



“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 2024

Dear Church Council members,

Grace and peace to you.

We look forward to welcoming Bishop Eaton back from her leave of absence. This brief overview is shared on her behalf as you begin your preparations for the April 2024 Church Council meeting.

What can you anticipate for this meeting?

- Receive an update regarding the Budget Prioritization Task Force
- Receive an update from the co-chairs of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church
- Receive an update on God’s Love Made Real
- Engage in racial justice and gender justice education; Please prepare yourself ahead of time by reviewing the [resources](#) previously shared in Church Council Teams.
- Consider a social message on gun-related violence and trauma

What else should be noted? Committees will meet the afternoon of Friday, April 12. An optional hearing will be held on Saturday morning, April 13 for the draft social statement on civic life and faith. During the Saturday lunch, the advisory members will be hosting lunch presentations about the ministry happening in their associations and organizations.

We anticipate you will have read the leaders’ written reports in advance of the meeting. Instead of hearing verbal reports from all the leaders, you will have an opportunity to ask clarifying questions about their written reports. In addition, the committees without significant actions will have an abbreviated opportunity to share their committee reports with you.

Some action items will be *en bloc*. As you know, this is to allow 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 13 at 10 a.m. This is also the deadline for any new business you wish to add to the Church Council agenda.

You 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.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Burk". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Michael L. Burk
Presiding Bishop Pro Tempore

Report from the Presiding Bishop *Pro Tempore*

From the beginning of my service as presiding bishop *pro tempore*, I understood that I was entrusted with the authority of the Office of the Presiding Bishop and oversight of the responsibilities afforded that office. In my communications and actions, I sought to be clear that I have been caring for the ministry of Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton on behalf of this church.

So as not to confuse people, including and sometimes especially our partners ecumenically and internationally, my work has been mostly internally focused. Of course, I have been responsible for knowing everything the presiding bishop needs to know about things internal or external to the day-to-day business of the churchwide organization (CWO), and sometimes far-reaching decisions have been necessary. But most of my time has been spent with and on behalf of the CWO.

I have worked primarily with members of the Administrative Team (executives and advisors) and others who report directly to the presiding bishop. They have been supportive, constructive partners. I am especially glad that they've been honest about the challenges they face and the stresses that are felt by the people they lead. My goal in working with them has been to be both strategic in thinking about our shared work, and pastoral in our evolving relationships. I think that approach has allowed us to continue moving forward together on behalf of this church and in keeping with the directions that have been set by Bishop Eaton.

It was immediately clear that the system itself is anxious. There are several reasons for that, not the least of which is the confusion surrounding several seemingly distinct things happening all at once. These are things geared toward effecting constructive change in this church. Consider this list,

1. a newly initiated, but not yet understood Vision Team that moves the Executive for Administration out of that key role,
2. ongoing confusion related to what we mean to say, and what we hope to accomplish with Future Church: God's Love Made Real,
3. an innovation home area in the structure of the organization that's still new enough that it still feels like it is just emerging,
4. the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) doing their work,
5. and the election of a new presiding bishop on the near horizon.

It can feel like too much. And it has seemed less coordinated than would be helpful. But I remain hopeful.

The Rev. Louise Johnson moved from the position of Executive for Administration to lead what is being called the "Vision Team." This is an effort being funded by a restricted gift, that is intended to support the vision of the CWO and the entire ELCA in ways that might be described as "around the edges or beyond" the regular structures of the CWO. The team is in the proposal development phase. Bishop Eaton is committed to this work, having initiated it prior to her leave.

At Bishop Eaton's invitation, the new year began with the welcome of the Rev. Wyvetta Bullock back to the role from which she had earlier retired. Her return has been a gift to me and to the organization. That both her work and mine were described as "part time," had the potential of addition to already anxious circumstances, given the significance of these positions within the organization and beyond. I think people observed that both of us are wired to address the work before us regardless of the hours assigned for that work.

One more change is the appointment of the Rev. Khader El-Yateem to serve as the new Executive Director for Service and Justice. He begins in that role March 18.

Although the task force related to the 2025 Budget priorities is only now engaging the breadth of that work, significant effort has gone into setting the stage. A strategic approach to the heavy lift that lies ahead requires aligning the purposes of the CWO with resource allocation.

This is why it is essential to bring greater clarity to the vision that lives under the banner “God’s Love Made Real,” and, to what that vision means for the work of the CWO. At its best, the clarity we seek will enhance the chances that the vision is better understood and welcomed in synods and congregations. To be sure, there has been some confusion, in part because of the inconsistency of language, in part because of its own evolutionary path as a plan, building on decisions that were made as far back as 2016, and at least in part because of the timing on the heels of the pandemic, during which the Future Church work was adopted and introduced to people – remotely, when remote was not the norm.

On March 5, 2024, Jackie Baumhover, Director for Strategy, made a presentation at an all staff gathering, in-person and hybrid. With Jackie, I fielded several questions. Expressions of appreciation and comments that followed the event suggest that staff members have a better understanding of “God’s Love Made Real,” and a growing appreciation for how aligning work with stated purposes and goals with more measurable outcomes, will assist in moving forward with churchwide ministries.

I have attended two full meetings of the CRLC (remotely) and meetings of one committee. In conversation with some members of the commission and with the co-chairs, I have offered advice and encouragement about staying focused on the commission’s charge and on how they might use resource persons more constructively. They know that we are committed to providing whatever information we can to help them understand the current work and structure of the CWO.

I was privileged to participate in the recent meeting of the Conference of Bishops. After having been staff to that group (2001-2008) when I served as ELCA Executive for Worship, and after being part of the group as a synod bishop (2008-2020), it was good to be with them in a role that felt like coming full circle back to my roots in the CWO. It was a welcome homecoming.

At one point in my report to them I told the gathering, “I hope that you recognize that relational tension, whether between bishops and the churchwide organization or even among bishops, is not only likely, but predictable. We are, after all, human beings. I hope you can learn to see the tension as an opportunity to model a grace-filled grappling with intertwined responsibilities for bringing God’s own mission to expression.”

More than most, I have been anxious to welcome Bishop Eaton back from leave. I am glad to return to the ranks of the retired, reclaiming the title “Grandpa” as primary to my vocation. While there have been some challenging moments in these last months, I complete this service with no regrets for having accepted the appointment. I have a deeper sense of what it means to be in this together. And I hold fast to the promise that Christ is with us, now and in all the days that lie ahead.

With gratitude,

Michael L Burk
Presiding Bishop *Pro Tempore*
November 18, 2023 – March 17, 2024

Report from the Presiding Bishop

Reading the reports for this council meeting, it is clear that the mission and ministry of this church continued unabated during my leave. Thanks to my fellow officers, staff, and council members for your excellent work. Thanks also to Michael Burk who served as presiding bishop *pro tempore*. It is no small thing to come out of retirement and take on this ministry. The churchwide organization was in good hands.

As noted in his report, Presiding Bishop *Pro Tempore* Burk identified two projects which need greater clarity and focus: God's Love Made Real and the Vision Project. God's Love Made Real contains the vision for this church and is a continuation of the Future Church work. The Vision Project was formed by me and is funded by a donor. My intent was to have a small team wrap its arms around all the initiatives and research we have done through God's Love Made Real, the Barna/Fuller research, new starts, and a host of others and get all of these things 1.) moving and 2.) moving in the same direction. As is our habit we have studied and researched things to death but have not come up with concrete action. We don't need more research; we don't need more studies. We need action. I have met with and communicated this to the Vision Project. I will continue to meet with them to bring this about. Getting our arms around these two projects will also give the Budget Priorities Project sharper focus.

There will be many significant transitions between now and fall of 2025. There are ten bishop elections slated for the 2024 Synod Assembly season and twenty bishop elections in 2025. Not all will result in new bishops. New Church Council members will be elected at the Churchwide Assembly in 2025 as well as a new presiding bishop. In some encouraging ways, the Conference of Bishops gelled after the disruption of the pandemic and significant turnover during that same time. Tending these relationships among the bishops and among the Church Council members elected in 2022 are vital to ensure continuity while at the same time allowing a space for open and frank conversations.

When I began this call in 2013, I laid out four emphases – We Are Church. We Are Lutheran. We Are Church Together. We are Church for the Sake of the World. I still find this a helpful framework. I'll focus on the two emphases, We Are Church and We are Lutheran.

We Are Church. At its most recent meeting the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) spent time considering the Statement of Purpose found in chapter 4 of the ELCA Constitution. In doing so it is important to understand what is the unique and proper work of the church. No other institution on earth is charged with preaching the Gospel in its purity and administering the sacraments according to the Gospel. (AC VII) At the risk of sounding over dramatic I believe that the ELCA is experiencing somewhat of an identity crisis. Of course we work to feed the hungry, advocate for justice, welcome the stranger (Matthew 25:31-46) but that is not unique to the church. We serve the Word. Everything else we do flows from that but does not supplant it. The Gospel and our call to give the Gospel free course in the world is the main thing. We are not an NGO, we are not a social service organization. We are church. If we stray from our unique purpose our witness is diluted and our identity is lost.

We are Lutheran. We have a particular witness to the Gospel. Many current members came from traditions where they did not hear of God's free gift of grace our freedom in Christ to serve the neighbor. When they studied Lutheran theology, they felt a sense of liberation. They felt free of the exhausting and never-ending effort to make themselves acceptable to God, to earn God's love. Perhaps those of us who grew up in this tradition have become dulled to this radical Good News, to this true evangelical witness. I am concerned about re-branding that takes Lutheran out of the name.

I am grateful for the leave the Church Council gave. I was able to fully present for a daughter's wedding and my brother's death and burial. I am rested and ready to get back to work.

Peace. Be well.

Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Report from the Vice President

Happy Easter! He is Risen!

I hope y'all have been well since we last met in November 2023. I have had an eventful few months. I have virtually spoken to two Synod Councils and I have taken advantage of the ability to travel a bit more this year (now that Miriam is slightly older). In January, I attended the clergy wellness retreat for the Lower Susquehanna Synod, and I was incredibly happy to attend the Synod Vice President's Gathering in March.

I have mentioned in the past about how I feel there is a systemic devaluation of lay leadership. One of the easiest ways to help rectify that is to honor and support our Synod Vice Presidents. I'm excited to note that 41 Synod Vice Presidents attended the gathering. As I may have said, the 2019 Synod Vice President Gathering was instrumental in my development and growth as a Synod Vice President and I wouldn't be in this role without it (whether that's a good or bad thing is up to you to decide). Being among all those Synod Vice Presidents gave me a great deal of hope for this church. These lay leaders bring so much to this church and make it a better place.

This summer, I will be attending three Synod Assemblies. It brings me the greatest joy to be among Lutherans around the country and have conversations with them about their faith and what is going on in their corner of American "Lutherandom" (I may have made that word up). So, I am happy at all the opportunities and conversations I'll have with the folks in our synods as well as sharing the news that the churchwide expression isn't all that scary. Then in July, I am happy to be attending the ELCA Youth Gathering in New Orleans. This will be my first time attending, and I am really excited to be there. During all that, I may sneak in that Roberts Rules course I was planning on doing last year (oops) as well as watching a lot of soccer.

At this meeting we welcome back Presiding Bishop Eaton. I am happy for her time of rest and rejuvenation, and I am glad that we have her leadership. I want to thank Bishop Burk, who was willing to take on the role of Presiding Bishop Pro Tempore, and did so with great kindness and a sense of responsibility. I am excited to do the work of the Church with you, guided by the Holy Spirit. I hope and pray we have a wonderful meeting.

Imran Siddiqui
Vice President

Report from the Secretary

I stumbled across an article recently entitled, “8 Pandemic Words and Phrases People Absolutely Never Want to Hear Again.” The list included “new normal,” “unprecedented,” and “essential.” One that I would add to the list is “pivot.” Yet as I thought about this report, and the four-year anniversary of the Church Council meeting the weekend before the pandemic was named a pandemic, it was the word that seemed to describe much of what the Office of the Secretary has been and will be up to on various levels.

Level One: Across Our Church

Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church: The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) met for the second in-person meeting Nov. 30–Dec. 2, 2023 and gathered online Feb. 7 and 8, 2024. They agreed that their mandate focus is upon governance, as emphasized in the title of the enabling memorial, “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA.” The CRLC established seven committees to segment and distribute its work. They heard presentations and updates from ELCA staff and ELCA ethnic associations, as well as on “Future Church: God’s Love Made Real” and the DEIA audit findings.

The commission recommended changes to its membership and composition, which the Executive Committee of the Church Council reviewed. The action of the Executive Committee was “To acknowledge the considerable task and effort of the Church Council in appointing members to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church focusing on an inclusive and broad diversity of representation from all three expressions of the ELCA; To encourage and support the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to seek, identify, and hear all of the voices and perspectives that are necessary and helpful for its work, yet decline to appoint a replacement member to the commission or to petition the Church Council to expand the membership; and, To commend the members of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church for their thoughtful and faithful work in ensuring all voices and perspectives are heard in service to Christ’s gospel and in Christ’s church.” (EC24.01.04)

The agenda items for the third in-person meeting April 4–6 will be to receive committee reports, receive input from a variety of stakeholders, and discuss the overall CRLC timeline and framework for their recommendations.

OLFC Task Force: The Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministry has now met three times. Initial discussions have focused on the time limits for OLFC categories, the 15-hour minimum requirement for certifying a call, protocols for requesting a roster status (OLFC and retired status), and a process for appealing a roster status decision. In addition, there has been discussion of the variations across synods (and sometimes within synods) of how interim service is handled from a roster perspective, equity issues surrounding called and uncalled interims, and the effect of these policies upon roster status.

The task force will be continuing its work across the spring and summer, making recommendations for any constitutional changes or roster manual revisions in time for the fall meeting of the COB and the November Church Council meeting.

Annual Congregation Report: In Fall 2023, staff from the churchwide organization conducted listening sessions with synod bishops and staff to evaluate the Annual Congregation Report process. Based on the feedback, the Annual Congregation Report and its supporting materials underwent some immediate changes. These included:

- Redesigning Form A to increase readability;
- Enhancing the Form A instructions with better explanations and clearer definitions; and
- Recording informational videos to explain the purpose of Form A and provide instruction on how to complete it.
- Allowing for online password retrieval.

The churchwide organization has also put plans in place to address additional concerns that cannot be taken up immediately. These include:

- Making congregations' prior years' data available to view and edit;
- Easing the process of downloading and storing data;
- Translating Form A and its instructions into multiple languages; and
- Developing more dynamic and timely statistical reports.

These conversations with the synods are ongoing. The goal is to continue to evaluate changes already made and to prioritize what comes next.

Level Two: Synod-Related

Synod Assemblies: The spring synod assembly season is in clear sight, extending from April 19 through June 15, 2024. Ten synods will engage the bishop election process. Of those ten, two of the ten bishops will allow their names to go forward for re-election, which means there will be at least eight new bishops. The idea of an annual, multi-day, in-person synod assembly is no longer the norm:

- Seventeen synods will hold a one-day assembly
- Six synods will meet online only
- Three synods will have “atypical” meetings such as a regional gathering or ministry fair
- Three synods will not meet in assembly in 2024

Looking ahead to 2025, twenty synods will be holding bishop elections.

Nominations and Elections Task Force: The Task Force on Synod Nominations and Elections held its first meeting on Feb. 19. The 2022 Churchwide Assembly directed the Church Council to appoint a task force to “explore and analyze nomination and election processes used by synods and the churchwide organization, including but not limited to the ecclesiastical ballot, in order to determine best practices and to make practical recommendations concerning options for the selection of all synod and churchwide officers” and to provide a report on best practices to the COB and the Church Council in time for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Dan Eppley, manager for documentation, has carried out an in-depth analysis and comparison of all 65 synod constitutions, and several individuals who have helped conduct synod elections in recent years will be studying the analysis and will be holding conversations with synods to come up with their report in time for the fall COB and Church Council meetings.

Church Mutual Insurance: We are aware of the concerns that have been raised about Church Mutual, particularly as it relates to Church Mutual's non-renewal of policies for many churches, synods, and other ministries. Some of these issues can be tied to the larger crisis in the property insurance market, which is affecting all carriers, but other concerns, particularly around a lack of communication and lack of notice, are directly attributable to Church Mutual. We have endorsed Church Mutual for many years because they have worked with us to provide coverage and resolve difficult claims issues for churches. Most important, unlike some carriers, they have not in the past walked away from congregations facing difficult lawsuits or losses. These recent developments have caused us to reevaluate that relationship, however, and we are considering other options.

Level Three: Office of the Secretary

While the staff of the Office of the Secretary remains a pretty constant group, there are nonetheless changes. The work of research and evaluation in the churchwide organization has been “re-evaluated.” Adam DeHoek has had a change in position and will now serve as the senior director for Research and Evaluation and as a member of the OS Leadership Team. In addition to Adam's position, one new staff member has been hired to fill the researcher/evaluator role (Tim Snyder), and interviews are being

conducted for the congregational statistics analyst role. In describing this new and renewed focus on research and evaluation, we shared that the primary goals of this new team will be to collect and share relevant and actionable data in a timely manner with stakeholders across the ELCA ecology. One specific goal is to work closely with bishops and their staffs to uncover and understand felt needs around information, data, and processes. This is a continuation of and expansion of the good work and relationships many in OS already have with those serving in synods.

An additional goal is to build capacity in the organization around evaluation. Research and Evaluation staff will serve as evaluation consultants; this will include offering training on the basics of evaluation, providing guidance on small-scale evaluations, and championing the process of evaluation across the organization.

Another significant change in OS staffing is in the Archives. Joel Thoreson, who served in his role for over 20 years, moved on in December. Cathy Lundeen, who is our archivist for collections management and records management and who has served the churchwide organization for 23 years, will be taking on an expanded role and will serve as supervisor for a new assistant archivist. The position is being posted, and we would encourage you to give thought to any individuals you know who might have skills and training for that position.

These past three months have been a time of pivoting as we wished Bishop Eaton well during her time of leave and welcomed her back March 18. We are grateful to the Rev. Michael Burk for serving as presiding bishop *pro tempore* and appreciate the knowledge, skill, and grace that Bishop Burk brought to his work.

As always, I am grateful to all the staff of OS, and to the OS Leadership Team (Dana Adams, Tom Cunniff, Adam DeHoek, Keith Fry, MaryAnn Schwabe, and Jodi Slattery) in particular, for their ability and their willingness to demonstrate adaptability in responding to a changing world and church. I want to offer a particular shout-out to Associate General Counsel Paul Irwin, who pivoted to meet the legal needs of this church during Part Two of Tom's sabbatical, and Cathy Lundeen, who has single-handedly managed the work of the Archives during these past few months. In the midst of change and challenge, I am grateful for the constancy of my OS colleagues' commitment to the mission and ministry of this church.

APPENDIX A: CHURCHWIDE REPRESENTATIVES FOR SYNOD ASSEMBLIES

| | SYNOD | DATES | ELECTION | CHURCHWIDE REP |
|-----------|---|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| 1A | Alaska (<i>Wickstrom</i>) | 4/26/24-4/28/24 | X | Elizabeth Eaton |
| 1B | Northwest Washington | 5/18/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 1C | Southwestern Washington | N/A | | N/A |
| 1D | Northwest Intermountain | N/A (regional gatherings) | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 1E | Oregon | 6/1/2024 | | VIDEO & REP VIDEO |
| 1F | Montana | 5/30/24-6/1/24 | | Carmelo Santos |
| 2A | Sierra Pacific | 6/7/24-6/9/24 | | Rubén Duran |
| 2B | Southwest California | 5/31/24-6/1/24 | | Mary Campbell |
| 2C | Pacifica | N/A Regional gatherings | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 2D | Grand Canyon (<i>Hutterer</i>) | 6/13/24-6/15/24 | X | John Weit |
| 2E | Rocky Mountain (<i>Gonia</i>) | 4/24/24-4/27/24 | X | Sue Rothmeyer |
| 3A | Western North Dakota | 5/31/24-6/2/24 | | Keith Fry |
| 3B | Eastern North Dakota | 6/1/24-6/2/24 | | Kristen Opalinski |
| 3C | South Dakota | 5/31/24-6/1/24 | | Norma Malfatti |
| 3D | Northwestern Minnesota | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Jill Beverlin |
| 3E | Northeastern Minnesota | 4/27/2024 | | VIDEO & REP VIDEO |
| 3F | Southwestern Minnesota | 6/7/24-6/8/24 | | Phil Hirsch |
| 3G | Minneapolis Area (<i>Svenningsen</i>) | 5/2/24-5/4/24 | X | Lori Fedyk |
| 3H | Saint Paul Area | 5/10/24-5/11/24 | | Roger Willer |
| 3I | Southeastern Minnesota | 5/11/2024 | | Keith Fry |
| 4A | Nebraska | 6/1/24-6/2/24 | | Sara Cutter |
| 4B | Central States | 6/6/24-6/8/24 | | Sara Cutter |
| 4C | Arkansas-Oklahoma | 5/3/24-5/5/24 | | John Weit |
| 4D | Northern Texas - Northern Louisiana | 4/19/24-4/20/24 | | Nick Kiger |
| 4E | Southwestern Texas (<i>Briner</i>) | 5/3/24-5/5/24 | X | Victoria Flood |
| 4F | Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Imran Siddiqui |
| 5A | Metropolitan Chicago | 6/1/2024 | | Victoria Flood |
| 5B | Northern Illinois | 6/14/24-6/15/24 | | Miguel Gómez-Acosta |
| 5C | Central/Southern Illinois | 6/6/24-6/8/24 | | Rachel Wind |
| 5D | Southeastern Iowa | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Miguel Gómez-Acosta |
| 5E | Western Iowa | 4/19/24-4/20/24 | | Iain Chester |
| 5F | Northeastern Iowa | 6/1/24 *Ministry Fair* | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 5G | Northern Great Lakes | 5/18/2024 | | Nick Kiger |

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|-----------|---|-----------------|---|--------------------------------|
| 5H | Northwest Synod of Wisconsin (<i>Skow-Anderson</i>) | 6/7/24-6/8/24 | X | MaryAnn Schwabe |
| 5I | East-Central Synod of Wisconsin | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Phil Hirsch |
| 5J | Greater Milwaukee | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Vance Blackfox |
| 5K | South-Central Synod of Wisconsin | 5/17/24-5/18/24 | | Rachel Wind |
| 5L | La Crosse Area | 6/7/24-6/9/24 | | Daniel Kirschbaum |
| 6A | Southeast Michigan | 5/11/2024 | | Ryan Cumming |
| 6B | North/West Lower Michigan | 5/11/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 6C | Indiana-Kentucky (<i>Gafkjen</i>) | 6/7/24-6/9/24 | X | Sue Rothmeyer |
| 6D | Northwestern Ohio | 6/1/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 6E | Northeastern Ohio | 6/1/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 6F | Southern Ohio | 5/31/24-6/1/24 | | Don Kreiss |
| 7A | New Jersey | 5/11/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 7B | New England (<i>Hazelwood</i>) | 6/6/24-6/8/24 | X | Lori Fedyk |
| 7C | Metropolitan New York | N/A | | N/A |
| 7D | Upstate New York | 6/3/24-6/4/24 | | Rahel Mwitula Williams |
| 7E | Northeastern Pennsylvania | 6/8/2024 | | MarieAnne Sliwinski |
| 7F | Southeastern Pennsylvania (<i>Davenport</i>) | 5/3/24-5/4/24 | X | Sue Rothmeyer / Imran Siddiqui |
| 7G | Slovak Zion | N/A | | N/A |
| 8A | Northwestern Pennsylvania | 6/13/24-6/15/24 | | Norma Malfatti |
| 8B | Southwestern Pennsylvania | 6/14/24-6/15/24 | | MaryAnn Schwabe |
| 8C | Allegheny | 6/15/2024 | | VIDEO & REP VIDEO |
| 8D | Lower Susquehanna | 5/31/24-6/1/24 | | Phil Hirsch |
| 8E | Upper Susquehanna | 6/14/24-6/15/24 | | MarieAnne Sliwinski |
| 8F | Delaware-Maryland | 6/7/24-6/8/24 | | Jennifer DeLeon |
| 8G | Metropolitan Washington, DC | 6/1/2024 | | David Anglada |
| 8H | West Virginia-Western MD | 6/1/2024 | | Jodi Slattery |
| 9A | Virginia | 4/27/2024 | | VIDEO & REP VIDEO |
| 9B | North Carolina | 5/30/24-6/1/24 | | Iain Chester |
| 9C | South Carolina | 6/8/2024 | | VIDEO ONLY |
| 9D | Southeastern | 5/31/24-6/2/24 | | Amy Reumann |
| 9E | Florida-Bahamas | 5/31/24-6/2/24 | | Maryn Olson |
| 9F | Caribbean (<i>Negrón-Caamaño</i>) | 6/7/24-6/8/24 | X | Victoria Flood / Pedro Suárez |

Report from the Treasurer

FY23 Operating Results – Unrestricted

The unrestricted results of operations for the year ended Jan. 31, 2024, reflect tremendous gratitude for the generosity of our members, congregations, synods, and related organizations who have financially supported the work of the churchwide organization. At the same time, the organization is mindful of the sources and trends in the underlying data as we plan for our future work. Overall, the churchwide organization's fiscal year 2023 results are favorable with net revenues over expenses of \$3.5 million compared to a breakeven budget. Total unrestricted revenues exceeded plan by \$3.6 million and expenses were below plan by \$6.1 million, offset by the release of designated and restricted funds being \$6.2 million less than in the budget. Not releasing \$6.2 million of designated funds is actually positive news as the actual operating revenues were sufficient to cover the actual operating expenses without drawing monies from a designated fund and an endowment as was originally planned.

