



Apr. 4, 2022

To: Bishops of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Vice presidents of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Secretaries of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Members of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Administrative Team of the churchwide organization
Chief executive officers of separately incorporated ministries
Seminary leaders

From: Deacon Sue E. Rothmeyer, secretary

Subject: Report of Church Council Responses to Synod Resolutions, Previous Church Council
Actions, and Churchwide Assembly Actions (Mar. 31–Apr. 2, 2022)

I. RESPONSES TO SYNOD ACTIONS.....1
A. Ethiopia1
B. Amending Gendered Constitutional Language2
C. Guidance on Retired/Retiring Ministers from the Roster of the ELCA.....4
II. RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS CHURCH COUNCIL ACTIONS5
A. Climate Change Action5
B. Declaration of the ELCA to the People of African Descent8
III. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS9
A. Sanctuary9

I. RESPONSES TO SYNOD ACTIONS

A. ETHIOPIA

Minneapolis Area Synod (3G) [2021]

WHEREAS, Ethiopia—a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country—has been in the news for over four decades affected by natural and human caused disasters, drought, famine and war; and

WHEREAS, due to severe political persecution under three successive Ethiopian regimes over the last four decades has meant targeted imprisonment and killing, especially of the Oromo people, the largest group in Ethiopia; and

WHEREAS, the Oromo people belong to many faiths—Evangelical Christian (Lutherans), Islam, and Waaqeffataa—and members of these groups are refugees, many of whom fled on foot to neighboring countries to seek safety in different parts of the world; and

WHEREAS, since late 1970s and early 1980s the largest Oromo refugees were assisted and resettled by Lutheran Social Services and International Institute of Minnesota, by extension the largest East African communities are in the state of Minnesota; and

WHEREAS, among those refugees there were members of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY), which is the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia—the most targeted group because of members’ faith, especially under the Marxist regime (1974–1991) and again by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front regime (1991–2018)—who were targeted because of their demand for human rights and justice; and

WHEREAS, some of those refugees (former members of EECMY) faithfully continued to worship the Lord by setting up Bible study groups in their own Oromo language in their newly adopted country and soon grew to become full-fledged congregations, including Our Redeemer Oromo Evangelical Church of Minnesota (OROECM); and

WHEREAS, members of OROECM still have friends and family members back in Ethiopia under continued persecution, severe human rights violation, and total insecurity which has led to starvation, absolute poverty, and a state of war; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod in assembly urges the Office of the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA to call upon the office of the prime minister of Ethiopia to respect and uphold the human rights and security of all Ethiopian people and refrain from arbitrary arrest and incarceration, especially through the targeting of Oromo people and respect the rule of law; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod in assembly urges the Service and Justice unit, through the Lutheran Office for World Community, to call upon the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches Council, and all other faith groups within the country, to help to resolve all differences between the government and the opposition parties

peacefully so that peace prevails, and necessary normal governing functions can prevail, including peaceful elections and the transfer of power according to the law of the land; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod in assembly urges the Office of the Presiding Bishop to call upon the president of the Lutheran World Federation and the general secretary of the World Council of Churches to assist these faith communities in facilitating the discussions leading to peace in the land and to provide technical support as needed; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod in assembly urges the Office of the Presiding Bishop to call upon the office of the prime minister of Ethiopia to realize that a perpetual state of war, human rights abuse, injustice, imprisonment, and killings never provide solutions and instead to opt for peaceful solutions and goodwill among all the people of Ethiopia; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that the Minneapolis Area Synod in assembly urges the Office of the Presiding Bishop to call upon the office of the prime minister of Ethiopia to release all political prisoners without any precondition and call all political and concerned parties into a national dialogue to resolve the ongoing conflict.

Response from the Service and Justice home area (Spring 2022)

The resolution calls for actions by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Service and Justice home area, and the Lutheran Office for World Community.

It is recommended that the Church Council:

- 1) Take note of the Minneapolis Area Synod resolution on Ethiopia;
- 2) Ask the presiding bishop to take note as well and inform the other relevant churchwide offices of the resolution's contents; and
- 3) Ask the presiding bishop to consider and then take such actions as she may deem appropriate.

