It is sin when we uncritically support a member of a political party because of party affiliation or for our own personal gain. It is sin when we demonize others' motives while glorifying and sanctifying our own.

Article 5 Lutherans teach that people of faith come to know both sin and God's grace as God comes to us. In Christ, God reveals and gives God's divine self to restore or foster right relationships with God, with neighbors, and with our very selves. The Scriptures teach about two different strategies God uses to achieve this, and Lutherans call these "Law" and "Gospel."

This church understands the Law (God's directives) and the Gospel (God's promises in Christ) together as expressing the living Word of God for human life and well-being. The Law addresses our relationships and actions to others in this mortal life and to God, whom we are to worship. The Gospel, by contrast, proclaims God's relationship and merciful action to us from now into eternity.

God uses the Law to sustain life and the good of all, through different functions or uses.¹⁰ The civil use (first use) of the Law is to govern our behavior toward one another in human communities. In contrast, the theological use of the Law accuses and convicts human beings of sinfulness, even when a wrong is allowed by a government's law or not covered by human laws. God's directives (God's Law) are realistic about human beings. They reveal the corruption of many human motives, drive people to contrition, and prepare them for repentance.

¹⁰ The Formula of Concord asserts a "third function [use] of the Law," (FC Ep. VI and FC SD VI, BC 2000), but debate continues in Lutheran circles on whether a third use is redundant. Some hold that the third use is important because it makes clear that the externals of the Law are to be performed by the godly not in hostile fearfulness but in loving faithfulness. Others think this unnecessary. Since the externals of the Law remain the same regardless of the disposition of an individual's faith and love, this statement notes the presence of the debate and will not otherwise engage in it.

The Gospel is the good news of God's love in Christ, given by grace and gift alone and received in and through faith alone. The Gospel arrives as a blessed surprise, an unexpected gift that frees us from efforts to earn God's love or forgiveness. The Gospel has the liberating power to convert, transform, and re-create us in heart, mind, and spirit. Thus, Lutherans assert that the life of a Christian is described paradoxically as being simultaneously saint and sinner.

The Lutheran tradition commonly describes God's use of these two strategies, Law and Gospel with the analogy of God's two-handed reign.¹¹ Through God's "left-hand reign," God's power acts through the Law to curb, restrain, and lead people toward goodness and justice. Through God's "right-hand reign," God's power acts through the Gospel to draw, transform, and re-create people in heart, mind, and soul. Both "hands" serve God's intent to bring a rightly ordered life of peace and the common good.

Though distinct in function and purpose, the Law and the Gospel are not independent, and both flow from God's power and for God's purposes. God's left-hand reign should not be identified solely with political authority or the state. God's directives encompass culture, family, economics, and all aspects of daily life.

There is a substantive discussion of the appropriate interaction of these two strategies in the ELCA social message "Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in Democracy" (www.elca.org/socialmessages, p. 4). The dangers of misuse are also described there. Misuse includes beliefs such as: that God's two strategies are unrelated, that civic life and government are not God's concern, or that a particular nation, political strategy, or civil institution is identified with God's will or God's kingdom.¹²

Article 6 While God's people are called to do justice and love kindness (Micah 6:8), it is not always clear what that means in any particular situation. God's people approach the present world with watchfulness. That is, with abounding trust in God's reign and future and, at the same time, with measured realism and humility about human efforts, always fallible, to create a just society.

Through faith, God's church already takes part in the coming reign of God, announced by and embodied in Jesus. As the social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* explains, "The church still awaits the resurrection of the dead and the fulfillment of the whole creation in God's promised future. In this time of 'now ... not yet,' the church lives in two ages—the present age and the age to come. In this sense, the church is 'in' the world but not 'from' the world."¹³

Christians are simultaneously involved in God's work in the here-and-now and also in God's eternal work. It is unavoidable that Christians live in the here-and-now, with all its questions, ambiguities, and tensions. Some of those ways should be affirmed as better expressions of good than others and as more productive means toward creating well-being.

¹¹ Other analogies and phrases also are used in the Lutheran tradition and one common term has been "two kingdom." However, in the New Testament, "kingdom" is reserved for the reign of God alone. The reformers' insight that God works through two different strategies is vital, and the reformers grounded this insight not in actual kingdoms but in Paul's eschatology of the two ages, in Adam and in Christ (Romans 5:12).

¹² "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2020), 6ff, www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-messages.

¹³ This description of the tension appears in more detail in the ELCA social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, 3, www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements; hereafter *The Church in Society*.

Neither the Law nor the Gospel allows the church to accommodate easily the ways civic life often unfolds. The presence and promise of God's reign make the church inevitably restless and discontented with society's continued brokenness and violence. We are called to work for a better world. This means we should support and commend civic and political efforts that bring better measures of order, justice, and harmony. However, even those best efforts inevitably require revision and, within God's activity, improvement. Christians are simultaneously people of hope and courage, realism and restlessness.

Article 7 Since the Reformation, many of the historically dominant expressions of Lutheran theology and church structures have, despite some important exceptions, failed to make a priority of seeking the civic common good. The confessions commend civic good as "the righteousness of reason." They teach that "God requires the righteousness of reason...[and willingly should give it] the praises it deserves for our corrupt nature has no greater good than this,...."¹⁴ They note that God even honors it with temporal rewards....

A desire to avoid "works righteousness" too often excused Lutherans for passivity and the failure to act in the public arena. We have not always acted to hold governments or each other accountable.. An understandable desire for security and order has led many to remain complacent or even to support oppressive regimes and systems. At other times, some Lutherans have exhibited triumphalism or intolerance in taking political action.

This church acknowledges these past failures and is committed to renewed actions that turn toward holding civic leaders and those in positions of political authority accountable. Under normal circumstances, acting for accountability means making use of the tools of the U.S. democratic process. The concept of the consent of the governed implies an ongoing relationship between those in positions of authority and their constituents. Those in authority owe an account of how they are using that authority and the resources that have been entrusted to them.

On occasion, holding those in authority to account may call for engaging in nonviolent public protests. In some instances acts of nonviolent civil disobedience may be justifiable.¹⁵ Even when use of these tools are necessary, such actions must always be guided by an ethic of love and a spirit of upbuilding the common good.

Article 8 God provides multiple tools for striving toward social well-being. Because the Scriptures are the norm for faith and life, all Christian efforts are judged according to its central proclamation. The Lutheran theological tradition also looks to the insights from writings in the Book of Concord, as faithful, if historically conditioned, interpretations of the Scriptures.¹⁶

Our church teaches that God also provides human reason as a gift to be used for seeking justice and social harmony. Lutherans have sometimes used the language of "natural law" to describe the shared values and ends that are given by God, individually and collectively, to direct all human beings.

¹⁴ BC 2000, Apology, Article IV, 22-24, BC 2000, 124.

¹⁵ See For Peace in God's World, p. 20.

¹⁶ The Continuing Resolutions in the ELCA Constitution calls Unaltered Augsburg Confession a "true witness" to the scriptures (CBCR 2.05).

At its most basic, natural law refers to an inherent principle that God is to be worshiped, the good is to be done, and the bad is to be avoided. It is expressed by the exhortation of the Golden Rule or as the basic expectation to do no harm. This explains the sentiment in the Large Catechism that the Ten Commandments as natural law are something “written in the hearts of all [people].”¹⁷

However, the character of natural law has been misunderstood and has too often been weaponized against people deemed different, especially already marginalized and oppressed groups. This has been done by picking particular laws from the Scriptures and imposing them on others. This view misuses the function of Law in the Scriptures. Natural law is not a set of specific rules or unchanging social mores. The rightful attention to shared human principles can be only one part of the ongoing work of communal deliberation and conversation.

Because Law is God’s gift, the Scriptures exhort God’s people to “delight ... in the law of the Lord” (Psalm 1:1-2). For this reason, the Lutheran tradition appreciates all the gifts of human capacities. These include reason, emotion, experience, imagination, and scientific fields of study. For this reason the Lutheran approach to thinking about civic life employs principles of ethics and political concepts such as mutual self-determination and the common good. All human efforts are dimmed and distorted by sin. Nevertheless, these tools provide a common basis for Christians to work with others of goodwill toward the well-being of society.

The social teachings of this church are normed by the Scriptures and seek to employ the many gifts of human capacities to address contemporary social life. While these official teachings govern and guide this church’s positions on social questions, Lutherans recognize the possibility for continued rethinking and reconsideration through discernment as a community together.¹⁸

Article 9 As Lutherans participate in civic life seeking the well-being of all, we recognize that this work is neither unique to nor possessed by Christians alone. To “walk humbly” with God (Micah 6:8) must include seeking out the sound ideas, values, and contributions of all people, regardless of their religious tradition or worldview. The good of all must be discerned in common.¹⁹

Christians, as individuals or as the body of Christ in the world, have no guaranteed higher or better reasoning than people of other religions or worldviews. This means that Lutherans reject the claim, explicit or assumed by some, that Christians have revealed knowledge or unique insight into civic and political matters.

This does not mean that Christians have no contributions to make or that they should avoid drawing from their tradition, teaching, or faith language in speaking of public matters. God’s grace, received in faith, empowers people to hear and act in cooperation with their neighbors for the common good. A sense of God’s calling sharpens commitment to human dignity because we understand that all are created in God’s image. It awakens a sense of God’s biblical call for justice and peace.

The good news of Jesus changes hearts for compassion and care. Liberated from sin and the burden of seeking eternal salvation through our own efforts, we can join God’s efforts to create and re-create the

¹⁷ Large Catechism, third article of the Creed, Article 3, para. 67, BC 2000, 492.

¹⁸ Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns, 12 and 19. <https://www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/addressing-social-concerns> .

¹⁹ See “A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment” (Chicago: ELCA, 2019) www.elca.org/ecumenical

institutions and communities of human social life. Sin remains, but Lutherans call upon the Scriptures, find aid in their theological heritage, and use human capacities and practices of discernment to seek the means to participate wisely and critically in the civic life God intends. Our baptismal vocation to serve God and neighbor is lived out with others in society as channels of God's work in civic places of responsibility.

II. God Calls All People to Robust Civic Participation

Article 10 The Lord's prayer "Your will be done on earth as in heaven" refers to the entire scope of God's will for creation. Yet it certainly includes that aspect of life in society which describes activities and institutions related to public life, from one's neighborhood to national and international affairs. Participation in civic life comes in many shapes and sizes. A few examples include coaching soccer at a community center, attending PTA meetings, participating in peaceful demonstrations, volunteering one's business acumen for a community development initiative, engaging in political activity, and participating in international "sister city" programs.

The social fabric of a society depends upon such prudent, vigorous, and broad participation in civic life. Such participation is a medium through which people deepen relationships, create opportunities, and hold one another accountable for public life. This makes the decline of civic participation, in community organizations for example, in the United States at this time especially troubling²⁰.

Our church affirms the Lutheran teaching that anyone who seeks the community's well-being through civic participation is, knowingly or not, using the capacities God provides. There is no single or required way to live this out. The Christian faith celebrates the multitude of ways that God calls people into lives of service and community for the sake of the common good.

This statement assumes and draws upon elements of social teaching that relate to civic life found in previous ELCA statements and messages.²¹ The particular calling to be an active and informed citizen in relation to political life is most fully articulated in the social message "Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy."²² It affirms, for example, the need to pray for civic and political leaders (1Timothy 2:1-2), the responsibility to vote, the importance of being active in the political sphere, and the need for collective action toward fair and compassionate government.

Article 11 Lutherans historically have encouraged individuals to use their individual gifts for civic and political service faithfully at the local, state, national, or international level. Examples include work in civil service, public safety, health care, or education. Other examples include military personnel, judges, legislators, and appointed officials. These and many others are essential in making possible the effective functioning of civic services. Those called to such public service are urged to work toward justice and the

²⁰ See, for instance, Peter Levine and William A. Galston, "America's Civic Condition: A Glance at the Evidence," Brookings Institute, September 1, 1997, www.brookings.edu/articles/americas-civic-condition-a-glance-at-the-evidence/, accessed October 13, 2023, and Union of International Associations, "Decline in Civic Participation," Encyclopedia of World Problems & Human Potential, encyclopedia.uia.org/en/problem/decline-civic-participation, accessed October 24, 2023.

²¹ See for example, *Church in Society*, which sets the foundation. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

²² "Government and Civic Engagement." elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

common good, and never for dominating power or gain for themselves, or for particular groups with which they identify to the exclusion of others.

Civil service is often lifted up on the national stage, but this church encourages all people to explore service at state, county, and municipal levels, including volunteer service on boards, agencies, and committees. It is critical to encourage and guide youth and young adults in this church to consider taking up such places of responsibility.

Christians are encouraged to take an initial stance of respect for neighbors who work in civil service at all levels—local, state, and national—and under the three branches of government. Unfortunately, in this society, there is a common caricature of government workers as lazy, incompetent, or troublesome bureaucrats. This image is grossly misleading. It misrepresents the complexities of civic service, including in government. From a Christian perspective, such caricature violates the Eighth Commandment, that is, bearing false witness against another.

Civic employees and volunteers, however, are not above reproach, and they may and do fail in their responsibilities. Nevertheless, the default stance toward them should be dignity and respect, not slander and suspicion. When local trash collectors, postal workers, and county officials are not given honor for their good work, it reveals one way in which we fail to see their labor and service as God does.

At the same time, members of the public are expected to hold these civic servants and government officials accountable. Civic servants should do their jobs with integrity and fairness and in ways that serve the common good. Government institutions, programs, and policies must be held to high standards as a sign of their importance and impact. Courts must apply the law in accordance with precedent and with fairness, equality, and impartiality to preserve public trust. We should judge individual cases of failure carefully, avoiding generalizations that are unfair and that fail to help identify areas where improvement is genuinely needed.

Article 12 Congregations, synod-authorized ministries, campus ministries, and other recognized worshiping assemblies are centers to support civic participation precisely because they are to be grounded in the living Word of God's Law and Gospel. Rooted in Word and Sacrament, almost everything in worship, from the gathering to the sending, prepares us to join God's activity in civic life. The dynamic movement of the liturgy allows Christians to rest in God's mercy and be restored in hope but, at every turn, prepares them to be sent forth into the world to work for the community's good, both locally and beyond.

There are many examples. Besides preaching, the church's prayers lift up social concerns and ask guidance for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1) The peace of Christ is a sign of our unity in God and a reminder that we are sent to share this experience of peace with the world. The offering is collected to support the assembly and to share with other people in need, locally and around the globe.

There are many types of worshiping communities. They may be based locally or draw from broad regions. In all cases, as expressed in the ELCA constitution and social teaching, this church expects that each worshiping community will be engaged in forms of active civic participation as one element of life in Christ's church. This is one vital way that God's people serve neighbors in human society.

Article 13 Religious communities and organizations must discern when and how to constructively engage in civic life. Religions can create divisions in civic life or can contribute to mending the social

fabric and reconciling divided peoples. Being a source of healing requires faithful discernment as to contexts and to what specific roles and actions are called for. This church urges people of all religions and worldviews to seek constructive roles to counter growing hyper-partisan polarization, distrust, and ill will.

The Scriptures, echoed by the ELCA constitution and our church's social teaching, lift up a moral vision for civic life that reflects both the depth of sin in human fallenness and the heights of hope in God's redemption. This church's moral vision does not mean we expect to create God's kingdom on earth—only God can do that. However, this moral vision does give witness to the biblical idea of God's intention for *shalom* and thereby encourages us to stand for both justice and reconciliation in this time of divisiveness and acrimony.

This moral vision is held in tension with the realism of human nature's fallenness but reminds us that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. The moral vision also reminds us that, contrary to common assumptions and painful actions in civic life, all stand equally before God. There is no neighbor or stranger, no political ally or opponent for whom Christ did not die. As a community of inclusion, as a people of every race and tongue (Acts 2, Revelation 7:9), we are drawn by our civic engagement into wider inclusion. We are drawn into action so that all people may experience dignity and mutual self-determination.

The ELCA, as a member of Christ's Church, has long committed itself to reconciliation and healing in communities and civic life.²³ This church at every level is called to respond with compassion and imagination, drawing from experience and innovating new ways to address civic challenges.

For example, social ministries in the community are a means of civic participation and are widely affirmed by this church. Care facilities, food pantries, housing programs, and refugee resettlement efforts are but a few examples of responses found in individual congregations or in ministries affiliated with Lutheran Services in America. This church has a responsibility, working with all people of goodwill, to mediate conflict and to advocate just and peaceful resolutions while supporting institutions and policies that seek the well-being and power of all.

Article 14 Discerning the best course of action requires considering many different facets of any situation. Because we recognize that every person is one for whom Christ died, this church has a special responsibility to seek to provide safe spaces for challenging conversations. A safe space does not mean a space where all agree. The responsibility for safe space means providing space where all are honored and valued regardless of what they believe. This is true even as worshiping communities disagree or struggle together to discern the common good.

In the contemporary polarized social environment, the practice of communal moral discernment is an evangelical witness to God's intention that humans respect others and to the good use of reason. Fulfilling a wide spectrum of callings and coming from a diversity of experiences, Christians will often disagree passionately on social questions. Yet, because they share common convictions of faith, they are free, indeed obligated, to deliberate together on the challenges they face in the world. This is especially true when consensus is difficult or not reached. United in baptism with Christ and all believers, Christians are empowered to welcome and celebrate their diversity and to remain in conversation.

²³ *The Church in Society*, 4. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

Since the 1991 adoption of the social statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, the idea of our church as a safe space for discernment has been formally part of the ELCA's identity as a community of moral deliberation. It is an identity that our church continues to grow into. As a church, we recognize our many failures to live out this identity. At the same time, we give thanks that we may renew and build upon this heritage.

Article 15 The ELCA serves God and neighbor in civic life through its members and congregations but also through its synods and the churchwide organization. These long-standing commitments are named in the ELCA constitution, addressed initially in the 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*. Some examples, from that document, illustrate our church's ongoing civic contributions as part of our social witness:²⁴

- Supporting church-related economic, educational, and social ministry organizations in their service to human need;
- Speaking on timely, urgent issues on which the voice of this church should be heard and which have clear and specific grounding in ELCA social teaching;
- Working with and on behalf of the poor and those who suffer, using moral persuasion to advocate that political and economic decision-making bodies develop policies that advance justice, peace, and care of creation;
- Providing for federal chaplains in military and federal prisons; and
- Supporting the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations.

Article 16 This church has long affirmed that one means of discipleship involves civic participation as a prophetic presence. With Mary, the mother of Jesus, the church sings of God's action to bring down the proud and lift up the lowly (Luke 1:51-53). The church hopes to follow Jesus, who boldly declared a calling to proclaim good news to the poor, release for the incarcerated, healing for the sick, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 42:7). The prophetic role envisions and points us toward a better future of well-being.

The prophetic role toward justice-seeking, advocacy, and social change in all forms of civic life require care, patience, and wise distinctions. Civic participation as prophetic presence may be controversial, and worshiping communities need to take time and care to discern and identify common parameters for such action whether in service, advocacy, or toward social change.

This prophetic role includes "the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people."²⁵ As one aspect of the church's ministry, it belongs to all members through our baptismal vocation, irrespective of offices or roles within the church.

Such ministry may include exhorting civic leaders and institutions when they abuse those they are to serve or overreach their authority. This church says, with Martin Luther, that "to rebuke" those in authority "through God's Word spoken publicly, boldly and honestly" is "not seditious" but "a praiseworthy, noble, and ... particularly great service to God."²⁶

²⁴ *The Church in Society*, 8-9 contains the full list. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

²⁵ *The Church in Society*, 4. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4. The source is Martin Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 82" (1530) in *Selected Psalms II, Works*, vol. 13., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan et al. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956).

Theologically it is important to recognize that the exertion of social power when addressing or challenging civic life is part of this church's work under the Law, the left-hand strategy of God. (Articles 5 and 20). Though the church's message of the Gospel is sure, we cannot know what the outcomes of exerting social power in public actions will be. We must consistently evaluate whether neighbor justice, especially for the marginalized, is being served by the prophetic presence of this church.

Article 17 Faith-based advocacy is one among other means to work toward a civic life that better reflects God's vision for a more just and reconciled world. Advocacy comes in many forms, from institution-based efforts to more local practices sometimes called "faith-based organizing."²⁷ At whatever level, it often means pressing civic leaders or public-policy makers to respect the needs and dignity of all people and our common home, with special care for the vulnerable. Advocacy comes from the Latin *vocare* (to call), the root word for both voice and vocation.

Advocacy at whatever level can be a stewardship of the ELCA's voice and is grounded in the ELCA's constitution, which directs the ELCA to:²⁸

- Empower members to engage with systems and processes to promote the well-being of the human community and creation in the public square, local and federal government, and the international community;
- Advance justice in response to human suffering, marginalization, and exclusion;
- Promote equality, justice, and respect for the value of every person to reduce the systemic injustices impacting communities and societies; and
- Exercise corporate social responsibility through environmental, social, and justice principles to create a just and sustainable society.

The ELCA's corporate witness is governed by ELCA social teaching,²⁹ and advocacy occurs in both domestic and global accompaniment with people and communities. Likewise, this corporate witness is enriched and strengthened through ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration.³⁰ The united witness of the faith community builds and depends upon relationships of trust and communal discernment.

Faith-based organizing at the local level is born from relationships of service and solidarity. It is an expression of both individual discipleship and the life in community together. It grows most forcefully out of ministries among people and communities that have been denied their human dignity or are seeking greater justice. It supports and amplifies these voices. Though sometimes forms of advocacy are described as providing "a voice for the voiceless," we must be careful to identify and support opportunities for people to speak for themselves.³¹

Organizing people of varying interests to advocate for the common good may require different practices in different contexts. Building relationships and sharing vision can involve letters, calls, and meetings

²⁷ For more on ELCA faith-based organizing, see <https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church/organizing-for-mission/upcoming-events>

²⁸ ELCA Constitution 16.12.D21, 118.

²⁹ The ELCA's corporate witness is expressed, for instance, in the work of the Witness in Society team. See [elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church](https://www.elca.org/our-work/publicly-engaged-church).

³⁰ Such collaborations are specifically encouraged in the ELCA's ecumenical and inter-religious policy documents. See, "A Declaration of Ecumenical Commitment (Chicago: ELCA, 1991) and A Declaration of Inter-Religious Commitment" (Chicago: ELCA, 2019), (especially commitments 7,8, and 9). www.elca.org/ecumenical

³¹ One fuller treatment on this topic is *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* - Alexia Salvatierra and Peter Heltzel, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill., 2014.

with elected leaders and their staff. It can involve invitations for them to visit communities and ministries. It involves building public awareness in ways that include editorials, rallies and protests, earned and paid media, public testimony, community organizing, and more.

Using the trust of one-to-one relationships, faith-based organizers seek to spur action by building coalitions mostly in local contexts. Faith-based community organizing roots itself in shared values and commitments, in congregations and in other institutions, often across denominations and religious boundaries. Faith-informed advocacy can play a transformative role in a polarized political world by bringing people together to work toward the common good in the public square.

Article 18 Ethical discernment and action to love and serve the neighbor through civic life have multiple facets. One vital facet is participation in government and politics, which are essential dimensions of civic life. Civic life and service is not equal to government and political activity, but when rightly understood and practiced, political activity is necessary and good. It is important, then, to distinguish between ethics and politics, and this church teaches that civic or political concerns should be guided by ethical teaching.

Ethics involves careful discernment about what is right, good, or fitting. It asks what we ought to do, or not do and what we should value or not value, and who we should be or not be within community. In other words, ethics seeks to reflect on what we will seek to be and do to form a communities of well-being. ELCA social statements are ethical documents that provide this church's teaching for addressing such questions, which include civic and political life.

The word "politics" (*polis* is Greek for "the people") often is used today to express disgust with dishonest practices, grabs for exclusive control, lies, and deceptions. It is used to describe authority being used in a sinful way. Such practices are sinful and are real dangers that this society must confront. However, the Lutheran tradition teaches that God creates humans as political beings and is the creator and ultimate source of the political sphere.

"Politics," then, as used in this statement, describes a necessary and positive aspect of human life. It describes negotiating how the benefits, burdens, rights, and responsibilities of living in a society are shared. Politics, in this sense, happens whenever two or more people are gathered to live in community together. This includes life in the family and the church! Politics describes the activity in which each person's interests and the well-being of the community are navigated and negotiated. Politics is an essential and good dimension essential to human well-being.

Politics is always complicated and messy because it involves diplomacy, compromise, ambiguity, persuasion, and decision. The reality is that living in community requires negotiations, sometimes scrappy ones, about the ongoing (re)distribution of resources, rights, responsibilities, opportunity, and access for all members of society as needed to form a healthy community. It includes legislation, enforcement, judicial evaluation, community planning and organization, advocacy, and distribution of goods and services (such as postal delivery, overseas aid, etc.).

Politics and ethics are necessarily related. Ethics discerns; politics implements. For example, ethics presents the principle of self-determination as a primary value of a healthy political community. Government and political activity can be evaluated by how well they foster mutual self-determination for each community in a society and whether power is available to and produced for all members of that society, especially those from vulnerable or minority

populations (Articles 23 and 22).

Article 19 The two millennia that separate us from Jesus' social context make it difficult to appreciate the political dimensions of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was not political in the sense of affiliation with a particular political party or leadership circle. He did not negotiate or legislate civic laws or regulations. Still, Jesus' teaching, such as on caring for the poor and marginalized (Luke 4:18-19, Matthew 5:3-10), challenged socio-economic norms, social systems, and had political implications. His critique of political leaders (Luke 13:32) brought him into tension with the authorities of his day.

Further, when the early Christians claimed that "Jesus is Lord," they were making a claim with a political implication: Caesar is *not* Lord. Some Scripture passages, then, may be both theological *and* political statements (Acts 10:36, Philippians 2:11). They make a political claim in the sense that all government is accountable to God and Christians should not give prime loyalty to any government.

If Jesus is Ruler (Lord), then no nation, constitution, government or official can have our prime loyalty. God's commandments and demands to serve the neighbor have singular priority for Christians. God's rulership is not to be associated with a particular person or worldly structure such as a government, nation or political movements. As with Jesus, the call to love neighbor and do justice pushes us into engagement with society rather than out of it.

Only with appropriate attention to the political can we exercise neighbor love and serve neighbor justice to hold government accountable, oppose social oppression, seek various kinds of liberation, and work toward the common good. Political engagement in this sense is a means of channeling God's love through civic participation.

In this sense, then, addressing issues in the political arena *is* an element of Christian calling. This is true both for the individual and for our church in its corporate witness. But whereas individual Christians will engage politically, often *through* political parties, the institutional church itself is not to be a partisan community. When the church addresses social issues, some people may interpret, criticize, or even rebuke it as being partisan. However, this church seeks careful discernment and clear criteria for participation in God's work in the political sphere, criteria that transcends partisanship (see "Government and Civic Engagement"³², articles xx and xx, and Section V).

Article 20 All the baptized must wrestle with the relationship between their faith, the church, and civic life as they live out their responsibilities to "...care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace."³³ This church's involvement in civic life is primarily borne out in the lives of its members as they embody discipleship in their communities and relationships. Consistent with the testimony of Scripture and the Lutheran tradition, the ELCA is clear in its teaching that all Christians share in the calling to civic and political participation. This church strongly affirms this shared calling of all the baptized.

However, rostered ministers (such as bishops, pastors, deacons) face particular opportunities and challenges in light of their office and their public roles. Suggesting guideposts for the responsible relationship between the rostered minister's office and public role in society is easier on paper than providing precise "how-to" through the treacherous terrain created by hyperpolarized political battles.

³² Government and Civic Engagement, p. 9f. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

³³ ELW, 228. These are two of the responsibilities entrusted to the baptized.

Nevertheless, this church's theological commitments offer principles for guidance to rostered ministers as they serve both the church and society.

Rostered ministers are entrusted with proclamation of Christ's gracious and redemptive work, with the public ministry of the Word. In this they are called to proclaim both Law and Gospel. They provide biblical, theological, spiritual care and moral guidance through preaching, prayer, teaching, advocacy, accompaniment, and service. This living Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, can transform lives as Christ begins to take shape in people of faith.

In terms of God's Law, Lutheran theology teaches (Article 5) that its theological use (second use) convicts us of our sins, and that includes naming participation in social and structural evils. Preaching and teaching the civil use (first use) focuses on questions about whether a society—individually and corporately—is failing to achieve the well-being of all. In terms of Gospel, God's love frees us from the fear of death and condemnation so that we might serve the neighbor, including through civic participation.

In rostered ministry, deacons, pastors, and bishops are expected to connect the Christian faith to contemporary issues, theology with life. The ELCA's model constitution for the congregation states that they are "to speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people..."³⁴

They, therefore, have the responsibility to represent a church community's life experiences and perspectives, woven together with their leadership experiences and training. This makes their work political, as was true of Jesus (Article xx). It does not license partisanship, for example, in telling members which candidates or political parties to vote for or belong to (see Article xx).

Even as the opportunities and responsibilities of rostered ministry are a blessing, the office of preaching presents genuine earthly challenges because of its dual character. Therefore, ministers in the church wrestle with several dangers that are made all the more complicated because of increasing political polarization (Articles xx and xx).

On the one hand, in their proper work, ministers can be tempted to forget that theirs is an office of the Word, instituted by God for the specific purpose of cultivating faith.³⁵ This work occurs through the proclamation of the forgiveness of sin and the promise of eternal life in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They, likewise, can be tempted to neglect their role to admonish and exhort toward Christ's way of life. If this proper role is forgotten or neglected, ministers fail to discharge the ministry that is unique to the church.

On the other hand, in their significant work (alien work) of ministry to address public issues, there are dangers of both pride and despair. On the one side, ministers can be tempted by presumption, a certainty that would claim too much knowledge, religious righteousness, or authority in speaking to civic

³⁴ Model Congregation Constitution C9.23; this wording is found in the purpose statements of all three expressions of the ELCA

³⁵ The Augsburg Confession, V, teaches that the office is instituted by God "so that we may obtain faith" BC 2000, 41.

and political issues.³⁶ On the other side is the temptation toward resignation or quietism, such that complacency replaces courage and commitment.

Despite these challenges, this church holds that rostered ministers are charged to speak on public issues faithfully, bound by Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and governed by ELCA official social teaching. They are representatives of this church and of their church communities. This charge is especially critical when the political climate has made it increasingly difficult for the church to live out its “prophetic presence.” That is, this church holds that it has an “obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless people.”³⁷

Rostered ministers should take seriously the broader context and community setting in offering guidance and discernment as they work together with their church communities to determine how to participate in civic life. Rostered ministers need to have a deep understanding of their community and build-give priority to relationships of mutual understanding even while asking probing and challenging questions. Participants in these church communities have a responsibility to faithfully hear, respect, and support their rostered leaders when they faithfully and appropriately discern how to address public issues. They are accountable to the wider church and the church communities they serve in a way that prioritizes serving in love over being served.

At the same time, rostered ministers ~~are both accountable to and~~ need the love and care of the communities they serve. Participants in our church communities have a responsibility to faithfully hear, respect, and support their rostered leaders as they appropriately discern how to address public issues. Those they serve Such responsibility ~~have the responsibility~~ in the mutuality of Christian love, calls for to offer Spirit-led counsel, challenge, encouragement, and care to rostered ministers ~~fulfilling their necessary~~ who are seeking to fulfill their public role in both church and society. It must be kept in mind that rostered leaders face particular risks if they belong to historically marginalized communities or serve in uncomfortable contexts. The community should be intentional to provide care for their safety and well-being.

The Christian Church’s faith and baptismal calling reminds both lay and rostered ministers of our fundamental unity in the life, resurrection, and eternal promises of Christ. Living out this unity in word and deed is a shared responsibility between rostered and lay people.

III. Assessing the U.S. Constitutional Form of Government

Article 21 The Lutheran Confessions affirm political authority and political activity³⁸ in principle as one way the Triune God protects and coordinates the complex web of social and economic relationships for human well-being. Over time, Lutherans have come to understand, though, that we are called to live with a cautious restlessness about all forms of government since some provide better measures of well-being than others. Further, we have come to recognize more fully how sin permeates not simply individual action but every human system and structure.

³⁶ Article 28 of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession challenged claims by those with ecclesial offices to possess holy knowledge and privilege for political affairs of their time. BC 2000, 289

³⁷ See *The Church in Society*, 4.

³⁸ Apology, XVI, BC 2000, 231.

In the Lutheran theological tradition, the key question asked about government is how well it serves God's purposes of justice and good order, especially in caring for the most vulnerable members of the community.

Such discernment about political authority reaches as far back as the Reformation, as evident in Luther's catechisms and many writings of the reformers.³⁹ The Large Catechism says, "It would therefore be fitting if the coat of arms of every upright prince were emblazoned with a loaf of bread instead of a lion or a wreath of rue [a medicinal herb], or if a loaf of bread were stamped on coins...."⁴⁰ Rather than conquering more land or gaining more wealth, the role of government should be focused on ensuring that each person receives all the necessities for daily well-being.

Because government is an indispensable structure of society, Lutherans historically have granted respect and obedience to good civil authorities and institutions, in line with Romans 13. At the same time, the Lutheran tradition also maintains that there is a responsibility to assess and call individuals and institutions to account. The Lutheran heritage contains examples of leaders denouncing the misuse of those institutions and also cooperating with them toward the common good. How power is understood and used is key to this assessment.

Article 22 Human social life is an arena of multiple forms of power. This church teaches that an essential assessment of any use of power, whether in law, policy, or action, is whether it extends God's power for people and groups. This assessment is especially important with respect to those who have been denied power historically or marginalized by social systems.

As the Creator of all that is, God *is* sovereign. But God's sovereignty brings forth creatures who are not God, giving them power and sustenance. God's power creates creatures' power rather than depriving them of it (Article xx). Divine, self-giving power is always and everywhere plural. That is, divine power produces not one center of power but multiple transmissions of power.

That view of power is central to the Lutheran notion of justification by grace alone (Article 5). God's declaration of justification is God's sovereign act, but that sovereign act is communicated to us through faith. On earth, the point and power of justification is to fulfill and heal sinners through faith, i.e. to give sinners power to become what they were created to be. God's sovereign act is the beginning "moment" of power but is not fulfilled power.⁴¹ Similarly, the power of the Lord's Supper for Luther *is* the healing and strengthening of the recipient.

God's dominion satisfies the needs of every living creature (Psalm 145). Divine power is not the usual

³⁹ For example, Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther's pastor, was deployed to several European government bodies to advocate for and help draft laws creating community chests, a welfare net to assist the poor; see *The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation*, eds. Carter Lindberg and Paul A. Wee (Minneapolis: Lutheran University Press, 2016). For other examples, see Walter Altmann, *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, 2nd ed., trans. Thia Cooper (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016), 70-132.

⁴⁰ Large Catechism, Lord's Prayer, IV, para. 75, BC 2000, 450

⁴¹ There were some during the Reformation period who took the idea of justification by grace alone through faith to mean that they had no obligations to society or their neighbors. In other words, they understood God's sovereign act to be the end of God's power for them, not its beginning. Luther, among others, vehemently opposed this distortion and consistently held that the point of one's Christian freedom was for love of *neighbor*; the purpose of the gift of faith was to free one to improve the world. Like God's creative power, faith's power is fulfilled not by hoarding it (which Luther says marks unbelief, not faith) but by increasing the power of others.

political model of power. The common political understanding equates power with the ability to control and dominate. It is nonplural; that is, it seeks more for itself and less for others. This is the type of power referred to by the famous maxim “Power corrupts.” This distorted power of domination and control stands in contrast with divine sovereignty, which is fulfilled in creating and increasing the equitable power of God’s creatures.

As such, all power can be assessed by its adherence to the divine creative and self-giving purpose. It can be assessed by the extent to which power is distorted and misused for the sake of domination and exploitation. This is true whether in government, civic interaction, religious organizations, business, law enforcement, or the family.

To the extent that human power is directed solely or primarily to the control or domination of others, it is a sinful distortion of power. It is sin when power’s purpose to fulfill other creatures is used instead to destroy the independent power of others, intentionally or unintentionally. Power exercised as domination hollows out those who are subject to it, while those in control lose the vitality that allows them to adapt.

Like all power, governmental power is good in principle but subject to systemic distortions and sinful impulses. This statement discusses systemic distortions in several places (Article 4 and xx). Those in government, like all people, are sinners and are subject to limitations of knowledge, however well meaning, and the temptation to not acknowledge limits.

As a result, government may often seek its own advantage or that of its most influential constituencies at the expense of many of its people. This is especially likely if one thinks of politics and civic engagement as primarily a collection of warring interest groups engaged in a zero-sum game of wins and losses. This view distorts power into a contest of domination and control.

There are circumstances that do require the use of dominating power to defend against those who are doing significant harm—such as another government. In certain circumstances, even war might be legitimate, for example, to defend one’s country against existential threats or to oppose totalitarian regimes. Under such circumstances, dominating power can be justified in good conscience to counter immense harm.⁴²

Even in those cases, however, Christians and others believe constraints must be observed. For example, noncombatants and former combatants, including those from the enemy’s side, should be treated with care, as God’s creatures, not as mere objects of control or domination.

Article 23 The lodestar of divine power implies additional criteria for assessing government action. God’s self-giving creative and sustaining power gifts human creatures with agency, the ability to set their own course. The gifts of power therefore include a presumption for self-determination. (However, this presumption for self-determination has little to do with the ideology of “individualism,” that is, that the interests of the individual ought to have priority.)

⁴² *For Peace in God’s World*, 13, elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements. Theologian Paul Tillich calls this idea “the strange work of love to destroy what is against love”; see *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 49.

Thus, an important criterion for assessing government action is whether it extends the self-determination of the people—and thus *their* power. Practically, this means that the necessary starting point for considering what is good for others should be what those others believe is good for them.

This has implications, for example, in deciding which *level* of government, if any, properly acts in a given situation. In many instances a national government is needed. In other instances, a national government may be far removed from certain local realities. Likewise, local or state governments may be more removed from the effects of their actions on those outside their authority. Distance may increase the possibility for error in determining what will lead to another's well-being and what will damage others' self-determination and power. This is not a value judgement but simply a description of the limits of government, even in a representative democracy.

These possibilities, in turn, mean that both those in government and those they govern must ask what level of government is most appropriate and how best to design policies that foster self-determination. That is also why it is important to create opportunities to participate and be heard for those who will be most directly affected by those decisions.

A presumption is, however, not a rule, and self-determination is not an absolute value. That is one difference from an ideology of individualism in which the individual's desires and beliefs are given priority and sheer autonomy. Self-determination is a *presumption*, a guardrail. Sometimes laws and regulations even must oppose what people believe to be their own good. Individuals and groups can mistake what is good for them.

The presumption for self-determination is especially necessary when what seems good for "my group" significantly harms others and their self-determination. This is because self-determination already includes a norm of reciprocity. As a *universal* presumption deriving from God's creative and sustaining power, it gives priority to others' self-determination as well. Self-determination's mutuality, and its grounding in divine power, distinguishes this view from individualism.

Accordingly, this church stresses that self-determination *always* includes mutual, plural self-determination, which is also the sharing of power. It does *not* mean doing whatever one wants at the expense of others. Self-determination is necessarily mutual self-determination. This can be understood as a form of the Golden Rule: Extend to others their self-determination as you wish to have it extended to you.⁴³

Both the model of divine power and the consequent political presumption of self-determination include a criterion of fostering multiple transmissions of power, i.e. plurality. Both are indispensable elements for thinking through the nature and purpose of governments, including those of the United States.

Article 24 In the United States, the Constitution, ratified in 1788, provides the federal framework for what political authority may and may not do with respect to its citizens and other governmental and

⁴³ Christians look to Matthew 7:12 as the Golden Rule, while other traditions have a comparable standard in their writings.

nongovernmental institutions.⁴⁴ It provides for a national government consisting of three authorities with distinct roles and power sharing—executive, legislative, and judicial. It reserves certain matters to the states and others to citizens of the country regardless of the state in which they live. It also acknowledges Indigenous sovereign governments.

The U.S. Constitution was not utterly unique. There are precedents in human history for what we recognize as “democracy” or “a republic.” The Constitution was not even the first governing framework of the fledgling United States. That distinction belonged to the Articles of Confederation, adopted by the Continental Congress in 1777 and ratified by the 13 states in 1781.⁴⁵

But within a few years, it became clear that the young country likely would not survive under the Articles of Confederation. There was no effective executive power to enforce the national Congress’ decisions, and the nation was in danger of defaulting on its debts. The states had separate, often conflicting, policies, which sometimes were aimed at other states, as well as separate currencies. These and other deficiencies produced a failure that gave rise to the Constitution.

The Constitution *was* unique in crucial ways. The 1788 Constitution makes no mention of God or religion except to prohibit requiring religious tests for holding federal office. And for the first time in recorded history, the governing document of a people had to be ratified by the people it would govern rather than be imposed by a monarch, a sovereign state, or religious authority (Article xx).

The Constitution also strives against the monopolization of sovereignty and pure self-interest by instituting checks and balances across institutions and with the states. The structure of the new government was explicitly designed to combat extreme self-interest, which the drafters had experienced both under a parliamentary monarchy and among the states included in the Articles of Confederation.

It was controversial to provide for a strong executive, as the Constitution did. Because of that, the framers limited the executive branch, reserving certain matters for the legislature or the judiciary. Similarly, the Constitution provides for an executive not elected by Congress, to limit Congress’ power and influence. In addition to reserving some areas of authority for states, the Constitution provided all states with equal representation in the U.S. Senate to combat the fear that the larger states would ignore or destroy the vitality of smaller states. The courts were established to settle disputes and interpret laws. The authority of the courts was also checked by certain legislative and executive means.

The Constitution is both grounding and aspirational. It serves as an example *and* points this society to values and practices that the nation has not yet fulfilled. Its preamble clearly expresses this government’s purpose and provides a reference for assessing national faithfulness to that purpose:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union,
establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence,
promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves

⁴⁴ For one comprehensive discussion of the Constitution’s history, including its uniqueness and history of amendments, see Akhil Reed Amar, *America’s Constitution: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2005).

⁴⁵ For an excellent discussion of the Articles of Confederation and their context, see George William Van Cleve, *We Have Not a Government: The Articles of Confederation and the Road to the Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.⁴⁶

These provide some secular standards for evaluating government that also give specificity to the Christian question “Is the neighbor’s well-being served by government?”

Article 25 The most radical feature of the Constitution is its first three words: “we the people.” Never before had those who would be governed been required to vote their government into effect, to “ordain and establish” it. “The people” determined how they would be governed and this sets up a preference for self-determination inherent in the Constitutional process, as much as or more so than in the Constitution itself.

Much of the subsequent history of amendments to the Constitution made this preference for mutual self-determination more explicit. At the time of ratification, “the people” was largely limited to free white men. Many states also imposed a property-owning qualification on the right to vote. Slavery was recognized and accepted by the Constitution. Indeed, slaveholding states received additional congressional representation through the constitutional clause counting enslaved people as three-fifths of a person, even though those states denied them legal personhood and the vote.

Most members of Indigenous nations, who were not granted US citizenship until 1924, had no say in representation. Though American Indian sovereignty is recognized in the Constitution, that commitment was blatantly ignored as states and the federal government violated treaty after treaty, and it remains a source of struggle today.

The preference for self-determination was thus partly realized in the Constitution and partly unrealized. Amendments to the Constitution have tended to make that aspiration more effective by reducing the number of groups who were “governed” without their “consent” by expanding the right to vote.

In respect of people of African descent, the Reconstruction amendments essentially said that the 1787 Constitution’s “grand bargain” to preserve slavery got wrong who “we the people” should be. Later amendments granted the right of additional citizens to vote: women (1920) and young adults ages 18-20 (1971). Levying any tax as a condition to vote was prohibited (1964). Every amendment related to who is included in “we the people” has expanded who may participate in mutual self-determination. However, there remain patterns of obstruction to restrict exercise of these rights.

Like the theological presumption for mutual self-determination (Article 21), the Constitution’s “we, the people” has little in common with an ideology of individualism. The sovereignty of the people is a collective sovereignty and includes mutual self-determination. A core purpose of the protections of individual rights in the Bill of Rights and elsewhere is to strengthen “we the people.” The protection of individual and minority rights, in the Constitutional conception, is necessary for a healthy collective.

Article 26 The framers of the Constitution recognized that self-dealing by states under the Articles of Confederation was already destroying the country and the states themselves. Humans continue to demonstrate, in greater or lesser measure, the tendency to want to dominate and control, to seek our advantage over our neighbor, not for their interests but, in the end, for our own. Theologically, this

⁴⁶ Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, constitution.congress.gov/constitution/preamble.

tendency is part of the meaning we Lutherans recognize in teaching that even the justified are also sinners.

Article xx explains how government is subject to the same impulses. Accordingly, governmental action should be subject to the presumption that those governed have a right to identify what they see as their needs. Here, too, that presumption can be overcome, and government can act coercively upon those who are subject to it, particularly when those subjects are needlessly damaging others' capacity for self-determination. That assessment is the source of much criminal law, for example.

As the government acts to prevent harmful behavior, the priority should be seeking to produce and share power in ways to promote the common good. Examples of this communication of power and well-being include compulsory school attendance, Social Security, and regulations to incentivize accomplishing social goals.

A few of the questions to assess a government at federal, state, and local levels include: Has this act opened room for the self-determination of those in its jurisdiction? Has this coercive authority adequately protected valuable mutual self-determination to a reasonable extent? Has this regulatory authority made the operation of the economy smoother so that those affected can live their lives more fully? Has this action assisted or encouraged those who want to participate in civic life to do so? Will the act do these things in the future? Does it effectively rectify failures of the past, especially failures to include the marginalized?

All of these illustrate the criteria about whether, on balance, an action has increased or will increase the power, mutual self-determination, and well-being of those affected by a government. The answers to these questions provide the means for people of faith, and others, to join important civic conversations about what is taking place in U.S. civic and political life.

Article 27 The 1788 Constitution made a firm decision for religious neutrality, thus, allowing each person and group to practice the religion of their choice, or none. Article VI reads: "No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States." That was a radical choice because 11 of the 13 states at that time had religious qualifications for public officials. The same neutrality regarding religion was expressed in the very first words of the First Amendment to the Constitution (Section IV), ratified as part of the Bill of Rights in 1791.

The Constitution's choice to forbid religious tests was historically novel and has had momentous consequences. For example, neither Thomas Jefferson nor Abraham Lincoln had any institutional religious affiliation. A religious test would have left the country without their service and that of others from non-Christian faith traditions or no faith tradition. The United States opened public offices to people of all religions, as well to the nonreligious, and limited the ability of government to interfere with self-determined religious choice.

Article 28 The religious diversity and neutrality of both the original Constitution and its First Amendment (Section IV) reject past or present claims that the U.S. was founded as a Christian nation. In 1796, George Washington's administration made an official statement on the subject as part of an

international treaty: “The government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion.”⁴⁷

Many people involved in the movement for U.S. independence and the ratification of the Constitution had devout Christian faith, though others did not. The dominant religious practice of the times was certainly Protestant, as evidenced by the Christian ethos still present in our social fabric. However, it must be recognized that many who lived in and contributed to the establishment of the United States were not Christian and were instead people of various religions and worldviews.

The ELCA gives thanks for many of the ways in which God worked through Christian individuals and in that ethos. In this sense, it is possible to speak of Christianity as contributing to the founding of this country and to claim that the original U.S. ethos was influenced by Christianity. However, this church rejects the baseless claims that the U.S. was founded on specifically Christian beliefs or that the U.S. Constitution is a result of special revelation, thus establishing a Christian nation. The Constitution established that the nation’s sovereign is “we the people,” not “we the faithful” or “we the Christians.”

IV. Religion and the First Amendment

Article 29 The First Amendment to the Constitution begins: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” It indicates that the vitality of religious life arises from the self-determination of the people in the broad plurality of civil society, not from the government.

The first clause (“no law respecting an establishment of religion”) is known as the Establishment Clause. The second clause (“no law ... prohibiting the free exercise thereof”) is known as the Free Exercise Clause. The two clauses work together to protect religious liberty for all people in our pluralistic society, though federal, state, and local governments have, at times, fallen short in that protection.

The Establishment Clause is cut from the same cloth as the Constitution’s prohibition against religious tests for public office. Government is not the church, and the church is not the government. The intent of the Establishment Clause clearly is that government must not promote a particular faith or religion in general. Some recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court at the time of this writing, however, cast doubt on the continuing strength of that limitation on government.⁴⁸

As discussed in Article 30 this church reaffirms the need for strong boundaries that limit government involvement in the core activities of religion—worship, instruction in faith, and proselytizing. Such boundaries are needed to prohibit excessive government entanglement in religious institutions, provided that religious exercise does not harm the legitimate interests of the broader community. For example, the government has no authority to decide who is fit to be a minister or teacher of a faith. Nor does the

⁴⁷ Article 11 of the Barbary Treaties, signed at Tripoli on November 4, 1796. Treaties are binding acts of state and help articulate a country’s self-understanding on the international stage. Text accessed September 1, 2023, avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp.

⁴⁸ For example, see *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, 597 U.S. 507 (2022) (allowing coach to lead public prayer after high school football game) and *Carson v. Makin*, 596 U.S. 767, 806-810 (2022), in which a dissenting opinion analyzes Supreme Court decisions since 2017 that have diverged from the court’s historical position that the Establishment Clause prohibits governments from funding religious activities.

government have the competence to declare which of the rival factions in a religious body represents the correct expression of that faith.

Government by the people means there is no favored religion. However, as discussed in Article 32, our church holds that the free exercise of religion is not an absolute right and does not give faithful individuals or religious organizations license to harm others. Individuals and organizations have the right to determine the meaning of their religious commitments, but their exercise of such commitments does not create a right to impose significant harm on the neighbor.

Article 30 Religious worship, teaching, and proselytizing belong solely to religious institutions. Those activities, and the institutions that support them, are distinct from the exercise of civil authority. The government’s authority extends only to secular matters, not the relationship between people and the sacred.

By imposing a limit on the government’s involvement with religion and religious institutions, the Establishment Clause protects both government and religion. Without this limit, political actors could use their offices and the government’s powers to advance their faith—either to enhance that faith or to expand the government’s claim over the people.

For example, the government threatens the principle of nonestablishment whenever it displays religious symbols. A government-sponsored display of such symbols may be permissible if it sends a message about the history of a particular community. It would violate the principle of nonestablishment, however, if it intended to convey a message of religious truth. Courts in individual cases must closely scrutinize government-sponsored displays of religious symbols to discern the intended message and protect nonestablishment.⁴⁹

Similarly, government violates the principle of nonestablishment when it attempts to use public schools for evangelism or religious instruction. The Supreme Court has long held that required prayer or Bible reading in public schools are unconstitutional religious activity.⁵⁰ Though now being challenged in some state legislatures and courts, the principles of nonestablishment and pluralism preclude the government from promoting or coercing such activity.

Government funding of religious activity also impacts Establishment Clause concerns. Article xx of this statement explains this church’s position that there is a need for cooperative work between faith-based social welfare programs and the government. In those contexts, the government pays religious organizations for services of a secular character. If the government were to pay those organizations to provide worship or religious instruction, such funding would violate the principle of nonestablishment.⁵¹ For this reason, this church opposes requiring states to provide equal funding for religious education.

⁴⁹ For example, see *American Legion v. American Humanist Association*, 588 U.S. 19 (2019), in which a cross-shaped World War I monument on public land was found not to violate the Establishment Clause.

⁵⁰ See *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962) and *Abington School District v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963).

⁵¹ For this reason, many state constitutions expressly prohibit public funding of houses of worship or places of religious instruction. Though direct public funding may be prohibited, churches and religious organizations qualify for exemption from federal income tax under Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c)(3). In addition, property tax exemptions for houses of worship do not violate the Establishment Clause. *Walz v. Tax Commission of the City of New York*, 397 U.S. 664 (1970).

Finally, the nonestablishment principle forbids courts and government officials from deciding certain “essentially religious” questions. These include which faction of a divided congregation holds the correct interpretation of its faith, or whether a religious leader deserves employment at a congregation even if the congregation has fired them.⁵² Each of these contexts calls for “ecclesiastical abstention,” or deference to the religious institution’s governing structure. While ecclesiastical abstention does not insulate religious bodies from all judicial scrutiny, it bars the government from challenging a religious organization’s internal governance or religious decisions.⁵³

Through all these examples, this church embraces the principle of nonestablishment of religion by civil government and recognizes that its application requires judicial and political prudence. The Supreme Court’s interpretation of this principle now emphasizes the importance of “history and tradition” in that application.⁵⁴ This church believes that an assessment of our nation’s “history and tradition” must encompass the principle of nonestablishment even though we may not always agree about specific applications.

Article 31 The Free Exercise Clause works together with the Establishment Clause to protect and promote religious diversity in the United States. Prohibiting the establishment of a religion clears the ground for a plurality of religious faiths, as well as the absence of religious faith. The Free Exercise Clause opens space for self-determination, protecting the right of all people to decide what they believe and how as well as whether they express those beliefs within a religious community. It also guarantees the right of religious communities to gather as they choose for worship and religious instruction, and to select their own leaders and organizational form.

Bolstered by the First Amendment’s protection of the right to free speech, the Free Exercise Clause also protects the right of individuals to bring their beliefs into political discussion and decision-making, and of religious communities to engage in public debate according to their religious convictions. A prohibition on expressing religious beliefs in political debate would have deprived the U.S. public of much of the basis for the abolition of slavery and for the civil rights movement, to name just two examples.

In addition, the Free Exercise Clause bars the government from discriminating against believers and religious communities because of their faith. History includes examples of the government directly targeting some faiths for hostile treatment.⁵⁵ Some recent claims of religious discrimination, however, involve subtle forms of allegedly different treatment for believers or religious entities.

Under the Free Exercise Clause, as under the Establishment Clause, religion is constitutionally special. Sometimes, there are such significant differences between religious and secular organizations that they are not truly comparable. In that case, different treatment is appropriate. Other times, a religious activity is truly being singled out or treated differently from the activities of comparable secular organizations, which is not permissible.

⁵² See *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*, 565 U.S. 171 (2012), which found that federal discrimination laws do not apply to religious organizations’ selection of religious leaders.

⁵³ See *Watson v. Jones*, 80 U.S. 679, 733 (1871) and *Serbian E. Orthodox Diocese for U.S. & Can. v. Milivojevic*, 426 U.S. 696, 714 (1976).

⁵⁴ See *American Legion v. American Humanist Association*, 588 U.S. 19 (2019)

⁵⁵ See *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993)

This issue often arises in cases involving distribution of government funds. For example, as explained in Article xx, this church believes that, because religious education involves faith formation, there is a fundamental difference between secular public education and religious education such that it should be permissible for the government to fund secular public education without funding religious education.⁵⁶

In contrast, it should not be permissible for governments to deny organizations funding merely because they are religious. For example, a state program violated the Free Exercise Clause by denying a grant to a religious school for playground resurfacing while providing grants to similarly situated nonreligious schools.⁵⁷

The constitutionally protected right of free exercise is different than Christian freedom. For Lutherans, Christian freedom is given through Christ and arises solely from God’s promise of salvation. This is an eternal freedom from condemnation by the demands of God that no human fulfills. It is a gift of God received by faith and does not depend on any specific political arrangement.

Christian freedom is a matter of the Gospel, while the right of free exercise of religion is a matter of human law. Christian freedom has only indirect legal significance for organizations and individuals in the civil realm. However, it gives us the positive freedom to love God and neighbor.

This church affirms that Christian freedom includes the presumptive duty to obey civil law. There are exceptions, such as circumstances when the law has become tyrannical and abusive, especially to the most vulnerable. Then love may require something other than obedience to civil law. But in normal situations, Christians obey for the sake of good civil order—or, in other words, for the sake of the neighbor.

Article 32 Though the Free Exercise Clause offers stout protections for the right of people and religious communities to worship, practice, teach, and share their faith as they see fit, that right is not absolute. Religiously motivated conduct may violate the laws and regulations that structure our complex society.

When a conflict between religiously motivated practices and civil law occurs, the government should try to accommodate those practices. However, religious accommodations should not damage important public interests, including the civil rights of others.

The ELCA’s predecessor churches⁵⁸ adopted the then-prevalent legal standard of “strict scrutiny”⁵⁹ to define the balance between a religious accommodation and countervailing public interests. Under that standard, the government must accommodate a believer’s religiously motivated practice if that practice is “substantially burdened” by government rules, unless the government can show that denial of the

⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Supreme Court determined that states that prohibit use of school vouchers for religion-based private schools violate the Free Exercise Clause. See *Carson v. Makin*, 596 U.S. 767 (2022). In addition, at the time of this writing, the Supreme Court agreed to decide whether a state may fund a proposed religious charter school. See *Oklahoma Charter School Board, et al. v. Drummond*, Docket Nos. 24-394/396 (2025).

⁵⁷ See *Trinity Lutheran Church of Columbia, Inc. v. Comer*, 582 U.S. 449 (2017).

⁵⁸ See www.elca.org/resources/predecessor-social-teachings. Until the ELCA adopts teaching of its own on a topic, it accepts predecessor documents as the basis of social teaching insofar as they are in agreement.

⁵⁹ Courts review laws and government actions using the strict scrutiny standard—the highest and most stringent standard of judicial review—when they appear to infringe upon fundamental constitutional rights, including free exercise of religion. See *U.S. v. Carolene Products Co.*, 304 U.S. 144, 152 n. 4 (1938); *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963); and *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 U.S. 205 (1972).

requested accommodation is the “least restrictive means” of protecting a “compelling state interest.”⁶⁰ At the time our predecessor bodies adopted that language, courts in such cases tended to be quite deferential to the government despite using the language of strict scrutiny.

In the 1990 decision *Employment Division v. Smith*, the U.S. Supreme Court moved away from strict scrutiny entirely and held that the Free Exercise Clause did not require accommodations from neutral, generally applicable laws.⁶¹ In response, the ELCA, together with its ecumenical partners and a broad coalition of groups from across the religious and political spectrum, advocated for the adoption of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). This statute restored the strict scrutiny test as to federal government action.⁶² Many states followed suit with similar laws. The strict scrutiny standard continues to apply in important federal statutes and case law and the constitutions or statutes of some states.⁶³

More recently, the Supreme Court has moved away from its earlier deference to governmental authority and interpreted in literal terms the federal statutes that use the strict scrutiny standard to provide religious accommodations. These decisions focus almost exclusively on the burden imposed on religious exercise and pay scant attention to “important governmental interests”⁶⁴ and the interests of others harmed by the requested accommodation.⁶⁵

The ELCA affirms the need for a standard that balances religiously motivated conduct with public interests, including the protection of other individuals’ civil rights. This church urges legislators and the courts to fashion legal standards that respect the importance of religiously motivated conduct. In contrast with the strict scrutiny standard adopted by the ELCA’s predecessor churches, this church affirms an intermediate standard. Such a standard would require accommodation only if the proposed accommodation would *not* harm important (rather than compelling) public interests, impose significant burdens on others, or significantly impair the government’s efforts to serve the interests of those burdened.

⁶⁰ A state interest (also known as a government interest or a public interest) is “compelling” if it is essential or necessary rather than a matter of choice, preference, or discretion. See *Palmore v. Sidoti*, 466 U.S. 429, 432 (1984). Examples of compelling state interests include protection of public health and safety, regulation of violent crime, national security, and military necessity.

⁶¹ In this case, a state was allowed to deny unemployment benefits to a Native American person fired for violating a state law that criminalized peyote use even as part of a traditional religious ceremony. See *Employment Division v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990).

⁶² See Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, 42 U.S.C. § 2000bb et seq.; *City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507 (1997); and *Gonzales v. O Centro Espírita Beneficente União do Vegetal*, 546 U.S. 418 (2006).

⁶³ For example, see Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA), 42 U.S.C. § 2000cc et seq. Also, at the time of the drafting of this social statement, a majority of U.S. states have adopted some version of RFRA.

⁶⁴ A government interest is “important” when the interest is more than a legitimate goal or objective but is less than a compelling interest. See *Craig v. Boren*, 429 U.S. 190 (1976). For example, when a government action limits certain types of free speech or makes gender-based classifications that could violate constitutional equal protection rights, the government must show that its action furthers an important government interest (such as regulating the time, place, and manner of speech in a public forum or remediating past societal discrimination) by means that are substantially related to that interest.

⁶⁵ For example, see *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 573 U.S. 682 (2014), which exempts privately held for-profit corporations from federal laws affecting employees, based on the religious objections of its owners.

This standard leaves room for judicial interpretation. However, it offers a starting point that better reflects the necessary balance among respect for the wide diversity of religious practices in our pluralistic society, respect for the government’s interests in protecting and promoting the public welfare, and respect for the interests of others in the community.

Article 33 Based on the First Amendment, some people, including religious individuals, mistakenly believe that religious commitments and claims stemming from religious values are out of bounds in public life. This can include claims that there should be no interaction with or funding of religious organizations by the government, or that discussion of government policies or political matters should never happen within assemblies of believers.

Some invoke a “wall of separation” between church and state to deny the place of religious voices in the public square. This phrase, however, is not in the Constitution⁶⁶ and should not be substituted for what the Constitution actually says. The First Amendment does not prohibit or discourage the application of religious convictions to public life. The Establishment Clause applies only to the government and those acting as officers of the government. It does not require religious individuals or communities to withhold their beliefs from public life.

As Christians, we know from experience how religion plays a central role in our identity; the same is true for people who are part of other religious and spiritual traditions.” If nonestablishment or “separation of church and state” meant that religious commitments should not enter public life, religious people would be uniquely harmed. Not only would this conflict with the Free Exercise Clause, but it would also uniquely disadvantage religious people in that they—and they alone—would be unable to bring their most deeply held convictions to bear on public issues.

If people of all faiths could not bring their highest commitments to the consideration of civic questions, public life would be impoverished. History points to the specifically religious invocations of many slavery abolitionists and participants in the civil rights movement, for example. Moreover, many public officials turn to their religiously formed moral sources in considering critical decisions for local, state, and federal governments.

The proper relationship of personal religious commitment to political and civic life cannot, then, be reduced merely to a wall of separation between “church” versus “state.” Rather, religious commitment must be guided in civic life by the constructive relationships that religious organizations hold with political bodies. The next section addresses the character and boundaries of such constructive relationships.

V. Constructive Relationships Between Religious Organizations and Political Authority

Article 34 As God’s people pray for God’s will to be done on earth, it is necessary to set forth ELCA teaching about the constructive relationship of religious organizations to political authority. The U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment, neither prohibits nor requires that religious institutions

⁶⁶ This famous metaphor seems to have originated with Roger Williams, but was most famously used by Thomas Jefferson in his personal writings.

actively engage in civic and political life. The Constitution leaves those decisions largely to religious institutions themselves.

The basis for the ELCA's understanding of this church's relationship with government is twofold. First, this church teaches a scriptural responsibility before God to join divine activity toward the well-being of society. It is God who gives the church a responsibility to address society's issues under the aspect of God's Law while also addressing the good news of mercy and life to individuals. Yet in this approach, there is always a creative tension since God's church is "in" the world but not "from" the world.⁶⁷ Second, as a corporate body in society, this church corporately takes to heart God's gift of an earthly sovereignty that resides in "we the people."