Mission Support was 2.4% or \$.9 million below the plan and 4.3% or \$1.6 million below the prior year. 2023 marks the third out of four years since 2020 where the year over year decline exceeded 4 %. Mission support begins with individual members, many of whom have been negatively impacted by rising interest rates and inflation. International conflicts, the migrant crisis, and geopolitical turmoil have eroded consumer confidence. In addition, church attendance overall has not resumed to pre-pandemic levels and governmental support to nonprofit organizations has been fully utilized; and with expenses rising, in many cases, congregations and synods have fewer revenues to share. Finally, the philanthropic spikes noticed during the pandemic have not proven to be sustainable for most nonprofit organizations. While these are all likely contributors to the decline, questions about the likelihood of these trends reversing in the short term must be considered.

Consistent with many other nonprofits, declines in giving trends were also noted in both unrestricted and restricted direct gifts. In addition to the likely economic impact on giving discussed above, the 40% shortfall to budget (30% to prior year) in unrestricted direct gifts is also attributable to overly ambitious goal setting, staffing vacancies in the fundraising staff, and an abundance of generous gifts related to Holy Closures that were realized in FY22, which did not repeat in FY23.

The shortfalls in mission support and direct gifts were more than offset by investment income of \$7.0 million. While this category is conservatively budgeted, FY23 was benefitted by poor performance in FY22. Investment income was \$5.2 million favorable to the budget and \$5.6 million better than last year. While our investment returns were positive for much of the year, investment income grew from \$3.0 million at the end of October to \$7.0 million during the 4th quarter. Of this, \$2.4 million represents unrealized gains at Jan. 31, 2024.

In addition, bequest income exceeded plan by nearly \$4.0 million and prior year by \$3.1 million. We are especially grateful for all of those who nurtured relationships and instilled a love for our church in those donors who remembered the work of the churchwide organization in their estate plans. In accordance with our policies, the majority of the excess bequest income will be added to the Mission Development Fund endowment which supports future new and innovative ministries and other churchwide priorities. While we celebrate cash management and favorable investment returns and bequest income, we also recognize that these are not predictable, sustainable revenue streams which should be assumed to recur at this level for planning purposes. We give thanks to the continued faithfulness of the Mission Investment Fund, a separately incorporated ministry of the ELCA, for their continued investment in our church's

growth and vitality through a \$1.5 million gift to support grants to new and developing congregations.

Prudent, faithful, and diligent attention to expense control also contributed to the favorable performance for the year as actual expenditures were only 91% of the spending authorization, resulting in savings of \$6.1 million. The average spending for the past 3 years, excluding FY20, was 92.2%. Significant areas of savings included compensation and benefits for staff vacancies (44%), travel and events (19%), and purchased services (9%). It is important to note that the most significant savings were in the Innovation home area, which became more fully staffed in the fourth quarter, so we anticipate the underspending to be less in future years.

The strength of the 4th quarter revenue streams and spending below the projected 95% did not require the utilization of the budgeted operations support designated fund. Therefore, we will be presenting a revised FY24 budget utilizing this fund, in lieu of the deficit budget that was originally approved.

ELCA World Hunger

We celebrate a record year for ELCA World Hunger expenditures which totaled over \$24.9 million. Our ability to work to address the root causes of hunger and poverty around the world is made possible each year by the generosity of individuals, congregations, and synods. We give thanks.

Spending in FY23 exceeded revenue streams by \$4.8 million as was planned due to an accumulated fund balance from generosity in recent years. Direct gifts from individuals, congregations, and synods totaled nearly \$17.3 million, representing 84.3% of the plan. We look forward to 2024 and celebrating 50 years as Lutherans working together in hunger ministries around the world.

Lutheran Disaster Response

Nearly \$13.7 million was raised in FY23 in support of Lutheran Disaster Response. Major disasters supported include the crisis in the Middle East, domestic wildfires, and general disaster funds. Spending totaled over \$17.5 million with significant grants supporting the Eastern Europe and Middle East crises, general hurricane preparedness and response, wildfires, and tornadoes.

We strive to faithfully steward those gifts entrusted to us as we are called to carry out the duties assigned to the churchwide organization and for which others depend on us. Our financial position remains strong, and we are grateful for the support from synods, congregations, members, ministry partners, and for the work of the Church Council.



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA
SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | 2023 ACTUAL | 2023 BUDGET | 2022 ACTUAL | Year-to-Date Variance | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | | | | ACTUAL Vs. BUDGET Favorable/(Unfavorable) | CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR Favorable/(Unfavorable) |
| UNRESTRICTED | | | | | |
| Mission Support | 37,080,134 | 38,000,000 | 38,727,560 | (919,866) | (1,647,426) |
| Other | 28,033,069 | 23,507,098 | 23,043,410 | 4,525,971 | 4,989,659 |
| TOTAL UNRESTRICTED | 65,113,202 | 61,507,098 | 61,770,970 | 3,606,104 | 3,342,233 |
| TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released | 749,983 | 6,922,562 | 806,427 | (6,172,579) | (56,444) |
| TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE AND SUPPORT | 65,863,186 | 68,429,660 | 62,577,397 | (2,566,474) | 3,285,788 |
| LESS TOTAL EXPENSES | 62,309,074 | 68,429,660 | 60,780,021 | 6,120,586 | 1,529,053 |
| NET REVENUE OVER (UNDER) EXPENSES | 3,554,112 | - | 1,797,376 | 3,554,112 | 1,756,736 |



REVENUE SUMMARY
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | 2023 ACTUAL | 2023 BUDGET | 2022 ACTUAL | Year-to-Date Variance | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | | | | ACTUAL vs. BUDGET Favorable/(Unfavorable) | CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR Favorable/(Unfavorable) |
| UNRESTRICTED | | | | | |
| Mission Support | 37,080,134 | 38,000,000 | 38,727,560 | (919,866) | (1,647,426) |
| Direct Gifts | 6,336,180 | 10,537,000 | 9,189,098 | (4,200,820) | (2,852,918) |
| Investment Revenue | 7,005,992 | 1,851,000 | 1,368,653 | 5,154,992 | 5,637,339 |
| Bequests and Trusts | 6,841,607 | 2,850,000 | 3,705,391 | 3,991,607 | 3,136,217 |
| Endowment | 3,606,353 | 3,264,000 | 3,441,574 | 342,353 | 164,779 |
| Rent | 1,041,369 | 1,233,101 | 1,786,642 | (191,732) | (745,273) |
| Services and Other Revenue | 1,701,568 | 2,271,997 | 2,052,053 | (570,429) | (350,485) |
| Mission Investment Fund | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 | - | |
| Total Revenue | 65,113,202 | 61,507,098 | 61,770,970 | 3,606,104 | 3,342,233 |
| TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released | 749,983 | 6,922,562 | 806,427 | (6,172,579) | (56,444) |
| Net Operating Revenue and Support | 65,863,186 | 68,429,660 | 62,577,397 | (2,566,474) | 3,285,788 |



ACTUAL EXPENSES VS. SPENDING AUTHORIZATION
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | Actual Expense | Spending Authorization | Variance Favorable (Unfavorable) | Percent of Budget |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Home Areas | | | | |
| Christian Community and Leadership | 21,970,123 | 22,652,836 | 682,713 | 96.99% |
| Service and Justice | 10,819,129 | 12,677,267 | 1,858,138 | 85.34% |
| Innovation | 1,018,185 | 3,014,272 | 1,996,087 | 33.78% |
| Operations | 23,949,420 | 25,317,991 | 1,368,571 | 94.59% |
| Presiding Bishop | 9,560,383 | 10,538,889 | 978,506 | 90.72% |
| Secretary | 4,953,231 | 5,292,364 | 339,133 | 93.59% |
| Treasurer | 9,435,113 | 9,486,738 | 51,625 | 99.46% |
| Other | | | | |
| General Treasury | 2,432,197 | 2,479,666 | 47,469 | 98.09% |
| Depreciation | 2,120,019 | 2,287,628 | 167,609 | 92.67% |
| TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES | 62,309,074 | 68,429,660 | 6,120,586 | 91.06% |

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA ELCA WORLD HUNGER
 SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSE
 For the Period Ending January 31, 2024**

| | ACTUAL | BUDGET | ACTUAL VS. BUDGET | YTD % of Budget |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| BEGINNING BALANCE | 13,007,464 | | | |
| Income | | | | |
| Direct Giving | 17,280,796 | 20,499,000 | (3,218,204) | 84.30% |
| Endowments and Donor Requested Payments | 990,664 | 750,000 | 240,664 | 132.09% |
| Bequests & Trusts/Misc * | 1,843,885 | 1,500,000 | 343,885 | 122.93% |
| Release of Bequest Income | - | 4,020,000 | (4,020,000) | |
| Service and Other Revenue | 209 | - | 209 | |
| Total Income | 20,201,732 | 26,769,000 | (6,567,268) | |
| Expenses | | | | |
| Service and Justice: | | | | |
| Domestic Program | 4,025,185 | 5,045,926 | (1,020,741) | 79.77% |
| International Program | 16,844,412 | 17,271,514 | (427,102) | 97.53% |
| Witnessing in Society | 2,162,207 | 2,197,632 | (35,425) | 98.39% |
| Fundraising Allocation Expense | 1,923,005 | 2,255,004 | (331,999) | 85.28% |
| Total Expense | 24,954,808 | 26,770,076 | (1,815,268) | |
| NET | (4,753,077) | (1,076) | (4,752,001) | |
| ENDING BALANCE | 8,254,388 | | | |

* 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.

SPRING 2024 CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION ANNUAL REPORT

Churchwide Priorities

Background

In 2016, in partnership between the churchwide organization, the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council and others, Future Directions 2025 was put forward to embody 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. So, as outlined last year, we began the work of identifying what the ELCA can do in its efforts to bring those disproportionately missing from our pews to know the difference God's grace and love in Christ make. However, what was not clear was just how that was to be accomplished.

What became clear was that language and purpose were not known consistently throughout the organization. "Purpose," "vision," "mission" and "goals" were used in such a way that not only created confusion but enabled mistrust. So a deep dive into where and how the language we use to define this church and our organization was in order. In 2020 the creation of Future Church was meant to set forward goals for the church, not replace or deprioritize the people in the pews or the good work already happening. But inconsistent use of words like "priorities" and "purpose" made it difficult for people to follow, understand and ultimately see themselves in the work.

Moving Forward

Shortly after its launch in 2020, it became clear that Future Church needed a new name. So, with help from a wide variety of voices across the denomination, "God's Love Made Real" was born. It was an effort to create a shorthand for the lengthy vision statement but to be concise and inclusive enough to encapsulate its meaning. God's Love Made Real is our north star, meant to inform and guide the work of the churchwide organization, synods and congregations. It's the way that we – in our various roles – seek to bring God's grace and love to expression. God's Love Made Real is not just about engaging new, young and diverse members. It's about understanding the needs of our current and future members – because we cannot engage new members without our current ones. It's about culture and structure – because we cannot have a structure that does not foster culture or a culture that does not work within the structure. Understanding where and how we provide programs and services as determined by this church, for this church, is essential to *"a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for all people and creation."*

In an effort to create synergy across the denomination and organization with regards to language, the Administrative Team and Bishop Pro Tempore Michael Burk and Jackie Baumhover, director for strategy, presented a road map forward, sharing the research work into the appropriate language, and outlined a direction that helps align the work of the churchwide organization with its constitutionally bound responsibilities and the work lifted up at churchwide assembly. This work will allow us to begin to make space to do the hard work of positioning the churchwide organization to live out its unique purpose and live 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.

These goals are a lens we use to better understand the churchwide organization's purpose, as laid out in the constitution: *"In keeping with this church's purposes, it shall develop churchwide policy, set standards for leadership, establish criteria for this church's endeavors, and coordinate the work of this church. It shall be a means for the sharing of resources throughout this church, and shall provide programs and services as determined by this church"* (ELCA Constitution, Chapter 11).

INNOVATION

The Innovation home area continues to promote a culture of collaboration and experimentation within the churchwide organization and throughout the church. The first cohort of the [Congregations Lead Initiative](#) concluded in November 2023, with 42 congregations completing a two-year program designed to encourage congregations to meet the needs of their communities and [try something new](#). A second cohort, launched in March, will incorporate learnings so far, focusing on online programming; a shorter, six-month commitment; and continued experimentation.

In collaboration with ecumenical partners, the Innovation home area explored the experiences of young-adult parents and their relationship to faith, religious practice and parenting through a survey study conducted in fall 2023. This study produced four major findings including that 71% of respondents agreed that life is generally harder than they expected it to be at this point. Over the coming months the team will host several webinars to engage leaders across the church in conversation around this topic.

At the churchwide organization, Innovation home area staff are working with each home area on a total of 28 active projects. These projects continue to encourage cross-unit collaboration (a total of 36% of projects include cross-unit partnership) and to seek feedback and input from those we serve, with 18 (64%) of the projects including users in the process. The team also launched Equity Design Training at the churchwide organization, with 27 staff participating in a multiweek experience.

OPERATIONS

Worship

The Worship team oversees the development and review of worship resources intended for use throughout the ELCA. In 2023 the Worship team facilitated two conversations with the Conference of Bishops as part of work on the 2022 Churchwide Assembly memorial "Holy Communion Practices in Unusual Circumstances and in Pandemic Times." Work to inventory and make appropriate updates to

various [worship resources on ELCA.org](#), including our [Frequently Asked Questions](#), ramped up in 2023 and continues. This work was helped by the addition of an ELCA Worship intern in 2023. A weekly resource on the ELCA Worship blog, "[For What Shall We Pray?](#)," continues to aid worship planners with prompts to make appropriate contextualization to the Prayer of Intercession in worship each week.

The work of worship resource development includes monthly collaboration with the Worship Resource Development Working Group (WRDWG), composed of the churchwide organization Worship team and the 1517 Media/Augsburg Fortress worship development staff. This group dedicated significant time in 2023 to envisioning future needs for worship resources and worship education.

The Worship team also plans worship for churchwide events and the churchwide organization and facilitates worship at various meetings. In 2023 the Worship team, in collaboration with the Christian Communities and Leadership home area, gathered a group to prepare worship for the Rostered Ministers Gathering in Phoenix. In partnership with Information Technology, upgrades for the Lutheran Center chapel received approval in 2023. Due to be finalized in the second quarter of 2024, these upgrades will allow for occasional hybrid worship opportunities for churchwide organization staff as well as meetings and events held at the Lutheran Center.

Information Technology (IT)

Information Technology and Digital Solutions kept a fast pace in 2023, both operationally and with continuous improvements. During this time we compensated for turnover and five openings at year's end on the team.

Information security remains a top priority for the team and our partners to keep systems and the data we are entrusted with secure. We also focused on moving more of our infrastructure (ECIS, ELCA.org) to the cloud and improving security related to hybrid/remote work.

Adoption and education services for staff have grown. Some highlights include preparing for the next organization-wide education day in April, participating in the leadership development session with People Solutions on the accountability competency and moving to an IT orientation that occurs over three days, twice per month, starting in April.

Microsoft Teams continued to grow as a tool to enable community and relationships as the primary internal collaboration tool, and for collaboration for groups such as the Conference of Bishops. New features have been released to improve its friendly utilities and ease of use. Currently, advanced Teams features are being piloted to demonstrate improved transcription, translation, engagement and meeting notes. Enhanced hybrid meetings using voice or face recognition are being carefully considered with legal input on any privacy/legal implications for use of this technology.

Chapel improvements are underway to create a better hybrid chapel experience. New meeting equipment in the New York office conference rooms has been installed. Along with technology improvements, the team is working closely with the Innovation team around understanding effective meetings to inform changes needed at the Lutheran Center.

Synod and congregation use of technology has been an increased focus for the team in order to provide greater value to the church. We conducted listening sessions with several synods around the annual report process. This led to a report identifying the challenges that have been shared, updated training videos and instructions for completing the report, and updated technology features for this year's launch of the report forms. The Finance and IT teams conducted a successful webinar for synod treasurers and bookkeepers regarding the synod remittance process and system. Finally, we are exploring a partnership with an organization called SteepleCom that could produce supplemental income for congregations.

Our partnership with Strategic Communications and Development Marketing has produced several constituent-focused projects related to digital capabilities. We completed the move to a robust email platform to allow for more responsive and flexible communication for those that we serve. The next phase of this work will introduce new online giving forms with additional payment options, the ability to cover processing fees and supporting digital wallet giving at the Youth Gathering. The Seeker website plans for a spring launch with additional iterations over the next few months. New platforms for the online resource library and for [ELCA.org](https://www.elca.org) are being built. We have been working with the Foundation to launch a new donor/investor portal in April with integration to Workday to automate statement posting.

Finally, out of research from his sabbatical, Jonathan Beyer developed an article on artificial intelligence (AI). It explores how the churchwide organization will proceed with this technology and how AI can be of assistance to the church. The internal paper was adapted into an [article](#) that can be leveraged by a broader audience.

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations

Ecumenical Dialogues

The third meeting of the resumed ELCA-Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) dialogue took place in February 2024 on the topic of "Ecclesiology: Theology & Polity."

In late 2023, Fortress Press published the report of Round XII of the U.S. Lutheran-Catholic Dialogue, [Faithful Teaching](#). Round XIII is underway on the topic of episkopé in the Scriptures and the teachings of the ancient church. This year is the 25th anniversary of the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification; next year will mark 60 years of U.S. Lutheran-Catholic dialogue.

Full Communion

The council acted in spring 2023 to receive a "Proposal for Exchangeability of the Diaconate," which would allow for the exchangeability of deacons as an interpretation of *Called to Common Mission*, our full communion agreement with The Episcopal Church (TEC). A parallel process for reception is underway in TEC. Work to update the "Orderly Exchange" document to include this proposal, as well as learnings from 25 years of partnership, is concurrent.

In July 2023 the heads of churches in Churches Beyond Borders (ELCA, TEC, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, and the Anglican Church of Canada) gathered in Calgary during the joint assembly

of the two Canadian churches to formally commemorate their partnership of full communion, following the respective actions of each church to receive the "[Memorandum of Mutual Recognition](#)."

Conciliar Ecumenism

The [World Council of Churches](#) (WCC) Central Committee met June 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland, for its first meeting following the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany. During the meeting Kathryn Lohre and ELCA Vice President Imran Siddiqui were elected to serve as members of the Central Committee. WCC's 75th anniversary was commemorated, and a strategic plan was adopted.

The [13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation](#) (LWF) took place Sept. 13-19, 2023, in Krakow, Poland, under the theme "One Body, One Spirit, One Hope." The ELCA delegation included Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and the Rev. Dr. Robin Steinke as well as Bishop Leila Ortiz, the Rev. William Flippin Jr., Brad Wendel and Khadijah Islam, the last four of whom were elected to serve on the LWF Council for the next period.

Presiding Bishop Eaton assumed the chair of the Governing Board of the [National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA](#) for a two-year term ending in October 2025.

Nicaea and Augsburg Confession

2025 will mark the 1,700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea of 325. The ELCA's engagement will connect with the [World Council of Churches](#) and the [Lutheran World Federation](#), and the National Council of Churches. 2030 will mark the 500th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession; ELCA commemorations will be planned in concert with LWF efforts.