Church Council action:

To receive the resolution on “Ethiopia” from the Minneapolis Area Synod and the response from the Service and Justice home area;

To request that the presiding bishop consider the resolution and inform the Lutheran Office for World Community, Service and Justice home area, and other relevant churchwide home areas of the contents of the “Ethiopia” resolution;

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop to take the actions deemed most appropriate; and

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

B. AMENDING GENDERED CONSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE

Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J) [2022]

Whereas the Greater Milwaukee 2021 Synod Assembly called for amendments to the binary language related to gender in this church's and this synod's governing documents (2021 SA Resolution 2), we, the Synod Council of the Greater Milwaukee Synod,

RESOLVE, that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider and recommend the following amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly; and 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.

5.01. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be one church. This church recognizes that all power and authority in the Church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, its head. Therefore, all actions of this church by congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization shall be carried out under his rule and authority in accordance with the following principles:

- e. 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, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units shall be laypersons; that, **as nearly as possible**, at least ~~45~~ 50 percent of the lay members of these assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units shall be **people who identify as: women, transgender, non-binary, gender queer, agender, bigender, gender non-conforming, or gender expansive** and, **as nearly as possible**, at least 45 percent shall be men, and that, **where possible**, the representation of **rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament** shall include **many genders. both men and women**. At least 10 percent of the members of these assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English. Processes shall be developed that will assure that in selecting staff there will be a balance of

gender diversity ~~women and men~~, persons of color and persons whose primary language is other than English, laypersons, and persons on the rosters of this church. This balance is to be evident in the selection of staff consistent with the inclusive policy of this church.

- f. Except as otherwise provided in this constitution and bylaws, synods, through synod councils, shall establish processes that will ensure that at least 60 percent of the members of their assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units shall be laypersons; that, **as nearly as possible**, at least ~~50~~ **45** percent of the lay members of their assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units shall be **people who identify as: women; transgender, non-binary, gender queer, agender, bigender, gender non-conforming, or gender expansive**; and, **as nearly as possible**, at least 45 percent shall be men, and that, **where possible**, the representation of **rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament** shall include **many genders. both women and men**. Each synod shall establish processes that will enable it to reach a minimum goal that 10 percent of the membership of its assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English.

~~**5.01.H21.** 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, women, men, or other genders.~~

10.21.03. In strengthening interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and in fostering relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as with ecumenical and global companions, the responsibilities of the synod include the following:

- b. fostering organizations for **people of all ages and genders youth, women, and men**, and organizations for language or ethnic communities;

10.41.01. Membership of the Synod Assembly, of which at least 60 percent of the voting membership shall be composed of laypersons, shall be constituted as follows:

- c. A minimum of one lay member elected by each congregation with fewer than 175 baptized members and a minimum of two lay members elected by each congregation with 175 or more baptized members related to the synod, **typically at least one of whom shall be a person who identifies as: a woman, transgender, non-binary, gender queer, agender, bigender, gender non-conforming, or gender expansive; shall be voting members. typically one of whom shall be a man and one of whom shall be a woman**, shall be voting members. The Synod Council shall establish a formula to provide additional lay representation from congregations on the basis of the number of baptized members in the congregation. The Synod Council shall seek to ensure that, **as nearly as possible**, at least ~~45~~ **50** percent of the lay members of the assembly shall be women, **transgender, non-binary, gender queer, agender, bigender, gender non-conforming, or gender expansive**, and, **as nearly as possible**, at least 45 percent shall be men.

17.50.03. Constitutional provision 16.12. and bylaws 11.34.01., 14.21.02., and 14.21.06. shall apply to this organization. Bylaw ~~16.11.04~~ **15.21.03.** shall apply to the women's organization with the exception of the balance provisions for **multiple genders women and men** and for laypersons and rostered ministers.

And, be it further,

RESOLVED, that the ELCA Church Council, with guidance from the Office of the Secretary, shall establish a formal process to review the gender-specific language in this church's governing documents, social statements, and policies no less than every three years.