The theological conviction of responsibility before God and the reasoned conviction about the consent of the governed intersect to undergird a productive relationship. The ELCA constitution expresses this understanding as a calling to "work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state in a relation of functional interaction."⁶⁸

Article 35 The phrase "work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor" makes clear that the church should engage political authority actively and flexibly. Theologically speaking, "works with" points to the Lutheran understanding of God's two regimens—and the dominant means in society is the civic use of the law. God calls religious organizations to join divine activity in society through their understanding of God's care for creation and society. The Triune God, our all-encompassing source and commitment, works in society and calls the church to public action.

This church also understands "work with" as grounded in the foundational commitment that sovereignty in the United States rests in "we the people." Both individuals and corporate bodies in the U.S. find their purpose summed up in the preamble to the Constitution: "to promote the general welfare."⁶⁹ These constitutional underpinnings encourage those who live in this country and all organizations and institutions to work with governing authorities toward that end.

Living in the U.S. implies a promise and opportunity to seek the welfare of all residents through every aspect of civic life. This does not imply that this church's relationship with political authority is cozy. Often, to be sure, "working with" affirms the mutual endeavor of addressing human needs. Sometimes, however, "working with" entails critical challenges to government, such as advocating for change in policies and programs that harm people and the creation.

Article 36 The phrase "maintaining institutional separation of church and state" does not point to a "wall of separation" of public (government) from private (religious) arenas. The integrity of the relationship depends on understanding proper jurisdiction.

On the one hand, theologically, such a distinction is congruent with the Lutheran understanding of how God works differently in the church and in the state (see Article xx). Religious faith does not provide

⁶⁷ *The Church in Society*, 3. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

As the church (the ecclesiastical estate) interacts with the state (the political estate), it is not the Gospel (narrow sense) but the Law which it is called to speak. This is the civil or first use of the Law.

⁶⁸ "Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2022), 4.03.n., www.elca.org/constitution.

⁶⁹ See constitution.congress.gov/constitution/preamble.

revelatory or other special knowledge, beyond common human faculties, regarding the practical policies or means for government's work. (Article xx) At the same time, "institutional separation" follows the logic of the U.S. Constitution. It points to preserving the integrity and distinction of both political authority and religious institutions, based on their distinctive purposes, organizational principles, and competences (articles xx-xx).

While institutionally distinct, religious organizations and institutions share spaces of mutual concern and action with government. The ELCA therefore holds that this relationship should be one of "functional interaction." That is, it is a critical engagement governed by institutional boundaries created on the one side by the faith-based purpose and competence of religious faith and institutions and on the other side by the secular purpose and competence of government.

Religious organizations, then, cross the boundaries of their role when they campaign for parties or candidates or assert specific legislation or policies as if these were God's plan. Religious communities are mistaken when they identify a particular political movement as God's, or claim divine revelation for the Constitution, or identify the U.S. national experience with salvation history.

For these reasons, this church, unlike some Christian churches, teaches that it is not the church's role to endorse candidates or parties. The ELCA also recognizes the legal soundness of the Johnson Amendment⁷⁰ in prohibiting religious bodies or their representatives from verbally or financially supporting candidates or parties. Individual parishioners may, of course, advocate specific candidates and parties on the basis of religious values or reasoned criteria but should not claim to do so as spokespeople for a church.

At the same time, this dynamic, critical engagement approach *encourages* religious organizations to champion values in the public sphere for the sake of society's good. The ELCA teaches that religious communities may speak publicly about their values to express support for policies and legislation that seem the best among competing legislation or policy. This church, for example, actively assesses and advocates for policies that affect those who are hungry (Matthew 25:35).

Article 37 In the work of functional interaction, churches and other nonprofits in the U.S. have become increasingly dependent on aid from public entities. The ELCA continues to support the prime criterion that government support for faith-based social services is appropriate only when they, as religious-based organizations, serve people without expectation about or regard to their faith. ELCA ministries, such as chaplaincy in armed services, correctional institutions, hospitals, and other care facilities meet this criterion, as do ELCA social ministry organizations.

The ELCA view asserts a complicated protection that enables support of good government while insisting on the important distinction between religion and civil authority. To maintain the distinction, the ELCA holds that:

- Government must not fund programs that discriminate between religions in providing their services and benefits;
- Government must not fund programs that require recipients to participate in religious activities as a condition of receiving a public service; and

⁷⁰ The Johnson Amendment is a provision in the U.S. tax code, since 1954, that prohibits all 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.

- Government must treat program service providers equally—on religious and other grounds—and selection of funded service providers must be based solely on outcomes identified in publicly available criteria.

This dynamic, function-driven interactionist relationship⁷¹ has guided constructive, beneficial interactions between the ELCA and political authority. Our church will continue to be so guided. As a church, we also commend this approach as salutary, both theologically and practically, for consideration by other religious bodies in their interaction with political authority in the U.S.

Article 38 The ELCA understanding of civic life and faith affirms healthy forms of patriotism. Patriotism is to love one's country, to pray for its well-being, to be committed to its success, to have a sense of pride in it, to criticize it, and to work for its reform when necessary. All of these can be elements of how Christians and their communities live out discipleship as individuals and in corporate bodies.

There are also expressions of patriotism that are unhealthy. They actually are distortions of true patriotism and can be dangerous for the country and for vulnerable populations within it. Such forms of unhealthy patriotism attribute to the country, to a political party, or even to a racial or ethnic group a veneration, worship, loyalty, or trust owed to God alone (Mark 12:17). Christ's church cannot condone elevating a country or anything else to the place that belongs only to God; for this is succumbing to idolatry. This statement rejects unhealthy forms of patriotism, including those related to any form of religious nationalism.⁷²

At the time of this writing, there is a peculiar form of unhealthy patriotism gaining traction in the United States--Christian nationalism. Christian nationalist belief seeks to fuse selected Christian ideas about what should be the national way of life with a comprehensive cultural framework.⁷³ That framework incorporates highly selective narratives, practices, symbols, and value systems. For example: "In a Christian nation, social power is placed in the service of the Christian religion."⁷⁴ Christian nationalism, explicitly seeks to implement such a legislative framework. Yet, this "turns God into a mascot for the state."⁷⁵

In hardline strains of Christian Nationalism, only white, U.S.-born, Christian believers are considered genuine U.S. citizens. This privileging of white, U.S.-born Christians is consistent with our country's violent history of practices of white superiority, such as the hundreds of years of Black African slavery or Jim Crow laws.

Such belief in an intrinsic moral and intellectual superiority of white European Christian civilization has been used to justify as natural and right that white Christians, especially males, should be in power. Such

⁷¹ The designation "function-driven interactionist approach" is found in Roger A. Willer, "Religious Organizations and Government: An Ecclesial Lutheran 'Take,'" *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 62:1, spring 2023.

⁷² A variety of religious nationalisms exist in the US and globally. Many are addressed in [The Problem of Religious Nationalism, in the US and Globally: A Policy Statement of the National Council of Churches - National Council of Churches](#). The presence in the United States of Christian Zionism is one example. See: [Hope for the Future | The Lutheran World Federation](#) and [May 2007: Christian Zionism - Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#) as helpful starting places.

⁷³ *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (London: Oxford University Press, 2020) is one well-regarded social science source on Christian nationalism.

⁷⁴ Cited from Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2022), 208. The sentence subsequent to the quote summarizes a longer section of the book.

⁷⁵ Amanda Tyler, *How to End Christian Nationalism* (Broadleaf Books, 2024), 69.

views about race, ethnicity, sex, social/economic class, and religion deny that one's birth in the nation or one's great contributions and service to the country are enough for a resident to be considered a "true American." It distorts who is considered to be a true citizen of the nation.

A comparison of all strains of religious nationalism, including Christian nationalism, with the actual teachings of Jesus and of the Holy Scriptures reveals that these values are not Christlike. Christian nationalism, in particular perverts the Christian message by cherry-picking texts that interpret the Scriptures in ways that connect religion to domination.

Christian nationalism fuses an imagined conception of a Christian nation with a false vision of God's ultimate will. It confuses the kingdom of God with a particular government. Jesus rejects identification of earthly structures with God's kingdom or will: "My kingdom does not belong to this world." (John 18:36). Lutherans teach that the kingdom of God is not a nation, not a particular culture, not a racial grouping, not a form of government, and not even a denomination or a religion. (Articles xx)

For theological reasons, the ELCA rejects Christian nationalism as a distortion of the Christian faith that crosses the line into idolatry. This church also realizes that Christian nationalism contradicts the U.S. motto, *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one). It effectively substitutes "we the (self-declared) true American-Christians" for "we the people." It is an unhealthy form of patriotism that harms this country, divides it, and especially endangers the well-being of vulnerable members of our society.

VI. Selected Contemporary Concerns in Civic Life

Article 39 As we pray to discern God's will for today, our church addresses particular issues in contemporary civic life through its social teaching. Since 1988, social statements have addressed nearly every facet of contemporary life: economics, criminal justice, science and human power, war and the military-industrial complex, sexuality and family, health care, and others (visit www.elca.org/socialstatements).

ELCA social messages have spoken to civic and political concerns such as human rights, terrorism, and community violence (www.elca.org/socialmessages). ELCA social policy resolutions, adopted by ELCA assemblies, have addressed narrow policy questions. Some, for instance, speak to voter apathy, racially motivated restrictions to voting, and gerrymandering (https://resources.elca.org/?_categories=faiht-and-society).

The issues addressed in this section do not revisit questions the ELCA already has addressed and therefore is not intended to be comprehensive. Rather these articles supplement the existing teaching of this church on selected contemporary questions.

Article 40 Among the most troubling contemporary hindrances to healthy civic life in the United States at this time is hyperpartisan polarization because it undercuts the search for collaborative solutions and does significant damage to individuals and the social fabric. The U.S. political system depends on the presence and work of partisan activity. Different interests and perspectives are normal and the party system itself provides an avenue for organizing, educating, and advocating for issues of political concern.

With the exception of a few instances, such as the Civil War, however, this partisanship did not bar cross-party work, collegiality or friendships. Parties commonly formed coalitions, made compromises,

and could work together toward their varied yet overlapping views of the common good. Working together often forged more effective ideas than working alone.

At the time of writing, a quite different hyperpartisanship is increasingly evident. Political identity now is often closely linked with other identifications such as ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, race, urban or rural residence, cable news preference, and even restaurants and stores frequented. These constellation of identifications, “mega-identities,”⁷⁶ are becoming supreme. The many commonalities among people, despite political affiliation, are increasingly overwhelmed by these rigid us-versus-them identities. Because of them, the relationships of colleagues, friends and family often are harmed.

These mega-identities take partisanship to new levels—to hyperpartisanship polarization. They are being reinforced by cable news preference, social media echo-chambers, the assertions of elected officials, and other factors. They are reinforced by a “nationalization” of issues and an oversize focus on those issues. Local political campaigns are becoming overwhelmed by outside money, and although there vibrant, democratic discussion remain of, for example, zoning policy at the local level, those discussions get little play in the media.

The result is a polarization in which loyalty to hyperpartisan identities becomes absolute. This loyalty is supposedly because of one’s family safety, protection from “them,” and the survival of “our way of life.” This hyperpartisan polarization is practiced as “zero-sum power,” as a winner-take-all struggle for domination. Those with alternative perspectives are designated as enemies rather than fellow members of the public with a different view.

Many today are cynical and assume such polarization is unavoidable. It is certainly a reality, and many accept such outsized loyalty and harsh practices as necessary, or even right and good. However, such hyperpartisan animosity destroys the fabric of a nation and the lives of those in it, especially people already marginalized.

This statement contends that a different approach is both possible and necessary. A productive commonality of purpose is possible, one in which all can participate. There is a path forward that is not motivated primarily by fear of others and belief in the greater purity of one’s own group. It is a path different than rancorous attack and hyperpartisan animosity. These are vices to be confronted, both within the church and within the wider society.

This alternative approach is primarily not about tolerance but about respectful engagement. Article 14 describes how practicing discernment together is a gift for civic life and a witness to God’s love because it models how people with opposing views can give priority to the practice of careful listening and respect.

For Christians, our identity in Christ as forgiven sinners undercuts polarization and urges love for every person as a creature of God who is not to be dominated and whose well-being we should try to improve. Our Christian identity encourages us to take seriously both our well-considered perspectives *and* the limitations of our knowledge, thoughtfulness, empathy, and goodwill. Our identity in Christ encourages a posture of prayer for those who disagree as well as a careful listening to others who have well-considered perspectives that may be quite different from our own.

⁷⁶ The term “mega-identities” has been used by a number of writers, but for more see Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020).

The presumption of democracy and the criterion of mutual self-determination likewise require the starting point of respect and listening (Article xx). These are comparable to values aspired to in the U.S. Constitution—truly democratic values, commitment to diversity, and the public good of all. The objective should be a common search for finding constructive ways to enhance the well-being of human society and all creation.

On that basis, the ELCA calls for an end to practices that contribute to hyperpartisan polarization. Both as a society and as a church, we must end any winner-take-all mindsets, which approach our common life together as if it were a highly competitive sporting event. Political opponents are not enemies simply because they have a different opinion of what is the best course forward for a specific issue or because they travel in different social circles.

It is possible to face difference without aggression and with an eye to the common good. It is even possible to close huge gaps by an exchange of values and ideas that changes *all* participants for the better. The solutions found in collaboration are often better as most of us know from personal and social experience. Civic, including political, experience should not be an exception.

Article 41 In this current polarized context, civic thought and opinion leaders as well as information sources bear a particular responsibility to foster constructive debate and solutions. While this is the responsibility of each of us, individuals and groups look to thought and opinion leaders and various information sources to negotiate life in a fast-paced, information-saturated society. Most of us look to both certified and unconventional experts, and both are influential in shaping the values and behaviors of the public.

Civic thought leaders do not always see themselves as such, but leadership comes in many forms and exists in many forums. Elected and publicly appointed leaders are obvious. However, civic thought leaders include community league coaches, social media influencers, news reporters, religious ministers, activists, think tank staff, the heads of nonprofit and volunteer organizations, and many others.

A healthy society requires such leaders to be models of vigorous and constructive participation. To bring people together, these leaders must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse that hinders conscientious listening among neighbors. Civil disagreement about issues and the interpretation and relative importance of facts is understandable, but inflammatory rhetoric and personal attacks have no place in the public arena. Our society needs to be a place of informed public dialogue that enables people to hear one another and find solutions.

The ELCA commends leaders that model constructive practices, which are essential to honest analysis and creative solutions to social problems. Likewise we denounce “hateful, deceptive, violent speech that has too readily found a place in our national discourse.”⁷⁷ Our church also encourages associations, think tanks, and other sources of analysis and information to seek to understand cultural and political differences, rather than deride them. All of these are necessary steps toward building political accommodation and encouraging fact-based negotiation.

⁷⁷ In 2024 the ELCA Conference of Bishops issued a common statement on the need to speak the truth. <https://www.elca.org/news-and-events/8247>

Article 42 The saying is hundreds of years old that “falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it,”⁷⁸ but it is widely acknowledged that the spread of lies, rumor, and ignorance in civic life has reached new levels today in media of all types. It is especially acknowledged as acute in social media activity.⁷⁹

Healthy civic engagement depends on clear distinctions between fact and all forms of falsehoods, ranging from partial misstatements to intentional disinformation to outright lies. The reach of media and the lack of clarity about the origins of its information, especially posts in social media, all necessitate stronger self-regulation in all media. This urgency increases significantly given the ability of artificial intelligence (AI) to convincingly conjure utterly false information, images, and video,

The Eighth Commandment directs people of faith to exert efforts against bearing false witness. The small catechism teaches that “we are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead, we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.” Our church, then, encourages us all to ask, in every personal interaction and on social media, whether our words or those we repeat represent the best possible understanding of our neighbor.

We should be “innocent as doves” when it comes interpreting the intentions of our neighbor but “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16) when it comes to discerning what information we encounter in any media. We should not share:

- Sensationalist headlines;
- Insulting memes;
- Information whose source we cannot verify; or
- Information from sources whose purpose or chief likely effect is to stir up anger or hatred and to undermine, rather than foster, our civic unity.

For the sake of U.S. civic life, the ELCA calls upon media and social media platforms to:

- Align policies and procedures worldwide with the most comprehensive and rigorous online safety regulations possible within U.S. law. ;
- Regularly assess and publicly disclose the extent to which platforms may foster violations of civil and human rights;
- Protect users by labeling AI-generated content;
- Allow oversight of operations in human rights hotspots;
- Allow transparency in algorithms and advertisements; and
- Regularly assess, report on, and address hate speech, misinformation and disinformation, removing these as quickly as possible through fact-checking.

Article 43 In the political arena, money plays a commanding role. Individuals, corporations, lobbyists, PACs, super PACs, nonprofits, industry trade groups, and interest groups spend money to influence

⁷⁸ This saying is attributed to satirist Jonathan Swift, Anglican cleric (1667-1745).

⁷⁹ In one study, researchers found that falsehoods were 70% more likely to be re-shared on a social media platform (X, formerly Twitter) than true statements. Moreover, humans were *more likely* to repeat or amplify a false statement than automated bots were. See “Study: False News Spreads Faster Than the Truth,” MIT Sloan School of Management, March 8, 2018, mitsloan.mit.edu/ideas-made-to-matter/study-false-news-spreads-faster-truth. Another study (<https://www.newsguardtech.com/misinformation-monitor/september-2022/>) of the TikTok app found “for a sampling of searches on prominent news topics, almost 20 percent of the videos presented as search results contained misinformation....”

political campaigns. Contributions are spent in a variety of ways, including political advertising to influence public opinion on candidates and ballot measures. Public officials are generally required by law to report on their personal finances to ensure that ethical guidelines are followed. However, so-called “dark money” is increasingly present. It is widely suspected to have outside influence on elections, public policy, and political discourse.

The U.S. Supreme Court has held that financial contributions by individuals and groups to political campaigns are a form of free speech protected by the First Amendment.⁸⁰ The ELCA acknowledges that publicly accountable financial contributions are both legal and basic to campaigning. They demonstrate a level of commitment consistent with a donor’s views. Historically, laws often have included reporting requirements for disclosure of a contributor’s name, address, and occupation. Individuals who choose to engage in contributing are expected to adhere to the appropriate laws and consider the implications such disclosures could have with their employer/s or other entities.

While some federal, state, and local laws continue to regulate the sources and contribution limits for elections, it is widely recognized that recent Supreme Court opinions have altered the system of campaign finance.⁸¹ As a result, the expansive influence of money in elections and politics has become an ever more dominant feature of public life.

The ELCA affirms that every citizen should have the opportunity to play a free and active part in the functioning of our communities. However, the ability to be heard should not be effectively limited to those individuals, organizations, or corporations that have above-average financial wealth and resources at their disposal.

Democracy is threatened if those with the most disposable income have the dominant voice with politicians while those with less are effectively silenced. Free speech does not include the right to drown out the speech of one’s neighbors. To do so is to obstruct equitable roles for all participants in a society.

This church urges the adoption of legislation by state and federal lawmakers to set limits on campaign and other political contributions. Likewise, legislation is needed to increase transparency in our elections and political processes through financial reporting by public officials, including the judiciary, about all contributions and gifts. It is up to legislators to take steps that lead to transparency of overpowering corporate and super PAC money that distort the political debate and influence our representatives. Our church urges policies and reforms that help:⁸²

- Enhance transparency and increase public awareness of campaign contributions and financial reporting by public officials;
- Hold corporations publicly accountable for the lobbying of trade associations that contradict their publicly proclaimed standards;
- Expand access for citizens across the economic spectrum to run for political office; and
- Reduce the power of wealth to shape political debates and media influence, including political advertising.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., *Buckley v. Valeo*, 424 U.S. 1 (1976).

⁸¹ For example, in *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010), the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed that corporations are protected by the First Amendment’s right to free speech and that statutes restricting corporations’ independent expenditures are unconstitutional.

⁸² For more, see the ELCA document at <https://resources.elca.org/advocacy/money-in-politics/>

Article 44 ELCA teaching has long held that it is the proper concern of government to regulate aspects of social life to provide for the safety and well-being of its people. This church also recognizes that sometimes government policies, statutes, regulations, and judicial opinions harm well-being more than they promote it. Harm results from poorly conceived and implemented policies and from intentional actions that discriminate against some in favor of others.

There is a critical distinction between fallible structure and structured oppression. Government is fallible because it is made up of humans. It has not served its purpose when its goals, policies, and programs are poorly designed or implemented, or cause undue waste or hardship. In contrast, government becomes oppressive when its goals, policies, and programs are designed or transformed into vehicles for oppressing the neighbor—such as voter suppression laws or gerrymandering.

All public servants have a duty to ensure that government remains true to its purpose of protecting and fostering the common good. Public partnerships between nonprofits, which include all faith-based organizations, and the private sector can be means to enhance the work of both partners when dedicated to the common good. Finally, when government goes astray, members of the public have an obligation to seek reform through the procedures of democratic self-rule.

It is not possible for this church, or any civic actor, to identify a complete set of ethical norms that apply in all cases for discerning failures in civic and political life. Some criteria for discernment are elaborated in articles of this statement and in previous ELCA social messages and social statements.⁸³

However, at a minimum, discernment regarding these everyday but weighty questions should strive to include the perspectives of those affected as well as fair representation of those served. That is the starting point for mutual self-determination and deciding whether the neighbor is being well-served.

Article 45 The ELCA has worshiping communities in Washington, D.C., and several of the U.S. territories, e.g., Guam, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands. The ELCA's Caribbean Synod, in fact, consists largely of several of these territories. This fact and the lives of millions of people in these areas urge our church to discern the responsibility of the United States for these areas under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Congress as possessions or unincorporated territories.⁸⁴ The ELCA recognizes that issues pertaining to the relationship between these territories and the wider U.S. society are manifold and complex, but they must not be ignored.

Many view the political relationship between the U.S. government and its unincorporated territories as problematic because of the inherent inequality between the territories and the states. There is also the specter of continued colonialist relationships in which territories lack any real power for self-determination. Territories get a representative in Congress with voice but no vote, despite residents being required to sign up for military selective service and having a long and distinguished record of service to the U.S. in general. Territorial residents pay taxes but do not have equitable representation.

⁸³ "Government and Civic Engagement: 13, or in various social statements as they address economic life, health care, and other issues, at www.elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements.

⁸⁴ The ELCA holds "that equitable voting representation in Congress be granted to the citizens of the District of Columbia." Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Social Policy Resolution CA01.07.62, "Congressional Voting Representation for the District of Columbia" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2001). <https://resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/dc-congressional-voting-spr01/>

Many believe that the U.S. Congress has actually undermined the democratic processes in the territories.⁸⁵

This church recognizes complicating factors. One of those is the legacy of racism, since the vast majority of local residents in all the territories belong to racially minoritized groups—historically Black, Indigenous, Latiné, and Pacific Islander people.

The relationship between U.S.-based churches and the territories is also complicated because the churches were complicit in the colonizing of territories, their economic exploitation, and stripping ancestral inhabitants of their religious and spiritual traditions.⁸⁶ The goal of converting people to Christianity was deeply entangled with expansionist ideology. We believe, as Lutherans, that the Holy Spirit brings faith to people—it should not be forced or coerced by human action. Thus churches bear responsibility to help repair the harm done.

An intentional, humble listening is the starting point of the principle of mutual self-determination and is the first step on the path toward justice and healing. This process of careful listening can be difficult and challenging. However, when rooted in sincerity and a genuine willingness to understand each other, it can lead to new possibilities of reparation, healing, and wholeness.⁸⁷ This church urges that, in collaboration with ecumenical partners and others of goodwill, it is possible to foster and facilitate processes of listening and accountability between the territories and those in positions of power over them in the U.S. government.

Consistent with the principle of mutual self-determination (Article 22), the ELCA is committed to advocating for equality in government representation for the District of Columbia and U.S. territories for economic and social equity, and for their right of self-determination.

Article 46 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians are U.S. citizens with a unique, historical relationship to the U.S. Federally recognized tribes have sovereignty as Tribal Nations and the U.S. Federal Government has a federal trust responsibility with those nations.⁸⁸ This sovereignty and the federal trust responsibility is based variously on treaties, the U.S. Constitution, and Supreme Court decisions.

In this history, treaties and other legal guarantees repeatedly were *not* honored by European settlers and those who followed as they swept across the North American continent. Native people have endured horrid racial, social, and economic oppression that constitute some of the most shameful

⁸⁵ A case in point is the Promesa law (see oversightboard.pr.gov/debt/) imposed on Puerto Rico as a condition to adjust the commonwealth's debt. Its Board of Fiscal Control, appointed by the U.S. Congress, has power to veto laws passed by the duly elected members of Puerto Rico's local legislature as well as the power to block initiatives from the duly elected governor.

⁸⁶ See José David Rodríguez, *Caribbean Lutherans: The History of the Church in Puerto Rico* (Fortress Press, forthcoming).

⁸⁷ This is illustrated by the Truth and Healing Movement, launched by the ELCA with the American Indian and Alaska Native people. For more information, visit www.elca.org/truthandhealing.

⁸⁸ The federal Indian trust responsibility is a legal obligation under which the United States "has charged itself with moral obligations of the highest responsibility and trust" toward Indian tribes (*Seminole Nation v. United States*, 1942). This obligation was first discussed by Chief Justice John Marshall in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* (1831). www.bia.gov, accessed 2/10/2025,

chapters of American history. The ELCA, with others in this country, recognizes that this dreadful history must be acknowledged, the status of Native Americans in the United States protected, and efforts at reconciliation and justice increased.⁸⁹

There are many layers to the history, but it is imperative to recognize that it is grounded in the Doctrine of Discovery, originating in 15th-century papal bulls.⁹⁰ The doctrine was introduced into United States law by U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823). It stipulated that discovery of territory previously unknown to Europeans gave the discovering nation title to territory against all other European nations, and that this title could be perfected by possession.

Though global in scope, this principle undergirded the actions of people who made claims on Native lands in North America.⁹¹ Justified by this doctrine, the settlers who moved across North America, including predecessors of this church, claimed Indian lands as their own property.

The legal doctrine was plainly rooted in Christian discourse. The ELCA has acknowledged that the doctrine “created a theological framework that supported racism, colonialism, and the annihilation of Indigenous people. Today it continues to support those evils and injustices found in our church, U.S. law, and legal interpretation.”⁹²

The ELCA has joined other religious bodies in explicitly repudiating this European-derived doctrine, calling it an “improper mixing of the power of the church and the power of the sword.”⁹³ This church has acknowledged and called for repentance of its complicity in the colonialism that continues to harm tribal governments and tribal members.⁹⁴

Early in its life, the ELCA named and acknowledged the sovereignty of Federally-recognized Tribal Nations and committed to speaking out for just treatment.⁹⁵ This social statement reaffirms this church’s stance on the importance of that sovereignty. It calls for and commits this church to support just policy in treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, religious freedom, and other matters that affect the civic well-being of American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians

In particular this statement calls upon the US Federal Government, it’s government agencies, and its residents, along with all other governments with the U.S. to:

⁸⁹ “Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian and Alaska Native People” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), 2, <https://tinyurl.com/ywt42njz>.

⁹⁰ Several papal bulls in the 15th century established the doctrine, which legally codified land acquisition, colonialism, and religious intolerance. One easily accessible discussion of the complex meaning and history may be found in en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_doctrine (accessed November 19, 2023).

⁹¹ “Declaration,” 2.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid, citing Augsburg Confession, XXVIII, Latin text, BC 2000.

⁹⁴ ELCA Social Policy Resolution CA16.02.04., “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.” <https://www.elca.org/our-work/congregations-and-synods/ministries-of-diverse-cultures-and-communities/indigenous-ministries-and-tribal-relations/repudiation>

⁹⁵ ELCA Social Policy Resolution CA91.5.28., “1992: Year of Remembrance, Repentance, and Renewal.”

- Honor the legal trust relationship the US Federal Gov has with Tribal Nations/Federally recognized Tribes, acknowledging their sovereignty, self-determination, and self governance;
- Be guided by concerns for truth, justice, reconciliation, visibility, equity, and healing as central to these sovereign relationships;
- Prioritize consultation with Tribal Nations that ensures equity and honors parity with them;
- Give particular attention to policies and legislation that upholds sovereignty and increases Native American self-determination;
- Support efforts to increase voter registration and access to polling places and early voting while opposing state efforts to raise barriers to the ballot box;
- Engage in careful listening and consultation with Native Americans on matters with environmental impact affecting both their original and sovereign land.

Article 47 Comprehensive, honest civics education is an essential element for revitalized civic life. It provides the building blocks of a society. The ELCA has addressed the social institution of education in the United States and is on record that “schools, therefore, ought to teach the principles and virtues of living together in responsible freedom in a democratic society, which includes respect for the diverse cultures and beliefs of their students.”⁹⁶

To have a strong democracy, members of the public must know how civic institutions are supposed to function and how they are called to participate. A comprehensive, honest civics curriculum therefore must teach the whole story of U.S. history in its aspirations, successes, and failures. It should emphasize the values inherent in the U.S. Constitution. It should draw upon what the community holds in common and explore in a fair and impartial way those issues on which the community is divided.

Essential to that is both factual accuracy and inclusion of works of the many groups that have been part of the American story. The ELCA encourages curricula that promote understanding of the full history of U.S. government operations and cultures; it opposes legislation that prevents students from a full engagement with those stories.

Article 48 No single solution will reduce the increasingly fevered polarization or repair the damage that endangers our social fabric and democratic republic. One fundamental element is a renewed, constructively grounded, and thoughtful commitment to civic life across this nation. Hyperpartisan polarization is, in part, the result of individuals withdrawing from widespread participation in civic life. This church holds that a return to robust civic engagement that seeks the public good is the responsibility of all residents of this country and is our calling as Christians.

The social message “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy” addresses at greater length the nature and purpose of a healthy civic engagement, especially in relation to citizenship.⁹⁷ Among other elements, that message teaches that civic engagement takes numerous

⁹⁶ *Our Calling in Education* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2007), 26-27. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

⁹⁷ “Government and Civic Engagement,” 14. elca.org/faith/faith-and-society/social-statements

forms—informed voting, attending public meetings, holding public office, political party involvement, policy advocacy, community organizing, and nonviolent protest.

The message points out that civic engagement arises both from concern about disorder and injustice and from hope for the well-being of all. It affirms elements of a healthy civic engagement such as democratic self-governance, support for public servants, and well-crafted policies that foster justice, racial and social equity, and reconciliation. The ELCA urges its members and all residents of this society to contribute to and urge robust civic participation.

Conclusion

Article 49 “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.” As Jesus taught the disciples, so we pray in this church. We do so in concert with Christians down through the ages and into the future who, in the Spirit, are witnesses to God’s will for just peace and well-being. We do so in faith, understanding that God’s creative power is shared throughout all creation and is given to human beings to use in civic life for the good of all.

May we walk humbly with you as we strive for justice, kindness, and peace in human society. May we as your church live wisely by the civic use of the Law in joining your purpose toward shalom. May we, as your people, join all others of goodwill in the work of government as gift, aspiration, and responsibility to serve the common good of “we the people.” May we, as your forgiven ones, be empowered by your gracious Word and Sacraments to boldly and courageously seek the good of the neighbor through our participation in civic life.

Glossary

These terms are **underlined** when used the first time in the statement’s articles.

Alien Work: See “proper work” below.

Book of Concord: A collection of writings from 1580 that were subscribed to by some 80 princely and municipal governments. It was published on the 50th anniversary of the 1530 Augsburg Confession and is generally understood as an authoritative, confessional, set of documents for the Evangelical/Lutheran movement across the globe. The most widely affirmed writings include the Augsburg Confession, its Apology, and Luther’s two catechisms. The ELCA accepts the entire book as authoritative.

Christian nationalism: A cultural framework that idealizes and advocates fusion of highly selected Christian beliefs with U.S. civic life. This nationalistic ideology holds, among other things, that the U.S. Constitution was divinely inspired, that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United States, and that this nation holds a uniquely privileged status in God’s eyes. Proponents range from those who believe the U.S. legally should be declared a Christian nation (approximately 21% of the U.S. population) to those involved in more virulent strains that are openly racist, patriarchal, and antidemocratic.

Church: This word has multiple meanings, largely dependent on context. Fundamentally “church” is the event of God’s saving presence wherever two or three are gathered (Matthew 18:30). In the Lutheran tradition, this event is specifically identified with God’s commands and promises in the proclamation of the Word and distribution of the Sacraments. In its widest sense the word applies to the universal (catholic) body of Christ, describing all believers. Church is used to designate denominations (the ELCA for example) but also local congregations, as in “going to my church.” In this statement regarding civic life, “this church” or “our church” refers to the ELCA as a body that is part of the Church Catholic.

Civic life: This term describes activities and institutions in society that are not primarily individual or that occur within a family/household or private space. An activity is civic when it is in a public space whether in one’s neighborhood, state, nation, or beyond.

Common good: The term has various definitions but is used here to denote what is beneficial in a society in terms of justice and peace for all people and creation. It conveys the belief that the purpose of government is to seek these outcomes for the well-being of all members of the public.

Community of moral deliberation/discernment: A concept established in the first ELCA social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, as an element of the ELCA’s identity to which our church is called to grow. The concept envisions the whole community praying for one another, studying Scripture, and wrestling together toward moral understanding and action. This approach to doing ethics is bottom-up rather than top-down. Romans 12:2 speaks of discernment and Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles suggest the idea as a mark of the church, that of “the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.”

Confessions: The term has wider meanings in Scripture and historical theology, but in this study, it designates the ELCA’s authorized teaching standard of the Book of Concord.

Corporate social responsibility: The means by which a corporation, nonprofit, or other organization intentionally specifies its contributions or responsibilities toward the well-being of society, especially in economic decisions. The Corporate Social Responsibility program of the ELCA, for instance, decides ELCA investment policy in socially responsible ways, as guided by ELCA social teaching. This program also enables dialogue between this church and representatives of the businesses with which it deals, regarding the social implications of company practices.

Dark money: A common term used to describe campaign contributions in which the source of the money is not disclosed to the public but silently influences political discourse, election outcomes, and public policy.

Discernment: As used here, the practice of evaluating multiple factors in an issue to find an appropriate response that seems God-pleasing. It generally implies active theological or ethical reflection involving study, prayer, and dialogue. It seeks wisdom through God’s Spirit as understood through a community process (Romans 12:1-2). (See also “Community of moral deliberation/discernment.”)

Doctrine of Discovery: Several papal bulls in the 15th century established this doctrine, which legally codified for European countries and settlers land acquisition, colonialism, and religious intolerance in

relation to Indigenous people.

Establishment Clause: The term used for the first clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states that government “shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion.” This means that government cannot establish a state/national religion or impose any form of worship or devotion upon members of the public. It does not mean that a person’s religious commitments cannot or should not enter into or influence their public life in the form of political activity or broader civic engagement. (See also “Separation of church and state” and “Free exercise of religion.”)

Ethics: The science and art of asking “How then shall we live?” or “What is the good?” Ethics implies extended reflection and dialogue toward critically considering, defining, negotiating, and determining what ought to be or what ought to be done. It is a practice done both by individuals and as a community. It often involves analyzing a current, accepted moral idea to determine its rationale or ways it should be altered. The terms “ethics” and “morals” are somewhat different but are often used interchangeably. (See “Morality.”)

Faith: Even in a religious context this term has as many meanings and uses, but the fundamental Lutheran emphasis is a trusting response to and trusting relationship with God. This relationship of trust is expressed through means such as active participation in religious communities and attention to key teachings of the church universal.

Free Exercise Clause: The second phrase in the First Amendment (“Congress shall make no law... prohibiting the free exercise [of religion]”) focuses on the relationship between faith and public/civic life. The first clause, prohibiting establishment of a state religion, clears the ground for the faithful to determine their own best way of exercising faith in their own public life. (See “Establishment Clause” and “Separation of church and state.”)

God’s sovereignty: This claim has had multiple meanings in Christian thinking but fundamentally describes God’s supreme power or God’s rule and reign over and in the universe. This statement speaks theologically of God’s sovereignty as the source of all power and thus of political sovereignty. Both power and sovereignty are fundamental to civic life. (See “Power.”)

Justice: Generally, this term refers to an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment, and reciprocity. This statement emphasizes the aspects of justice related to civic life and government. These include fair and equal treatment under the law, ending oppression based on power differences, and, as emphasized in the Scriptures, a right and wholesome relationship with God and within community.

Law and Gospel: Together these two terms express a key Lutheran emphasis that God’s Word and work in human society occur under different means. “Law” is understood to have two forms: (1) as a directive and corrective for society (first, or civil, use) and (2) as judgment on sin (second, or theological, use). “The Law” is a summary term for God’s directives for human living, such as the Ten Commandments. “The Gospel” is the good news of God’s mercy, received in faith on account of Jesus Christ.

Luther, Martin (1483-1546): German priest, theologian, author, and professor. Luther was a seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation and is the namesake of Lutheranism.

Mega-identity: An interlocking set of social identifications: ethnic, religious, urban/rural, conservative/liberal. When these identifications cohere in a set that is semifixed and loaded with huge emotional stakes, they become a mega-identity that walls off people from others, especially those who don't share the same characteristics or beliefs.

Morality/morals: Originates from the Greek word "mores," which designated the binding customs of a culture or society related to what is good or right. It designates an existing or already negotiated moral structure. In every society, certain actions, goals, and character traits are considered moral, immoral, or some combination thereof, according to established norms. "Ethics" and "morals" often are used interchangeably. (See "Ethics.")

Neighbor: The term has multiple references but suggests a member of one's community. However, humans live in multiple communities and so can refer to a person's neighborhood or town, region, international community or, even, ecological community.

Neighbor justice: A term and concept that describes seeking to meet neighbors' needs for equality and equity in public life. Though rooted in the biblical directive to "love your neighbor as yourself," the term expresses how faith is active in love seeking justice in relationships and in the structures of society.

Partisanship: Strong loyalty and, often, blind adherence to a specific party, group, faction, set of beliefs, or person.

Polarization: As used in this study, a partisanship so strong that partisans are rigidly set apart from other groups, whose beliefs and views are considered utterly opposite and most often inferior, dangerous to society, and unworthy of consideration. There is no value of or respect for "those people." In everyday speech, such polarization is often expressed in the saying "my way or the highway."

Politics: The term comes from the Greek word *polis*, meaning the city or place of the people. As used here, designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when, where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or influencing government to seek the common good. (See "Common Good.")

Political: That which relates to political activity, see *politics*.

Power: All power is based in God, who is all power and whose sovereignty creates, sustains, and redeems creatures who are not God. Divine power is not a possession, but a gift that aims to create power for others. Power is not merely the capacity to control or sovereignty. To the extent that acts of power, whether political or otherwise, are reduced to such control, they are a distortion and perversion of power, because sovereignty is not an end, but reaches its end in the gift of power to and for the fulfillment of others. In Luther's theology, this understanding of divine power is central to his theology of creation, justification by grace, and the Lord's Supper.

Proper versus alien work: "Proper" and "alien" are best known among Lutherans in connection to the distinction between the "proper work" of God in justifying sinners and the "alien work" of God in condemning sinners. However, these terms are theologically useful in related if more general

meanings since the word "alien" comes from the Latin "alius" simply meaning "other". In this statement the distinction is made in terms of the calling of rostered ministers. The unique, "proper work" of the ministry of the Word is defined in the historic Lutheran tradition and in our Confessions in terms of the proclamation of Christ's mediatorial and redemptive work, including justification, sanctification, and eternal life. At the same time, rostered ministers of the Word also engage in other kinds of work; these works can helpfully be described as "alien work."

Religious diversity: The state of affairs in which more than one religion is accepted within a society. In the United States, the term generally indicates a situation in which the society sees the value of each person having their own religious beliefs and practicing them openly and safely. This includes the freedom to practice no religion.

Rostered ministers: This designation in the ELCA includes all the ordained such as bishops, pastors, chaplain, deacons, and others.

Self-determination: Most basically, the ability of people or communities to determine their own objectives and actions with minimal external compulsion in the mutuality of common life. In terms of political authority, it means that people have the right to freely choose their government within the collective life of a society.

Self-governance: The ability of people to play a fundamental role in the functioning of their government.

Separation of church and state: This phrase is often used as shorthand for the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which forbids state-sponsored religion. However, this applied meaning of the phrase is contested. For example, many people believe it means that religious convictions or religious institutions should have no legitimate role in social or political life. The ELCA constitution, on the other hand, endorses institutional separation with functional interaction and argues that the church as a civic body must avoid partisanship but engage in civic life because God calls people of faith to join God's activity there.

Shalom: The Scriptures use the Hebrew word *shalom* to refer to God's intent for whole, healthy, peaceful, joyous, just relations among all elements in God's creation. It is often translated as "peace," but it means far more than mere peace of mind or absence of violence. In the Scriptures, shalom indicates universal well-being and wholeness—a state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed. Though the term appears in what Christians call the Old Testament, it also has a long, rich history as a central and complex concept within Judaism that Christians should acknowledge and respect.

Sin: This word expresses the human proclivity for being in opposition to God. Sin is variously described as disobedience, lack of trust, self-centeredness, pride, or complacency, among other things. Sin occurs in an individual's thoughts and actions but also is expressed in organizations, institutions, and systems. In the last three cases, it is often termed "structural" or "systemic" sin.

Solidarity: The term describes a kinship within all of nature that issues from God's creative activity. The term expresses the contention that the interests of the entire community of life should be legitimate concerns when decisions are made and actions evaluated.

Sovereignty: This term can be used in various ways but in this statement it refers to ultimate authority in a particular arena.

Systemic sin: This theological theme recognizes that social and political systems are developed by humans and because of this, the sin embedded in them is greater than the sin of any individual action. For instance, consider a society where a racial minority has dramatically less access to political power because of laws or widespread discrimination and that, therefore, has less chance of living and thriving. That is a systemic sin.

Theology: This term can indicate academic or abstract reflection, but in this study the term generally refers to faithful reflection about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, engages in theology when expressing thoughts about God, the church, God in relation to civic life, etc.

Theology of the cross: A term identified with theological writing by Martin Luther to refer to a theology that sees “the cross” (that is, divine self-revelation) as the only source of ultimate knowledge concerning who God is and how God saves. It is contrasted with the “theology of glory,” which places great emphasis on human capacity and human reason to know who God is and what God wills.

Three estates: Used to designate the fundamental structures in human society (originally in Christian Europe). The Reformation period identified the three overarching social functions (estates) were identified as a) the church, b) the government, and c) the family (which included all of society’s economic functions). The concept remains useful as a teaching about God’s active involvement in society and human roles therein, but must be understood in contemporary terms.

Two kingdoms: A traditional theological term described more accurately by other terms from the Reformation, see “Two reigns.”

Two reigns, hands, or regimens of God: These terms refer to Lutheran teaching regarding the distinction between God’s activity in the world through secular means, and God’s gracious activity through the church. God’s “right-hand reign” conveys the tangible power of God’s love and forgiveness to people of faith, which stirs us to forgive others, to express mutual love and care, and to strive for justice. God’s “left-hand reign” works through secular roles, structures, and institutions to protect and foster the social well-being of the people and creation. The ELCA teaches that God’s two reigns (hands, ways, regimens) for governing creation are both necessary and that they are interrelated.

Vocation: In this statement, a calling from God that comes as both gift and responsibility. The ELCA understands baptismal vocation as fundamental; it is God’s saving call, lived out in joyful response through service to the neighbor in daily life. This overarching vocation is expressed in multiple callings (or specific vocations) such as being a responsible citizen, parent, student, worker, etc.

Word: Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom God’s message to us as both Law and Gospel reveals God’s judgment and mercy. The ELCA constitution holds that the Word is expressed in creation and in the history of Israel but is centered in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are the written Word of God in the sense that they are inspired by God’s Spirit as the writers tell the story and announce God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Through them, God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

Works righteousness: As conceived during the Reformation period, describes the practice or belief that some level of right activity, belief, or character is required to achieve righteousness in God's eyes. The Lutheran tradition encourages people to seek righteousness (right action, character, and relationship) in civic life but emphasizes the biblical teaching that no works righteousness can achieve God's salvation (Romans 3:21). Rather, righteousness is given by God's mercy as a gift on account of Christ and is received by faith.

Implementing Resolutions

Resolved:

1. To urge members of this church to pray, participate in, and advocate for civic life in the United States that reflects God's activity and call seeking the well-being of all people and creation marked by justice and peace;
2. To encourage members to draw inspiration from the ELCA social message on Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy, which highlights the call to embrace daily our baptismal vocation through active participation in self-governance;
3. To reaffirm and encourage use across our church of other existing social teaching and policy documents that promote robust and wise civic participation, such as those that address matters of voting, campaign finance, public service, nonviolent protest, and the like;
4. To recognize with deep appreciation the commitments and efforts by those in this church—including but not limited to churchwide organization teams such as Witness in Society and Building Resilient Communities, as well as the many church-related social ministry organizations and educational institutions—that contribute to healthy civic life through service, advocacy, or education;
5. To call upon all members of this church to intentionally evaluate the dangers of polarization and the threats posed by disregard for democratic practices and self-government;
6. To encourage ELCA worshiping assemblies and ministries to build bridges, foster reconciliation, practice communal discernment, provide opportunities for difficult conversations, and address polarization constructively in their communities;
7. To encourage synod leaders, in collaboration with other appropriate bodies, to explore creating or expanding state public policy advocacy in their domains as part of the ELCA Witness in Society network, similar to those already existing in several states;
8. To direct the churchwide office, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, the theologians, and ethicists, rostered leaders, as well as elected lay leaders, to develop guidelines and protections consistent with this social statement regarding the roles in civic life of representatives of this church with official responsibility to preach, teach, and lead on behalf of our church;
9. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to consider the need for civics education curricula, civic participation guidance, and related theological reflection, and to create these in multiple formats, including multimedia and online;
10. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to explore the need for resources dedicated to nonviolent

- 2186 resistance and peaceful engagement in civic life, with special concern for materials dedicated to
2187 religious and political histories, liturgical guidance, and training for rostered and lay leaders;
2188 11. To direct the Witness and Society Team of the Churchwide Organization and call upon all
2189 expressions of this church in their advocacy efforts to support and advocate for policies and laws
2190 consistent with this social statement and to give sustained attention to the fresh convictions and
2191 commitments found here in its creation of programs and projects;
2192 12. To direct the Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop to
2193 share this statement as a resource for dialogue, discernment, and collaboration with ecumenical
2194 and inter-religious partners toward the well-being of all people and creation from within the
2195 U.S. context;
2196 13. To urge faculty, staff, and administrators of ELCA-related colleges, universities, and seminaries
2197 to renew and emphasize education toward callings in public service and to model and
2198 encourage dynamic civic participation among their students;
2199 14. To direct appropriate units in the churchwide organization, coordinated by the Office of the
2200 Presiding Bishop, to establish or oversee processes for implementation of these resolutions,
2201 with an initial report to the fall meeting of the ELCA Church Council in 2027.

Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement, *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*

Background and Executive Summary

The ELCA addresses social concerns in many ways, among them developing and enacting official documents that articulate this church's social teaching and policy. These documents include social statements, social messages, and social policy resolutions that both express and inform the ELCA's moral discernment, teaching, and public witness. They are developed through extensive, inclusive, and accepted processes of deliberation across this church.

These documents and processes are part of a living tradition, open to ongoing dialogue and discernment. For this reason, the ELCA has developed formal procedures for reconsideration of social teaching documents that allow for potential editing, revising, or archiving when necessary. These procedures are described in "[Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns](#)."

Background

The 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted "to authorize a social statement reconsideration to revise *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) so that its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples in accordance with 'Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns' (2018)" (CA22.01.07). This action authorized reconsideration for potential editing of three specific sections of the social statement. Consistent with the procedure for a reconsideration to edit, the action did not authorize reconsideration of the substantive meaning of the sections. Separately, the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to authorize a substantive reconsideration of pages 19-21 of the original social statement (CA22.03.23).

The executive committee of the ELCA Church Council seated the ELCA Reconsiderations Task Force in 2024 and directed the task force to handle, first, a reconsideration for possible edits and, second, a reconsideration for possible substantive revision. The Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement represents work on the first reconsideration, for possible edits. This decision balanced the desire for reconsideration work to begin with the capacity of the church for ELCA-wide discernment, given the simultaneous work on other important matters, such as the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, consideration of a social statement on faith and civic life, and development of social messages.

After meeting in person in 2024 and 2025, posting the draft edits, considering feedback from the public comment period (October 2024–January 2025), and engaging in prayerful discernment, the task force reached consensus on a Proposed Edited Social Statement. This proposed text was then reviewed by the ELCA Conference of Bishops and ELCA Church Council, and minor corrections were made to the text. The ELCA Church Council received the proposed text and voted to recommend it to the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

This Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement is now publicly available through the ELCA website. The 2025 Churchwide Assembly will take action on this text in July-August 2025, after which the task force will begin work on the second reconsideration. Before then, ELCA synods may take action at their own assemblies by sending memorials to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in response to the recommended, proposed text.

Executive Summary

The edits recommended in this document represent the discernment of the ELCA in reconsidering three specific sections of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*. Consistent with the 2022 Churchwide Assembly's authorization for reconsideration, these recommended, proposed edits are not intended to change the substantive meaning of the sections. Rather they respond to the assembly's authorization to update or clarify wording from the original social statement in light of:

- “The import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals.”
- “Public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples.”
- “[The] diversity of family configurations” (CA22.01.07).

These phrases from the authorization point to broad categories of edits found within the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement. The paragraphs below offer some examples of these categories.

In several places in the text, language from the original social statement was edited for consistency with the ELCA constitution and more recent social teachings, especially the social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019). For example, in line 291, a reference to “sexual orientation and gender identity” was replaced with the phrase “sex, gender, and sexuality,” which is consistent with the meaning of the original text and with language adopted in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*. This category of edits updates wording to reflect “current church understanding” as named by the assembly when it authorized the reconsideration.

One category of edits involved updating language to reflect recognition of legal marriage between individuals of the same gender in the United States. For example, in several sentences describing marriage, gendered language (“husband and wife”) was replaced with nongendered language such as “marriage for both spouses” (line 105) or “the couple” (line 118). In addition, the heading in line 123 was changed to “Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Marriage” to reflect the legality of marriages between individuals today.

Some of the text in the original social statement was moved within the sections for clarity. For example, a paragraph on “the historic Christian tradition” was moved to lines 151-154 in the Recommended, Proposed Edited Social Statement. This places the paragraph in a more logical spot within the section.

Some edits reflect attention to the diversity of families. For example, in lines 65-66, the term “crucial” was deleted when describing the role of physical lovemaking in marriage. This edit reflected attention to married couples for whom physical lovemaking is not possible or not desired. Similarly, conditional language was added to descriptions of procreation. This reflects awareness that not all married couples anticipate or desire children (for example, see lines 113-115).

Some sentences or phrases were edited to reflect current language about sex, gender, sexuality, and marriage. For example, in line 130, the original social statement named “many of our sisters and brothers in same-gender relationships.” Consistent with current language, this was changed to “We in the ELCA recognize that many of our siblings of diverse sexual orientations in relationships.” This does not change the substantive meaning of the passage but reflects current language used in the ELCA constitution.

The task force also recognizes in humility that all language is continually evolving, especially language about human sexuality and relationships. The proposed edits are intended to reflect language that is current and consistent with language used within the ELCA at the time of writing.

The section of the social statement that describes four convictions of conscience regarding same-gender sexual behavior and relationships (lines 169-198) was intentionally left unedited. Discernment of the public feedback on draft edits to this section led the task force to this decision. This section is the focus of the second reconsideration authorized by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust

The social statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust was amended and adopted by a two-thirds vote (676-338) by the eleventh biennial Churchwide Assembly on August 19, 2009, at Minneapolis, Minnesota.

The edited text below is not official ELCA teaching but rather is the ELCA Church Council Recommended, Proposed Social Statement for consideration by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Reader's Note: The 2022 Churchwide Assembly authorized an editorial reconsideration of three subsections of section IV, from pages 15 to 24 of the 2009 adopted social statement. The task force assigned this work sought to update or clarify wording from the original social statement in light of

- “the import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals”
- “public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples” and
- “[the] diversity of family configurations” (CA22.01.07).

Green indicates Recommended Proposed Edits, for easy identification.

The 2009 social statement is unaltered up to this point on page 15.

IV. Sexuality and social structures that enhance social trust

Lutherans believe that God works through social structures for the good of society. The Lutheran Confessions identify marriage and the family as foundational structures that support human community.

Marriage: shelter and context for trust

Trust is a quality of relationship that, while never perfected, is nurtured and reinforced over time. The trust and mutuality afforded by marriage can make marriage one of the most beautiful, abiding, and transformative forms of human relationship. Depth of care, matched to an intimacy of touch, creates relationships much stronger than simple and momentary erotic interest. Sexual intimacy, together with promises of fidelity and public accountability, is intended to nurture bonds that allow people to thrive. Additionally, marriage can provide a rich context for the care and support of children and dependents.

In the United States, individual states determine the legal status and definition of marriage and may not discriminate against marriages between individuals of legal age based on race, sex, gender, or sexuality.¹ Within Christianity, marriage is often understood as a covenant of mutual promises, commitment, and hope between two individuals, authorized legally by the state and blessed by God. Ongoing interpretation of the Scriptures and the Confessions² has introduced complex considerations to moral discernment about sex, gender, and sexuality, about which there is not universal agreement.

As mentioned previously (page 10), this church recognizes that these matters are not central to our salvation, though they are central to the trust, flourishing, and well-being of human relationships. For this reason, they do require our best moral discernment, guided by Scripture, the sciences, and human experience, though this discernment may lead to different conclusions.

Lutherans long have affirmed that the public accountability of marriage, as expressed through a legal

contract, provides the necessary social support and social trust for relationships that are intended to be sustained throughout life and within changing and often challenging life situations. In this country, pastors carry both legal and religious responsibilities for marriage. In carrying out these responsibilities, pastors hold and exercise pastoral discretion for the decision to marry in the church. In the community of the church they preside over the mutual promises made between a couple seeking the lifelong, monogamous, and faithful relationship of marriage.

Marriage requires constant care and cultivation. It is intended to protect the creation and nurturing of mutual trust and love as one foundation of human community. Because of the promises of fidelity and public accountability, marriage is intended to provide a context of love, trust, honesty, and commitment, within which a couple can express the profound joy of relationship as well as address the troubles they encounter throughout life. It is a binding relationship that should provide conditions for personal well-being and the flourishing of the partner; it also can provide conditions for the raising and nurturing of children.³ It is intended to be a blessing to the community and the world.

Christians believe that marriage is not solely to legitimize physical sexual intimacy but to support long-term and durable communion for the good of others.⁴ It is a communion within which the play and delight of love are expressions of the depth of trust and in which lovemaking can be a tender and generous act of self-giving that tends to the joy and pleasure of the other.

The public character of marriage also implies a civil responsibility. Marriage is intended not only to protect the people who are married, but to signal to the community their intention to live a peaceful and mutually fulfilling life, even as they endeavor to strengthen the community in which they live. The public promises of marriage, therefore, also protect the community by holding people accountable to their vows. Fidelity to promises blesses all who depend on this trust within and beyond the marriage.

The Christian commitment to marriage recognizes that sin enters all relationships, both within and outside the institution of marriage. All marriages fall short of intentions, and difficulties are inevitable, both because of the different needs and desires of the two individuals and because of sin, which places the anxious concern for self before the needs of the other. Infidelity to marriage promises betrays the intimate trust of the partner, the security of the family, and the public trust of the community.

Precisely because marriage is the place where deep human trust and needs abide, it also can be a place of great harm. Many experience neither love nor trust within marriage. Harming another emotionally, physically, or spiritually, including through the misuse or abuse of power, is a profound injury. It also is a betrayal and violation of the shelter and trust that are intended within the marriage relationship. Particular care must be taken to support and find safe haven for all who are at risk within a marriage. This includes those whose sense of self is destroyed or damaged within the marriage relationship and, therefore, whose ability to act or advocate for their own health and safety may be inhibited or lost.

This church recognizes that in some situations the trust upon which marriage is built becomes so deeply damaged or is so deeply flawed that the marriage itself must come to a legal end (Matthew 19:3-12). This church does not treat divorce lightly, nor does it disregard the responsibilities of marriage. However, in such situations, it provides support to the people involved and all who are affected. Individuals experiencing marital distress are encouraged to avail themselves of pastoral care; to be assured of God's presence, forgiveness, and healing; and to remain in the communion of the church, recognizing the all-encompassing mercy of God.

This church will provide supportive pastoral care to those who are separated or divorced. Further, it believes that those who wish to remarry may gain wisdom from the past and may be assured of the Gospel's freedom, amid brokenness and forgiveness, to enter into their new responsibilities in joy and

hope. This church will tend pastorally to the special concerns of blended families, to children of separated or divorced parents, and to the particular tensions that may accompany family distress and transition.

Despite its awareness of the presence of sin and failure in marriage, the Christian tradition places great emphasis on the value of marriage for both spouses. It is in marriage that the highest degrees of physical intimacy are matched with and protected by the highest levels of binding commitment, including legal protection. It is in marriage that public promises of lifetime commitment can create the foundation for trust, intimacy, and safety.

Both the couple's intent in their lifelong promises and the civil requirements for marriage are important. Mutual promises of enduring care and fidelity, made before God, allow a couple to open themselves to each other. They permit the sharing of profound and tender affection as well as deep vulnerabilities and anxieties. The legal contract creates a public arrangement, within which a couple can safely and equitably share their assets and resources, arrive at joint decisions, and plan for a shared future, and may anticipate, protect, and nurture children.

The church's historical experience supports its confidence that solemn promises, made before a company of witnesses who ask for God's blessing on the couple, have the power to create a unique framework within which two people, a new family, and the community may thrive. Consistent with that experience, this church has confidence that such promises, supported by the contractual framework of civil law, can create a lifetime relationship of commitment and cooperation.

Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Marriage

Within the last decades, this church has begun to understand and experience in new ways the need or desire of individuals to seek marriage as a relationship of lifelong companionship and commitment, as well as public accountability and legal support. At the same time, public debates and deliberations have continued regarding understandings of sex, gender, and sexuality in medicine, social science, and corresponding public policy.

We in the ELCA recognize that many of our siblings of diverse sexual orientations in relationships sincerely desire the support of other Christians for living faithfully in all aspects of their lives, including their sexual fidelity. In response, we have drawn deeply on our Lutheran theological heritage and Scripture. This has led, however, to differing and conscience-bound understandings about the place of such relationships within the Christian community. We have come to various conclusions concerning how to regard marriage of LGBTQ+ couples, including whether and how to recognize publicly those lifelong commitments within the context of this church.

While Lutherans hold various convictions regarding marriage between individuals of diverse sex, gender, or sexuality, this church is united on many critical issues.⁵ It opposes all forms of verbal or physical harassment and assault based on actual or perceived sex, gender, or sexuality. It supports legislation and policies to protect civil rights and to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, and public services. It has called upon congregations and members to welcome, care for, and support all couples and their families and to advocate for their legal protection.

The ELCA recognizes that it has a responsibility to care for all children of God. This includes a responsibility to minister to those with diverse sex, gender, or sexual identities and to those who are seeking counsel about their gender or sexual self-understanding. All are encouraged to avail themselves of the means of grace and pastoral care. This church understands pastoral care to be marked by a gracious affirmation of the value of the individual's life and by concern for their well-being, regardless of their sex, gender, or sexuality.⁶

The historic Christian tradition has recognized marriage to be a covenant between a man and a woman, reflected in the language of Genesis 1:27; 2:23-24.⁷ However, this church acknowledges that consensus does not exist concerning how to regard marriage for couples of diverse sexual orientations, even after many years of thoughtful, respectful, and faithful study and conversation.

In response, this church draws on the foundational Lutheran understanding that the baptized are called to discern God's love in service to the neighbor. In our Christian freedom, we therefore seek responsible actions that serve others and do so with humility and deep respect for the conscience-bound beliefs of others. We understand that, in this discernment about ethics and church practice, faithful people can and will come to different conclusions about the meaning of Scripture⁸ and about what constitutes responsible action. We further believe that this church, on the basis of "the bound conscience,"⁹ will include these different understandings and practices within its life as it seeks to live out its mission and ministry in the world.

The following section will be the focus of the next Reconsideration Process. The task force, recognizing this and noting the deep concerns shared in feedback, intentionally did not attempt to clarify or update language in the following bullet points.

This church recognizes that, with conviction and integrity:

- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that same-gender sexual behavior is sinful, contrary to biblical teaching and their understanding of natural law. They believe same-gender sexual behavior carries the grave danger of unrepentant sin. They therefore conclude that the neighbor and the community are best served by calling people in same-gender sexual relationships to repentance for that behavior and to a celibate lifestyle. Such decisions are intended to be accompanied by pastoral response and community support.
- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that homosexuality and even lifelong, monogamous, homosexual relationships reflect a broken world in which some relationships do not pattern themselves after the creation God intended. While they acknowledge that such relationships may be lived out with mutuality and care, they do not believe that the neighbor or community are best served by publicly recognizing such relationships as traditional marriage.
- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and lifelong loving and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are honored and held to high standards and public accountability, but they do not equate these relationships with marriage. They do, however, affirm the need for community support and the role of pastoral care and may wish to surround lifelong, monogamous relationships or covenant unions with prayer.
- On the basis of conscience-bound belief, some are convinced that the scriptural witness does not address the context of sexual orientation and committed relationships that we experience today. They believe that the neighbor and community are best served when same-gender relationships are lived out with lifelong and monogamous commitments that are held to the same rigorous standards, sexual ethics, and status as heterosexual marriage. They surround such couples and their lifelong commitments with prayer to live in ways that glorify God, find strength for the challenges that will be faced, and serve others. They believe same-gender couples should avail themselves of social and legal support for themselves, their children, and other dependents and seek the highest legal accountability available for their relationships.

Although at this time this church lacks consensus on this matter, it encourages all people to live out their faith in the local and global community of the baptized with profound respect for the conscience-bound

belief of the neighbor. This church calls for mutual respect in relationships and for guidance that seeks the good of each individual and of the community. Regarding our life together as we live with disagreement, the people in this church will continue to accompany one another in study, prayer, discernment, pastoral care, and mutual respect.

Loving families: ground and source for social trust

One of the places where social trust is most important is in the context of the family. In contemporary society, the term “family” denotes a variety of forms, such as married couples, partners, children, extended relatives, and others who may be part of one’s chosen family. This understanding is more akin to the older term “household,” employed by Luther to include immediate family members, relatives, and others.

Lutherans understand that intimacy, trust, and safety, particularly for those most vulnerable, are best sheltered within families. When safety and trust are eroded or destroyed within the family, it becomes a dangerous or even demonic place where abuse can reign. Thus, Lutherans take great care to support whatever creates and sustains strong families as a foundation and source of trust.

Children learn either trust or distrust from their earliest relationships of dependence upon parents, caregivers, and others in the household. Patterns of loyalty and confidence established in the family can reach into all future relationships. Those who do not learn to trust face significant obstacles to becoming trustworthy individuals in the more complicated relationships of modern life and may find it difficult to develop a mature and healthy sexuality.

The family is a primary source of trust precisely because of the remarkable level of commitment and care that characterizes familial bonds. While Scripture places family as secondary to the community of God’s people (Matthew 10:37; 12:49), it also attests to the family’s foundational role in protecting and nurturing human community (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1–4). The Lutheran Confessions recognize this role¹⁰ and the connection between family and sexuality in their discussions of the commandments related to each.¹¹

This church regards the family as an indispensable social institution because of its role in establishing conditions of trust and protection of the vulnerable. As such, society is responsible for both protecting and supporting families through public policy to ensure that these critical responsibilities will be met and that dependent family members will be protected and treated justly when households dissolve.¹²

Social service ministries of this and other churches work to secure the well-being of families in many ways. They give particular attention to those who have no family or to families with limited resources. They raise their moral voice to affirm and celebrate the life-giving importance of familial covenants of care. They teach others to embrace these callings of responsibility and love.