Inter-Religious Relations

The ELCA participates in five inter-religious dialogues – with Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs – co-convened by the National Council of Churches. The church was strongly represented at the Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago in August 2023 on the 130th anniversary of the inaugural event. The Islamic Society of North America honored Kathryn Lohre, ELCA executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations & Theological Discernment, with their interfaith award during their annual convention. In December 2023, [Shoulder to Shoulder](#) convened a press conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., to uplift a joint declaration of commitment to fighting anti-Muslim and anti-Jewish hate in our context, and continues to offer practical "Faith Over Fear" trainings. The ELCA's two newest interreligious resources are "[Preaching and Teaching 'With Love and Respect for the Jewish People'](#)" and "[ELCA Guidelines for Ministry in a Multi-Religious World](#)."

Theological Discernment

Theological Diversity and Engagement (TDE)

Theological Diversity and Engagement provided several 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 make the ELCA so rich. Here are some examples:

- The director, the Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, served as theologian in residence and keynote speaker at several regional, synod and churchwide events.
- TDE is working with the AMMPARO network in providing theological grounding for upcoming educational materials exploring the ethical issues surrounding private detention centers for migrants.

The work of theological diversity is done in ecumenical networks, for instance with the Theology Table of the National Council of Churches and with the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. This includes theological work on racism and white supremacy, questions of theological anthropology and incarnational theology, and preparations toward the observance of the [1,700th Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea](#).

The ELCA's Theological Roundtable met in person in Chicago in March for the first time since before the pandemic. Updates on the state of the various and diverse ELCA theological networks were shared, in addition to topical presentations and table conversations. A panel on expansive approaches to theological formation in the ELCA, including the Certificate in Womanist Theology, a new program for [Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders](#) and a [Bilingual Certificate in Climate Justice and Faith](#), lifted up ways in which students from various continents and ecclesial traditions in addition to Lutheranism are important to our thinking and future work.

Theological Ethics

ELCA social teaching governs the institutional life, witness and teaching of the ELCA while providing frameworks for discernment and guidance for its members.

The work of the ELCA Task Force for Studies on [Civic Life and Faith](#) continues with a focus on response to a draft social statement on civic life and faith (comment period closes Sept. 30). The task force will consider revisions in light of that feedback and prepare a proposed statement by February 2025.

A task force to lead [reconsideration on two aspects of Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust](#) (as authorized by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly) is being selected and should begin work in late June. The intention is to provide a draft in October of any proposed wording resulting from a reconsideration of the editorial question about naming as marriage the publicly accountable, lifelong relationships of same-gender and gender-nonconforming couples (see statement, p. 19) in light of current church understanding, church policy, civil law and public acceptance of same.

In addition, a [social message on gun-related violence and trauma](#) has been prepared for consideration at the April 2024 Church Council meeting. The council will also consider a recommendation regarding what social message should be developed during the 2024-25 social message cycle. The recommendation from Theological Ethics, after several consultations, is for a message on child abuse and protection.

The Lutheran Ethicists' Network meets in January 2025 on the topic of polarization. [The Journal of Lutheran Ethics](#) will publish six issues on various topics such as child protection, child maltreatment and White Christian Nationalism. Planning around education and community engagement is underway, such as an interactive booth at the ELCA Youth Gathering.

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, Conference of Bishops and directors for evangelical mission (DEMs). GJWE also supports new staff members through orientations and regularly collaborates and offers learning opportunities with churchwide organization colleagues.

The [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action study guide](#) is a flexible study guide on the social statement [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#) in six sessions; a Spanish version is complete and will be uploaded by April 15.

Implementing Resolution 17, related to *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*, calls for the ELCA 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 and sexism. An ad hoc committee of the Church Council, chaired by Tracey Beasley, is planning this work, which will begin publicly at the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix.

Implementing Resolution 8 calls on the ELCA 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 Dr. Mary J. Streufert, director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment, is now available to support this effort.

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

In order to improve the quality of women's experiences of ministry, donor-funded efforts since 2021 have included increased learning from women in rostered ministry and collaboration with synods and their bishops. The report [Family and Parental Leave Policies of the ELCA](#) has inspired nearly a third of synods to improve paid family and parental leave policies since the first results were shared in 2022. Further, the report [Sexual Boundary Violations in the ELCA](#) analyzes policies and practices across the ELCA. It was shared with bishops in 2023, and synods are using it to create reforms and renewal.

The women's pre-assembly at the LWF Assembly was effective in influencing the communion's [gender justice strategy](#) for the next seven years. Priorities include interpretation and implementation of the [LWF Gender Justice Policy](#) (2013), which is available in over 20 languages; theological education and formation that is gender just; access to theological education for women; and calling on member churches to address sexual and gender-based violence within churches.

Racial Justice

This year the focus of Racial Justice has been the development of educational resources aimed at condemning white supremacy. To enhance the effectiveness and reach of our initiatives, the racial justice staff is actively collaborating with the synod's racial justice leaders. The aim is to ensure that the church's efforts in this crucial area are well-aligned and coordinated.

The Racial Justice staff continues to provide leadership and support through the churchwide organization and in partnership with synods, promoting effective racial justice strategies both within

the church and with ecumenical partners, using an intersectional approach. We have maintained this effort by hosting educational sessions in partnership with Gender Justice at the churchwide organization, Conference of Bishops, Church Council meetings, Young Adults in Global Mission events, summer missionary orientation and directors for evangelical mission gatherings.

We collaborate with Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities (MDCC) in the following areas:

- African Descent Ministries: We co-lead the Seasons of Jubilee gatherings and participate in the United Nations Permanent Forum on People of African Descent.
- Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations: We are an active part of the task force for the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, attending the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues and co-leading the Day of Mourning learning event.
- White Lutherans for Racial Justice: We serve as the staff liaison, consulting and coordinating educational opportunities to further our joint efforts toward racial justice.

Strategic Communications

Member Engagement

Strategic Communications is working with Salient Global on a communications strategy to grow member engagement. Six key priorities have been identified, and four of the priorities resulted in statements of work that will provide member and engagement definitions, allow us to define key metrics and help prioritize our work around engagement. We are currently implementing statements of work in these areas: communications governance and *Living Lutheran* strategy and framework.

Living Lutheran.org

Living Lutheran continues its online progression with new content daily and featured stories and sections familiar to our print readers. The final print magazine, in December 2023, celebrated the legacy of *Living Lutheran* through its predecessor publications, going back to the 19th century. We navigated some of our more popular features (“I’m a Lutheran” and “Deeper Understandings,” to name two) to an online presence, incorporating new ways to connect with readers through photo essays, videos and digital collaborations. In February we integrated one of our most-read sections in the magazine, the obituaries, onto the website, updated monthly to ensure that our readers can maintain continuity. In April we are launching a survey, in line with the Salient Global work, to better determine the wants and needs of the *Living Lutheran* audience and the general ELCA to help increase engagement and foster growth.

Development

The abundant generosity of our church and our God was made plain yet again in 2023. Though the Development team navigated change throughout most of the year and the world at large faced international and local complexities that impacted philanthropic giving, the ministries of our church were resourced. We saw new ministries launched, leaders equipped, hungry people fed and the gospel preached – all this made possible by the Holy Spirit alone but empowered by the generosity of

this church. We saw new initiatives spring from the mission, vision and values of the ELCA and from the dedication and commitment of members of this church. The Development team thanks the synods that shared a combined \$37.1 million in Mission Support in FY23, as well as gifts for ministry over and above their Mission Support that totaled more than \$600,000. In total the Development team stewarded nearly \$78 million in gifts from generous individuals, congregations and synods in FY23. To the whole church the Development team says "thank you," and thanks be to God for another year of church-together work!

Annual Giving

- The Annual Giving team is composed of Development Marketing and Communications, Leadership Circle (mid-level gifts), Mission Funding directors (major gifts), Congregational Generosity, Events, and directors of giving for Service and Justice and for Christian Community and Leadership. This team is primarily responsible for raising funds to cover the churchwide organization's general operating budget, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response, and engaging donors and congregations in support of these programs.
- A key priority of the team in Q3 and Q4 FY23 was formalizing this new structure and inviting and engaging donors to support these programs. Overall, generosity to these funds through December 2023 is down compared to FY22 but consistent with trends in the nonprofit sector. In December year-over-year performance increased slightly for all areas other than "Where Needed Most." The team continues to have several vacancies, and filling them is anticipated to strengthen FY24 revenue.
- The team has also collaborated with ELCA World Hunger to prepare for the 2024 Youth Gathering pre-offering and interaction center, which will challenge participants to learn about and advocate on hunger and justice issues under the theme "Generation Zero Hunger."

Programmatic Giving Highlights

- Service and Justice Giving: In 2024, ELCA World Hunger celebrates 50 years of ministry. Much focus has been on continuing to develop strategies and materials for this celebration. Information and resources can be found at [ELCA.org/WH50](https://www.elca.org/WH50). In anticipation of summer home assignment for global personnel, work is also being done to promote opportunities to host missionaries in congregations and to strengthen the missionary covenant program.
- Christian Community and Leadership Giving: During its November 2023 meeting the ELCA Church Council consolidated the church's fundraising priorities to four categories: "Where Needed Most," ELCA World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Response and Future Church. Several Christian Community and Leadership programs have been consolidated into "Where Needed Most." The Development team has been communicating with colleagues at ELCA programs to explore how those programs might be better represented in 2024, given the consolidated fundraising priorities.

Congregation and Synod Support

- In April, Congregation and Synod Support completes its first full year of integrating the work of storytelling, congregational stewardship and Mission Support. The team equips synod and congregation leaders with resources and tools for telling the stories of the ministries we support

together, especially through regular offerings and Mission Support, and how they make a difference as we respond to God's call to love and serve our neighbors. Examples of these resources from the past few months include:

- "Stewardship 101" webinars, planned with synod staff and made available to leaders.
- Congregational cohorts participating in Cultivating Generous Congregations.
- Synod bishops, as well as other synod and congregation leaders, pursuing the Lake Institute on Faith & Giving's Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising.
- A monthly Mission Support memo, published on the "[Stories of Faith in Action](#)" website.
- A bimonthly stewardship resource called "[Where Your Heart Is.](#)"
- The latest versions of the congregational annual meeting report covers, congregational Mission Support intent forms for 2024 and congregational thank you certificates for 2023: www.elca.org/sofia#RelevantResources.

Development Services

- The Development Services team partnered with Information Technology and Digital Solutions and with Development Marketing and Communications to implement a new online marketing and giving system, Engaging Networks. Development Services started using the new system for all its email communication at the end of the year and hopes to apply it to online donations in 2024.
- The call center in Development Services received over 10,000 calls in 2023. Development Services continues to see a large number of constituents who prefer talking to call center staff over engaging with the organization online.
- The Gift Processing team processed over 173,000 gifts in FY23. Lutheran Disaster Response saw a major increase in gifts during August, mainly in response to hurricanes and the Hawaiian wildfires.

Institutional Giving

- The Institutional Giving team works alongside program colleagues to identify, research, solicit and steward grants from institutions (primarily foundations) in support of transformational opportunities or budgeted priorities of the churchwide organization. The team also provides guidance and resources to colleagues within the ELCA ecosystem.
- The Institutional Giving team brought in over \$1 million in grant funding from 23 unique institutions in FY23. Larger grants came from Lilly Endowment Inc. for the Formation Lab project (to foster compelling preaching) and from the Margaret A. Cargill Foundation for the Total Inclusion! program, a collaboration with Lutheran Outdoor Ministries.
- Some key fundraising priorities for 2024 include budgeted work through AMMPARO, ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response work in South Sudan, and ELCA World Hunger's advocacy focus. The team is currently developing a proposal to the Lilly Endowment on deepening congregational ministry with children through worship and prayer.

Transformational Gifts and Strategic Initiatives

- The Transformational Gifts and Strategic Initiatives team was created as an outgrowth of the Campaign for the ELCA. Its work focuses on engaging with ELCA members to discern whether their philanthropic objectives align with the ELCA's mission, vision and values.
- Transformational projects now underway stress collaboration between the donors funding projects and the churchwide organization staff implementing them. These currently include Future Church: God's Love Made Real, the Quality of Call initiative and the new vision project directed by the Rev. Louise Johnson.

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AND LEADERSHIP (CCL)

In 2023, CCL restructured to better align with the priorities of the churchwide organization. Young Adult Communities as well as Discipleship and Inclusive Communities are now working areas with focus on engagement and discipleship. We have added an emphasis on evangelism and are studying current grant processes to create space for expanding ways new ministries develop. Financial practices inherited from the pandemic are being reevaluated and corrected to reach sustainability.

The Rostered Ministers Gathering was a touchpoint for clergy community building. The Gathering team is actively creating a similar experience for our youth ([ELCA.org/gathering](https://www.elca.org/gathering)) this summer while engaging with an outside group to study our brand and suggest changes for the next cycle to make touchpoints more frequent than once every three years. A young adult component is being added during the current cycle.

The Candidacy Leadership Development Team has hosted listening sessions for the first draft of a new process. They are currently working on the second draft and recommending constitutional changes for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. A team is addressing recruitment for M.Div. students, building on the success of the Young Adults in Global Mission (YAGM) program.

YAGM is expanding into Cambodia in 2025. The Lilly Endowment-funded preaching initiative is recruiting cohorts for the fall, including Spanish-language support. The International Leaders program continues to fund scholarships through our Network of ELCA Colleges and Universities and to recruit and send international camp counselors.

SERVICE AND JUSTICE

An integrated response to the war in Gaza has been coordinated across Service and Justice. Lutheran Disaster Response and ELCA World Hunger provided financial support for our companion the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and for Augusta Victoria Hospital through the Lutheran World Federation and funding to ACT Alliance. Witness in Society engaged in advocacy. Arab and Middle Eastern Ministries launched the Interfaith Emotional and Spiritual Care project to support U.S. Arab communities affected by the crisis. Sumud: For Justice in Palestine and Israel (formerly Peace Not Walls) hosted webinars for awareness and advocacy about the crisis.

Service and Justice Global Service stewards this church's mission through the sending of mission personnel in other countries. The team serves as the channel to promote, recruit, orient and employ Global Mission personnel to serve along companion churches. Currently there are 101 missionaries serving in seven different patterns of service in areas of evangelism, education, health care, community development and leadership training.

ELCA World Hunger celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2024. In February nearly 150 people from across synods and congregations gathered for the World Hunger Leadership Gathering in Houston, Texas. Two local service-learning opportunities, focusing on the intersections of migration and hunger, were facilitated by AMMPARO and local Latine congregations in the Houston area.

Service and Justice is engaging in a new partnership with Lutheran Services in America through the Faith, Families and Community Partnerships Initiative, where people with lived experience of poverty, human services professionals, people of faith and policymakers learn together to reimagine the actions necessary to stabilize families and reduce the need for foster care. By listening, learning and shifting mindsets, this collaboration of the Service and Justice teams and Lutheran Services in America seeks to address long-standing inequities in family stability and spur new action to ensure that all children in the U.S. live in safe, stable and permanent homes that advance their health and opportunity.

This year is all about election engagement. Introduced in 2016 in response to 2013 Churchwide Assembly adoption of the social policy resolution "Voting Rights to All Citizens," the ELCA's election engagement strategy, led by the Witness in Society team, aims to activate, energize and equip ELCA congregations, networks and members for civic engagement during the 2024 election season and afterward with tools to help us live out our baptismal promises in our public lives. A new ELCA Election Activators network for local civic engagement launches in April. Focus on voting rights includes a new fact and activity sheet on race and voting; guidance for churches and clergy participating in the electoral process are also available. Under development: translation of the civic engagement guide into Spanish and resources on misinformation, depolarization and Christian Nationalism.

Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities teams prioritize and equip leaders through theological leadership training programs. Asian and Pacific Islander Ministries celebrates 10 graduates of the Asian Lay Evangelist Program, 10 students have completed classes in Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders (TEIL), and African Descent Ministries is engaged in five new-start cohorts.

Report from the Conference of Bishops

Equip. Connect. Inform. These three words provided for the sake of the Conference encapsulated the goals of the assembly. The Conference of Bishops gathers biannually to be equipped for the office, informed regarding the work of our churchwide organization and shared ministries, and connected with one another for mutual support and sharing. Martin Luther writes in the Smalcald Articles that the gospel works through spoken word, the forgiveness of sins, through baptism and the Eucharist, and “through the mutual conversation and consolation” of siblings in Christ (Luther SA III.4).

Working sessions on Wednesday and Thursday provided a wealth of information and time for table reflections and whole-group discussion and deliberations. The Conference received reports related to the practices of Holy Communion and the Sacraments in digital spaces, the process for electing a Presiding Bishop, and the “still new to us” design of the First Call process. Working sessions included reflections related to the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, led by the bishop representatives on the commission, and a report from the Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group. Additional reports and updates were received from Presiding Bishop *Pro Tem*, the Rev. Michael Burk, Secretary, Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, and committees of the Conference.

Rooted in daily prayer and worship, focused on the themes of the 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering: Created to Be: Brave, Authentic, Free, Disruptive, Disciples, the gathering grew in a spirit of collaboration, and an energy which moved discussion to action. Informed by colleague bishops and the Immigration Ready Bench and Middle East Ready Bench, two significant letters and one statement were produced. Please see [official ELCA communications](#) for the:

- **Statement from ELCA Conference of Bishops to provide solidarity and support for humanitarian efforts in Texas, particularly in light of current events against these efforts.**
- **Statement from the ELCA Conference of Bishops concerning the situation in the Middle East**
- **Letter to President Joseph R. Biden concerning building a foundation for lasting peace with justice**

The Conference gave thanks for the work of eight synod bishops whose time in office is coming to an end, and prayed for two colleagues whose names will go forward in discernment of another term. Wisdom, blessings, and prayers were shared. Leaving the gathering, participants reported that they were feeling, “grateful, engaged, healthy, hopeful, and buoyed for the work ahead.” Many, many, thanks to the partnership of churchwide staff, seminaries and seminary presidents, ministry partners, and separately incorporated ministries.

Bishop Yehiel Curry
Chair, Conference of Bishops



EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH OF AMERICA
SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSES
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | 2023 ACTUAL | 2023 BUDGET | 2022 ACTUAL | Year-to-Date Variance | |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | | | | ACTUAL Vs. BUDGET Favorable/(Unfavorable) | CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR Favorable/(Unfavorable) |
| UNRESTRICTED | | | | | |
| Mission Support | 37,080,134 | 38,000,000 | 38,727,560 | (919,866) | (1,647,426) |
| Other | 28,033,069 | 23,507,098 | 23,043,410 | 4,525,971 | 4,989,659 |
| TOTAL UNRESTRICTED | 65,113,202 | 61,507,098 | 61,770,970 | 3,606,104 | 3,342,233 |
| TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released | 749,983 | 6,922,562 | 806,427 | (6,172,579) | (56,444) |
| TOTAL OPERATING REVENUE AND SUPPORT | 65,863,186 | 68,429,660 | 62,577,397 | (2,566,474) | 3,285,788 |
| LESS TOTAL EXPENSES | 62,309,074 | 68,429,660 | 60,780,021 | 6,120,586 | 1,529,053 |
| NET REVENUE OVER (UNDER) EXPENSES | 3,554,112 | - | 1,797,376 | 3,554,112 | 1,756,736 |



REVENUE SUMMARY
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | 2023 ACTUAL | 2023 BUDGET | 2022 ACTUAL | Year-to-Date Variance | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--|---|
| | | | | ACTUAL vs. BUDGET Favorable/(Unfavorable) | CURRENT YEAR vs. PRIOR YEAR Favorable/(Unfavorable) |
| UNRESTRICTED | | | | | |
| Mission Support | 37,080,134 | 38,000,000 | 38,727,560 | (919,866) | (1,647,426) |
| Direct Gifts | 6,336,180 | 10,537,000 | 9,189,098 | (4,200,820) | (2,852,918) |
| Investment Revenue | 7,005,992 | 1,851,000 | 1,368,653 | 5,154,992 | 5,637,339 |
| Bequests and Trusts | 6,841,607 | 2,850,000 | 3,705,391 | 3,991,607 | 3,136,217 |
| Endowment | 3,606,353 | 3,264,000 | 3,441,574 | 342,353 | 164,779 |
| Rent | 1,041,369 | 1,233,101 | 1,786,642 | (191,732) | (745,273) |
| Services and Other Revenue | 1,701,568 | 2,271,997 | 2,052,053 | (570,429) | (350,485) |
| Mission Investment Fund | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 | 1,500,000 | - | |
| Total Revenue | 65,113,202 | 61,507,098 | 61,770,970 | 3,606,104 | 3,342,233 |
| TOTAL Designated and Restricted Funds Released | 749,983 | 6,922,562 | 806,427 | (6,172,579) | (56,444) |
| Net Operating Revenue and Support | 65,863,186 | 68,429,660 | 62,577,397 | (2,566,474) | 3,285,788 |



ACTUAL EXPENSES VS. SPENDING AUTHORIZATION
For the Period Ending January 31, 2024

| | Actual Expense | Spending Authorization | Variance Favorable (Unfavorable) | Percent of Budget |
|------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Home Areas | | | | |
| Christian Community and Leadership | 21,970,123 | 22,652,836 | 682,713 | 96.99% |
| Service and Justice | 10,819,129 | 12,677,267 | 1,858,138 | 85.34% |
| Innovation | 1,018,185 | 3,014,272 | 1,996,087 | 33.78% |
| Operations | 23,949,420 | 25,317,991 | 1,368,571 | 94.59% |
| Presiding Bishop | 9,560,383 | 10,538,889 | 978,506 | 90.72% |
| Secretary | 4,953,231 | 5,292,364 | 339,133 | 93.59% |
| Treasurer | 9,435,113 | 9,486,738 | 51,625 | 99.46% |
| Other | | | | |
| General Treasury | 2,432,197 | 2,479,666 | 47,469 | 98.09% |
| Depreciation | 2,120,019 | 2,287,628 | 167,609 | 92.67% |
| TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES | 62,309,074 | 68,429,660 | 6,120,586 | 91.06% |

**EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA ELCA WORLD HUNGER
 SUMMARY OF REVENUE AND EXPENSE
 For the Period Ending January 31, 2024**

| | ACTUAL | BUDGET | ACTUAL VS. BUDGET | YTD % of Budget |
|---|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|
| BEGINNING BALANCE | 13,007,464 | | | |
| Income | | | | |
| Direct Giving | 17,280,796 | 20,499,000 | (3,218,204) | 84.30% |
| Endowments and Donor Requested Payments | 990,664 | 750,000 | 240,664 | 132.09% |
| Bequests & Trusts/Misc * | 1,843,885 | 1,500,000 | 343,885 | 122.93% |
| Release of Bequest Income | - | 4,020,000 | (4,020,000) | |
| Service and Other Revenue | 209 | - | 209 | |
| Total Income | 20,201,732 | 26,769,000 | (6,567,268) | |
| Expenses | | | | |
| Service and Justice: | | | | |
| Domestic Program | 4,025,185 | 5,045,926 | (1,020,741) | 79.77% |
| International Program | 16,844,412 | 17,271,514 | (427,102) | 97.53% |
| Witnessing in Society | 2,162,207 | 2,197,632 | (35,425) | 98.39% |
| Fundraising Allocation Expense | 1,923,005 | 2,255,004 | (331,999) | 85.28% |
| Total Expense | 24,954,808 | 26,770,076 | (1,815,268) | |
| NET | (4,753,077) | (1,076) | (4,752,001) | |
| ENDING BALANCE | 8,254,388 | | | |

* 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.