Executive Committee action [EC22.02.06b]

To refer the "Amending Gendered Constitutional Language" resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Office of the Secretary for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further action; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (Spring 2022)

The Office of the Secretary notes that the proposed amendments to constitutional provisions called for by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council were received too late to meet the constitutionally mandated notification period detailed in 22.11.a. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*. For the Church Council to propose to the Churchwide Assembly an amendment to a provision, there must be official notice sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. Such amendments thus would have

needed to be forwarded to the Church Council for consideration prior to its November 2021 meeting; if the Council chose to propose amendments to the Churchwide Assembly, notification would have had to be presented to the synods no later than Feb. 8, 2022. While bylaws and continuing resolution amendments function under different requirements, the language proposed in the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council resolution would require first that the constitutional provisions to which these refer be amended. The Office of the Secretary will take these proposed amendments under review for possible consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

In regard to the request for a formal review process for gender-specific language in this church's governing and other documents, the Office of the Secretary has been actively involved in a recent revision of the "Style Guidelines for the ELCA," which addresses use of gendered language in ELCA communications and documents. In addition, many of the proposed amendments to the governing documents that have been proposed by the Church Council to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly eliminate gendered references to people and were based on an extensive review of the constitutions of this church by Office of the Secretary staff.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on "Amending Gendered Constitutional Language" resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To request that the Office of the Secretary consider the amendment to the constitutional provision 5.01. and related bylaw and continuing resolution references as it reviews possible amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly;

To direct the churchwide organization to adhere to the "ELCA Style Guide" to ensure the appropriate usage of gender-inclusive language in ELCA communications and documents; and

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

**C. GUIDANCE ON RETIRED/RETIRING MINISTERS FROM THE ROSTER OF THE ELCA
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (8B) [2021]**

Bishop Kurt Kusserow submitted a letter to the Church Council on behalf of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council seeking guidance with retired or retiring ministers from the roster of the church whose status is in question or uncertain. Specifically, the synod council is asking about the required triennial review of the ministers on this church's retired roster and to propose that the guidance be added to the *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* for the benefit of this whole church.

Church Council action [CC21.04.06s]

To receive the request from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council requesting guidance regarding the review of retired ministers on the roster of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;

To refer the matter to the Office of the Secretary for further research and to request that a response be provided at the Fall 2021 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from Office of the Secretary (Nov. 2021)

Following the referral to the Office of the Secretary of the resolution from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council, Secretary Sue Rothmeyer conferred with Bishop Kurt Kusserow, whose letter had prompted the request. Bishop Kusserow has offered to serve on an *ad hoc* task force to consider guidelines for synods to use in conducting the status review of retired rostered ministers called for in the roster manual. He requested that a member of the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops also serve on the task force, and Bishop Shelley Wickstrom of the Alaska Synod has agreed. The task force will submit a proposal to the Roster Committee and the Conference of Bishops for possible guidelines to be inserted in the roster manual. A final draft would then be submitted to the Church Council to approve for inclusion in the roster manual.

Church Council action [CC21.11.25v]

To receive the response on "Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA" from the Office of the Secretary;

To anticipate a progress report at the Spring 2022 Church Council meeting with possible updates to the roster manual; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (Spring 2022)

In response to the resolution from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council requesting guidance in performing the triennial review required by the roster manual of all rostered ministers who are retiring or who have been granted retired status, the Office of the Secretary has been in communication with Bishop Kurt Kusserow, bishop of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod. Bishop Kusserow has offered to be part of a working group that will develop such guidelines. In addition, Bishop Shelley Wickstrom of the Alaska Synod, a member of the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops, has agreed to participate in the group, along with Deacon Connie Schmucker, assistant to the bishop of the Florida-Bahamas Synod. The Rev. Keith Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration, will provide staff support for the working group. An initial meeting is being set for early April with a tentative goal of having guidelines to present for consideration by the Roster Committee and the Conference of Bishops at the conference’s fall 2022 meeting, in hopes of having a possible revision of the roster manual for approval at the Church Council’s November 2022 meeting.

Church Council action:

To receive the progress report on “Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA” from the Office of the Secretary;

To anticipate a report and a possible revision of the “Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America”; and

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

II. RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS CHURCH COUNCIL ACTIONS

A. CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

Background:

At its November 2019 meeting, Church Council referred a recommendation on climate change from the Conference of Bishops [CB19.09.26] to the Domestic Mission unit for a timeline on when the resolution would receive further attention [CC19.11.41].