At the same time, realistic awareness of weakness and sin prevents Lutherans from romanticizing family life or setting up false ideals. In particular, sexual abuse or betrayal of promises and commitments within the family constitute flagrant harm precisely because they occur within the context where trust is most assumed.

This church recognizes its responsibility in congregations and through social ministry organizations to support its members and others in all the difficulties that beset family life and to seek ways to ensure and support the protection of the most vulnerable.

Social trends¹³ in the United States and elsewhere properly raise concerns about the health of families. While these trends do involve individuals who carry personal responsibility for their choices, they also are driven by economic and social forces that are both complex in origin and significantly resistant to

correction.

In the latter half of the 20th century, the legally married, heterosexual, nuclear family was supported by strong social conventions. With that strong social support, the nuclear family fosters positive experiences for many people. This does not mean, however, that it has always done so effectively. In fact, families of all kinds can shelter sexism or domestic violence, and in such situations, the safety of children or others who may be harmed is of utmost importance. Moreover, there have always been wide variations in household structure, as stated above, including households with extended family members or non-biologically-related members.

In this country and in our congregations, families are formed in many ways. Some examples include biologically related and adoptive families, foster families, blended families, families with a missing generation, families without children, and families where the parents are the same sex or gender. Millions of households in the U.S., and many in our church, are headed by single or unmarried parents, whether widowed, divorced, or never married. The critical issue with respect to the family is not whether it has a conventional form but how it performs indispensable individual and social tasks. All families have responsibility for the tasks of providing safety, shielding intimacy, and developing trustworthy relationships.

This church's first response toward families and households should be one of welcome and support that includes particularly the care for and safety of children. Children are to be invited into the community of the baptized regardless of their family situation or household structure.

This church responds to the needs of families through its ministry and service in various settings. It also has the task of addressing and advocating against social and economic trends that inhibit the development of strong families.

Through the proclamation of God's Word and the sacraments, God creates and strengthens faith and supports believers both inside and outside of families. Family life also is supported when its members strive to meet reasonable expectations to forgive and to seek forgiveness and to bear each other's burdens responsibly. When trust has been betrayed in such situations, then forgiveness, loving correction, and reconciliation should be encouraged when appropriate to the specific situation.¹⁴

This church acknowledges with regret the way in which the misuse of historical teachings concerning sex, gender, and sexuality has harmed individuals, deepened suffering, or torn families apart. This includes actions that abandon or shun people for unwed pregnancy, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Hate crimes and violence based on the victim's actual or perceived sex, gender, or sexuality sometimes are perpetrated in the name of Christ. Not only must such behaviors be denounced, but this church must work toward greater understanding of sex, gender, and sexuality.¹⁵

Regardless of one's belief, on the complex topics in this social statement, this church must seek that which is positive and life-giving for the neighbor while protecting each other from that which is harmful and destructive (Matthew 22:39-40.)¹⁶

Since social trust is directly related to social justice, this church must call for justice in matters relating to families and sexuality. Complex and profound changes have occurred in family law over the past fifty years relating to divorce, alimony and child support, custody, adoption, parental rights, and civil unions. The continuing evolution of family law is of vital importance as legislators and courts strive to protect dependent individuals and justly assign responsibility for their care.

These laws have a direct impact on patterns of social trust within households and networks of kinship. Criminal statutes, state enforcement, and judicial handling of matters related to sexual abuse, sexual harassment, sexual threats, and domestic violence require our close attention.¹⁷ Victims of sexual violation must be able to rely on public institutions for intervention in troubled relationships. They must be able to expect protection when their trust in an individual has been abused.

Society at large must ensure that all who are dependent upon others in the household for spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being are protected by social policies and practices. Even social institutions and practices not directly related to family institutions can and should facilitate and support familial care and responsibility. Examples include tax and poverty law, real estate and zoning regulations, and insurance industry policies and practices.

The ELCA will support familial relationships as central to nurturing and sustaining trust and security in human relationships. It will advocate for public policies that support and protect families. This church commits itself to continued attention to and discernment about diverse family configurations and the ways they serve to shelter and protect relationships of mutual trust.

2009 social statement continues unaltered from this point onward, see page 25.

¹ In the United States, marriage is defined by state law. The U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015) holds that states may not discriminate against marriages between individuals according to sex, gender, or sexuality, but otherwise the legality of marriage in the U.S. is determined at the state level.

² "The Lutheran Confessions are Reformation-era writings, central to Lutheran theology and practice and constitutionally affirmed by the ELCA" (ELCA, *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* [Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019], p. 71, footnote 14). Though the writings that constitute the Book of Concord (commonly referred to as the Lutheran Confessions) engage a range of issues regarding teaching and practice, they do not address every question or topic. Rather they focus on the Scriptures' purpose: to reveal Jesus Christ.

³ This church acknowledges that there are multiple ways of nurturing children, including but not limited to caring for one's own biological or adopted children.

⁴ (formerly footnote 23) Luther's concluding explanation of the sixth commandment says about marriage: "... above all it is essential that husband and wife live together in love and harmony, cherishing each other wholeheartedly and with perfect fidelity." Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, par. 219 (BC 200:415).

⁵ (formerly footnote 24) See ELCA Church Council minutes for 1993 and ELCA Churchwide Assembly minutes for 1991, 1993, 1995, and 1999 respectively: CC93.03.37; CA91.07.51; CA93.03.4; CA95.6.50; CA99.06.27. These actions may be found at www.elca.org.

⁶ A similar approach to pastoral care is evident in other ELCA social teaching; see, for an early example, the 1991 ELCA social statement on abortion, p.6.

⁷ While not the only reference in Scripture to marriage, Genesis 1:27; 2:23–24 has been a core source for the historic Christian tradition. It is often cited alongside Mark 10:6–9, where Jesus references the Genesis verses while responding to the male-privileged divorce practices of his day and forbidding all divorce: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason ... the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

⁸ (formerly footnote 25) "The difference between interpreters should not be understood as a conflict between those who seek to be 'true to Scripture' and those who seek to 'twist the Bible' to their own liking. The disagreements are genuine." This is the conclusion of Dr. Arland J. Hultgren and Dr. Walter F. Taylor Jr. Both are members of the ELCA and both are highly regarded scholars and teachers. The citation is from Arland Hultgren and Walter Taylor, Background Essay on Biblical Texts for Journey Together Faithfully, Part Two: The Church and Homosexuality. (Chicago: ELCA, September 2003), 18. This essay was written at the request of the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality. It can be accessed at resources.elca.org/faith-and-society/journey-together-faithfully-part-2/.

⁹(formerly footnote 26) The Apostle Paul testifies to conscience as the unconditional moral responsibility of the individual before God (Romans 2:15–16). In the face of different conclusions about what constitutes responsible action, the concept of “the conscience” becomes pivotal.

When the clear word of God’s saving action by grace through faith is at stake, Christian conscience becomes as adamant as Paul, who opposed those who insisted upon circumcision (Galatians 1:8). In the same way Luther announced at his trial for heresy, “Unless I am persuaded by the testimony of Scripture and by clear reason . . . I am conquered by the Scripture passages I have adduced and my conscience is captive to the words of God. I neither can nor desire to recant anything, when to do so against conscience would be neither safe nor wholesome” (WA 7: 838; *Luther’s Works* 32:112). However, when the question is about morality or church practice, the Pauline and Lutheran witness is less adamant and believes we may be called to respect the bound conscience of the neighbor. That is, if salvation is not at stake in a particular question, Christians are free to give priority to the neighbor’s well-being and will protect the conscience of the neighbor, who may well view the same question in such a way as to affect faith itself. For example, Paul was confident that Christian freedom meant the Gospel of Jesus Christ was not at stake in questions of meat sacrificed to idols or the rituals of holy days (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8:10–14 and 10:23–30). Yet he insisted that, if a brother or sister did not understand this freedom and saw eating this meat as idolatry to a pagan god, the Christian was obligated to “walk in love” by eating just vegetables for the neighbor’s sake (Romans 14:17–20)!

¹⁰ (formerly footnote 27) This social statement draws upon this rich understanding of the role of conscience and calls upon this church, when in disagreement concerning matters around which salvation is not at stake, including human sexuality, to bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), honor the conscience, and seek the well-being of the neighbor. ²⁷ This is evident in Luther’s commentary on parental responsibilities. See Small Catechism, Preface, par. 19–20 (BC 2000:350), and Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, par. 167–78 (BC 2000:409–410).

¹¹ (formerly footnote 28) See, for instance, Luther’s reference to the fourth commandment while discussing the sixth: Large Catechism, Ten Commandments, par. 167–178 (BC 2000:413ff.); see also, par. 206 and 218.

¹² (formerly footnote 29) These include laws governing marriage, dissolution of marriage, inheritance, guardianship, custody, parental rights and duties, property, pensions, social security, taxes, and health benefits. The interdependence and mutual responsibilities of married couples are crucial in welding them into a legal unit as well as a loving household. Parents and guardians are legally compelled to attend to the welfare, support, protection, and education of their children and youth.

¹³ Such trends include remarkably large numbers of physically or psychologically absent fathers and teenagers with parenting responsibilities for which they are not prepared. They include the reluctance of some individuals to commit themselves to marriage. Stresses on marriages and individuals in marriages contribute to high rates of divorce with accompanying concerns for children and other extended family members.

¹⁴ Forgiveness and reconciliation can be appropriate responses in certain situations; however, in the context of care, neither can be demanded of victims of violence or betrayal. “Christians are not in a position to demand forgiveness by others for others. Coercing someone to forgive may actually subvert healing and accountability” (“Gender-based Violence,” p. 10).

¹⁵ ELCA social message, “Gender-based Violence,” pp. 2, 6-10.

¹⁶ See *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, pp. 2-5, 12-14, 28-30, 34-35, 61-62.

¹⁷ For more on domestic violence and gender-based violence, see *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*, p. 76. See also “Gender-based Violence” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2015.)



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA
SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES
For the Period Ending January 31, 2025

	Year-to-Date Variance				
	CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR			ACTUAL Vs. BUDGET	
				Favorable/(Unfavorable)	Favorable/(Unfavorable)
UNRESTRICTED	2024 Actual	2024 Budget	2023 ACTUAL		
Mission Support	\$ 35,225,726	\$ 36,053,152	\$ 37,080,134	\$ (827,426)	\$ (1,854,408)
Other	26,853,948	21,050,000	28,033,069	5,803,948	(1,179,121)
TOTAL UNRESTRICTED	62,079,674	57,103,152	65,113,202	4,976,522	(3,033,528)
TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released	555,703	10,831,889	749,983	(10,276,186)	(194,280)
TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE AND SUPPORT	62,635,377	67,935,041	65,863,186	(5,299,664)	(3,227,808)
LESS TOTAL EXPENSES	62,476,076	68,083,962	63,477,136	5,607,886	(1,001,060)
NET REVENUE OVER (UNDER) EXPENSES	\$ 159,301	\$ (148,921)	\$ 2,386,050	\$ 308,222	\$ (2,226,749)



REVENUE SUMMARY

For the Period Ending January 31, 2025

	2024 Actual	2024 Budget	2023 ACTUAL	Year-to-Date Variance	
				ACTUAL vs. BUDGET	CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR
				Favorable/(Unfavorable)	Favorable/(Unfavorable)
UNRESTRICTED					
Mission Support	\$ 35,225,726	\$ 36,053,152	\$ 37,080,134	\$	(1,854,408)
Direct Gifts	7,844,728	7,550,000	6,336,180	294,728	1,508,548
Investment Revenue	8,120,003	2,790,604	7,005,992	5,329,399	1,114,012
Bequests and Trusts	2,822,503	3,000,000	6,841,607	(177,497)	(4,019,104)
Endowment	3,939,802	3,550,000	3,606,353	389,802	333,448
Rent	1,044,904	1,049,996	1,041,369	(5,092)	3,535
Services and Other Revenue.	1,582,009	1,609,400	1,701,568	(27,391)	(119,559)
Mission Investment Fund	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	-	
Total Revenue	\$ 62,079,674	\$ 57,103,152	\$ 65,113,202	\$ 4,976,522	\$ (3,033,528)
TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released	555,703	10,831,889	749,983	(10,276,186)	(194,280)
Net Operating Revenue and Support	\$ 62,635,377	\$ 67,935,041	\$ 65,863,186	\$ (5,299,664)	\$ (3,227,808)



ACTUAL EXPENSES VS. SPENDING AUTHORIZATION
For the Period Ending January 31, 2025

	Actual Expense	Spending Authorization	Variance Favorable (Unfavorable)	Percent of Budget
Home Areas				
Christian Community and Leadership	\$ 21,480,203	\$ 22,385,585	\$ 905,382	96%
Service and Justice	10,717,069	12,749,328	2,032,259	84%
Innovation	1,431,931	1,695,751	263,820	84%
Operations	24,392,039	26,445,125	2,053,086	92%
Presiding Bishop	9,790,496	11,011,046	1,220,550	89%
Secretary	5,276,758	5,705,057	428,299	92%
Treasurer	9,324,786	9,729,022	404,236	96%
Other				
General Treasury	2,501,531	2,469,259	(32,272)	101%
Depreciation	1,953,303	2,338,914	385,611	84%
TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES	\$ 62,476,076	\$ 68,083,962	\$ 5,607,886	92%

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA ELCA WORLD HUNGER

SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSE

For the Period Ending January 31, 2025

	ACTUAL	BUDGET	ACTUAL VS. BUDGET	YTD % of Budget
BEGINNING BALANCE				
Income	8,254,388			
Direct Giving	18,512,489	19,000,000	(487,511)	97.43%
Endowments and Donor Requested Payments	1,082,847	1,000,000	82,847	108.28%
Bequests & Trusts/Misc *	1,064,370	1,500,000	(435,630)	70.96%
Release of Bequest Income	-	4,500,000	(4,500,000)	
Service and Other Revenue	-	-	-	
Total Income	20,659,706	26,000,000	(5,340,294)	
Expenses				
Service and Justice:				
Domestic Program	3,950,263	4,173,118	(222,855)	94.66%
International Program	15,776,571	15,644,345	132,226	100.85%
Witnessing in Society	2,598,342	2,783,629	(185,287)	93.34%
Fundraising Allocation Expense	2,138,316	2,090,004	48,312	102.31%
Total Expense	24,463,492	24,691,096	(227,604)	
NET	(3,803,785)	1,308,904	(5,112,689)	
ENDING BALANCE	4,450,602			

* Bequest and trusts income will be recognized as received; however, spending of Bequest and trusts income will be deferred until the following fiscal year, beginning with FY19.

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
BUDGET AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
April 4, 2025
7 - Statement of Financial Position

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Statement of Financial Position - Assets**

	<u>1/31/2025</u>		<u>1/31/2024</u>
ASSETS			
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 26,117,622	\$	25,092,395
Accounts receivable	6,167,848		6,373,281
Loans receivable	267,635		537,704
Due from related organizations, net	2,743,362		7,588,045
Investments	657,464,201		601,114,379
Prepaid expenses and other assets	7,783,742		7,239,358
Property, furniture, and equipment, net	14,522,388		15,750,911
Beneficial interest in irrevocable, split-interest agreements, held by ELCA Foundation	-		
	9,689,310		10,778,491
Beneficial interest in perpetual trusts	<u>20,379,044</u>		<u>19,763,485</u>
 Total assets	 <u>\$ 745,135,152</u>	 \$	 <u>694,238,049</u>

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Statement of Financial Position - Liabilities & Net Assets**

	<u>1/31/2025</u>		<u>1/31/2024</u>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS			
Liabilities			
Accounts payable	\$ 237,996	\$	542,334
Deferred revenue	992,769		3,637,445
Due to related organizations, net	810,652		1,290,278
Accrued liabilities	4,248,201		5,800,538
Annuities payable	2,509,987		4,948,896
Funds held for others	6,978,643		5,925,920
Funds held for others in perpetuity	<u>119,594,385</u>		<u>108,719,387</u>
Total liabilities	<u>135,372,633</u>		<u>130,864,798</u>
 Net assets			
Without donor restrictions	167,811,329		129,051,871
With donor restrictions	<u>441,951,190</u>		<u>434,321,380</u>
Total net assets	<u>609,762,519</u>		<u>563,373,251</u>
 Total liabilities and net assets	 <u>\$ 745,135,152</u>	 \$	 <u>694,238,049</u>

The requested action is to reduce the spending authorization by \$2.5 million in light of revised mission support forecasts. In addition, the release from designated funds will be reduced to preserve more of this fund for FY2026. The revised budget will be breakeven instead of a loss.

Triennium Budget Proposal 2026-2028

Introduction

1. Process

The Office of the Presiding Bishop has the responsibility to provide for the preparation of the budget of the churchwide organization. In fulfilling this responsibility, the office works with the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council, the churchwide organization's Administrative Team, and consults with the Conference of Bishops when appropriate. The Administrative Team is composed of the presiding bishop, secretary, treasurer, and executive for administration, along with the executive directors of the churchwide units (which may also be described as home areas). (ELCA bylaw 15.11.02.).

The authority for the budget development process is described in this church's *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*. The following references are from those documents.

The appropriate roles of participants in the budget development process are:

- The presiding bishop provides for preparation of the budget (13.21.f.).
 - The executive for administration, under the direction of the presiding bishop, develops the budget, reports to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly through the Budget and Finance Committee (15.12.A20.d.).
- The Church Council, upon recommendation of the presiding bishop, submits budget proposals to the Churchwide Assembly and approves expenditure authorizations (14.21.05.).
 - The Budget and Finance Committee presents budgets to the Church Council for consideration by the Churchwide Assembly (14.41.A15.).
- The Churchwide Assembly adopts a budget for the churchwide organization (12.21.e.).
- The Administrative team provides common counsel and coordination (15.11.02.).
- The Office of the Treasurer estimates income and provides advice (11.41.03.).

2. Budgeting principles

The budgeting process and the people who participate in it are guided by two key principles of organization:

5.01.h. Leaders in this church should demonstrate that they are servants by their words, lifestyle, and manner of leadership. Leaders in this church will recognize their accountability to the Triune God, to the whole Church, to each other, and to the organization of this church in which they have been asked to serve.

5.01.i. As a steward of the resources that God has provided, this church shall organize itself to make the most effective use of its resources to accomplish its mission.

3. Constitutional Directives

The churchwide organization aligns its work with the purposes described in our Constitution 11:21.

- a. Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
- b. Provide resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve, and witness in their ministry in daily life.

- c. Support and establish policy for this church's mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.
- d. Witness to the Word of God in Christ by united efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, responding to human need, caring for the sick and suffering, working for justice and peace, and providing guidance to members on social matters.
- e. Foster interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to implement the mission of this whole church.
- f. Provide for the rostered ministries for this church.
- g. Oversee and establish policy for this church's relationship to seminaries, colleges, universities, schools, and other education endeavors, and provide support as appropriate.
- h. Establish and reflect this church's ecumenical stance and its relationship to other churches, and direct this church's policy for relationship with persons of other faiths.
- i. Develop and administer policies for this church's relationship to social ministry organizations and cooperate with public and private agencies that enhance human dignity and justice.
- j. Determine and implement policy for this church's relationship to governments.
- k. Provide for a comprehensive financial support system for this church's mission and for the administration of financial resources necessary for fulfillment of the particular responsibilities of the churchwide organization.
- l. Provide planned giving opportunities for the financial support of this church, its congregations, synods, agencies, and institutions through the establishment of a foundation.
- m. Provide pension and other benefits plans for this church.
- n. Provide a church publishing house.
- o. Provide archives for the retention of its valuable records, and coordinate archival activity in the synods, regions, institutions, and agencies of this church.
- p. Provide and monitor a system of discipline, appeals, and adjudication.
- q. Establish and operate other programs and activities, as determined by this church, on behalf of and in support of the congregations and synods of this church.

4. Considerations that shape this proposal

The churchwide organization considers current and relevant mission opportunities and challenges. Our aim is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the church and world. Our vision is "*A world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation.*" **God's Love Made Real**

We are thankful for the generosity of our members that support the mission and ministry of this church. Our partnership with synods is an important relationship that continues to serve this church. The reality is that today's social and political environment creates new opportunities and challenges. Our major revenue stream, Mission Support, continues to decline year-over-year. This has caused shifts in how we serve this church and the world. Our plan is to achieve sustainable spending levels, while ensuring the purposes of the organization are carried out with the best stewardship possible. Our goal is to allocate resources across the organization using the following distribution.

- Seventy percent (70%) are allotted to organization-wide alignment and goals that are reflective of historical spending commitments, focusing on core operations and infrastructure.
- Twenty percent (20%) are allotted to strengthen effective programs that are growing.
- Ten percent (10%) are allotted to new and emerging initiatives.

The churchwide organization has intentionally established and funded an Innovation Unit to pursue new and creative ideas for ministry within the organization and across this church. We also are pursuing major

donors and grants for extra-budgetary funding that allows us to experiment with new ministry settings, learn from research, and expand partnerships with synods.

Triennial Budget Planning Considerations

The triennium budget proposal to be presented to the 2025 churchwide assembly must include the following for current fund (unrestricted) and World Hunger:

- a. Income estimates 2026 – 2028
- b. Spending authorization 2026 only

The churchwide assembly proposed language will include the following provisions:

- a. 2026 – to authorize the Church Council to revise the spending authorization after periodic review of revised income estimates
- b. 2027 and 2028 – to authorize the Church Council to establish a spending authorization after periodic review of revised income estimates

Significant revenue streams and the sustainable fundraising model which is funded by various revenue streams are regularly reviewed by the Resource Development Committee, a subcommittee of Budget and Finance.

A financial report is provided by the Treasurer to the Executive Committee each month.

The churchwide budget has been prepared to align with the strategic and operational plan priorities as outlined in the Future Church reorganization of 2021.

Income estimates - Current (Unrestricted) Fund

- Mission support is based on a review of mission support intents submitted by synods. The year-to-year trend over the past three years has been an annual decline of 4.6 percent. The decreases in the proposed budget from 2026 – 2028 reflect declines of 4.3 percent - 4.7 percent. Mission support received in the three years from 2019 – 2021 compared to the three years from 2022 – 2024 was a decrease of a \$12.9 million. The challenge is that as fewer dollars are received at the congregational level, a greater percentage must be retained by congregations to support their ministries; as fewer dollars are passed on to synods, a greater percentage of dollars received must be retained by the synod to support their ministries; as fewer dollars are passed along to the churchwide organization, the churchwide organization must find ways to replace this lost income and/or continue to reassess what work/programs must be scaled back or eliminated.
- Direct Gifts – One of the ways we reduce the impact of mission support declines is through annual gifts given by members, congregations, and synods. The development team of the churchwide organization shares stories with members and congregations about the priorities of the church and the work that the churchwide organization does in support of these priorities, generating gifts in support of unrestricted “where needed most,” temporarily restricted programs such as missionaries or young adults in global mission, or other restricted programs. In addition, synods share special gifts as well as gifts generated by the sale of property in conjunction with the

closing of congregations. Direct gift income is increasing slightly based on plans of the development team. The 3-year average is \$7.8 million. While we believe this remains an opportunity for the churchwide organization, we are mindful of the underlying pressures on the economy at this time.

- Investment income – During the past three years, we significantly outperformed the budget in 2023 and 2024 but were significantly below plan in 2022. The proposed budget is more aggressive than prior years but achievable given the level of investable assets, policy, and projected average return of approximately three percent.
- Bequest and trust income – As this category is highly unpredictable, the budget reflects the 10-year average of \$3.66 million. The amount increased in 2027 and 2028, reflecting the continued aging of our membership and the period of the greatest transfer of wealth. Should all revenues exceed the budget, excess bequest income is used to replenish the Mission Development Fund endowment, in support of new and innovative ministry ideas and churchwide priorities.
- Endowment income was projected based on asset growth, offset by the possibility of endowment reductions to fund some ministries.
- Rent – This represents income from tenants that rent space in the Lutheran Center. While some organizations have required employees to return to the office post-Covid, some existing tenants have reduced space and there has not been significant activity in the past couple of years. This is budgeted based on current occupancy to be conservative; however, the churchwide organization has engaged a broker and is more aggressively marketing the space.
- Mission Investment Fund – This represents a generous grant from our separately incorporated ministry in support of new start activities.
- Designated Funds Released and Endowment Withdrawals – In 2018, the churchwide organization established a church council designated fund in support of projected revenue shortfalls in future years. This assumes this fund will be fully utilized in 2025 and 2026. Endowments which are not permanently restricted and where donor intent allows, will be reviewed for opportunities to support churchwide organization ministries if current funding is not sufficient. These opportunities are non-recurring and limited but can be used to provide budgetary support as the churchwide organization realigns spending based on declining revenue streams. See further discussion in the spending proposal below.

Income estimates – World Hunger

Except for maintaining a targeted fund balance of approximately \$3,000,000, the churchwide organization raises World Hunger monies in the same year that they are planned to be spent. Historically, over 50 percent of the annual revenue is received in the last quarter of the year. For these two reasons, these balances are carefully monitored in the event spending needs to be revised at any point during the year.

Direct giving to ELCA World Hunger has been trending downward steadily, averaging -2.3 percent over the past five years. We primarily attribute this trend to decreased giving from annual donors (those who receive mailed and emailed communications) and declining church attendance. World Hunger efforts are largely driven by thousands of small gifts rather than major gifts donors. In recent years we have also noticed a trend of more synods retaining a portion of dollars raised for hunger efforts in support of local ministries rather than entrusting those funds to ELCA World Hunger for distribution. Accordingly, the revenue estimates show modest declines of 1.3 percent annually.

World Hunger endowment distributions remain flat over the triennium and bequest and trust income has been increased slightly, reflecting the most recent 3-year trend. The 5 and 10-year trends are more aggressive.

Spending Proposal – Current (Unrestricted) Fund

Our goal is to support our ministries and programs so that they may be effective and to spend within our generated revenue in any given year. In recent years revenues have exceeded or been close to expenses as a result of investment returns and spending less than the budgeted amounts. The allocated spending authorization in FY25 was reduced to be closer in line with historical spending plus leaving \$1.4 million to be allocated, should it become necessary.

Over the past 20 years, mission support has declined from representing 80 percent of unrestricted revenue streams to 56 percent in FY24. In looking forward, it is important to assess the sustainability of both unprecedented investment returns and continued underspending as the allocated budgets have been decreased. In FY25, we expect that such favorability will not be possible and therefore will need to spend down some accumulated reserves. We continue to celebrate our members' generous support of our ministries and are committed to use dollars as efficiently as possible. The trends also indicate that we must put together a plan to address the declines in organized religion and the resulting impact on our revenue streams. Over the history of the ELCA, the churchwide organization has continued to reorganize and refine our work in light of our priorities and declining revenue streams. And we have been blessed. During the next triennial, we need to plan to take more intentional actions toward redefining the work of the churchwide organization. Several data points will be used to inform these decisions:

- 1) Evaluation of current priorities and performance against metrics
- 2) Recommendations from our research evaluation team and the Barna Fuller research project conducted since 2023
- 3) Approved recommendations from Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church
- 4) Visions of a newly elected presiding bishop

Strategic and informed implementation of these changes will begin in 2026 during the development of a new strategic plan but likely not be possible to be fully completed until FY2027. As a result, the proposed 2026 spending authorization reflects the need to balance against continued revenue declines and the likelihood that some reserves set up over the past six years will be fully utilized in 2025 and 2026. The proposed 2026 spending authorization does reflect a reduction of approximately \$1.0 million over actual 2023 and 2024 spending and from \$3 – 4 million over projected 2025 spending. As resources allow, we will continue to invest more deeply in programs aligned to this vision and based on the data that has been gathered.

The distribution to each unit/office of the churchwide organization as presented in the FY26 Spending Authorization is commensurate with the FY25 allocation. As we develop more detailed plans for FY26, these allocations by unit/office may change.

Spending Proposal – World Hunger

Annually the World Hunger planning team builds a detailed spending proposal based on the planned revenues for that year. The 2026 spending authorization reflects our intent to budget spending based on the projected income to be received for the year. ELCA World Hunger restores dignity and wholeness for communities facing loss, conflict, disaster, and injustice. We resurrect hope for refugees seeking safety at StARS in Cairo, empower women in community through a sewing program in Columbia, and nurture young leaders at Dal Al Kalima University in Bethlehem who are living through the impossible. Our domestic grants fill small funding gaps in communities that create a huge impact, whether enabling local leaders to connect surplus food to increasingly empty food pantries that are the frontlines for American poverty or host transformational conversations with Senators that determine the future of U.S. nutrition funding for the poorest American households.

ELCA Churchwide Organization								
	2023	2024	2025	2025	2025	2026	2027	2028
	Actual	Actual	Nov Approved Budget	April Request for Revision	Proposed Budget	Proposed Revenue	Proposed Revenue	Proposed Revenue
Mission Support	\$ 37,080,134	\$35,229,229	\$ 34,355,650	\$ 33,550,000	\$ 32,100,000	\$ 30,600,000	\$ 29,200,000	\$ 29,200,000
Direct Gifts, incl Missionaries, YAGM, and Temp Restricted	6,336,180	7,844,264	8,000,000	8,000,000	8,250,000	8,500,000	8,750,000	8,750,000
Investment Income	7,005,992	8,120,003	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000
Bequests & Trusts	6,841,607	2,822,967	3,000,000	3,000,000	3,600,000	4,000,000	4,500,000	4,500,000
Endowment	3,606,353	3,939,802	3,600,000	3,600,000	3,650,000	3,700,000	3,750,000	3,750,000
Rent	1,041,369	1,044,904	1,050,000	1,050,000	1,000,000	865,000	870,000	870,000
Service Level Agreements/Other	1,701,568	1,582,008	1,900,000	1,900,000	1,600,000	1,600,000	1,600,000	1,600,000
Mission Investment Fund	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
Total Unrestricted and Temp Restr Funds	\$ 65,113,203	\$ 62,083,177	\$ 57,405,650	\$ 56,600,000	\$ 55,700,000	\$ 54,765,000	\$ 54,170,000	\$ 54,170,000
Other Sources of Funds								
Designated Funds Released	-	-	5,893,476	4,925,000	3,082,936	-	-	-
Endowment Withdrawals	-		3,200,000	3,200,000	2,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
Restricted Funds Released	749,983	555,703	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000
Total Other	\$ 749,983	\$ 555,703	\$ 9,743,476	\$ 8,775,000	\$ 5,732,936	\$ 2,150,000	\$ 2,150,000	\$ 2,150,000
Total Income	\$ 65,863,186	\$ 62,638,880	\$ 67,149,126	\$ 65,375,000	\$ 61,432,936	\$ 56,915,000	\$ 56,320,000	\$ 56,320,000
Total Spending	(62,309,000)	(62,476,076)	(67,875,000)	(65,375,000)	(61,500,000)			
Net Revenues over Expenses	\$ 3,554,186	\$ 162,804	\$ (725,874)	\$ -	\$ (67,064)			

Represents the action items: 2026 Spending authorization and 2027 - 2028 income

ELCA Churchwide Organization						
Proposed World Hunger Revenues - 2026 - 2028						
	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
	Actual	Actual	Nov Approved Budget	Proposed Budget	Proposed Revenue	Proposed Revenue
	\$ 13,007,464	\$8,254,388	\$ 4,450,602	\$ 4,450,602	\$ 4,450,602	
	17,366,974	18,512,489	19,000,000	18,750,000	18,500,000	18,250,000
	990,664	1,082,847	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000	1,000,000
Bequests & Trusts/Misc	1,844,094	1,064,370	1,500,000	1,800,000	1,800,000	1,800,000
Total World Hunger Income	\$ 20,201,732	\$ 20,659,706	\$ 21,500,000	\$ 21,550,000	\$ 21,300,000	\$ 21,050,000
Total World Hunger Spending	(24,954,808)	(24,463,492)	(21,500,000)	(21,550,000)		
Ending Fund Balance	\$ 8,254,388	\$ 4,450,602	\$ 4,450,602	\$ 4,450,602		

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

2026 Spending Authorization Proposal by Unit/Office

	CURRENT FUND			ELCA WORLD HUNGER			TOTAL
	Adjustments for		2026 Proposed Spending	Adjustments for		2026 Proposed Spending	2026
	2025 Budget	2026 Spending		2025 Budget	2026 Spending		
Christian Community & Leadership	\$ 20,750,881	\$ (1,273,126)	\$ 19,477,755	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 19,477,755	
Service & Justice	11,355,640	(696,701)	10,658,939	21,058,000	492,000	32,208,939	
Innovation	1,704,646	(104,585)	1,600,061	-	-	1,600,061	
Office of the Presiding Bishop	10,335,978	-	-				
Office of the Secretary	5,648,178	(634,142)	9,701,836			9,701,836	
Office of the Treasurer	9,827,547	(346,532)	5,301,646			5,301,646	
		(602,948)	9,224,599			9,224,599	
General Treasury	3,536,365	-	-				
Depreciation	2,215,765	(216,966)	3,319,399			3,319,399	
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 65,375,000	\$ (3,875,000)	\$ 61,500,000	\$ 21,058,000	\$ 492,000	\$ 21,550,000	\$ 83,050,000

DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

**ROSTERED MINISTERS,
CONGREGATIONS, AND
MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS**



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Originally approved November 19, 1989, and subsequently approved Dec. 5, 1993, April 10, 2010, Nov. 10, 2014, March 8, 2020, April 17, 2021, Nov. 12, 2021, and April XX, 2025, by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, pursuant to ELCA constitutional provision 20.21.

Published April 2025

Citations from the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* are based on the 2024 edition of that document.

DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

Grounding Values

Rooted in God's grace and steadfast love, we are called as followers of Jesus to live a life "of bold trust in God and joyful, generous service to everyone we know and meet in daily life."¹ Affirming God's gracious covenant made with us in baptism, we commit to live in right relationship with God and our neighbors.

When the gift of relationship with God and our neighbors is violated or used inappropriately, there is a need for accountability and just action. It is in this context that we, as a church body, establish guidelines for our conduct, actions, and ways in which we communicate with one another. These guidelines are necessary as we "continue in the covenant God made with us"² in our baptism to ensure that all people, and the church in particular, are protected from harmful or inappropriate actions, speech, communications, or other misconduct. As church, we must abide in a context that holds ourselves, and one another, to account for the sake and care of the whole church.

The following definitions and guidelines for discipline are set forth with the understanding that, following misconduct, the desired outcome is restoration of right relationships with God and with one another. This church embraces disciplinary processes which may include elements of counseling, admonition, and correction with the objective of healing and reconciliation. This church also acknowledges certain circumstances where reconciliation and restoration to the community may not be possible or may cause further harm. Particularly egregious conduct may result in suspension or removal from the roster or from membership.

¹ <https://elca.org/Faith>

² In the rite of Affirmation of Baptism (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, p. 236), the presiding minister asks:

"You have made public profession of your faith. Do you intend to continue in the covenant God made with you in holy baptism:
to live among God's faithful people,
to hear the word of God and share in the Lord's supper,
to proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, to
serve all people, following the example of Jesus,
and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth?"

Grounding Context

The *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* (CBCR) outlines the grounds for discipline, the discipline that may be imposed, and who may bring charges:

- for ministers of Word and Sacrament at 20.22.01. through 20.22.03.;
- for ministers of Word and Service at 20.23.01. through 20.23.03.;
- for congregations at 20.31.01. through 20.31.03.; and
- for members of congregations at 20.41.01. and 20.41.02.

The constitution also outlines the processes for discipline. The disciplinary process for ministers of Word and Sacrament is set forth at 20.22.04. through 20.22.24. These same processes also apply to ministers of Word and Service by operation of 20.23.04. and 20.23.05. and to congregations by operation of 20.31.04. and 20.31.05. The detailed operations of these processes are set forth in the rules governing disciplinary proceedings, a separate document also created by the Committee on Appeals and approved by the Church Council (20.22.14.). The disciplinary process for members of congregations is set forth in 20.41.03. through 20.41.11. and also in *C15.01. through *C15.07. of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*.

The CBCR assigns primary responsibility for the discipline process to synods (20.11.). Accordingly, it provides synod bishops with substantial discretion in the investigation of misconduct (20.22.04. through 20.22.06.).

Provision 20.21. of this church's constitution specifically calls for the Committee on Appeals to "establish **definitions and guidelines**, subject to approval by the Church Council, to enable clear and uniform application of **the grounds for discipline** of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations." The purpose of this document is to elaborate on the grounds for discipline and to guide rostered ministers, congregations, and members in our lives together. Additionally, it is intended to help bishops, synod staff, hearing officers, discipline committee members, and consultation committee members in their work and to clarify what conduct is not acceptable in this church.

This document is written in accordance with the decisions of churchwide assemblies. It is grounded in our biblical and Lutheran confessional sources, which help to shape this church's social teachings. No language in this document may be construed to contradict or override a current authorized social teaching of this church.

DEFINITIONS

Unless the context indicates otherwise, for the purpose of this document:

1. “Adultery” means voluntary sexual intercourse between a married person and someone other than that person’s current spouse.
2. “Constitution” means the *Constitutions, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.
3. “Church” or “this church” means the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
4. “Family” means not only persons related by genetics or marriage³ but may also include “a variety of forms, more akin to the older term of ‘household,’ exclusively employed by Luther to include immediate family members, relatives, and others.”⁴
5. “Harass” means to persistently annoy another or to create an unpleasant or hostile situation by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct. Mere criticism or disagreement is not harassment.⁵
6. “Hate group” means an organization or group that encourages or promotes the dehumanization of others through hate speech, hostility, violence, or bigotry towards an individual or group on account of group characteristics such as race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status. “Hate group” does not include groups solely because they hold differing political or philosophical views regarding social controversies or advocate for the advancement or protection of historically underrepresented groups.
7. “Hate speech” means the expression of animosity or disparagement of an individual or group on account of a group characteristic such as race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status.
8. “Infidelity” means the act or fact of having a romantic or sexual relationship with someone other than one’s spouse or partner.

³ In 2009, the ELCA adopted “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust” as a social statement of this church. In its section on marriage (pages 15–21), “Gift and Trust” described a range of views existing within this church. Included among these views was both a recognition of an understanding of marriage as a relationship between a man and a woman and a commitment to the support of couples in lifelong, monogamous, same-gendered relationships. In the intervening decade, the action of the United States Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644 (2015), guaranteed access to legal marriage to LGBTQIA+ couples in all fifty states.

⁴ See “A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” p. 21. See also pp. 15ff. and 25ff.

⁵ See the social message, “Gender-Based Violence.”

9. "Intellectual property" means property that derives from the work of the mind or intellect and can be registered and protected under state or federal copyright, trademark, or patent laws.
10. "Libel" means a written defamatory statement or representation that conveys an unjustly unfavorable impression.
11. "Plagiarism" means wrongly representing the works of others as one's own, in oral or written form.
12. "Promiscuity" means having casual or indiscriminate sexual relations which do not proceed from or contribute to mutual respect, intimacy, commitment to, and care of others.
13. "Retaliation" or "retaliatory action" means the discharge, suspension, demotion, or other punitive action taken against an individual. Appropriately defending oneself against false accusations is not considered retaliation.
14. "Rostered minister" includes ministers of Word and Sacrament, ministers of Word and Service, and, in this context, candidates for rostered ministry.⁶
15. "Slander" means a false and defamatory oral statement about a person.
16. "Serious crime" means a crime that could be punishable by imprisonment for more than six months.
17. "Sexual abuse" means rape; sexual assault; sexual harassment; sexual relations with a minor child or a person otherwise not capable of consent; sexual relations resulting from threats, intimidation, coercion, blackmail, extortion, or manipulation; and sexual relations (outside of marriage) between a rostered minister and a person with whom the rostered minister has a pastoral or supervisory relationship, including, but not limited to, an employee, volunteer, student, or counselee, or a person in the congregation or other ministry served by the rostered minister.

⁶ See paragraph 3, "Report of Actions of the Church Council (March 6–8, 2020)." The Church Council voted to include the following language in the candidate statement on the Entrance Information form provided in the ELCA Candidacy Manual:

"As a candidate for rostered ministry in this church, I understand I will be held accountable to the synod's candidacy committee regarding this church's expectations for my speech and conduct as set forward in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers*. I understand that my candidacy for rostered ministry brings increased attention to my life. I am responsible for informing my bishop regarding any circumstance that might subject me to discipline according to *Definitions and Guidelines* were I a rostered minister. I understand that the candidacy committee may modify my candidacy status in response to my speech and conduct."

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF ROSTERED MINISTERS

The normative expectations of this church for its rostered ministers focus on faithful and effective exercise of ministerial leadership. In all matters of morality and personal ethics this church expects its rostered ministers to be exemplary in conduct.

Grounds for discipline of rostered ministers are as follows:

- A. Preaching or teaching in conflict with the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapter 2 of this church's constitution.
- B. Conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office** is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers. These guidelines define and describe kinds of behavior which are incompatible with the character of the ministerial office and may be grounds for discipline.
 - 1. Confidentiality:** Ministers of Word and Sacrament must comply with 7.45.⁷ of this church's constitution and not disclose information protected by that provision unless expressly permitted by that provision. All rostered ministers must respect and protect other confidential information and not disclose it absent good cause. Good cause includes, but is not limited to, permission of those who shared the confidence, disclosure required by law, or disclosure necessary to prevent great harm.⁸
 - 2. Integrity:** Rostered ministers must be honest and forthright in their dealings with others. Dishonesty, deception, duplicity, or the manipulation of others for personal benefit or gain is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
 - 3. Professional attention to duties:** A rostered minister of this church has made commitments through ordination and through acceptance of a letter of call or appointment. Continued neglect of or indifference toward such commitments constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.

⁷ "In keeping with the historic discipline and practice of the Lutheran church and to be true to a sacred trust inherent in the nature of the pastoral office, no minister of Word and Sacrament of this church shall divulge any confidential disclosure received in the course of the care of souls or otherwise in a professional capacity, nor testify concerning conduct observed by the minister of Word and Sacrament while working in a pastoral capacity, except with the express permission of the person who has given confidential information to the minister of Word and Sacrament or who was observed by the minister of Word and Sacrament, or if the person intends great harm to self or others." (CBCR 7.45.)

⁸ Communication in the nature of confession may be privileged by law. Other confidential information does not fall under this privilege. The question of which communications between a rostered minister and member are "privileged," such that their disclosure may not be compelled by law, varies from state to state. Questions regarding this issue should be directed to local legal counsel.

- 4. Care of family:** For rostered ministers in a family, the following conduct is considered incompatible with the character of the ministerial office:
- a. Desertion or abandonment of a family member;
 - b. Abuse of a family member; or
 - c. Repeated failure to meet legally determined support obligations of a family member.
- 5. Sexuality and public ministry:**⁹ This church does not tolerate the abuse of the ministerial office for personal sexual gratification or exertion of authority over others. This church's understanding of human sexuality is stated in its authorized social teachings.
- Rostered ministers who abuse the trust placed in them by engaging in infidelity, adultery, promiscuity, or sexual abuse of another are engaging in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹⁰
- 6. Addiction and substance misuse:**¹¹ Misuse of substances (such as alcohol or drugs) or compulsions (such as gambling or use of pornography) that impair the ministerial function of a rostered minister is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Continued high-risk behavior or refusal to comply with treatment also constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹²

⁹ See "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and the social message, "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions."

¹⁰ In 2009, this church expressly addressed the question of sexuality and public ministry in "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust," which states (p. 35):

This church does not tolerate the abuse of the ministerial office for personal sexual gratification. This church holds high expectations for those individuals called to serve as rostered leaders. Pastors, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers who abuse the trust placed in them by engaging in promiscuity, infidelity, adultery, or forms of sexual abuse violate those high standards. Such violations severely damage the credibility of the public ministry to which this church and its leaders are called.

Provision B.5. is substantially based on this teaching of this church. This provision does not change the aspirational teaching of this church, set forth in its social statements, that all members of this church should abstain from sexual intercourse until married. See "A Social Statement on Abortion" (p. 4) and "A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" (p. 31).

¹¹ See the social message, "Commercial Sexual Exploitation."

¹² Consistent with the value of restoration of right relationships, the approach of this church to such misuse may be referral for and insistence on evaluation, and the church may counsel inpatient or outpatient treatment should addiction be identified. Refusal to explore the possibility of misuse may result in referral to behavioral health resources with the expectation that they will be used and recovery maintained. Public ministry may not be appropriate until health and wellness are restored.

7. Fiscal responsibilities:¹³ The following fiscal misconduct is considered conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office:

- a. Indifference to or avoidance of legitimate and neglected personal debts;
- b. Embezzlement of money or improper appropriation of the property of others;
- c. Using the ministerial office improperly for personal benefit or financial gain;
- d. Soliciting members or others to directly or indirectly acquire gifts, bequests, or similar benefits for personal gain.

8. Membership in certain organizations: This church has specifically declared in 7.31.11.¹⁴ and 7.61.05.¹⁵ that discipline may be administered to any of its rostered ministers who belong to any organization other than the Church which claims to possess in its teaching and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church.

Conduct considered incompatible with the character of the ministerial office includes membership in, or taking actions in concert with, a hate group or groups organizations that encourage or promote hatred or bigotry on the basis of race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status.

9. Commission of a serious crime:¹⁶ A rostered minister who commits a serious crime is subject to discipline for engaging in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. If the violation of law is purposefully and exclusively done as a principled act of civil disobedience to protest or to test a law which is reasonably perceived as unjust or contrary to Christian beliefs, it may not be grounds for discipline. Rostered ministers charged with a crime shall promptly notify the bishop's office in their synod of roster.

¹³ See "A Social Statement on: Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All."

¹⁴ "No person who belongs to any organization such as a lodge or fraternal order which claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins or is discovered to be a member of such an organization. (CBCR 7.31.11.)

¹⁵ "No person who belongs to any organization such as a lodge or fraternal order which claims to possess in its teachings and ceremonies that which the Lord has given solely to the Church shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins or is discovered to be a member of such an organization. (CBCR 7.61.05.)

¹⁶ See "A Social Statement on: The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries," Section 2D.

- 10. Hateful speech or actions:**¹⁷ ¹⁷ A rostered minister's use of harassing, abusive, discriminatory, libelous, slanderous or hateful speech or actions, at any time, whether in person or on any form of social media, is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
- 11. Abusive activity:** A rostered minister's physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual abuse of staff, colleagues, congregation members, or others is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office. Such abuse could include, but is not limited to, bullying or harassment in written or verbal form, either in person or by remote communication.
- 12. Intellectual property:** Rostered ministers will remain committed to protecting and honoring all intellectual property. Rostered ministers must also work to ensure that they do not misuse the intellectual property of others without appropriate permission and/or citation. Plagiarism is conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
- 13. Retaliatory action:** A rostered minister may not take retaliatory action toward anyone who submits a complaint against the rostered minister to the leadership of a congregation; to the dean of a conference; to a synod bishop, synod council member, or synod staff member; to the presiding bishop or churchwide staff; or to any other person who holds the capacity to receive a complaint. Such retaliatory actions constitute conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.
- 14. Relationship with prior congregation(s) or ministry:** Rostered ministers who have resigned or retired from or otherwise no longer officially serve a congregation or other ministry shall honor the integrity of the congregation or ministry. They shall respect and honor the current rostered minister(s) and mission of the congregation or ministry they no longer are called to serve.¹⁸ ¹⁸ They shall decline invitations from members to perform pastoral acts and refrain from asking members to directly or indirectly seek permission to perform such acts from the currently serving rostered minister. They shall not participate or interfere, whether personally or through a proxy, in the life of the congregation or ministry in any way, unless invited to participate by the current rostered minister(s) in conjunction with the congregation council or governing board. Such interference constitutes conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office or retirement status.

¹⁷ See "A Social Statement on: Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture," "A Social Statement on: Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action," and the social policy resolution, "Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric."

¹⁸ "Ministers of Word and Sacrament shall respect the integrity of the ministry of congregations which they do not serve and shall not exercise ministerial functions therein unless invited to do so by the pastor, or if there is no duly called pastor, then by the interim pastor in consultation with the Congregation Council. (*Constitution for Synods*, †S14.19.)

15. Adherence to covenantal relationships: Rostered ministers who actively and affirmatively incite, initiate, or encourage a congregation to leave the ELCA are engaged in conduct incompatible with the character of the ministerial office.¹⁹ This does not apply to exploring a cooperative relationship with a full-communion partner congregation.

C. Willful disregard or violation of the functions and standards established by this church for the rostered ministries of this church is grounds for discipline. Such standards and responsibilities established by this church are found in Chapter 7 of this church's *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*.

D. Willful disregard of the constitutions, bylaws, or continuing resolutions of this church is grounds for discipline of rostered ministers.

¹⁹ "Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ... Each pastor with a congregational call shall, within the congregation ... encourage adherence to covenantal relationships with this church as expressed in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*." (CBCR 7.31.02.)

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF CONGREGATIONS

- A. Departing from the faith confessed by this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. A summary of the faith confessed by this church is found in Chapters 2 and 3 of this church's constitution.
- B. Willful disregard or violation of any of the criteria for recognition as congregations of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church. These criteria are set forth in 9.21. and 9.22. of this church's constitution.
- C. Willful disregard or violation of the constitutions, bylaws, or continuing resolutions of this church** is grounds for discipline of a congregation of this church.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONS

A. Persistent and public denial of the Christian faith by a member of a congregation of this church may be grounds for disciplinary action against the member. The behavior must be seen to bring harm to the faith of others and detract from the mission and ministry of the congregation. The Christian faith as confessed by this church is expressed in Chapter 2 of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*. A congregation member who persists in denial of this faith and seeks to convince others to do so may be subject to discipline. In order to warrant discipline, such behavior must be more than occasional expressions of doubt, private comments, or conduct contrary to the Christian faith.

B. Willful and/or criminal conduct grossly unbecoming of a member of the Church is grounds for disciplinary action against a congregation member. Commission of violent crimes including murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, rape, attempted rape, sex crimes, hate crimes, child abuse, intimate partner abuse, elder abuse, or any similar offense is seen as reprehensible to the Christian community and may warrant discipline. Persons who are found to have engaged or who are currently engaging in such actions remain in need of pastoral care and compassion.

A member's use of harassing, abusive, discriminatory, libelous, slanderous, or hateful speech or actions, at any time, whether in person or on any form of social media, may be grounds for discipline.

Conduct which includes membership in, or taking actions in concert with, a hate group or groups ~~organizations that encourage or promote hatred or bigotry on the basis of race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status~~ may be grounds for discipline.

C. Continual and intentional interference with the ministry of the congregation is grounds for discipline of a member engaging in such behavior. A congregation member who repeatedly interrupts the congregation's gatherings, worship services, fellowship or educational activities, congregation or council meetings, or disparages the congregation or its ministry to others in ways that damage or destroy the ability of other members to carry out the church's mission may be disciplined by the church. In order to warrant discipline, such conduct must be more serious than a member merely expressing disagreement, being impolite, or even exhibiting anger. The member must have engaged in a course of conduct and communication so persistent, inappropriate, and objectionable that the congregation's ability to perform ministry is being impaired.

D. Willful and repeated harassment, abuse, bullying, libel, or slander of member(s) of the congregation are grounds for discipline of a member. If the treatment of another, including rostered ministers or staff, by a member of the

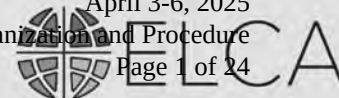
congregation repeatedly devolves into slanderous, vicious, or intentionally hurtful communications, no matter the means of such communications, the behavior is unacceptable and may warrant disciplinary action. Similarly, if any members, rostered ministers, or staff are being constantly harassed by another member for any reason, whether such harassment is based upon race, sexual orientation, national origin, age, ethnicity, culture, religion, disability, language, socioeconomic status, gender, gender identity, or immigration status or any other reason, perceived or real, the behavior may warrant discipline without regard to the nature of the harassment. The use of phone, email, text messages, social media or other remote communication, and behaviors including anything from shouting and gestures to actual stalking, may all be means of unacceptable defamatory or harassing behavior between members.



July 28 – August 2
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
CHURCH COUNCIL

April 3-6, 2025
CWA Rules of Organization and Procedure



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Rules of Organization and Procedure

Introduction

These “Rules of Organization and Procedure” serve many purposes. First, they bring together in one place all the provisions of the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions, as well as “standing” rules that describe the composition, functions, and responsibilities of the Churchwide Assembly. Constitutional provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions are highlighted in purple for convenience.

Bylaw 12.31.09, in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* specifies that parliamentary procedures shall be in accordance with *Robert’s Rules of Order*, latest edition, “unless otherwise ordered by the assembly.” Experience from past churchwide assemblies has demonstrated that plenary discussion and the conduct of the assembly’s business are best served by modifying certain parliamentary rules of *Robert’s Rules of Order*. These modifications, as well as numerous other procedural matters not covered by *Robert’s Rules of Order*, are a second purpose of these rules.

A third purpose is to adopt as part of the Rules of Organization and Procedure provisions from continuing resolutions related to the assembly. When adopted, a two-thirds vote will be required for their amendment or suspension as pertaining to business at this assembly.

At this Churchwide Assembly, most voting members will access the *Pre-Assembly Report*, including these rules, electronically by means of a tablet equipped with a custom application (the ELCA Churchwide Assembly Guide). This application will allow submission of resolutions, motions, nominations, and certain notices electronically. (These documents may be submitted on paper forms only if the electronic submission system is not functional.) The procedure for electronic submission is described in Part Seven of these rules.

Adoption of these rules will follow the procedure required by *Robert’s Rules of Order*. The Church Council’s recommendation to adopt will be the main motion before the assembly.

Outline

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Recommended for Assembly Action

Two-Thirds Vote Required

To adopt the “Rules of Organization and Procedure” for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly (exclusive of quoted and highlighted constitutional provisions and bylaws that are already in force).

PART ONE: AUTHORITY AND DUTIES

Authority of the Churchwide Assembly

The legislative function of the churchwide organization shall be fulfilled by the Churchwide Assembly as described in Chapter 12 of this Constitution. (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 11.31.).

The Churchwide Assembly shall be the highest legislative authority of the churchwide organization and shall deal with all matters which are necessary in pursuit of the purposes and functions of this church. The powers of the Churchwide Assembly are limited only by the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation, this constitution and bylaws, and the assembly's own resolutions (ELCA 12.11.).

Any matter for which adoption by a vote of two-thirds of those voting in a prior Churchwide Assembly was required by the constitution or bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall require a two-thirds vote to be amended or repealed by a subsequent Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.12.).

Duties of the Churchwide Assembly

The Churchwide Assembly shall:

- a. Review the work of the churchwide officers, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- b. Review the work of the churchwide units, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- c. Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies.
- d. Establish churchwide policy.
- e. Adopt a budget for the churchwide organization.
- f. Elect officers, board members, and other persons as provided in the constitution or bylaws.
- g. Establish churchwide units to carry out the functions of the churchwide organization.
- h. Have the sole authority to amend the constitution and bylaws.
- i. Fulfill other functions as required in the constitution and bylaws.
- j. Conduct such other business as necessary to further the purposes and functions of the churchwide organization (ELCA 12.21.).

Assembly Presiding Officer

The presiding bishop shall ... preside at the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 13.21.c.).

The vice president shall be a layperson who shall serve ..., in the event the presiding bishop is unable to do so, as chair of the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 13.31.).

Assembly Secretary

The secretary shall be responsible for the minutes and records of the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 13.41.02.a.).

Notice of Meeting

The secretary shall give notice of the time and place of each regular assembly by publication thereof at least 60 days in advance on this church's website and in this church's periodical (ELCA 12.31.02.).

Notice shall be provided to all voting members or voting members-elect not more than 30 days or less than 10 days in advance of any meeting. Notice may be provided electronically for voting members or voting members-elect who have provided email addresses, unless the voting member or voting member-elect has requested that written notice be mailed (ELCA 12.31.02.).

Agenda

The secretary shall ..., in collaboration with the presiding bishop ... provide for the preparation of the agenda for the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 13.41.02.h.).

Program and Worship

The arrangements for agenda, program, and worship shall be under the supervision of the presiding bishop (ELCA 12.31.04.).

Arrangements

Logistical arrangements for churchwide assemblies shall be made by the secretary or by an assembly manager working under the secretary's supervision. Such committees as may be necessary to facilitate the planning for and operation of the assembly may be established by the secretary in consultation with the presiding bishop (ELCA 12.31.05.).

PART TWO: MEMBERS OF THE ASSEMBLY

Assembly Voting Members

Each synod shall elect one voting member of the Churchwide Assembly for every 6,000 baptized members in the synod. In addition, each synod shall elect one voting member for every 50 congregations in the synod. The synod bishop, who is *ex officio* a member of the Churchwide Assembly, shall be included in the number of voting members so determined. Unless otherwise determined by the synod, the synod vice president shall serve as an *ex officio* member of the Churchwide Assembly and be included in the number of the synod's voting members. The voting members elected by each synod shall comply with the principles of organization, commitment to inclusiveness, and interdependence as specified in Chapter 5 of this Constitution.

In addition, each synod shall elect one additional voting member who is a youth or young adult at the time of the election and one additional voting member who is a person of color or a person whose primary language is other than English The secretary shall notify each synod of the number of assembly members it is to elect (ELCA 12.41.11.).

The officers of the churchwide organization, the members of the Church Council, and the bishops of the synods shall serve as *ex officio* members of the Churchwide Assembly. Unless otherwise determined by a synod, the synod vice presidents shall also serve as *ex officio* members of the Churchwide Assembly. *Ex officio* members shall have voice and vote. (ELCA 12.41.16.).

The total number of voting members at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly is 845.

Eligibility to Serve as Voting Member

Each voting member of the Churchwide Assembly shall be a voting member of a congregation of this church. Any such voting member (except a rostered minister ...) shall cease to be a member of the assembly if no longer a voting member of a congregation of this church within the synod from which elected (ELCA 12.41.13.).

Certification of Voting Members

The secretary of each synod shall submit to the secretary of this church at least nine months before each regular Churchwide Assembly a certified list of the voting members elected by the Synod Assembly (ELCA 12.41.12.).

Seating of Alternate Voting Members

If a voting member elected by the Synod Assembly is unable to serve, the name of an eligible person chosen by the Synod Council shall be submitted by the secretary of the synod to the secretary of this church. If a vacancy occurs or exists within 30 days or less of the convening of the Churchwide Assembly or during the meeting of the Churchwide Assembly, the synod bishop may submit the name of an eligible person to the secretary of this church. The individual whose name is submitted to the secretary of this church shall be registered and seated by the Credentials Committee as a voting member from the synod (ELCA 12.41.12.).

Inclusive Representation

Except as otherwise provided in this constitution and bylaws, the appropriate office or unit of the churchwide organization, through the Church Council, shall establish processes that will ensure that at least 60 percent of the members of its assemblies... shall be laypersons; that, as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent of the lay members of these assemblies ... shall be women and, as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent shall be men, and that the representation of rostered ministers shall include both men and women. At least 10 percent of the members of these assemblies ... shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English (ELCA 5.01.e.).

It is the goal of this church that at least 10 percent of the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly ... be youth and young adults. The Church Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal. For purposes of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, the term "youth" means a voting member of a congregation who has not reached the age of 18 at the time of election or appointment for service. The term "young adult" means a voting member of a congregation between the ages of 18 and 30 at the time of election or appointment for service (ELCA 5.01.E19.).

Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English means African American, African Caribbean, African Descent, African National, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Latin(-o, -a, -é, -x), Hispanic, American Indian, Indigenous, and Alaska Native people, as well as multi- and bi-racial people. (ELCA 5.01.J24.a.).

For purposes of the representational principles set forth in 5.01.e. and f., the percentage of laypersons that is not allocated to women or men may be allocated to persons who identify as gender non-binary, gender fluid, genderqueer, transgender, women, men, or other gender identities. (ELCA 5.01.G24.).

Additional Voting Members Provided

The Church Council may allocate up to 10 additional voting members among synods, but no single synod may be allocated more than two additional voting members (ELCA 12.41.11.).

Additional voting members have been allocated by the Church Council as follows:

<u>Synod</u>	<u>Additional Members</u>
Alaska (1A)	2
Arkansas-Oklahoma (4C)	2
Slovak Zion (7G)	2
West Virginia-Western Maryland (8H)	1
Caribbean (9F)	2

Assembly Properly Constituted

Each assembly... of the churchwide organization ... shall be conclusively presumed to have been properly constituted, and neither the method of selection nor the composition of any such assembly... may be challenged in a court of law by any person or be used as the basis of a challenge in a court of law to the validity or effect of any action taken or authorized by any such assembly (ELCA 5.01.j.).

Advisory Members

Executive directors of units of the churchwide organization, the executive for administration, and other persons from the churchwide organization designated by the presiding bishop shall serve as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly. The Church Council also may designate other persons as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly. Advisory members shall have voice but not vote (ELCA 12.41.17.).

Other Non-Voting Members

Other categories of non-voting members may be established by the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.41.18.).

Presidents of the colleges, universities, and seminaries of this church, unless elected as voting members of the assembly, shall have voice but not vote (ELCA 12.41.A89.).

A representative of the faculty of each seminary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be appointed by the president of each seminary to serve as a seminary faculty resource person In addition, a teaching theologian who is a member of a congregation of this church and who is teaching at a college or university of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be appointed by the steering committee of the Association of Teaching Theologians in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to serve as a faculty resource person. Faculty resource persons shall have voice, if so granted in the assembly's rules, but not vote in plenary sessions of the assembly (ELCA 12.41.B07.).

Continuation of Ex Officio Members

If the term of office of an *ex-officio* member of the Churchwide Assembly ends during a Churchwide Assembly, such person shall nevertheless remain an *ex-officio* member of the Churchwide Assembly, and shall not be replaced in that capacity, until the conclusion of the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.41.D24.).

An individual whose term of office as a bishop of a synod commences within one month of the assembly, unless elected as a voting member of the assembly, shall have the privilege of seat and voice, but not vote, during the assembly.

Resource Members

Resource members shall be persons recommended by the presiding bishop of this church or by the Church Council who, because of their position or expertise, can contribute to the work of the Churchwide Assembly. Resource members shall have voice only with respect to matters within their areas of expertise. Resource persons shall not have vote.

Congregation Observers

Each congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may register with the secretary of this church one congregation observer for the Churchwide Assembly prior to May 31 in the year of a Churchwide Assembly.... Such observers shall have neither voice nor vote in plenary sessions of the assembly (ELCA 12.41.C25.).

Official Visitors

Official visitors shall be persons invited by the presiding bishop of this church or the Church Council to address the Churchwide Assembly. They shall not have vote.

Access to Seating

A person will be admitted to restricted seating areas only upon display of proper credentials.

Assembly Costs

The churchwide organization shall be responsible for the costs of the Churchwide Assembly, including reasonable costs for travel, housing, and board for voting and advisory members (ELCA 12.31.06.).

PART THREE: QUORUM AND PROCEDURE

Quorum

At least one-half of all persons elected as voting members must be present at a meeting to constitute a quorum for the legal conduct of business. If such a quorum is not present, those voting members present may adjourn the meeting to another time and place, provided that only those persons eligible to vote at the original meeting may vote at the adjourned meeting (ELCA 12.31.07.).