PRELIMINARY AND UNAUDITED

The Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity Annual Report

The 2016 Churchwide Assembly adopted a resolution to create a task force composed entirely of persons of color from regions and synods across the country so that the views and voices of this church, so often unheard or unheeded, might benefit the whole church. The document, “How Strategic and Authentic is Our Diversity? A Call for Confession, Reflection, and Healing Action” was adopted by more than a two-thirds vote (855-13) by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly. The Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity (STAD) Advisory Committee was appointed in 2019 to support implementing resolutions recommended in the [Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.pdf \(elca.org\)](#). The Rev. Priscilla Paris-Austin currently convenes the Advisory Committee. Bishop Yehiel Curry served as liaison bishop from 2022-2023. Bishop Felix Malpica of the La Crosse Area Synod will join the STAD Advisory Committee in April. Judith Roberts, Senior Director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, serves as staff liaison to the committee and coordinator of the strategy with other churchwide organization staff. Sharei Green serves as part-time administrative support to the committee.

The Advisory Committee continues to receive quarterly updates from churchwide staff and provide recommendations for implementing the strategy. STAD Advisory Committee members continue to work within their synods in an advisory capacity to support the document in synod diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Over the past year, the implementation of the STAD document has focused on the following areas: addressing systemic and root causes of historical and contemporary racism, healing actions, theological education and leadership development, ecumenical engagement, and healing actions.

Healing Actions

ELCA Declaration to American Indian and Alaska Native People

ELCA churchwide organization staff Vance Blackfox, Interim Senior Director, Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities and Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, developed Truth and Healing resources to recognize “A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America TO AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE.” The declaration directly results from the social policy resolution “[Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery](#)” adopted at the 2016 Churchwide Assembly. The declaration acknowledges the theological and Christian foundation of the Doctrine of Discovery, which has codified colonialism and religious intolerance as societal norms for more than 500 years. Resources are available on the ELCA web page: [Truth & Healing Movement - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#). In addition, the promotion of the National Day for Truth and Healing on September 30, aka Orange Shirt Day, recognizes the victims of the Canadian and American Indian residential school system. Advocacy work continues in this area.

ELCA Declaration to People of African Descent

In 2023, the African Descent Ministries (ADM) hosted the Reclaim Gathering. This initiative brought together elder and younger leaders of the African Descent Community to address past wounds through dialogues and group reflections. Next-step efforts include an African Descent Leadership retreat in partnership with the African Descent Lutheran Association. The retreat's intention is cooperation, leadership development, and succession planning.

African Descent Ministries’ Black History Month project titled *Talks at the Desk* was launched in 2022. The series explores the stories of African Descent leaders, celebrates youth talents, acknowledges the empowering and challenging history of the historic churches, and gives space for the community to tell the church what they want them to hear.

Racial Justice Ministries and African Descent Ministries launched the “Season of Jubilee” initiative. This research project stems from the [2019 apology to People of African Descent](#). The goal is to reach 600 African-descent Lutherans to understand community reinvestment. Seventeen cities have been identified. The goal is to develop an implementation plan to reinvest back into communities. The Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda, Program Director for African Descent Ministries, serves as staff lead.

Ecumenical Engagement

Condemning White Supremacy

The 2019 Churchwide Assembly adopted the social policy resolution “[Condemnation of White Supremacy and Racist Rhetoric](#).” The Rev. Dr. Carmelo Santos, Director for Theological Diversity and Engagement, is working on an ecumenical National Council of Churches (NCC) project condemning white supremacy. Resources also will be developed from a Lutheran theological perspective.

Deepen relationships with Historic Black Churches

The ELCA encourages pastors, congregations, community leaders, synod staff, and bishops to build and deepen partnerships with Historic Black Churches. One example is the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and its cooperation with Bethel AME Church, which has included building stronger relations among congregants, accompaniment/advocacy in their quest for reparations for Bethel’s church building (which was taken to create the Penguins hockey arena and then returned), rededication of their church, prayer, worship, pulpit supply, and exchange.

Theological Education and Leadership Development

Theological Education

On October 8, Indigenous leaders launched an Indigenous Pedagogy at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Eleven students are enrolled. They will have the option to go through candidacy and onto the roster.

Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary launched a one-year program for lay and rostered leaders, Certificate in Racial Justice and Faith, facilitated by Donna Allen—Womanist Theology. Four modules were designed on Church History by the Rev. Dr. Carla Guzmán, Intersectionality, and Racial Justice by the Rev. Dr. Surekha Nelavala, Stolen Lands by Dr. Kelly Sherman Conroy, and Artistic Practices for Religious Leaders by Dr. Tamisha Tyler. The first cohort was by invitation. Scholarships are available. Equally divided in terms of racial and ethnic representation.

ELCA Fund for Leaders (FFL)

Over the years, theological education within the ELCA has failed to equip Lutherans with an understanding of the gospel that can help dismantle racist practices and structure within our churches and institutions. The inadequacy of theological education and leadership formation in our church should be addressed by engaging voices from the margins. ([Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity](#), p. 8; specific recommendations for FFL appear in the STAD booklet recommendations #6, p. 14, and #11, p. 15.)

FFL is housed in the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) Home Area. FFL explores how students currently receive the Educational Grant Program payments to discern if it is possible to transfer resources and distribute them through that program (recommendation #6). Those funds are dispersed to current students of color at the nomination of seminary staff and come to the student as a surprise after enrollment. There is no application process. While these resources are much appreciated, they are not widely known across the church and do not help to show potential leaders of color that resources are available to them.

FFL first expanded support to TEEM students (recommendation #11). At the STAD Advisory Committee's counsel, FFL initially extended support to all TEEM students regardless of their racial/ethnic background. In the first year of the TEEM Scholarship (2022-2023), 42% of the TEEM awardees were People of Color candidates. For the current year (2023-2024), the percentage is 47%. This slight increase is likely because of the introduction of the new Theological Education for Indigenous Leaders (TEIL) program. Of the 83 students supported, twelve identified as African American, four as African or Afro-Caribbean, seven as American Indian/Alaska Native, four as Asian Pacific Islander, ten as Latino/Hispanic, and two as multi-racial. The remaining 44 identified as White. The TEEM scholarship has proven to have substantial ripple effects beyond the scholarship dollars. It has been beneficial for synods to know there are resources available for TEEM as they discern what program might best fit their candidate. Additionally, increased funding for TEEM means that multi-ethnic learning spaces are supported. There is an opportunity to explore other recommendations, such as funding-specific internship opportunities in the coming year.

Structural Accountability

Educational Debt Task Force

In September 2023, the ELCA Educational Debt Task Force transitioned to its research phase. During this phase, the task force seeks to understand the experience and impact of educational debt among ELCA candidates and rostered ministers (especially for leaders of color). With its research, the task force intends to resource existing and forming programs, task forces, and study committees, considering their research needs. Finally, the task force is pursuing information about programs to assist rostered ministers in reducing their educational debt, specifically at the synod level.

To address these objectives, the task force has gathered stories of educational debt through conversations with 35 ELCA candidates and rostered ministers. Additionally, the task force has engaged in two data collection efforts: 1) a survey of synod bishops and staff and 2) a survey of rostered ministers.

The survey of synod leaders sought to determine what activities are happening in educational debt reduction, how many synods have programs, and how success is defined and measured. Rostered ministers surveyed detailed the impact of educational debt on ELCA rostered ministers. This survey received responses from a diverse set of rostered ministers (e.g., gender, racial, ethnic identities, age, and amount of time ordained). Beyond understanding the experience and impact of educational debt, the survey also gathered information to address the pay gap analysis requested by the ELCA Church Council.

Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment

ELCA Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment works to incorporate the priorities into its efforts to foster gender justice with others. Much of this work is strategic, relational, and empowering.

1. Through seminary and churchwide partnerships, staff support work to diversify theological education and formation by piloting the ELCA Doctoral Scholar in Residency at Trinity Seminary for another year. The idea is to work with more leaders to ensure the continuation of this effort to support ELCA women of color in finishing their doctoral dissertations and gaining teaching experience and collegial connections.
2. Gender Justice participates in ongoing conversations to support an ELCA Womanist Theology Initiative and ensures ELCA women of color lead, connect and participate in the Lutheran Women in Theological and Religious Studies (LWTRS) network.
3. In collaboration with ELCA Racial Justice, staff support ongoing learning and action on condemning white supremacy and patriarchy within the Church Council and Conference of Bishops. Staff also orient new churchwide organization employees to gender justice from an intersectional perspective.

4. Gender Justice connects to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) to shape Lutheran theological education with gender and racial justice as priorities approved in the 2023 LWF Women's Pre-assembly resolution.

ELCA Quality of Call Initiative

A church that is equitably served by people who are empowered to serve their gifts, irrespective of identity marker heretofore targeted by systems of and individuals for bias, discrimination, and oppression.

Dr. Mary J. Streufert, director for ELCA Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment, ELCA Quality of Call for Women in Ministry, is leading the Quality of Call for Women in Ministry Initiative. Quality of Call for People of Color Leaders work is led by Jennifer DeLeon, Director for Racial Justice.

Synod Diversity Goal Report Card

The churchwide organization has developed an assessment process to record efforts of diversity initiatives for the 65 synods. The reporting tool was launched on March 8, 2024. The 2024 report will measure synod activities with the recommendations based on the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity. The 2024 reports will be shared at the 2024 Fall Church Council meeting. This work aligns with ELCA Constitution 5.01.A16.: *This church commits itself to ethnic and racial diversity. Each expression of this church shall annually assess its ethnic and racial diversity when compared to the demographic data of its community or territory. The churchwide organization will work with synods as they assist congregations to reach out to persons of color or whose primary language is other than English.* And 5.01.B19. *Each synod shall submit its goals and strategies to the appropriate churchwide unit or office and shall annually submit a report on progress toward its goals to such unit or office.*

Church Council Approved the Creation of the Task Force Addressing Disciplinary Concerns for Rostered Ministers of Color (CC22.04.04)

Referred the Recommendations to Create an Ombuds position (CC23.04.05)

A draft of the report developed by the Task Force Addressing Disciplinary Concerns for Rostered Ministers of Color was presented to the Spring 2023 Conference of Bishops. The Conference of Bishops requested time to review the report and provide additional input.

The work of this task force concluded with the following recommendations, which the Church Council received and referred to at its Spring 2023 meeting.

To receive the report and recommendations from the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color and thank the members of the task force for their care and due diligence to the work;

To refer the recommendations regarding the current discipline process to the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, with a report to be made to the Church Council at its November 2023 meeting;

To refer the recommendations regarding the creation of an ombudsperson position/office to the Administrative Team, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, with a report to be made to the Church Council at its November 2023 meeting; and

To refer the recommendations regarding revisions to the Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Task Force on Specialized Ministry and On-Leave-From-Call Status. (CC23.04.05)

Additional discussion from the Fall 2023 Conference of Bishops concluded with concerns regarding the location, scope of function, and budget of the proposed ombudsperson position/office.

The Administrative Team needs to continue the conversation with the Conference of Bishops and leaders from the original task force about the proposed next steps to report to the Church Council at its Fall 2024 meeting.

Ad Hoc Committee related to guidance on a process for public repentance and a churchwide day of confession and repentance regarding the sins of patriarchy and sexism

Submitted by Mary Streufert, Director for Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment

The committee meets regularly to support the plans called for by the 2019 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

Implementing Resolution 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;" (*Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action*, p. 83).

As per previous reports, due to the pandemic and the capacity of this church, the process will begin at the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. The committee is working closely with the churchwide assembly planning committee to prepare both the assembly and the whole church to participate in a litany of confession and repentance. The committee is working on the details of resources, communication, worship, and artwork that can support recognition of patriarchy and sexism as sin and action to serve neighbors with intersectional gender justice. These objectives reflect the title and the content of the social statement *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (2019).

[Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action Social Statement | Fe sexismo y justicia.pdf](#)
[Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action Study Guide](#) (Spanish translation coming soon)
["What do Lutherans say about gender justice...?"](#) Video

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Pastor Tara Lynn
Mr. Iván Perez
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FAQ on the Proposed Social Message on Gun-related Violence & Trauma

What is the action for consideration before the CC at its April meeting?

To adopt "Gun-related Violence and Trauma" as a social message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America addressing the epidemic of gun-related trauma in the U.S. with attention to the cluster of issues underlying it.

What is the project?

In Spring 2023, the ELCA Church Council acted to: "To authorize the development of a social message on the epidemic of gun-related trauma in the U.S. with attention to the cluster of issues underlying it, such as national gun policy, personal security, growing community violence, public health, and social perplexity in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns" (2018)."

Refresh my memory, what are social messages?

Social messages are topical documents adopted by the ELCA Church Council to focus attention and action on timely, pressing matters of social concern to the church and society. They are used to address pressing contemporary concerns in light of the prophetic and compassionate traditions of the scriptures. They may elaborate and focus ELCA teaching and policy but must be consistent with previously adopted teaching and policy positions, especially from social statements. (In this case see *For Peace in God's World and the message on Community Violence* at www.elca.org/socialstatements. Social messages draw attention to specific topics, and they encourage moral discernment and action.

What was the participation level during the Draft Comment Period (10/15/23 to 2/1/24)

This comment period included feedback from three major participants groups.

- About 250 ELCA members filled out the online survey.
- An unusually large number of non-ELCA individuals used the public occasion of the survey for comment. A complete report on survey results are available in a full, public report at <https://www.elca.org/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Current-Social-Writing-Projects/Gun-Trauma>
- 40+ individuals provided extended comments by email.

How was the Proposed text developed?

The Director for Theological Ethics worked with a writing contractor, Dr. Per Anderson, retired professor from Concordia, Morehead. They were assisted throughout the entire process by members of a consultants' group who provided initial insights and then critiqued text until a final Draft text was published online, October 15, 2023.

The first circle consultants included: Mr. Colter McCarty (Montana), Bp. Bill Tesch (Minnesota), Dr. David Yamane (N. Carolina), Rev. Ron Letnes (Minnesota); Rev. Angela Smith (Pennsylvania, Rev. Gwendolyn King (Church Council); Rev. Michael Vinson (Colorado), Mr. Joel Miller (Church Council), Ms. Sara Lilja (New Jersey), Ms. Lashonda Hicks Curry (Illinois)

After the close of the Draft public comment period, and with attention to all sources of feedback, including emails and other communications, the director developed a revised text working with the lead writer. A revised text was shared in early February for review and suggestion by the consultants' group and the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee of the Conference of Bishops. In late February, the proposed text was shared with all bishops. This Proposed Social Message represents the result of these careful efforts to hear public comment and work with reviewers and bishops to craft a text for Church Council consideration. Please note the message has not had a final copy edit; this is always done after adoption and before publication.

1 A social message on ...

2

3

Gun-related Violence and Trauma

4

5 *As adopted on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the Church Council on*
6 *“date” by a vote of “x”x.*

7

8

9

This Message in Summary

10

11 *Guns and gun-related violence and trauma are woven into U.S. history and society in substantial,*
12 *complex, and problematic ways. The full social message therefore requires length, nuance, and*
13 *complexity. This summary provides an overview of key aspects of the four sections, much like a map that*
14 *conveys the main points of a complex landscape.*

15

16 *I. Introduction: God’s Resolve for Peace Abides*

17 *II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem*

18 *III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God’s Resolve for Peace*

19 *IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace*

20

21 *At its heart, this social message makes the case for reframing the gun debate and activity in the U.S.*
22 *beyond gun rights versus gun control. The message commits the ELCA to a moral framework of shared*
23 *responsibility that comes to terms with trauma honestly and seeks prevention carefully through a public*
24 *health model. Such a model suggests individual and institutional practices that could reduce tragic,*
25 *irresponsible, and illegal uses of firearms and their related risks and harms. This message argues that*
26 *such a framework can open up constructive dialogue and action across many, many communities and*
27 *should be publicly embraced.*

28

29 *Section I shows how this message builds upon the scriptural references, insights, themes, and*
30 *commitments found in the ELCA social statement For Peace in God’s World and the ELCA social message*
31 *“On Community Violence.” (Readers may review those at www.elca.org/socialstatements.) From a*
32 *Lutheran Christian perspective, it returns to themes such as peacemaking and prevention that, too often,*
33 *have been sidelined. It soberly charts the horrific facts and the disparities of age, class, gender, and race*
34 *of the nearly 50,000 lives taken each year. It introduces, as well, two factors increasingly recognized by*
35 *social science: the widespread effects of trauma and the rise of defensive gun cultures.*

36

37 *Section II explores the multiple, often unrecognized forms of trauma resulting from armed threats and*
38 *shootings in which the perpetrator intends to harm others or self. These actions not only harm people*
39 *physically but traumatizes human spirits, families, communities, and the social order itself. The call to see*
40 *trauma in this way expands moral responsibility for gun-related harm.*

41

42 *Section III reminds Christians of the centrality of Christlike service of neighbor in our social roles. It calls*
43 *them, and all people of goodwill, to practice wise and proactive efforts to restrain gun-related violence*
44 *and prevent it. This emphasis on prevention aligns the ELCA with a growing movement to approach gun*
45 *misuse as a public health crisis. This section also recognizes that members of our church and society are*
46 *divided in various ways and degrees about how to reduce gun-related harms. These divisions cannot be*

47 *fully addressed in this message, and some of them call for further discernment, such as defensive gun use*
48 *for example.*

49
50 *Section IV calls upon multiple types of secular communities to prevent violence and make peace. It spells*
51 *out the responsibilities of communities as diverse as shooting associations and firearm defense groups,*
52 *health care providers and firearm businesses. The section also describes the distinctive responsibilities of*
53 *our church and other faith communities toward peacemaking. These include calls to bridge divides, build*
54 *community, advocate policy, and care for the traumatized.*

55
56 *This message concludes that reframed understanding and practices in responsible communities can resist*
57 *and reverse the immense and mournful toll of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use in the United*
58 *States today.*

59
60
61
62
63

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64 I. God's Resolve for Peace Abides

65
66 "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,'
67 when there is no peace." —Jeremiah 6:14

68
69 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." —Matthew 5:9

70
71 "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from
72 you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."
73 —Isaiah 54:10

74
75 Christians are called to be peacemakers. When Christians make peace, they respond in faith and
76 gratitude toward God's sovereign promise of a world where violence and trauma are no more. God's
77 resolve for peace through steadfast love calls all people to do as God does—to ever strive for peace
78 through love of neighbor. This striving takes many forms through the roles and places of responsibility
79 where we live—and where today we lament gun-related violence and trauma in the United States.

80
81 Christians are not alone in mourning. Most people in the U.S. long for an end to senseless harm and
82 killing, even as they may disagree passionately about solutions.¹ These disagreements reflect cultural
83 and moral diversity in society and in our churches, which are compounded by mistrust, exclusion, and
84 alienation.² Discord over firearm misuse cannot be addressed in isolation from these and other social
85 realities. Among them, health disparities of age, class, gender, and race contribute significantly to
86 shootings that claim nearly 50,000 lives each year.³ Some communities know seemingly endless violence
87 and trauma due to tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. There is no peace for these neighbors or
88 many more throughout our society.

89
90 For Christians, human yearnings to live in peace are continually thwarted by relations and activities of
91 sinful brokenness and disorder that beset all people, communities, and institutions. Individually and
92 collectively, humans sin when they fail to love and trust God above all else or when they turn inward at

93 the expense of others. They possess the gifts of God but withhold them from their neighbors. Gun-
94 related violence and trauma are among the ways humans fail to serve God’s covenant of peace and to
95 live in good and right relations. Despite our sinful identities and ways, we trust that God’s resolve for
96 peace abides.

97
98 For three decades, the ELCA has addressed the manifestations of gun-related violence and trauma in the
99 U.S. through social messages, resolutions, statements, study materials, and pastoral letters. To hold
100 government accountable for civic well-being, ELCA leaders and members have advocated for state and
101 federal regulations to prevent firearm misuse.⁴ In these and other ways, our church has sought through
102 teaching and witness to reduce self-harm and criminal violence involving guns. Yet there is no peace.

103
104 Nevertheless, we hold that God continues to call all people to strive anew toward solutions. Christians
105 and all people of goodwill should, above all, do no harm and avoid risk of harm while striving in
106 numerous ways for peace—in our homes, our communities, and our souls. Through this message, this
107 church affirms that current societal trends and new understandings of gun-related risks and harms call us
108 to witness anew and with urgency to our shared responsibility for peacemaking. We can collaborate to
109 reduce harm and seek peace, even as we disagree about how to address some complex and changing
110 realities.

111
112 *What societal trends and new understandings call the ELCA to witness anew?*

113
114 **Growing and disparate violence amid pervasive insecurity**

115 At the time of this writing, national gun suicide and murder rates have recently returned to near-record
116 highs. Three hundred people in the U.S. are shot every day. Over 100 perish. Though public mass
117 shootings account for only a tiny fraction of criminal homicides, they have grave effects beyond lost lives.
118 Guns are now the leading cause of death among individuals under 20. Within this population and others,
119 persisting racial disparities of health and harm cry out for attention.⁵

120
121 Though U.S. shootings occur disproportionately across populations and places, members of our society
122 share a pervasive sense of insecurity.⁶ This insecurity takes different forms and degrees, with various
123 sources and histories. We live in an information-saturated society that delivers instantaneous news of
124 gun deaths and the troubles they tell. Narratives of social unrest, constant change, and uncontrolled
125 threat naturally provoke fear. This insecurity can be confirmed when elected officials respond to yet
126 more carnage with partisan rhetoric and simplistic solutions.