Response from the Domestic Mission unit (March 2020)

The ELCA response to climate change is not unified but is conducted across all three churchwide expressions. Programmatic responsibility includes Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR), Advocacy, Global Mission, World Hunger, Stewardship, and Congregational Vitality. In addition, Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) as a grassroots Lutheran entity is instrumental in education and resourcing congregations and synods. These and other stakeholders met in January 2020 to propose a holistic and integrated approach and coordination on the impacts of climate change as a matter of sustainability.

The first phase in addressing climate change is the formation of a Sustainability Table that brings together the different churchwide programs and ministries to address not only climate change, but other environmental and energy matters that recognizes the intersectionality and impact of climate on every fiber of life; and to move with resolve to implement actions. *(Please see below.)* The convener initially will be the Advocacy Program Director, Environment and Corporate Social Responsibility.

	Sustainability Table Description
Purpose	To explore and pull together holistically ELCA churchwide and congregational strategies and activities that care for and protect all of creation into a coordinated effort for being more effective stewards of God’s good creation.
Goal	To build capacity at all levels for equipping the Church to actively utilize our many gifts in witness and service in response to human need in our communities, countries and the world.
Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Develop specific goals and measurements2. Establish Steering Committee members: Advocacy; Young Adult, Domestic Mission, Global Mission, Mission Advancement, Synods/Congregations, Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC)3. Create Smaller Working Issue Groups: Communication, Education, Advocacy, Energy/Building Grounds, Worship, Justice (racial, ethnic, economic, environmental) and Funding.

Membership	Advocacy, LDR, Campus Ministries, Global Missions, Universities and Colleges, Young Adult Ministry, Multi-Cultural/Ethnic Ministry Associations, Synods Rep., Deacons, Lay people, Church Council, Outdoor Ministry, Bishop Rep., Facilities/Operations (CW), Investment staff, Strategic Communications, Coaches, Ecumenical Partners, Science/Tech & Faith; and Worship/Music, Stewardship, and Mission Advancement.
Meeting Timeline	Initial Introductory Call-----December 16, 2019 Organizing Meeting-----January 27, 2020 Steering Committee Call-----On or before March 2, 2020 Full Table Meeting-----On or before March 31, 2020 Scheduled Meetings-----Once per quarter

Church Council action [CC20.03.03g]

- To receive the response on climate change from the Domestic Mission unit;
- To affirm the coordinated approach and proposed timeline for this church’s response to climate change; and
- To anticipate progress reports at future Church Council meetings with a final report by the April 2022 Church Council meeting.

Response from Domestic Mission unit (Oct. 2020)

Addressing climate change in a more unified manner across ELCA began with the 2019 fourth-quarter launching of the Sustainability Table (Table). The Table seeks to build capacity and brings together the different churchwide programs and ministries. It embodies our responsibility as stewards of God’s creation through climate action seeking justice and equity for all. Below is a synopsis of the climate change work.

Sustainability Table: The Table operates with Funding, Faith Formation, Capacity Building, Organizational and Operational, Communication, and Advocacy workgroups; and a Steering Committee. The work includes seeking sources of funding for resiliency projects; building up ELCA congregations’ and ministries’ capacities for adapting to climate change; piloting a Rainwater Harvesting project to teach and share learnings about water conservation; developing a plan to address the impact of racism on sustainability; and formulating strategies to address the interconnectivity of climate change and disasters. Areas being evaluated include notification to potential buyers of areas prone to flooding and subject to wildfires, how to build back better, assist Lutheran Disaster Response in preparing for January 2021 consultation; identifying role for ELCA in greenhouse gases mitigation measures, and devising climate migration action plan.

Advocacy: Promoting policies to equitably transition to resilient societies without leaving anyone behind. ELCA leadership and interfaith colleagues organized two (2019 and 2020) innovative interfaith events to galvanize experiences, relationships, and resources toward addressing the climate crisis infused with conviction and hope at this watershed moment each held during United Nations Climate Change Week. Through collaboration with ecoAmerica’s Blessed Tomorrow, the ELCA co-branded an ELCA-specific video and researched resources for talking about climate change with congregations and members (available at [Resources](#)). ELCA votes initiatives and advocacy tools equip members with facts and tips to express their creation care concerns in policy consideration and the ballot. Awareness of intersection of environmental racism and health is raised in resources produced by ELCA advocacy staff. Arranged for diverse ELCA group to participate in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) as an accredited party.