Absence of Members

Members shall not absent themselves from any session of the assembly without valid excuse, under penalty of forfeiture of the meal allowance for the day of absence and proportionate reimbursement of travel expenses.

Parliamentary Procedure

The Churchwide Assembly shall use parliamentary procedures in accordance with *Robert's Rules of Order*, latest edition, unless otherwise ordered by the assembly (ELCA 12.31.09.).

Note: The 12th edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised*, is, therefore, the governing parliamentary law of this church, except as otherwise provided.

No motion shall be out of order because of conflict with federal, state, or local constitutions or laws.

Proxy and Absentee Voting Precluded

Proxy and absentee voting shall not be permitted at a Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.31.08.).

Obtaining the Floor

In plenary sessions of the Churchwide Assembly, voting members, including *ex officio* members, have prior right to obtain the floor, unless the chair determines that it is in the best interests of the assembly to call upon an advisory member, a resource member, or another individual with voice.

Questions of Personal Privilege

Questions of personal privilege that are not urgent and do not relate to the assembly as a whole are out of order. (Questions of privilege that relate to the assembly as a whole include such concerns as problems with acoustics, voting devices, lighting, and emergencies.) 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 the secretary's assistant. The chair may, at the chair's sole discretion, allow such matters to be addressed at a later time.

Speeches

Unless otherwise determined by a majority vote of the assembly, 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 then sit down.

After four people have spoken in a row on the same side of the motion before the assembly and if no one has risen to speak on the other side of the motion, debate will automatically be considered closed and the question will move to a vote.

Alternating Speeches

Insofar as is possible during discussion, a speaker on one side of the question shall be followed by a speaker on the other side.

To facilitate alternating speeches, assembly members awaiting recognition at the floor microphones shall approach the appropriate microphone (marked green for those in favor of the pending matter on the floor; marked red for those opposed to the pending matter on the floor).

Purpose and Use of “White Paper”

A white paper, provided in the registration packet of voting members, is to be used to identify a member who wishes to offer an amendment to the pending matter or some other motion that is in order. Except when authorized to interrupt a speaker by *Robert’s Rules of Order*, voting members seeking to bring a motion shall line up at any microphone and await recognition by the chair.

Motion to Rescind or Amend Something Previously Adopted at This Assembly

A two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting shall be required to rescind or to amend something previously adopted during this Churchwide Assembly. This rule does not apply to constitutional or bylaw amendments previously adopted by this assembly. (See PART FIFTEEN: Amendments to Governing Documents *below*.)

Suspending or Revising the Rules

After the adoption of the Rules of Organization and Procedure and any amendments thereto offered prior to the adoption of the Rules, any further amendment to, revision in, or suspension of the Rules shall always require for adoption a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting.

Moving the Previous Question

A member who has spoken on the pending question(s) may not call for a vote on the question(s).

A motion to end debate by moving the previous question shall apply only to the immediately preceding motion; a motion to end debate on all matters on the floor or more than the immediately pending question is not in order.

Applause

In the give-and-take of debate on issues before the Churchwide Assembly, members of the assembly and visitors shall refrain from applause.

Departing from Agenda

With the consent of a majority of the voting members, the chair shall have the authority to call items of business before the assembly in whatever order the chair considers most expedient for the conduct of the assembly’s business.

A motion to alter the agenda shall require for adoption a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting.

Unfinished Business

Upon adjournment of the Churchwide Assembly, all remaining unfinished items of business shall be referred to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for disposition.

Audit of Credentials Report

At the request of the chair of the Credentials Committee or of the assembly, the chair may order an audit of the report of the Credentials Committee. When so ordered, the Credentials Committee will provide the bishop of each synod with a list of the registered voting members from such synod. Each bishop (or other voting member duly appointed by the bishop) shall then make appropriate corrections on such list and certify the accuracy of the list with such corrections as may be indicated. Each bishop (or other voting member duly appointed by the bishop) shall promptly return the certified list to the chair of the Credentials Committee. The accuracy of the list of voting members of the Church Council shall be certified by the vice president of the ELCA.

PART FOUR: COMMITTEES OF THE ASSEMBLY

Mandated Committees

The Churchwide Assembly shall have a Reference and Counsel Committee, a Memorials Committee, a Nominating Committee, and an Elections Committee (ELCA 12.51.).

Reference and Counsel Committee

A Reference and Counsel Committee, appointed by the Church Council, shall review all proposed changes or additions to the constitution and bylaws and other items submitted that are not germane to items contained in the stated agenda of the assembly (ELCA 12.51.01.).

Memorials Committee

A Memorials Committee, appointed by the Church Council, shall review memorials from synod assemblies and make appropriate recommendations for assembly action (ELCA 12.51.02.).

Nominating Committee

A Nominating Committee, elected by the Churchwide Assembly, shall nominate at least one person for each position for which an election will be held by the Churchwide Assembly in accordance with Chapter 19 of this constitution (ELCA 12.51.03.).

The Church Council shall place in nomination the names of two persons for each position [on the Nominating Committee] (ELCA 19.11.01.).

Elections Committee

An Elections Committee, appointed by the Church Council, shall be responsible for the conduct and supervision of elections. (ELCA 12.51.04.)

In the election of a presiding bishop, vice president, or secretary, the Elections Committee shall report the results of any balloting by announcing the number of votes received by each nominee and the names of those nominees qualified to remain on the next ballot or the name of the nominee who is elected.

The Elections Committee shall report the results of balloting in other elections by announcing the name of the person elected or by announcing the names of nominees qualified to remain on the ballot. Vote totals shall be reported to the secretary of this church and recorded in the minutes of the assembly. Based on the report of the Elections Committee, the chair shall declare elected those who received the required number of votes.

A report showing the results of a ballot shall be distributed to the voting members concurrently with, or as soon as practical after, the announced report of the Elections Committee.

Credentials Committee

The Credentials Committee shall oversee the registration of voting members and shall report periodically to the Churchwide Assembly the number of voting members registered.

Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee

The Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee shall assist officers of this church in planning the agenda, program, worship, and arrangements at the Churchwide Assembly.

Other Committees

The Churchwide Assembly may authorize such other committees as it deems necessary (ELCA 12.51.).

Such committees as may be necessary to facilitate the planning for and operation of the assembly may be established by the secretary in consultation with the presiding bishop (ELCA 12.31.05.).

Ad Hoc Committees

Such committees as may be necessary to facilitate the organization and consideration of business before the assembly may be established by the presiding bishop in consultation with the secretary.

Additional Appointments

Additional officials or committees (e.g., sergeants-at-arms, parliamentarians, tellers, pages, etc.) of the Churchwide Assembly shall be appointed by the presiding bishop.

PART FIVE: VOTING PROCEDURES

Voting by Electronic Device

Voting generally shall occur through use of a wireless electronic device at each voting member's seat.

There will be a voting device at the place of each voting member. The device should remain there throughout the assembly when not being used for voting. Devices must not be removed from the table by voting members. Devices are to be left at the table at the end of the day for recharging and maintenance, and will be returned to the table prior to the next plenary session. A voting device must not be used by anyone except the voting member to whom it has been assigned.

Synod bishops (or their designees) will check at the end of every plenary session to ensure that all voting devices are in place.

Voting members must be seated at the table that contains their assigned voting device in order to cast a vote.

Voting by electronic device shall be in accordance with instructions from the chair or the Elections Committee. The chair will announce when voting is to begin.

Once the voting period has begun and voting members have registered their vote, confirmation will appear on the device's screen. If this message is not received, the synod bishop or a member of the Elections Committee should be notified immediately.

At any time prior to the announcement that the voting period has ended, voting members may change their minds and register a different vote. A second vote will cancel the first vote. Confirmation of the second vote will be sent.

Periodically during the assembly, a test vote may be taken to ensure that all devices are in working order.

If a voting device is inoperable or lost, or if a voting member for any reason cannot use the voting device, the voting member should notify the secretary's assistant (seated next to the podium) or a member of the Elections Committee (stationed around the plenary hall).

Various Other Methods of Voting

As directed by the chair, voting also may take place by voice, by show of hands, by standing, or by written ballot.

Any member who because of physical limitation cannot raise a hand or stand to vote should contact the Elections Committee for assistance.

Each voting member's registration packet contains a paper ballot to be used if the chair so directs. If a paper ballot is called for by the chair, it should not be folded. The ballot will be collected at the voting member's table in accordance with instructions from the Elections Committee or from the chair.

Division of the House

When a division of the house is ordered, the vote shall be by electronic device, by standing vote, or by written ballot as directed by the chair. No division of the house is in order when a vote has been taken by electronic device, by a counted standing vote, or by written ballot.

PART SIX: RELATION OF ASSEMBLY TO CHURCH COUNCIL AND CHURCHWIDE UNITS

Relationship to Church Council

The Church Council shall exercise interim legislative authority and shall serve as the board of directors of the churchwide organization (ELCA 14.11.).

"Interim legislative authority" is defined to mean that between meetings of the churchwide assemblies, the Church Council may exercise the authority of the Churchwide Assembly, including dealing with all matters which are necessary in pursuit of the purposes and functions of this church, so long as:

- a. the actions of the Church Council do not conflict with the actions of and policies established by the Churchwide Assembly; provided, however, that nothing in this constitution and bylaws precludes the Church Council from establishing policies concerning areas where the Churchwide Assembly has not acted; and
- b. the Church Council is not precluded by the Articles of Incorporation or this constitution and bylaws from taking action on the matter (ELCA 14.13.).

Responsibilities of Church Council

The Church Council shall act on the policies proposed by churchwide units, when requested by the presiding bishop or the churchwide unit. The Church Council shall ensure that the actions of the Churchwide Assembly are implemented by the applicable unit or office (ELCA 14.21.01.).

The Church Council shall review all recommendations from churchwide units for possible consideration by the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 14.21.03.).

The Church Council, upon recommendation of the presiding bishop, shall submit budget proposals for approval by the Churchwide Assembly and authorize expenditures within the parameters of approved budgets (ELCA 14.21.05.).

The Church Council shall arrange the process for all elections as specified in this constitution and bylaws for churchwide units to assure conformity with established criteria (ELCA 14.21.22.).

The Church Council shall report its actions to the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 14.21.07.).

Status of Church Council Recommendations

The recommendation of the Church Council with respect to any proposal by a churchwide unit or any other matter shall be treated as a motion made and seconded, unless the Church Council shall otherwise determine.

Relationship to Churchwide Units

Each unit shall report to the Churchwide Assembly and will report to the Church Council in the interim. The policies, procedures, and operation of each unit shall be reviewed by the Church Council in order to assure

conformity with the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions and with Churchwide Assembly actions (ELCA 16.12. and 14.21.01.; see also 17.20.05., 17.20.A21.e., 17.30.03., 17.40.02. and 17.50.03.).

Relationship to the Board of Pensions (also known as Portico Benefit Services)

The Churchwide Assembly shall:

- a. approve amendments to the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits that have been referred by the Church Council; and
- b. refer any amendments to the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits initiated by the Churchwide Assembly to the Board of Pensions for recommendation before final action by the Church Council, assuring that no amendment shall abridge the rights of sponsored members in the ELCA Retirement Plan (ELCA 17.20.01.).

The Church Council shall ... refer, as it deems appropriate, proposed amendments to the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits to the Churchwide Assembly for final action (ELCA 17.20.02.e.).

The Board of Pensions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—also known as Portico Benefit Services—shall ... manage and operate the Pension and Other Benefits Program for this church and plans for other non-profit organizations having a formal affiliation with a church or a religious organization, and invest the assets according to fiduciary standards set forth in the plans and trusts (ELCA 17.20.A21.a.).

The Board of Pensions shall ... report to the Churchwide Assembly through the Church Council, with the Church Council making comments on all board actions needing approval of the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 17.20.A21.f.).

PART SEVEN: RESOLUTIONS, MOTIONS, AND NOTICES

Submission of Resolutions and Motions

Substantive resolutions or motions, or amendments to either, must be presented using an electronic form to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant before the established deadline or, if applicable, immediately after being moved. Paper forms will be used only if the electronic form is not functional. The electronic form provided for this purpose is available in the Churchwide Assembly Guide; if needed, paper forms will be available from the secretary's assistant. Other forms also are available in the Churchwide Assembly Guide. The method for electronically submitting resolutions and motions is described below. Questions about the process of submitting resolutions may be submitted to the parliamentarian or the secretary.

Nature of Resolutions and Motions

► **Germane Resolutions and Motions:** A germane resolution or motion is one closely related to or having bearing on the matter before the assembly. A resolution or motion that is germane to the matter before the assembly may be offered when in order by any voting member from the floor by going to a microphone and being recognized by the chair. Nothing in this provision is intended to modify established deadlines. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

► **Non-Germane Resolutions and Motions:** Any resolution or motion not germane to the matter before the Churchwide Assembly or on the assembly agenda must be submitted to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.) Each resolution or motion must be supported by one other voting member. At least 24 hours must elapse before such resolution may be considered in plenary session. The secretary shall refer any such resolution to the Reference and Counsel Committee, which may:

- (a) Recommend approval;
- (b) Recommend referral to a unit or office of this church;
- (c) Recommend a substitute motion to the assembly; or
- (d) Recommend that the assembly decline to approve the resolution or motion.

► **Same or Similar Subjects:** The Reference and Counsel Committee may group together in a single recommendation resolutions or motions on the same or similar subjects. A resolution or motion on the same subject as a recommendation already on the agenda of the assembly, such as a memorial, will not be submitted to the assembly for separate action by the Reference and Counsel Committee. The chair of the committee will inform the voting member of the committee's decision.

► **Beyond Deadline for Submission:** Any resolution or motion not germane to the matter before the Churchwide Assembly or on the assembly agenda that a voting member submits because of circumstances that develop during the assembly and that cannot be submitted to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline (see PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*) must be submitted to the secretary or the secretary's assistant electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) and be supported by one other voting member.

The secretary shall refer such resolutions or motions to the Reference and Counsel Committee, which may:

- (a) Decline to refer the resolution or motion to the assembly;
- (b) Recommend approval;
- (c) Recommend referral to a unit or office of this church;
- (d) Recommend a substitute motion to the assembly; or
- (e) Recommend that the assembly decline to approve the resolution or motion.

Consideration of a resolution or motion submitted beyond the deadline will require the assembly to suspend the rules prior to presentation of the matter to voting members by the Reference and Counsel Committee.

► **On Societal Issues:** In its recommendation, the Reference and Counsel Committee, following consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop, shall inform the Churchwide Assembly when a resolution or motion requires action on a societal issue for which this church does not have an established social policy. Should such resolution or motion be adopted by the Churchwide Assembly, the matter shall be referred to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, which shall bring to the next regular meeting of the Church Council a plan for appropriate implementation.

► **Budget Expectations:** Resolutions with budget expectations should follow the process referenced in PART FOURTEEN.

Substitute Motions

When a substitute motion is made, secondary amendments may be offered first to the original motion. After all secondary amendments to the original motion have been disposed of, secondary amendments to the substitute motion may be offered. When all amendments to the substitute motion have been disposed of, the vote shall be taken on whether the substitute motion is to be substituted as the original motion or rejected.

Electronic Submission

Whenever authorized by these rules, resolutions, motions, amendments, nominations, or notices may be submitted electronically through the Churchwide Assembly Guide by completing the applicable form located in the “Forms” tab, identifying the supporting voting member(s), as required, and transmitting it to the secretary’s assistant by pressing the “Submit” button at the end of the form. An email response will be sent acknowledging receipt. If an electronic submission is improper or if additional information is necessary, the voting member will receive follow-up notification by email.

PART EIGHT: MEMORIALS FROM SYNOD ASSEMBLIES

Definition of Memorials

Memorials are proposals for action involving broad policy issues submitted by synod assemblies to the churchwide organization. Memorials from synod assemblies are reviewed by the Memorials Committee, which makes appropriate recommendations for assembly action. The committee’s review of the memorial shall include information about the financial and personnel implications if adopted. The committee may consult with the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council when preparing its recommendations.

Status of Committee’s Recommendations

When the Memorials Committee has recommended the passage of a memorial considered by the committee, the committee’s recommendation and text of the memorial recommended for passage shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Memorials Committee has recommended the adoption of a substitute recommendation for the memorial on a subject, the committee’s recommendation shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Memorials Committee has recommended referral of a memorial, the committee’s recommendation shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Memorials Committee has recommended that the assembly decline a memorial without the committee making any other recommendation related to the same or closely related subject, the memorial, if then moved by a voting member from the synod originating the memorial and seconded, shall be the main motion, and the committee’s recommendation shall be received as information.

En Bloc Resolution in Response to Certain Memorials

Responses to synod memorials, as recommended by the Memorials Committee in a report distributed to assembly members prior to, or at, the first business session of the assembly, may be approved by *en bloc*¹ resolutions when so proposed by the Memorials Committee.

¹ Adoption of several motions by a single assembly resolution; sometimes known as a “consent calendar” or an “omnibus” bill or resolution.

Voting members who desire the assembly to discuss a synod memorial or the Memorials Committee's response that is proposed for *en bloc* consideration may request that it be removed from a proposed *en bloc* resolution, provided the member's request is supported by 10 other voting members. Such request shall be made in accordance with the following paragraph. The assembly then will consider and vote separately on the proposed response of the Memorials Committee. After such removals, *en bloc* resolutions shall be voted upon without amendments or debate.

► **Separate Consideration:** To call for such separate consideration, a voting member must submit notification on the memorials form electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline (*see* PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*). The form is available in the ELCA Churchwide Assembly Guide, and paper forms will be available, if needed, from the secretary's assistant.

Substitute Proposal

With respect to any recommendation made by the Memorials Committee in a report distributed to the assembly members prior to or at the first business session of the assembly, a voting member of the assembly may offer a substitute motion to the committee's recommendation only if such member has given notice electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) by the established deadline, provided the request is supported by 10 other voting members. For such notice, a voting member who desires to offer a substitute to the recommendation of the Memorials Committee must complete the memorials form and submit it to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline and provided the request is supported by 10 other voting members. (*See* PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.) In addition, the text of the proposed substitute shall be submitted on a Motion Form electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary or the secretary's assistant.

Consultation with at least one of the co-chairs of the Memorials Committee is required when a substitute will be moved and is recommended when any other amendment will be proposed to the response recommended by the Memorials Committee.

Recommendation on Same Matter

A voting member's resolution or motion dealing with the same or similar matter as a subject being reported by the Memorials Committee cannot be considered prior to the Memorials Committee's recommendation and motion with respect to that matter. This rule does not apply to a resolution or motion that proposes an amendment to a constitutional provision, bylaw, or continuing resolution.

PART NINE: RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REFERENCE AND COUNSEL COMMITTEE

Status of Committee's Recommendations

When the Reference and Counsel Committee has recommended the approval of a resolution or motion considered by the committee, the committee's recommendation and text of the resolution or motion recommended for passage shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Reference and Counsel Committee has recommended the adoption of a substitute recommendation for the resolution(s) or motion(s) on a subject, the committee's recommendation shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Reference and Counsel Committee has recommended referral of a resolution or motion, the committee's recommendation shall be the main motion before the assembly.

When the Reference and Counsel Committee has recommended that the assembly decline a proposed resolution or motion without the committee making any other recommendation related to the same or a closely related subject, the voting member's resolution or motion, if then moved by that voting member and seconded, shall be the main motion and the committee's recommendation shall be received as information.

PART TEN: VOTES ON AND AMENDMENTS TO SOCIAL STATEMENTS AND RELATED ACTIONS

Definition of Social Statements

Social statements are major documents addressing significant social issues. They meet the criteria of and are prepared in accordance with "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns," adopted by the Churchwide Assembly in 1997 and amended by the Church Council most recently in 2018.

Deadline for Submission

Any amendment to a social statement, or to recommendations or resolutions concerning a social statement, must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline. (*See* PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*).

Voting members who submit amendments may be requested to meet with the staff of the unit that developed the statement.

If in the opinion of the chair of the assembly the amendments to a social statement, or to recommendations or resolutions concerning a social statement, are either too voluminous or too complex for the assembly to consider expeditiously, all amendments may be referred by the chair to either the Reference and Counsel Committee or to an *ad hoc* committee appointed by the chair for its recommendations for the consideration of the statement or recommendations or resolutions and the proposed amendments by the assembly.

If a voting member wishes to offer a substantive amendment that was not submitted prior to the deadline, the assembly, by a majority vote, may consent to the consideration of such an amendment.

Vote to Adopt Social Statements

A two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting in the Churchwide Assembly shall be required for adoption of a social statement.

A social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be developed pursuant to a policy approved by the Church Council, following consultation with the Conference of Bishops. The text of a proposed social statement shall be reviewed by the Conference of Bishops and approved and recommended to the assembly by the Church Council. A proposed social statement shall require for adoption a vote of two-thirds of those voting members present and voting in a Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.12.01.).

Vote to Amend or Repeal

Any matter for which adoption by a vote of two-thirds of those voting in a prior Churchwide Assembly was required by the constitution or bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall require a two-thirds vote to be amended or repealed by a subsequent Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 12.12.).

Reconsideration of Social Statement

In accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns,” Churchwide Assemblies may reconsider previously adopted social statements. Such reconsideration may involve either a revision or removal of the statement. This may be done in two ways:

1. A Churchwide Assembly, by a two-thirds vote, may call for the reconsideration of a social statement at the next assembly. Subsequent to such a vote, the social statement shall be referred to the Office of the Presiding Bishop for re-study. The proposed change and the reasons for it shall be made available to this church with an official notice of such proposed action to be sent to the synods by the secretary of this church at least three months prior to the Churchwide Assembly at which it will be considered. A two-thirds vote of the assembly shall be required to revise or remove the social statement.
2. The Church Council, by a two-thirds vote of its voting members, may ask the Churchwide Assembly to reconsider a social statement. Such Church Council action must be taken no later than at the Church Council meeting in the autumn prior to the assembly. The proposed change and the reasons for it shall then be made available to this church with an official notice of such proposed action to be sent to the synods by the secretary of this church at least three months prior to the Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the assembly shall be required to reconsider the statement and also to revise or remove it. Both actions may occur at the same assembly.

Vote to Adopt Certain Recommendations or Resolutions from a Social Statement Task Force Requiring Amendment of Constitutional Provisions or Bylaws

A two-thirds vote of the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting shall be required to adopt recommendations or resolutions originating from or relating to the subject of a social statement task force report or amendments or substitute motions related to such recommendations or resolutions that require amendment of a constitutional provision or bylaw for implementation.

PART ELEVEN: VOTES ON PROPOSALS FOR CHURCH-TO-CHURCH AGREEMENTS

This church may establish official church-to-church relationships and agreements. Establishment of such official relationships and agreements shall require a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting in a Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 8.61.).

Each church body votes on a relationship of full communion using the same resolution. Amendments to a resolution establishing full communion, therefore, are not in order.

PART TWELVE: NOMINATIONS

Nominations Desk

Nominations from the floor at the Churchwide Assembly shall be made at the Nominations Desk, which shall be maintained under the supervision of the secretary of this church (ELCA 19.11.A24.a.).

A nomination from the floor shall be made by using the form provided by the secretary of this church. Nomination forms may be obtained from the Nominations Desk at times prescribed in the assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure (ELCA 19.11.A24.b.).

Nominations may be submitted electronically prior to the established deadline (*see* PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*) or on a paper form to the Nominations Desk at the times described below if the electronic submission system is not functional.

Information and additional forms may be obtained from the Nominations Desk on Monday, July 28, from 1:00 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. and Tuesday, July 29, from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The deadline for floor nominations is 12:15 p.m. on Tuesday, July 29.

Congregational Membership

Each nominee for an elected position in the churchwide organization and each nominee for a position on the board of a separately incorporated ministry elected by the Churchwide Assembly shall be a voting member of a congregation of this church, unless otherwise specified in the constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of this church (ELCA 19.04.).

Term Limit

Elections shall be for one six-year term, without consecutive reelection, with approximately one-half of the members of the Church Council and of each board or committee elected each triennium, unless otherwise specified in this church's constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions (ELCA 19.03.).

Nominations Form

The required form to be used in making nominations from the floor shall include the nominee's name, address, phone number, congregation or synod-authorized worshiping community membership, synod membership, information that enables compliance with the principles of organization as specified in Chapter 5 of this constitution, and such other information as the secretary of this church shall require (ELCA 19.11.A24.c.).

The nomination form for the common ballot is available in the Churchwide Assembly Guide. Paper forms may be used if the electronic submission system is not functional and will be available, if needed, at the Nominations Desk at the times described above.

For purposes of nomination procedures, "synod membership" is defined ... as follows:

- a. A layperson shall be recorded in the synod that includes the congregation in which such a person holds voting membership, with the recognition that such a person shall reside within the territory of the synod or in an area immediately adjacent to the territory in the case of border areas.
 - b. A rostered minister shall be recorded in the synod on whose roster such a minister's name is maintained.
- (ELCA 19.11.A24.d.; ELCA 19.04.02.).

Making Floor Nominations

Floor nominations for the Church Council, the Nominating Committee, or other committee or board to be elected by the Churchwide Assembly require, in addition to the nominator, the documented support of at least 20 other voting members (ELCA 19.11.B21.a.).

A nomination from the floor for any position (other than presiding bishop, vice president, and secretary) shall be made by filing the completed nomination form with the Nominations Desk at times prescribed in the assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure (ELCA 19.11.B21.b.).

Floor nominations for the board of trustees of each of the separately incorporated ministries identified in Chapter 17 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* require, in addition to the nominator, the written support of at least 20 other voting members.

Nominations from the floor for any position (other than presiding bishop, vice president, secretary) shall be made by filing the completed prescribed form electronically before the established deadline (*see* PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*) or on a paper form with the Nominations Desk if the electronic submission system is not functional.

The Nominations Desk is open on Monday, July 28 from 1:00 p.m. to 9:15 p.m. and Tuesday, July 29 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The deadline for floor nominations is 12:15 p.m. on Tuesday, July 29.

Nominations will be considered made in the order in which filed at the Nominations Desk (ELCA 19.11.B21.c.).

For Boards and Committees: Restrictions on Nominations

Except as otherwise provided, the Nominating Committee shall nominate two persons for each council or committee position ... for which an election will be held by the Churchwide Assembly. Nominations from the floor, where permitted in the nomination process, shall be presented in the specific category named by the Nominating Committee and shall therefore meet the same criteria as the persons against whom the nominee is nominated. In the materials provided in advance to each member of the assembly, the Nominating Committee shall set forth the specific criteria applicable to each category that must be met by persons nominated from the floor (ELCA 19.11.02.).

The Church Council shall endeavor to ensure that every synod has at least one person serving on the Church Council or churchwide boards, committees, task forces, or other groups. Among those persons elected by the assembly, excluding the officers, no more than two persons from any one synod shall serve on the Church Council or any one board, committee, task force, or other group (ELCA 19.11.05.).

Nominations from the floor for positions on boards or committees shall comply with criteria and restrictions established by the Nominating Committee and set forth in materials provided to each voting member of the assembly (ELCA 19.11.C21.a.).

See Section VIII—Report of the Nominating Committee—of the *Pre-Assembly Report* for details on restrictions.

A former full-time or part-time employee shall not be eligible for three years subsequent to such employment for nomination or election to the board of a separately incorporated ministry or committee related to the churchwide unit or office in which the employee served (ELCA 19.06.A22.).

So long as the number of incumbent members from a given synod serving on a board or committee with terms not expiring plus the number of positions on the same board or committee to which individuals from the same synod already have been nominated (whether by the Nominating Committee or from the floor) total less than the maximum number of two individuals from the same synod who may serve on that board or committee, an individual from the same synod may be nominated for another position on that board or committee, provided other criteria and restrictions are met. Individuals from the same synod may be nominated for a position on a board or committee to which individuals from the same synod already have been nominated, provided other criteria and restrictions are met (ELCA 19.11.C21.b.).

For Church Council: Restrictions on Nominations

The members of the Church Council, except the chair of the Conference of Bishops and the treasurer of this church, shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly.

- a. In preparation for the Churchwide Assembly, the Church Council shall determine how this church's commitment to inclusive representation will affect the next election to the Church Council. For 32 of the council members, the Nominating Committee shall invite each eligible synod to submit suggested nominees and shall then nominate persons who fulfill the categories assigned by the Church Council. With respect to the other nominees, the Church Council shall review its size and composition and take into consideration the experience and expertise of existing members and synod nominees as well as the needs of the council in seeking to fulfill its duties and responsibilities. Based upon this analysis, the Church Council shall instruct the Nominating Committee to provide nominations in specific categories for the remaining positions up to 13.
- b. Excluding the churchwide officers and the chair of the Conference of Bishops, there shall not be more than two members of the Church Council from a synod. The Church Council shall have at least two members from each region.
- c. No synod bishop, with the exception of the chair of the Conference of Bishops, shall serve as a voting member of the Church Council.
- d. The terms of office of persons elected to regular terms on the Church Council by the Churchwide Assembly shall begin at the conclusion of the Churchwide Assembly at which such persons were elected (ELCA 19.02.).

Except as otherwise provided, the Nominating Committee shall nominate two persons for each council or committee position, according to the process described in continuing resolutions, for which an election will be held by the Churchwide Assembly. Nominations from the floor, where permitted in the nomination process, shall be presented in the specific category named by the Nominating Committee and shall therefore meet the same criteria as the persons against whom the nominee is nominated. In the materials provided in advance to each member of the assembly, the

Nominating Committee shall set forth the specific criteria applicable to each category that must be met by persons nominated from the floor (ELCA 19.11.02.).

Nominations for positions on the Church Council shall comply with criteria and restrictions established by the Church Council and Nominating Committee and set forth in materials provided to each voting member of the assembly (ELCA 19.11.D21.).

On behalf of the Nominating Committee, the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—in the year preceding each regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly—shall solicit from eligible synods on a rotating basis the names of two persons in specified categories, in keeping with the principles of organization as specified in Chapter 5 of this constitution, for possible election to the Church Council. Upon their nomination by the assemblies of the respective synods, the names of the two persons shall be presented to the Nominating Committee for submission to the Churchwide Assembly. In the event that any nominee withdraws or is disqualified from possible service, the Nominating Committee shall request that the nominee's synod provide a replacement name. In the event that the vacancy occurs subsequent to the preparation of the report of the Nominating Committee to the Churchwide Assembly, a floor nomination shall be provided from the same synod as the original nominee. Except as provided herein, no floor nominations for positions on the Church Council shall be permitted at the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 19.02.A24.).

See Section VIII—Report of the Nominating Committee—of the *Pre-Assembly Report* for details on restrictions.

For Nominating Committee: Restrictions on Nominations

The Church Council shall place in nomination the names of two persons for each position. The committee shall consist of at least one member but no more than three members from any region. Nominations from the floor shall also be permitted, but each floor nomination shall be presented in the specific category named by the Church Council and shall therefore meet the same criteria as the persons against whom the nominee is nominated. In the materials provided in advance to each member of the assembly, the Church Council shall set forth the specific criteria applicable to each category that must be met by persons nominated from the floor (ELCA 19.11.01.).

Nominations from the floor for positions on the Nominating Committee shall comply with criteria and restrictions established by the Church Council and set forth in materials provided to each voting member of the assembly (ELCA 19.11.E21.a.).

So long as the number of incumbent members from a given region serving on the Nominating Committee with terms not expiring plus the number of Nominating Committee positions to which individuals from the same region have already been nominated (whether by the Church Council or from the floor) total less than the maximum number of three individuals from the same region who may serve on the Nominating Committee, an individual from the same region may be nominated for another Nominating Committee position, provided other criteria and restrictions are met. Provided other criteria and restrictions are met, individuals may be nominated for a Nominating Committee position for which someone from the same region has already been nominated (ELCA 19.11.E21.b.).

PART THIRTEEN: ELECTION PROCEDURES

Election Procedures Utilizing the Common Ballot

The common ballot is used in those elections when the ecclesiastical or nominating ballot is not used (ELCA 19.11.F24.a.).

In each case in which there are floor nominations, there shall be a preliminary ballot that shall include the names of the nominees presented by the Nominating Committee or the Church Council, and the person or persons nominated from the floor, where permitted. The names of the two persons receiving the highest number of votes cast shall be placed on the final ballot (ELCA 19.11.04.).

Each ticket for which an election is held will be considered a separate ballot (ELCA 19.11.F24.b.).

A voting member may vote for only one nominee on each ticket (ELCA 19.11.F24.c.).

Failure to vote for a nominee for every ticket does not invalidate a ballot for the tickets for which a nominee is marked (ELCA 19.11.F24.d.).

Ballots must be marked in accordance with the instructions presented in plenary session (ELCA 19.11.F24.e.).

Unless otherwise ordered by the assembly, polls for the first common ballot close at the time designated in the assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure (ELCA 19.11.F24.f.).

(See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

On the second ballot, the polls will remain open for a reasonable time, as determined by the chair, to permit members to record their votes (ELCA 19.11.F24.g.).

(See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

On the second ballot, the first position on each ticket shall be given to the nominee who received the greatest number of votes on the first ballot. If two nominees are tied for the highest number of votes, their respective positions shall be in alphabetical order (ELCA 19.11.F24.h.).

Majority Required for Election

In all elections by the Churchwide Assembly, other than for the presiding bishop, vice president, and secretary, a majority of the votes cast on the first ballot shall be necessary for election. If an election does not occur on the first ballot, the names of the two persons receiving the highest number of votes cast shall be placed on the second ballot. On the second ballot, a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election (ELCA 19.05.02.).

Breaking Ties

On the first common ballot, the blank ballots of the treasurer and vice president shall be held by the chair of the Elections Committee to be presented to the treasurer for vote only in those elections where a tie would otherwise exist, and to be presented to the vice president for vote only in those elections to break a tie remaining after the ballot of the treasurer has been counted (ELCA 19.11.G21.b.).

On the second common ballot, the marked ballot of the treasurer shall be held by the chair of the Elections Committee and shall be counted only where necessary to break a tie that would otherwise exist (ELCA 19.11.G21.c.).

PART FOURTEEN: BUDGET PROPOSALS

Budget Procedures

The presiding bishop shall ... provide for the preparation of the budget for the churchwide organization (ELCA 13.21.f.).

At the direction of the presiding bishop, the executive for administration shall ... develop the budget for the churchwide organization and report to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly through the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council with regard to the preparation of the budget (ELCA 15.12.A22.d.).

A Budget and Finance Committee shall be composed of members of the Church Council elected by the council. The treasurer of this church shall serve as an *ex officio* member of the committee. This committee shall have staff services provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Office of the Treasurer. The committee shall prepare and present a comprehensive budget to the Church Council for its consideration and presentation to the Churchwide Assembly. The committee shall relate to the work of the Office of the Treasurer (ELCA 14.41.A15.).

The Church Council, upon recommendation of the presiding bishop, shall submit budget proposals for approval by the Churchwide Assembly and authorize expenditures within the parameters of approved budgets (ELCA 14.21.05.).

The Churchwide Assembly shall ... adopt a budget for the churchwide organization (ELCA 12.21.e.).

Each synod shall remit to the churchwide organization a percentage or amount of all donor-unrestricted receipts contributed to it by the congregations of the synod. The actual percentage or amount shall be determined through individual consultations with each synod. Consultations may recognize and include receipts other than unrestricted receipts in establishing and reporting the synod's remittance to the churchwide organization (ELCA 10.71.).

Proposed amendments to the budget must be submitted to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.) Each amendment must be supported by one other voting member. The secretary shall refer such proposed amendments to the Budget and Finance Committee. During the consideration of the budget by the assembly, the Budget and Finance Committee shall report on the implications of each proposed amendment.

Any amendment to the budget that increases a current program proposal of, or adds a current program proposal to, a churchwide unit must include a corresponding decrease in some other current program proposal of the same or another churchwide unit(s) and/or increase in revenues. Any amendment to the budget that proposes an increase in revenues shall require an affirmative vote by at least two-thirds of those present and voting.

The assembly may refer to the Church Council for final action any amendment to the budget that has been presented in accordance with these Rules of Organization and Procedure. Such referral shall not preclude the assembly from acting on other budget amendments or from adopting the budget.

Appropriations

When a motion calling for an appropriation comes before the Churchwide Assembly from any source other than the Church Council or a memorial from a synod, it shall be referred at once to the Reference and Counsel Committee. The Reference and Counsel Committee shall refer the proposed appropriation to the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council. The Budget and Finance Committee may consult with the churchwide unit(s) affected by the proposed appropriation. The Budget and Finance Committee may conclude that it cannot evaluate adequately the proposed appropriation prior to assembly adjournment and may request that the Church Council be designated to

receive the evaluation later and to determine whether or not the proposed appropriation shall be authorized. The findings of the Budget and Finance Committee shall be forwarded to the Reference and Counsel Committee, which shall then make its recommendation to the Churchwide Assembly. If the report of the Reference and Counsel Committee is negative, a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting shall be required for adoption.

A proposed appropriation that originates with a synod through a memorial will be handled in the same way as in this preceding rule, except that reference shall be to the Memorials Committee rather than to the Reference and Counsel Committee.

New Studies or Research Proposals

Each proposal by a voting member for a study or research project shall be made as a main motion and shall be referred to the Reference and Counsel Committee. The Reference and Counsel Committee shall refer the proposal to the Office of the Secretary, which, in consultation with the churchwide unit to which the proposal is directed, will seek to determine the purpose, relationship to existing studies and research projects or current programs, potential value, overall costs including staff requirements, and availability of budget and staff. The Office of the Secretary may conclude that it cannot evaluate adequately the proposal prior to assembly adjournment and request that the Church Council be designated to receive the evaluation at a later time and determine whether or not the study or research project should be initiated. The findings of the Office of the Secretary shall be submitted to the Reference and Counsel Committee, which may make its recommendation to the assembly. If the recommendation calls for a new appropriation, the matter also shall be referred at once to the Budget and Finance Committee for consideration and report to the Reference and Counsel Committee. If the report of the Reference and Counsel Committee is negative, a two-thirds vote of the voting members present and voting shall be required for adoption.

A proposal that originates with a synod through a memorial shall be handled the same way, except that reference shall be to the Memorials Committee, rather than to the Reference and Counsel Committee.

Process for Initiation or Reconsideration of Social Statements

The process for initiating the preparation of a social statement or commencing a revision or removal of a social statement adopted at a prior Churchwide Assembly shall be governed by the document, “Policies and Procedures for Addressing Social Concerns,” which was adopted by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly (CA97.05.21) and revised by the Church Council in 2006 (CC06.11.51), 2011 (CC11.04.28), and 2018 (CC18.11.23o).

PART FIFTEEN: AMENDMENTS TO GOVERNING DOCUMENTS

Constitutional Amendments

This constitution may be amended only through either of the following procedures:

- a. The Church Council may propose an amendment, with an official notice to be sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. The adoption of such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the members of the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting.
- b. An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more members of the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed amendment shall be referred to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation, following which it shall come before the assembly. If such an amendment is approved by a two-thirds vote of members present and voting, such an amendment shall become effective only if adopted by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at the next regular Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 22.11.).

A constitutional amendment may be proposed only by a main motion.

A proposed constitutional amendment must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary’s assistant prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

Bylaw Amendments

Bylaws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or amended at any regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly when presented in writing by the Church Council or by at least 15 members of the assembly. An amendment proposed by at least 15 members of the assembly shall immediately be submitted to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation. An amendment may not be placed before the assembly for action sooner than the day following its presentation to the assembly unless it has been presented in writing by the Church Council and sent with an official notice to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting shall be necessary for adoption (ELCA 22.21.).

A bylaw amendment may be proposed only by a main motion.

A proposed bylaw amendment must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.) The secretary first shall report to the assembly any bylaw amendments so submitted and the amendments then shall be referred to the Reference and Counsel Committee.

Any floor amendment that is to be offered to a bylaw amendment proposed by the Church Council must be submitted in accordance with the requirement for bylaw amendments that are proposed by voting members.

Continuing Resolutions

Continuing resolutions not in conflict with the constitution or bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be adopted or amended by a majority vote of the Churchwide Assembly or by a two-thirds vote of the Church Council. Such continuing resolutions become effective immediately upon adoption. Matters related to the administrative functions of the churchwide organization shall be set forth in the continuing resolutions (ELCA 22.31.).

Should the conference, committee, or board in question disagree with the action of the Church Council in amending a continuing resolution, it may appeal the decision to the Churchwide Assembly. (See ELCA 10.81.03.)

A continuing resolution amendment may be proposed only by a main motion.

A proposed continuing resolution amendment must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

Amendments to the Constitution for Synods

The *Constitution for Synods* contains mandatory provisions that incorporate and record therein provisions of the constitution and bylaws of this church. Amendments shall be made in accordance with the required provisions in Chapter 18 of the *Constitution for Synods*. Non-mandatory provisions shall not be inconsistent with the constitution and bylaws of this church (ELCA 10.13.).

An amendment to the *Constitution for Synods* may be proposed only by a main motion.

A proposed amendment to the *Constitution for Synods* must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

Amendments to the Model Constitution for Congregations

A *Model Constitution for Congregations* shall be provided by this church. Amendments to the *Model Constitution for Congregations* shall be made in the same manner as prescribed in Chapter 22 for amendments of the bylaws of this church (ELCA 9.53.02.).

An amendment to the *Model Constitution for Congregations* may be proposed only by a main motion.

A proposed amendment to the *Model Constitution for Congregations* must be submitted electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline. (See PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*.)

En Bloc Resolution for Amendments to Governing Documents

Amendments to the constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions as recommended by the Church Council in a report distributed to assembly members prior to, or at, the first business session of the assembly, may be approved by *en bloc* resolutions when so proposed by the Church Council.

Voting members who desire the assembly to discuss a particular amendment that is included in the *en bloc* resolutions may request that the particular amendment be removed from the proposed *en bloc* resolutions, provided the member's request is supported by 10 other voting members. Such request shall be made in accordance with the following paragraph. The assembly then will consider and vote separately on the particular proposed amendment. After removals, the *en bloc* resolutions shall be voted upon without amendment or debate.

To call for such separate consideration, a voting member, with the support of 10 other voting members, must submit notification electronically (or on a paper form if the electronic form is not functional) to the secretary of this church or the secretary's assistant prior to the established deadline (see PART EIGHTEEN: Deadlines *below*).

Notice shall be given by the secretary of this church to the assembly of which constitutional provisions or bylaw proposals have been removed from the *en bloc* resolutions by specific voting members.

Vote to Adopt Certain Recommendations from Reports

A two-thirds vote of the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting shall be required to adopt recommendations from any report that requires amendment of a constitutional provision or bylaw of this church for implementation.

Reconsideration or Rescission Prohibited

After the adoption by the assembly of a constitutional or bylaw amendment, a motion for reconsideration or a motion to rescind or amend such action is not in order.

PART SIXTEEN: ELECTIONS OF OFFICERS

Election Procedures

Set forth hereafter are the procedures for the elections of the presiding bishop, the vice president, and the secretary, whether or not there will be an election at this assembly for any of these positions. Elections are required because of completion of the specified term for a position or when a vacancy otherwise occurs.

Background Checks and Screening

Background checks and screening shall be required and completed for persons nominated as churchwide officers prior to their election, if possible, or as soon as practical after their election. The specific procedures and timing of background checks and screening shall be determined by the Church Council (ELCA 19.01.B09.).

The Protocol for Churchwide Officer Background Checks and Screening and the forms which the nominees need to complete, including a Biographical Information Form, a Disclosure Form, and a Background Check Disclosure and Release Information Form, are available.

Restrictions on Nominations for Officers

The officers shall be the presiding bishop, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Each officer shall be a voting member of a congregation of this church (ELCA 13.11.).

The presiding bishop shall be a minister of Word and Sacrament of this church (ELCA 13.21.).

The presiding bishop shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly to a six-year term and serve until a successor takes office (ELCA 13.22.).

The presiding bishop shall be a full-time, salaried position (ELCA 13.22.02.).

The vice president shall be a layperson (ELCA 13.31.).

The vice president shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly to a six-year term and serve until a successor takes office (ELCA 13.32.).

The vice president may perform such other tasks for the benefit of this church as the Church Council directs, and may be compensated as the Church Council determines (ELCA 13.32.02.).

The secretary shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly to a six-year term and serve until a successor takes office (ELCA 13.42.).

The secretary shall be a full-time, salaried position (ELCA 13.42.02.).

The secretary may be either a rostered minister or a lay person.

Ecclesiastical Ballot Defined

An “ecclesiastical ballot” for the election of officers (other than treasurer) of the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is an election process:

- a. in which on the first ballot the name of any eligible individual may be submitted for nomination by a voting member of the assembly;
- b. through which the possibility of election to office exists on any ballot by achievement of the required number of votes cast by voting members of the assembly applicable to a particular ballot;
- c. that precludes spoken floor nominations but allows nomination of persons not in attendance at the meeting;
- d. in which those casting ballots have primary responsibility to nominate persons willing to serve if elected;
- e. in which the first ballot is the nominating ballot if no election occurs on the first ballot;
- f. in which the first ballot defines the total slate of nominees for possible election on a subsequent ballot, with no additional nominations;
- g. in which each synod bishop will seek to inform nominees from that synod that they have been nominated and that they may withdraw if they do not seek election;
- h. that allows, after the reporting of the first ballot, the persons nominated to withdraw their names prior to the casting of the second ballot;

- i. in which any name appearing on the second ballot may not be subsequently withdrawn;
- j. that does not preclude an assembly's adoption of rules that permit, at a defined point in the election process and for a defined period of time, speeches to the assembly by nominees or their representatives and/or a question-and-answer forum in which the nominees or their representatives participate; and
- k. in which the number of names that appear on any ballot subsequent to the second ballot shall be determined in accordance with provisions of the governing documents. (ELCA 19.01.C19.).

Election Procedures Utilizing the Ecclesiastical Ballot

- a. The chair will announce what type of voting system is to be used for the election.
- b. On the first ballot for each office being selected by ecclesiastical or nominating ballot, both the first and last names of a nominee should be used. Members should endeavor to use correct spelling and should provide any additional accurate information identifying the nominee, such as title, position, synod, congregation, or residence.
- c. A member may vote for only one nominee on each ballot.
- d. Ballots should not be marked prior to the time the chair advises the voting members to do so.
- e. When the results of the first ballot are presented, the chair of the assembly will announce when and how persons nominated may withdraw their names prior to the casting of the second ballot.
- f. On the second and subsequent ballots, the first position on each ballot shall be given to the nominee who received the greatest number of votes on the immediately preceding ballot, with the remaining positions assigned to the other nominees in descending order of the number of votes received on the immediately preceding ballot. If two or more nominees were tied with the same number of votes on the immediately preceding ballot, their respective positions shall be in alphabetical order.
- g. On each ticket, the polls will remain open for a reasonable time, as determined by the chair, to permit voting members to record their votes (ELCA 19.01.D24.).

Election of the Presiding Bishop

In a year when the presiding bishop, vice president, or secretary shall be elected, those who will serve as voting members of the upcoming Churchwide Assembly shall be invited to identify the names of up to three persons per office who might be considered for election as presiding bishop, vice president, or secretary. Names shall be submitted to the Office of the Secretary at least four months prior to the assembly. The Office of the Secretary shall contact those persons identified and request biographical information. At least 30 days prior to the Churchwide Assembly, the biographical information received from those persons open to consideration shall be distributed to the voting members (ELCA 19.01.A24.).

The presiding bishop shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. The election shall proceed without oral nominations. If the first ballot for presiding bishop does not result in an election, it shall be considered a nominating ballot. On the first ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. Thereafter only such votes as are cast for persons who received votes on the first or nominating ballot shall be valid. On the second ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. On the third ballot, the voting shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the votes cast shall be required for election. On the fourth ballot, voting shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot, and 60 percent of the votes cast shall elect. On subsequent ballots, voting shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot, and a majority of the votes cast shall elect (ELCA 19.01.02.).

Names pre-identified and posted on the assembly website or through the Churchwide Assembly Guide prior to the assembly shall be removed from the site and the application following the adoption of these rules. The biographical information shall be provided for the top seven nominees plus ties after the second ballot.

Those wishing to withdraw and not let their names go to the second ballot may do so in paper form to the Nominations/Elections desk in the registration area, electronically via email (nominations@elca.org), or by phone in the hearing of two members of the elections committee. The deadline for withdrawing is Tuesday, July 29, at 12:15 p.m.

If there is no election on the second ballot, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) shall complete the Biographical Information Form, Disclosure Form, and Background Check Disclosure and Release Information Form approved by the Executive Committee of the Church Council. Nominees shall receive instructions on how to complete these forms.

Prior to the third ballot for presiding bishop, biographical data will be distributed for the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position).

All nominees will be present for the following forums or be permitted to address the assembly by remote communication.

Prior to the third ballot for presiding bishop, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) will be invited to address the assembly, with each speech limited to four minutes. If any such person is not present at the assembly and is unable to address the assembly by remote communication, the bishop of the synod of such person's roster shall, in consultation with such person, if possible, designate an alternate to speak on behalf of such person.

Prior to the fourth ballot for presiding bishop, the three nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the third ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) are invited to respond to questions. Voting members may submit questions electronically to the secretary of this church or to the secretary's assistant by the deadline of Tuesday, July 29 at 12:15 p.m. From the questions submitted, the Executive Committee of the Church Council, excluding the presiding bishop and nominees, shall select a sample of questions and determine the process to be followed. The question-and-answer period shall be moderated by an individual appointed by the Executive Committee of the Church Council. Each of the nominees shall be asked questions in rotating order, and each response shall be no longer than two minutes. Nominees are required to use their time to respond to the question asked and may not use their time to present on matters not related to the question.

Election of the Vice President

The vice president shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. The election shall proceed without oral nominations. If the first ballot for vice president does not result in an election, it shall be considered a nominating ballot. On the first ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. Thereafter only such votes as are cast for persons who received votes on the first or nominating ballot shall be valid. On the second ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. On the third ballot, the voting shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the second ballot and two-thirds of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. On the fourth ballot, voting shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot and 60 percent of the votes cast shall elect. On subsequent ballots, voting shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot and a majority of votes cast shall elect (ELCA 19.01.03.).

Those wishing to withdraw and not let their names go to the second ballot may do so in paper form to the Nominations/Elections desk in the registration area, electronically via email (nominations@elca.org), or by phone in the hearing of two members of the elections committee.

If there is no election on the second ballot, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot shall complete the Biographical Information Form, Disclosure Form, and Background Check Disclosure and Release Information Form approved by the Executive Committee of the Church Council. Nominees shall receive instructions on how to complete these forms.

Prior to the third ballot for vice president, biographical data will be distributed for the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position).

All nominees will be present for the following forums or be permitted to address the assembly by remote communication.

Prior to the third ballot for vice president, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) will be invited to address the assembly, with each speech limited to four minutes. If any such person is not present at the assembly and is unable to address the assembly by remote communication, the bishop of the synod of such person's congregation membership shall, in consultation with such person, if possible, designate an alternate to speak on behalf of such person.

Prior to the fourth ballot for vice president, each of the three nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the third ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) will be asked in rotating order to respond to three questions determined by the Executive Committee of the Church Council, excluding the vice president and nominees. Each nominee's response to each question shall be limited to two minutes. Nominees are required to use their time to respond to the question asked and may not use their time to present on matters not related to the question.

Election of the Secretary

In a year when the presiding bishop, vice president, or secretary shall be elected, those who will serve as voting members of the upcoming Churchwide Assembly shall be invited to identify the names of up to three persons per office who might be considered for election as presiding bishop, vice president, or secretary. Names shall be submitted to the Office of the Secretary at least four months prior to the assembly. The Office of the Secretary shall contact those persons identified and request biographical information. At least 30 days prior to the Churchwide Assembly, the biographical information received from those persons open to consideration shall be distributed to the voting members (ELCA 19.01.A24.).

The secretary shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. The election shall proceed without oral nominations. If the first ballot for secretary does not result in an election, it shall be considered a nominating ballot. On the first ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. Thereafter only such votes as are cast for persons who received votes on the first or nominating ballot shall be valid. On the second ballot, three-fourths of the votes cast shall be required for election. On the third ballot, the voting shall be limited to the seven persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the second ballot and two-thirds of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. On the fourth ballot, voting shall be limited to the three persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot and 60 percent of the votes cast shall elect. On subsequent ballots, voting shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) receiving the greatest number of votes on the previous ballot and a majority of the votes cast shall elect (ELCA 19.01.04.).

Names pre-identified and posted on the assembly website or through the Churchwide Assembly Guide prior to the assembly shall be removed from the site and the application following the adoption of these rules. The biographical information shall be provided for the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position).

Those wishing to withdraw and not let their names go to the second ballot may do so in paper form to the Nominations/Elections desk in the registration area, electronically via email (nominations@elca.org), or by phone in the hearing of two members of the elections committee. The deadline for withdrawing is Thursday, July 31, at 12:15 p.m.

If there is no election on the second ballot, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) shall complete the Biographical Information Form, Disclosure Form, and Background Check Disclosure and Release Information Form approved by the Executive Committee of the Church Council. Nominees shall receive instructions on how to complete these forms.

Prior to the third ballot for secretary, biographical data will be distributed for the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position).

All nominees will be present for the following forums or be permitted to address the assembly by remote communication.

Prior to the third ballot for secretary, the seven nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the second ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) will be invited to address the assembly, with each speech limited to four minutes. If any such person is not present at the assembly and is unable to address the assembly by remote communication, the bishop of the synod of such person's congregation membership shall, in consultation with such person, if possible, designate an alternate to speak on behalf of such person.

Prior to the fourth ballot for secretary, each of the three nominees receiving the greatest numbers of votes on the third ballot (plus ties in the final qualifying position) will be asked in rotating order to respond to three questions determined by the Executive Committee of the Church Council, excluding the secretary and nominees. Each nominee's response to each question shall be limited to two minutes. Nominees are required to use their time to respond to the question asked and may not use their time to present on matters not related to the question.

Majority Required for Election

On the final ballot for the election of presiding bishop, vice president, and secretary of this church, when only two names appear on the ballot, a majority of the legal votes cast is necessary for election.

Breaking Ties

On the ballot for the election of the presiding bishop, vice president, and secretary, when only two names appear, the marked ballot of the treasurer shall be held by the chair of the Elections Committee and shall be counted only where necessary to break a tie that would otherwise exist (ELCA 19.11.G21.a.).

PART SEVENTEEN: STATUS OF REPORTS

Assembly Reports

At least 20 days prior to an assembly the secretary shall prepare and distribute to each congregation and to the voting members-elect a bulletin of reports. Distribution to congregations may be accomplished by posting the report on the website of this church (ELCA 12.31.03.).

Reports of the Presiding Bishop and Secretary of This Church

Following presentation, the presiding bishop's report and the secretary's report shall be referred to the Reference and Counsel Committee.

Status of Reports

All reports published in the bulletin of reports shall be treated as having been received by the assembly without formal vote.

Distribution of Materials

Materials may be distributed on the floor of the assembly only with the written consent of the secretary of this church. In cases where the secretary does not consent, appeal may be made to the Reference and Counsel Committee. That committee's decision shall be final.

PART EIGHTEEN: DEADLINES

Monday, July 28, 2025

- 9:15 p.m.** Separate consideration (removal from *en bloc*) of responses to synod memorials
Substitute responses to synod memorials
Separate consideration (removal from *en bloc*) 2025 archival of certain social policy resolutions
Separate consideration (removal from *en bloc*) of the constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions
Proposed changes to the amendments to the constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions
Proposed amendments from the floor to the constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions

Tuesday, July 29, 2025

- 12:15 p.m.** **Nominations from the floor**
Proposed amendments to the Proposed Social Statement on Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All and implementing resolutions
Withdrawal from ballot for presiding bishop
Questions for presiding bishop question-and-answer forum
- 6:15 p.m.** Proposed amendments to 2026–2028 budget proposal

Wednesday, July 30, 2025

- 10:45 a.m.** Non-germane resolutions
Proposed amendments to Proposed Edited Social Statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009)
Proposed amendments to Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommendations
- 1:45 p.m.** First Common Ballot

Thursday, July 31, 2025

- 12:15 p.m.** Withdrawal from ballot for secretary

PART NINETEEN: ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Use of computers and other electronic devices, such as cellphones (in texting mode only), smart phones, tablets, and other wireless electronic communication devices is allowed in the plenary hall during assembly sessions, provided that such devices are in a silent mode and do not disturb voting members. Speaking on any device is prohibited in the plenary hall during assembly sessions. Members and others are expected to be courteous and respectful and are encouraged to leave the hall if they intend to engage in communication activities that are not related to the work of the assembly. Use of computers and other electronic devices is precluded during worship.

Members and others using ELCA-issued electronic equipment shall ensure that such equipment is used for assembly purposes only and in a manner that is consistent with good stewardship and the mission and ministry of this

church. Use of such equipment and related technology is contingent upon agreement to the terms and conditions of the use agreement.

PART TWENTY: OTHER MATTERS

College Corporation Meetings

The voting members of the Churchwide Assembly also constitute the voting members of certain college corporations that hold meetings as part of the agenda of the assembly. The assembly will recess to conduct the corporation meeting(s) and reconvene at the conclusion of the corporation meeting(s) or at the beginning of the next scheduled session of the assembly. Quorum requirements for college corporation meetings are specified in the governing documents of each college. The quorum requirement for the Churchwide Assembly does not apply to college corporation meetings.

Amendments to Continuing Resolutions Recommended by the Office of the Secretary

CONSTITUTION, BYLAWS, AND CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA®

Chapter 10. SYNODS

10.30. OFFICERS

- 10.31.B25** *Association of Synod Vice Presidents: The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the synod vice presidents of this church. The churchwide vice president shall be a member with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. Triennially, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall elect a chair and vice chair to preside at meetings.*
- a. The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall provide to synod vice presidents opportunities for orientation, worship, spiritual renewal, continuing education, collaboration, and leadership development. To fulfill these responsibilities, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall:*
 - 1) meet twice every three years (in years in which churchwide assemblies are held, the association meeting shall occur in conjunction with the assembly) and periodically gather informally as desired;*
 - 2) provide a forum in which goals, objectives, and strategies concerning lay leadership may be developed and shared;*
 - 3) serve as a resource for training and guidance in the governance of this church;*
 - 4) assist the vice presidents in their role as collaborative leaders with bishops in fostering the work of the synods; and*
 - 5) when requested, provide advice and counsel to the Church Council and others holding leadership positions in this church.*
 - b. The Association of Synod Vice Presidents may establish committees as the members from time to time may determine to assist in fulfillment of its responsibilities.*
 - c. Staff services for meetings of the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be provided by the synod relations staff in the Office of the Secretary.*

Chapter 12. CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY

12.30. MEETINGS OF THE CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY

- 12.31.A25.** *Certain proposals that are scheduled on the agenda for assembly action or information at the Churchwide Assembly are the subject of hearings. Hearings for the Churchwide Assembly may be held either during the assembly or by remote communication prior to the assembly. Notice of the hearings shall be provided electronically.*
- a. Voting members, advisory members, resource members, and other categories approved by the Church Council may attend with voice.*
 - b. Other categories of non-members may attend the hearing, if space permits, and shall not have voice.*
 - c. The chair of the hearing shall endeavor to maintain decorum and order. For serious breaches of order, the chair may call upon the assistance of sergeants-at-arms, if the hearing is held in-person, or technology support staff, if the hearing is held remotely.*
 - d. Insofar as is possible during discussion, a speaker on one side of the question shall be followed by a speaker on the other side.*
 - e. Hearings have no legislative authority.*
- Hearing procedures shall follow Robert's Rules of Order, latest edition, unless otherwise ordered by the Church Council.*

12.41.18. Other Non-Voting Members. Other categories of non-voting members may be established by the Churchwide Assembly.

12.41.C24C25. *Congregation Observers.* Each congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may register with the secretary of this church one congregation observer for the Churchwide Assembly prior to May 31 in the year of a Churchwide Assembly.

....

b. *A registration fee shall be established by the secretary of this church for registration and related costs, including enabling observers to receive the same meals as are provided for voting members.*

c. *Transportation costs, housing, other meals, and related expenses shall be the responsibility of the registered observer or sending congregation.*

Chapter 15.

CHURCHWIDE ADMINISTRATION AND OFFICES

15.10. OFFICES AND ADMINISTRATION

15.11.01. There shall be the following offices:

- a. Office of the Presiding Bishop;
- b. Office of the Secretary; and
- c. Office of the Treasurer.

~~15.11.A20. The work of the offices shall be coordinated through the Operations Leadership Team.~~

15.11.02. Administrative Team. The presiding bishop, secretary, treasurer, and executive for administration, along with the executive directors of the churchwide units, shall function as an administrative team, directed by the presiding bishop. The presiding bishop may appoint up to two additional members to the administrative team for terms of one year with the possibility of reappointment. This administrative team shall assist the presiding bishop in providing leadership, planning, oversight, management, supervision, and coordination in the operation of the churchwide organization.

15.11.B20. Leadership Teams

~~Three leadership teams shall complement the work of the Administrative Team in providing collaborative leadership for planning, oversight, and management of the churchwide organization and other churchwide efforts. Each team may be composed of a combination of churchwide staff, synod leadership, and representatives from congregations, networks, and/or affiliated ministries, appointed by the presiding bishop.~~

~~a. Strategic Leadership Team: The Strategic Leadership team, convened by the presiding bishop, shall set, lead, and evaluate the strategic framework to achieve and support priority goals and initiatives of this church.~~

~~b. Operations Leadership Team: The Operations Leadership team, convened by the executive for administration, shall provide efficient and effective leadership, planning, oversight, management, and coordination of the daily operations of the churchwide organization, including infrastructure and resource management (human and financial) and governance related matters.~~

~~c. Innovation Leadership Team: The Innovation Leadership team, convened by the executive director for innovation, shall assess, implement, and evaluate experimental ideas and initiatives to further this church's shared mission.~~

15.12. OFFICE OF THE PRESIDING BISHOP

15.12.A22A25. Responsibilities of the Executive for Administration

The executive for administration shall be accountable to the presiding bishop and shall serve as chief administrator of the churchwide organization. The executive for administration shall be elected by the Church Council upon nomination of the presiding bishop and shall serve coterminous with the term of the presiding bishop. At the direction of the presiding bishop, the executive for administration shall:

....

e. *provide staff services and documentation to the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee and the Board Development Committee of the Church Council; and*

- f. oversee churchwide strategic communications, including branding, messaging, and content development; and
- g. provide for building management and coordinate central services for the churchwide organization.

15.12.~~B21~~**B25. Responsibility for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations**

Responsibility for ecumenical, inter-Lutheran, and inter-religious relations shall be exercised by the Office of the Presiding Bishop by upholding this church's ecumenical vision and inter-religious commitments through various bilateral discussions, dialogues, and multi-lateral and conciliar bodies and initiatives, as well as in supporting synods, congregations, and the churchwide organization in their ecumenical and inter-religious vocation. This includes guiding reception of theological agreements, implementation of inter-religious commitments, and advising on relational matters. Responsibility also includes supporting membership in ecumenical and inter-religious organizations such as the World Council of Churches, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, and The Lutheran World Federation. The presiding bishop, who serves as this church's chief ecumenical and inter-religious officer, shall appoint an executive who will assist the presiding bishop, coordinate the staff and groups that engage in this work, and recommend policies, guidelines, and agreements through the presiding bishop to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly.