127
128 **Seeing trauma and seeking protection**

129 Two dimensions of insecurity merit searching attention today. First, encounters with gun-related violence
130 are increasingly understood by researchers to involve forms of trauma that have powerful lasting effects
131 on individuals and communities.⁷ As a result, the risks and harms of gun violence are now understood to
132 extend far beyond people wounded and killed by gunfire.

133
134 Second, while gun-related trauma and insecurity take different forms, one significant public response to
135 perceived threat and vulnerability can be seen in the growing trend of defensive gun ownership among
136 people who buy firearms. Security concerns are prompting millions of previously unarmed people each
137 year to become owners. These purchases add to the some 40% of U.S. households where an estimated
138 75 million or more owners keep over 400 million firearms.⁸

139 II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem

140

141

“Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.

142

Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children,

143

because they are no more.” —Jeremiah 31:15

144

145

“My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is.” —Lamentations 3:17

146

147 *Why is seeing trauma morally significant?*

148

149 Peacemaking begins with understanding what is going on and what our neighbors need to flourish.

150 Trauma research offers insight into the often-unmet needs of people and communities that experience

151 gun violence. This research exposes the full reach and impact of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use.

152 It reveals that far more people than officially reported are harmed or at risk of harm. By seeing the

153 trauma of gun-related violence, we become mindful of less visible assaults and burdens that our

154 neighbors bear, which call for moral concern and response.

155

156 Gun-related trauma affects people as individuals and as members of families, communities, and society.

157 It affects some people and communities much more profoundly than others due to disparities in health

158 conditions and protective resources.⁹ Seeing trauma can help us to advance our understanding of the

159 threats, impacts, and legacies of criminal violence and self-harm. We can better name wounds that call

160 for care and better formulate wise public policy that seeks prevention as well as restraint.

161

162 *What is gun-related trauma?*¹⁰

163

164 Gun-related trauma includes individual and collective responses to harmful events and threatening

165 conditions. It stems from exposure to events or conditions that are emotionally disturbing or life-

166 threatening, with lasting adverse effects on health. People can be traumatized at any age, but trauma

167 can have particularly debilitating effects on childhood development.¹¹

168

169 Trauma is a subjective and socially conditioned experience. Two or more people can experience the

170 same event or condition but may not be traumatized in the same way. Trauma varies according to one’s

171 proximity to the event or condition, the existing resources and strengths of those affected, and the

172 severity and persistence of the assault. It varies according to the amount of support needed and

173 available to affected people.

174

175 **Forms and relations of trauma**

176 Gun-related trauma can follow an acute incident such as armed robbery. It can result from adverse

177 childhood experiences of routine exposure to gun violence. Traumatic events can be communal as well

178 as individual and can have a compounding effect when they happen to people who cope with preexisting

179 trauma that stems from biases such as homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism.

180

181 Some people and groups can experience trauma as firsthand participants whereas others may be

182 traumatized as secondhand participants responding to wounded people.¹² Scholars note how trauma

183 extends in different ways through time. A traumatic event may end, but effects can linger.¹³ Persisting

184 trauma can be transmitted across generations through families and communities. Whole societies can be

185 traumatized by eruptions of violence such as a terrorist attack that triggers insecurity and disorientation.

186 **Powerlessness and trauma**

187 Human health and well-being depend upon our individual ability to cope with challenging life events.
188 People must summon courage and resilience to function as agents in relation to others. Similarly,
189 humane societies require individuals who respect, trust, and cooperate daily with others to fulfill life-
190 giving roles and institutions. Gun-related trauma threatens these personal, social, and spiritual goods.

191
192 When gun-related trauma occurs, people are wounded in body, mind, and spirit by experiences that
193 overwhelm understanding and integration. These experiences have no place in the beliefs and values
194 people use to make sense of their experiences and to pursue lives worthy of their humanity. In a state of
195 trauma, the existential convictions that hold our lives together can be shredded.

196
197 Gun violence threatens bodily life. The trauma that can follow threatens meaningful and purposeful
198 agency. It can provoke emotional and spiritual crisis that has no apparent end or that may lie dormant
199 for years. To see trauma in the lives of people affected by gun-related violence is to see suffering and
200 powerlessness.

201
202 *How do forms of gun-related trauma affect members of our society?*

203
204 **Anticipatory trauma and defensive responses**

205 Traumatizing experiences and resulting perceptions of insecurity can inform the way people picture the
206 future and their environments. These neighbors live in some degree of life-altering fear. Senses of threat
207 can put them on guard for imagined likely harm and even justify hypervigilance. Polling research
208 indicates that four in 10 people in the U.S. fear becoming a victim of gun-related violence. Young people
209 are more fearful than adults. Over half of our neighbors expect gun violence to increase in coming years.
210 They are evenly divided over whether gun ownership makes the country safer. Most individuals who buy
211 guns today do so for defensive uses and are increasingly socially diverse.¹⁴

212
213 Defensive gun owners are responding to various perceptions or experiences of unrest and insecurity—
214 lawlessness, social instability, racism, xenophobia, and tyranny. They seek to protect self, family,
215 community, culture, political liberty, and other goods. Many defensive gun owners think that
216 government fails to keep the peace and that civilians must therefore claim their right to use lethal force
217 in defense against death or grave bodily injury.¹⁵ Certain gun rights rulings from U.S. courts and
218 legislative actions have strengthened the sense of need for defensive gun ownership today.

219
220 Though a majority of U.S. residents decline gun ownership, many are open to it in the future. Given
221 current trends, every person will likely know at least one victim of gun violence in their social network.¹⁶
222 Over half of adults say they or family members have personally experienced gun-related threat, injury, or
223 self-defense. Eight in 10 people report feeling safe in their neighborhoods, yet an equal number report
224 that they have taken at least one precaution to protect themselves or family members from gun-related
225 violence.¹⁷

226
227 In circumstances such as these, where people adopt defensive mindsets and practices, they are
228 exhibiting a form of trauma that can be understood as anticipatory. Anticipatory trauma has been
229 documented among violence survivors and people and communities that take steps to avoid becoming
230 victims.¹⁸ It involves taking protective actions grounded in fear of sudden, life-threatening violence, a
231 fear people know in different ways and degrees. Some people buy guns whereas others purchase knives
232 or pepper spray. Parents talk to their children about mass shooters or the police. Kids go to school

233 wearing bulletproof backpacks and practice lockdown drills. Individuals avoid large crowds. Millions
234 today anticipate trauma.¹⁹

235

236 **Gun suicide and survivor trauma**

237 We can see trauma not only in gun-related dread but also in personal loss and pain following gun-related
238 self-harm and suicide. Nearly 60% of gun deaths in the U.S. are self-inflicted, ending over 25,000 lives.²⁰
239 Firearms do not cause suicidal thoughts. They do, however, provide a highly lethal means of ending a
240 personal crisis characterized by desperate and impulsive thinking. Ninety percent of gun suicide attempts
241 are completed, and these account for half of all suicides. White and Indigenous men account for the vast
242 majority of these deaths²¹ Because these lives end violently and often without warning, they are
243 traumatic for surviving family and friends.²²

244

245 Research shows that ready firearm access is a risk factor for suicide.²³ Firearm suicides can be reduced
246 through safety restraints that put time and distance between the firearm and the person in crisis. Such
247 restraints include safety-seeking laws, educational programs, and voluntary practices. People increasingly
248 recognize firearm suicide as a public health crisis marked by disparities that call for restraint and
249 prevention. Such suicides can be prevented through improved access to mental health care and greater
250 commitment to the social determinants of health.

251

252 **Criminal homicide and community trauma**

253 Over 20,000 U.S. residents are murdered with firearms every year. This violence is concentrated among
254 relatively few people in high-crime neighborhoods and communities. Though the U.S. has the highest
255 rates of gun ownership and homicide among developed countries, 99.21% of gun owners do not
256 threaten or harm others or themselves.²⁴

257

258 Apart from mass shootings and intimate partner violence, gun violence predominantly harms people
259 living in Black and Hispanic communities, where rates of injury and death greatly exceed national rates.
260 Black youth and young men represent 2% of U.S. residents but sustain nearly 40% of gun homicide
261 deaths.²⁵ This gun violence inequality correlates with high rates of marginalization, poverty, crime,
262 alcohol and drug use, unemployment, and other persistent threats to personal and communal health.

263

264 Threatening and deadly gun use contributes to cycles of violence and trauma common to economically
265 depressed neighborhoods.²⁶ When violence keeps neighborhoods from meeting member needs,
266 community trauma follows. If needs continue, trauma can become intergenerational. Persisting violence
267 erodes social capital, impairs social networks, and breeds hopelessness. Community trauma threatens
268 investments in housing, schools, businesses, and recreational spaces. Social solidarity and responsibility
269 suffer. People can become desensitized to violence and embrace attitudes and behaviors that engender
270 more violence.²⁷

271

272 Policing and incarceration have historically been primary responses to community violence and trauma.
273 Today, because more people understand the need for prevention, community-based violence
274 intervention programs are making important gains in many affected neighborhoods and show promise
275 for reducing gun homicide.²⁸ These programs cultivate community leadership and knowledge, focusing
276 on individuals most at risk of perpetrating violence.

277

278 Community-based violence intervention programs develop leaders and provide support services, tailored
279 to local needs, that promote healthy alternatives to daily violence and trauma. Respected community
280 members interrupt conflict and retaliation, reducing the wounds and powerlessness of trauma by

281 building relationships between conflicting parties and between people and the support services they
282 need. Community-based violence intervention programs across our nation do effective peacemaking—
283 and create hope.

284
285 **Public mass shootings and the violence-trauma cycle**

286 Public mass shootings are another source of trauma. These are events in which four or more people are
287 murdered indiscriminately in public.²⁹ Though these shootings may receive outsize attention in the news
288 and public opinion, they still cause immense loss, suffering, and fear. They violate spaces where
289 community unfolds—workplaces, schools, worship places, shops, plazas, clubs, theaters. They traumatize
290 the local community—and the nation.

291
292 Mass public shootings injure, kill, and traumatize hundreds and sometimes thousands of people at a
293 time with distressing frequency. Though the risk of being shot in public remains extremely low, we as a
294 society should recognize the pervasive fear of wanton murder as anticipatory trauma. These shootings
295 merit societal concern for the losses sustained and the shock, sorrow, and dread that follow for so many
296 people. This violence offers a glimpse into the trauma of all victims and an opportunity to grow in
297 empathy and solidarity.

298
299 We must also understand neighbors who kill.³⁰ Mass shooters typically have experienced violence and
300 trauma as children—parental suicide, physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, bullying. Without
301 proper care such trauma can inspire teenage and adult rage, hate, and despair that can lead to angry,
302 isolated, and retaliatory behavior, both punishing and suicidal. Trauma does not fully explain mass
303 shootings. However, these events exhibit the violence-trauma cycle seen in other communities troubled
304 by suicide and criminal homicide.

305

306 **III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God’s Resolve for Peace**

307
308 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: Do not
309 resist an evildoer.” —Matthew 5:38-9

310
311 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you:
312 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” —Matthew 5:43-4

313
314 Gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. demand courageous and unremitting works of love seeking
315 peace. This seeking must be undertaken collectively and collaboratively to bridge disabling conflicts and
316 to secure peace for all those threatened and harmed by gun violence—victims, perpetrators, and
317 neighbors at risk. The social teaching of our church calls us to this Christlike service.

318
319 *What is the current social teaching of the ELCA on gun-related violence?*

320
321 **ELCA teaching on community violence**

322 The 1994 social message “Community Violence” addresses a society “haunted by violence” amid
323 “disintegrating social structures and values” that affect U.S. residents of “every class, color, and locality,”
324 while noting inequalities that continue today. It commends a proactive ethic of prevention and urges
325 ELCA members “to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make
326 violence so pervasive.”³¹

327
328 The message notes that countering the brokenness and disorder that lead to violence and trauma will be
329 an incremental and long-term process. Present threats and harms must be restrained as well—to protect
330 the neighbor. God tasks government to administer justice, maintain order, and establish security.³² This
331 governance includes coercive and sometimes lethal force through policing and the military. To safeguard
332 the public, government may enact laws that regulate gun access.

333
334 This ethic of restraint supplements an ethic of prevention. Together these paired concerns seek a
335 response equal to the complexity of violence, including its traumatizing dimensions.³³

336 337 **ELCA teaching on peacemaking**

338 With the 1995 social statement *For Peace in God's World*, ELCA teaching adopted another proactive
339 stance by affirming a common calling to peacemaking. Though the statement aligns with the Lutheran
340 tradition that Christians may serve in the military and conduct just wars, it boldly adds that this church
341 “needs the witness of its members who in the name of Jesus Christ refuse all participation in war, who
342 commit themselves to establish peace and justice on earth by nonviolent power alone.” Accordingly, the
343 ELCA social statement embraces the priority of building a just peace to prevent war.³⁴ Our church also
344 teaches that peacemaking should define domestic and community life as well as the affairs of the state.

345
346 The ELCA statement commits our church to undertake Christian peacemaking in a pluralistic and
347 interdependent society where God works among all people, communities, and structures. We are to
348 participate in God's resolve for peace through the roles, associations, and institutions that sustain human
349 life. In all these, all people of goodwill have opportunities and a shared responsibility to build a just
350 peace of unity in diversity.³⁵

351 352 *How does love of neighbor advance peacemaking today?*

353 354 **Living in the neighbor through love**

355 Christian peacemakers participate in the love of God when they counter brokenness and disorder
356 through works of love. In the foundational essay “The Freedom of a Christian,” Martin Luther pictures
357 this participation as living in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. Christians should “do
358 nothing in this life except what is profitable, necessary, and life-giving” for the neighbor. We should
359 “serve and help our neighbor in every possible way.”³⁶ Christian love builds powerful relations of giving
360 and receiving that counter the isolation, despair, enmity, and nihilism that often contribute to lethal
361 harm and criminal homicide.

362 363 **Shared responsibility beyond liberal individualism**

364 Christian love of neighbor advances peacemaking because it counters a widespread understanding of
365 gun ownership that minimizes personal responsibility for societal violence and trauma. Many U.S.
366 residents embrace this minimal understanding, often called liberal individualism, that values personal
367 freedom and autonomy over benefiting others.

368
369 In this view, individuals may do as they please so long as they do not harm others or put them at serious
370 risk. Gun owners, then, are duty-bound to do no harm to their neighbors—but not morally obligated to
371 benefit them.³⁷ Owners fulfill their social responsibility so long as they practice safe firearm use and
372 thereby respect their neighbors' rights to life and liberty. In this view, the state is tasked to protect the
373 public from illegal gun use through legally authorized coercive restraint and lethal force. It should not

374 infringe on a person’s sphere of liberty and self-determination. It should not limit individual gun
375 ownership beyond prohibiting harm and serious risk to others.³⁸

376
377 Owners who embrace this liberal individualism do not see themselves as duty-bound to reduce the
378 collective burdens of U.S. gun ownership. However, Christian love of neighbor calls for greater
379 responsibility. Shared responsibility for the good of society means that Christians and all people should
380 vigorously reduce gun-related harm and risk through many callings and wise practices as works of love.
381 Section IV elaborates on how this can be done.

382

383 *Can a Christian be a defensive gun owner?*

384

385 **Addressing defensive gun use**

386 At this writing, the ELCA has not addressed the question whether Christians may use guns for defensive
387 purposes. Does the Christian call to peacemaking include a voluntary, legally authorized, and regulated
388 role of defending a vulnerable neighbor against attack? What about self-defense in such situations?
389 These are critical and complex questions for U.S. Christians today that call for open and civil
390 conversations across our church. This message provides a framework for personal and communal
391 deliberation and discernment and calls on members, congregations, and synods to engage in them.³⁹

392

393 **Affirming necessary government restraint**

394 Millions of U.S. residents buy guns today because they lack confidence in policing to keep them safe. In
395 support of this stance, there are troubling law enforcement deficiencies in some states and
396 communities. Warranted or not, this pervasive sense of insecurity is real. The society-wide question is
397 whether mass civilian ownership of defensive guns promotes personal and public safety and should
398 become a permanent feature of our society.

399

400 This message holds that gun-related violence and trauma can and should be vastly reduced through
401 multifaceted restraint and prevention. Our church affirms that police may need to use coercive restraint
402 and lethal force to reduce tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. It also affirms police reform, along
403 with better public health and safety systems, as the best societal response to gun violence and trauma in
404 the U.S. currently.

405

406 **Nonviolence amid human brokenness and disorder**

407 Christ’s disciples should ever witness to the coming reign of God when violence will pass away. This
408 witness occurs in a sinful world where vulnerable neighbors must be protected from harm. For Christians
409 who practice peacemaking, violence must be the last resort in defense of the neighbor. Violence against
410 an aggressor must avoid collateral harm to others and be limited to restoring peace following hostilities.
411 In this way, disciples seek to love the enemy through nonviolent action while accepting coercive and
412 sometimes violent governmental protection as a godly way of containing sin.

413

414 *IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace*

415

416 “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” —Romans 14:19

417

418 In Romans, St. Paul writes with concern to a community divided over dietary practice. Because the work
419 of God in Christ benefits all, St. Paul urges the community to seek peace and flourishing together. This

420 message teaches that Christians in the U.S. today are called to such reconciling and constructive work in
421 a society divided over gun use and what peace and flourishing require of our society.

422
423 At the same time, there is a related responsibility for all people of goodwill as a matter of civic duty.
424 Relatively few people in our society perpetrate gun violence or trauma against others or themselves.
425 However, these neighbors cause immense loss and lasting harm to civic life. This message reasons that a
426 societal project of peacemaking requires all civic-minded individuals and groups to contribute through
427 institutions and associations dedicated to human health and fulfillment. Historical experience and
428 growing research warrant that multifaceted efforts toward personal and communal peace can reduce
429 gun violence. Peacemaking should be a civic role and a shared responsibility of all.

430
431 *How can members of our society share responsibility for peacemaking?*

432
433 **Peacemaking for gun owners and shooting associations**

434 Approximately a third of adults in the U.S. own guns. They have different interests—collecting, hunting,
435 defense, sporting, work—and different outlooks about what ownership means and requires. Most see
436 gun ownership as a normal lifelong activity, and many worry that various social actors seek to take their
437 guns away. They often feel misunderstood and unfairly blamed for violence.⁴⁰

438
439 Many gun owners see themselves as safety-minded and more conscientious about training, storage, and
440 use than others might think. They are reluctant to get involved in gun violence prevention apart from
441 taking responsibility for their own conduct, which typically means seeking personal safety legally. The
442 shooting associations generally support this stance. Though owners and associations often contest
443 coercive legal restrictions to reduce gun misuse, most agree that effective voluntary practices exist and
444 may be willing to promote these practices through collective public action.

445
446 Gun owners and shooting associations today should undertake greater public responsibility. By owning
447 and using a lethal device in public, U.S. gun owners and their associations constitute a distinct
448 community and should be accountable to the two-thirds of U.S. adults who do not own a gun and
449 deserve to know that owners are trustworthy and safe members of their communities. When someone
450 misuses a gun, it contributes to societal trauma and threatens the personal freedom and public trust
451 enjoyed by gun owners and nonowners alike in a nation with more guns than people.

452
453 The ELCA calls upon U.S. gun owners and shooting associations to assume a collective responsibility and
454 an active commitment to be a trustworthy community within a diverse, interdependent, and fragile
455 society. Some owners are not observant of high standards of public safety through proper training,
456 storage, and use. They should become more responsible through education and formation by
457 associations and other owners committed to reducing misuse and harm through rigorous voluntary
458 practice.⁴¹ Thousands of harmful outcomes could be avoided annually if every gun had a safe owner.
459 These standards can be codified by shooting associations and exercised voluntarily. Collective voluntary
460 response can preclude the need for protective legal restrictions by government in the absence of
461 universal safe practice.

462
463 Active leadership by gun owners and shooting associations to cultivate gun safety would be a major step
464 toward a peaceable society. The safety that gun owners typically seek for themselves, loved ones, and
465 friends must be secured for all people. This church commends creation and promotion of obligatory
466 universal safety standards to support a culture of peace. In addition to saving lives, such activism would
467 address misunderstanding and mistrust between gun owners and nonowners.

468 Beyond universal safe practice, gun owners and shooting associations can be a cultural and political force
469 for reducing gun-related violence and trauma for all. Collectively, such leaders can promote legal
470 restraints to protect victims and stop perpetrators. They can encourage gun violence prevention through
471 public health strategies and practices.

472
473 **Peacemaking for firearm management and firearm defense groups**

474 U.S. residents are evenly divided over whether permissive and mass gun ownership diminishes or
475 increases public safety.⁴² Two opposing advocacy groups reflect and propagate this division. Both groups
476 seek to protect public safety by restraining violence, albeit in different ways and with differing visions of
477 peace and flourishing.

478
479 Firearm management groups seek to regulate and restrict access to guns to decrease risks of misuse—
480 accidents, homicides, and suicides. They seek governmental regulation and enforcement to affirm
481 societal norms and to mitigate harmful behavior that perpetuates the cycle of violence and trauma.

482
483 Firearm defense groups seek to protect and support firearm ownership for various uses through limited
484 government infringement upon legal rights to life and to bear arms. They hold that risks of ownership
485 can be mitigated by minimal regulation coupled with rigorous law enforcement and responsible
486 voluntary practices.

487
488 Firearm management and defense groups command significant memberships, financial support, and
489 political power. Christians in the U.S., including in our church, participate in these groups and know their
490 political gains and setbacks. Despite vigorous efforts, a complex and costly societal stalemate over guns
491 and safety persists with no end in sight.

492
493 The ELCA commends the good-faith intentions and efforts of firearm activist groups when they seek to
494 create a political center that enables our society to exercise shared responsibility for cessation of gun-
495 related violence and trauma. Given abiding polarization and disabling partisanship, new activist groups
496 are needed. These groups should focus upon brokering a political center of cooperation in difference.
497 This church urges formation of peacemaking groups that seek to understand the cultural and political
498 divide over guns and work toward common ground through dialogue.⁴³

499
500 **Peacemaking for community development and social ministry organizations**

501 The communal dimensions of suicide and criminal homicide need greater attention. The concepts of
502 community trauma and intergenerational trauma help to correct individualistic notions of need and
503 response. Research shows that community-based associations and problem-solving improve life in many
504 ways. They build trust and hope through successful cooperation. Various forms of community-based
505 renewal have positive effects upon the incidence of gun violence and trauma in the U.S. One example of
506 such peacemaking is the Healthy People 2030 objectives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human
507 Services.⁴⁴

508
509 The social ministry organizations of the ELCA and other faith communities, likewise, play significant roles
510 in the welfare of U.S. society in times of emergency and abiding need. In addition to direct service lines,
511 these organizations seek to support the social sources of health. They seek prevention and early
512 intervention while dismantling many forms of injustice. Our church values highly the work done by social
513 ministry organizations to advance public health for all and thereby foster peace. These organizations
514 have great potential to reduce gun misuse and minister to trauma.