Corporate Social Responsibility: Review and update issues sheets and screens for social purpose funds investing guidance. Participate in the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) committees addressing justice and climate change issues; and serve on ICCR’s Board.

Stewardship: ELCA Caring for Creation Coaching has 16 Level II coaches prepared to work with congregations. We are currently preparing guidelines and orientation for some of these coaches to accompany congregations on their Earth Charter Implementation Plans. A new cohort of coaches will start in October. Also introducing 10 Questions to Manage Your Energy Footprint to congregations and synods.

The next update will be issued in the Spring of 2021.

There was not significant progress to report to the Spring 2021 meeting of the Church Council, so the progress report was postponed to the Fall 2021 meeting.

Response from Service and Justice (Nov. 2021)

The Sustainability Table (Table) established in 2019 assists the ELCA in addressing climate change. Below is a synopsis of the ongoing climate change work.

The Sustainability Table (including Building Resilient Communities (BRC) and Witness In Society (WIS)): The Table's work includes preparing ELCA congregations' and ministries' capacities for building resilient communities in the face of climate change and other environmental matters.

The Table's Capacity Building working group from December 2020 to February 2021 conducted an online survey in the Delaware-Maryland Synod on Care for Creation. The survey helped develop a baseline understanding of environmental issues. Most respondents believed climate change is happening now but see a gap between what they perceive can be done and what is being done. The follow-up work assisted by ELCA Creation Care Coaches (now numbering 22) includes holding eight focus group sessions. The Capacity Building working group submitted a question on creation care in the Form C questionnaire for the ELCA Congregation Annual Report for inclusion in the 2021 report. The responses will help inform the current thinking and capacities of the church and its ministries. Listening sessions were held with Central States and Arkansas-Oklahoma synods. The sessions helped identify needed resources for synods. The Table, working with the Member Communications Strategy working group, will develop a sustainability website to provide a centralized churchwide space for resources. The Table's Organizational and Operational working group will assist in procuring the resources.

WIS led a coalition of partners in holding a side event during President Biden's April 2021 Summit on Climate Change. The consultation called for the inclusion of the expertise of Indigenous and faith communities alongside career politicians and others to implement climate solutions. The ELCA will send a diverse delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Conference of the Parties (COP 26) from October 31 to November 12, 2021. COP 26 will be the most significant COP since 2015 for addressing the climate crisis, "seen as the summit to both address what has and hasn't been achieved since 2015, while also setting concrete plans to reach the Paris Agreement targets" ([Euronews](#) Sept. 30), and the US also having rejoined the Paris Agreement." The ELCA met with high level Treasury Department officials on ways multilateral financial institutions can align with climate change goals.

BRC and WIS are partnering to initiate a Net-Zero by 2050 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions pilot project with the Pennsylvania synods to accompany communities on the journey to a livable future where no one is left behind, starting with support for ministries in reducing their GHG emissions. Interested facilities will receive a baseline assessment of their emissions and site-specific long-term evergreen climate action plan proposals informed by their ministry priorities. Depending upon the ministry site, the recommendations may cover energy efficiency, water use, waste reduction, transportation, and land use/farming.

The Corporate Social Responsibility staff updates documents for social purpose funds investing guidance and is a member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) committees addressing justice and climate change issues and serves on ICCR's Board.

The final update will be issued in the Spring of 2022.

Church Council action [CC21.11.25t]

- To receive the progress report on climate change from the Service and Justice unit; and
- To request the final report at the April 2022 Church Council meeting.

Response from Service and Justice (Spring 2022)

The Sustainability Table (Table) established in 2019 assists ELCA in addressing climate change. The Sustainability Table includes Building Resilient Communities (BRC), Witness in Society (WIS), and ELCA members of the congregations. Below is a synopsis of the ongoing climate change work.

Table's work includes preparing ELCA congregations' and ministries' capacities for building resilient communities in the face of climate change and environmental matters.