- a. ~~The presiding bishop shall appoint an executive who shall coordinate the ecumenical, inter-Lutheran, and inter-religious activities of this church, and shall recommend, through the presiding bishop, policies to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly. To fulfill these responsibilities, the executive shall:~~
 - 1) ~~assist the presiding bishop of this church in carrying out the presiding bishop's role as the chief ecumenical officer of this church;~~
 - 2) ~~administer the ecumenical, inter-Lutheran, and inter-religious discussions (including bilateral dialogues) in which this church is involved;~~
 - 3) ~~provide active support of the membership of this church in ecumenical organizations, such as World Council of Churches, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and The Lutheran World Federation;~~
 - 4) ~~guide the process of reception of theological agreements and give advice in matters of fellowship and unity with other Lutheran churches; and~~
 - 5) ~~assist synods, congregations, and churchwide units in carrying out their ecumenical, inter-Lutheran, and inter-religious responsibilities by giving guidance and by preparing guidelines for action.~~
- ba. From time to time as necessary, the Executive Committee of the Church Council shall convene as the U.S.A. National Committee of The Lutheran World Federation. The U.S.A. National Committee also consists of the members of this church who serve as voting members of the council of The Lutheran World Federation. An ELCA advisor to the council of The Lutheran World Federation and/or the executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations shall serve as consultants to the U.S.A. National Committee of The Lutheran World Federation.
- eb. Ecumenical representatives shall be chosen by the presiding bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in consultation with the Executive Committee of the Church Council. These representatives include members of delegations to national and international inter-church entities in which this church holds membership and members of inter-Lutheran, inter-faith, and ecumenical discussions, including and bilateral dialogues and conversations, in which this church participates. All such appointments shall be reported to the Church Council as information.

15.12.~~C21~~**C25. Responsibility for Human Resources ~~People Solutions~~ and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion**

Responsibility for ~~people solutions~~human resources and diversity, equity, and inclusion shall be exercised by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, which shall develop and manage the personnel policies and procedures for the churchwide organization, including policies and procedures regarding equal-employment opportunity; recruitment, interview, and selection of staff; compensation and benefits; employee-assistance programs; just and equitable employee-relations practices; performance evaluation; maintenance of personnel records; and training. In accordance with bylaw 14.21.06., the Church Council shall adopt personnel policies upon recommendation of the Office of the Presiding Bishop. The presiding bishop shall appoint an executive who shall be responsible for ~~people solutions~~human resources and this church's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

15.12.D24D25. Responsibility for Theological Discernment

~~Responsibility for theological discernment shall be exercised in by the Office of the Presiding Bishop for serving the Church's theological work by promoting, coordinating, and facilitating theological discernment of the this Church's church's message and its theological foundations in collaboration with all who share in the responsibilities to be teachers of the faith in the Church, including the Conference of Bishops, the seminary faculties, teaching theologians, theological networks, the convocation of teaching theologians, networks such as Lutheran ethicists and women theologians, the editorial staff of the publishing ministry and publications, and all rostered ministers. This includes upholding this church's commitments to address matters of theological ethics in church and society through ELCA social teaching and to advance full participation, equal opportunity, and justice through work that addresses issues including patriarchy and white supremacy, economic injustice, sexism, and gender injustice. This responsibility for serving the Church's theological work also shall encompass theological work in and commitment to discern, understand, and respond to racism, classism, and sexism and issues of justice for women in the Church and in society in order to advance full participation, equal opportunity, and justice for all. To fulfill these responsibilities, the presiding bishop shall appoint an executive who will assist the presiding bishop and coordinate the service of staff and groups that provide theological resources and support assistance in programmatic implementation.~~

15.12.E24E25. Responsibility for Development

Responsibility for planning, coordination, and management of the execution of this church's fundraising efforts and donor communications shall be exercised by the Office of the Presiding Bishop. To fulfill these responsibilities, the presiding bishop shall appoint an executive who, in collaboration with the Endowment Fund of the ELCA, shall:

- a. ~~set and implement strategy and development of donor communications, engagement, and solicitation guide strategy and development of marketing communications;~~
- b. ~~provide for Mission Support interpretation, consultation, and stewardship support for synods and congregations and consultations in collaboration with the Office of the Treasurer;~~
- c. ~~develop and execute programs to seek current gifts, major and deferred gifts, bequests, grants, and endowment funds to support ministries of this church;~~
- d. ~~engage individuals members, congregations, synods, and agencies and institutions of this church in efforts to raise financial support for the ministries of this church;~~
- e. ~~provide advice to the Office of the Treasurer in the recommendation and establishment within that office of policies and procedures for gift acceptance and management, as well as annual revenue projections;~~
- f. ~~process gifts, support constituents, steward donors, and manage constituent data of the church in collaboration with the Office of the Treasurer; and~~
- g. ~~coordinate its programs with other stewardship and financial resource development activities of this church and in alignment with its mission objectives.~~

15.12.F25. Responsibility for Worship

~~Responsibility for leadership of the worship life of this church shall be exercised by the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This includes supporting the worship ministry of this church, overseeing the development, review, interpretation, and introduction of worship resources intended for use throughout this church, and, through the presiding bishop, recommending policies related to worship and sacramental practices to the Church Council and, when appropriate, the Churchwide Assembly. Responsibility also includes assisting synods, congregations, and the churchwide organization in carrying out the ministry of worship; developing and implementing worship for churchwide assemblies and other events; providing worship opportunities for the churchwide organization; and representing the presiding bishop and the churchwide organization to other church bodies and organizations on matters related to worship. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall provide, through the Publishing House of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, worship resources and shall support the development of a variety of congregational resources that are consistent with the proclamation, prayer, worship, and sacramental practices of this church. To fulfill these responsibilities, the presiding bishop shall appoint an executive for worship.~~

15.12.G25. The Office of the Presiding Bishop shall relate to the Alliance for Faith, Science, and Technology, the Association for Christian Fundraising, the Association of Lutheran Church Musicians, and the Lutheran Music Program/Lutheran Summer Music Academy and Festival.

15.14. OFFICE OF THE TREASURER

15.14.01. The responsibilities of the Office of the Treasurer, in addition to those specified in the bylaws, shall be set forth in continuing resolutions.

15.14.A20A25. Responsibilities of the Office of the Treasurer

- a. This office shall be related to the treasurer, who shall be its full-time executive officer.
- b. This office shall have the sole authority and responsibility to establish and maintain banking relationships for the churchwide organization.
- c. This office shall have the authority to borrow; issue bonds, notes, certificates, or other evidence of obligation; or increase contingent liabilities within the overall limits determined by the Churchwide Assembly and the more restrictive limits established by the Church Council. No churchwide board shall make a commitment that binds the churchwide organization to an outside lending or other similar institution or which creates a liability of this church to such an institution without prior approval of the Office of the Treasurer.
- d. This office, through the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council, shall recommend to the Church Council a certified public accounting firm to audit the financial records of the churchwide organization. Synod financial reports shall be submitted to this office for compilation.
- e. This office shall provide for internal audit procedures of the churchwide organization.
- f. This office shall provide legal documents pertaining to the financial and property management matters of the churchwide organization. These legal documents shall be signed by the officers authorized by the Church Council.
- g. This office shall be authorized, within policies established by the Churchwide Assembly and the Church Council, to purchase or otherwise acquire title to real property; to mortgage, lease, sell, or otherwise dispose of the same; and otherwise to act on behalf of the churchwide organization regarding real property.
- h. This office shall provide for a common system of financial reporting from synods and regions.
- i. This office, within the policies established by the Church Council, shall assure the implementation of a donor gift acknowledgment process.
- j. This office, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop (Development) and the Endowment Fund of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, shall recommend:
 - 1) policy for the valuation process for noncash gifts;
 - 2) the management of assets of its life-income agreements;
 - 3) gift acceptance policies for the establishment and management of memorial funds administered by the Endowment Fund of the ELCA in cooperation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop; and
 - 4) the distribution of earned-income payments to remainder beneficiaries as regulated by the life-income, trust, and other fiduciary donor agreements held by the churchwide organization.
- k. This office shall provide for the management of operating and capital funds within the policies established by the Churchwide Assembly and the Church Council.
- l. This office shall manage capital loan funds established by the Church Council. The management shall be within policies established jointly by the Office of the Treasurer and other affected churchwide units.
- m. This office shall provide for building management and coordinate central services for the churchwide organization.
- n. This office, in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary, shall examine the risk management and insurance needs of the churchwide organization and synods.

15.14.B21B25. Responsibility for Information Technology

The treasurer shall provide for information technology and digital solutions in support of the work of the churchwide organization. The treasurer shall appoint an executive who shall be responsible for the development and review of guidelines and policies for computer standards, security of electronic data, application development, data storage and data retrieval, and shall enable use of electronic technologies and digital solutions for churchwide staff to assist in support of congregations, synods, and related institutions and agencies of this church.

Chapter 16.

UNITS OF THE CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION

16.10. CHURCHWIDE UNITS

16.11. A unit of the churchwide organization is assigned leadership responsibility for major, identified portions of the mission and ministry of this church.

16.11.A21. As it pertains to the churchwide organization, a unit may also be described as a home area.

16.11.B20B25. Identity of Units

Units of the churchwide organization, which shall function through cooperation, coordination, and collaboration, are the following:

- a. Christian Community and Leadership unit;
- b. Innovation unit; and
- c. ~~Operations unit; and~~
- d. Service and Justice unit.

Each unit, ~~except the Operations unit,~~ shall have an executive director.

16.12. Each unit shall report to the Churchwide Assembly and will report to the Church Council in the interim.

16.12.01. The responsibilities of the units shall be described in continuing resolutions.

16.12.A24A25. Responsibilities of the Christian Community and Leadership Unit

The Christian Community and Leadership unit shall foster and facilitate the work of synods, congregations, the churchwide organization, and others in reaching and welcoming more people into the Christian faith through Christian communities. It energizes and engages the core membership and works with the whole of this church to recruit, develop train, and ~~deploy send~~ lay and rostered leadership to fulfill ~~the this Church's church's~~ purpose. It works across all expressions of this church to accomplish these goals domestically and internationally.

This unit shall:

- a. create and revitalize congregations and ministries;
- b. enhance inspire and coordinate evangelism ~~and discipleship~~;
- c. oversee ~~the development of~~ multicultural ministries and collaborate with the Service and Justice unit on this development and on the commitment of this church to diversity and inclusivity;
- d. support efforts to reach and disciple new ~~people,~~ and young people, and to become more economically diverse;
- e. foster relationships with educational institutions, including participation in and support of the Network of Colleges and Universities of this church;
- f. recruit, train, and ~~help to deploy send~~ lay and rostered leaders;
- g. ~~support manage and maintain~~ the candidacy and assignment processes;
- h. coordinate the work of Young Adults in Global Mission ~~and~~;
- i. organize the ELCA Youth Gathering and the Rostered Ministers Gathering; and
- ij. oversee the chaplaincies of this church in domestic specialized ministry settings as well as federal chaplaincies both at home and abroad; ~~and~~
- j. ~~support the worship ministry of this church by overseeing the development and review of worship resources intended for use throughout this church, and recommend, through the presiding bishop, policies related to worship and sacramental practices to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly.~~

This unit shall relate to Lutheran Men in Mission, National Lutheran Campus Ministry, Inc., Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators, Inc., ~~the Order of Lutheran Franciscans, and the Evangelical Lutheran Education Association,~~ the Association of Partners in Christian Education, Lutheran Outdoor Ministry, LuMIN, the ELCA Youth Ministry Network, the Christian Education Network of the ELCA, the Lutheran Faith Community Nurse Association, and Lutheran Suicide Prevention Ministry.

16.12.C20. Responsibilities of the Operations Unit

The Operations unit shall comprise the following:

- a. ~~the Office of the Presiding Bishop;~~
- b. ~~the Office of the Secretary; and~~
- c. ~~the Office of the Treasurer.~~

16.12.D21C25. Responsibilities of the Service and Justice Unit

The Service and Justice unit shall foster and facilitate this church's engagement in service and promote efforts to call and act for justice. It shall engage in mission, service, and justice in accompaniment with churches and organizations in other countries; serve as the means through which churches in other countries engage in mission to this church and society; engage with communities, coalitions and networks, congregations, and synods in service and justice work within the territorial jurisdiction of this church; and provide guidance to members on matters of social justice.

The Service and Justice unit shall support the freedom of Christians to love and serve their neighbor through the following areas:

- a. Global Mission: sustain and accompany this church's Peoples and Communities: maintain global church-to-church relationships and mutual endeavors for evangelical witness and sharing of mission personnel; engage with synods and congregations in shared partnership of the global work;
- b. Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities: support oversee the work of the ethnic specific and multicultural ministries, serve as a resource on behalf of these communities to the wider Church and carry out and collaborate on multicultural ministries and the this church's commitment of this church to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and inclusivity;
- ~~b.c.~~ Building Resilient Communities: meet human need and enhance human dignity; work to overturn oppression and injustice; and engage members and constituents collaboratively toward the flourishing of human community and creation through domestic and international programs including ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response, and AMMPARO advocacy, development, and disaster response programming internationally and domestically; and
- ~~ed.~~ Witness in Society: equip and encourage empower members to engage with systems and processes in the public square, with local and federal government, and with corporations and the international community to promote the well-being of the human community and creation in the public square, local and federal government, and the international community; equip and encourage members to seek dignity and peace; advance justice in response to human suffering, marginalization, and exclusion; and promote equality, justice, and respect for the value of every person to reduce the systemic injustices impacting communities and societies; to advance corporate social responsibility through environmental, social, and justice principles to create a just and sustainable society.

The Service and Justice This unit shall relate to those Independent Lutheran Organizations and other social ministries that engage in efforts related to service, justice, and global mission, including Global Refuge, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran World Relief, Friends of Mwangaza Global Health Ministries, Lutheran Health Care Bangladesh, Lutheran Partners in Global Ministry, ReconcilingWorks, Kodugus Renewal Ministry, and the Deaconess Community of the ELCA; the service, justice, and global mission efforts of full communion churches; and Church World Service and the Deaconess Community of the ELCA.

The Service and Justice unit shall develop personnel policies for long-term and other missionaries in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and administer such policies after their approval by the Church Council.

Chapter 17.

SEPARATELY INCORPORATED MINISTRIES

17.30. This church shall have a separately incorporated ministry, known as the Mission Investment Fund of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, . . .

17.30.01. The Mission Investment Fund of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall have a board of trustees composed of 9–12 persons elected by the Churchwide Assembly to one six-year term and shall not be eligible for consecutive re-election. The terms of members of the board of trustees elected by the Churchwide Assembly shall begin at the commencement of the first board meeting following the assembly. The composition of the board of trustees shall comply with the representational principles described in constitutional provision 5.01.e. Up to two trustees may be members of congregations of church bodies with which this church is in a relationship of full communion, provided that both are not from the same church body.

17.30.B25. To effect the change from the possibility of three three-year terms to one six-year term for trustees of the Mission Investment Fund adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, the Executive Committee of the Church Council shall divide the trustees to be elected by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly into two classes, one class elected to three-year terms and one class elected to six-year terms. The two classes shall be as nearly equal in size as possible.

Amendments to Bylaws Recommended by the Office of the Secretary

CONSTITUTION, BYLAWS, AND CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA®

Chapter 7. MINISTRY

7.30. STANDARDS FOR MINISTERS OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

7.31.12. No person who belongs to or takes actions in concert with a hate group shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins, is discovered to be a member of, or takes actions in concert with a hate group.

7.60. STANDARDS FOR MINISTERS OF WORD AND SERVICE

7.61.08. Invitation to Service. In accord with bylaw 8.63.01. and following, a minister of Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been established by the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and with which this church has agreed regarding the exchangeability of ministers of Word and Service, may serve contractually in a ministry setting of this church under a "Letter of Invitation to Extended Service" upon the authorization of the bishop of the synod in which such service occurs.

7.61.09. No person who belongs to or takes actions in concert with a hate group shall be called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received into the ministry of this church, nor shall any person so called and received onto the roster of Ministers of Word and Service or otherwise received by this church be retained in its ministry who subsequently joins, is discovered to be a member of, or takes actions in concert with a hate group.

Chapter 8. RELATIONSHIPS

8.60. OFFICIAL CHURCH-TO-CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS

8.63. The provisions governing ecumenical availability and service of ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service shall be set forth in the bylaws.

8.63.02. A minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be authorized by the synod bishop to serve in a congregation or employing entity of this church. For ministers of Word and Service, such service is only permissible if their church body has reached agreement with this church on the exchangeability of ministers of Word and Service. Such service shall be rendered under a contract between the congregation or employing entity and the minister ~~of Word and Sacrament~~ in a form proposed by the synod bishop and approved by the congregation or employing entity. Any such service shall be in accord with churchwide policies developed at the direction of the presiding bishop and secretary, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

8.63.03. Whenever a rostered minister of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is to serve or is serving in a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by the Churchwide Assembly, or whenever a minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been so declared and established is to serve or is serving in this church, a full sharing of relevant information concerning such rostered minister's experience and fitness for ministry is expected between the synod bishop (or other appropriate office or entity) of this church and the appropriate person, office, or entity in the other church. Relevant information related to fitness for ministry

- shall include, but is not limited to, any information concerning disciplinary proceedings or allegations that could result, or could have resulted, in disciplinary proceedings.
- 8.63.04.** A minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may be granted the privilege of both voice and vote in the Synod Assembly during the period of that minister's service in a congregation or ministry setting of this church, in accord with bylaw 8.63.02.
- 8.63.05.** The availability of a minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to serve in this church pursuant to bylaw 8.63.02 shall be understood normally in three categories: availability to serve in an occasional situation; availability to meet an extended need, including service in "yoked parish" settings; and availability for a transfer of roster status.
- a. Occasional service for ministers of Word and Sacrament: An occasional situation is defined as one in which a minister of Word and Sacrament of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists may be asked to preach or administer the sacraments in a congregation of this church on an occasional basis with the authorization of the synod bishop.
 - b. Extended service for ministers of Word and Sacrament: A minister of Word and Sacrament of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists may be invited to serve as the pastor of a congregation of this church for an extended period of time, yet remain a minister of Word and Sacrament of the minister's present church body. Such a person would be expected to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments in a congregation of this church in a manner that is consistent with the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to live in a manner consistent with the ministerial policy of this church. Such service shall be rendered only as authorized by the synod bishop in order to serve the ministry and mission needs of this church in a given situation.
 - c. Transfer for ministers of Word and Sacrament: A minister of Word and Sacrament of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists who seeks to serve indefinitely within the ministry of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may apply for admission to the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and be approved through the candidacy process for admission to the roster. Such a minister would then become a minister of Word and Sacrament of this church upon receipt and acceptance of a regular call and installation in a congregation or other setting in this church, at which point the minister would no longer be serving under the exchangeability provisions of full communion.
 - d. Occasional service for ministers of Word and Service: An occasional situation is defined as one in which a minister of Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists and with which agreement has been reached on the exchangeability of ministers of Word and Service may be asked to serve in a congregation or ministry setting of this church on an occasional basis with the authorization of the synod bishop.
 - e. Extended service for ministers of Word and Service: A minister of Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists and with which agreement has been reached on the exchangeability of ministers of Word and Service may be invited to serve as a deacon of a congregation or ministry setting of this church for an extended period of time, yet remain a minister of Word and Service of the minister's present church body. Such a person would be expected to serve in a congregation or ministry setting of this church in a manner that is consistent with the Confession of Faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and to live in a manner consistent with the ministerial policy of this church. Such service shall be rendered only as authorized by the synod bishop in order to serve the ministry and mission needs of this church in a given situation.
 - f. Transfer for ministers of Word and Service: A minister of Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists who seeks to serve indefinitely within the ministry of Word and Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may apply for admission to the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and be approved through the candidacy process for admission to the roster. Such a minister would then become a minister of Word and Service of this church upon receipt and acceptance of a regular call and installation in a congregation or other setting in this church, at which point the minister would no longer be serving under the exchangeability provisions of full communion.

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- 8.63.06.** Rostered ministers of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, while serving in an ecumenical setting, remain subject to the standards, policies, and discipline of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. A minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists is understood by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as subject to the standards, policies, and discipline of the church body in which the minister is rostered or holds ministerial membership. Such a minister, while serving in a congregation or other ministry of this church, is expected to abide by the standards and policies of this church related to ministers ~~of Word and Sacrament~~.
- 8.63.07.** When a minister of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service from a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by a Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America completes a contract for extended service, the synod file on that minister shall be sent to and retained by the Office of the Secretary.

The ELCA Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry

Prepared by Deacon Shannon Johnson, Project Coordinator, and Dr. Mary Streufert, Director

In 2019, two members of the ELCA noticed fewer women serving in calls as senior pastors than men, prompting them to make a major gift to the churchwide organization to explore root causes and drive change. This gift began the ELCA Quality of Call Initiative, with a focus on three different groups that face discrimination in rostered ministry: (1) women, (2) Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color (BIPOC), and (3) LGBTQIA+. The work on this focus began first because it was the initial focus of discernment by the donors. The other two foci are not yet fully developed. Experiences of discrimination and privilege people from among these groups have often intersect, so none of these three focus areas is isolated from the others. The work of one focus area is thus not isolated from the others. This report focuses on the efforts of the Quality of Call for Women in Ministry over the last five years. In addition to the initial donor gift, the Quality of Call for Women in Ministry received financial support from the ELCA Mission Development Fund.

The Quality of Call Initiative seeks to support the whole ELCA to be a church that is welcoming and affirming of ministers so that they are not experiencing bias, discrimination, and harassment. In 2020, the team for the focus on women in ministry initiated its work through listening, to understand and address the issues women who are pastors or deacons in the ELCA faced.

Below are specifics that the initiative accomplished. This work was guided by a team including Dr. Mary Streufert (Director, Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry and Director, ELCA Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment), Deacon Shannon Johnson (Project Coordinator for Quality of Call Initiative and Region 4 Candidacy and Leadership Manager), Ms. Heather Dean (Program Coordinator, Theological Discernment), Rev. Ramie Bakken (Region 5 Candidacy and Leadership Manager), and Rev. Christina Montgomery, (Team Associate and parish pastor (Oct. 2021-August 2023) and current ELCA Racial Justice Manager).

Like most plans developed in 2020, the Quality of Call for Women changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team embraced an adaptive approach to this work, which served the goals of the Initiative well as we sought to understand and address the multiple factors that affect a minister's call. The Quality of Call for Women in Ministry has initiated change through a three-step approach: listen, convene, and act. In some cases, the listening was to women sharing their experiences as rostered ministers; at other times, it was listening to data or gathering policies across the church and relating them to ELCA social teaching and commitments. Convening partners across the church invited bishops, synod councils, rostered ministers, seminaries, and others to come together, take what was learned from *listening*, and consider fostering change in their context. From this, action was and continues to be born. The action may be a singular act, such as updating a policy, or more complex, like partnering with other synods to reform boundaries education together. The actions across the church were different because they were contextualized. They were actions to address the ways sexism and patriarchy are keeping people from fully living into the vocation to which God calls them.

Strategic Goal 1: Cultivate relationships with and support synods in their roles to affect intersectional gender justice for women in ministry.

Nearly half of ELCA synods are initiating change through Quality of Call Collaborative Grants.

Another approach of the Quality of Call Initiative that has been effective in creating change has been to support synods themselves in the process of listening, convening, and acting to support change. Early in the initiative, we gathered stories of empowerment and challenges women in ministry have experienced. To expand what we learned beyond the churchwide team, we invited the participating synods to engage in Insights to Action workshops to explore the stories, discuss what we learned, and together discern for change initiatives in their context.

These Insights to Actions moved into a larger collective action through Collaborative Grants. The first collaborative grant brought seven synods together to address the issues in their contexts. To date, seven collaborations have been formed through 32 synods, with \$334,500 awarded in collaborative grants. The goals of these collaborative grants are varied and unique to their contexts, including, for example, regional boundaries education on gender justice, developing a series on preaching and teaching about women in the bible, ally training, creative sabbath space retreats, connecting and empowering retreats, and more. Following the pattern of listening, convening, and acting, these collaborative grants effect change where more than half of active pastors and deacons serve.

Women in ministry lead local change through Pop-up Grants.

Ten Pop-up Grants of up to \$2,000 were awarded to support the smaller change efforts of women in ministry across this church. The grant plans are unique, creative, and directly planned and carried out by women in ministry. They include liturgy development about women in scripture, spiritual direction cohorts, pulpit sharing programs for marginalized voices, book studies, education events for rostered ministers against sexism, spiritual practice retreats, and gatherings for women in ministry to connect and identify ministry opportunities.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 1) Collected 261 stories from women in ministry in response to the prompt: “Think about a time when you experienced a sense of thriving and/or empowerment, or a sense of struggling and/or limitation, that affected you in your role in your ministry setting. What happened?”
 - a. This story-based research approach influenced the Lutheran World Federation to adopt a similar approach for its Women in Ministry survey and report. See [Women in Ordained Ministry interim report EN final.pdf](#)
- 2) Designed and facilitated Insights to Action workshops with over 100 participants in eight synods. Participants were women in ministry, synod staff, and bishops. Using the collected stories from women in ministry, participants identified themes and, in small groups, explored actions they could take together to make change.

Strategic Goal 2: Increase compensation for women in ministry.***Twenty-three synods (35%) updated parental leave policies between February 2021 and February 2024.***

As we explored compensation, we reviewed policies for family leave (leave taken for the care of a family member) and parental leave (leave taken for the addition of a child to the family). Collecting and sharing this data and bringing it into conversation with our social teaching¹ and churchwide actions,² [this report](#) was one means to encourage and support synod bishops, staff members, and councils to revise their policies, with updates occurring in 23 synods between Feb. 2021 and Feb. 2024. Most of these updates increased leave time for both parents, with 80% of synods recommending equal parental leave, regardless of gender or caregiving role. The parental and family leave policies provide an opportunity to support rostered ministers and to align our value of the vocations within families and rostered ministry.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 3) Eight synods updated their family leave policies between October 2021 and February 2024.
- 4) Consulted with the ELCA Research and Development team to support the study of compensation for ELCA rostered ministers.
- 5) Revised the call process in collaborating synods, developed question lists of questions to ask and not to ask when interviewing a candidate for call.³
- 6) Hosted compensation negotiations training for women in ministry.⁴

Strategic Goal 3: Respond to and prevent sexual harassment.***As 46% of women report experiencing sexual harassment in congregational ministry, bishops and synod staff members responded positively to the comprehensive report and resources to address sexual boundary violations.***

In the [50th Anniversary Survey Report](#), 46% of rostered women reported experiencing sexual harassment in congregational ministry. Significant numbers of rostered women experience sexual harassment elsewhere within the church, such as with churchwide colleagues and in seminary settings. To address this, we investigated and developed a [comprehensive review](#) of synod policies and resources to prevent and respond to instances of sexual harassment of rostered ministers and other sexual boundary violations like ministerial sexual misconduct and sexual abuse of minors in the church. We discovered that only two synods offered sample policies that protect church employees from sexual harassment. The report has led to ongoing conversations with synod leadership, ELCA lawyers, and churchwide staff members for misconduct prevention to address the issues and support synods with preventative and responsive resources.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 7) In collaboration with ELCA General Counsel, developed sexual boundary violations policy assessment tool and sample policy for congregations and synods to protect against sexual harassment.

¹ Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action, Implementing Resolution #7, 2019.

² [Summary of Actions of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly - ELCA Resources](#) Category B3: Parental and Family Medical Leave

³ Effort of a collaborative grant.

⁴ Effort of a collaborative grant.

- 8) Collaborated with FaithTrust Institute to develop a workshop for ELCA rostered ministers who identify as women. The objective of this online workshop was to equip participants with effective responses and tools to address sexual and gender-based harassment when people target them with these behaviors and actions within their ministry roles.
- 9) Advanced the work of potential partnership with the Criterion Institute by connecting with ELCA partners to introduce Criterion Institute's "Roadmap" for Christian churches to use their financial investment power to mitigate gender-based violence. ["Roadmap" was inspired by and is rooted in the ELCA social message "Gender-based Violence" (2015)]. Made initial contacts and scheduled meetings with Portico, Mission Investment Fund, ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility and churchwide organization executives.
- 10) Developed and facilitated a session on practical steps when facing sexual harassment, facilitated by the Quality of Call Initiative for women in ministry team members.

Strategic Goal 4: Decrease instances of gender-based discrimination.

Candidacy committees engage in workshops on ways to support candidates and promote gender justice in formation after findings from a story-based study on formation for rostered ministry in the ELCA.

After conducting story-based research on the formation experiences of individuals preparing for rostered ministry in the ELCA, we facilitated a workshop at the ELCA Digital Candidacy Summit to share ways to promote Gender Justice and support candidates. The candidacy process was designed long ago the majority of candidates shared these identity markers: male, white, straight, just graduated college, lives on seminary campus, and may or may not be married. For some time, this has not been the description of a majority of candidates and more clearly ELCA candidates represent a number of shared and unique identity markers and life situations. Updates have been made to the candidacy process and the ELCA Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group is continuing this work. In the meantime, the Gender Justice and Formation workshop taught gender justice basics and suggestions of "dos and don'ts" to support candidates.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 11) Facilitated a workshop at the Rostered Ministers Gathering on the language and images of God.
- 12) Facilitated educational sessions with two candidacy committees to address intersectional sexism.
- 13) Collected and analyzed 176 stories from rostered ministers about their experience in the formation process to become a rostered minister.
- 14) Facilitated a conversation series on sexism in ministry with the ELCA Natural Systems Academy.
- 15) Sponsored and promoted a four-part coaching series, *Already Enough: Unlocking Your Power as a Woman in Ministry*, led by Dr. Crystal Hall, for nearly 200 registrants.

Strategic Goal 5: Increase opportunities for women in ministry.

Twenty-four women in ministry received scholarships to participate in supervisory course.

The skills and dynamics for supervising a ministry staff are different than supervising in other professional settings and an area in which many rostered ministers do not feel they have had formal training or preparation. Whether leading a large church staff or supervising a part-time church secretary, these skills are needed. The feedback from participants in the *Stepping Up to Supervision* course through Faith+Lead, facilitated by Rev. Susan Beaumont, shared that this has changed their ministry and provided tools to supervise stronger teams and lead staff and volunteer dynamics effectively.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 16) Supported the women's session, "Women, Power, and Influence," which was added to a supervision course offered to rostered ministers in Region 9 and presented by Susan Beaumont, with 80 women in participation.
- 17) Supported book study in womanist biblical interpretation, using Rev. Dr. Angela Parker's book *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I? Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority*. The Quality of Call purchased more than 80 books for participants and the book study facilitators' honorarium.
- 18) Sponsored a cohort of 20 ELCA women in ministry to attend the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership Conference in 2023.
- 19) Sponsored 24 partial scholarships for women in ministry to participate in *the Stepping Up to Supervision* course hosted by Faith+Lead, facilitated by Rev. Susan Beaumont.
- 20) Sponsored and facilitated the Global Learning Partners course "Meeting's Reimagined" for women in ministry and a partner from their context.
- 21) Sponsored and coordinated with an ELCA coach for group coaching sessions in Spanish for women in ministry whose primary language is Spanish.

Strategic Goal 6: Collaborate with ELCA partners to address sexism and patriarchy through an intersectional lens.

Collaborated with partners to pilot an effort to support the next generation of teaching theologians who are women who are Black, Indigenous, Persons of Color (BIPOC) and focus on womanist, mujerista, feminist, decolonial, and/or queer Lutheran theologies to teach at ELCA institutions.

There is a generation gap among ELCA teaching theologians of women of color, with the few remaining women of color nearing retirement, soon to leave even fewer women of color in the field. In an exploration to change this, the Quality of Call for Women partnered with Trinity Lutheran Seminary and awarded Denise Rector as the first recipient of the two-year pilot doctoral scholar in residence for ELCA women of color in liberative theologies, allowing Rector to gain teaching experience at the seminary and compensation, support, and time to complete her dissertation. The positive effect of this pilot is experienced not just by Rector and Trinity Seminary, but also by Rector's students and the ministries they will serve in and throughout this church. *Living Lutheran* covered [this story](#), which went on to inspire a first-call pastor who is a woman of color who had been discerning doctoral studies. She shared that she read about it, and her heart lit up; she has the article posted in her office.

Additional achievements in this area:

- 22) Contributed to the ELCA Boundaries Education Working Group to support synods with guidelines on boundaries education and resources for shifting to a three-year model of boundaries education that includes boundaries basics, gender justice, and racial justice.
 - a. At least 24 synods have adopted this model, and 18 of these synods shifted to this model in partnership with the Quality of Call
- 23) Facilitated workshops or presentations about the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry with or at:
 - a. The Conference of Bishops
 - b. ELCA Church Council
 - c. The Bishops' Advisory Council
 - d. The Assistant/Associate to the Bishop's Gathering

- e. Directors for Evangelical Mission
- f. The Rostered Ministers Gathering
- g. The Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering
- h. Synod assemblies
- i. Candidacy committee education
- j. ELCA Lawyers Association
- k. “Region 10” collaboration retreat

Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry Coming to Close

After five years of working toward being a church that is welcoming and affirming of ministers so that they are not experiencing bias, discrimination, and harassment, the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry is transitioning to close. This transition is not because there is no longer bias, discrimination or oppression toward women in ministry. This work was designed as a grant-funded initiative with a set number of years, and it has initiated many new ways to support women in ministry, initiated many reforms to promote better systems, and initiated partners engaged throughout this church to continue the work to listen, convene, and act to address sexism and patriarchy.

As this work transitions, some aspects will shift to ELCA Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment for ongoing support.

This transition only affects the focus of the Quality of Call for women in ministry, not the remaining two foci for rostered ministers who are BIPOC and rostered ministers who identify as LGBTQIA+.

It is worthwhile to note for the whole church that the gap in specific and sufficient staff support and budget through the churchwide organization to support and connect women in ministry has left a gap in this church.

Roles related to the Quality of Call Initiative

Quality of Call for Women in Ministry

Rev. Ramie Bakken, Candidacy and Leadership Manager for Region 5

Ms. Heather Dean, Program Coordinator for Theological Discernment

Dcn. Shannon Johnson, Project Coordinator for Quality of Call Initiative and Region 4 Candidacy and Leadership Manager

Rev. Christina Montgomery, Team Associate and parish pastor (Oct. 2021-August 2023) and current Racial Justice Manager)

Dr. Mary Streufert, Director for Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment, Director for the Quality of Call for Women in Ministry

Quality of Call for Ministers who are BIPOC

Ms. Jennifer De Leon, Director for Racial Justice, Director for the Quality of Call for Ministers who are BIPOC

Quality of Call for Ministers who Identify as LGBTQIA+

TBD

Executive Oversight and Support of the Quality of Call Initiative

Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, Presiding Bishop

Rev. Philip Hirsch, Executive Director, Christian Community and Leadership, the primary executive with immediate project oversight

Ms. Kathryn Lohre, Executive for Theological Discernment and Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations

Dcn. Mary Ann Schwabe, Executive for Synod Relations

Ms. Rachel Wind, Executive for Development

Ms. Alix Schwindt, Donor Communications Strategy Manager

Advisory Bishops

Advisory bishops serve as a listening, advising, and supportive body for the Quality of Call Initiative. The bishop advisors have no decision-making role but provide counsel, questions, and insight for the vision, planning and implementation of the work of the Quality of Call Initiative. They help to interpret and promote the work of the Quality of Call Initiative, especially in the contexts of the Conference of Bishops, synods, and congregations.

Bp. Susan Candea, Central States Synod

Bp. Laurie Jungling, Montana Synod

Bp. Leila Ortiz, Metropolitan D.C. Synod

Bp. Kevin Strickland, Southeastern Synod

This work could not have happened with the depth and integrity that it has without the service of Deacon Shannon Johnson. The ELCA is in her debt.

Synod Visit Reports

Name: Joanne Engquist
Synod Visited: Alaska Synod
Visit Date: March 22, 2025
Purpose of Visit: Synod Council Meeting (online)

What are the joys and opportunities happening within the Synod?

The synod is preparing for its assembly at the end of April where it will gather around the theme, based on Isaiah 55:12: “You shall go out in joy and be led back in peace.” I was able to attend only the beginning of the council meeting which included devotions, minutes review/updates, and the bishop’s report. Also on the agenda: the treasurer’s report, cluster updates, and updates on/or reports from several committees.

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?

Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church member Rev. Sean Avery was present (Pr. Avery is a synod council member). I directed people to reach out to him following the publication of the commission’s report which would be published in the coming week. I also described the process ahead to receive the report and then to take actions informed by the report and based on the action from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

The Synod Council raised no concerns or questions for the churchwide organization or the ELCA Church Council. They voiced appreciation for the work ahead in preparing for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly and upcoming deliberations of matters before us all as the ELCA.

I assured the council of my ongoing personal prayers for the synod, and my newly formed appreciation of their territory following my first trip to Alaska last winter.

En Bloc Items

I. Budget and Finance Committee

II. Executive Committee

A. Appointment of Elections Committee

Churchwide bylaw 12.51.04., in regard to the Churchwide Assembly, provides for the appointment of an Elections Committee for the conduct and supervision of elections.

CC ACTION [En Bloc]

Recommended:

To appoint the members of the Elections Committee for the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

- Ms. Jennifer Trom (chair)
- Ms. Bobbie Ochoa [POC]
- Mr. Kenny Olmedo [YA; POC]
- Mr. Casy Goslin
- Mr. Erik Rehms; and

To authorize the Executive Committee of the Church Council to appoint additional members to the Elections Committee for the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly as needed.

B. Progress Report from the Educational Debt Task Force

At the Spring 2022 Church Council meeting, the Educational Debt task force was authorized and charged with studying the issue of addressing educational debt among rostered ministers and developing a comprehensive strategy to provide educational debt relief to as many rostered ministers as possible [CC22.04.05]. A final report with possible recommendations was anticipated for this Spring 2025 Church Council meeting. The task force is requesting an extension due to several factors identified in their [progress report](#).

CC ACTION [En Bloc]

Recommended:

To receive the progress report from the Educational Debt Task Force and to postpone the final report with possible recommendations to the November 2025 Church Council meeting.

C. Ratification of Church Council Committees

Following the elections at the Churchwide Assembly, newly elected Church Council members will indicate their committee preferences prior to the October 2025 meeting. A final listing of committee membership for the triennium will be ratified by the Church Council at its October 2025 meeting upon recommendation by the Executive Committee.

At its October 2025 meeting, the Church Council also will appoint members to related advisory or liaison appointments for the time period from 2025 to 2028. Members of the Board Development Committee will be appointed by the Executive Committee in October 2025.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To ratify the following appointments of continuing members of the ELCA Church Council to Church Council committees for the 2025–2028 time period beginning at the close of the Churchwide Assembly on August 2, 2025:

Budget and Finance Committee: Lisa Ahlness, Heather Brown, Kari Olsen, and Rindra Josoa;

Christian Community and Leadership Committee: Sheena Foster, Hans Giller, Joel Miller, and Linda Rivera;

Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee: Jamie Brueschoff, Gwendolyn King, and Olivia Martin-Call;

Legal and Constitutional Review Committee: Leroy Cannon, Mitch McCartney, and Jennifer Trom; and

Service and Justice Committee: Kristy Henriksen and Ivan Perez.

D. Elections to Executive Committee

The Executive Committee terms of all the elected executive committee members end at the conclusion of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Newly elected chairs of the standing committees of the Church Council (Budget and Finance; Faith, Society, and Innovation; Legal and Constitutional Review; and Service and Justice) will serve on the council's Executive Committee beginning at the close of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, or soon thereafter when a chair is elected. The chair of the Christian Community and Leadership Committee will begin serving immediately as there is a current vacancy.

At their spring 2025 committees' meetings, the council's standing committees may elect their chairs to begin their terms on Aug. 2, 2025. The newly elected chairs will be invited to participate with voice but not vote in the Executive Committee meetings from the time of their election to the Churchwide Assembly. This overlap will allow for a smoother transition of this committee and to carry out the functions of the Executive Committee between the close of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly and the first regular meeting of the newly constituted Church Council in October 2025.

At-large members to the Executive Committee will be elected at the October 2025 Church Council meeting.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To declare that the newly elected chair of the Christian Community and Leadership Committee shall be a member of the Executive Committee of the Church Council effective immediately.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To declare that the newly elected chairs of the Budget and Finance Committee; Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee; Legal and Constitutional Review Committee; and Service and Justice Committee shall be members of the Executive Committee of the Church Council beginning at the close of the Churchwide Assembly on August 2, 2025, or soon thereafter when a chair is elected.

III. Legal and Constitutional Review Committee

A. 2025 Churchwide Assembly Rules of Organization and Procedure

In each triennium, the Church Council submits a recommendation to the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding proposed "Rules of Organization and Procedure." Voting members of the assembly act on the rules in the first plenary session. A two-thirds vote of the assembly is required for adoption of the rules.

The text of the proposed rules can be found [here](#). These rules have been developed and refined based on the history of previous Churchwide Assemblies as well as the experience of predecessor church bodies.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To recommend adoption of the following proposed action by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

To adopt the “Rules of Organization and Procedure” for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly (exclusive of quoted and highlighted constitutional provisions and bylaws that are already in force).

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To authorize the presiding bishop and secretary of this church to prepare further editorial and scheduling revisions that may be found necessary for the Rules prior to their publication in the Churchwide Assembly Bulletin of Reports; and

To report any changes to the Church Council at its July 2025 meeting.

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

The Office of the Secretary recommends proposed amendments to various continuing resolutions in the ELCA Constitution.

All the proposed amendments 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 amendments, other than amendments to Chapter 10, to the *Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as described in “Proposed Amendments – Continuing Resolutions.”

IV. Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee

A. Archiving of Certain Social Policy Resolutions

Social policy resolutions (SPRs) serve as this church’s policy directives until a) replaced by subsequent resolutions, b) rendered moot by subsequent social teaching documents, or c) sent to archive by a Churchwide Assembly. A review for relevance shall be initiated 25 years after adoption. Social policy resolutions are adopted in a particular social context, and this planned review of their continued relevance enables subsequent generations of church leaders to consider whether a resolution should continue to represent the policy of this church.

The [list of social policy resolutions](#) to be considered for archiving is in the Church Council materials. The list is for Church Council review and indicates which ones are recommended for archive. In accordance with *Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns* (2018), SPRs that are 25 years old automatically are considered, but “retired” only by Church Council recommendation to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly for action.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To recommend the following en bloc action for adoption by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

To archive the social policy resolutions identified in the “2025 Archiving of Certain Social Policy Resolutions” document, in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

V. Service and Justice Committee

VI. Christian Community and Leadership Committee

A. Experiment with Candidacy Process

The Candidacy Development Working Group is continuing the work of reshaping the formation process for candidates for Rostered Ministry in the ELCA. Since coming before the Church Council, the working group has further engaged stakeholders in the process including seminary leaders (deans, presidents, contextual ed administrators, and admissions staff), synod bishops, and candidacy staff. The group is recommending a competency-based theological education process as normative for the formation of this church's rostered ministers.

A competency-based process will require candidates to be assessed at the beginning of the candidacy process (entrance). Based on the outcomes of the assessment, a formation plan will be recommended for candidates. Formation plans may include a Master of Divinity or Master of Arts in Religion degree but may also include an a la cart plan comprised of certificate programs, contextual education, Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) units, or other formation opportunities. Throughout the candidacy process, candidates will demonstrate their competence for public ministry by acquiring a portfolio of artifacts demonstrating their capabilities. Prior to being approved for ordination, candidates will again be assessed using their portfolio and other screening tools that are in development.

The rubrics for competency demonstration and the assessments are being developed by a small group of subject matter experts, including several seminary staff and other synod education leaders.

The Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group is seeking the Church Council's approval to allow several synods to experiment with the new process in an initial launch process beginning in the fall of 2025. To review a high-level summary of the draft process outline for the candidacy revamp, please [click here](#).

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To affirm a one-year experiment, beginning fall of 2025 and ending in the fall of 2026 and involving several synods selected by the Candidacy staff of the Churchwide organization based on demographic criteria and willingness of synods to partner to finalize the proposed revisions to the candidacy process;

To request that the synods in the experiment continue to form candidates for ministry utilizing the proposed process and give feedback to the Candidacy Working group and Candidacy staff for process improvement; and

To request that the director for candidacy consult with experimenting synods and provide updates to the Church Council throughout the duration of the one-year period.

VII. Other Items

A. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the Church Council meeting on [Nov. 14-17, 2024](#) have been provided to council members electronically on Church Council Microsoft Teams.

The minutes of the council's Executive Committee meetings on [Oct. 29, 2024](#), [Nov. 14, 2024](#), [Dec. 18, 2024](#), [Jan. 21, 2025](#), and [Feb. 18, 2025](#) 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 (Keith.Fry@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 Nov. 14-17, 2024 meeting of the Church Council; and
To ratify actions of the council's Executive Committee as indicated in the minutes of the Oct. 29, 2024, Nov. 14, 2024, Dec. 18, 2024, Jan. 21, 2025, and Feb. 18, 2025, meetings.

B. Church Council Nominations and Elections

The Church Council has the responsibility for electing people to fill terms on boards of Separately Incorporated Ministries (SIM), social ministry organizations, and seminaries. Bylaws 8.21.03. and 8.21.04. outline basic parameters for the election of members to the boards of ELCA seminaries. Pursuant to 14.22. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the Church Council is also 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 elect to the board of directors of Wartburg Theological Seminary to a term beginning June 1, 2025, and expiring May 31, 2029: Ms. Courtney Wiler.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To elect to the board of directors of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to a term beginning October 1, 2024, and expiring September 30, 2028: Ms. Carmen Teresa Cintron-Figueroa; and

To elect to the board of directors of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to a term beginning April 3, 2025 and expiring September 30, 2026: Mr. Tony Johnston.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To re-elect to the board of directors of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University to a second term beginning July 1, 2025, and expiring June 30, 2028: The Rev. Jack Sullivan and The Rev. Stephen Donald Wachtman

C. Churchwide Nominating Committee Recommendation

The Church Council nominates individuals for possible election to the Nominating Committee by the Churchwide Assembly, in accordance with 12.51.03 and 19.11.01 of *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. The committee has a range of 12 to 18 members. At least one but no more than three members must be from each of the nine regions of this church. Members serve one six-year term (or until a successor is elected) and are not eligible for re-election. Biographical forms for nominees can be found [here](#).

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the written report of the Office of the Secretary on nominees for the Churchwide Nominating Committee;

To note that bylaw 19.11.01 states in regard to the Nominating Committee: "The Church Council shall place in nomination the names of two persons for each position. The committee shall

consist of at least one member but no more than three members from any region. Nominations from the floor shall also be permitted, but each floor nomination shall be presented as an alternative to a specific category named by the Church Council and shall therefore meet the same criteria as the persons against whom the nominee is nominated. In the materials provided in advance to each member of the assembly, the Church Council shall set forth the criteria applicable to each category that must be met by persons nominated from the floor”;

To request, therefore, that the Church Council restrict the tickets to the following: lay woman (Region 1); lay woman (Region 2); lay woman (Region 3); lay woman (Region 4); lay woman (Region 6 or 9); lay man (Region 8); rostered minister (Region 1); rostered minister (Region 2 or 8); and rostered minister (Region 5, member of historically underrepresented group);

To authorize the Executive Committee of the Church Council to appoint additional members to the Nominating Committee for the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly as needed; and

To request that the Church Council transmit the following slate of nominees to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly:

Churchwide Nominating Committee

Group 1: Lay Woman (Region 1)

1. Ms. Carolyn Beth Adams, Southwestern Washington Synod (1C)
2. Ms. Kasey Miranda Schultz, Northwest Washington Synod (1B)

Group 2: Lay Woman (Region 2)

1. Ms. Diane L. Brauer, Rocky Mountain Synod (2E)
2. Ms. Karen Michele McClain, Southwest California Synod (2B)

Group 3: Lay Woman (Region 3)

1. Ms. Kristine Kay Bjorke, Minneapolis Area Synod (3G)
2. Ms. Kathy Fick, Eastern North Dakota Synod (3B)

Group 4: Lay Woman (Region 4)

1. Ms. Elizabeth Ann Dieringer, Southwestern Texas Synod (4E)
2. Ms. Susan Humphrey, Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod (4C)

Group 5: Lay Woman (Region 6 or 9)

1. Ms. Ginger Mildred Cutrell, Southeastern Synod (9D)
2. Ms. Jillan Marie Russell, Northwestern Ohio Synod (6D)

Group 6: Lay Man (Region 8)

1. Mr. Kevin D. Anderson, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod (8G)
2. Mr. John Henderson (8F)

Group 7: Rostered Minister (Region 1)

1. The Rev. Susan Marie Halvor, Alaska Synod (1A)
2. The Rev. Martin Wells, Northwest Intermountain Synod (1D)

Group 8: Rostered Minister (Region 2 or 8)

1. The Rev. Nicole Raddu Ferry, Rocky Mountain Synod (2E)
2. [to be determined]

Group 9: Rostered Minister (Region 5, member of historically underrepresented group)

1. The Rev. Anthony Acompanado, Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J)
2. The Rev. Lukas E. Harris-Ferree, Metropolitan Chicago Synod (5A)

D. Churchwide Assembly Action

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To combine CC24.11.14 and CC24.11.19 for consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to now read:

To recommend the following for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

To adopt, *en bloc*, with the exception of such amendments as may be considered separately, certain amendments recommended by the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to the Articles of Incorporation and *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, and other amendments to the Articles of Incorporation and the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; and

To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make appropriate changes in the Constitution for Synods and the Model Constitution for Congregations congruent with the ELCA Constitution as amended.

Progress Report from the Educational Debt Task Force

At its Spring 2022 meeting, the Executive Committee of the ELCA Church Council voted to form the Educational Debt Task Force (EC22.03.12). The task force is currently in its research phase, which has three main objectives:

- Better understand the breadth and depth of the experience and impact of educational debt among ELCA candidates and rostered ministers;
- Gather information about what programs already exist to assist rostered ministers to reduce their educational debt; and
- Resource existing and forming programs, task forces and study committees, actively considering their research needs.

Originally, the task force had intended to conclude its work with a final report at the Spring 2025 meeting of the Church Council; however, over the past six months, several factors at broad and narrow levels have slowed the progress of the task force.

- Since its first gathering, the task force had invested significant time and energy into learning about the federal Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program, which serves to cancel borrowers' balance on Direct Loans after certain requirements are met. Additional education and promotion of PSLF were to be part of the task force's final recommendations. However, decisions made at the federal level about this program have left its future unsettled. As a result, the task force needed to revise some of its thinking about the promotion of PSLF.
- Several members of the task force stepped down due to increased personal and professional responsibilities. These members were Nathan Block, Bishop Yehiel Curry, and the Rev. Carlton Rodgers. To take the place of these members, the proposal is that Bishop Meggan Manlove and the Rev. Shelley Cunningham be appointed to the task force. (Biographies are provided in a separate document.)
- Staff support for the task force was limited. Adam DeHoek, who has served to convene the task force, onboarded a renewed Research and Evaluation team at the churchwide organization. This process took considerable time; as such, capacity to support the task force was limited.

Due to these issues, the task force requests that its final report be delivered at the November 2025 meeting of the Church Council. To meet this goal, the task force intends to execute the following plan:

- By the end of April, ELCA Research and Evaluation will prepare a research report of the findings from the quantitative survey of ELCA rostered ministers which was conducted in 2024.
- In May, after this report has been drafted, members of the task force will each write commentaries, offering their perspective on the key takeaways and how they envision using the information in their own work.
- In June, the task force will hold an in-person meeting to review the commentaries and develop recommendations to the Church Council and other key stakeholder groups.
- A final report, including these recommendations, will be prepared and submitted to the Church Council.

The Educational Debt Task Force envisions continuing the work of communicating its findings and developing resources into early 2026.

ELCA Educational Debt Task Force: Roster of Members - Additions

April 2025

ELCA Educational Debt Task Force – Proposed Additional Members



Bishop Meggan Manlove
Bishopmeggan.manlove@nwimsynod.org

Bishop Meggan Manlove grew up in Custer, South Dakota. She graduated from Concordia College, Moorhead, spent a year in the Jesuit Volunteer Corps in Syracuse, NY and then earned her M.Div. from the Univ. of Chicago Divinity School. She was shaped and nourished by both outdoor ministries (including three summers at Christikon) and campus ministry (ELCA and Episcopal in Chicago). She served a parish in rural Western Iowa for six years and moved to Nampa, Idaho in 2010 to serve as pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church. She earned her Doctor in Ministry from San Francisco Theological Seminary in May 2021. Her dissertation is titled *Equipping Lutherans for Faith Storytelling*.

Bishop Manlove loves working collaboratively and cares deeply about food security and affordable housing. In her free time, she enjoys exploring the region, deepening friendships, reading fiction, and watching good movies.

ELCA Educational Debt Task Force – Proposed Additional Members



The Rev. Shelley
Cunningham
scunningham@porticobenefits.org

Pastor Cunningham currently serves as lead for Customer Outreach and Church Relations at Portico Benefit Services. As part of this role, she leads Portico's team of Regional Representatives, who serve as liaisons for ELCA synod staff, rostered ministers, and sponsoring employers.

Pastor Cunningham was ordained as an ELCA Minister of Word and Sacrament in 1998 and has faithfully served as pastor of congregations in Bloomington, New Brighton, and Rochester, MN. She has a B.A. degree from the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA, and Master of Divinity degree from Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.

She lives in Rochester and has three adult children. She enjoys sharing her gifts of writing and spiritual reflection as an occasional contributor to the devotional publications *God Pause* and *Christ In Our Home*.

Thank you

Contact Information

For more information,
please contact Adam
DeHoek at

Adam.dehoek@elca.org
773-380-2445

2025 Archiving of Certain Social Policy Resolutions

Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee/Church Council action

Recommended: To recommend that the Church Council approve the following *en bloc* action

To recommend the following en bloc action for adoption by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

To archive the social policy resolutions identified in the “2025 Archiving of Certain Social Policy Resolutions” document, in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

Background

The list below identifies social policy resolutions that are recommended for archiving by Theological Ethics staff of the ELCA churchwide organization, consistent with ELCA policy (see below.) As archived teachings, these social policy resolutions will remain available online but will not be part of the body of official ELCA teaching.

From ELCA Policies and Procedures for Addressing Social Concerns (2018), p. 25

“Social policy resolutions serve as this church’s policy directives until a) replaced by subsequent resolutions, b) rendered mute by subsequent social teaching documents, or c) sent to archive by a churchwide assembly. A review for relevance shall be initiated 25 years after adoption. Social policy resolutions are adopted in a particular social context, and this planned review of their continued relevance enables subsequent generations of church leaders to consider whether a resolution should continue to represent the policy of this church.

Review procedure:

...2. The director for theological ethics shall bring a recommendation to the Church Council regarding which resolutions should remain in force and those that should be archived in the category of historical documents.

The recommendation should be guided by comments from those consulted and the following criteria:

- Relevance to the ELCA’s contemporary mission.
- Continued significance for society.
- Congruence with ELCA social teaching.”

NAME OF SPR (MAY BE ABBREVIATED) AND LINK	YEAR	NUMBER	DECISION NOTES	BRIEF SUMMARY OF SPR
Birmingham Pledge	2001	CA01.02.07	refers to outdated Pledge (originating org is closed)	endorses "Birmingham Pledge" for individuals
Boycott South Carolina	1999	CA99.06.31	refers to action related to specific event in 2000	affirms moving Spring 2000 Conference of Bishops meeting out of South Carolina due to confederate flag flying over capitol
Church Jordan Palestine	2001	CC01.04.22	superseded by subsequent social teachings, including CA05.06.23, CA09.06.36, CA16.05.15, CA16.06.31, CA13.06.27	requests Presiding Bishop to send letter to then-President Bush expressing solidarity with Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and Palestine; encourages participation in Ecumenical Prayer Vigil and calls for attention to conflict in Middle East at synod assemblies
Commercial Sexual Exploitation	2001	CC01.11.101	superseded by social message on same topic	directs development of educational resources on commercial sexual exploitation; requests Corporate Social Responsibility review of investment screen for pornography
DC Congressional Voting	2001	CA01.07.62	superseded by CA.22.01.05c on Advocating for DC Statehood	affirms ELCA support for full voting rights for DC residents
Economic Justice	1999	CA99.06.44	superseded by social statement on Economic Justice	acknowledges adoption of social statement
Economic Sanctions Iraq	2001	CA01.06.37	Refers to specific, timebound legislation; Cuba embargo already addressed more thoroughly in CA95.07.63 (SPR on advocacy related to Cuba)	calls for end to economic sanctions against Iraq and prayer for Iraqi people; reaffirms ELCA's opposition to US embargo on Cuba
Education Materials Homosexuality	1999	CA99.06.57	focused on support for outdated educational resource	acknowledges publication of outdated resource "Talking Together as Christians about Homosexuality"

<u>Farmers in Crisis</u>	1998	CC98.11.56	refers to specific, timely crisis in late 1990s	calls for attention to rural communities and farms in light of agricultural crises of mid- to late 1990s
<u>Foot Mouth Disease</u>	2001	CA01.07.79	refers to past disease outbreak	calls for prayer and networked response to outbreaks
<u>Global Warming</u>	2001	CA01.07.57	superseded by Earth's Climate Crisis social message	affirms social statement on Caring for Creation
<u>Healthcare Policy</u>	2001	CA01.02.08	superseded by Health Care social statement	encourages study related to development of social statement on health
<u>Independent Sports League</u>	1999	CA99.06.59	Refers to specific, timebound concern	affirms concern about scheduling conflicts between recreational activities and church activities; requests educational materials
<u>Jubilee 2000 Campaign</u>	1999	CA99.03.06	superseded by SPR on Jubilee CC24.11.20bb	affirms concern for international debt and expresses support for Jubilee 2000: USA Campaign promoting advocacy on international debt
<u>Older Adult Ministry</u>	1999	CA99.03.10	refers to specific, timebound year of commemoration; superseded by 2001 SPR	affirms celebration of International Year of Older Persons (1999) and encourages development of ministry resources focused on and inclusive of older adults
<u>Ordination of Gay and Lesbian Persons</u>	2001	CA01.06.36	out-of-date; requests actions that were taken after 2009	requests timeline for decision on rostering of homosexual persons
<u>Ordination of Noncelibate Gay and Lesbian Persons</u>	1999	CA99.06.27	superseded by 2009 Churchwide Assembly action to change Ministry Policies	declines to propose change to ministry requirements at the time; affirms welcome to gay and lesbian people to participate fully in the life of the church; acknowledges need for continuing discernment

<u>Peace</u>	2001	CA01.07.60	refers to timebound decade of nonviolence and peace (2001-2010)	acknowledges ELCA efforts toward participation in Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence"
<u>Peace Nonviolence</u>	1999	CA99.06.40	refers to actions specific to Decade of Nonviolence and Peace (2001-2010)	affirms support for "Decade for a Culture of Nonviolence" (2001-2010); requests reports in response to Decade
<u>Persecution of Christians</u>	1999	CA99.03.07	superseded by CA03.06.40 Support Persecuted Churches	calls for respect, tolerance, and understanding of other faiths; calls for study of religious persecution and religious freedom; calls for advocacy for victims of religious persecution
<u>Response to St Paul VE</u>	2000	CC00.11.67	superseded by Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust social statement	declines request to amend "Visions and Expectations"
<u>School Voucher Proposals</u>	2001	CA01.06.26	superseded by Our Calling in Education social statement (2007); all evaluation criteria herein are listed in social statement	provides criteria for evaluating school voucher proposals
<u>School Vouchers</u>	2000	CC00.04.13	superseded by Our Calling in Education social statement (2007); all evaluation criteria herein are listed in social statement)	adopted as interim measure to provide guidance on ethical discernment of school voucher proposals
<u>Severe Droughts</u>	1999	CA99.06.23	refers to specific, timebound crisis	expresses concern for current (1999) droughts in US; calls for strengthening Lutheran Disaster Response drought relief policies
<u>Stand with Africa</u>	2001	CA01.07.55	refers to specific, timebound campaign that is no longer operational	acknowledges Churchwide Assembly action (2001) on Stand with Africa campaign
<u>Studies on Sexuality</u>	2001	CC01.11.103	refers to specific, timebound actions; superseded by Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust social statement	acknowledges need for further discernment on sexuality; affirms hiring of staff person to lead process of discernment and development of study resources related to social

				message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions
<u>US Navy Puerto Rico</u>	1999	CA99.06.42	Focused on military training facility that is now closed; superseded by 2001 SPR	affirms ELCA commitment to human rights; calls for end to US military operations on island of Vieques
<u>World Hunger Report</u>	2001	CA01.06.27	refers to outdated project	calls for partnership with Stand with Africa campaign

Other committee or board
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Dr. Carmen Teresa Cintron-Figueroa

Synod of Congregation: Caribbean Synod, ELCA (9F)
Congregation: Iglesia Evangélica Luterana Getsemaní (ID: 00009) - Dorado, Puerto Rico
Birthdate: 11/02/1974 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: No **Ethnicity:** Latin(o/a/é)/Latin-x/ Hispanic
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

31 Luna Ave
Camino del Sol II
MANATI, PR 00674 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 2155848424 (Cell)

Email:

tere.cintron@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Swiss School of Business Research (2022-2024): Doctor Of Philosophy
University of Puerto Rico (1997-2003): Master Of Business Administration
University of Puerto Rico (1992-1996): Bachelor Of Business Admin

Employment:

Assoc. Director Business Development - Global Engagement (06/04/2012 - Present)
Church World Service
New York, NY

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Lutheran Social Services (Exec Director) (2009-2011)
ELCA LIFT Task Force (Member) (2009-2011)
ELCA Caribbean Synod (Treasurer) (2007-2008)

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

I seek to contribute through strategic leadership and financial stewardship. My expertise in strategic planning, financial analysis, and grant writing, honed through a decade of business development and extensive engagement with several colleges and universities, aligns seamlessly with the board's mission. Furthermore, my proficiency in different business areas and multicultural leadership fosters innovation and inclusive growth. I am eager to leverage these skills to support the ELCA's vital work and ensure its sustainable impact.

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.

My lived experience offers unique insight into systemic inequities, enabling me to advocate for: Inclusive Communication: Cultural awareness and language experience drive advocacy for accessible programs. Economic Equity: Firsthand hardship informs strategies to empower impoverished communities. Holistic Ministry: Understanding intersectionality ensures diverse needs are met. Equitable Resource Use: Financial expertise and lived experience promote fair funding.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. ELCA Foundation Board
2. Mission Investment Fund Board of Trustees
3. Church Council

Reference: Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla **E-mail:** rmalpica@lstc.edu

Relationship: My former Pastor

3/12/2025 9:15:08 AM

Other committee or board
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

Mr. Tony 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.
Chicago, IL 60643 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

9950 S. Prospect Ave.
Chicago, IL 60643 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 3128379001 (Cell)
Alternate: 3127559400 (Work)

Email:

tjohnston@ccctu.org (Work)

Educational Institutions:

Washington University (1990-1992): Master of Arts
Indiana University (1989-1990): Master of Arts
Augustana College (1982-1986): Bachelor of Arts

Employment:

President (11/20/2015 - 03/11/2025)
Cook County College Teachers U
Chicago, IL

Previous Employment:

History Professor-Harry S Truman College (2014-2015)
Coordinator of Tutoring-Harry S Truman College (2000-2014)

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?