515

516 **Peacemaking for gun violence researchers**

517 To pursue restraint and prevention, our society needs willpower informed by common and sound
518 understanding. The questions to be answered are difficult and costly to investigate. Actionable
519 knowledge can be elusive despite rigorous inquiry. Disputes over findings can make the search for truth
520 seem impossible and imperil hope of preventing and restraining gun-related violence and trauma.
521 Current impasses over public policy contribute to inadequate research evidence as well as to polarization
522 and distrust of knowledgeable professionals.

523
524 Nevertheless, critical advancements toward peacemaking demand dispassionate and expert research.⁴⁵
525 New studies into gun and violence data, risks and protective factors, and evidence-based strategies need
526 to be undertaken for the sake of positive social change.

527
528 **Peacemaking for firearm businesses**

529 U.S. firearm businesses—manufacturers, distributors, and sellers—share interests, convictions, and
530 involvements with gun owners and shooting associations. As a result, firearm businesses are well-
531 positioned to curb misuse within their communities and the nation and thereby lessen harms and senses
532 of insecurity.

533
534 Many firearm businesses today are embroiled in long-standing societal conflict about whether and how
535 they should be held accountable for harms caused by those who misuse shooting products that
536 otherwise function safely. These businesses are not subject to typical federal consumer-product safety
537 oversight. Per state and federal statutes, also they enjoy strong immunity from civil lawsuits by parties
538 claiming public nuisance or product harm liability. Governments, nongovernmental groups, and
539 individuals are utilizing legislation and litigation in efforts both to circumvent and to uphold immunity
540 laws amid conflicting visions of greater public safety. These adversarial actors are engaged in debates
541 and actions that are defining the legal and social norms of firearm businesses in the U.S.⁴⁶

542
543 The ELCA holds that businesses bear a reasonable responsibility to minimize harm caused by the design,
544 production, marketing, and distribution of their products. Persisting litigation for product harm brought
545 by aggrieved parties, as well as congressional investigation of five companies that produce AR-15–style
546 rifles, raises doubts about commitments to responsibility among some U.S. firearm businesses.⁴⁷

547
548 This church calls upon firearm businesses to embrace structures and practices that reduce tragic,
549 irresponsible, or illegal use of their products. Current immunity from litigation and exemption from
550 oversight for product safety undermine their accountability. However, like other U.S. businesses that face
551 public scrutiny over product safety, gun manufacturers, distributors, and sellers may embrace
552 peacemaking if pressed by public opinion, government regulation, or members of the U.S. gun
553 community.

554
555 One troubling fact uncovered by congressional investigators is that five manufacturers of AR-15–style
556 rifles fail to monitor shootings involving their guns. These companies participate in tracing conducted by
557 the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in criminal investigations but do not utilize this
558 information. Five percent of U.S. residents own an AR-15–style rifle, yet five manufacturers claim no
559 process for understanding how their firearms are used.

560
561 Shared responsibility means that these and other gun manufacturers should join public debates about
562 what makes for restraint and prevention. These companies should ask whether their products and

563 practices make the public safer and more secure and what they can do to support safety in design,
564 marketing, and use. Firearm distributors and sellers should ask these questions as well.

565
566 The production and sale of AR-15–style rifles raise urgent and divisive questions of public risk and safety.
567 The ELCA calls upon firearm businesses to engage in the national debate about legal access to this
568 modified military weapon. Our church has consistently affirmed comprehensive legal controls of military
569 assault weapons since 1993.⁴⁸

570
571 Some 50% of U.S. adults support outlawing all sales of AR-15–style rifles.⁴⁹ They are rightly horrified by
572 experiences and understandings of the injury, death, and trauma that AR-15–style rifles can inflict on
573 victims, survivors, families, law enforcement, first responders, and the public. Roughly one third of
574 adults oppose a national ban, including 20 million owners who safely use this firearm for various reasons
575 and purposes.⁵⁰

576
577 A critical question raised by this message is whether the risks and inevitability of horrendous harm from
578 illegal use justifies outlawing sales and other restrictions of AR-15–style rifles in the interests of
579 protecting the vulnerable neighbor. Our church continues to hold that some restrictions are needed and
580 urges broader national debate toward shared societal resolve to reduce an untenable public threat in
581 the production and sale of AR-15–style rifles.

582
583 **Peacemaking for law enforcement**

584 Federal, tribal, territorial, state, county, and local law enforcement officers confront gun-related violence
585 and trauma daily. They labor under high demands and risks. These public servants participate in God’s
586 providence because human society needs fair-minded protectors and keepers of order and justice. This
587 church gives thanks for the dedication and competence of law enforcement officers to restrain
588 interpersonal conflict and thwart criminal behavior.

589
590 Good policing is deeply relational and depends upon partnerships between law enforcement officers and
591 the communities they serve. Public safety depends upon trust in law enforcement to respect and protect
592 the rights of all. Most police work diligently to serve their communities and uphold trust. However, this
593 church has recognized that “the reputation of law enforcement has been stained by evidence of racial
594 bias and excessive use of force.”⁵¹

595
596 This message extends previous ELCA calls for structural reform of police departments and for trust-
597 building through greater public support of and investment in communities. This includes strengthening
598 policies that engender community-oriented policing to increase public support and partnership.

599
600 Improvement of public trust in law enforcement will contribute to greater public trust in the other
601 functions of government to protect society from harms and risks. Broad gains are needed to address the
602 senses of insecurity that contribute to anticipatory trauma and defensive responses. Accordingly, the
603 ELCA urges law enforcement officers and their professional associations to join with other social actors
604 addressed in this message to develop public policy toward strengthening public backing and trust in
605 government to keep the peace. A comprehensive public health response of restraint and prevention
606 needs the wisdom of policing professionals.

607
608 **Peacemaking for health care providers and public health professionals**

609 Many public health professionals frame gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. as a public health
610 crisis. They are supported by research that documents demographic and geographic inequalities in how

611 violence and trauma are distributed. Social inequalities lead to health disparities that contribute to
612 violence and that should be subject to systemic remedy, such as addressing upstream sources of violence
613 to lessen downstream harm.

614
615 Our society has addressed public health crises and prevailed. Some 60 years ago, U.S. automobile
616 deaths reached levels that prompted comprehensive national response. Fatalities have since dropped
617 dramatically, and health care providers contribute to that result. Newborns do not go home from the
618 hospital without a car seat. Pediatricians often talk to parents about guns in the home.

619
620 Imagine, now, routine conversations between all health providers and their patients about gun safety.
621 Patients might report risks to themselves or others. Providers can encourage safety practices and other
622 protective measures—or intervene as needed. This church affirms efforts by health care providers to
623 monitor and respond to risks and harms related to gun violence and trauma.

624
625 **Peacemaking for journalists and news organizations**

626 Public understanding of gun-related violence and trauma is affected by news sources and firsthand
627 experiences. Mass shootings dominate news coverage by national outlets and often communicate
628 misunderstandings of gun violence in the U.S. News organizations have a major opportunity to inform
629 the public through stories that consider the causes and risks of gun violence, trauma that follows, and
630 measures to prevent future harm. Importantly, sound information can help individuals critically evaluate
631 their own sense of insecurity and see ways to get involved in solutions.

632
633 The ELCA calls upon journalists and news organizations to heed campaigns against copycat shootings.
634 Gun violence perpetrators often seek validation and fame through a performance crime. They study
635 news coverage of past shootings and plot a more infamous one. Resistance campaigns have developed
636 journalistic standards for denying perpetrators the scripts they use and the glory they seek. These
637 campaigns challenge journalists and news organizations to be responsible by minimizing attention to
638 killers and focusing instead on the whole story.⁵²

639
640 **Peacemaking for thought leaders**

641 In addition to news organizations, other sources of information commonly accessed online affect public
642 understanding of gun use and misuse. Individuals and groups rely upon these resources to negotiate life
643 in a changing, complex, and often perplexing society. Society members look to trusted analysts to make
644 sense of public affairs and their own life experiences. They look to authentic and unconventional experts
645 to propose solutions to problems. These thought leaders influence the values and behavior of the public.

646
647 Influential public voices play an essential role in the search for shared, responsible action. The
648 complexity and costs of gun-related harm and risk today, coupled with a public policy impasse, require
649 changes that society must enact in concert and over time. To enable common action, thought leaders
650 must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse. In response to mistrust and polarization, leaders
651 should model humility, empathy, and openness toward learning from others. U.S. peacemaking must
652 bridge wide societal differences, which requires thought leaders who broker civil, informed, and
653 constructive public dialogue.

654
655 **Peacemaking for political actors**

656 U.S. residents view gun violence and the inability of major political parties to work together to be among
657 the nation's top five problems.⁵³ They disagree strongly, along party lines, about the effects of gun
658 ownership on public safety. State and federal laws on gun policy are frequently decided by party-line

659 voting. People generally doubt such laws will bring needed change as partisanship disables civic life and
660 the functioning of democracy.

661
662 Our church teaches that all people are called to civic engagement. Political engagement means caring for
663 the neighbor in numerous public ways—informed voting, community organizing, attending public
664 meetings, and holding public office, among others. Healthy governmental institutions require vigorous
665 movement toward a political center of cooperation in difference that serves the needs of all.

666
667 Gun-related violence and trauma cannot be restrained or prevented without sound and effective
668 governmental action. Sustained reduction will require stronger cooperation by lawmakers and those
669 they represent. Christians practicing civic engagement should seek to discourage polarization and restore
670 public trust in government to protect the neighbor from risk and harm. Such trust can be restored only
671 by change that disrupts public pessimism.

672
673 *What are the distinctive responsibilities of our church and other faith communities in*
674 *peacemaking?*

675
676 Faith communities cultivate experiences, beliefs, values, and practices to welcome all, connect
677 differences, and engage members with stories of the divine. Faith communities intercede in the
678 brokenness and disorder of life—ministering to pain, speaking truth to power, reconciling conflict, and
679 modeling nonviolence and justice. Given the uncertainty, mistrust, and polarization in U.S. society, what
680 makes for peace must include building shared humanity and community to bridge differences and
681 support purposeful cooperation.

682 683 **Bridging divides**

684 To achieve shared responsibility, we must bridge cultural divides between people who own guns and
685 those who do not. These divides exist within and across faith communities as well as our nation
686 generally. Faith communities are uniquely prepared to bring together people with different perspectives
687 about guns and safety. Rostered ministers bridge divides when they witness in word and deed to God's
688 reconciling grace in Christ. They lead toward peace by giving voice to community differences. As pastoral
689 caregivers, rostered ministers can talk to parishioners about responsible gun ownership and protecting
690 the neighbor.

691 692 **Cultivating civic empathy**

693 Mindful of St. Paul's call for mutual upbuilding, faith communities should cultivate civic empathy that
694 enables people to understand and respect the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of those with whom
695 they disagree. This empathy honors the legitimacy of their participation in civic life, acknowledges
696 human fallibility, and promotes political compassion between neighbors. Such generosity of spirit can
697 counter disabling discord so that people can work out their moral and political differences toward
698 community peace in difference, and their needs can be met.

699 700 **Building community**

701 Reducing gun-related violence and trauma must include building interpersonal and community relations
702 where people feel heard, valued, and connected. Research on suicide and homicide reveals a need for
703 trust, inclusion, agency, and accountability among people at risk of perpetrating violence. The mutual
704 bonds of love and belonging that faith communities cultivate are critical to countering the isolation and
705 alienation that lead to destructive behavior. Love of neighbor always furthers earthly peace.

706

707 **Advocating policy**

708 This message commends our church and other faith communities to engage in gun-related political
709 advocacy. Our shared responsibility for restraint and prevention expands the scope and scale of such
710 work to address trauma as well as violence.

711
712 This message urges congregations and synods within the ELCA to form standing peacemaking groups to
713 learn together and witness publicly. Such ministry will support civic empathy and build community. The
714 mission of these groups will depend upon social location as well as needs and opportunities at hand.
715 This work may include alliances with ecumenical and interreligious groups. This message outlines various
716 peacemaking callings for these groups and commends existing social teaching documents to advance
717 comprehensive advocacy for peace.

718
719 Concerning ELCA advocacy to manage access to guns, our church affirms hunting, sporting, policing, and
720 military uses. Today, handguns are used most often for crime. Since 1993, ELCA policy has called for
721 legislative management of handguns and military assault weapons. This policy has consistently focused
722 on laws aimed at criminal misuse while calling for ongoing assessment of access management. It holds
723 that controls are needed to protect the neighbor and encourage responsible behavior.

724
725 **Healing trauma**

726 Gun-related trauma occurs in various forms and degrees. Trauma not only harms individuals and
727 communities; it can also contribute to cycles of violence that affect future generations. People in the U.S.
728 are increasingly aware of the complex and lasting aspects of trauma in childhood or in war and the need
729 for restorative care. Greater awareness of gun-related trauma is needed because countless neighbors
730 require care now and in the future. Faith communities have institutional wisdom and members
731 committed to awareness of this often-invisible moral harm. They can affect personal and communal
732 healing.

733 **Conclusion: The summons to peacemaking**

734
735 The ELCA believes communities of faith exist because God encounters human beings with divine love as
736 well as divine demands that shape identity and behavior. Consequently, communities of faith should deal
737 with the way things really are and what really matters, grounded in trust of what God will bring about.

738
739 As a Christian church, the ELCA teaches that “in publicly gathering to proclaim and celebrate God’s
740 Gospel of peace, the Church uniquely contributes to earthly peace. Its most valuable mission for peace is
741 to keep alive news of God’s resolve for peace, declaring that all are responsible to God for earthly peace
742 and announcing forgiveness, healing, and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴

743
744 This message proclaims anew that all people are responsible for peacemaking toward a vast reduction of
745 gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. All members of our society are responsible for doing what
746 makes for peace. Christians should make peace by living always in Christ and in the neighbor—sustained
747 in forgiveness, healing, and hope by the promise of God’s resolve for peace.

748
749

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²⁰ The social message "Suicide Prevention" (1999, 2021) gives attention to these tragedies touching so many. For a comprehensive discussion of gun suicide, see Michael D. Anestis, Allison E. Bond, and Shelby L. Bandel, "Understanding Risk and Implementing Data-driven Solutions for Firearm Suicide," *ANNALS of the American*

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²³ See David M. Studdert, Yifan Zhang, Sonja A. Swanson, and others, “Handgun Ownership and Suicide in California,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 382 (June 4, 2020): 2220-2229, www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/nejmsa1916744.

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²⁷ Normalized violence and trauma have been shown to be harmful to the emotional, cognitive, and spiritual development and health of children, youth, and adults. Black and Hispanic youth in one study report feelings of being abandoned by adults—parents, teachers, police—as they navigate high exposure to violence, crime, and drug use. They share a pervasive social mistrust and lack of attachment to their elders. Exposure to and fear of gun violence cause these young people to give up resilience and hope. To cope with trauma and to support their families, they report becoming indifferent to violence and resigned to delinquent behavior. Seeing no resources to overcome the destruction posed by guns, crime, and drugs, these youth feel they must leave their community to succeed. See Ijeoma Opara, David T. Lardier Jr., Isha Metzger, and others, “‘Bullets Have No Names’: A Qualitative Exploration of Community Trauma Among Black and Latinx Youth,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 29 (August 2020): 2117-2129, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8409467/.

²⁸ Buggs and others, “Social and Structural Determinants of Community Firearm Violence and Community Trauma,” 233-4 (see note 26 for link); “Community-based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence,” Center for American Progress, July 14, 2022, www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/#:~:text=CVI%20programs%20reduce%20gun%20violence&text=An%20alternative%20to%20reliance%20on,are%20used%20across%20the%20country; Jason Corburn, DeVone Boggan, Brian Muhammad, and others, “Advancing Urban Peace: Preventing Gun Violence and Healing Traumatized Youth,” *Youth Justice* 22, no. 3 (2022): 272-289, journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14732254211020138.

²⁹ Jillian Peterson and James Densley, *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic* (New York: Abrams Press, 2021), 4-5.

³⁰ Peterson and Densley argue that mass shooters typically share four characteristics: (1) childhood trauma, (2) an identifiable crisis point, (3) a script to follow and someone to blame, and (4) opportunity. Research shows the rate of childhood trauma among U.S. mass shooters to be three times higher than in the general population.

³¹ ELCA social message “Community Violence” (1994), 1-2, 4.

³² *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013), 9, 21-2.

³³ ELCA social message “Community Violence” (1994), 6.

³⁴ *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), 11-12. The text declares, “First and foremost, love of neighbor obligates us to act to prevent wars and to seek alternatives to them. ... For this reason, this statement focuses on building a just peace and identifies tasks that create conditions for peace.” This focus coheres with “just war” principles, where war is always a mournful act of last resort. However, this moral priority of preventing war bears the influence of pacifism within the wider church.

³⁵ *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), 7-8.

³⁶ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 82.

³⁷ Daniel Callahan, “Minimalist Ethics,” *Hastings Center Report* 11, no. 5 (October 1981): 19-25.

³⁸ This liberal individualism finds expression in the 2008 U.S. Supreme Court decision *District of Columbia v. Heller*, which granted Second Amendment rights to bear arms to private individuals. However, according to *Heller*, this entitlement is not absolute. Government can infringe upon individual liberty through laws that protect the public health and the safety of residents. Personal freedom cannot transgress harm to others. See Michael R. Ulrich, “A Public Health Approach to Gun Violence, Legally Speaking,” *Journal of Law, Medicine & Ethics* 47, S2 (2019): 114, journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1073110519857332.

³⁹ This church needs to be in discernment about whether and under what conditions defensive use may be affirmed. Christians have and should struggle with the question of using lethal force, because Jesus called his disciples to follow him in nonviolent love of friends and enemies alike, even unto torture and death. Though the apostolic church rejected war and embraced martyrdom, Roman soldier converts, as well as Christian protection from and eventual rule over the Roman Empire, brought divisions within the church over nonviolence that endure to this day.

⁴⁰ Michael B. Siegel and Claire C. Boine, “The Meaning of Guns to Gun Owners in the U.S.: The 2019 National Lawful Use of Guns Survey,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 59, no. 5 (2020): 678-685, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0749379720302397.

⁴¹ On gun owner views and safety practices, see “America’s Complex Relationship With Guns,” Pew Research Center, June 2017 (see note 8 for link); Michael D. Anestis, Jane Moerl-Brooks, Rachel L. Johnson, and others, “Assessment of Firearm Storage Practices in the US,” 2022, *JAMA Network Open*, jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2801915; Michael D. Anestis, Allison E. Bond, Jayna Mocerri-Brooks, and others (2023), “Perceptions of the Utility of Secure Firearm Storage Methods as a Suicide Prevention Tool Among Firearm Owners Who Currently Store Their Firearms Loaded and Unlocked,” *Suicide and Life-threatening Behavior*, 00 (2023): 1-7, doi.org/10.1111/sltb.13023.

⁴² “Gun Violence Widely Viewed as a Major—and Growing—National Problem,” Pew Research Center, June 28, 2023.

⁴³ On the prospects for common ground on gun control, see Patrick Sharkey and Megan Kang, “The Era of Progress on Gun Mortality: State Gun Regulations and Gun Death from 1991 to 2016,” *Epidemiology* 34, no. 6 (2023): 786-792, and Kathleen Grene, Armani Dharani, and Michael Siegel, “Gun Owners’ Assessment of Gun Safety Policy: Their Underlying Principles and Detailed Opinions,” *Injury Epidemiology* 10:21 (2023), doi.org/10.1186/s40621-023-00430-z.

⁴⁴ On the Healthy People 2030 program, see health.gov/healthypeople, which includes these goals for gun-related violence: health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/violence-prevention/reduce-firearm-related-deaths-ivp-13.

⁴⁵ Gun-culture and gun-violence research is growing after 20 years of government-related decline, and stable resources are returning to encourage scholars to dedicate their careers to this field, such as the recently formed Research Society for the Prevention of Firearm-Related Harms. Meanwhile, respected institutes such as the Pew Research Center and programs such as RAND Corporation’s Gun Policy in America provide nonpartisan information that serves peacemaking today.

⁴⁶ Adam Gabbatt, “Wave of Lawsuits Against US Gun Makers Raises Hope of End of Mass Shootings,” *Guardian*, May 27, 2023, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/may/27/gun-lawsuits-manufacturer-sellers-crimes; Timothy

D. Lytton, "An End Run Around the Gun Industry Liability Shield," *Regulatory Review*, July 26, 2021, www.thereview.org/2021/07/26/lytton-end-run-around-gun-industry-liability-shield/.

⁴⁷ House Committee on Oversight and Reform, July 27, 2022, "Memorandum to Members on Investigation in Gun Industry Practices and Profits," prepared by Chairwoman Carolyn B. Maloney, docs.house.gov/meetings/GO/GO00/20220727/115024/HHRG-117-GO00-20220727-SD005.pdf;

⁴⁸ "Community Violence—Gun Control," Social Policy Resolution, CA93.06.10, www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#Socialresolutions.

⁴⁹ "Views on Semiautomatic Weapons Remain Partisan," AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, May 2022, apnorc.org/projects/views-on-assault-weapons-remain-partisan/#:~:text=Fifty%2Done%20percent%20of%20Americans,additional%2018%25%20hold%20neither%20opinion.

⁵⁰ Emily Guskin, Aadit Tambe, and Jon Gerberg, "Why Do Americans Own AR-15s?," *Washington Post*, March 27, 2023, www.washingtonpost.com/nation/interactive/2023/american-ar-15-gun-owners/.

⁵¹ *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013), 9.

⁵² Footnote for the Violence Project.

⁵³ "Inflation, Health Costs, Partisan Cooperation Among the Nation's Top Problems," Pew Research Center, June 21, 2023, www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/.

⁵⁴ *For Peace in God's World* (1995), 3.