The Table's Steering Committee decided to re-evaluate the needs of this church. These include a focus on establishing a website to provide resources on sustainability for churches and congregations and addressing historical environmental justice issues. The [Sustainability Website](#), while the committee continues to improve it, will eventually test the site with diverse ELCA focus groups. The Table is also working with ELCA Development Operations to explore options for external funding from federal and state sources. The Table's goal of becoming more diverse includes extending invitations to area desk managers.

WIS led a diverse delegation to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's Conference of the Parties (COP 26) from October 31–November 12, 2021. COP 26 finalized the Paris Agreement Rulebook and continued with crucial discussions on climate finance, impacts that cannot be addressed by mitigation and adaptation measures (loss and damages), and raising commitments from all to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. WIS continues the climate change work within ELCA (including BRC and Lutheran Disaster Response) and with ecumenical, interfaith, and secular (eNGO) groups external to ELCA. In February 2022, ACT Alliance, Lutheran World Federation, the World Council of Churches, and WIS sponsored a side-event to the [United Nations](#)

[Environment Assembly](#), entitled “Voices of Hope and Faith: Sharing visions of living in harmony with nature,” presenting an opportunity for youth, indigenous people and women to voice a call for action now.

BRC and WIS are partnering to initiate a Creation Care Steward pilot project in Pennsylvania for reducing the carbon footprint of worship facilities, camps, seminaries, and other facilities. The learnings from this project will be shared with the rest of the ELCA to help chart the path to Net-Zero by 2050. BRC and WIS are accompanying communities on the journey to a livable future where no one is left behind. Thus far, 24 churches, both campuses of United Lutheran Seminary, and three camps have elected to join the project. Each will receive a baseline assessment of their emissions and site-specific long-term evergreen climate action plan proposals informed by their ministry priorities. Depending upon the ministry site, the recommendations may cover energy efficiency, water use, waste reduction, transportation, and land use/farming. WIS is working with the World Resources Institute, Georgetown University, and the United States Environmental Protection Agency to develop the tools for conducting the assessment.

The Corporate Social Responsibility staff updates documents for social purpose funds investing guidance and is a member of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) committees addressing justice and climate change issues and serves on ICCR’s Board.

While this work continues, this is the final report to Church Council.

Church Council action:

To receive with gratitude the final report on climate change from the Witness in Society Team in the Service and Justice unit.

B. DECLARATION OF THE ELCA TO THE PEOPLE OF AFRICAN DESCENT

Background:

At the 2016 Churchwide Assembly, the assembly received the African Descent Lutherans memorial from 10 synods calling for a number of actions related to the ELCA’s observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and the commemoration of the United Nation’s International Decade of People of African Descent. In response, the assembly requested in part that the Domestic Mission unit staff create a “Declaration to the African Descent Community.” [CA16.05.17]

At its special meeting in June 2019, the Church Council adopted “A Declaration to the People of African Descent” and directed additional action steps to be taken. [CC19.06.23]

Church Council action [CC19.06.23]

...To direct Planning, Research and Evaluation to measure and report progress on the discriminatory treatment within the call process and to urge Portico to assist with providing information to the churchwide organization to measure and report progress on inequitable compensation of clergy of color by the November 2021 meeting of the Church Council...

Response from Christian Community and Leadership (Nov. 2021)

Due to the transition of related research staff, the progress report will be delayed, and the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) home area will not be ready to report by the Nov. 2021 meeting. However, this work is expected to be included as part of the Quality of Call project, which is considering barriers faced by women, people of color, and LGBTQIA+ pastors in the ELCA.

Additionally, Portico Benefit Services has reported that they do not have ethnic background in its systems and therefore would not have any data to segment rostered ministers of color. The terms of Portico’s privacy policy by which Portico gathers compensation information from membership precludes using that data for purposes other than providing benefits.

An update on this work is anticipated for the Spring 2022 meeting with a full report in Fall 2022

Church Council action [CC21.11.25u]

To receive the update from the Christian Community and Leadership unit and Portico Benefit Services on the research work related to the discriminatory treatment within the call process and the inequitable compensation of rostered ministers of color; and

To request a progress report be presented at the Spring 2022 Church Council meeting with a final report at the Fall 2022 Church Council meeting.

