

## ELCA Office of the Secretary

### Myths and Facts About Congregational Governance

Recently, a number of rumors have been circulating regarding supposed changes to ELCA governance coming before the 2025 Churchwide Assembly from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). Some are suggesting that the Churchwide Assembly will eliminate congregational autonomy. Others are claiming that the Churchwide Assembly will authorize synods or the ELCA churchwide organization to seize congregational property.

*To be clear, these rumors are untrue.*

#### **What is the Churchwide Assembly?**

The Churchwide Assembly is the highest legislative authority in the ELCA churchwide organization. It meets every three years. This year, the 2025 Churchwide Assembly will meet in Phoenix, Arizona from July 28 through August 2.

#### **Will the Churchwide Assembly consider constitutional changes?**

Yes, as it always does. At every meeting, the *Churchwide Assembly considers changes to the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, which include the *Constitution for Synods* and the *Model Constitution for Congregations*. These proposed changes come to the Churchwide Assembly from the Church Council, which serves as the churchwide organization's board of directors. The Church Council must act on the proposed changes and transmit them to the synods at least six months prior to the Churchwide Assembly.

#### **Do any of the proposed changes eliminate congregational autonomy?**

No. The proposed changes can be found [here](#), and the rationales can be found [here](#). As you can see from reading these documents, there is nothing in the proposed changes that would eliminate, or even reduce, congregational autonomy and self-governance. In particular, the proposed changes to the *Model Constitution for Congregations* are minimal and do not reduce congregational autonomy in any way.

#### **Do any of the proposed changes allow synods (or the churchwide organization) to seize congregational property?**

No. The proposed changes do not affect congregational property ownership. Likewise, there are no changes to the provisions related to synod administration or preservation of congregational property.

**Do any of the proposed changes affect the disaffiliation process?**

No. There are no proposed changes to the disaffiliation process.

**What is the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)?**

The 2022 Churchwide Assembly instructed the Church Council to create the CRLC to review the constitutional Statements of Purpose and Principles of Organization of the three expressions of the church (congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization), keeping in mind this church's commitment to dismantle racism.

**Does the CRLC have the authority to make any changes?**

No. It is an advisory body formed to make findings and recommendations.

**Do the CRLC's recommendations eliminate congregational self-governance, threaten congregational property, or affect the disaffiliation process?**

No. Although the CRLC's report is not yet complete, none of the recommendations advanced to date would do any of these things. Some of the CRLC's recommendations are already incorporated in the proposed changes the Church Council is sending to the Churchwide Assembly. Those recommendations are specifically noted in the rationale document.

**Where can I learn more?**

The proposed changes to the constitutions offered to the assembly by the Church Council are [here](#), and the rationales are [here](#).

The CRLC's home page is here: <https://www.elca.org/about/leadership/church-council/crlc>.