By being on the LSTC Board, I believe I bring my spirituality, educational and union experience together to help strengthen the LSTC as an educational institution. I try to bring my Lutheran faith into my role as an educator and as a union leader. All three aspects try to bring us closer as human beings and as human beings, closer to God. I will attempt to humbly offer my skills and experience in work relations and the academic area of history and the humanities to help strengthen the school as in its academic and spiritual goals.

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.

I do not identify as a member of those groups, but I am dedicated to making sure diversity, equity and inclusion are part of our civil society.

Reference: Jennie English **E-mail:** jennie.english@ameritech.net

Relationship: She is my pastor.

3/11/2025 2:55:04 PM

Other committee or board
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

April 3-6, 2025
Biographies
Page 3 of 21

The Rev. Jack Sullivan

Synod of Congregation: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

Congregation: Ecumenical

Birthdate: 06/01/1959 **Gender:** Man

Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** Black/African American/African Descent

Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Work)

The Ohio Council of Churches
125 East Broad Street
Columbus, OH 43215 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

6303 Pompano Street
Canal Winchester, OH 43110 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 2169055119 (Cell)

Email:

jsullivan@ohcouncilchs.org (Work)

Educational Institutions:

Ohio University (1977-1983): Bachelor Of Science
Lexington Theological Seminary (1983-1986): Master Of Divinity
United Theological Seminary, Dayton (1991-1993): Doctor Of Ministry

Employment:

Executive Director (01/01/2019 - Present)
The Ohio Council of Churches
Columbus, OH

Previous Employment:

Senior Pastor, First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Findlay, OH (2017-2019)
Executive Director, Murder Victims Families for Reconciliation (2015-2016)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Regional Minister and President, Pennsylvania Region, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (2011-2014)
Senior Pastor, Fifth Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Cleveland, OH (2007-2011)
Interim Pastor, Mercer Island United Methodist Church, Mercer Island, WA (2005-2006)

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

I have been invited to consider a second appointment to the advisory board of Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Bexley, OH. Trinity is an institution that I have come to know well and respect deeply as it creatively and thoroughly prepares people for ministries in Christ's church. As a leader of an ecumenical body, I appreciate Trinity's commitment to serve the ELCA, in particular, and the whole church, in general. I consider this opportunity to help advance Trinity as God's continued call for me to collaborate in giving leadership and support to the unique offering of theological education made available by Trinity Lutheran 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.

I am an African American Christian. While I am part of a majority White denomination, I was nurtured by the Historic Black Church, America's original ecumenical freedom and justice body. With a Black Church ethos at work in my very being, I understand the church to be a movement that advances Jesus Christ's agenda of transformative, systems-altering love, justice, unity, and peace. The perspectives and gifts from the Historic Black Church are available to all church bodies and communities, and my role is to share them in every forum in which I give leadership and service.

Reference: The Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins **Phone:**6143092150 **E-mail:**dave@heartlanducc.org

Relationship: David is the president of the OCC's governing board.

3/3/2025 1:47:14 PM

Other committee or board
Trinity Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Stephen Donald Wachtman

Synod of Congregation: Southern Ohio Synod, ELCA (6F)
Congregation: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (ID: 04516) - Columbus, Ohio
Birthdate: 09/07/1963 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Synod of Roster: 6F **Leader Key:** L022338
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Work)

2001 Northwest Blvd
Columbus, OH 43212 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

1702 Cardiff Road
Columbus, OH 43221 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 6145798128 (Cell)
Alternate: 6144869433 (Work)

Email:

steve.wachtman@engagedbygrace.org (Work)

Educational Institutions:

Capital University (1981-1985): Bachelor Of Arts
Trinity Lutheran Seminary (1988-1992): Master Of Divinity

Employment:

Pastor (07/01/1992 - Present)
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Columbus, OH

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

SOS Congregational Resource Team (2018-2025)
Capital University Board of Trustees (2006-2022)

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

As a graduate of both Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University, of which Trinity is now a part, I am eager to support the health and well-being of both organizations through my service on the Trinity Lutheran Seminary Advisory Board. Having served 16 years as a Capital University Board Trustee, I have institutional knowledge that can be helpful. Spiritual gifts for Leadership, Administration and Faith will also provide resource in these times of fundamental change for both the church and education.

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.

N/A

Reference: Bishop Suzanne Darcy Dillahunt **Ph:** 6147143157 **E-mail:** bishopsdillahunt@southernhiosynod.org
Relationship: She is bishop of the synod where I serve as pastor.

3/13/2025 8:59:57 AM

Other committee or board
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Dr. Courtney Wilder

Synod of Congregation: Nebraska Synod, ELCA (4A)
Congregation: Augustana Lutheran Church (ID: 03291) - Omaha, Nebraska
Birthdate: 02/27/1975 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

811 S 38th Ave
Omaha, NE 68105 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 4025993451 (Cell)

Email:

wilder@midlandu.edu (Work)

Educational Institutions:

The University of Montana (1993-1998):

The University of Chicago (1998-2008):

Employment:

Professor of Religion (07/15/2008 - Present)

Midland University

Fremont, NE

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Board member of Lutheran Service Corps (2022-2023)

Church council member, Augustana Lutheran Church (2017-2019)

Member and President of the Association of Teaching Theologians (2016-2018)

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

I have a strong commitment to theological education and to the work of the ELCA. Since being invited to consider joining the Wartburg board of directors I have engaged in careful and serious discernment and do not take the responsibility lightly. As a career educator, I would provide practical skills related to higher education (experience with assessment and accreditation processes, with evaluation of curricula, and with hiring and promotion processes for faculty) and a longstanding practice of seeing the mission of higher education as service to students and the community. My beliefs as a Lutheran strengthen my commitment to justice, especially for underserved and minority communities. My work on theology of disability includes engagement with the community, biblical interpretation, and experience with disability access.

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.

Although I do not currently need accommodations, I have previous personal experience with a years-long mobility impairment requiring significant medical care. The impact of this experience on my life, and my children's lives, was powerful and led me to learn more about disability issues. I remain strongly committed to inclusion work inside and outside the church.

Reference: Bishop Scott Johnson **Phone:**4028965311 **E-mail:**scott@nebraskasynod.org

Relationship: Former co-worker at Midland University

3/12/2025 8:29:17 AM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Carolyn Beth Adams

Synod of Congregation: Southwestern Washington Synod, ELCA (1C)
Congregation: Messiah Lutheran Church (ID: 13038) - Vancouver, Washington
Birthdate: 02/13/1959 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

11102 NW 38th Ave
Vancouver, WA 98685 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 3609534401 (Cell)

Email:

bethadams13@msn.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Pacific Lutheran University (1977-1981): Bachelor Of Science

Employment:

Regional Gift Planner, Region 1 (10/01/2012 - 12/01/2023)
ELCA Foundation
Chicago, IL

Previous Employment:

WorkSource (2011-2012)
Thrivent Financial (2006-2010)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Messiah Lutheran Church Council, multiple terms (2000-2011)
Southwestern Washington Synod, ELCA financial task force (2025-2025)

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

God has always made opportunities available to me to assist in making His world a better place. As a volunteer in a faith community, or professional providing resources to those wondering how to increase their generosity to His work, my call has been to help in myriad ways. I consider this invitation to make myself available to the Churchwide Nominating Committee another of His opportunities, as he guides my path. Years of podium presentation, workshops and committee work at synod assemblies and with congregations has honed my approach to group work. I am an active listener who engages well with others to focus on the goal/task at hand. I am an enthusiast for ensuring that all voices are heard.

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: Josh Kerney **Phone:** 5305200142 **E-mail:** josh.kerney@elca.org

Relationship: Friend, coworker, peer at the ELCA Foundation

3/5/2025 2:51:33 PM

Nominating Committee

Mr. Kevin D. Anderson

Synod of Congregation: Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, ELCA (8G)
Congregation: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (ID: 02662) - Gaithersburg, Maryland
Birthdate: 09/21/1953 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

18660 Queen Elizabeth Drive
Brookeville, MD 20833 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 3015701257 (Home)

Alternate: 2406017349 (Cell)

Email:

kevin.d.anderson@comcast.net (Home)

Educational Institutions:

University of Michigan Law School (1978-1981): Doctor Of Jurisprudence

University of Wisconsin--Whitewater (1973-1976): Bachelor Of Business Admin

Employment:

Managing Director (formerly Partner) (02/01/2007 - 12/20/2023)

BDO USA, P.C.

Washington, DC

Previous Employment:

Deloitte LLP (1999-2006)

United States Department of Treasury (1995-1998)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

ELCA Church Council (2019-2025)

Committee on Appeals (two short terms) (2015-2019)

Portico Benefit Services (Board of Pensions) (2009-2015)

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

Over nearly 25 years I have sought and served in ever-increasing levels of responsibility in all three expressions of the church, ranging from congregational president to Synod Council, Synod Secretary, and the churchwide positions set forth above. My Church Council service includes the Executive Committee, Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, member of the Audit Committee, and chair of a temporary committee to revise and update the Church Council's committee structure. I am both a lawyer and a certified public accountant, with more than four decades of professional experience, and I bring these skills and experience to all of my service within the church.

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.

N/A

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Committee on Appeals
2. Committee of Hearing Officers
3. Audit Committee

Reference: Imran Siddiqui **Phone:** 4045568134 **E-mail:** Imran.Siddiqui@elca.org

Relationship: ELCA Vice President--served on Council for three years together

1/27/2025 4:45:54 PM

Dr. Kristine Kay Bjorke

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Synod of Congregation: Minneapolis Area Synod, ELCA (3G)
Congregation: Lord Of Life Lutheran Church (ID: 07539) - Maple Grove, Minnesota
Birthdate: 07/18/1967 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

6737 99th Ave. N.
Brooklyn Park, MN 55445 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 6125970048 (Cell)

Email:

kkbjorke@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Luther Seminary (2014-2018): Doctor Of Ministry
Luther Seminary (1993-2007): Master Of Arts
Lutheran Bible Institute WA (1988-1991): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

Grant Director Age to Age Initiative (01/03/2024 - Present)
Capital University
Columbus, OH

Previous Employment:

ELCA Churchwide Org-Project Manager Svc Learn ELCA Yth Gathering & Interim Prog Mgr for Youth Min (2019-2023)
InterServe Ministries -Co-founder and Director (Twin Cities) (2005-2019)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

ELCA Youth Gathering Supplies Manager, Houston TX
Minneapolis Area Synod Staff (5 hours per week) Assistant to First Third CYF (2020-2024)
Scholarship Review Board-Trinity Education Foundation-Seattle WA (2019-2023)

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

My calling into mission and service has been shaped by God's faithfulness and the ever-evolving needs of the Church. I first discerned this call as a camp counselor, where I witnessed the transformative power of faith in young people. Compelled by the Holy Spirit, I equipped myself to minister to youth and their families for the past 30 years. In response to the shifting landscape of the Church, I was led to help congregations faithfully discern how to 'right size' their staffing for sustainable ministry. Through my doctoral work in collaborative ministry, I sought to be a faithful steward of God's mission, preparing for a Church that has yet to be seen. Rooted in Christ's call to equip and build up the body of believers, my vocation continues to be one of accompaniment, innovation, and hope for the future of the Church.

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.

I do not personally identify as a member of the groups listed above—people of color, non-English speakers, individuals of diverse gender identities, those who have experienced poverty, individuals living with disabilities, or those born outside the United States. However, as one called to embody Christ's love and justice, I have sought to steward the leadership and privilege entrusted to me in ways that uplift others. In the spirit of servant leadership, I have worked to create space for those whose voices have been marginalized—not as a token gesture, but through prayerful discernment of their gifts, intentional mentorship, and a commitment to true partnership in the body of Christ.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Nominating Committee

Reference: John Hulden **Phone:** 7018669795 **E-mail:** j.hulden@mpls-synod.org

Relationship: John supervised me when I worked at the Minneapolis Area Synod office and we worked in partnership

3/7/2025 9:24:49 AM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Diane L Brauer

Synod of Congregation: Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA (2E)
Congregation: Community of Joy Lutheran Church (ID: 16435) - Rio Rancho, New Mexico
Birthdate: 06/14/1955 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

3213 Hunters Meadows Circle NE
Rio Rancho, NM 87144 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 4027709510 (Cell)

Alternate: 4027709510 (Cell)

Email:

dbrauer.db@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Pacific Lutheran University (1973-1977): Bachelor Of Arts

Southeast Community College (2004-2006): Associates Degree In The Arts

Employment:

Executive Assistant to the Vice Presidents (02/01/2011 - 05/01/2016)

Regional West Medical Center

Scottsbluff, NE

Previous Employment:

Lincoln Public Schools (2006-2011)

Chase Drug (1996-2004)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Faith, Sexism, and Justice: One in Christ Social Statement Task Force (2012-2019)

Women of the ELCA Executive Board (2005-2011)

Board, Lutheran Campus Ministry of New Mexico (2023-2025)

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

Serving on the nominating committee is a call to work towards a church council and ELCA committees that are diverse and inclusive in age, ethnicity, gender, region, and experience. I feel I bring a relatively sound understanding of the work of the church council and the organizational structure of the ELCA. I have lived in several synods and served synodical boards and synod committees in most of them. I feel I have strong organizational skills and communication skills. The best part of serving in these ways was the relationships and the people I have encountered and the faith they have shared that has brought growth in my own faith. We are a church full of amazing, faith-filled people, committed to serving and loving our neighbors at home and across the world. This call to serve is an opportunity to be part of that continuing work.

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. Church Council
2. Committee on Appeals

Reference: Syd Brinkman **Phone:** 3192693657 **E-mail:** fourbrnk@netins.net

Relationship: Served on the Executive Board, Women of the ELCA with me, Friend

3/12/2025 1:26:54 PM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Ginger Mildred Cutrell

Synod of Congregation: Southeastern Synod, ELCA (9D)
Congregation: Trinity Lutheran Church (ID: 05832) - Tullahoma, Tennessee
Birthdate: 01/10/1947 **Gender:** Transgender Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

141 Mortons Lake Rd
Manchester, TN 37355 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 9312477318 (Cell)

Email:

gingergmc@charter.net (Home)

Educational Institutions:

The Ohio State University (1965-1970): Bachelor Of Business Admin
Murray State University (1973-1976): No Degree Earned
American Society for Quality Control (1970-2013): Educational Specialist

Employment:

Division Quality Manager (responsible for six sites) (11/01/2008 - 07/31/2013)
Eaton Corporation - Electrical Division
Moon Township, PA

Previous Employment:

General Tire / GenCorp - Quality Management (1970-2000)
various (2000-2008)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Executive Board - Churchwide Women of the ELCA (2023-2025)
The Table - Nashville TN - founding member / WELCA founder (2020-2024)

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

I never considered myself a deeply religious person. My wife of 46 years passed after a long illness in 2022, and I realized life is short. Gender Identity and religion seemed at odds with each other. When I made my decision to transition and live as my authentic self as a woman, I talked to my pastor at TRINITY. He helped me to understand the Lutheran Philosophy of God's Love and acceptance of the inner self, regardless of the exterior. And I began my transition. That fall I attended the 2022 SE Synod WELCA convention as was accepted as a woman by the ladies. Two subsequent Ladies Lutheran Retreat and the 2023 SE Synod WELCA event gave me a sense of purpose. When I was asked to let my name be submitted for an open WELCA EXECUTIVE BOARD position at the 2023 Triennial, I agreed and let God decide. I was elected to the Board and now help guide our inclusion practices. I have since developed a Transgender Experience workshop for cis members.

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.

I am a fully transitioned Transgender Woman, medically, socially, and legally. I believe the LGBTQIA+ community is an untapped resource for growth. But members need to be educated to counter the false narrative of the ultra-conservative right who have usurped God's message and twisted Jesus's words. The transgender community is currently living in fear due to being targeted.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Church Council
2. Publishing House (Augsburg Fortress) Board of Trustees

Reference: Pastor Alex Hoffner **Phone:** 7068141004 **E-mail:** pastorhoff@yahoo.com

Relationship: He is my pastor at Trinity

2/10/2025 1:20:54 PM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Elisabeth Ann Dieringer

Synod of Congregation: Southwestern Texas Synod, ELCA (4E)
Congregation: Christ Lutheran Church (ID: 14139) - Georgetown, Texas
Birthdate: 10/28/2000 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

3173 CR 150
Georgetown, TX 78626 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

1610 N 6th St
Tacoma, WA 98403 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 5129661221 (Cell)

Email:

ellie.dieringer@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Pacific Lutheran University (2018-2023): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

YAGM Short Term Recruiter (08/18/2024 - 12/31/2024)

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Chicago, IL

Previous Employment:

Juventud Para Cristo Uruguay, YAGM Volunteer (2023-2024)

PLU: Residential Life Leadership and Civic Engagement Director, Admissions Coordinator (2018-2023)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

LWF CSW69 Delegate (2024-2024)

LWF Women's Human Right Advocacy Training in Geneva, Switzerland (2024-2024)

Young Adult Gathering Small Group Leader (2024-2024)

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

I am passionate about radical inclusion in decision-making and leadership spaces, especially of young adults and people of historically marginalized identities. Through my involvement with and representation of Young Adult Communities in intergenerational spaces, I have had the joy of connecting with a wide array of folks and am empowered to utilize those relationships, experiences, and connections to nominate candidates for meaningful involvement. My role as a Short-Term Recruiter especially equipped me with new connections to synods, congregations, and communities throughout the denomination. Connection is at the core of my vocation, and this would be a meaningful opportunity to leverage both my passions and my gifts.

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.

I identify as a member of the LGBTQIA2S+ community and am passionate about gender justice & radical queer inclusion in religious spaces, especially in leadership roles. As a queer young adult, intersectionality is at the core of how I understand and approach leadership opportunities. Of course this includes uplifting other voices in the queer community, but my understanding of "queering" space empowers me to seek out perspectives, leadership styles, and communications styles beyond those that I hold.

Reference: Kayla Zopfi **Phone:** 2183295908 **E-mail:** kayla.zopfi@elca.org

Relationship: Colleague

3/7/2025 2:21:09 PM

The Rev. Nicole Raddu Ferry

Synod of Congregation: Rocky Mountain Synod, ELCA (2E)
Congregation: Trinity Lutheran Church (ID: 30111) - Monument, Colorado
Birthdate: 01/03/1964 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Synod of Roster: 2E **Leader Key:**
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

17714 Brass Buckle Way
Monument, CO 80312 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 5056950019 (Cell)
Alternate: 7194813072 (Work)

Email:

pastornicole@trinitymonument.org (Work)

Educational Institutions:

University of Tennessee (1982-1986): Bachelor In Social Work
University of Maryland (1987-1988): Master Of Science In Social Work
The Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg (2004-2012): Master Of Divinity

Employment:

Pastor (12/01/2024 - Present)
Trinity Lutheran Church
Monument, CO

Previous Employment:

Bethlehem Evangelical Lutheran Church Los Alamos, NM (2012-2024)
New Hope Lutheran Church Columbia, MD (2008-2012)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Co- Dean for the North New Mexico Conference in the Rocky Mountain Synod (2016-2022)
Candidacy Committee in the Rocky Mountain Synod (2015-2023)
Trauma Support Team for the Rocky Mountain Synod (2021-2022)

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

I have been very blessed to be part of the Lutheran Church since my baptism in 1964. I attended a Lutheran School through 8th grade and my family was very involved in "all things" church throughout my life. Joining an ELCA Lutheran Church in 1987 allowed me to expand my involvement in serving during worship, serving on the Council, working with youth, and working for three different ELCA churches in various capacities. I was then blessed by the first ELCA church to be asked to discern pastoral ministry. I believe very strongly that our world of church is changing and that God, as God always is, is up to a new thing for the good of the gospel. My many roles in the church and my healthy systems understanding and teamwork in social work has given me an excellent foundation to bring my gifts to this committee. My communication is strong to different groups and systems and yes, I love Jesus and believe our world needs our ELCA presence in times such as this. It would be an honor to serve.

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.

I am not currently representing these voices and yet my childhood and my work in social work gives me clarity about the challenges that poverty or lower income brings.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Church Council
2. Committee on Discipline
3. Committee on Appeals

Reference: The Rev. James Gonia **Phone:** 7203087446 **E-mail:** photogoniaco@gmail.com

Relationship: Pastor Jim was my previous bishop and has known me for 12 years.

The Rev. Susan Marie Halvor

Synod of Congregation: Alaska Synod, Elca (1A)
Congregation: Lutheran Church Of Hope (ID: 13003) - Anchorage, Alaska
Birthdate: 12/15/1970 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Synod of Roster: 1A **Leader Key:** L024974
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

2561 La Honda Dr
 Anchorage, AK 99517 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

2561 La Honda Dr
 ANCHORAGE, AK 99517 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 9072122993 (Work)
 Alternate: 9073019268 (Cell)

Email:

shalvor@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (1996-2000): Master Of Divinity
 Pacific Lutheran University (1989-1993): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

Manager, Spiritual Care Department (07/05/2004 - Present)
 Providence Alaska Medical Center
 ANCHORAGE, AK

Previous Employment:

Joy Lutheran Church, Eagle River, Alaska (2000-2004)
 Evening Coordinator, Sarah House (Luther Place Shelter Ministries), Washington, DC (1993-1995)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Multicultural Ministry Representative, Synod Council, Alaska Synod (2009-2021)
 Member PLTS Advisory Board (2014-2020)
 Chair, Alaska Synod Anti-Racism Committee (estimated dates) (2002-2006)

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

I have deep Lutheran roots as well as sharing the perspectives of those who are outside the church. As a hospital chaplain, Lutheran theology is a rich resource when encountering suffering and loss, speaking to the ambiguity and complexity of life and reminding us that death does not have the last word. I've seen many ways of "doing church," having visited and preached at most of our Alaska Synod congregations, as well as preaching at other ecumenical congregations. I bring the perspectives of people who aren't Lutheran, who are unchurched, and who have felt unwelcome or rejected by church. Most of my ministry has taken place outside congregational walls. I'm skilled at supporting and accompanying people through change. I'm curious about what new thing God is doing, and discovering how people and communities find hope, strength and resiliency in difficult times. I have strong managerial skills, and experience in middle management in a large Catholic healthcare organization.

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.

I came out as a lesbian in seminary and have been out through my 20 years of ministry with the ELCA and in the hospital setting. Amplifying diverse voices is one of my passions, and a big reason I live in Anchorage, Alaska, where more than 110 languages are spoken in our school district. We have some of the most diverse schools and zip codes in the nation. I work with a diverse team of chaplains. It's very clear to me that we are stronger, wiser and more reflective of God's creation when we're all at the table. Being honest and vulnerable about who I am has helped to create safe space for others who may feel even more vulnerable. I've observed people change their perspectives after connecting with someone they thought was "other." As church leaders in a divided society, learning to communicate across differences is crucial. My wife is a Navy veteran, now working for the Air Force. She and I are different politically, and I'm grateful for regular practice together in crossing divides.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Committee on Discipline
2. Publishing House (Augsburg Fortress) Board of Trustees
3. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: Rev. Shelley Wickstrom **Phone:**9072010193 **E-mail:**Wickstromshelley@gmail.com

Relationship: She was my bishop in the Alaska Synod for the last 12 years

Nominating Committee

The Rev. Lukas E Harris-Ferree

Synod of Congregation: Metropolitan Chicago Synod, ELCA (5A)
Congregation: Grace Lutheran Church (ID: 20055) - Evanston, Illinois
Birthdate: 03/17/1993 **Gender:** Genderqueer
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Synod of Roster: 5A **Leader Key:** L039353
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

1425 Washington St
Unit 1
Evanston, il 60202 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 9376389333 (Cell)

Email:

ferree09@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

University of Toledo (2011-2015): Bachelor In Social Work
Trinity Lutheran Seminary (2015-2019): Master Of Divinity

Employment:

Pastor (08/15/2021 - Present)
Grace Lutheran Church
Evanston, IL

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Luther Memorial Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA (2017-2019)

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

I hope that the ELCA will continue to work as a denomination to recognize the ways in which we have not encouraged diversity. I hope that we continue to create space for differing beliefs while clearly defining denominational beliefs, and that we would always speak out against injustice that occurs in our world. I strongly believe that this denomination has many gifts to offer the Church and creates space for diverse thought. The diverse thought present in the ELCA can also make it challenging to stay in community but the diverse thought present proves the denomination's commitment to community. My service on the nominating committee would bring my perspective of diversity and ensure inclusion throughout the nominations we suggest. I have the gift of being connected broadly throughout the ELCA. As a pastor, I often do the work of discerning whose gifts would serve committees well and will translate those skills to this role.

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 person represented in one of these historically underrepresented groups, I constantly ask, "who is not at this table that should be?". I know the pain of being sidelined in this Church and will ensure all voices are represented adequately so that we fully represent the diversity present in our beloved Church. It is our Gospel call to create space for all people, especially those of historically underrepresented groups, at the tables of decision making and power.

Reference: Hannah Hawkinson **Phone:** 7732595109 **E-mail:** stlc.pastorhannah@gmail.com

Relationship: Colleague

3/26/2025 9:20:29 AM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Susan Humphrey

Synod: Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod, ELCA, (4C)
Congregation: Joy Lutheran Church (ID: 16395) - Tulsa, Oklahoma
Birthdate: 10/20/1954 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

11519 S. Hudson Ave
Tulsa, OK 74137 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

11519 S. Hudson Ave
Tulsa, OK 74137 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 9186954045 (Cell)
Alternate: 918-695-0395 (Home)

Email:

Dabbler54@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Asbury College (University) (1973-1977): Bachelor Of Education
Ohio State University (1978-1980): No Degree Earned

Employment:

Art Teacher/ Elementary Teacher (01/03/2005 - 12/18/2013)
Immanuel Lutheran Christian Academy
Broken Arrow , Ok

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Arkansas Oklahoma Synod Council (2022-2025)
Women of the ELCA Churchwide Board (1999-2005)
WELCA Katie's Fund Taskforce (2022-2025)

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

God has called to serve in many and various ways. I have been a missionary in Indonesian (before marrying a Lutheran), and development associate for Oaks Indian Mission (an ELCA Native American ministry), the president and board member for the Oklahoma Conference of Churches (worked with 17 denominations), an elected lay member for the ELCA delegation to the National Council of Churches, am an active participant in all levels of Women of the ELCA where I currently serve as A-Ok President and on the Katie's Fund Campaign Taskforce. In the that position , I have presented information about the Fund to 8 different Synodical groups in the last year. I bring my passion for ministry and connection to everything I do. I love networking and helping others discern their path. At heart, I consider myself "just an art teacher" but I love organizational challenges. It's how I serve and encourage others to live into their call.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Church Council
2. Publishing House (1517 Media) Board of Trustees
3. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: Bishop Becca Middeke-Conlin **Phone:** 2039157303 **E-mail:** becca@aokelca.org

Relationship: Friend/Synod Bishop A-OK

1/14/2025 12:29:11 PM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Karen Michele McClain

Synod of Congregation: Southwest California Synod, ELCA (2B)
Congregation: St Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church (ID: 05028) - Santa Monica, California
Birthdate: 12/02/1962 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** Black/African American/African Descent
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

15506 S Orchard Ave
Gardena, CA 90247 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 3107041883 (Cell)
Alternate: 3103298652 (Home)

Email:

pkmcclain@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

University of California Los Angeles (1979-1985): Bachelor Of Arts
University of Southern California (1990-1993): Master Of Business Administration

Employment:

Manager (10/21/2012 - Present)
University of California Los Angeles
Los Angeles, CA

Previous Employment:

National Credit Union Administration (2009-2012)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

St. Paul's Financial Secretary (2024-)
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) Board Member (2017-2024)

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

Having been baptized and confirmed in the Lutheran Church, the mission and service to the people of God has been at the core of my upbringing. Having recently served on the LSTC Board of Directors in the capacity of a member of the Marketing and Fundraising Committee, the Campaign Steering Committee, chair of the Communication Speakers Bureau Task Force, and Board Secretary has enhanced my awareness, skills and knowledge in the leadership of the future of the church and the role of the seminary in educating, shaping and molding the future generation of church leaders.

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.

While acknowledging the role that people of color who came before me played in moving the church forward from whence it came, it would be an honor and privilege to continue to lift up and continue to represent their legacy.

Reference: Rev. James Boline **Phone:**3238938458 **E-mail:**james.boline@stpaulsantamonica.org

Relationship: I am a member of his congregation

3/26/2025 1:38:03 AM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Jillian Marie Russell

Synod of Congregation: Northwestern Ohio Synod, Elca (6D)
Congregation: St Paul's Lutheran Church (ID: 13321) - Waldo, Ohio
Birthdate: 12/07/1999 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

6263 Almendinger Rd
Prospect, OH 43342 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 7402627143 (Cell)

Email:

jillianrussell99@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Capital University (2018-2022): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

Guest Relations Coordinator (09/11/2023 - Present)

HopeWood Outdoors

Marengo, OH

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

NWOS Synod Council (2022-)

NWOS Microgrant Committee (2020-2022)

NWOS Female Lay Churchwide Assembly Voting Member (2019-2019)

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

Serving on committees, especially within the wider church, is something that I have always valued and looked up to those who also served. I was sent this application from a dear colleague and as I was thinking over applying for a committee nomination, I felt pulled to do this work. I believe God called me into mission and service in the ELCA through the work of this board or committee because of my life experiences and dedication to all that I do within the church and ELCA. I have served on many committees and boards throughout my life, including both church and non-church related committees and boards. I have seen how much boards and committees can affect the work going on around us and want to ensure that we are taking in account for the decisions that we make and how it affects not only us but others within the organization. I also have been one to stand up for what is right and wrong and not shy away from stating my opinion when it is needed or when I see how it impacts others.

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. Church Council
2. Committee on Discipline
3. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: Drew Tucker **Phone:**9193700177 **E-mail:**drew@hopewoodoutdoors.org

Relationship: Exec. Director of HopeWood Outdoors

1/22/2025 8:20:54 AM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Kasey Miranda Shultz

Synod of Congregation: Northwest Washington Synod, ELCA (1B)
Congregation: Columbia City Church Of Hope (ID: 30888) - Seattle, Washington
Birthdate: 02/11/1995 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

8413 Fremont Ave N
Seattle, WA 98103 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 2533651454 (Cell)

Email:

kdotc30@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Boston University (2013-2017): Bachelor Of Arts
University of Washington (2021-2022): Certificate

Employment:

Recreation Coordinator (03/01/2022 - Present)
Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust
Seattle, WA

Previous Employment:

EarthCorps (2020-2021)
ELCA Global Mission (2018-2020)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Columbia City Church of Hope Treasurer (2020-2023)
Active Coach and Administrative Assistant for Coach Northwest (NW WA Synod Coaching) (2022-2025)
ELCA Churchwide Voting Member (2022-2025)

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

I am a lifelong Lutheran and a firm believer in the power of lay leadership. I have been shaped by years at Holden Village, service through Lutheran Volunteer Corps (in Seattle) and Young Adults in Global Mission (in Madagascar), and the authentic community of my current home church in south Seattle. To this work, I bring an extensive network of contacts across the ELCA, a desire to continue to build and strengthen and build those relationships, and a heart for discernment. I feel called to help this church that I love grow into its calling to welcome all by working to increase representation, inclusion, and accessibility at all levels.

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.

I identify as part of the queer community

Reference: Rev. Darla DeFrance **Phone:**2069091813 **E-mail:**darla@columbiacityhope.org

Relationship: Rev. DeFrance is my pastor

3/26/2025 12:41:29 AM

Nominating Committee

Mr. John Henderson

Synod of Congregation: Delaware-Maryland Synod, Elca (8F)
Congregation: All Saints Evangelical Lutheran Church (ID: 30089) - Baltimore, Maryland
Birthdate: 01/13/1951 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** Black/African American/African Descent
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

2300 N. Calvert Street
402
Baltimore, MD 21218 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 4438020559 (Home)

Email:

jah5646@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Univ of the District of Columbia (Date not specified.): Bachelor Of Arts In Ed.
Southern New Hampshire Univ (Date not specified.): Master Of Arts

Employment:

Public Housing Revitalization Specialist (09/01/2001 - 11/18/2018)
US Dept of Housing and Urban Developmeny
Washington, DC

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church (Pimlico) (1998-2019)
African Descent Lutherans Assoc, Region 8 Representative (2023-2025)

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

I bring administrative and organizational skills as a result of 25+ years' experience in affordable housing development and real estate financing, using tax-credit equity, public and private financing, and New Market Tax Credits as sources of project financing. I serve on community boards, including but not limited to St. Ambrose Housing Aid Services and Mary's House for Older Adults; a non-profit organization serving the LGBTQ+Senior community. I particularly enjoy working with local community organizations in building their capacity and their ministries.

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.

N/A

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Mission Investment Fund Board of Trustees
2. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: Mydea Karpeh **Phone:**4438509544 **E-mail:**Tuandea@aol.com

Relationship: Professional colleague and sister in Christ

3/31/2025 12:44:21 PM

Nominating Committee

Ms. Kathleen Fick

Synod of Congregation: Eastern North Dakota Synod, ELCA (3B)
Congregation: United Lutheran Church (ID: 12358) - Grand Forks, North Dakota
Birthdate: 10/22/1954 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

6205 Lake Dr
Grand Forks, ND 5820- United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 7018852526 (Cell)

Email:

kathyannfick@icloud.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Luther College (Date not specified.):
Clarke College (Date not specified.):
University of ND-Luther Seminary (1981-1989):

Employment:

Director/Campus Minister (08/01/1989 - 06/30/2019)
Christus Rex campus Ministry
Grand Forks, ND

Previous Employment:

Lutheran Social Services of ND (1984-1987)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

National Lutheran Campus ministry call and board and call committee (1989-2019)
Eastern North Dakota Synod ELCA synod council multiple times (1989-2019)
Welcoming Committee chair for RIC United Lutheran (2022-2025)

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

I network well and have long term friendships across the years that might serve well in the attempt to secure nominees for future openings. C

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.

I live now with a as visual disability which also offers limited independent mobility.

Reference: Sue Rothmeyer, Tessa Leiseth, Joanne Engquist

Relationship: Colleagues

4/1/2025 11:41:54 PM

Nominating Committee

The Rev. Martin Duane Wells

Synod of Congregation: Northwest Intermountain Synod, ELCA (1D)
Congregation: St Mark Lutheran Church (ID: 04827) - Spokane, Washington
Birthdate: 02/09/1949 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** European Descent/White
Synod of Roster: 1D **Leader Key:**
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

Collegeville Institute 8000
Collegeville Institute
Collegeville, MN 56321 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

404 W 24th Ave
Spokane, WA 99203 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 5099901654 (Cell)

Email:

mshmmwells@aol.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

University of Denver (1967-1971): Bachelor Of Business Admin
University of Puget Sound (1973-1976): Doctor Of Jurisprudence
Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary (1976-1981): Master Of Divinity

Employment:

Acting Executive Director (06/25/2023 - 06/15/2025)
Collegeville Institute
Collegeville, MN

Previous Employment:

Eastern WA and Idaho Synod (1999-2017)
Executive Director Holden Village (1994-1999)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

ELCA Discipline Committee (2019-2023)

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

My dear Synod Bishop nominated me for this role. It is not one I would have picked for myself, but the church needs people to fill roles.

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. Committee on Appeals
2. Committee on Discipline
3. Committee of Hearing Officers

Reference: Bp Meggan Manlove **Phone:** 5098389871 **E-mail:** bishopmeggan.manlove@nwimsynod.org

Relationship: She is bishop of my home synod.

3/31/2025 2:45:52 PM

Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions

1. Fortifying Urban Ministries

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.08]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Fortifying Ministries in Underserved Urban Areas” from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod;

To affirm the strategic direction of the ELCA Fund for Leaders ministry to enhance the capacity of people of color through its disbursement of scholarships to Theological Education for Emerging Ministries candidates;

To refer this memorial to the Congregational Vitality Training and Development Team in the Christian Community and Leadership home area to create a churchwide Urban Ministry group, in partnership with the appropriate leaders in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, to accompany ELCA synods in their urban strategies that lead to the enhancement of congregational vitality and ministry sustainability in the urban context. The group will 1) collaborate with other studies already underway, 2) resource synods by gathering best practices in urban ministry and emerging ideas in the care and creative use of church facilities, 3) identify supportive networks within this church and among ecumenical partners, and 4) encourage piloting innovative ways to address the realities and complexities of urban ministry, including enhancing urban internship opportunities. The group may consider additional topics as needed;

To request that the churchwide Urban Ministry group consult with and provide regular reports to the Church Council to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled; and

To provide a final report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly on the results of its study, new urban initiatives, and ways for this church to fortify the witness and service among people and communities in underserved urban areas.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b3]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Fortifying Urban Ministries in Underserved Urban Areas” to the Christian Community and Leadership home area for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2022)

The responsibility for the implementation of this memorial has been assigned to the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) home area. 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 a churchwide organization group to address this memorial on urban ministry, in partnership with leaders in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod who sent this memorial forward and who also passed a similar resolution on urban ministry for their synod.

Two initial action steps have been taken:

1. An initial consultation with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod staff has taken place. The synod has appointed the Rev. Regina Goodrich, pastor of Mediator Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, Penn. and dean of the synod’s Central Conference, and the Rev. Brian Penman, the synod’s director for evangelical mission, as *ad hoc* members of the Synod Task Force for Urban Ministry. They are identifying members for this task force and are planning to meet for the first time in early November.
2. Pastors Chrostowski and Duran have begun to develop criteria for the selection of participants for the churchwide group on urban ministry, including representation from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod leadership. The intention is to have group membership finalized in December and to begin convening in early 2023.

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership Home Area (April 2024)

In the beginning of 2023, Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) experienced a leadership transition and team realignment. Late in June the new senior director, the Rev. Miguel F. Gómez-Acosta, was hired. Pastor Gómez-

Acosta was able to touch base with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop Patricia Davenport at the November 2023 Conference of Bishops meeting to identify who on her staff was the contact person for the Fortifying Urban Communities synod task force. However, due to other priorities having to do with budget cuts and responding to requests for ministry reviews, he was not able to connect with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's director for evangelical mission (DEM), the Rev. Bryan Penman, until February 2024.

At that meeting, staff were notified that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's task force has been meeting since 2022. As part of their work, they partnered with Innovation Lab to conduct surveys of their urban congregations. Pastor Penman agreed to serve on a churchwide organization team to discuss the issue and agreed to invite two other members from the task force to be a part of the national conversation.

Pastor Gómez-Acosta also followed up with the executive director for Innovation, Mr. Iain Chester. Mr. Chester reported that surveys and visitations were conducted in 2023. His team has a list of learnings that was shared with the local task force and has agreed to share those findings at the first meeting of the churchwide organization's Fortifying Urban Ministries team. Currently staff are in the process of identifying other DEMs to serve on this team.

Church Council Action [CC24.04.09e]

To receive the response on "Fortifying Urban Ministries in the Underserved Urban Areas" from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a final report on the work by the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

Report from the Christian Community and Leadership Home Area (April 2025)

The Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force addressing this memorial would like to respectfully note concerns regarding the ELCA's previous approach to this issue, which has primarily focused on studies and discussions with limited actionable outcomes. Additionally, the preliminary work has revealed that the allocated timeframe is impossible given the complexity of the matter. The scope extends beyond simply 'supporting urban ministries,' as it necessarily involves addressing underlying systemic factors including racism, classism, and other structural barriers that impact this task force's ability to effectively comprehend and respond to the needs of urban congregations.

Since the last report to the April 2024 meeting, the task force has convened three times. The task force began by reviewing the original intent of the memorial through interviews with individuals who assisted in drafting it for the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. Next, the task force examined previous urban ministry initiatives by surveying the varied experiences of each task force member in their respective urban contexts. The most notable initiative was In the City for Good, which was launched at the 1998 Churchwide Assembly and operated for approximately a decade. Finally, the task force consulted with Innovation home area regarding its 2023 project with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Their report on urban ministry visits within the synod revealed four significant findings:

1. **Serving Neighbors:** Every congregation, regardless of size, engages with their immediate community in meaningful ways. This was particularly evident in the prevalence of food ministries across nearly all congregations. For most, this community service forms a central element of their organizational identity.
2. **Building Challenges:** Facility size and/or maintenance presents significant challenges for all congregations surveyed.
3. **Attendance Trends:** The majority of congregations reported experiencing declining attendance, with common themes including challenges in returning to in-person worship and overall membership reduction.
4. **Collaboration Opportunities:** Congregations are developing innovative solutions to their challenges and envisioning new ministry possibilities. However, these efforts often remain isolated within individual communities. Neighboring congregations may be addressing

identical challenges without awareness of potential synergies or shared learning opportunities within the broader community.

Based on these meetings, the task force has developed several initial recommendations, while recognizing that additional time would be beneficial to comprehensively address the complex issues at hand. Recommendations include:

1. **Regular Network Establishment:** The churchwide organization should establish a consistent networking forum (Network for Urban Ministries) where congregational and judicatory leaders can access support and exchange ideas to strengthen urban ministries. This could also serve as a platform for documenting and sharing effective evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship practices occurring within urban congregations.
2. **Resource Coordination:** The churchwide organization would benefit from considering a staffed resource center where urban ministries can access information and assistance regarding funding opportunities such as grants. The designated staff member would be responsible for gathering and distributing relevant information to Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs), Assistants to the Bishops, and ministry leaders.
3. **Inclusive Definition:** The ELCA would benefit from expanding its definition of urban ministries to better reflect the diverse populations encompassed by this memorial. Urban ministries frequently extend beyond communities of African descent to include varied ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. **Messaging Strategy:** Christian Community and Leadership home area should collaborate with DEMs to develop a communication approach that reinforces the core identity of urban ministries as Jesus-centered communities serving the world. Through this messaging, DEMs can inspire urban congregations they engage with across the synod.
5. **Property Resource Utilization:** The ELCA should leverage the recently launched Church Property Resource Hub to facilitate discussions with urban ministries regarding property utilization and maintenance challenges.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the final report on “Fortifying Urban Ministries in the Underserved Urban Areas” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To thank the members of the Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force for their faithful and comprehensive work in finding ways for this church to fortify the witness and service among people and communities in underserved urban areas;

To affirm the recommendations outlined in the final report and urge the churchwide organization to explore ways to implement them; and

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

2. Land Back

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.03.14]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from Northwest Washington Synod, Oregon Synod, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod concerning the Land Back movement;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to explore including land acknowledgements which center Native voices as part of their public gatherings;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to become educated about the Indigenous peoples who thrived, prior to European contact, on the land they currently inhabit;

To learn about, learn from, and be in deepening relationship with Indigenous people and tribal nations;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners, to support creative programs of restorative justice in partnership with Indigenous people, including, but not limited to, whenever considering a transfer or sale of real property, including returning land (and any structures built on it) after satisfying any financial obligations, to the appropriate Native nations, and when direct return is not feasible or not desired by the Indigenous people, to return the proceeds from the sale of the land to the ELCA Native American Ministry Fund or other local Indigenous led ministries or organizations;

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to work collaboratively with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners to explore sources and needs in funding for the more than 30 ELCA Indigenous congregations and service ministries; and

To direct the Resource Development and the Budget and Finance Committees of the Church Council to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these congregations and service ministries; and for these synods, home areas, offices, and committees to present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to first engage with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners whenever planning or considering work related to Indigenous people or ministries.

Response from Churchwide Organization (April 2025)

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas have visited on site, alone or together, several native ministries for the purpose of listening and developing a better understanding of their funding and leadership strategies. This includes 16 out of the 24 Native ELCA Ministries listed below:

Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rocky Boy, MT
Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Rock Point AZ
House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Rock Point, AZ
Alaska Native Lutheran Church Anchorage, Alaska
Our Saviors Lutheran Church Nome, Alaska
Kingigin (formerly Thornton Memorial) Lutheran Church Wales, Alaska
Shishmaref Lutheran Church Shishmaref, Alaska
Brevig Memorial Lutheran Church Brevig, Alaska
Teller Lutheran Church Teller, Alaska
Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
* Woyatan Ministry Rapid City, South Dakota
* Wambli Ska (Woyatan Ministry) Rapid City, South Dakota
* Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministry (OLUTEP) Pine Ridge, South Dakota
* Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center Pine Ridge, South Dakota
Open Circle, Portland, Oregon
Native American Urban Ministry Phoenix, Arizona

*planned but not yet completed at the writing of this report

The Office of the Treasurer worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations to request copies of budgets from these ministries for the purpose of understanding their financial needs. Here is a summary of what has been received.

- 13 ministries submitted both revenue and expenditure budgets
- 5 ministries submitted expenditure budgets only
- 2 ministries declined to participate
- 4 ministries did not respond

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations and the Office of the Treasurer to develop a historic understanding of what resources each Native American Ministry has received since the start of the ELCA in 1988 from all sources that staff could identify. The table below summarizes these grants.

Years	Grant \$ provided to ELCA Indigenous Ministries by:			Programmatic Staff Support	Totals
	<u>Churchwide</u>	<u>Synods</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Churchwide</u>	
1988 - 2013	\$7,261,299	No info	-	\$1,442,389	\$8,703,688
2014 – 2022	\$3,523,343	\$2,176,132	-	\$1,075,393	\$6,774,868
2023 – 2024 *	<u>\$933,378</u>	<u>\$599,857</u>	<u>\$256,000</u>	<u>\$656,023</u>	<u>\$2,445,258</u>
Total	\$11,718,020	\$2,775,989	\$256,000	\$3,173,805	\$17,923,814
* Represents years since 2022 CWA Action					

An **additional \$2.1 million** in grants have been provided to other organizations that relate to these Indigenous ministries including Thunder Valley/Community Development Corporation (Pine Ridge), Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Pacifica Synod, and Oglala Lakota Housing Authority. Of this \$2.1 million in grants to other organizations, \$1.65 million has been given in 2023 and 2024. This brings the total support to **\$20.0 million since 1988** based on data that staff could recover.

Ongoing Support

In reviewing the thirteen complete budgets that were submitted, the range of annual support needed to breakeven ranged from \$0 - \$307,000 annually. Here is a breakout:

Annual Profit/Loss	# of Respondents
Breakeven or better	5
Deficit less than \$10,000	2
Deficit between \$30,000 - \$60,000	3
Deficit between \$70,000 - \$100,000	2
Deficit over \$300,000	1

The Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations has reported that the two ministries that declined to respond have annual combined budgets of well over \$1 million but does not know their revenues. The churchwide organization intends to continue supporting these 24 ELCA Indigenous ministries through a combination of Current fund (unrestricted), World Hunger, and Lutheran Disaster Response funds. Given the current declines in both unrestricted revenues and World Hunger revenues,

there is not current capacity to increase the funding support at this time without significantly compromising other work that the churchwide organization does on behalf of the ELCA.

In addition to the support provided by the churchwide organization, there are currently two endowments (one is permanently restricted with a fair market value of over \$1.7 million and the other is temp restricted with a fair market value of over \$676,000) held at the ELCA Foundation. Distributions from these endowments are 4% annually. Currently that income of just under \$100,000 annually is reinvesting but could be utilized. Withdrawals could also be made from the temp restricted endowment provided the donor restrictions have been met. As far as is known, no withdrawals have been made since 2020.

The churchwide organization currently solicits grants from external agencies to support the work. Typically, these agencies do not allow for passthrough grants to other organizations; however, the churchwide organization staff is willing to provide assistance to the 24 ELCA Indigenous Ministries including alerts to potential funding opportunities, training on researching and writing grant applications, and review of applications prepared by these ministries.

The churchwide organization continues to pray for these communities and provide resources on the elca.org website.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the report on the “Land Back” memorial from the churchwide organization regarding its findings of possible funding for ELCA Indigenous congregations and services ministries;

To acknowledge the diminishing revenues to increase funding during the 2026-2028 triennium budget cycle;

To encourage the Service and Justice home area to utilize the available funds in the two identified endowments as a sustainable source of income to support the initiatives of ELCA Indigenous congregations and services ministries;

To urge the churchwide organization staff to provide assistance as requested to the identified ELCA Indigenous Ministries by providing training, offering training on research and grant-writing applications and review of applications prepared by these ministries, and developing fundraising trainings that respond to the realities of each unique ministry context; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.

3. Specialized Ministries and On-Leave-from-Call Status

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.26]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Southwest California Synod, South Dakota Synod, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Northern Illinois Synod, La Crosse Area Synod, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, Northwestern Ohio Synod, and Lower Susquehanna Synod concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status;

To direct the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to initiate a review process of the “Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” and the constitutional provisions and policies and procedures as they relate to interim, transition, bridge, specialized, non-parish-based, and innovative calls, as well as on-leave-from-call status, protocols for removal from the rosters, and communication protocols;

To direct the Church Council to ensure that this review process include in its scope of inquiry, but not be limited to: the time limits given for on-leave-from-call, steps for requesting a roster status, and a process by which an action

or lack of recommendation from a bishop may be appealed, including the possibility of an appeal in a judicatory other than the synod from which they were removed from the roster;

To require that those involved in the review process include a diverse group representing both the roster of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Word and Service who are or have recently been involved in specialized ministries (e.g., interim, transition, campus, outdoor, college or seminary faculty, chaplains, mission developers, etc.), and those currently or recently on leave from call for a variety of reasons (e.g., between calls, family, disability, study, healing from abuse, etc.);

To urge bishops and synod councils to use sparingly any action by which a minister is removed from the roster for non-disciplinary reasons, unless the minister requests removal, until this review is complete, especially for those serving contract calls, as supply preachers, and in other ELCA ministries that don't qualify as a call; and

To require that the appropriate unit of the churchwide organization prepare a report and recommendations for consideration by the Fall 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

*Report and recommendations to include above as well as response to the following resolutions:

- “Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA” (CC22.11.34.ee.)
- “Extending Pastoral Counseling through Private Practice” (CC22.11.34.gg.)
- “Providing for Ordination of Candidates serving as Interim Pastors” (CC23.11.20cc)
- “Revisions to Roster Manual” regarding roster appeals (EC23.11.53c1)
- “Extending OLFC to six years” (EC22.03.10c); and
- recommendations to current discipline process shared by Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color (CC23.04.05)

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

A Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministry was appointed by the Executive Committee of the Church Council [EC23.09.40] to initiate the review process. The task force was also requested to address related topics as cited in the various resolutions listed above.

The Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries has prepared a preliminary report and recommendations that are included in the materials for this meeting of the Church Council, along with proposed amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* for presentation by the Church Council to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. (The proposed amendments are included as an appendix to the task force’s report and also appear among the amendments proposed by the Office of the Secretary, which will be offered to the Church Council at this meeting by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee.)

The current recommendations relate to the questions concerning On Leave from Call (OLFC) protocols and protocols for granting and continuing retired status that are included in the memorial and in the various resolutions listed above. They also were informed by and respond to the recommendations that came from the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color, as the recommendations of that task force included reform of the protocols for granting OLFC and retired status, given that the existing protocols hold potential for unfair application. The recommendations propose substantive changes to the existing policy, some of which will be addressed through bylaw changes while others will be addressed through policy changes to the *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters* that will be presented for approval following successful adoption of the revised bylaws by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Still to be addressed in the next few months are questions related to specialized ministry. In January, the task force will be convening listening sessions with rostered ministers engaged in specialized ministry, with a further report and recommendations to be presented to the Conference of Bishops for consultation at its February 2025 meeting and a final report and recommendations to be presented to the Church Council at the April 2025 meeting. The issues concerning pastoral counseling through private practice will be part of those recommendations, as will the question of allowing for candidates to be ordained to interim ministry.

Church Council Action [CC24.11.20s]

To receive the response and preliminary report on the memorial concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status from the Office of the Secretary and the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries;

To thank the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries for their faithful work in the review process;

To affirm the recommendations for On-Leave-from-Call Status, interim ministry, retired roster status, and average time requirements for calls that are identified in the preliminary report;

To anticipate another report and recommendations regarding specialized ministries to be presented at the April 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (April 2025)

Following submission to the Church Council of a preliminary report to the Church Council in November 2024, the Task Force on On Leave from Call and Specialized Ministry turned its attention to the remaining issues raised by the original Churchwide Assembly action, specifically those of specialized ministry and the three-year congregational service bylaw, as well as to remaining responses to the synod resolutions assigned to the task force by the council, including the questions of ordination directly to interim ministry and of calls to private pastoral counseling practice.

The final report of the task force can be [found here](#).

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the response and final report on the memorial concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status from the Office of the Secretary and the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries;

To thank the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries for their faithful work in the review process;

To affirm the recommendations for on-leave-from-call status, steps for requesting a roster status, interim ministry, retired roster status, average time requirements for calls, specialized ministry, and exceptions to the three-year congregational service bylaw that are identified in the final report;

To affirm the report as the response to the following:

- **“Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA” (CC22.11.34.ee.)**
- **“Extending Pastoral Counseling through Private Practice” (CC22.11.34.gg.)**
- **“Providing for Ordination of Candidates serving as Interim Pastors” (CC23.11.20cc)**
- **“Revisions to Roster Manual” regarding roster appeals (EC23.11.53c1)**
- **“Extending OLFC to Six Years” (EC22.03.10c); and**
- **Recommendations regarding the current discipline process shared by the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color (CC23.04.05); and,**

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

4. Greenhouse Gas Reduction

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.25]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Oregon Synod, Southwest California Synod, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Minneapolis Area Synod, Saint Paul Area Synod, Southwestern Texas Synod, Northern Illinois

Synod, Northeastern Iowa Synod, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Greater Milwaukee Synod, North/West Lower Michigan Synod, New England Synod, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Central States Synod, and Delaware-Maryland Synod concerning greenhouse gas reduction;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to engage in creation care and advocacy based on the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, participation, and solidarity;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to advocacy and action in support of 50% reduction from 2005 levels in United States economy-wide net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To direct the ELCA churchwide organization to set the goal of reducing its net greenhouse gas pollution 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its network ministry through the Creation Care Network to inform and guide this church in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;

To encourage congregants, rostered ministers, and bishops to commit themselves to education about the urgency of the climate emergency, the global opportunities of a just transition and to lift up loving our neighbor in response to the climate emergency through their preaching;

To affirm the Mission Investments Fund's "Green Building" initiative and resources, and to encourage continued commitment to supporting ministries in caring for creation and addressing climate change;

To refer to the Service and Justice home area, Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary, and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for implementation consistent with the memorials; and

To request the churchwide organization provide a report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly assessing the progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions across all three expressions and sharing lessons learned to help meet reduction goals.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b2]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on "Greenhouse Gas Reduction" to the Service and Justice home area, in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.

Response from the Service and Justice home area (November 2022)

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing all of God's creation. Leading scientists from around the world have confirmed that global average temperatures are growing warmer due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Human use of fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases (GHGs) into the air is the main source of the increase in these gases. As levels of carbon dioxide and other GHGs increase, more and more of the sun's heat is trapped by the atmosphere and less escapes back into space. The increase in trapped heat changes the climate, causing altered weather patterns, including multi-year droughts, extreme storms, flooding, and rising sea levels.

The memorials direct the ELCA churchwide organization to establish targets to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This target is consistent with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report that states that, in order to prevent the worst climate damages, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) need to fall by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. The ELCA has supported these targets in its advocacy and creation care education work.

Representatives of the Service and Justice home area, the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, and the Office of the Presiding Bishop met to discuss implementation of the memorial directive. This discussion noted that the churchwide organization has already achieved reductions through reduced travel, more online collaboration, and hybrid work plans. The work to establish a 2005 baseline and to create emission and energy use reduction targets will require expertise beyond current churchwide staff capacity. Funding for a half-time position has been set aside in the Service and Justice home area, beginning in 2023. The churchwide organization sees this initiative as a witness to ELCA commitments to care for creation, and an initiative that can model what synods and

congregations can do. The churchwide organization supports the reconstituting of the Creation Care Network that is currently underway.

A progress report will be made to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.r]

To receive the response on “Greenhouse Gas Reduction” from the Service and Justice home area;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and commend it for its initiatives and commitments to creation care and environmental advocacy;

To request a progress report be provided by the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting with a report expected for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from Service and Justice (April 2025)

ELCA’s churchwide response to this memorial has been ongoing as various ministry representatives continually participate in visioning and implementation of sustainability efforts. The churchwide organization’s energy usage has been in a season of reduction as staff travel has been half as frequent since 2019. The main facility in Chicago remains in good standing with a 91% Energy Star rating as a LEED certified building. An institution-wide effort to consider human inclusivity and planetary health is expressed in a living reference document titled “Sustainable Event Guidelines” for use by all when planning gatherings.

Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) interviewed synod-wide leaders, reviewed reports from hundreds of congregations and a professional survey of over 593 members and identified numerous lessons learned in response to the call to action in this 2022 memorial (<https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/climate-change-in-the-pews/>). While data shows that 74% of ELCA members want their church to do more for climate justice, many people are still unaware of available education and worship resources. Very few churches or synods have been able to measure their greenhouse gas emissions rates, even though there are free and affordable tools. Lack of time, expertise, and consistent recording-keeping is a commonly referenced hindrance. Suggested resources and networking support are offered by energy auditing organizations, but rather than hyper-focus on *output*, this church’s faith-based work has been re-directed to consistently implore a reduction of waste and share theological groundings for drastically reducing the collective input of energy pollution.

The World Hunger Education and Networking team has prioritized creation care and greenhouse gas reduction through two multi-year grants. One has gone to the Center for Climate Justice and Faith in support of their certificate programs for faith leaders (both rostered and lay-leaders) from around the world as they work to better understand how climate change disproportionately impacts communities that already are vulnerable to hunger, and that contributed to and benefitted the least from the greenhouse gas emissions that created the climate crisis. The second substantial multi-year grant was awarded to Lutherans Restoring Creation, a Social Ministry Organization of the ELCA, to support their stewardship as they host, manage, and report on the work of the ELCA’s Creation Care Network.

Continued advocacy for reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is encouraged and amplified by the full-time program director for environment and energy policy in the Service and Justice home area and colleagues throughout state public policy offices. This work and the related resources are continually updated on the website [hub](#). ELCA Witness in Society team has taken numerous actions to support advocacy around creation care and the reduction of GHG emissions as well as events across the church to educate and equip congregants and rostered ministers to speak and act on the climate emergency. ELCA Climate advocacy works across various levels of government and institutions to call for change.

Specifically, ELCA Witness in Society members work at the state level, across 16 states, on policies that address climate change. Federal policy staff in ELCA's D.C. office work directly with members of congress, across all 50 states and 4 territories, to advocate for policy to prevent climate change and promote climate justice. Additionally, the ELCA Witness in Society team addresses climate change by advocating at the global level through United Nations events, including UN General Assembly, UN Water Conference, UN High Level Political Forum, and the Annual United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference of Parties. Each of these events reach all 193-member states of the United Nations.

Over the course of the last 5 years, the ELCA Advocacy offices in D.C., New York City, and across three states have dedicated substantial time and capacity toward advocating for policy-change in mitigating climate change (reducing GHG emissions). Here are examples of legislation or executive actions that have been worked on by ELCA advocacy staff and made significant headway politically.

1. Federal/International: Mitigation efforts include the Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Power Plant Regulations 2024, Vehicle Emissions Standards Rule, Methane Rule 2024, United States Updated GHG Reduction Commitment (NDC) 2025

2. States (California, Colorado, Wisconsin): 19 pieces of legislation to mitigate climate change

Witness in Society Federal staff have provided training on advocacy at various ELCA events including: Global Mission Summer Missionary Orientation, World Hunger Leaders Gathering, ELCA Youth Extravaganza, Lutheran Disaster Response Community of Practice Gathering, and the Youth Leadership Summit, reaching over 1,500 people at these events. Additionally, ELCA Witness in Society, collaborating with ELCA Young Adults, has organized an Advocacy Immersion trip as an annual gathering of young adults to discuss Climate Justice and engage in direct advocacy. This program has engaged over 35 young adults in the last two years. Finally, ELCA Witness in Society reaches people through State Public Policy Offices and their events on climate including annual Lobby Days that gather hundreds of Lutherans or Interfaith advocates to meet with state lawmakers about climate legislation.

The ELCA's Creation Care Network facilitates communication across all three expressions of the ELCA and ensures a spectrum of churchwide organization members and representatives from synods, congregations, and ecumenical organizations regularly assess emerging programs, event planning and procurement, and communications to consider long-term environmental impacts and opportunities for leveraging assets. Lutherans Restoring Creation maintains an abundance of resources and data collection as they connect with congregations and constituents across the nation. They offer creation care coaching and training services, along with an online searchable database of local and regional actions that ELCA members and congregations have made nationwide. LRC also supports and amplifies theologically grounded courses, training and resources for both pastoral and lay-leaders on the just use and sharing of Earth's resources.

This work is increasingly collaborative amongst this church's international and interfaith colleagues as climate change is a threat multiplier. From disaster relief to migrant support, God's call to love neighbor does not stay within the confines of staff portfolio obligations. This summer the World Hunger Education and Network team set up experiential learning opportunities at the National Youth Gathering and included elements of climate induced disaster that participants navigated through, as it exacerbated hunger and poverty both domestically and internationally. They also sponsored Lutherans Restoring Creation to come and set up a reflective education space at the conclusion of the World Hunger learning journey where youth were exposed to composting, revisioning the future through art, and had an opportunity to make a climate commitment.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has provided technical and financial support to congregations working to transform their physical spaces into climate resiliency hubs. They also integrate climate

awareness and ways to mitigate and prepare for the increasing frequency and intensity of storms as a standard discussion point in all disaster trainings. LDR financially supported and participated in workshops and conferences regarding disaster response to climate-induced storms, including the 2024 Mid-Atlantic Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster with the theme “Impacts and Implications of a Warming World.”

In spring of 2024, the ELCA released a study guide called “[Our Kairos Moment](#)” to dive deeper into the [Message on Earth’s Climate Crisis](#). The four-session study guide is for small groups and is available to inspire learning and action. It uses videos, storytelling, bible studies, and interactive activities to help groups explore the effects of climate change on communities in the US and around the world and inspire one another to effective action.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the report on “Greenhouse Gas Reduction” from the Service and Justice home area;

To commend the initiatives and efforts supported through the Creation Care Network to engage in creation care and environmental advocacy to guide this church in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions; and

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

Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force

Final report from the Christian Community and Leadership Home Area (April 2025)

The Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force addressing this memorial would like to respectfully note concerns regarding the ELCA's previous approach to this issue, which has primarily focused on studies and discussions with limited actionable outcomes. Additionally, the preliminary work has revealed that the allocated timeframe is impossible given the complexity of the matter. The scope extends beyond simply 'supporting urban ministries,' as it necessarily involves addressing underlying systemic factors including racism, classism, and other structural barriers that impact this task force's ability to effectively comprehend and respond to the needs of urban congregations.

Since the last report to the April 2024 meeting, the task force has convened three times. The task force began by reviewing the original intent of the memorial through interviews with individuals who assisted in drafting it for the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. Next, the task force examined previous urban ministry initiatives by surveying the varied experiences of each task force member in their respective urban contexts. The most notable initiative was In the City for Good, which was launched at the 1998 Churchwide Assembly and operated for approximately a decade. Finally, the task force consulted with Innovation home area regarding its 2023 project with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Their report on urban ministry visits within the synod revealed four significant findings:

1. **Serving Neighbors:** Every congregation, regardless of size, engages with their immediate community in meaningful ways. This was particularly evident in the prevalence of food ministries across nearly all congregations. For most, this community service forms a central element of their organizational identity.
2. **Building Challenges:** Facility size and/or maintenance presents significant challenges for all congregations surveyed.
3. **Attendance Trends:** The majority of congregations reported experiencing declining attendance, with common themes including challenges in returning to in-person worship and overall membership reduction.
4. **Collaboration Opportunities:** Congregations are developing innovative solutions to their challenges and envisioning new ministry possibilities. However, these efforts often remain isolated within individual communities. Neighboring congregations may be addressing identical challenges without awareness of potential synergies or shared learning opportunities within the broader community.