Response from Christian Community and Leadership (Spring 2022)

Christian Community and Leadership Home Area is gathering data from three synods about rostered ministers of color and the size of the congregations they serve. A [study](#) done by The Episcopal Church USA suggests a strong

correlation between the size of the ministry and compensation for a rostered minister ([additional narrative to study](#)). The study also would suggest one way to address the issue raised would be to include rostered ministers of color in interviewing for large member congregations. This will be reported in Fall 2022.

A [report](#) indicating wait times for candidates of color seeking first calls accompanies this response to the Church Council. A plan to address this inequity needs to be developed by the Conference of Bishops who oversee first call placements.

Conversations between Portico Benefit Services and the ELCA churchwide organization continue regarding the sharing of data and the needs to protect privacy as well as to help the church understand the trends related to compensation.

The data and additional information being collected will be shared with the Quality of Call Initiative that will begin the work of improving the quality of call for rostered ministers of color that will most include wait time and compensation.

The Christian Community and Leadership home area will provide an update and progress report for the Fall 2022 Church Council meeting with a final report coming to the Spring 2023 Church Council meeting.

Church Council action:

To receive the progress report from the Christian Community and Leadership unit regarding the research work related to the discriminatory treatment within the call process and the inequitable compensation of rostered ministers of color; and

To request a progress report be presented at the Fall 2022 Church Council meeting and a final report be presented at the Spring 2023 Church Council meeting.

III. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

A. SANCTUARY

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA19.03.07]

To receive with gratitude the memorial from the Metropolitan New York Synod concerning sanctuary;

To reaffirm the long-term and growing commitment of this church to migrants and refugees and to the policy questions involved, as exemplified most recently in the comprehensive strategy “Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities” (AMMPARO);

To recognize that the ELCA in congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization are already taking the actions requested by this memorial; and

To request that appropriate staff on the AMMPARO team, LIRS, and the Domestic Mission, Global Mission, and Mission Advancement units review the existing strategies and practices by the five current sanctuary synods and develop a plan for additional tools that provide for education and discernment around sanctuary;

To declare the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America a sanctuary church body; and

To request the ELCA Church Council, in consultation with the appropriate churchwide units and offices, provide guidance for the three expressions of this church about what it means to be a sanctuary church body and provide a report to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

Executive Committee Action [EC19.09.28.a6]

To refer the 2019 Churchwide Assembly action on Sanctuary to the Global Mission and Domestic Mission units, in consultation with the AMMPARO (“Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) team, LIRS and other appropriate churchwide organization 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 AMMPARO Team (November 2019)

There are essentially three requests from the 2019 Churchwide Assembly for further action:

1. educational materials for congregations and synods;
2. guidance for the three expressions of this church on what it means to be a sanctuary church body from the Church Council in consultation with the churchwide organization; and
3. a report to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

In terms of educational materials, the churchwide office has already produced talking points, an overview of sanctuary, and a video answering frequently asked questions. A new congregational study titled “Transformed Communities: Freed for Radical Welcome,” originally produced by Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, has been edited by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) with significant input by AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) staff as a Bible study for congregations to begin to discern their work with migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. More materials will continue to be produced.

In order to provide the requested guidance for the three expressions on what sanctuary means, AMMPARO staff, as well as others at the churchwide office, have reached out to other denominations who have supported sanctuary congregations to receive any materials and resolutions that they have produced. A small group of churchwide staff has been assembled as an advisory team to the AMMPARO Sanctuary team to oversee this process and recommends the following five-step process:

1. Convene the five sanctuary synods and selected sanctuary hosting congregations to receive their guidance and suggestions in January 2020. Representatives from LIRS and churchwide staff will be included.
2. Get feedback, if possible, on preliminary conclusions at the March 2020 joint meeting of the Church Council and Conference of Bishops.
3. Present a draft of the final report to the Fall 2020 Conference of Bishops meeting for feedback.
4. Present the definitions and final report to the Church Council at its fall 2020 meeting. Release the definitions, together with tools for synods and congregations, to use following the Church Council's action. These tools will be guides for those who wish to engage around sanctuary. Resources will be available shortly after the approval of the definitions by the Church Council.