1 A social message on ...

2

3

Gun-related Violence and Trauma

4

5 *As adopted on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America by the Church Council on*
6 *“~~xx~~” by a vote of “xx.”*

7

8

9

This Message in Summary

10

11 *Guns and gun-related violence and trauma are woven into U.S. history and society in substantial,*
12 *complex, and problematic ways. The full social message therefore requires length, nuance, and*
13 *complexity. This summary provides an overview of key aspects of the four sections, much like a map that*
14 *conveys the main points of a complex landscape.*

15

16 *I. Introduction: God’s Resolve for Peace Abides*

17 *II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem*

18 *III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God’s Resolve for Peace*

19 *IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace*

20

21 *At its heart, this social message makes the case for reframing the gun debate and activity in the U.S.*
22 *beyond gun rights versus gun control. The message commits the ELCA to a moral framework of shared*
23 *responsibility that comes to terms with trauma honestly and seeks prevention carefully through a public*
24 *health model. Such a model suggests individual and institutional practices that could reduce tragic,*
25 *irresponsible, and illegal uses of firearms and their related risks and harms. This message argues that*
26 *such a framework can open up constructive dialogue and action across many, many communities and*
27 *should be publicly embraced.*

28

29 *Section I shows how this message builds upon the scriptural references, insights, themes, and*
30 *commitments found in the ELCA social statement *For Peace in God’s World*, the ELCA social message “*On**
31 *Community Violence”***and draws from others such as the social statement *The Church and Criminal***
32 ***Justice*.** *(Readers may review those at www.elca.org/socialstatements.) From a Lutheran Christian*
33 *perspective, it returns to themes such as peacemaking and prevention that, too often, have been*
34 *sidelined. It soberly charts the horrific facts and the disparities of age, class, gender, and race of the*
35 *nearly 50,000 lives taken each year. It introduces, as well, two factors increasingly recognized by social*
36 *science: the widespread effects of trauma and the rise of defensive gun cultures.*

37

38 *Section II explores the multiple, often unrecognized forms of trauma resulting from armed threats and*
39 *shootings in which the perpetrator intends to harm others or self. These actions not only harm people*
40 *physically but traumatizes human spirits, families, communities, and the social order itself. The call to see*
41 *trauma in this way expands moral responsibility for gun-related harm.*

42

43 *Section III reminds Christians of the centrality of Christlike service of neighbor in our social roles. It calls*
44 *them, and all people of goodwill, to practice wise and proactive efforts to restrain gun-related violence*
45 *and prevent it. This emphasis on prevention aligns the ELCA with a growing movement to approach gun*
46 *misuse as a public health crisis. This section also recognizes that members of our church and society are*

47 *divided in various ways and degrees about how to reduce gun-related harms. These divisions cannot be*
48 *fully addressed in this message, and some of them call for further discernment, such as defensive gun use*
49 *for example.*

50
51 *Section IV calls upon multiple types of secular communities to prevent violence and make peace. It spells*
52 *out the responsibilities of communities as diverse as shooting associations and firearm defense groups,*
53 *health care providers and firearm businesses. The section also describes the distinctive responsibilities of*
54 *our church and other faith communities toward peacemaking. These include calls to bridge divides, build*
55 *community, advocate policy, and care for the traumatized.*

56
57 *This message concludes that reframed understanding and practices in responsible communities can resist*
58 *and reverse the immense and mournful toll of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use in the United*
59 *States today.*

60 *Message in Full*

61

62 I. God's Resolve for Peace Abides

63

64 "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,'
65 when there is no peace." —Jeremiah 6:14

66

67 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." —Matthew 5:9

68

69 "For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from
70 you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you."

71

—Isaiah 54:10

72

73 Christians are called to be peacemakers. When Christians make peace, they respond in faith and
74 gratitude toward God's sovereign promise of a world where violence and trauma are no more. God's
75 resolve for peace through steadfast love calls all people to do as God does—to ever strive for peace
76 through love of neighbor. This striving takes many forms through the roles and places of responsibility
77 where we live—and where today we lament gun-related violence and trauma in the United States.

78

79 Christians are not alone in mourning. Most people in the U.S. long for an end to senseless harm and
80 killing, even as they may disagree passionately about solutions.¹ These disagreements reflect cultural
81 and moral diversity in society and in our churches, which are compounded by mistrust, exclusion, and
82 alienation.² Discord over firearm misuse cannot be addressed in isolation from these and other social
83 realities. Among them, health disparities of age, class, gender, and race contribute significantly to
84 shootings that claim nearly 50,000 lives each year.³ Some communities know seemingly endless violence
85 and trauma due to tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. There is no peace for these neighbors or
86 many more throughout our society.

87

88 For Christians, human yearnings to live in peace are continually thwarted by relations and activities of
89 sinful brokenness and disorder that beset all people, communities, and institutions. Individually and
90 collectively, humans sin when they fail to love and trust God above all else or when they turn inward at
91 the expense of others. They possess the gifts of God but withhold them from their neighbors. Gun-
92 related violence and trauma are among the ways humans fail to serve God's covenant of peace and to

93 live in good and right relations. Despite our sinful identities and ways, we trust that God’s resolve for
94 peace abides.

95
96 For three decades, the ELCA has addressed the manifestations of gun-related violence and trauma in the
97 U.S. through social messages, resolutions, statements, study materials, and pastoral letters. To hold
98 government accountable for civic well-being, ELCA leaders and members have advocated for state and
99 federal regulations to prevent firearm misuse.⁴ In these and other ways, our church has sought through
100 teaching and witness to reduce self-harm and criminal violence involving guns. Yet there is no peace.

101
102 Nevertheless, we hold that God continues to call all people to strive anew toward solutions. Christians
103 and all people of goodwill should, above all, do no harm and avoid risk of harm while striving in
104 numerous ways for peace—in our homes, our communities, and our souls. Through this message, this
105 church affirms that current societal trends and new understandings of gun-related risks and harms call us
106 to witness anew and with urgency to our shared responsibility for peacemaking. We can collaborate to
107 reduce harm and seek peace, even as we disagree about how to address some complex and changing
108 realities.

109
110 *What societal trends and new understandings call the ELCA to witness anew?*

111
112 **Growing and disparate violence amid pervasive insecurity**

113 At the time of this writing, national gun suicide and murder rates have recently returned to near-record
114 highs. Three hundred people in the U.S. are shot every day. Over 100 perish. Though public mass
115 shootings account for only a tiny fraction of criminal homicides, they have grave effects beyond lost lives.
116 Guns are now the leading cause of death among individuals under 20. Within this population and others,
117 persisting racial disparities of health and harm cry out for attention.⁵

118
119 Though U.S. shootings occur disproportionately across populations and places, members of our society
120 share a pervasive sense of insecurity.⁶ This insecurity takes different forms and degrees, with various
121 sources and histories. We live in an information-saturated society that delivers instantaneous news of
122 gun deaths and the troubles they tell. Narratives of social unrest, constant change, and uncontrolled
123 threat naturally provoke fear. This insecurity can be confirmed when elected officials respond to yet
124 more carnage with partisan rhetoric and simplistic solutions.

125
126 **Seeing trauma and seeking protection**

127 Two dimensions of insecurity merit searching attention today. First, encounters with gun-related violence
128 are increasingly understood by researchers to involve forms of trauma that have powerful lasting effects
129 on individuals and communities.⁷ As a result, the risks and harms of gun violence are now understood to
130 extend far beyond people wounded and killed by gunfire.

131
132 Second, while gun-related trauma and insecurity take different forms, one significant public response to
133 perceived threat and vulnerability can be seen in the growing trend of defensive gun ownership among
134 people who buy firearms. Security concerns are prompting millions of previously unarmed people each
135 year to become owners. These purchases add to the some 40% of U.S. households where an estimated
136 75 million or more owners keep over 400 million firearms.⁸

137 **II. Seeing Trauma in Insecurity, Despair, and Mayhem**

138

139 “Thus says the Lord: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping.
140 Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children,
141 because they are no more.” —Jeremiah 31:15
142

143 “My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is.” —Lamentations 3:17
144

145 *Why is seeing trauma morally significant?*

146
147 Peacemaking begins with understanding what is going on and what our neighbors need to flourish.
148 Trauma research offers insight into the often-unmet needs of people and communities that experience
149 gun violence. This research exposes the full reach and impact of tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use.
150 It reveals that far more people than officially reported are harmed or at risk of harm. By seeing the
151 trauma of gun-related violence, we become mindful of less visible assaults and burdens that our
152 neighbors bear, which call for moral concern and response.
153

154 Gun-related trauma affects people as individuals and as members of families, communities, and society.
155 It affects some people and communities much more profoundly than others due to disparities in health
156 conditions and protective resources.⁹ Seeing trauma can help us to advance our understanding of the
157 threats, impacts, and legacies of criminal violence and self-harm. We can better name wounds that call
158 for care and better formulate wise public policy that seeks prevention as well as restraint.
159

160 *What is gun-related trauma?*¹⁰

161
162 Gun-related trauma includes individual and collective responses to harmful events and threatening
163 conditions. It stems from exposure to events or conditions that are emotionally disturbing or life-
164 threatening, with lasting adverse effects on health. People can be traumatized at any age, but childhood
165 trauma, especially when untreated or unrecognized, can have lifelong debilitating effects.¹¹
166

167 Trauma is a subjective and socially conditioned experience. Two or more people can experience the
168 same event or condition but may not be traumatized in the same way. Trauma varies according to one’s
169 proximity to the event or condition, the existing resources and strengths of those affected, and the
170 severity and persistence of the assault. It varies according to the amount of support needed and
171 available to affected people.
172

173 **Forms and relations of trauma**

174 Gun-related trauma can follow an acute incident such as armed robbery. It can result from adverse
175 childhood experiences of routine exposure to gun violence. Traumatic events can be communal as well
176 as individual and can have a compounding effect when they happen to people who cope with preexisting
177 trauma that stems from biases such as homophobia, transphobia, racism and sexism.
178

179 Some people and groups can experience trauma as firsthand participants whereas others may be
180 traumatized as secondhand participants responding to wounded people.¹² Scholars note how trauma
181 extends in different ways through time. A traumatic event may end, but effects can linger.¹³ Persisting
182 trauma can be transmitted across generations through families and communities. Whole societies can be
183 traumatized by eruptions of violence such as a terrorist attack that triggers insecurity and disorientation.
184

184 **Powerlessness and trauma**

185 Human health and well-being depend upon our individual ability to cope with challenging life events.
186 People must summon courage and resilience to function as agents in relation to others. Similarly,

187 humane societies require individuals who respect, trust, and cooperate daily with others to fulfill life-
188 giving roles and institutions. Gun-related trauma threatens these personal, social, and spiritual goods.

189
190 When gun-related trauma occurs, people are wounded in body, mind, and spirit by experiences that
191 overwhelm understanding and integration. These experiences have no place in the beliefs and values
192 people use to make sense of their experiences and to pursue lives worthy of their humanity. In a state of
193 trauma, the existential convictions that hold our lives together can be shredded.

194
195 Gun violence threatens bodily life. The trauma that can follow threatens meaningful and purposeful
196 agency. It can provoke emotional and spiritual crisis that has no apparent end or that may lie dormant
197 for years. To see trauma in the lives of people affected by gun-related violence is to see suffering and
198 powerlessness.

199
200 *How do forms of gun-related trauma affect members of our society?*

201
202 **Anticipatory trauma and defensive responses**

203 Traumatizing experiences and resulting perceptions of insecurity can inform the way people picture the
204 future and their environments. These neighbors live in some degree of life-altering fear. Senses of threat
205 can put them on guard for imagined likely harm and even justify hypervigilance. Polling research
206 indicates that four in 10 people in the U.S. fear becoming a victim of gun-related violence. Young people
207 are more fearful than adults. Over half of our neighbors expect gun violence to increase in coming years.
208 They are evenly divided over whether gun ownership makes the country safer. Most individuals who buy
209 guns today do so for defensive uses and are increasingly socially diverse.¹⁴

210
211 Defensive gun owners are responding to various perceptions or experiences of unrest and insecurity—
212 lawlessness, social instability, racism, xenophobia, and tyranny. They seek to protect self, family,
213 community, culture, political liberty, and other goods. Many defensive gun owners think that
214 government fails to keep the peace and that civilians must therefore claim their right to use lethal force
215 in defense against death or grave bodily injury.¹⁵ Certain gun rights rulings from U.S. courts and
216 legislative actions have strengthened the sense of need for defensive gun ownership today.

217
218 Though a majority of U.S. residents decline gun ownership, many are open to it in the future. Given
219 current trends, every person will likely know at least one victim of gun violence in their social network.¹⁶
220 Over half of adults say they or family members have personally experienced gun-related threat, injury, or
221 self-defense. Eight in 10 people report feeling safe in their neighborhoods, yet an equal number report
222 that they have taken at least one precaution to protect themselves or family members from gun-related
223 violence.¹⁷

224
225 In circumstances such as these, where people adopt defensive mindsets and practices, they are
226 exhibiting a form of trauma that can be understood as anticipatory. Anticipatory trauma has been
227 documented among violence survivors and people and communities that take steps to avoid becoming
228 victims.¹⁸ It involves taking protective actions grounded in fear of sudden, life-threatening violence, a
229 fear people know in different ways and degrees. Some people buy guns whereas others purchase knives
230 or pepper spray. Parents talk to their children about mass shooters or the police. Kids go to school
231 wearing bulletproof backpacks and practice lockdown drills. Individuals avoid large crowds. Millions
232 today anticipate trauma.¹⁹

233
234 **Gun suicide and survivor trauma**

235 We can see trauma not only in gun-related dread but also in personal loss and pain following gun-related
236 self-harm and suicide. Nearly 60% of gun deaths in the U.S. are self-inflicted, ending over 25,000 lives.²⁰
237 Firearms do not cause suicidal thoughts. They do, however, provide a highly lethal means of ending a
238 personal crisis characterized by desperate and impulsive thinking. Ninety percent of gun suicide attempts
239 are completed, and these account for half of all suicides. White and Indigenous men account for the vast
240 majority of these deaths²¹ Because these lives end violently and often without warning, they are
241 traumatic for surviving family and friends.²²

242
243 Research shows that ready firearm access is a risk factor for suicide.²³ Firearm suicides can be reduced
244 through safety restraints that put time and distance between the firearm and the person in crisis. Such
245 restraints include safety-seeking laws, educational programs, and voluntary practices. People increasingly
246 recognize firearm suicide as a public health crisis marked by disparities that call for restraint and
247 prevention. Such suicides can be prevented through improved access to mental health care and greater
248 commitment to the social determinants of health.

249

250 **Criminal homicide and community trauma**

251 Over 20,000 U.S. residents are murdered with firearms every year. Contrary to wide-spread belief, this
252 violence, however, is concentrated significantly among relatively few people who live in high-crime
253 neighborhoods and communities. Though the U.S. has the highest rates of gun ownership and homicide
254 among developed countries, 99.21% of gun owners do not threaten or harm others or themselves.²⁴ Gun
255 violence, then, correlates significantly with communities marginalized because of poverty, race, and
256 ethnicity, which are already suffering from high unemployment and public health disparities.²⁵ This
257 continual threat and deadly gun use contributes to cycles of violence and trauma common to
258 economically depressed neighborhoods.²⁶

259
260 When violence keeps neighborhoods from meeting their needs, considerable community trauma
261 follows.²⁷ If social needs continue to be unmet, trauma can become intergenerational. Persisting
262 violence erodes social capital, impairs social networks, and breeds hopelessness. Community trauma
263 threatens investments in housing, schools, businesses, and recreational spaces. Social solidarity and
264 responsibility may suffer. Some people may become desensitized to violence and embrace attitudes and
265 behaviors that engender more violence.²⁸

266
267 Policing and incarceration have historically been the primary responses to community violence and
268 trauma. Today, because more people understand the need for prevention, community-based violence
269 intervention programs are making important gains in many affected neighborhoods and show promise
270 for reducing gun homicide.²⁹ These programs cultivate community leadership and knowledge, focusing
271 on individuals most at risk of perpetrating violence.

272
273 Community-based violence intervention programs develop leaders and provide support services, tailored
274 to local needs, that promote healthy alternatives to daily violence and trauma. Respected community
275 members interrupt conflict and retaliation, reducing the wounds and powerlessness of trauma by
276 building relationships between conflicting parties and between people and the support services they
277 need. Community-based violence intervention programs across our nation do effective peacemaking—
278 and create hope.

279

280 **Public mass shootings and the violence-trauma cycle**

281 Public mass shootings are another source of trauma. These are events in which four or more people are
282 murdered indiscriminately in public.³⁰ Though these shootings may receive outsize attention in the news

283 and public opinion, they still cause immense loss, suffering, and fear. They violate spaces where
284 community unfolds—workplaces, schools, worship places, shops, plazas, clubs, theaters. They traumatize
285 the local community—and the nation.

286
287 Mass public shootings injure, kill, and traumatize hundreds and sometimes thousands of people at a
288 time with distressing frequency. Though the risk of being shot in public remains extremely low, we as a
289 society should recognize the pervasive fear of wanton murder as anticipatory trauma. These shootings
290 merit societal concern for the losses sustained and the shock, sorrow, and dread that follow for so many
291 people. This violence offers a glimpse into the trauma of all victims and an opportunity to grow in
292 empathy and solidarity.

293
294 The violence-trauma cycle also is at play in domestic shootings (members of a household and/or
295 family) and intimate partner violence (past and current dating partners and past and current
296 spouses). Guns in the home increase the risk of use and extend the power dynamic of abusers
297 to threaten and control. This more often involves males over females.³¹ Gun homicides and
298 threats of gun violence both create and increase trauma among survivors, families, and
299 communities.

300
301 We must also understand neighbors who kill.³² Mass shooters typically have experienced violence and
302 trauma as children—parental suicide, physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, bullying. Without
303 proper care such trauma can inspire teenage and adult rage, hate, and despair that can lead to angry,
304 isolated, and retaliatory behavior, both punishing and suicidal. Trauma does not fully explain mass
305 shootings. However, these events exhibit the violence-trauma cycle seen in other communities troubled
306 by suicide and criminal homicide.

307

308 III. Countering Violence and Trauma as God’s Resolve for Peace

309

310 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you: Do not
311 resist an evildoer.” —Matthew 5:38-9

312

313 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you:
314 Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” —Matthew 5:43-4

315

316 Gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. demand courageous and unremitting works of love seeking
317 peace. This seeking must be undertaken collectively and collaboratively to bridge disabling conflicts and
318 to secure peace for all those threatened and harmed by gun violence—victims, perpetrators, and
319 neighbors at risk. The social teaching of our church calls us to this Christlike service.

320

321 *What is the current social teaching of the ELCA on gun-related violence?*

322

323 **ELCA teaching on community violence**

324 The 1994 social message “Community Violence” addresses a society “haunted by violence” amid
325 “disintegrating social structures and values” that affect U.S. residents of “every class, color, and locality,”
326 while noting inequalities that continue today. It commends a proactive ethic of prevention and urges
327 ELCA members “to take up the challenge to prevent violence and to attack the complex causes that make
328 violence so pervasive.”³³

329
330 The message notes that countering the brokenness and disorder that lead to violence and trauma will be
331 an incremental and long-term process. Present threats and harms must be restrained as well—to protect
332 the neighbor. God tasks government to administer justice, maintain order, and establish security.³⁴ This
333 governance includes coercive and sometimes lethal force through policing and the military. To safeguard
334 the public, government may enact laws that regulate gun access.

335
336 This ethic of restraint supplements an ethic of prevention. Together these paired concerns seek a
337 response equal to the complexity of violence, including its traumatizing dimensions.³⁵

338 339 **ELCA teaching on peacemaking**

340 With the 1995 social statement *For Peace in God's World*, ELCA teaching adopted another proactive
341 stance by affirming a common calling to peacemaking. Though the statement aligns with the Lutheran
342 tradition that Christians may serve in the military and conduct just wars, it boldly adds that this church
343 “needs the witness of its members who in the name of Jesus Christ refuse all participation in war, who
344 commit themselves to establish peace and justice on earth by nonviolent power alone.” Accordingly, the
345 ELCA social statement embraces the priority of building a just peace to prevent war.³⁶ Our church also
346 teaches that peacemaking should define domestic and community life as well as the affairs of the state.

347
348 The ELCA statement commits our church to undertake Christian peacemaking in a pluralistic and
349 interdependent society where God works among all people, communities, and structures. We are to
350 participate in God's resolve for peace through the roles, associations, and institutions that sustain human
351 life. In all these, all people of goodwill have opportunities and a shared responsibility to build a just
352 peace of unity in diversity.³⁷

353 354 *How does love of neighbor advance peacemaking today?*

355 356 **Living in the neighbor through love**

357 Christian peacemakers participate in the love of God when they counter brokenness and disorder
358 through works of love. In the foundational essay “The Freedom of a Christian,” Martin Luther pictures
359 this participation as living in Christ through faith and in the neighbor through love. Christians should “do
360 nothing in this life except what is profitable, necessary, and life-giving” for the neighbor. We should
361 “serve and help our neighbor in every possible way.”³⁸ Christian love builds powerful relations of giving
362 and receiving that counter the isolation, despair, enmity, and nihilism that often contribute to lethal
363 harm and criminal homicide.

364 365 **Shared responsibility beyond liberal individualism**

366 Christian love of neighbor advances peacemaking because it counters a widespread understanding of
367 gun ownership that minimizes personal responsibility for societal violence and trauma. Many U.S.
368 residents embrace this minimal understanding, often called liberal individualism, that values personal
369 freedom and autonomy over benefiting others.

370
371 In this view, individuals may do as they please so long as they do not harm others or put them at serious
372 risk. Gun owners, then, are duty-bound to do no harm to their neighbors—but not morally obligated to
373 benefit them.³⁹ Owners fulfill their social responsibility so long as they practice safe firearm use and
374 thereby respect their neighbors' rights to life and liberty. In this view, the state is tasked to protect the
375 public from illegal gun use through legally authorized coercive restraint and lethal force. It should not

376 infringe on a person’s sphere of liberty and self-determination. It should not limit individual gun
377 ownership beyond prohibiting harm and serious risk to others.⁴⁰

378
379 Owners who embrace this liberal individualism do not see themselves as duty-bound to reduce the
380 collective burdens of U.S. gun ownership. However, Christian love of neighbor calls for greater
381 responsibility. Shared responsibility for the good of society means that Christians and all people should
382 vigorously reduce gun-related harm and risk through many callings and wise practices as works of love.
383 Section IV elaborates on how this can be done.