Based on these meetings, the task force has developed several initial recommendations, while recognizing that additional time would be beneficial to comprehensively address the complex issues at hand. Recommendations include:

1. **Regular Network Establishment:** The churchwide organization should establish a consistent networking forum (Network for Urban Ministries) where congregational and judicatory leaders can access support and exchange ideas to strengthen urban ministries. This could also serve as a platform for documenting and sharing effective evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship practices occurring within urban congregations.
2. **Resource Coordination:** The churchwide organization would benefit from considering a staffed resource center where urban ministries can access information and assistance regarding funding opportunities such as grants. The designated staff member would be responsible for gathering and distributing relevant information to Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs), Assistants to the Bishops, and ministry leaders.
3. **Inclusive Definition:** The ELCA would benefit from expanding its definition of urban ministries to better reflect the diverse populations encompassed by this memorial. Urban ministries

frequently extend beyond communities of African descent to include varied ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.

4. **Messaging Strategy:** Christian Community and Leadership home area should collaborate with DEMs to develop a communication approach that reinforces the core identity of urban ministries as Jesus-centered communities serving the world. Through this messaging, DEMs can inspire urban congregations they engage with across the synod.
5. **Property Resource Utilization:** The ELCA should leverage the recently launched Church Property Resource Hub to facilitate discussions with urban ministries regarding property utilization and maintenance challenges.

Respectfully and prayerfully offered for consideration,

Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force

**Update on Indigenous Ministries Requested Action
from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly**

Below is a summary of the action that was taken. The highlighted section identifies what the Churchwide Organization was asked to address.

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.03.14]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from Northwest Washington Synod, Oregon Synod, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod concerning the Land Back movement;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to explore including land acknowledgements which center Native voices as part of their public gatherings;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to become educated about the Indigenous peoples who thrived, prior to European contact, on the land they currently inhabit;

To learn about, learn from, and be in deepening relationship with Indigenous people and tribal nations;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners, to support creative programs of restorative justice in partnership with Indigenous people, including, but not limited to, whenever considering a transfer or sale of real property, including returning land (and any structures built on it) after satisfying any financial obligations, to the appropriate Native nations, and when direct return is not feasible or not desired by the Indigenous people, to return the proceeds from the sale of the land to the ELCA Native American Ministry Fund or other local Indigenous led ministries or organizations;

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to work collaboratively with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners to explore sources and needs in funding for the more than 30 ELCA Indigenous congregations and service ministries; and

To direct the Resource Development and the Budget and Finance Committees of the Church Council to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these congregations and service ministries; and for these synods, home areas, offices, and committees to present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to first engage with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners whenever planning or considering work related to Indigenous people or ministries.

Response from Churchwide Organization (April 2025)

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas have visited on site, alone or together, several native ministries for the purpose of listening and developing a better understanding of their funding and leadership strategies. This includes 16 out of the 24 Native ELCA Ministries listed below:

Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rocky Boy, MT
Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Rock Point AZ
House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Rock Point, AZ
Alaska Native Lutheran Church Anchorage, Alaska
Our Saviors Lutheran Church Nome, Alaska

Kingigin (formerly Thornton Memorial) Lutheran Church Wales, Alaska
Shishmaref Lutheran Church Shishmaref, Alaska
Brevig Memorial Lutheran Church Brevig, Alaska
Teller Lutheran Church Teller, Alaska
Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
* Woyatan Ministry Rapid City, South Dakota
* Wambli Ska (Woyatan Ministry) Rapid City, South Dakota
* Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministry (OLUTEP) Pine Ridge, South Dakota
* Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center Pine Ridge, South Dakota
Open Circle, Portland, Oregon
Native American Urban Ministry Phoenix, Arizona

*planned but not yet completed at the writing of this report

The Office of the Treasurer worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations to request copies of budgets from these ministries for the purpose of understanding their financial needs. Here is a summary of what has been received.

13 ministries submitted both revenue and expenditure budgets
5 ministries submitted expenditure budgets only
2 ministries declined to participate
4 ministries did not respond

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations and the Office of the Treasurer to develop a historic understanding of what resources each Native American Ministry has received since the start of the ELCA in 1988 from all sources that staff could identify. The table below summarizes these grants.

Years	Grant \$ provided to ELCA Indigenous Ministries by:			Programmatic Staff Support	Totals
	<u>Churchwide</u>	<u>Synods</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Churchwide</u>	
1988 - 2013	\$7,261,299	No info	-	\$1,442,389	\$8,703,688
2014 – 2022	\$3,523,343	\$2,176,132	-	\$1,075,393	\$6,774,868
2023 – 2024 *	\$933,378	\$599,857	\$256,000	\$656,023	\$2,445,258
Total	\$11,718,020	\$2,775,989	\$256,000	\$3,173,805	\$17,923,814
* Represents years since 2022 CWA Action					

An **additional \$2.1 million** in grants have been provided to other organizations that relate to these Indigenous ministries including Thunder Valley/Community Development Corporation (Pine Ridge), Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Pacifica Synod, and Oglala Lakota Housing Authority. Of this \$2.1 million in grants to other organizations, \$1.65 million has been given in 2023 and 2024. This brings the total support to **\$20.0 million since 1988** based on data that staff could recover.

Ongoing Support

In reviewing the thirteen complete budgets that were submitted, the range of annual support needed to breakeven ranged from \$0 - \$307,000 annually. Here is a breakout:

Annual Profit/Loss	# of Respondents
Breakeven or better	5
Deficit less than \$10,000	2
Deficit between \$30,000 - \$60,000	3
Deficit between \$70,000 - \$100,000	2
Deficit over \$300,000	1

The Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations has reported that the two ministries that declined to respond have annual combined budgets of well over \$1 million but does not know their revenues. The churchwide organization intends to continue supporting these 24 ELCA Indigenous ministries through a combination of Current fund (unrestricted), World Hunger, and Lutheran Disaster Response funds. Given the current declines in both unrestricted revenues and World Hunger revenues, there is not current capacity to increase the funding support at this time without significantly compromising other work that the churchwide organization does on behalf of the ELCA.

In addition to the support provided by the churchwide organization, there are currently two endowments (one is permanently restricted with a fair market value of over \$1.7 million and the other is temp restricted with a fair market value of over \$676,000) held at the ELCA Foundation. Distributions from these endowments are 4% annually. Currently that income of just under \$100,000 annually is reinvesting but could be utilized. Withdrawals could also be made from the temp restricted endowment provided the donor restrictions have been met. As far as is known, no withdrawals have been made since 2020.

The churchwide organization currently solicits grants from external agencies to support the work. Typically, these agencies do not allow for passthrough grants to other organizations; however, the churchwide organization staff is willing to provide assistance to the 24 ELCA Indigenous Ministries including alerts to potential funding opportunities, training on researching and writing grant applications, and review of applications prepared by these ministries.

The churchwide organization continues to pray for these communities and provide resources on the elca.org website.

**Report of the Task Force on On-Leave-From-Call and Specialized Ministry
April 2025**

Mandate

The Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministry was mandated by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly and appointed by the Church Council in response to memorials sent from eight synods. The assembly took the following action:

ASSEMBLY ACTION CA22.04.26

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Southwest California Synod, South Dakota Synod, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Northern Illinois Synod, La Crosse Area Synod, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, Northwestern Ohio Synod, and Lower Susquehanna Synod concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status;

To direct the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to initiate a review process of the “Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” and the constitutional provisions and policies and procedures as they relate to interim, transition, bridge, specialized, non-parish-based, and innovative calls, as well as on-leave-from-call status, protocols for removal from the rosters, and communication protocols;

To direct the Church Council to ensure that this review process include in its scope of inquiry, but not be limited to: the time limits given for on-leave-from-call, steps for requesting a roster status, and a process by which an action or lack of recommendation from a bishop may be appealed, including the possibility of an appeal in a judicatory other than the synod from which they were removed from the roster;

To require that those involved in the review process include a diverse group representing both the roster of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Word and Service who are or have recently been involved in specialized ministries (e.g., interim, transition, campus, outdoor, college or seminary faculty, chaplains, mission developers, etc.), and those currently or recently on leave from call for a variety of reasons (e.g., between calls, family, disability, study, healing from abuse, etc.);

To urge bishops and synod councils to use sparingly any action by which a minister is removed from the roster for non-disciplinary reasons, unless the minister requests removal, until this review is complete, especially for those serving contract calls, as supply preachers, and in other ELCA ministries that don't qualify as a call; and

To require that the appropriate unit of the churchwide organization prepare a report and recommendations for consideration by the fall 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

In addition, the Church Council asked the task force to consider the work of other task forces and to respond to other resolutions that had come from synods:

- “Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA” (CC22.11.34.ee.)
- “Extending Pastoral Counseling through Private Practice” (CC22.11.34.gg.)
- “Providing for Ordination of Candidates serving as Interim Pastors” (CC23.11.20cc)
- “Revisions to Roster Manual” regarding roster appeals (EC23.11.53c1)
- “Extending OLFC to Six Years” (EC22.03.10c); and
- Recommendations regarding the current discipline process shared by the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color (CC23.04.05)

Process

The task force met a number of times to identify issues and develop strategies for gathering information from rostered ministers and from the Conference of Bishops. Members held a series of listening sessions across this church for rostered ministers who are on leave from call (OLFC) or who have recently been OLFC. Surveys of the Conference of Bishops (COB) were conducted to solicit bishops' opinions on questions related to OLFC, interim ministry, and the process for exceptions to the three-year congregational service bylaw relating to ministers of Word and Sacrament seeking calls to specialized ministry either for ordination to a first call or within their first three years of service. In addition, members reviewed the policies of full communion partners, including The Episcopal Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ, the Reformed Church in America, and the United Methodist Church. The task force also engaged in discussion of this church's understanding of call and of ordination.

The following sections detail the task force's analysis of the issues and its recommendations for revisions to governing documents and roster policies related to the areas of concern raised by the Churchwide Assembly and the various synod resolutions referred to the task force.

On-Leave-From-Call Status

The Churchwide Assembly action identified three primary areas of concern related to on-leave-from-call status:

- Time limits for OLFC
- Steps for requesting a roster status
- Possibility of an appeal of the synod bishop's status recommendation

Under existing policy, regular OLFC is limited to three years, while family leave and study leave are both for six years. OLFC must be requested in writing within 45 days of ending a call, and the synod bishop must make a recommendation to the Synod Council as to whether leave should be granted. A positive recommendation from the bishop allows the Synod Council to vote on granting the status. A failure to endorse the request, however, immediately terminates the process and results in the removal of the rostered minister from the roster. Rostered ministers have complained that this process is open to potential abuse by a bishop, who could use an unappealable negative recommendation to remove a minister with whom the bishop has a poor relationship, avoiding the formal disciplinary process.

Rostered ministers are required to seek annual renewal of their OLFC status from the Synod Council. Those whose leave is coming to an end can seek up to two years of extension, which must be requested by the synod bishop and Synod Council, recommended by the COB's Roster Committee, and approved by the Conference of Bishops. These extensions are quite regularly granted. Second, and even third, extensions can be granted by the COB, effectively expanding the time limit to as much as 12 years for those with family or study leave and 9 years for those with regular OLFC.

Task force members were struck by the consistency of the discussions across the listening sessions. It was clear that there is much anxiety around the process of OLFC. While the process is outlined in the roster manual, it often is unfamiliar to rostered ministers. In addition, synods have their own paperwork and process steps for requesting OLFC status. Rostered ministers report that they frequently are confused by or are ignorant of the process and that they have not received clear instruction from the synod regarding expectations for requesting OLFC status, the time limits, and what is expected for annual renewal of the leave or for requesting an extension. Many rostered ministers report a sense of isolation or of "being forgotten." Many feel frustrated that they are actively engaged in ministry such as supply preaching or

88 serving as an interim, yet that ministry is not officially recognized as a call. Even the term “on leave from
89 call” is a source of pain for some, because they continue to understand themselves as called to ministry—
90 they simply don’t have a recognized outlet for exercising their continuing call to ministry.

91 There was almost unanimous consensus among those interviewed that the three-year limit for regular
92 OLFC is too short, and that, as the end of the leave approaches, anxiety rises and stress mounts because of
93 the threat of being removed from the roster.

94 Interviewees discussed the fact that this church and its needs for rostered ministry are changing.
95 Increasingly, congregations cannot afford a pastor at the minimum 15 average hours per week threshold
96 that is the current criterion for ministry to qualify as a call. (This threshold was established because of
97 Portico requirements for sponsorship.) Ministers wondered why their ten hours a week of supply
98 preaching or other ministry with one congregation or multiple congregations as a transition or bridge
99 pastor could not count as a call.

100 Rostered couples are especially challenged by the time limits, with one spouse often unable to find a call
101 near their spouse’s call. Those in the listening sessions wondered how the ELCA could be more adaptive
102 with the language of “call,” especially in interim situations. Some synods issue calls for most interims,
103 while others do not issue interim calls at all, and still others issue calls only for interims that have
104 significant time commitments. The result is that for some ministers who are OLFC but serving as interim
105 pastors the OLFC “clock” doesn’t stop ticking, while for others an interim call “resets the clock” and they
106 can start over with a full term of leave again. This can happen even within the same synod, depending on
107 the bishop’s or Synod Council’s decisions about which interims qualify for a letter of call.

108 Finally, there is definitely a perceived stigma among rostered leaders about being OLFC. The feeling most
109 often expressed is that the minister is seen as having “failed” in a call and had to leave, which adds to the
110 grief of leaving the call.

111 In surveying synod bishops, the task force learned that the refusal to make a positive recommendation to
112 grant leave is exercised less frequently than popular perception would suggest. Only three bishops
113 reported using that authority even once a year. A majority of bishops favor increasing time limits. A
114 majority also supported the idea of maintaining some time limits for OLFC but establishing an alternative
115 roster status for those ministers who continue to provide ministry such as supply and contract ministry
116 that does not currently qualify for a letter of call, and a similar majority supported some sort of inactive
117 roster status for those who, for various reasons, need to step away from all active ministry for a time.

118 Bishops having sole authority to deny on-leave or retired status without review was seen as problematic.
119 A majority of bishops supported establishment of a policy that all requests for a change in roster status
120 would automatically go before the Synod Council with the bishop’s recommendation as a point of
121 information, rather than being determinative. There was support for establishment of a policy that, if the
122 bishop’s recommendation is to deny the roster status request, the rostered minister would have to be
123 informed of that recommendation and be given a guaranteed opportunity to present the minister’s
124 position. There was support for establishing a process that would allow for the minister to appeal the
125 bishop’s recommendation at the synod level.

126 ***Recommendations for On-Leave-From-Call Status:***

- 127 • Establish in the roster manual a protocol for roster status requests that includes the following:
128 (*See Appendix for proposed roster manual changes.*)
 - 129 o All requests for on-leave status will be voted on by the Synod Council.

- o The synod bishop will make a recommendation to the Synod Council regarding approval or denial of the status request.
 - o The bishop will communicate the recommendation to the rostered minister prior to the Synod Council vote.
 - o If the recommendation is for denial of status, the rostered minister will be granted an opportunity to address the Synod Council or a designated committee.
 - o After hearing from the rostered minister and the synod bishop, the committee may request that the bishop convene a consultation panel to investigate further and make recommendations to the Synod Council. The decision of the Synod Council is final.
 - o If the Synod Council wishes to override the synod bishop's positive recommendation for leave, the rostered minister would be granted the same opportunity to be heard as described above before a final decision is made.
- The regular on-leave category would be intended primarily for those rostered ministers who for various reasons are choosing to step away from active ministry for a season. Others may be granted a Synod Council letter of call to supply ministry.
 - Increase the time limit for regular leave to six years to match the limits for family and study leave, still with the possibility of being granted extensions to that leave. Rostered ministers already on leave would have their current leave extended to the new limit.
 - Establish in the ELCA Constitution the possibility of a Synod Council letter of call to supply ministry that would be a one-year term call, renewable annually, for those ministers of Word and Sacrament who do not have a settled call but who remain active in ministry. This type of call would not be eligible as a first call for those candidates seeking ordination.
 - Establish policies and standards in the roster manual for those who have a letter of call to supply ministry that includes minimum thresholds for service and a requirement of annual reporting to the synod bishop of the minister's exercise of the call, with that report to be incorporated into the regular annual report form required of all rostered ministers.
 - Encourage synods to consider whether ministers of Word and Service without a regular call may nonetheless actually be currently engaged in an employment that could, in fact, qualify as a call.
 - Include in the ELCA bylaws that a rostered minister who resides at too great a distance from any congregation of this church to be able to sustain an active relationship with that congregation, or if there are no congregations of this church in the vicinity, other than a congregation previously served, may be granted permission to hold membership in a congregation of one of our full communion partners. (This possibility has already been granted to those rostered ministers with retired or disability status.)
 - Change the title from "on leave from call" to simply "on leave" to stress that the rostered minister is temporarily on voluntary leave, but to avoid suggesting that the Spirit's call to ministry has been withdrawn.

(See Appendix for proposed changes to the Constitution and certain of the proposed changes to the roster manual. Additional changes to roster manual policy will be drafted following action by the Churchwide Assembly.)

Interim Ministry

As detailed above, the task force learned that calls to interim ministry are handled very differently from synod to synod, which can lead to inequity. The task force believes that issuance of a synod letter of call to interim ministry should be the norm in most situations, while still leaving discretion to the synod

bishop and Synod Council to vary from that norm if there are circumstances that call for it, such as a very short-term interim that is better addressed by a supply pastor.

Synods have also asked that ministers of Word and Service be given the possibility of a Synod Council letter of call to serve as an interim deacon in a congregation. It should be stressed that this is not to be understood as granting sacramental authority to a deacon to serve as an interim pastor. However, a deacon could receive a synod call to serve as an interim congregation deacon and the synod bishop could separately, under the established policies, authorize that deacon to also serve as a synod-authorized minister (SAM).

Recommendations for Interim Ministry:

- Establish in the bylaws that rostered ministers serving in an interim ministry shall normally serve under a letter of call. (The existing exception will be maintained that allows ministers with retired status to be appointed to serve an interim without a letter of call.)
- Add “interim congregation deacon” to the Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Service in the ELCA Constitution.

Because of the often complicated dynamics of congregations in transition and the possibility that an interim may last only for a short time, the task force does not recommend allowing for ordination of candidates to serve in interim ministry calls. However, it does recommend that exceptions continue to be considered for rostered ministers who have served a portion of their initial three years in a congregation and who have demonstrated the gifts and maturity to navigate interim ministry.

- Revise language in the roster manual to clarify that exceptions for interim ministry are allowable with approval of the Conference of Bishops by adding language on p. 24: “d) Only pastors who have served in a regular called congregational ministry for a minimum of three years are eligible to serve in a called interim ministry unless an exception is granted by the Conference of Bishops.”

Retired Roster Status

This task force was asked by the Church Council to incorporate into its work the previous work of a task force that was created to look at roster manual policies regarding the granting of retired roster status, triennial review of those with retired roster status, and revocation of retired status.

Many of the issues laid out above concerning the granting of OLFC status are similar to those that exist for the retired status. The task force believes that these requests should follow the same protocol as requests for OLFC, with the rostered minister being granted opportunity to present a position in the case of a recommendation for denial or revocation of status.

Recommendations for Retired Roster Status:

- Establish policies in the roster manual that require the following: *(See Appendix.)*
 - All requests for granting or revocation of retired status will be voted on by the Synod Council.
 - The synod bishop will make a recommendation to the Synod Council regarding approval or denial of the status request.
 - The bishop will communicate the recommendation to the rostered minister prior to the Synod Council vote.

- o If the recommendation is for denial of status, the rostered minister will be granted an opportunity to address a designated committee.
 - o After hearing from the rostered minister and the synod bishop, the committee may request that the bishop convene a consultation panel to investigate further and make recommendations to the Synod Council. The decision of the Synod Council is final.
 - o If the Synod Council wishes to override the synod bishop's positive recommendation for retired status, the rostered minister would be granted the same opportunity to be heard as described above before a final decision is made.
- Provide in the roster manual clear guidelines for synod councils to use in the review of retired status currently mandated at least triennially.

Average Time Requirements for Calls

Current policy requires that all calls must require an average minimum of 15 hours per week. As described above, however, an increasing number of ministry situations do not require (or cannot afford) that many hours of service.

The task force believes that it would be wise to eliminate average time requirements for non-stipendiary and supply ministry calls and establish policies to set minimum accountability standards for those calls, and to reduce the requirement for a regular letter of call to 10 hours average minimum per week. Rostered ministers who are working fewer than 15 hours per week would be advised that their call does not qualify for Portico benefits. The churchwide organization would work with Portico to create a mechanism for a sponsoring entity to report whether a call meets Portico's threshold for sponsorship.

Recommendations for Average Time Requirements for Calls:

- Eliminate average time requirements for non-stipendiary and supply ministry calls and establish policies in the roster manual for minimum accountability standards.
- Reduce the average time requirement for regular calls to 10 hours per week.

Specialized Ministry

As this church increasingly seeks means of opening itself to new forms of ministry, new understandings of worshipping communities, and innovative means of serving the neighbor, the need for trained leadership for these ministries presents itself more and more frequently. One response has been the lifting up of the roster of Word and Service, which at its core is focused on specialized ministry to this church and to the neighbor and world in all its many forms.

For ministers of Word and Sacrament, however, the questions are more complex, primarily for those candidates and first-call pastors who are seeking synod calls for ministry outside of the congregation. Bylaw 7.41.02. describes a key component of this church's understanding of the ministry of Word and Sacrament:

7.41.02. Initial Call to Congregational Service. Because the responsibilities of the office of the ministry of Word and Sacrament are most clearly focused in the congregational pastorate, experience in which is deemed by this church to be invaluable for all other ministry of Word and Sacrament, initial service of at least three years shall be in a congregation of this church, or, with the approval of the synod bishop, a congregation of a church body with which a relationship of full communion exists. Exceptions to the three-year requirement may be

granted under criteria and procedures recommended by the appropriate churchwide unit,
reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council.

At the heart of this discussion are the issues of how we are to understand calling to the ministry of Word and Sacrament. It may be that some of these ministries are better served by ministers of Word and Service or by laypersons. Also to be considered is the conviction strongly held by many that three years of pastoral formation in a congregation is a great benefit to this church. Others hold an equally strong conviction that the three-year bylaw restrains the movement of the Spirit into new ministries.

The exception process is intended to allow for openness to different forms of ministry for Word and Sacrament ministers. The current process requires the following: 1) a letter of request from the synod bishop; 2) a letter of request from the candidate; 3) a vote from the Synod Council indicating willingness to issue a letter of call if the exception is granted; 4) a letter from the entity the candidate hopes to serve; and 5) a letter of support from the candidate's Candidacy Committee. That documentation is presented to the Roster Committee, which then makes a recommendation to the COB, which at its twice-yearly meetings votes to grant or deny the exception. (The Roster Committee also has authority to grant exceptions for urgent requests during the interim between COB meetings.)

There is a perception among many rostered ministers and candidates that the process for an exception is cumbersome and slow, and that requests are frequently denied. However, a review of the past 10 years of exception requests reveals that, of 171 requests, all but five were approved by the COB. The reason most often cited for debate over a given request was the question of whether a particular ministry required sacramental responsibilities. What those numbers do not reflect, however, would be those situations where the synod bishop may have chosen not to request an exception to the bylaw, perhaps because the bishop believed that the proposed call did not entail any sacramental responsibilities.

In response to concerns about the need for congregational pastoral formation and participation in sacramental responsibilities, the Roster Committee now regularly requires that ministers seeking exceptions commit to ongoing formation by serving for a limited number of hours per month for a limited term in a local congregation, concurrent with their service in the non-congregational call.

There are also categories of call that do not require a vote by the full COB. The Roster Committee is empowered to grant exceptions for federal chaplaincy and global service, and mission development calls are considered to fulfill the congregational service requirement.

The task force believes that there is a middle path that both tends to concerns about pastoral formation and the nature of call to Word and Sacrament ministry and recognizes the need for openness to new forms of ministry and the work of the Spirit.

Recommendations for Specialized Ministry:

- Expand the number of designated categories of call that do not require an exception request to include the following:
 - o Federal chaplaincy
 - o Global service (other than YAGM-related)
 - o Hospital/hospice chaplaincy
 - o Campus ministry
 - o Mission development
 - o For the purposes of exceptions, "mission development" is to be understood as a call to Word and Sacrament ministry with a Synod-Authorized Worshipping Community (SAWC). Calls to

other developing ministries, such as Synod-Authorized Outreach Ministries (SAOMs), would still be subject to an exception request and authorization by the Conference of Bishops, which will consider the degree to which sacramental ministry is part of the responsibilities of the call.

- Establish policies in the roster manual that require the following:
 - All requests for exceptions to the three-year bylaw must come to the Conference of Bishops from the Synod Council, rather than the council simply affirming its willingness to extend a letter of call.
 - The synod bishop will make a recommendation to the Synod Council regarding approval or denial of the request to seek an exception from the Conference of Bishops.
 - The bishop will communicate the recommendation to the candidate or rostered minister prior to the Synod Council vote.
 - If the recommendation is for denial of the request, the candidate or rostered minister will be granted an opportunity to address a designated committee.
 - After hearing from the candidate (or rostered minister) and the synod bishop, the committee may request that the bishop convene a consultation panel to investigate further and make recommendations to the Synod Council. The decision of the Synod Council is final.
 - If the Synod Council wishes to override the synod bishop's positive recommendation for an exception request, the rostered minister would be granted the same opportunity to be heard as described above before a final decision is made.
- Standardize roster manual policies concerning the expectation that all ministers of Word and Sacrament who receive exceptions to the three-year bylaw will provide concurrent, time-limited service in a local congregation in order to receive ongoing pastoral congregational formation.
- Encourage more frequent meetings of the Roster Committee to consider requests for exceptions in order to speed the exception process for those requests that require urgency.

The task force is not prepared at this time to make recommendations regarding letters of call for pastoral counseling in private practice, which is an area of ministry that raises unique questions of liability for the synods.

Conclusion

The Task Force on On Leave from Call and Specialized Ministry is grateful for the opportunity to meet together and to engage rostered ministers from across this church in envisioning faithful, just, and equitable policies that will also serve the needs of the gospel in the many and varied contexts in which our rostered ministers serve. We have heard the voices of ministers deeply pained by their experiences in those times of waiting for a new call, as well as the voices of those who believe that our current policies need to change in those places where they may hinder the work and call of the Spirit. Our prayer as a group is that the recommendations we make might tend to the needs of our rostered ministers and that they might offer good order in a time of change, while remaining open to the new thing to which the Spirit is calling this church.

Members of the Task Force:

Mr. Philip Allen
Ms. Yvonne Curtis
Bishop Paul Erickson
Ms. Julie Grindle

Bishop Constanze Hagmaier
Bishop Kurt Kusserow
Deacon Krista Lind
The Rev. Gabriel Marcano

The Rev. Keats Miles-Wallace
Deacon Karla Neumann Smiley

The Rev. Charles Pierson Shaw

APPENDIX

7.31.07. On Leave ~~from~~ Call. A minister of Word and Sacrament of this church, serving under a regularly issued letter of call, who leaves the work of that ministry without accepting another regularly issued letter of call, and who requests a temporary leave from active ministry, may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of this church, ~~upon endorsement by the synod bishop, by action of the Synod Council in the synod of which the minister of Word and Sacrament is a member of the synod on whose roster the minister is listed,~~ under policy developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council. Such leave shall be reviewed annually and may be terminated by the Synod Council if it no longer meets the criteria under which it was granted.

- a. ~~Normative Pattern Regular Leave: By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, upon endorsement by the synod bishop, a~~ A minister of Word and Sacrament who is without a current letter of call and who has requested temporary leave from active ministry may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of this church for a maximum of ~~three~~ six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.
- b. Study Leave: By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, with the approval of the synod bishop and in consultation with the appropriate churchwide unit, a A minister of Word and Sacrament engaged in graduate study, in a field of study that will enhance service in the ministry of Word and Sacrament, may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of this church for a maximum of six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.
- c. Family Leave: A minister of Word and Sacrament may request leave for family responsibilities. By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, upon endorsement by the synod bishop, such a minister of Word and Sacrament who is without a current letter of call and who requests leave for the birth or care of a child or children of the minister of Word and Sacrament or the care of an immediate family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health condition may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of this church—under policy developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council—for a maximum of six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.
- d. Exception Extensions to of these time limits for the purpose of serving the needs of this church may be granted in accordance with established policy of this church by the Synod Council in the synod of current roster after having received approval by the Conference of Bishops.
- e. Ministers who have been granted on-leave status are expected to maintain membership in a congregation of this church. If a minister of Word and Sacrament who has been granted on-leave status resides at too great a distance from any congregation of this church to be able to sustain an active relationship with that congregation, or if there are no congregations of this church in the vicinity, other than a congregation previously served, the bishop of the synod in which the minister of Word and Sacrament is listed on the roster may grant permission for the minister of Word and Sacrament to hold membership in a congregation or parish of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

7.41.01. Service under Call. A minister of Word and Sacrament of this church shall serve under a letter of call properly extended by a congregation, a Synod Council, a Synod Assembly, the Church Council, or the Churchwide Assembly.

- a. Calls may be extended for stated periods of time and for shared-time ministry by the appropriate calling body under criteria recommended by the appropriate churchwide

unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council for service in a congregation, synod, or churchwide unit, in an institution or agency of this church, or in another setting in a category of work as provided by continuing resolution 7.44.A19.

- b. A pastor serving under call to a congregation shall be a member of that congregation. In a parish of multiple congregations, a pastor shall be a member of one of the congregations being served.
- ~~c. Ministers of Word and Sacrament serving in interim ministry appointed by the synod bishop may serve under a letter of call, according to policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council. A call to interim ministry shall be a term call extended by the Synod Council upon recommendation of the synod bishop.~~

7.41.03. **Calls to Interim Ministry.** Ministers of Word and Sacrament serving in interim ministry shall normally serve under a letter of call, according to policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and approved by the Church Council. A call to interim ministry shall be a term call extended by the Synod Council upon recommendation of the synod bishop. Ministers of Word and Sacrament who have retired status may be appointed by the synod bishop without a letter of call.

7.41.04. **Calls to Supply Ministry.** When it is deemed necessary for the mission needs of this church, and upon recommendation of the synod bishop, a letter of call may be issued by the Synod Council—according to criteria, policies, and procedures recommended by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council—to a minister of Word and Sacrament for supply ministry. The minister of Word and Sacrament shall include a description of this ministry in the annual report to the synod bishop. A call to supply ministry is to be reviewed at least annually by the Synod Council and continued only as warranted for the ministry needs of this church. Such a call may be terminated by the Synod Council when it no longer fulfills the criteria under which it was issued.

[RENUMBER OLD 7.41.03. through 7.41.09]

7.44.A19. Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

a. Principles for Sources of Calls

- 1) A “call” is an action by expressions of this church, as specified in the “Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament,” through which a person is asked to serve in a specified ministry. Such an action is attested in a “letter of call.”
- 2) Interdependence within the body of this church suggests that any action of one of its entities affects other entities. Therefore, interdependence is expressed in all calls extended within this church.
- 3) A call expresses a relationship between this church and the person called involving mutual service, support, accountability, supervision, and discipline.
- 4) A letter of call is issued by that expression of this church authorized to do so which is most directly involved in accountability for the specified ministry.
- 5) Decisions on calls for ministries in unusual circumstances not otherwise provided for but deemed to be in the interests of this church’s care of the Gospel are referred to the Conference of Bishops for recommendation to the appropriate calling body.

b. Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament

	Setting	Calling Body
1.0	Congregational ministry	
1.1	Single congregation	Congregation meeting
1.11	Pastor	
1.12	Senior pastor	
1.13	Associate/assistant pastor	
1.14	Co-pastor	
1.15	Shared-time pastor	
1.2	Multiple-congregation parish	Congregation meetings, acting on a common proposal
1.21	Pastor	One of the participating congregations
1.22	Other pastoral arrangements	One of the participating congregations
1.3	Coalition and cluster ministry	Synod Council
1.4	Congregations beyond this church	
1.41	Independent Lutheran congregation	Synod Council
1.42	Overseas independent Lutheran congregation	Church Council upon request of appropriate churchwide unit
1.43	Full communion congregation	Synod Council
1.44	Other	Synod Council or Church Council
1.5	Interim pastor	Synod Council
1.6	Pastor in a synod-authorized ministry	Synod Council
2.0	Synod ministry	
2.1	Bishop	Synod Assembly

INSERT: 1.7 Supply Pastor Synod Council

7.74.A21. Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Service

b. Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Service

	Setting	Calling Body
1.0	Congregational ministry	
1.1	Single congregation	Congregation meeting
1.2	Multiple-congregation parish	Congregation meetings, acting on a common proposal, with one of the participating congregations issuing the call
1.3	Coalition and cluster ministry	Synod Council
1.4	Congregations beyond this church	
1.41	Independent Lutheran congregations	Synod Council
1.42	Full communion congregation	Synod Council
1.43	Deacon in a synod-authorized ministry	Synod Council
1.44	Other	Synod Council
1.5	<u>Interim congregation deacon</u>	<u>Synod Council</u>

7.61.08. On Leave ~~from Call~~. A minister of Word and Service of this church, serving under a regularly issued letter of call, who leaves the work of that ministry without accepting another regularly issued letter of call, and who requests a temporary leave from active ministry, may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of this church, upon endorsement by the synod bishop, by action of the Synod Council in the synod of which the minister of Word and Sacrament is a member of the synod on whose roster the minister is listed, under policy developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council. Such leave shall be reviewed annually and may be terminated by the Synod Council if it no longer meets the criteria under which it was granted.

- a. Normative Pattern Regular Leave: By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, upon endorsement by the synod bishop, a A minister of Word and Service who is without a current letter of call and who has requested temporary leave from active ministry may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of this church for a maximum of ~~three~~ six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.
- b. Study Leave: By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, with the approval of the synod bishop and in consultation with the appropriate churchwide unit a A minister of Word and Service engaged in graduate study, in a field of study that will enhance service in the ministry of Word and Service in this church, may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of this church for a maximum of six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.
- c. Family Leave: A minister of Word and Service may request leave for family responsibilities. By annual action of the Synod Council in the synod of which a member, upon endorsement by the synod bishop, such a minister of Word and Service who is without a current letter of call and who requests leave for the birth or care of a child or children of the minister of Word and Service or the care of an immediate

family member (child, spouse, or parent) with a serious health condition may be retained on the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of this church—~~under policy developed by the appropriate churchwide unit, reviewed by the Conference of Bishops, and adopted by the Church Council~~— for a maximum of six years, beginning at the completion of an active call.

- d. ~~Exception to~~ Extensions of these limits for the purpose of serving the needs of this church may be granted in accordance with established policy of this church by the Synod Council in the synod of current roster after having received approval by the Conference of Bishops.
- e. If a minister of Word and Service who has been granted on-leave status resides at too great a distance from any congregation of this church to be able to sustain an active relationship with that congregation, or if there are no congregations of this church in the vicinity, other than a congregation previously served, the bishop of the synod in which the minister of Word and Service is listed on the roster may grant permission for the minister of Word and Service to hold membership in a congregation or parish of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

SELECTED PROPOSED ROSTER MANUAL CHANGES

Page 31, under “Definition and criteria for on leave from call status”

(See also page 66, items 4 and 5 for Ministers of Word and Service—parallel changes to be made there)

Proposed language:

- o ~~4) If a rostered minister requesting on-leave from call status desires to make a personal statement relative to the request, the Synod Council may, at its discretion and in the manner of its determination, allow for a personal appearance by the rostered minister to the Synod Council (or its designated committee). The synod bishop shall make a recommendation to the Synod Council whether to grant or deny on-leave status, and shall inform the rostered minister of the nature of the recommendation prior to the Synod Council taking action. If the bishop recommends granting on-leave status, the Synod Council shall determine, in its discretion, whether to grant that status. If the bishop recommends that the rostered minister not be granted on-leave status, the bishop shall inform the rostered minister that the minister has the right make a personal statement to the Synod Council (or its designated committee), in the manner of the Synod Council’s determination, before it acts on the bishop’s recommendation. The rostered minister shall be given a reasonable amount of time to respond to this notification. The Synod Council (or its designated committee) may request that the bishop convene a consultation panel to investigate the situation more fully and make recommendations to the Synod Council. If the Synod Council wishes to override the synod bishop’s positive recommendation for leave, the rostered minister would be granted the same opportunity to be heard as described above before a final decision is made.~~

~~5) On-leave-from-call status is not automatically granted. Action granting or denying leave from call is to be taken by the Synod Council [ELCA constitutional provision 20.17., bylaw 7.31.07., and †S8.12.i.9. in the Constitution for Synods] upon endorsement by the synod bishop within 90 days of receiving a recommendation from the synod bishop.~~ A committee may be designated by the bishop to evaluate applications and bring recommendations to the Synod Council through the synod bishop for action.

Page 36, under “Policy and procedures related to retired status”

(See also page 71 for ministers of Word and Service—parallel changes to be made there)

- o c. The synod bishop shall determine whether the minister of Word and Sacrament [Service] is eligible for retired status and whether, ~~in the bishop's sole discretion, to recommend to the Synod Council that such roster status be granted. If the synod bishop does not endorse the request, the bishop shall report the decision to the Synod Council, in executive session if deemed necessary to recommend to the Synod Council that such roster status be granted. The bishop shall inform the rostered minister of the nature of the recommendation prior to the Synod Council taking action. If the synod bishop recommends granting retired status, the Synod Council shall determine, in its discretion, whether to grant retired status. If the bishop recommends that the rostered minister not be granted retired status, the bishop shall inform the rostered minister that the minister has the right to make a personal statement to the Synod Council (or its designated committee) in the manner of the Synod Council's determination, before it acts on the bishop's recommendation. The rostered minister shall be given a reasonable amount of time to respond to this notification. The Synod Council (or its designated committee) may request that the bishop convene a consultation panel to investigate the situation more fully and make recommendations to the Synod Council. If the synod bishop does endorse the request, †~~The Synod Council shall determine, in its discretion, whether to grant retired status. If the Synod Council wishes to override the synod bishop's positive recommendation for retired status, the rostered minister would be granted the same opportunity to be heard as described above before a final decision is made.

1. Greenhouse Gas Reduction

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.25]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Oregon Synod, Southwest California Synod, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Minneapolis Area Synod, Saint Paul Area Synod, Southwestern Texas Synod, Northern Illinois Synod, Northeastern Iowa Synod, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Greater Milwaukee Synod, North/West Lower Michigan Synod, New England Synod, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Central States Synod, and Delaware-Maryland Synod concerning greenhouse gas reduction;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to engage in creation care and advocacy based on the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, participation, and solidarity;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to advocacy and action in support of 50% reduction from 2005 levels in United States economy-wide net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To direct the ELCA Churchwide organization to set the goal of reducing its net greenhouse gas pollution 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its network ministry through the Creation Care Network to inform and guide this church in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;

To encourage congregants, rostered ministers, and bishops to commit themselves to education about the urgency of the climate emergency, the global opportunities of a just transition and to lift up loving our neighbor in response to the climate emergency through their preaching;

To affirm the Mission Investments Fund's "Green Building" initiative and resources, and to encourage continued commitment to supporting ministries in caring for creation and addressing climate change;

To refer to the Service and Justice home area, Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary, and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for implementation consistent with the memorials; and

To request the churchwide organization provide a report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly assessing the progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions across all three expressions and sharing lessons learned to help meet reduction goals.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b2]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on "Greenhouse Gas Reduction" to the Service and Justice home area, in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.

Response from the Service and Justice home area (November 2022)

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing all of God's creation. Leading scientists from around the world have confirmed that global average temperatures are growing warmer due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Human use of fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases (GHGs) into the air is the main source of the increase in these gases. As levels of carbon dioxide and other GHGs increase, more and more of the sun's heat is trapped by the atmosphere and less escapes back into space. The increase in trapped heat changes the climate, causing altered weather patterns, including multi-year droughts, extreme storms, flooding, and rising sea levels.

The memorials direct the ELCA churchwide organization (CWO) to establish targets to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This target is consistent with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report that states that, in order to prevent the worst climate damages, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) need to fall by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. The ELCA has supported these targets in its advocacy and creation care education work.

Representatives of the Service and Justice home area, the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, and the Office of the Presiding Bishop met to discuss implementation of the memorial directive. This discussion

noted that the CWO has already achieved reductions through reduced travel, more online collaboration, and hybrid work plans. The work to establish a 2005 baseline and to create emission and energy use reduction targets will require expertise beyond current churchwide staff capacity. Funding for a half-time position has been set aside in the Service and Justice home area, beginning in 2023. The CWO sees this initiative as a witness to ELCA commitments to care for creation, and an initiative that can model what synods and congregations can do. The CWO supports the reconstituting of the Creation Care Network that is currently underway.

A progress report will be made to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.r]

To receive the response on “Greenhouse Gas Reduction” from the Service and Justice home area;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and commend it for its initiatives and commitments to creation care and environmental advocacy;

To request a progress report be provided by the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting with a report expected for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from Service and Justice (April 2025)

ELCA’s churchwide response to this memorial has been ongoing as various ministry representatives continually participate in visioning and implementation of sustainability efforts. The churchwide organization’s energy usage has been in a season of reduction as staff travel has been half as frequent since 2019. The main facility in Chicago remains in good standing with a 91% Energy Star rating as a LEED certified building. An institution-wide effort to consider human inclusivity and planetary health is expressed in a living reference document titled “Sustainable Event Guidelines” for use by all when planning gatherings.

Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) interviewed synod-wide leaders, reviewed reports from hundreds of congregations and a professional survey of over 593 members and identified numerous lessons learned in response to the call to action in this 2022 memorial (<https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/climate-change-in-the-pews/>). While data shows that 74% of ELCA members want their church to do more for climate justice, many people are still unaware of available education and worship resources. Very few churches or synods have been able to measure their greenhouse gas emissions rates, even though there are free and affordable tools. Lack of time, expertise, and consistent recording-keeping is a commonly referenced hindrance. Suggested resources and networking support are offered by energy auditing organizations, but rather than hyper-focus on *output*, this church’s faith-based work has been re-directed to consistently implore a reduction of waste and share theological groundings for drastically reducing the collective input of energy pollution.

The World Hunger Education and Networking team has prioritized creation care and greenhouse gas reduction through two multi-year grants. One has gone to the Center for Climate Justice and Faith in support of their certificate programs for faith leaders (both rostered and lay-leaders) from around the world as they work to better understand how climate change disproportionately impacts communities that already are vulnerable to hunger, and that contributed to and benefitted the least from the greenhouse gas emissions that created the climate crisis. The second substantial multi-year grant was awarded to Lutherans Restoring Creation, a Social Ministry Organization of the ELCA, to support their stewardship as they host, manage, and report on the work of the ELCA’s Creation Care Network.

Continued advocacy for reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is encouraged and amplified by the full-time program director for environment and energy policy in the Service and Justice home area and colleagues throughout state public policy offices. This work and the related resources are continually

updated on the website [hub](#). ELCA Witness in Society team has taken numerous actions to support advocacy around creation care and the reduction of GHG emissions as well as events across the church to educate and equip congregants and rostered ministers to speak and act on the climate emergency. ELCA Climate advocacy works across various levels of government and institutions to call for change. Specifically, ELCA Witness in Society members work at the state level, across 16 states, on policies that address climate change. Federal policy staff in ELCA's D.C. office work directly with members of congress, across all 50 states and 4 territories, to advocate for policy to prevent climate change and promote climate justice. Additionally, the ELCA Witness in Society team addresses climate change by advocating at the global level through United Nations events, including UN General Assembly, UN Water Conference, UN High Level Political Forum, and the Annual United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference of Parties. Each of these events reach all 193-member states of the United Nations.

Over the course of the last 5 years, the ELCA Advocacy offices in D.C., New York City, and across three states have dedicated substantial time and capacity toward advocating for policy-change in mitigating climate change (reducing GHG emissions). Here are examples of legislation or executive actions that have been worked on by ELCA advocacy staff and made significant headway politically.

1. Federal/International: Mitigation efforts include the Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Power Plant Regulations 2024, Vehicle Emissions Standards Rule, Methane Rule 2024, United States Updated GHG Reduction Commitment (NDC) 2025
2. States (California, Colorado, Wisconsin): 19 pieces of legislation to mitigate climate change

Witness in Society Federal staff have provided training on advocacy at various ELCA events including: Global Mission Summer Missionary Orientation, World Hunger Leaders Gathering, ELCA Youth Extravaganza, Lutheran Disaster Response Community of Practice Gathering, and the Youth Leadership Summit, reaching over 1,500 people at these events. Additionally, ELCA Witness in Society, collaborating with ELCA Young Adults, has organized an Advocacy Immersion trip as an annual gathering of young adults to discuss Climate Justice and engage in direct advocacy. This program has engaged over 35 young adults in the last two years. Finally, ELCA Witness in Society reaches people through State Public Policy Offices and their events on climate including annual Lobby Days that gather hundreds of Lutherans or Interfaith advocates to meet with state lawmakers about climate legislation.

The ELCA's Creation Care Network facilitates communication across all three expressions of the ELCA and ensures a spectrum of churchwide organization members and representatives from synods, congregations, and ecumenical organizations regularly assess emerging programs, event planning and procurement, and communications to consider long-term environmental impacts and opportunities for leveraging assets. Lutherans Restoring Creation maintains an abundance of resources and data collection as they connect with congregations and constituents across the nation. They offer creation care coaching and training services, along with an online searchable database of local and regional actions that ELCA members and congregations have made nationwide. LRC also supports and amplifies theologically grounded courses, training and resources for both pastoral and lay-leaders on the just use and sharing of Earth's resources.

This work is increasingly collaborative amongst this church's international and interfaith colleagues as climate change is a threat multiplier. From disaster relief to migrant support, God's call to love neighbor does not stay within the confines of staff portfolio obligations. This summer the World Hunger Education and Network team set up experiential learning opportunities at the National Youth Gathering and included elements of climate induced disaster that participants navigated through, as it exacerbated hunger and poverty both domestically and internationally. They also sponsored Lutherans Restoring

Creation to come and set up a reflective education space at the conclusion of the World Hunger learning journey where youth were exposed to composting, revisioning the future through art, and had an opportunity to make a climate commitment.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has provided technical and financial support to congregations working to transform their physical spaces into climate resiliency hubs. They also integrate climate awareness and ways to mitigate and prepare for the increasing frequency and intensity of storms as a standard discussion point in all disaster trainings. LDR financially supported and participated in workshops and conferences regarding disaster response to climate-induced storms, including the 2024 Mid-Atlantic Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster with the theme “Impacts and Implications of a Warming World.”

In spring of 2024, the ELCA released a study guide called “[Our Kairos Moment](#)” to dive deeper into the [Message on Earth’s Climate Crisis](#). The four-session study guide is for small groups and is available to inspire learning and action. It uses videos, storytelling, bible studies, and interactive activities to help groups explore the effects of climate change on communities in the US and around the world and inspire one another to effective action.

Responses to Synod Actions

1. Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation

Upstate New York Synod (7D) [2022]

WHEREAS, ELCA Constitution 7.44A19 “Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament” b. “Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament” 1.2 reads:

Setting	Calling Body
1.2 Multiple-congregation parish	Congregation meetings, acting on a common proposal
1.21 Pastor	One of the participating congregations
1.22 Other pastoral arrangements	One of the participating congregations WHEREAS, pastors more and more are being asked to serve more than one congregation; and

WHEREAS, each congregation, as a place where the Promises of Jesus are proclaimed to gathered people, has the authority to call a person to be their proclaimer of those promises of Jesus; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the ELCA Church Council work up a resolution to be presented at the next ELCA Churchwide Assembly that allows more than one congregation concurrently to call the same person as pastor, and to make all necessary changes to its constitution.

Executive Committee action [EC22.06.19c3]

To refer the “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” resolution from the Upstate New York Synod to the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the appropriate churchwide organization office or home area, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and
To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2022)

This question will need to be discerned with the Conference of Bishops, in consultation with the Leadership Committee and the Roster Committee of that body. Any change would require amendments to the governing documents and revision of the roster manual.

After discussion with the Christian Community and Leadership home area, the Office of the Secretary plans to bring a report and proposed timeline to the Church Council at its November 2023 meeting, with a final report and recommendations to be brought to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC22.11.34.ff.]

To receive the timeline on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary on when the resolution will receive further attention;

To request a progress report by the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting, with a final report and recommendations by the Fall 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2023)

The energy and focus of the Conference of Bishops (COB) and its Leadership Committee over the past year has been on the restructuring of the candidacy process. As that work is coming to fruition, it will be possible for the Leadership and Roster Committees of the COB to begin to address this question. Conversation with the bishops will be scheduled for the spring 2024 COB. As any change to these policies would require amendments to the ELCA Constitution, a report and recommendations will come to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC23.11.20z]

To receive the progress report on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary and to anticipate a report and recommendations at the November 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

Because of ongoing discernment about the candidacy process and about the protocols for leave, there

has not been an opportunity for full discussion of the question of allowing for concurrent calls for rostered ministers. The question will be put before the Roster and the Leadership Committees of the Conference of Bishops in coming months. A report and recommendation will be made to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting.

Church Council action [CC24.11.20v]

To receive the progress report on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary;

To request a report and recommendation be presented at the April 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (April 2025)

More time is requested for full discussion of the question of allowing for concurrent calls for rostered ministers. The question will be put before the Roster and the Leadership Committees of the Conference of Bishops. Given the timing, the recommendation is for it to be considered along with other constitutional amendments that might be brought forward to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the progress report on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary;

To request the Office of the Secretary and the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee consider it along with the proposed constitutional amendments that will be brought to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

2. Enhancing the Call Process

Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J) [2024]

WHEREAS, the ELCA has created a system whereby candidates for call can see a 75-word summary statement about any congregation in the call process, which enhances their ability to pursue promising matches; and

WHEREAS, congregations would benefit from having a similar capacity to review potential candidates, thus streamlining and focusing their efforts during the call process; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council be instructed to request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider creating and implementing as soon as possible a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site Profile, to review brief (up to 75 words) summary statements that do not contain identifying information from potential candidates for called positions, with the possibility of requesting additional information on suitable candidates from their synod.

Executive Committee Action [EC25.01.02]

To refer the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Christian Community and Leadership home area, in consultation with the Office of the Secretary, for a report or a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from Christian Community and Leadership (April 2025)

On March 4, 2025, Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) home area called a meeting with IT and Office of the Secretary representatives to discuss the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution [EC25.01.02]. While churchwide staff were sympathetic to the desire to offer ELCA congregations more agency in the call process, several concerns were raised with adding this functionality without wider due

diligence. Namely, the concerns identified were with security for rostered ministers, lack of geographical screening, potential for coded language, increased ability to marginalize, and lack of buy-in from the Conference of Bishops. As a concession, staff wondered whether adding the personalized ministry statement, which is already included in the Rostered Ministers Profile, could be added to the results page of the search function at the synod expression.

CCL contacted the Greater Milwaukee Synod to discuss this response. It was received well, and the identified concerns were affirmed. The recommendation is to not implement any changes based on this request.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the response on “Enhancing the Call Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To decline to create and implement a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site Profile, to review brief summary statements from potential candidates for called positions; and

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

3. Full Funding for ELCA Ministries

Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod (4C) [2023]

[Originally submitted as a memorial to the Office of the Secretary but the resolution did not memorialize the Churchwide Assembly. The Secretary has determined that the action should be reclassified as a resolution.]

WHEREAS, at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly a memorial with regards to explore the sources and needs in funding for the various Indigenous ministries of the ELCA, to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these ministries, and present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

WHEREAS, there are numerous other ministry areas of the ELCA that are suffering from the lack of sustainable funding for their ministries; and

WHEREAS, these ministry areas are vitally important to the life of the mission and ministry of the ELCA; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that similar explorations of the sources and needs in funding for the ministries of the ELCA listed below and identification of potential sources of funding for these ministries with presentation of findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2028 meeting with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for the funding of these ministries during the 2029–2031 triennium budget cycle: Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, Congregational Renewal ministries.

Executive Committee action [EC23.07.35.d]

To refer the “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod to the Office of the Treasurer, in consultation with other appropriate churchwide units, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (November 2023)

The Office of the Treasurer will complete this exploration work in conjunction with the review of funding for indigenous ministries [CA22.03.13] with a full report for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC23.11.20ee]

To receive the timeline on “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Office of the Treasurer;

To request a report to present findings of possible funding of the Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, and Congregational Renewal ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026-2028 triennium budget cycle; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (April 2025)

The churchwide organization acknowledges that they do not fully understand how full funding of these ministries is defined and for what period this applies. The Office of the Treasurer reviewed the current work and a summary of the budgeted dollars to be spent on these ministries in FY2025 is shown below. This spending may come from more than one programmatic unit or office and includes spending from both unrestricted and restricted funds.

Ministry Area	FY25 Budgeted Spending in this area
Youth & Young Adults ministries	\$3,346,370
College/Campus ministries	\$1,246,801
Latin-x ministries	\$1,562,766
African Descent ministries	\$1,105,174
Arab & Middle Eastern ministries	\$262,303
Asian & Pacific Islander ministries	\$538,707
African Nationals ministries	\$175,143
Ministries of Diverse Communities and Cultures	\$1,448,895
Disabled and Differently Abled ministries	\$48,079
Education ministries	\$4,684,840
LGBTQIA+ ministries	\$118,750
Congregational Renewal, including urban ministries	\$5,738,851
New starts, including urban ministries	\$4,664,792
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility	\$468,443
Total	\$25,409,914

Ongoing Support

It is likely that these numbers may be even higher than presented because restricted funds, other than World Hunger, are not budgeted, so for most, staff were not able to identify what spending will be in FY25. Staff also did not include any withdrawals from endowments which may support this work.

Many of these categories are already a priority for the churchwide organization, not only for spending from the unrestricted budget but also for spending from donors. Here are some ways that churchwide organization is prioritizing these areas in 2025:

- Youth gathering is currently in reassessment and strategy creation, with the intent of finding ways to drive attendance at the gathering in 2027 and to identify ways to continue the momentum experienced at the 2024 gathering. For example, in 2025 and 2026, external funding has been secured to test hosting pop-up gatherings in a variety of locations.
- The Gather (online worshipping community) has set a goal to double participation from 1,000 to 2,000 within 2025. Various initiatives are underway to engage new individuals.
- The addition of a Young Adult Regional Representative position is being piloted in 2025. This individual will work with synod staff. One goal is to identify ways to coordinate effectively across regional networks for campus ministry, youth ministry, and young adult ministries.
- In 2025, directors in Ministries of Diverse Communities and Cultures are focused on setting clear strategies for their respective ethnic communities with a plan to host a full gathering for the associations in 2026 to expand this work.

It is hard to imagine that these categories will not remain priorities for the churchwide organization as the work is refined under the direction from a new presiding bishop and the Church Council. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that these ministries will continue to receive funding from the churchwide organization. The question that remains is whether this constitutes “full funding.” Regardless, given the current declines in both unrestricted revenues and World Hunger revenues, there is not current capacity to increase the funding support for all of these areas at this time without significantly compromising other work that the churchwide organization does on behalf of the ELCA.

There are other ways that the churchwide organization can support these ministries, including looking for other revenue streams. The churchwide organization currently solicits grants from external agencies to support the work. The churchwide organization staff is willing to provide assistance to diverse ELCA ministries including alerts to potential funding opportunities, training on researching and writing grant applications and review of applications prepared by these ministries.

The churchwide staff trusts that their commitment to continue to fund these ministries is clear based on the current investments in the ministries.

CC ACTION *[EN BLOC]*

Recommended:

To receive the report on the “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the churchwide organization;

To acknowledge the diminishing revenues to increase funding during the 2026-2028 triennium budget cycle;

To encourage the churchwide organization to look for additional revenue streams to continue its support of the work of the following ministries: Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latin-x ministries, African Descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and Differently Abled Persons ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, and Congregational Renewal ministries;

To urge the churchwide organization staff to provide assistance as requested to diverse ELCA ministries through means such as notifying them to potential funding opportunities, offering training on research and grant-writing applications, reviewing of applications prepared by these ministries, and developing fundraising trainings that respond to the realities of each unique ministry context; and

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

Enhancing the Call Process

Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J) [2024]

WHEREAS, the ELCA has created a system whereby candidates for call can see a 75-word summary statement about any congregation in the call process, which enhances their ability to pursue promising matches; and

WHEREAS, congregations would benefit from having a similar capacity to review potential candidates, thus streamlining and focusing their efforts during the call process; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council be instructed to request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider creating and implementing as soon as possible a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site Profile, to review brief (up to 75 words) summary statements that do not contain identifying information from potential candidates for called positions, with the possibility of requesting additional information on suitable candidates from their synod.

Executive Committee Action [EC25.01.02]

To refer the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Christian Community and Leadership home area, in consultation with the Office of the Secretary, for a report or a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from Christian Community and Leadership (April 2025)

On March 4, 2025, Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) called a meeting with IT and Office of the Secretary representatives to discuss the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution [EC25.01.02].

While churchwide staff were sympathetic to the desire to offer ELCA congregations more agency in the call process, several concerns were raised with adding this functionality without wider due diligence.

Namely, the concerns identified were with security for rostered ministers, lack of geographical screening, potential for coded language, increased ability to marginalize, and lack of buy-in from the Conference of Bishops. As a concession, staff wondered whether adding the personalized ministry statement, which is already included in the Rostered Ministers Profile, could be added to the results page of the search function at the synod expression.

CCL contacted the Greater Milwaukee Synod to discuss this response. It was received well, and the identified concerns were affirmed. The recommendation is to not implement any changes based on this request.

Response to Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries Resolution

Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod (4C) [2023]

[Originally submitted as a memorial to the Office of the Secretary but the resolution did not memorialize the Churchwide Assembly. The Secretary has determined that the action should be reclassified as a resolution.]

WHEREAS, at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly a memorial with regards to explore the sources and needs in funding for the various Indigenous ministries of the ELCA, to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these ministries, and present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

WHEREAS, there are numerous other ministry areas of the ELCA that are suffering from the lack of sustainable funding for their ministries; and

WHEREAS, these ministry areas are vitally important to the life of the mission and ministry of the ELCA; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that similar explorations of the sources and needs in funding for the ministries of the ELCA listed below and identification of potential sources of funding for these ministries with presentation of findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2028 meeting with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for the funding of these ministries during the 2029–2031 triennium budget cycle: Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, Congregational Renewal ministries.

Executive Committee action [EC23.07.35.d]

To refer the “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod to the Office of the Treasurer, in consultation with other appropriate churchwide units, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (November 2023)

The Office of the Treasurer will complete this exploration work in conjunction with the review of funding for indigenous ministries [CA22.03.13] with a full report for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC23.11.20ee]

To receive the timeline on “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Office of the Treasurer;

To request a report to present findings of possible funding of the Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, and Congregational Renewal ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (April 2025)

The churchwide organization acknowledges that they do not fully understand how full funding of these ministries is defined and for what period this applies. The Office of the Treasurer reviewed the current work and a summary of the budgeted dollars to be spent on these ministries in FY2025 is shown below. This spending may come from more than one programmatic unit or office and includes spending from both unrestricted and restricted funds.

Ministry Area	FY25 Budgeted Spending in this area
Youth & Young Adults ministries	\$3,346,370
College/Campus ministries	\$1,246,801
Latin-x ministries	\$1,562,766
African Descent ministries	\$1,105,174
Arab & Middle Eastern ministries	\$262,303
Asian & Pacific Islander ministries	\$538,707
African Nationals ministries	\$175,143
Ministries of Diverse Communities and Cultures	\$1,448,895
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The churchwide staff trusts that their commitment to continue to fund these ministries is clear based on the current investments in the ministries.

Faith, Society and Innovation Committee



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Informational Items

Received Updates and Reports from:

- Judith Roberts, Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity
- Mary Streufert
 - *Confession and Repentance for the Sins of Patriarchy and Sexism at CWA*
 - *The Quality of Call for Women in Ministry*
- Kathryn Lohre, updates on Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations
- Jackie Baumhover, Barna/Fuller Research
- Wyvetta Bullock, 2025 Operational Plan

Informational Items

Social Message on Child Protection

tinyurl.com/3fpcjeec

A draft of this social message has been released for public feedback.

Public comment period, from March 21 through June 30, 2025.

Draft presented to Church Council in Fall, 2025.

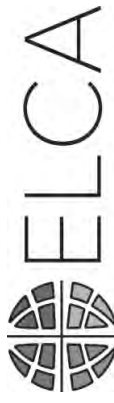


Informational Items

Confession and Repentance for the Sins of Patriarchy and Sexism at CWA

From Implementing Resolution 17 from the social statement Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action:

To direct the ELCA Church Council to establish a process for public repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy and sexism and establish a churchwide day of confession and repentance no later than the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly



En Bloc Items

Archive Certain Social Policy Resolutions

Recommended:

To recommend the following en bloc action for adoption by the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

To archive the social policy resolutions identified in the “2025 Archiving of Certain Social Policy Resolutions” document, in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

These recommendations from *Faith, Society and Innovation Committee* are *en bloc* actions for Church Council approval.

Items for Action

Social Message on White Supremacy

Recommended CC Action:

To authorize staff of the Theological Discernment Team, in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns (2018),” to review and bring a recommendation regarding the request for a social message on White Supremacy to the November 2025 Church Council meeting.



Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life

Recommended CC Action:

*To recommend the following for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:
To adopt the proposed social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being for All” as a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).*



Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life: Implementing Resolutions

Recommended CC ACTION

To recommend the following implementing resolutions for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

1. To urge members of this church to pray, participate in, and advocate for civic life in the United States that reflects God's activity and call seeking the well-being of all people and creation marked by justice and peace;
2. To encourage members to draw inspiration from the ELCA social message on Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy, which highlights the call to embrace daily our baptismal vocation through active participation in self-governance;
3. To reaffirm and encourage use across our church of other existing social teaching and policy documents that promote robust and wise civic participation, such as those that address matters of voting, campaign finance, public service, nonviolent protest, and the like;



Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life Implementing Resolutions (continued)

Recommended CC ACTION

To recommend the following implementing resolutions for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

4. To recognize with deep appreciation the commitments and efforts by those in this church—including but not limited to churchwide organization teams such as Witness in Society and Building Resilient Communities, as well as the many church-related social ministry organizations and educational institutions—that contribute to healthy civic life through service, advocacy, or education;
5. To call upon all members of this church to intentionally evaluate the dangers of polarization and the threats posed by disregard for democratic practices and self-government;
6. To encourage ELCA worshipping assemblies and ministries to build bridges, foster reconciliation, practice communal discernment, provide opportunities for difficult conversations, and address polarization constructively in their communities;



Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life Implementing Resolutions (continued)

Recommended CC ACTION

To recommend the following implementing resolutions for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

7. To encourage synod leaders, in collaboration with other appropriate bodies, to explore creating or expanding state public policy advocacy in their domains as part of the ELCA Witness in Society network, similar to those already existing in several states;
8. To direct the churchwide office, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, the theologians, and ethicists, rostered leaders, as well as elected lay leaders, to develop guidelines and protections consistent with this social statement regarding the roles in civic life of representatives of this church with official responsibility to preach, teach, and lead on behalf of our church;
9. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to consider the need for civics education curricula, civic participation guidance, and related theological reflection, and to create these in multiple formats, including multimedia and online;



Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life Implementing Resolutions (continued)

Recommended CC ACTION

To recommend the following implementing resolutions for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

10. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to explore the need for resources dedicated to nonviolent resistance and peaceful engagement in civic life, with special concern for materials dedicated to religious and political histories, liturgical guidance, and training for rostered and lay leaders;
11. To direct the Witness and Society Team of the Churchwide Organization and call upon all expressions of this church in their advocacy efforts to support and advocate for policies and laws consistent with this social statement and to give sustained attention to the fresh convictions and commitments found here in its creation of programs and projects;



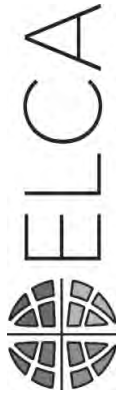
Item for Action

Social Statement on Faith & Civic Life Implementing Resolutions (continued)

Recommended CC ACTION

To recommend the following implementing resolutions for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

12. To direct the Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations in the Office of the Presiding Bishop to share this statement as a resource for dialogue, discernment, and collaboration with ecumenical and Inter-religious partners toward the well-being of all people and creation from within the U.S. context;
13. To urge faculty, staff, and administrators of ELCA-related colleges, universities, and seminaries to renew and emphasize education toward callings in public service and to model and encourage dynamic civic participation among their students;
14. To direct appropriate units in the churchwide organization, coordinated by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to establish or oversee processes for implementation of these resolutions, with an initial report to the fall meeting of the ELCA Church Council in 2027.