A report will be presented at the Spring 2022 Church Council meeting with a final report presented to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council action [CC19.11.47t]

To receive the response on “Sanctuary” from the AMMPARO (“Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) team;

To affirm the timeline proposed in the response;

To request that the definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body for the three expressions of this church be provided to the Church Council's Fall 2020 meeting;

To request a final report be provided to the Church Council's Spring 2022 meeting in anticipation of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from the AMMPARO Sanctuary Team (November 2020)

The ELCA AMMPARO Team received significant input at the March 2020 joint Conference of Bishops and Church Council meeting as well as through the online feedback form for congregational members. A variety of opportunities were contemplated but were not possible to carry out as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To respond to these changed conditions, the online feedback survey was heavily promoted and kept open for additional time in order to receive more input. The analysis of the input timeline was modified, which has delayed the drafting of definitions and guidelines.

The current uncertainty around future policy makes the drafting of effective guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body most difficult at this time. The ELCA constituency would best be served by guidelines that respond to the post-election context.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertain policy future around immigration issues as a result of the fall elections, the ELCA AMMPARO Team respectfully requests the Church Council postpone its receipt of the definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body until the Spring 2021 meeting of the Church Council.

Church Council action [CC20.11.33t]

To receive the update from the AMMPARO (“Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) Team on definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body;

To extend the deadline for these definitions and guidelines to the Spring 2021 Church Council meeting; and To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.

Response from the AMMPARO Team in the Service and Justice unit (Spring 2021)

The Service and Justice unit developed the “ELCA Sanctuary Church Guidelines” to provide guidance to congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization on the invitation to action from the Sanctuary Memorial, recognizing that this church's understanding of sanctuary will evolve amid changing contexts. The document can be located in the April 2021 Church Council meeting materials.

Church Council action [CC21.04.07]

To recognize that the ELCA's ministry as a sanctuary church body is a public witness that calls ELCA members to value the dignity of each human being made in God's image;

To thank the churchwide staff for the development of additional resources that provided education and discernment around sanctuary;

To encourage an understanding of the word 'sanctuary' that is rooted in the principles of walking alongside, or accompanying, immigrants and refugees while acknowledging that the word 'sanctuary' has no legal or universally accepted definition; and

To affirm the guidance provided in the "ELCA Sanctuary Church Guidelines" for ways congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization can accompany and support the ministry of sanctuary.

Response from the AMMPARO Team in the Service and Justice unit (Spring 2022)

Following the affirmation of the "ELCA Sanctuary Church Guidelines" by the ELCA Church Council at its Spring 2021 meeting, the guideline document was publicized and posted on the Sanctuary Church page on the ELCA website. AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) team received only positive expressions of thanks from people who were seeking this guidance. No negative feedback was received. As an additional resource for congregations interested in sanctuary, a "Sanctuary Discernment Guide" was produced and is in the final stages of editing before it will be posted on the ELCA Sanctuary Church webpage. This guide is actualized to this current context and will provide help to any congregation interested in better understanding sanctuary as well as information to congregations looking to declare sanctuary.

AMMPARO submitted a question to the 2020 Form C for congregations and received some astonishing information. At the end of 2020, 1692 congregations reported having discussed sanctuary in their congregations as a result of the sanctuary memorial, while 1693 congregations expressed a desire to learn more about sanctuary. The "Sanctuary Discernment Guide" will be offered to these congregations for their further study. A careful examination of the list of congregations interested in learning more about sanctuary reveals that every synod in the ELCA has at least one or two congregations and in some cases, dozens of congregations interested in learning more about sanctuary. Based upon the results of previous Form C questions that AMMPARO has submitted, a clear pattern of growing congregational interest, engagement and advocacy for migrant and refugees is visible and can be celebrated.

Sanctuary is not being requested in this current context. In fact, almost all persons who were previously in sanctuary in ELCA congregations have left sanctuary. The "ELCA Sanctuary Church Guidelines" and the new "Sanctuary Discernment Guide" will provide important resource material for all should the need arise in the future.

Church Council action:

To receive with gratitude the final report on "Sanctuary" from the AMMPARO ("Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities") Team in the Service and Justice unit; and

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