Item for Action

Proposed Edited Social Statement Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust, Reconsideration #1

Recommended CC Action:

To recommend the following for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

To adopt the identified changes to the social statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust (2009) as an editorial update to bring wording up to date, to clarify, and to bring it into congruence with subsequent social teaching, as authorized by 2022 Churchwide Assembly action CA22.01.07.



ELCA Churchwide Organization Treasurer's Report to Church Council *April 2025*

Financial Results as of January 31, 2025 Unrestricted Fund



Unrestricted Fund Results thru 1/31/2025

(in \$000s)	2024 Actual	2024 Budget	2023 Actual
Revenue			
Mission Support	\$35,226	\$36,053	\$37,080
Other	<u>26,854</u>	<u>21,050</u>	<u>28,033</u>
Total Revenue	62,080	57,103	65,113
Release of Design/Restr Funds	556	10,832	750
Expenses	<u>(62,476)</u>	<u>(68,084)</u>	<u>(63,477)</u>
Revenues in Excess of Expenses*	\$159	(\$149)	\$2,386

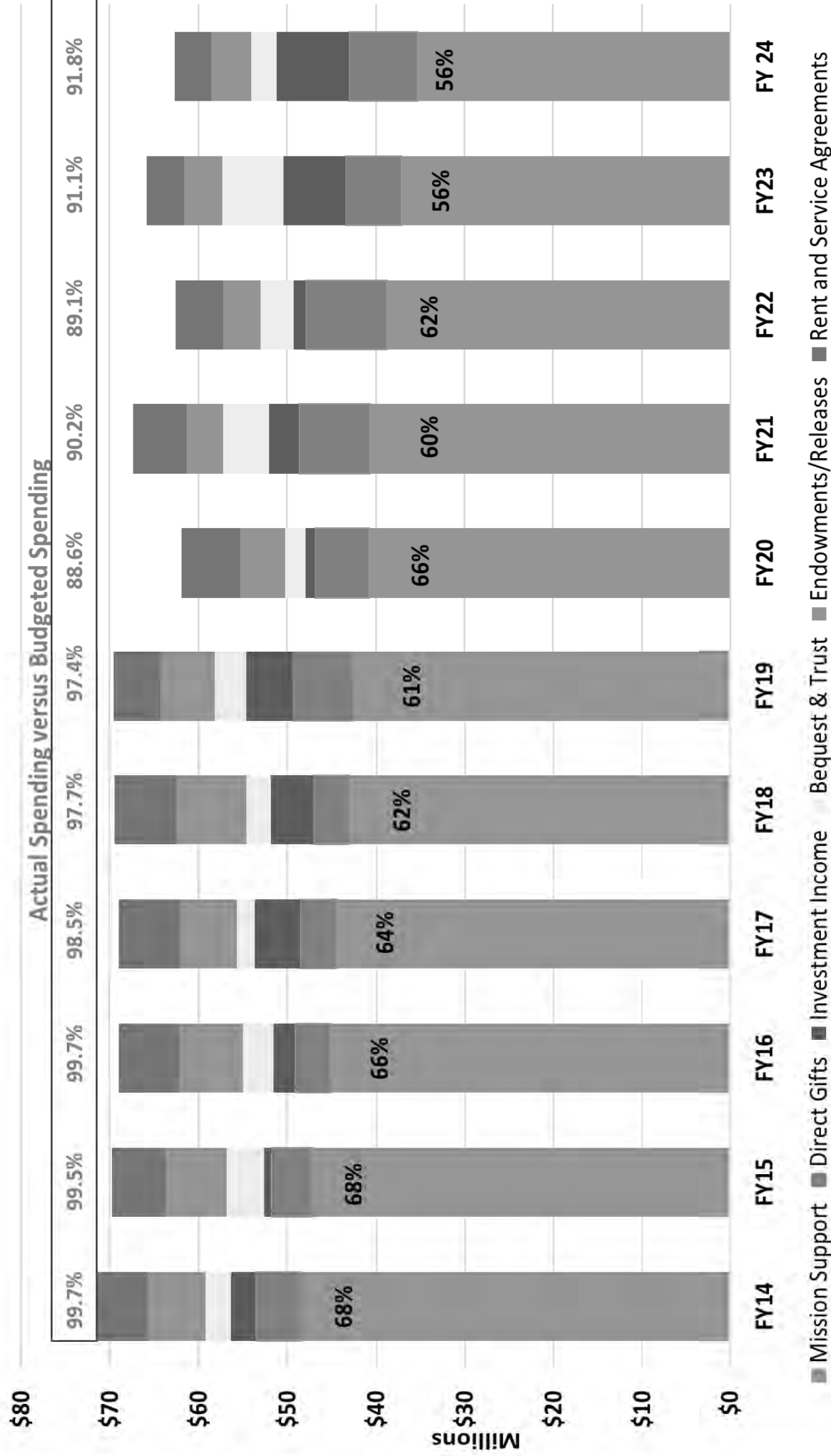
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Unrestricted Revenues and Expenses



ELCA World Hunger

	1/31/2025	1/31/2024
Beginning Fund Balance	\$8,254,388	\$13,007,464
Direct Gifts	18,512,489	17,366,974
Bequests & Endowment Distr	<u>2,147,217</u>	<u>2,834,758</u>
Total Revenues	\$20,659,706	\$20,201,732
Spending	<u>(24,463,492)</u>	<u>(24,954,808)</u>
Ending Fund Balance	\$4,450,602	\$8,254,388



FY25 Spending – Request for Change

	2025	2025	2025
	Nov Approved	Requested	Revised
	Budget	Change	Budget
Mission Support	\$ 34,355,650	\$ (805,650)	\$ 33,550,000
All Other Revenue	23,050,000		23,050,000
Total Unrestr Funds	\$57,405,650	\$ (805,650)	\$56,600,000
Desig Funds Released	5,893,476	(968,476)	4,925,000
Other Releases	3,850,000		3,850,000
Total Other	\$ 9,743,476	\$ (968,476)	\$ 8,775,000
Total Income	\$67,149,126	\$ (1,774,126)	\$65,375,000
Total Spending	(67,875,000)	2,500,000	(65,375,000)
Net Rev over Exp	\$ (725,874)	\$ 725,874	\$ -



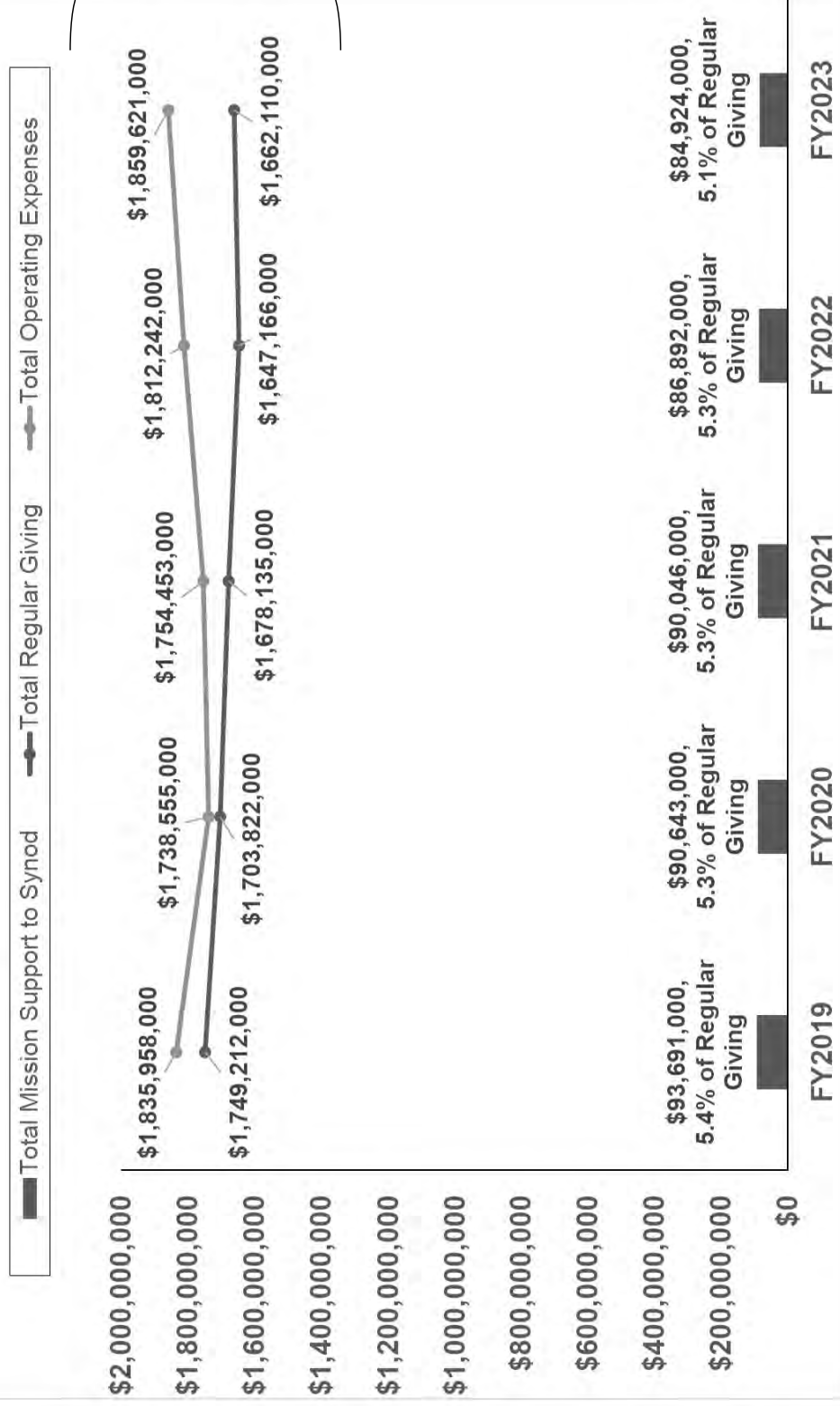
FY2026 – 2028 Budget Proposal

2026 – Spending Authorization

2027 & 2028 – Income Proposal



Totals Across the ELCA: Regular Giving and Operating Expenses Mission Support Shared by Congregations with the Synod



*FY2023 is the first time in ELCA history that total congregation expenses exceeded total regular giving by more than 10%



Proposed Income

	2025	2026	2027	2028
	April Request for Revision	Proposed Budget	Proposed Revenue	Proposed Revenue
Mission Support	\$ 33,550,000	\$ 32,100,000	\$ 30,600,000	\$ 29,200,000
Direct Gifts, incl Missionaries, YAGM, and Temp Restricted	8,000,000	8,250,000	8,500,000	8,750,000
Investment Income	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000	4,000,000
Bequests & Trusts	3,000,000	3,600,000	4,000,000	4,500,000
Endowment	3,600,000	3,650,000	3,700,000	3,750,000
Rent	1,050,000	1,000,000	865,000	870,000
Service Agreements/Other	1,900,000	1,600,000	1,600,000	1,600,000
Mission Investment Fund	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
Total Unrestricted	\$ 56,600,000	\$ 55,700,000	\$ 54,765,000	\$ 54,170,000
Other Sources of Funds				
Designated Released	4,925,000	3,082,936	-	-
Endowment W/D	3,200,000	2,000,000	1,500,000	1,500,000
RestrFunds Released	650,000	650,000	650,000	650,000
Total Other	\$ 8,775,000	\$ 5,732,936	\$ 2,150,000	\$ 2,150,000
Total Income	\$ 65,375,000	\$ 61,432,936	\$ 56,915,000	\$ 56,320,000

High Level Proposed Budgets

Current Fund	2025 Revised	2026	2027	2028
Total Income	\$65,375,000	\$61,432,936	\$56,915,000	\$56,320,000
Total Expenses	(65,375,000)	(61,500,000)		
Net income(loss)	\$---	\$(67,064)		



High Level Proposed Budgets

World Hunger	2025	2026	2027	2028
Beg Fund Bal	\$4,450,602			
Total Income	\$21,500,000	\$21,550,000	\$21,300,000	\$21,050,000
Total Expenses	<u>(21,500,000)</u>	<u>(21,550,000)</u>		
Ending Fund Bal	\$4,450,602	\$4,450,602		



Special Thanks to

- Tracey Beasley, Kerry Fehrman, Cherrish Holland, and Keoni Newman for 6 years of faithful service on BFC.
- Wyvetta Bullock for her years of service to this committee.
- Cherrish Holland for serving as BFC Chair and Kerry Fehrman as Vice Chair for last 3 years.
- To our visitors at the April meeting: Alejandro, Dina, Annette S, Chris J, and Bishop Eaton.

Thank you!

A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Budget & Finance Committee

April 2025



Information Items

Topics Discussed – No action taken

- Report on Mission Support
- Report of Resource Development Committee
- Update on Foundation/CWO Joint Committee Work
- Update on WELCA/LMM receivable balances



FY2024 Current Fund Proposed Action

- Total Unrestricted Revenues = \$62,635,475
- Total Unrestricted Expenses = \$62,476,076
 - Net income = \$159,399

To approve adding \$159,399 (the balance of net revenues over expenses for the year ended 1/31/2025) to the Church Council Designated Fund, Support for possible work from CWA Actions.



FY2025 Current Fund Proposed Action

FY2022 Actual Spending: \$59,203,111

FY2023 Actual Spending: \$62,309,000

FY2024 Actual Spending: \$62,476,076

FY2025 Spending Auth Appr in Nov: \$67,875,000

FY2025 Revised Spending Auth: \$65,375,000

To approve a reduction in the 2025 fiscal year current fund spending authorization from \$67,875,000 to \$65,375,000.



Triennial Budget 2026 – 2028

	2026	2027	2028
Current Fund Spending	\$61,500,000		
World Hunger Spending	\$21,550,000		
Current Fund Income		\$56,915,000	\$56,320,000
World Hunger Income		\$21,300,000	\$21,050,000



Other Actions Taken

Congratulations !

Pastor Lisa Ahlness
who was elected as the next BFC
Chair, effective August 2025.



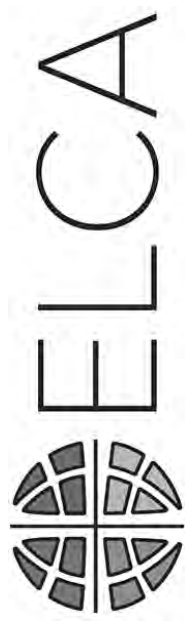
A WELCOMING CHURCH

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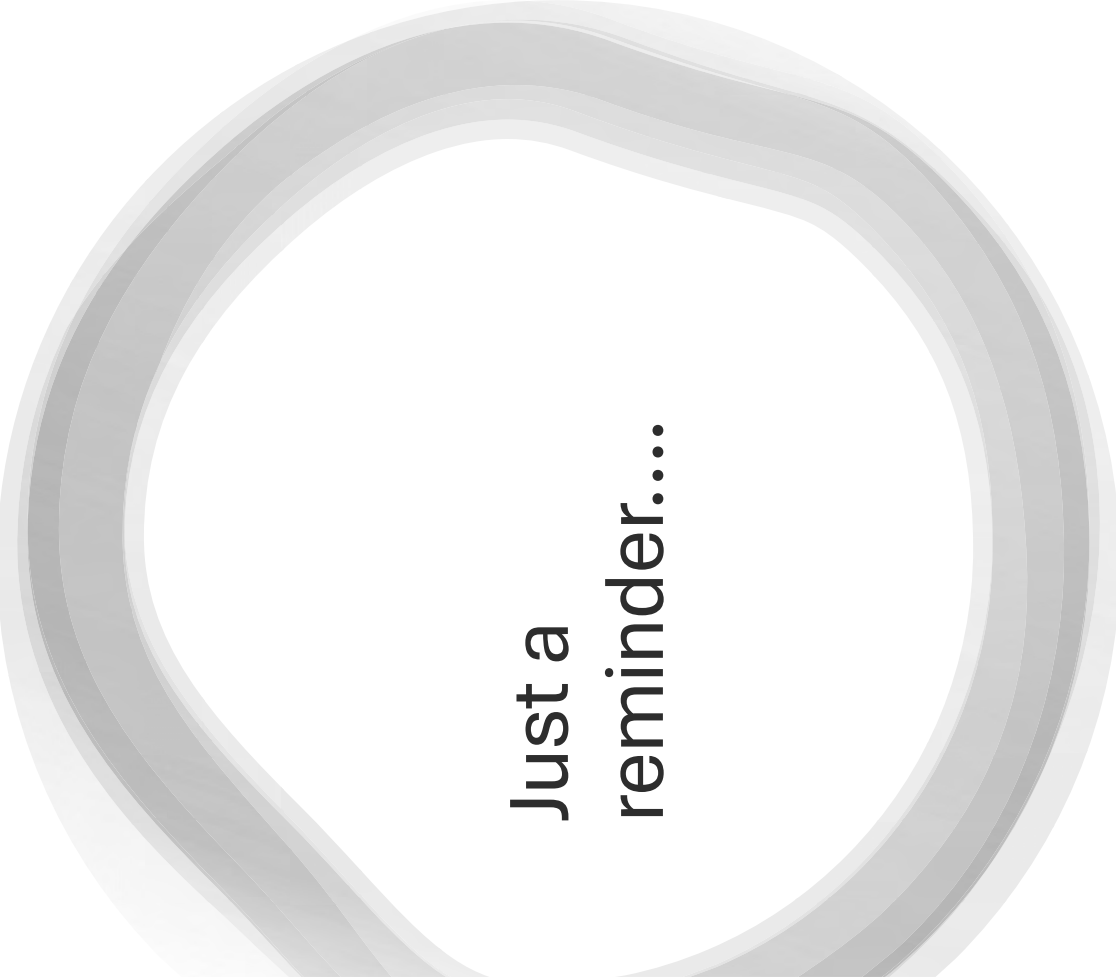
Thank You





*A world experiencing the difference
God's grace and love in Christ make for
all people and creation.*

This is God's Love Made Real

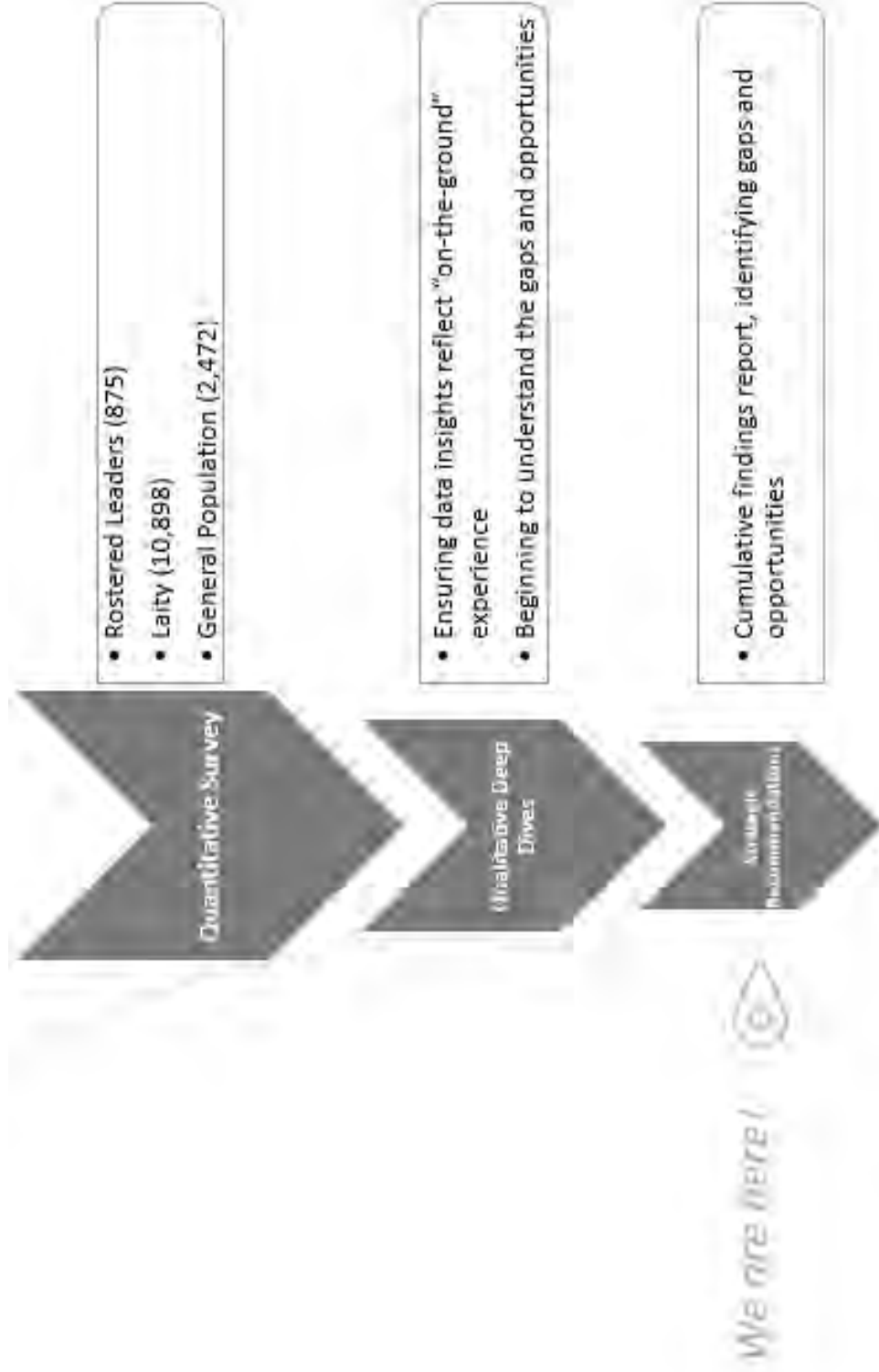


Just a reminder....

Fall 2020 the Future Church design team presented, and Church Council approved the following criteria for the ELCA:

- **Prioritize the engagement of new, young and diverse people.**
- Unite all expressions of the church (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization) into one church—together.
- Align decision-making, accountability and leadership where best suited.
- Operate in agile, flexible and speedy ways.
- **Act based on data and measurable impact.**
- Eliminate silos and divisions.

Barna Research Group and Fuller Leadership Formation



Barna and Fuller Strategic Commitments

Commitment #1: Cultivate congregations that are warmer, more inviting and more invitational in nature.

Commitment #2: Enhance ELCA-wide efforts to nurture and strengthen faith and spiritual formation.

Commitment #3: Tangibly and significantly incorporate and empower young people in all levels of the Church's life.

Commitment #4: Provide greater empowerment, equipping and tools for lay leaders to carry out the work of ministry and be the Church in the world today.

Commitment #5: Rethink, refocus and reorganize the ELCA's educational systems and structures to serve the current (and rapidly changing) needs of the ELCA.



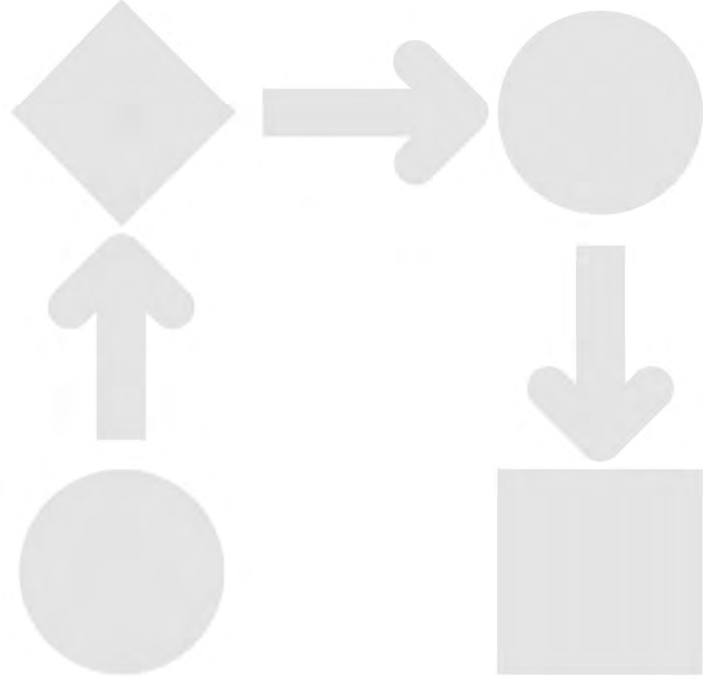
STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE ELCA

Strategic Commitments
Presented by



Part of God's Love Made Real
FEBRUARY 2025

Moving from
research and data
to **action**



Operational Plan:

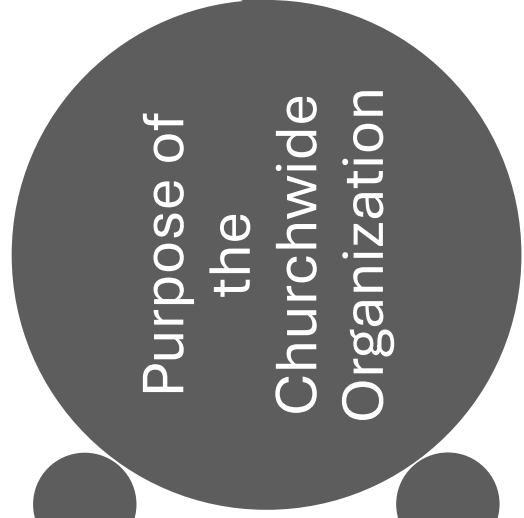


Alignment and measurement ensuring purpose, priorities are met while setting goals for the future.

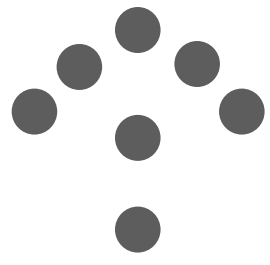
Research and Testing:



Adjusting current resources and creating new to ensure we're meeting the needs of those we serve



God's
Love
Made
Real



Engagement Between Youth Gatherings

Theme 2: Nurturing and strengthening faith and/or Spiritual formation.

Theme 3: Incorporating and empowering the young people in the church's life.

From the report:

In listening sessions with a cross-section of hundreds of ELCA leaders, a top recommendation that emerged was to invest in the development of youth, young adults and young families both inside and outside of ELCA congregations.

Our Steps:

To provide, smaller lower cost options between the 3 year cycle that expose our young people to the youth gathering and opportunities for connectivity outside of their home congregation.



Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM's)

Theme 4: Resource, equip, and empower the laity with tools for ministry to be the church in the world today.

Theme 5: Educational Systems and Structures

Educational Systems Review, Fuller Leadership Formation, Summer 2024

- *Recommendation #1: Gather additional data on SAMs, so that better decisions can be made.*
- *Recommendation #2: Develop a clear, easy-to-follow, national standard and process for lay leaders to function as Word and Sacrament ministers.*
- *Recommendation #3: Elevate the importance of, respect for, and training of lay leaders in the ELCA.*
- *Recommendation #4: Place greater emphasis on youth, college, and young adult ministries that might serve as feeders of future ELCA leaders.*
- *Recommendation #5: Develop a clear pathway of competency-based theological education that begins with lay leaders and ends with Rostered Leaders.*



Synod Authorized Ministers (SAM's)

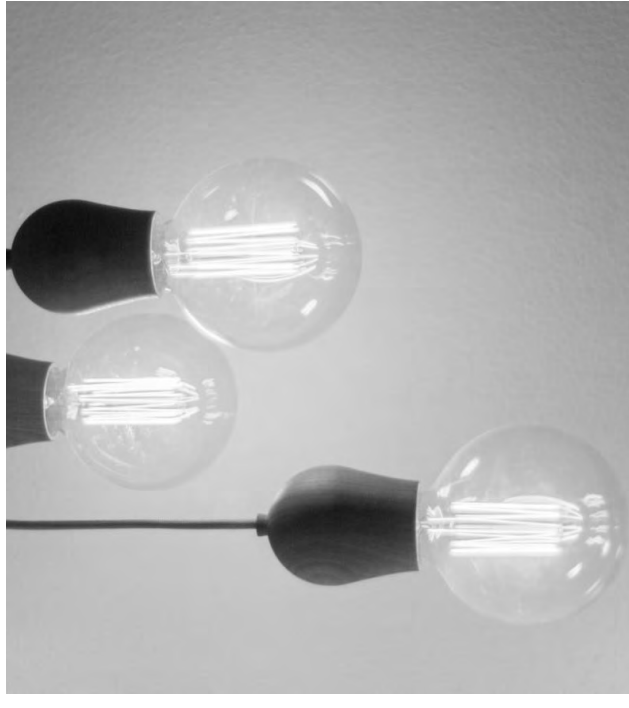
Research and Evaluation, Churchwide Organization

The Future Need for Pastoral Leaders in the ELCA (Aug/Sep 2024)

Synod-Authorized Ministers in Practice & Context: An Evaluation Study (2025)

Key Research Questions:

1. How do synod-authorized ministers experience and understand the ministries they provide?
2. How do those served by synod-authorized ministers experience and understand their leadership?
3. How do varying models of SAM formation serve varying contexts?
4. How might congregations, synods and the CWO collaborate to provide ongoing support and accountability for synod-authorized ministers?
5. Are there pathways from synod-authorized ministry to rostered ministry that might be developed and encouraged?

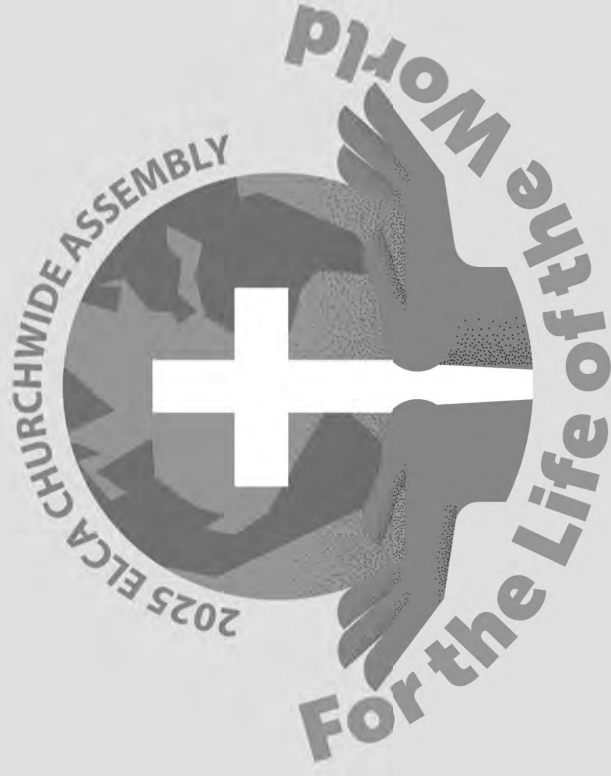




THANK YOU

Jackie Baumhover
Director for Strategy

Jackie.Baumhover@elca.org



Church Council Role at CWA

Jodi Slattery



July 28 – August 2
PHOENIX, ARIZONA

- Church Council will meet on Sunday, July 27
 - 10 a.m.: Executive Committee meets (*newly elected chairs attend*)
 - 1 p.m.: Worship with Conference of Bishops and synod vice presidents
 - 2:30 p.m.: Joint meeting with CoB and synod vice presidents
 - 3:45 p.m.: Separate meeting – Church Council
 - 5:30 p.m.: Dinner Reception
 - 6:00 p.m.: Shared dinner with CoB and synod vice presidents
- Meetings in Sheraton Phoenix Downtown



For the Life of the World



ELCA.org/CWA

Registration Desk Hours:	9:30 a.m. - 9:30 p.m.	10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	8:30 a.m. - 8:30 p.m.	10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.	8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.	10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
Nomination Desk Hours:	1:00 p.m. - 9:15 p.m.	10:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.	Closed	Closed	Closed	Closed

Travel – Deem

- Book your travel *before* you register
- Voting members receive special access to book their travel online at elca-dt.deem.com
 - Username: assembly2025
 - Password: 2025churchwide
- Online through the Deem travel app is preferred because it saves us money
- For those flying, shuttles will be provided between the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport [PHX] and hotels

Reminder:
Churchwide organization pays for voting member travel to and from the assembly, your hotel stay, and your meals during travel and during the assembly week.

For the Life of the World



Hotels

- Downtown Sheraton Phoenix
 - Church Council members will be housed here
- Hyatt Regency
- Hilton Garden Inn
 - Youth will be housed together at Hilton Garden Inn
 - Young adults can opt-out of staying at Hilton Garden Inn
- Do Not Contact the Hotels – your reservation is made based on your online CWA registration information

Church Council
members receive a
private hotel room.

For the Life of the World



Hotels

- Credit card required at check-in for incidentals
- Driving? Self-Parking is available at Sheraton
- Questions or need to make any changes?
 - Contact CWARegistrar@elca.org

For the Life of the World



Steps for receiving a Ramp Pre-paid Visa Card

- Early July, receive welcome email from Ramp
 - From: communications@ramp.com
 - Subject: You're invited to join Evangelical Lutheran Church in America on Ramp
- Click "Accept invite" and create a password
(*have a phone ready for verification*)
- Complete Ramp registration process
(*or you will not receive a card*)
- You will be asked to provide a preferred mailing address for the Visa card to be sent.



Legislative business at 2025 CWA

Presiding Bishop
election
*(agenda time needed
for 5 ballots plus
nominee forums)*

Secretary election
*(agenda time needed
for 5 ballots plus
nominee forums)*

Common ballot
elections
*(Church Council,
churchwide committees,
SIM boards)*

2026-2028 Budget

Amendments to ELCA
Constitutions

Archival of certain
Social Policy
Resolutions

Reconsideration # 1
Editorial edits to
*Human Sexuality:
Gift and Trust*

Consideration of new
social statement on
faith and civic life

Memorials
*(2022 had 78
memorials)*

Non-germane
resolutions
(anticipated)

Moderator for Churchwide Assembly Hearings

- Presentation portion will be recorded to view later (not Q&A)
- Voting members only will have voice
- Some of the Hearing Topics:
 - Budget
 - Memorials, in general
 - Memorial on seeking peace between Palestine and Israel
 - Faith and Civic Life proposed social statement
 - Human Sexuality proposed edited social statement



Roles at Churchwide Assembly

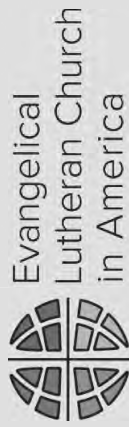
- **Members of CWA Prayer Team**
- **Resource people for council recommendations to CWA**
- **Hosts for presiding bishop nominees and secretary nominees**
- **Members of Churchwide Assembly Committees**
 - **Memorials Committee**
 - **Reference and Counsel Committee**
 - **Elections Committee**
 - **Ad Hoc Committees**



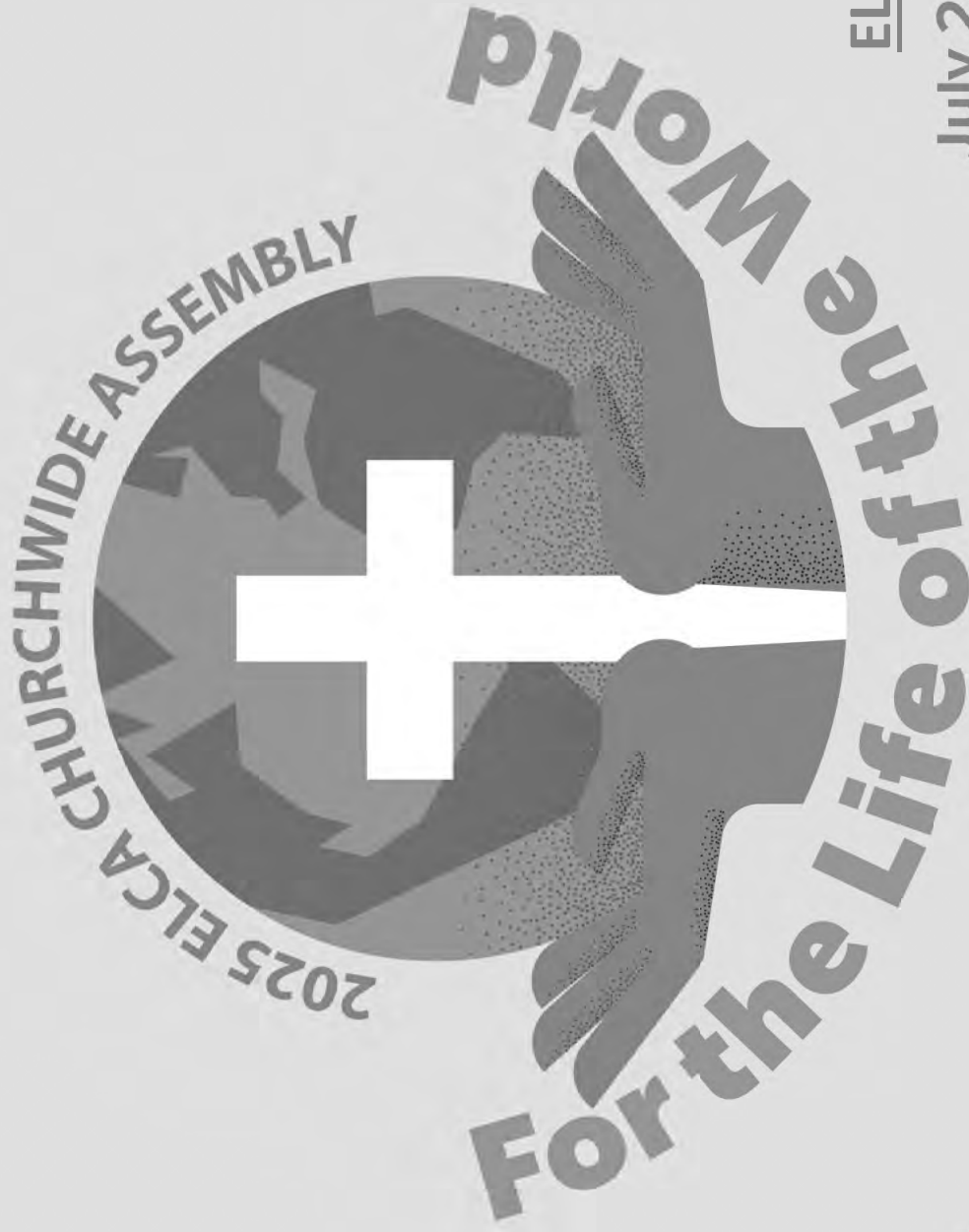
Important Communication Dates

- April 2: CWA registration opened for all voting members
- May 31: Deadline to book travel and complete registration for CWA
- June 10: Information on online Bible studies, online hearings, CWA Guide
- June 26: Online training on CWA Guide app (*at 2 pm or 7 pm CT*)
- Early July: Welcome email from Ramp Pre-paid Visa card
- July 8: Hotel confirmations sent
- July 8: CWA Bulletin of Reports posted
- Week prior to CWA: Online CWA Hearings held





Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America



[ELCA.org/CWA](https://elca.org/cwa)

July 28 – August 2

PHOENIX, ARIZONA

UPDATE FROM PORTICO BENEFIT SERVICES

April 2025

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
CHURCH COUNCIL

April 3-6, 2025

Portico Benefit Services Report and Digest of Board Actions

Page 1 of 3



Executive Summary

Submitted by Chris Johnson
President and CEO

At Portico, our priority — and responsibility — is to provide care for our members and steward our assets to help them thrive. I am

humbled and honored to serve and lead us into the coming year and see great promise in what lies ahead. As always, I welcome your feedback, your insight, and your conversation. Email me at CEO@PorticoBenefits.org. We are all in this together and we rise by lifting others. I look forward to seeing you at the upcoming Church Council meeting.

ORGANIZATIONAL UPDATES

On Jan. 14, we announced the formation of a new Executive Leadership Team (ELT) consisting of Stacy Kruse (CFO & COO), Lori Brown (General Counsel and Vice President), David Quello (CIO), Daron Meyer (CTO), and The Rev. Shelley Cunningham (Customer Outreach and Church Relations). The team has a combined 67+ years at Portico.

RECOMMENDED CHANGES: BENEFITS reEXAMINED

In February we received the Portico Board of Trustees' conditional approval for plan changes subject to the Conference of Bishops' endorsement and Church Council's approval. The Council of Bishops affirmed our plan changes on Feb. 26. Recommendations will be presented to the Church Council Executive Committee on April 3.

FEDERAL POLICIES AND EXISTING BENEFITS

Every election our country sees a potential change in leadership and in public policy. Our current environment is unprecedented by the speed at which the current administration is acting, the aggressiveness of their public policy, and their willingness to test the limits of governmental oversight.

- We understand that our members and clergy are particularly concerned with how new federal policies can impact our benefits, especially for our LGBTQIA+ members.
- We are committed to caring for the diverse needs of our whole community. While we are guided by ELCA social teachings and we are steadfast in ensuring that our members receive the care they need when they need it, as a benefits administrator we are also subject to federal regulations.
- Should any laws change that affect the way we administer benefits, we will communicate the details and alternatives in a timely manner to our members. We will continue to work closely with the Church Alliance to advocate on behalf of church plans.

VIRTUAL CARE EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

Virtual care for mental health, physical therapy, and common medical issues is accessible, affordable, and cost-effective. We encourage our members to use EAP and Talkspace, Sword, and 98point6® as beneficial resources.

PORTICO® + You
It all adds up.

Lutheran Services Carolinas Joins ELCA Health Plan

LSC is a 2,500-employee provider of senior care and family services that serves residents in both North and South Carolina. A long-time ELCA retirement plan client, they will join our health plan in June 2025.

Lutheran Services in America (LSA) CEO Summit Jan. 26 – 29

Portico attends this summit to discuss emerging trends in LSA organizations across the country as well as to support, participate, build retention, and explore new LSA relationships.

Churchwide and Financial Separately Incorporated Ministry (SIM) Summit Jan. 30

- In late January, each of the financial SIMs (Portico, ELCA Foundation, and Mission Investment Fund/Credit Union) met with the presiding bishop, secretary, treasurer, chief administrative officer, and legal to share their multi-year roadmap, strategy, current priorities, operating metrics, challenges, and structures.
- Discussion centered on how we can work more collaboratively in 2025 and develop a cadence to connect.

Upcoming Events:

- **Synod Assembly season** begins April 25 – 27. Portico representatives look forward to joining many of our synods as they gather to worship, vision, and tend to the mission and business of the church.
- **Larger Church Conference** May 5 – 6.
- Portico will be at the **Churchwide Assembly** in Phoenix July 28 – Aug. 2 for volunteer event support, education about proposed Benefits reExamined changes, and shared event space with Financial SIMs.

ROTH WELL RECEIVED IN 2024! TARGET DATE FUND (TDF) UPDATES

Effective Jan. 1, 2025, ELCA Retirement Plan members have a new option to make Roth after-tax contributions to their retirement plan. During Annual Enrollment last fall, 1,402 of our members elected to make Roth contributions.

- **Financial education** is key to effective retirement planning. In 2024, 4,100 members talked with a Portico Financial Planner in 14,200 phone interactions. Fidelity continues to offer new and expanded educational videos in 2025.
- Additionally, our **Target Date Funds (TDF)** lineup shifts every five years. We will be guiding our participating members through this process.

YEAR-END MARKET UPDATE

Portico saw good returns in 2024, particularly in the U.S. stock market. U.S. stocks soared, fueled by moderating inflation, lower interest rates, and optimism about artificial intelligence (AI). Non-U.S. stocks and bonds were positive but much more modest. The S&P 500 (including dividends) and the full-year performance of both stocks and bonds was positive.

- **The S&P 500** (including dividends) was up 2.4% for the quarter and 25.0% for the year, while investment-grade bonds were down 3.1% for the quarter to bring the annual return to 1.25%. Non- U.S. stocks were down 7.6% for the quarter and up 5.2% for the year.
- **Participating annuity monthly payments** increased by 5.3% on Jan. 1, 2025, and dividend-eligible annuity recipients received a lump-sum cash dividend payment of 21.2% in January 2025. Read more about 2024 influences and results in Portico Chief Investment Officer David Quello's quarterly market commentary on myPortico.
- **The "magnificent seven"** (Amazon, Microsoft, Nvidia, Tesla, Meta, Alphabet, and Apple) are large U.S. technology companies that have disproportionately driven strong stock market performance over the past couple of years due to investor optimism about AI, leading to potential productivity gains. Recent stock market behavior for these stocks and the broader market has been choppy as the market digests the tariffs and their impact on global trade and economic growth.

BUDGET AND MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2024 - PRESENT

- ELCA congregations continue to see a general **membership decline**. This can and does affect Portico's membership numbers. However, our total covered lives increased in 2024 by over 1,600 with the addition of new health plan members via our **social ministry employers**. These organizations help Portico maintain its scale.
- Continuing to prioritize stewardship and affordability, we started 2025 strong with a \$2.4 million favorable budget.
- **Our overall costs are based in three main areas:** retirement, annuity, and our health plan. We have seen the greatest cost increases in the health plan.

Description	Target	2024	Comments	Key Metrics: Definition/Relevance
Traditional Benefits Program Member (NPS)	51	52	Net Promotor Score (NPS) is an industry measurement to gauge overall satisfaction. • We ended 2024 with a traditional member NPS of 52 for the year, which is best in class according to our benchmark data.	
Traditional Benefits Program Employer (NPS)	40	52	• We ended 2024 with a traditional employer NPS of 52. This is a top box score that is considered best in class according to our benchmark data. • Our NPS with our social ministry organizations was 63, uncommonly high.	
Retirement Plan Expense Ratio (in basis points ~ bps)	74	48	Retirement plan expense ratio is an industry metric that measures the effectiveness in managing expenses associated with a retirement plan. • Portico ended the year with a <u>lower</u> expense ratio than any of the previous five years. This reflects strong management and stewardship of the plan members' assets.	
Participating Annuity Funded Ratio	> 1.0	1.063	The Funded Ratio is a critical measurement to determine the financial health of the Annuity Trust and whether assets can meet committed liabilities. • Portico remains above target after the 5.3% payment increase.	
Health Plan Expense Ratio (%)	< 12%	9.2%	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. • Portico ended the year favorably.	

Portico Benefit Services Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Christopher T. Johnson, President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: February 20-21, 2025

Category 1: *(Policies with an impact beyond the unit which require Church Council approval.)*

Resolutions/Actions

Approved the Resolution for Endorsement of recommendations to Implement Benefits reExamined Plan Changes to be presented to the Portico Board of Trustees at its July 2025 meeting.

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.)*

Resolutions/Actions

Received the Report on 2025 Trustee Conflict or Duality of Interest and Code of Conduct.

Received the 4Q2024 Portico Benefit Services Management Report.

Mission Investment Fund of the ELCA Report

Submitted by: Eva M. Roby, President and CEO

The past year has been one of significant transition and disciplined execution for the Mission Investment Fund. Despite navigating a challenging economic landscape, including persistent inflationary pressures, elevated interest rates, and shifting market dynamics, we have remained steadfast in our mission. Our commitment to financial stability and long-term positioning has consistently guided our decisions, enabling us to serve our customers, support the mission of the church, and invest in our future. As we reflect on the past year, I would like to provide an update on the achievements related to Mission Investment Fund's four key strategic initiatives for 2024.

The Mission Investment Fund's modernization initiative made significant progress in 2024, with the successful implementation of five key systems designed to enhance operational efficiency, improve customer interactions, and position us for the future alliance. These systems—Financial Services Cloud, Baker Hill, Payments Exchange, Prologue, and MuleSoft—will transform our digital banking capabilities, providing customers with a seamless experience in online banking, transfers, and account management.

2024 was a pivotal year in refining the strategic and financial case for the Mission Investment Fund and ELCA Federal Credit Union Alliance. We completed revised financial projections, solidified our long-term value proposition, and identified the essential products and services necessary for a successful launch. Moving into 2025, the focus will shift toward executing key integration milestones, finalizing systems alignment, launching initial product offerings, and ensuring a seamless customer experience.

In 2024, we reassessed and refined our strategy for engaging social ministry organizations affiliated with Lutheran Services in America. After evaluating our capabilities, we determined that our resources and product offerings need further alignment with the specific needs of this segment. As a result, we are conducting a targeted reassessment to determine which areas of this market the Mission Investment Fund can effectively serve.

The Mission Investment Fund remains financially sound, despite the planned short-term impact of investments related to modernization and the alliance. Key achievements include:

- An increase in the equity ratio to 27.5%, surpassing regulatory requirements and industry benchmarks.
- A loan portfolio that maintains high quality with stable delinquency ratios.
- Key performance indicators remaining within target ranges.
- Market performance gains in fixed income and equity investments that offset operating losses.

The Mission Investment Fund continues to serve as a pillar of financial strength for the church and its ministries. The work we are undertaking now, modernizing our operations, building strategic partnerships, and reinforcing financial stability, positions us for sustainable impact well into the future. As we move forward, we do so with confidence in our strategy, discipline in our execution, and an unwavering commitment to the mission we serve.

Mission Investment Fund (MIF) Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Eva Roby, President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: March 20, 2025

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

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 November, Augsburg Fortress and ELCA Worship staff gathered for three days at Cross Roads Camp and Retreat Center in Port Murray, New Jersey, with eight pastors, deacons, and chaplains from across the ELCA to identify needs around new and renewed pastoral care resources. This consultative group reviewed the results of research asking rostered leaders about emerging and under-resourced pastoral care situations they are encountering in their ministries, shared their own wisdom around the same, and made recommendations for next steps in resource development.

In January, we were thrilled to connect in person with 700+ children, youth, and family ministry leaders at the ELCA Youth Ministry Network's annual **Extravaganza**, held in Louisville, Kentucky. Hundreds of people visited our booth where they talked with us about our wide array of resources. Also at the Extravaganza, our marketing consultant Mark Howell held five focus groups with 40 participants to learn about what congregations need to resource their children's music ministries. These inputs will help us determine what types of children's music resources we will develop with funds from our **Unbridled Presence** grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc.

Also of note:

- **Sixty** synods have joined our new **Synod Advocate program**. Several times a year we mail synod advocates a box of free books and other resources curated from all five of AFP's imprints to share with congregations in their synod. We also provide personalized recommendations of resources to support synod programs and initiatives.
- In January, we sent **Lutheran Study Bible, Second Edition** to manufacturing. This new edition features the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, as well as updated and expanded study notes, articles, and feature content contributed by a diverse group of Lutheran scholars. We look forward to introducing you to this beautiful new Bible this summer at the Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix.
- In February, we recorded 20+ new **choral pieces** for Fall, Advent, and Christmas. It took ten hours over two days, 17 singers, one organist/pianist, and three conductors.
- Our 2025 Lenten devotional, *Life Renewed*, 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?

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)

A Dream Eclipsed: The Fractured Quest for Greater Lutheran Unity. Lowell G. Almen.
Refilling the Reservoirs: Spiritual Care for the Exhausted Caregiver. Brenda Bos.
Building a Moral Economy: Pathways for People of Courage. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda.
Agapic Anger: Influencing Change While Navigating Gender. Jan R. Schnell.

BROADLEAF BOOKS (broadleafbooks.com)

Disciples of White Jesus: The Radicalization of American Boyhood. Angela Denker.
How to End Christian Nationalism. Amanda Tyler.
The Wounds Are the Witness: Black Faith Weaving Memory into Justice and Healing. Yolanda Pierce.
The Asylum Seekers: A Chronicle of Life, Death, and Community at the Border. Cristina Rathbone.
Everything Could Be a Prayer: 100 Portraits of Saints and Mystics. Kreg Yingst.

BEAMING BOOKS (beamingbooks.com)

Mary and the Gardener. Paul Kerensa and Leanne Daphne.
Look-and-Find Easter Stories for Young Children. Megan Higgins.
Each Day Is a Gift. Lisl H. Detlefsen and Natalia Vasilica.
Lupita's Brown Ballet Slippers. Steena Hernandez and Melissa Castillo.
The Tide Is Rising, So Are We! Shoshana Meira Friedman and Kiki Kita.

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 21. All AFP employees were strongly encouraged to attend. Fifteen of our authors were workshop leaders or featured speakers, including Rev. Dr. Jacqueline Lewis, Rev. Dr. Yolanda Densen-Byers, Shari Seifert, Rev. Angela T. !Khabeb, Beckah Selnick, Sharei Green, Rev. Nicolette Faison, Rev. Jenny Sung, Joe Davis, Bp. Patricia Davenport, Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, Rev. Dr. Jia Starr Brown, Rev. Dr. Andrea Walker, Rev. Priscilla Paris-Austin, Bp. Felix Javier Malpica. We offered a 20 percent discount and free shipping through the end of February on all resources featured during the event.

Organizational Matters

The Congregational Resources team welcomed talented new staff: a marketing operations manager in December, and a production editor in February. Also in February, Fortress Press welcomed a new acquisitions editor, Kathleen Gallagher Elkins, who during the past ten years taught in the fields of theology and religious studies and served as director of the Master of Theological Studies program at St. Norbert College in De Pere, Wisconsin.

The current presidential administration has announced its intent to raise tariffs on imports from China by ten percent. While we may see a minor effect on our projected gross margins if China print prices go up, AFP's sourcing strategy has positioned us to mitigate the overall business impact of these tariffs.

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.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at blevinst@augsborgfortress.org.

Augsburg Fortress Publishers Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Tim Blevins, President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: October 31, 2024

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.)*

Voted to approve the minutes of the June 14, 2024 Board of Trustees meeting in open session.
(PH.24.10.04)

Voted approve the minutes of the June 14, 2024 Board of Trustees meeting in executive session.
(PH/ES.24.10.04)

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

None

Women of the ELCA Report

Submitted by Jennifer Hockenbery, Interim Executive Director

The work of the churchwide staff of Women of the ELCA is to support the organization's participants as they live out the mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. The past six months have been an exciting time for Women of the ELCA.

The executive board has met each month during the past six months in order to accomplish many agenda items including the following: creation of a debt pay back plan for the money owed to the ELCA, completion of the 2025 budget, approval of the new 2024-2026 strategic plan.

We are particularly excited about our new strategic plan: **CONNECT, CREATE, COMPLEMENT, CONTINUE, AND CELEBRATE.**

Goals are:

1. **Connect** with women who are not yet affiliated with Women of the ELCA in order to communicate Christ's love and affirmation and to offer to engage them in our circle of care that we might support and affirm their gifts and callings along with those of all the women currently in the organization.
2. **Create** new resources for women in a variety of contexts that they might grow in faith, affirm their gifts, and follow their callings.
3. **Complement** existing resources with strong stewardship.
4. **Continue** programs that nourish and strengthen members and the ELCA as a whole.

This plan highlights our desire to connect to more women who are not yet affiliated with Women of the ELCA in order to communicate Christ's love and affirmation, our intention to create new resources to help women in a variety of contexts grown in faith and service, complement our existing resources with a strong stewardship model, continue our many fine ministries and programs, and celebrate our vibrant community.

Plans are underway for the Women of the ELCA's Triennial Gathering, planned for 2026 in Des Moines, Iowa. This gathering, like that for the youth, is designed to uplift, inspire, and enrich the lives of participants as they are held in loving community. Our theme is "I am worthy," a theme that 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.

To learn more about Women of the ELCA and its varied ministries, visit its primary website or the websites of its magazines, *Gather* or *Café*.

Women of the ELCA Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Jennifer Hockenbery, interim executive director

Date of Board Meetings: November 7, 2024 Zoom Meeting; December 5, 2024 Zoom Meeting;
January 12, 2025 Zoom Meeting; January 12, 2025 Zoom Meeting; February 8, 2025 Zoom Meeting

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.)*

Motion to adopt the Strategic Plan High Level document as modified to include Goal 5: Celebrate Women of the ELCA (EB/WO 2024.12.50; Dec. 5, 2024)

The \$25,000.00 unrestricted gift from Julia Sabella go towards the current Fiscal Year 2024 budget as a Where needed most offering. (EB/WO 2024.12.52; December 17, 2024)

The Fiscal Year 2025 Finalized Budget be approved as presented. (EB/WO 2024.12.53; December 17, 2024)

The following debt pay back plan was approved to use \$13,789.00 from the Advocacy Grass Roots fund, \$21,872.00 from the Church Council Meeting fund, \$3,257.00 from the LWT Name Change fund and \$400,000.00 from the New Ministry Fund in Fiscal Year 2024 and the board intends to pay the remaining balance of the debt in Fiscal Year 2025. (EB/WO 2024.12.54; December 17, 2024)

For the third \$25,000.00 unrestricted gift from Julia Sabella to have \$12,500.00 go to Katie's Fund and have \$12,500.00 go to the 2024 budget and if not needed for the 2024 budget, then the amount should go to the 2026 Triennial Convention (EB/WO 2025.01.55; January 12, 2025)

Offered an 18-month contract extension to the Interim Executive Director, Jennifer Hockenbery. In addition, the board seeks to have a permanent Executive Director in place by 12/1/2026. (EB/WO 2025.01.56; January 12, 2025)

A motion was passed to replace the vacant executive board position created by the untimely death of Jennifer Ackerman. Linda Clarke received the next highest number of votes. She has accepted the position. (February 8, 2025)

The policy against electioneering at the Triennial Convention was passed. (February 8, 2025)
An updated procedure for assigning at-large voting members at the Triennial Convention was passed. (February 8, 2025)

The updated Synodical Leaders Guide was approved. (February 8, 2025)

A motion was passed that each Triennial Board will be responsible for updating the Synodical Leaders Guide and the Guide for Treasurers. (February 8, 2025)

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

Revisions to Executive Board manual (Nov. 7, 2024)

Discussion of Triennial Gathering Theme and Triennial Convention and Gathering Budgets (Dec. 5, 2024)

Discussion of holding the in-person portion of the Triennial Convention at Grandview University rather than using the Hilton (February 8, 2025)

ELCA Foundation Report

Submitted by Annette C. Shoemaker, Interim President and CEO

Last year was a time of transition as the ELCA Foundation wrapped up several infrastructure enhancing projects and prepared to move into the fourth year of the strategic plan, which will focus on transforming the gift planning strategy – everything from marketing to development. During 2024, the operations team implemented a new online client portal which has been met with appreciation from our investors. The transition to a new system that will accept appreciated securities is nearly complete and is expected to be fully operational in the coming weeks. This new system will handle stock gifts more expeditiously and will eliminate donor fees. In addition, a new lock box system for processing Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs) has been implemented, giving donors a simple and efficient way of sending gifts from their retirement accounts directly to beneficiaries. We hope to use these two specialized services as relationship-starters for donors new to the Foundation.

A new leadership position was created in 2024, vice president of Advancement, to organize and lead the efforts of marketing and gift planning. Jason Watt has completed six months of service while continuing to learn about the ELCA, the ELCA Foundation, and the broad network of partner organizations. He has also begun to make significant contributions to the future of the organization that will result in the financial sustainability of many ELCA ministries. Quickly picking up and reinforcing the concept of Objectives and Key Results, the latest generation of management by objectives, Mr. Watt has already led a successful Regional Gift Planner (RGP) staff meeting (with the help of Katie Murphy, director of Marketing Communications, and Josh Kerney, director of Gift Planning) focused on metrics, accountability and the skills required to become trusted advisors. Faced with several gift planner vacancies due to attrition and retirement, Mr. Watt also has begun an active recruitment program, with one new RGP already hired.

In 2024, the ELCA Foundation's marketing program saw strategic growth, with online lead generation increasing by 48.1% and web engagement rising across key pages. Email performance improved, with higher open and click-through rates, while *Insights* newsletter subscribers grew by 19.8%. Notable efforts included our first National Estate Planning Awareness Month campaign and a Christmas video message, which achieved a 51.1% open rate and 840+ views. As we move into 2025, we remain focused on expanding lead generation, strengthening partnerships, and deepening audience engagement.

A quick look at the current stats: Total assets under management increased approximately 8.5% year over year, totaling \$1.2 billion at year-end. The Ministry Growth Fund continued to show strong signs of growth with a solid year for deposits, \$28.2 million. Withdrawals, however, were at \$22.1 million – the highest level in 11 years. Distributions to ministry from realized gifts totaled \$21 million, including \$7.2 million to churchwide programs. When this is added to the quarterly distributions made from the Ministry Growth Fund, over \$61 million was distributed to ministry throughout the year.

As we started off 2025, United Lutheran Seminary voted to move their endowment funds to the ELCA Foundation. These funds, totaling approximately \$100 million, will be invested in the Ministry Growth Fund. We are pleased to be able to partner with the seminary and believe this is a strong signal of the benefits of church together.

Planned gifts developed during the year totaled \$66.2 million. This includes \$6.2 million in currently funded trusts, charitable gift annuities, named endowments and donor advised funds.

As we enter 2025, there is much disruption in our world and volatility in the markets. We continue to try and help our mission partners who are facing major funding cuts by walking with them and reaching out to donors who can and do provide financial support. We work with our financial partners to ensure that our gift vehicles are properly invested and protected during times of national and international uncertainty. And we continue to improve donor and investor services to support and secure financial sustainability for these ministries long into the future.

ELCA Foundation Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Annette C. Shoemaker, Interim President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: March 21, 2025

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.)*

VOTED AND APPROVED:

- FO.25.03.03 To approve ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust's Ministry Growth Fund to approve:
- A) Termination of the existing Social Purpose Portico Non-U.S. Equity Pool, contingent upon the activation of a new passive Portico Non-U.S. Equity Pool.
 - B) Investment in a new passive Portico Non-U.S. Equity Pool, pending the availability date and acceptance of market terms/pricing.
 - C) Update of the Investment Policy Statement (IPS) in due course to reflect these changes.
 - D) Movement of funds within the Endowment Fund Pooled Trust's Ministry Growth Fund accordingly.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

- FO.25.03.04 To approve the transition plan for the endowment assets at the United Lutheran Seminary Endowment Foundation into the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust's Ministry Growth Fund and the exception to the Ministry Growth Fund's investment policy statement in managing the United Lutheran Seminary Endowment Foundation transferred endowment assets as delineated by FEG Investment Advisors.

VOTED AND APPROVED:

- FO.25.03.05 To approve the FEG Investment Advisors contract revision and associated fee schedule.

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

VOTED AND APPROVED:

- FO.25.03.02 To approve the proposed 2025 budget.