384
385 *Can a Christian be a defensive gun owner?*

386
387 **Addressing defensive gun use**

388 At this writing, the ELCA has not addressed the question whether Christians may use guns for defensive
389 purposes. Does the Christian call to peacemaking include a voluntary, legally authorized, and regulated
390 role of defending a vulnerable neighbor against attack? What about self-defense in such situations?
391 These are critical and complex questions for U.S. Christians today that call for open and civil
392 conversations across our church. This message provides a framework for personal and communal
393 deliberation and discernment and calls on members, congregations, and synods to engage in them.⁴¹

394
395 **Affirming necessary government restraint**

396 Millions of U.S. residents buy guns today because they lack confidence in policing to keep them safe. In
397 support of this stance, there are troubling law enforcement deficiencies in some states and
398 communities. Warranted or not, this pervasive sense of insecurity is real. The society-wide question is
399 whether mass civilian ownership of defensive guns promotes personal and public safety and should
400 become a permanent feature of our society.

401
402 This message holds that gun-related violence and trauma can and should be vastly reduced through
403 multifaceted restraint and prevention. Our church affirms that police may need to use coercive restraint
404 and lethal force to reduce tragic, irresponsible, and illegal gun use. It also affirms police reform attuned
405 to peacemaking philosophy and practice, along with better public health and safety systems. These
406 encourage the best societal response to gun violence and trauma in the U.S. currently.

407
408 **Nonviolence amid human brokenness and disorder**

409 Christ’s disciples should ever witness to the coming reign of God when violence will pass away. This
410 witness occurs in a sinful world where vulnerable neighbors must be protected from harm. For Christians
411 who practice peacemaking, violence must be the last resort in defense of the neighbor. Violence against
412 an aggressor must avoid collateral harm to others and be limited to restoring peace following hostilities.
413 In this way, disciples seek to love the enemy through nonviolent action while accepting coercive and
414 sometimes violent governmental protection as a godly way of containing sin.

415
416 **IV. Toward Shared Responsibility in What Makes for Peace**

417
418 “Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” —Romans 14:19

419
420 In Romans, St. Paul writes with concern to a community divided over dietary practice. Because the work
421 of God in Christ benefits all, St. Paul urges the community to seek peace and flourishing together. This

422 message teaches that Christians in the U.S. today are called to such reconciling and constructive work in
423 a society divided over gun use and what peace and flourishing require of our society.

424
425 At the same time, there is a related responsibility for all people of goodwill as a matter of civic duty.
426 Relatively few people in our society perpetrate gun violence or trauma against others or themselves.
427 However, these neighbors cause immense loss and lasting harm to civic life. This message reasons that a
428 societal project of peacemaking requires all civic-minded individuals and groups to contribute through
429 institutions and associations dedicated to human health and fulfillment. Historical experience and
430 growing research warrant that multifaceted efforts toward personal and communal peace can reduce
431 gun violence. Peacemaking should be a civic role and a shared responsibility of all.

432
433 *How can members of our society share responsibility for peacemaking?*

434
435 **Peacemaking for gun owners and shooting associations**

436 Approximately a third of adults in the U.S. own guns. They have different interests—collecting, hunting,
437 defense, sporting, work—and different outlooks about what ownership means and requires. Most see
438 gun ownership as a normal lifelong activity, and many worry that various social actors seek to take their
439 guns away. They often feel misunderstood and unfairly blamed for violence.⁴²

440
441 Many gun owners see themselves as safety-minded and more conscientious about training, storage, and
442 use than others might think. They are reluctant to get involved in gun violence prevention apart from
443 taking responsibility for their own conduct, which typically means seeking personal safety legally. The
444 shooting associations generally support this stance. Though owners and associations often contest
445 coercive legal restrictions to reduce gun misuse, most agree that effective voluntary practices exist and
446 may be willing to promote these practices through collective public action.

447
448 Gun owners and shooting associations today should undertake greater public responsibility. By owning
449 and using a lethal device in public, U.S. gun owners and their associations constitute a distinct
450 community and should be accountable to the two-thirds of U.S. adults who do not own a gun and
451 deserve to know that owners are trustworthy and safe members of their communities. When someone
452 misuses a gun, it contributes to societal trauma and threatens the personal freedom and public trust
453 enjoyed by gun owners and nonowners alike in a nation with more guns than people.

454
455 The ELCA calls upon U.S. gun owners and shooting associations to assume a collective responsibility and
456 an active commitment to be a trustworthy community within a diverse, interdependent, and fragile
457 society. Some owners are not observant of high standards of public safety through proper training,
458 storage, and use. They should become more responsible through education and formation by
459 associations and other owners committed to reducing misuse and harm through rigorous voluntary
460 practice.⁴³ Thousands of harmful outcomes could be avoided annually if every gun had a safe owner.
461 These standards can be codified by shooting associations and exercised voluntarily. Collective voluntary
462 response can preclude the need for protective legal restrictions by government in the absence of
463 universal safe practice.

464
465 Active leadership by gun owners and shooting associations to cultivate gun safety would be a major step
466 toward a peaceable society. The safety that gun owners typically seek for themselves, loved ones, and
467 friends must be secured for all people. This church commends creation and promotion of obligatory
468 universal safety standards to support a culture of peace. In addition to saving lives, such activism would
469 address misunderstanding and mistrust between gun owners and nonowners.

470
471 Beyond universal safe practice, gun owners and shooting associations can be a cultural and political force
472 for reducing gun-related violence and trauma for all. Collectively, such leaders can promote legal
473 restraints to protect victims and stop perpetrators. They can encourage gun violence prevention through
474 public health strategies and practices.

475
476 **Peacemaking for firearm management and firearm defense groups**

477 U.S. residents are evenly divided over whether permissive and mass gun ownership diminishes or
478 increases public safety.⁴⁴ Two opposing advocacy groups reflect and propagate this division. Both groups
479 seek to protect public safety by restraining violence, albeit in different ways and with differing visions of
480 peace and flourishing.

481
482 Firearm management groups seek to regulate and restrict access to guns to decrease risks of misuse—
483 accidents, homicides, and suicides. They seek governmental regulation and enforcement to affirm
484 societal norms and to mitigate harmful behavior that perpetuates the cycle of violence and trauma.

485
486
487 Firearm defense groups seek to protect and support firearm ownership for various uses through limited
488 government infringement upon legal rights to life and to bear arms. They hold that risks of ownership
489 can be mitigated by minimal regulation coupled with rigorous law enforcement and responsible
490 voluntary practices.

491
492 Firearm management and defense groups command significant memberships, financial support, and
493 political power. Christians in the U.S., including in our church, participate in these groups and know their
494 political gains and setbacks. Despite vigorous efforts, a complex and costly societal stalemate over guns
495 and safety persists with no end in sight.

496
497 The ELCA commends the good-faith intentions and efforts of firearm activist groups when they seek to
498 create a political center that enables our society to exercise shared responsibility for cessation of gun-
499 related violence and trauma. Given abiding polarization and disabling partisanship, new activist groups
500 are needed. These groups should focus upon brokering a political center of cooperation in difference.
501 This church urges formation of peacemaking groups that seek to understand the cultural and political
502 divide over guns and work toward common ground through dialogue.⁴⁵

503
504 **Peacemaking for community development and social ministry organizations**

505 The communal dimensions of suicide and criminal homicide need greater attention. The concepts of
506 community trauma and intergenerational trauma help to correct individualistic notions of need and
507 response. Research shows that community-based associations and problem-solving improve life in many
508 ways. They build trust and hope through successful cooperation. Various forms of community-based
509 renewal have positive effects upon the incidence of gun violence and trauma in the U.S. One example of
510 such peacemaking is the Healthy People 2030 objectives of the U.S. Department of Health and Human
511 Services.⁴⁶

512
513 The social ministry organizations of the ELCA and other faith communities, likewise, play significant roles
514 in the welfare of U.S. society in times of emergency and abiding need. In addition to direct service lines,
515 these organizations seek to support the social sources of health. They seek prevention and early
516 intervention while dismantling many forms of injustice. Our church values highly the work done by social

517 ministry organizations to advance public health for all and thereby foster peace. These organizations
518 have great potential to reduce gun misuse and minister to trauma.

519
520 **Peacemaking for gun violence researchers**

521 To pursue restraint and prevention, our society needs willpower informed by common and sound
522 understanding. The questions to be answered are difficult and costly to investigate. Actionable
523 knowledge can be elusive despite rigorous inquiry. Disputes over findings can make the search for truth
524 seem impossible and imperil hope of preventing and restraining gun-related violence and trauma.
525 Current impasses over public policy contribute to inadequate research evidence as well as to polarization
526 and distrust of knowledgeable professionals.

527
528 Nevertheless, critical advancements toward peacemaking demand dispassionate and expert research.⁴⁷
529 New studies into gun and violence data, risks and protective factors, and evidence-based strategies need
530 to be undertaken for the sake of positive social change.

531
532 **Peacemaking for firearm businesses**

533 U.S. firearm businesses—manufacturers, distributors, and sellers—share interests, convictions, and
534 involvements with gun owners and shooting associations. As a result, firearm businesses are well-
535 positioned to curb misuse within their communities and the nation and thereby lessen harms and senses
536 of insecurity.

537
538 Many firearm businesses today are embroiled in long-standing societal conflict about whether and how
539 they should be held accountable for harms caused by those who misuse shooting products that
540 otherwise function safely. These businesses are not subject to typical federal consumer-product safety
541 oversight. Per state and federal statutes, also they enjoy strong immunity from civil lawsuits by parties
542 claiming public nuisance or product harm liability. Governments, nongovernmental groups, and
543 individuals are utilizing legislation and litigation in efforts both to circumvent and to uphold immunity
544 laws amid conflicting visions of greater public safety. These adversarial actors are engaged in debates
545 and actions that are defining the legal and social norms of firearm businesses in the U.S.⁴⁸

546
547 The ELCA holds that businesses bear a reasonable responsibility to minimize harm caused by the design,
548 production, marketing, and distribution of their products. Persisting litigation for product harm brought
549 by aggrieved parties, as well as congressional investigation of five companies that produce AR-15–style
550 rifles, raises doubts about commitments to responsibility among some U.S. firearm businesses.⁴⁹

551
552 This church calls upon firearm businesses to embrace structures and practices that reduce tragic,
553 irresponsible, or illegal use of their products. Current immunity from litigation and exemption from
554 oversight for product safety undermine their accountability. However, like other U.S. businesses that face
555 public scrutiny over product safety, gun manufacturers, distributors, and sellers may embrace
556 peacemaking if pressed by public opinion, government regulation, or members of the U.S. gun
557 community.

558
559 One troubling fact uncovered by congressional investigators is that five manufacturers of AR-15–style
560 rifles fail to monitor shootings involving their guns. These companies participate in tracing conducted by
561 the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in criminal investigations but do not utilize this
562 information. Five percent of U.S. residents own an AR-15–style rifle, yet five manufacturers claim no
563 process for understanding how their firearms are used.

564

565 Shared responsibility means that these and other gun manufacturers should join public debates about
566 what makes for restraint and prevention. These companies should ask whether their products and
567 practices make the public safer and more secure and what they can do to support safety in design,
568 marketing, and use. Firearm distributors and sellers should ask these questions as well.
569

570 The production and sale of AR-15–style rifles raise urgent and divisive questions of public risk and safety.
571 The ELCA calls upon firearm businesses to engage in the national debate about legal access to this
572 modified military weapon. Our church has consistently affirmed comprehensive legal controls of military
573 assault weapons since 1993.⁵⁰
574

575 Some 50% of U.S. adults support outlawing all sales of AR-15–style rifles.⁵¹ They are rightly horrified by
576 experiences and understandings of the injury, death, and trauma that AR-15–style rifles can inflict on
577 victims, survivors, families, law enforcement, first responders, and the public. Roughly one third of
578 adults oppose a national ban, including 20 million owners who safely use this firearm for various reasons
579 and purposes.⁵²
580

581 A critical question raised by this message is whether the risks and inevitability of horrendous harm from
582 illegal use justifies outlawing sales and other restrictions of AR-15–style rifles in the interests of
583 protecting the vulnerable neighbor. Our church continues to hold that some restrictions are needed and
584 urges broader national debate toward shared societal resolve to reduce an untenable public threat in
585 the production and sale of AR-15–style rifles.
586

587 **Peacemaking for law enforcement**

588 Federal, tribal, territorial, state, county, and local law enforcement officers confront gun-related violence
589 and trauma daily. They labor under high demands and risks. These public servants participate in God’s
590 providence because human society needs fair-minded protectors and keepers of order and justice. This
591 church gives thanks for the dedication and competence of law enforcement officers to restrain
592 interpersonal conflict and thwart criminal behavior.
593

594 Good policing is deeply relational and depends upon partnerships between law enforcement officers and
595 the communities they serve. Public safety depends upon trust in law enforcement to respect and protect
596 the rights of all. Most police work diligently to serve their communities and uphold trust. However, this
597 church has recognized that “the reputation of law enforcement has been stained by evidence of racial
598 bias and excessive use of force.”⁵³
599

600 This message extends previous ELCA calls for structural reform of police departments, for increased
601 training (such as de-escalation practices) and for trust-building through greater public support of and
602 investment in communities. This includes strengthening policies that engender community-oriented
603 policing to increase public support and partnership.
604

605 Improvement of public trust in law enforcement will contribute to greater public trust in the other
606 functions of government to protect society from harms and risks. Broad gains are needed to address the
607 senses of insecurity that contribute to anticipatory trauma and defensive responses. Accordingly, the
608 ELCA urges law enforcement officers and their professional associations to join with other social actors
609 addressed in this message to develop public policy toward strengthening public backing and trust in
610 government to keep the peace. A comprehensive public health response of restraint and prevention
611 needs the wisdom of policing professionals.
612

613 **Peacemaking for health care providers and public health professionals**

614 Many public health professionals frame gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. as a public health
615 crisis. They are supported by research that documents demographic and geographic inequalities in how
616 violence and trauma are distributed. Social inequalities lead to health disparities that contribute to
617 violence and that should be subject to systemic remedy, such as addressing upstream sources of violence
618 to lessen downstream harm.

619
620 Our society has addressed public health crises and prevailed. Some 60 years ago, U.S. automobile
621 deaths reached levels that prompted comprehensive national response. Fatalities have since dropped
622 dramatically, and health care providers contribute to that result. Newborns do not go home from the
623 hospital without a car seat. Pediatricians often talk to parents about guns in the home.

624
625 Imagine, now, routine conversations between all health providers and their patients about gun safety.
626 Patients might report risks to themselves or others. Providers can encourage safety practices and other
627 protective measures—or intervene as needed. This church affirms efforts by health care providers to
628 monitor and respond to risks and harms related to gun violence and trauma.

629
630 **Peacemaking for journalists and news organizations**

631 Public understanding of gun-related violence and trauma is affected by news sources and firsthand
632 experiences. Mass shootings dominate news coverage by national outlets and often communicate
633 misunderstandings of gun violence in the U.S. News organizations have a major opportunity to inform
634 the public through stories that consider the causes and risks of gun violence, trauma that follows, and
635 measures to prevent future harm. Importantly, sound information can help individuals critically evaluate
636 their own sense of insecurity and see ways to get involved in solutions.

637
638 The ELCA calls upon journalists and news organizations to heed campaigns against copycat shootings.
639 Gun violence perpetrators often seek validation and fame through a performance crime. They study
640 news coverage of past shootings and plot a more infamous one. Resistance campaigns have developed
641 journalistic standards for denying perpetrators the scripts they use and the glory they seek. These
642 campaigns challenge journalists and news organizations to be responsible by minimizing attention to
643 killers and focusing instead on the whole story.⁵⁴

644
645 **Peacemaking for thought leaders**

646 In addition to news organizations, other sources of information commonly accessed online affect public
647 understanding of gun use and misuse. Individuals and groups rely upon these resources to negotiate life
648 in a changing, complex, and often perplexing society. Society members look to trusted analysts to make
649 sense of public affairs and their own life experiences. They look to authentic and unconventional experts
650 to propose solutions to problems. These thought leaders influence the values and behavior of the public.

651
652 Influential public voices play an essential role in the search for shared, responsible action. The
653 complexity and costs of gun-related harm and risk today, coupled with a public policy impasse, require
654 changes that society must enact in concert and over time. To enable common action, thought leaders
655 must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse. In response to mistrust and polarization, leaders
656 should model humility, empathy, and openness toward learning from others. U.S. peacemaking must
657 bridge wide societal differences, which requires thought leaders who broker civil, informed, and
658 constructive public dialogue.

659
660 **Peacemaking for political actors**

661 U.S. residents view gun violence and the inability of major political parties to work together to be among
662 the nation’s top five problems.⁵⁵ They disagree strongly, along party lines, about the effects of gun
663 ownership on public safety. State and federal laws on gun policy are frequently decided by party-line
664 voting. People generally doubt such laws will bring needed change as partisanship disables civic life and
665 the functioning of democracy.

666
667 Our church teaches that all people are called to civic engagement. Political engagement means caring for
668 the neighbor in numerous public ways—informed voting, community organizing, attending public
669 meetings, and holding public office, among others. Healthy governmental institutions require vigorous
670 movement toward a political center of cooperation in difference that serves the needs of all.

671
672 Gun-related violence and trauma cannot be restrained or prevented without sound and effective
673 governmental action. Sustained reduction will require stronger cooperation by lawmakers and those
674 they represent. Christians practicing civic engagement should seek to discourage polarization and restore
675 public trust in government to protect the neighbor from risk and harm. Such trust can be restored only
676 by change that disrupts public pessimism.

677
678 *What are the distinctive responsibilities of our church and other faith communities in*
679 *peacemaking?*

680
681 Faith communities cultivate experiences, beliefs, values, and practices to welcome all, connect
682 differences, and engage members with stories of the divine. Faith communities intercede in the
683 brokenness and disorder of life—ministering to pain, speaking truth to power, reconciling conflict, and
684 modeling nonviolence and justice. Given the uncertainty, mistrust, and polarization in U.S. society, what
685 makes for peace must include building shared humanity and community to bridge differences and
686 support purposeful cooperation.

687
688 **Bridging divides**
689 To achieve shared responsibility, we must bridge cultural divides between people who own guns and
690 those who do not. These divides exist within and across faith communities as well as our nation
691 generally. Faith communities are uniquely prepared to bring together people with different perspectives
692 about guns and safety. Rostered ministers bridge divides when they witness in word and deed to God’s
693 reconciling grace in Christ. They lead toward peace by giving voice to community differences. As pastoral
694 caregivers, rostered ministers can talk to parishioners about responsible gun ownership and protecting
695 the neighbor.

696
697 **Cultivating civic empathy**
698 Mindful of St. Paul’s call for mutual upbuilding, faith communities should cultivate civic empathy that
699 enables people to understand and respect the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of those with whom
700 they disagree. This empathy honors the legitimacy of their participation in civic life, acknowledges
701 human fallibility, and promotes political compassion between neighbors. Such generosity of spirit can
702 counter disabling discord so that people can work out their moral and political differences toward
703 community peace in difference, and their needs can be met.

704
705 **Building community**
706 Reducing gun-related violence and trauma must include building interpersonal and community relations
707 where people feel heard, valued, and connected. Research on suicide and homicide reveals a need for
708 trust, inclusion, agency, and accountability among people at risk of perpetrating violence. The mutual

709 bonds of love and belonging that faith communities cultivate are critical to countering the isolation and
710 alienation that lead to destructive behavior. Love of neighbor always furthers earthly peace.

711
712 **Advocating policy**

713 This message commends our church and other faith communities to engage in gun-related political
714 advocacy. Our shared responsibility for restraint and prevention expands the scope and scale of such
715 work to address trauma as well as violence.

716
717 This message urges congregations and synods within the ELCA to form standing peacemaking groups to
718 learn together and witness publicly. Such ministry will support civic empathy and build community. The
719 mission of these groups will depend upon social location as well as needs and opportunities at hand.
720 This work may include alliances with ecumenical and interreligious groups. This message outlines various
721 peacemaking callings for these groups and commends existing social teaching documents to advance
722 comprehensive advocacy for peace.

723
724 Concerning ELCA advocacy to manage access to guns, our church affirms hunting, sporting, policing, and
725 military uses. Today, handguns are used most often for crime. Since 1993, ELCA policy has called for
726 legislative management of handguns and military assault weapons. This policy has consistently focused
727 on laws aimed at criminal misuse while calling for ongoing assessment of access management. It holds
728 that controls are needed to protect the neighbor and encourage responsible behavior.

729
730 **Healing trauma**

731 Gun-related trauma occurs in various forms and degrees. Trauma not only harms individuals and
732 communities; it can also contribute to cycles of violence that affect future generations. People in the U.S.
733 are increasingly aware of the complex and lasting aspects of trauma in childhood or in war and the need
734 for restorative care. Greater awareness of gun-related trauma is needed because countless neighbors
735 require care now and in the future. Faith communities have institutional wisdom and members
736 committed to awareness of this often-invisible moral harm. They can affect personal and communal
737 healing.

738 **Conclusion: The summons to peacemaking**

739
740 The ELCA believes communities of faith exist because God encounters human beings with divine love as
741 well as divine demands that shape identity and behavior. Consequently, communities of faith should deal
742 with the way things really are and what really matters, grounded in trust of what God will bring about.

743
744 As a Christian church, the ELCA teaches that “in publicly gathering to proclaim and celebrate God’s
745 Gospel of peace, the Church uniquely contributes to earthly peace. Its most valuable mission for peace is
746 to keep alive news of God’s resolve for peace, declaring that all are responsible to God for earthly peace
747 and announcing forgiveness, healing, and hope in the name of Jesus Christ.”⁵⁶

748
749 This message proclaims anew that all people are responsible for peacemaking toward a vast reduction of
750 gun-related violence and trauma in the U.S. All members of our society are responsible for doing what
751 makes for peace. Christians should make peace by living always in Christ and in the neighbor—sustained
752 in forgiveness, healing, and hope by the promise of God’s resolve for peace.

753
754

755 Endnotes

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³⁰ Jillian Peterson and James Densley, *The Violence Project: How to Stop a Mass Shooting Epidemic* (New York: Abrams Press, 2021), 4-5.

³¹ One report “Abusers with firearms are five times more likely to kill their female victims..”

<https://everytownresearch.org/report/guns-and-violence-against-women-americas-uniquely-lethal-intimate-partner-violence-problem>. For a comprehensive address see the ELCA’s social message On Gender-based Violence.

³² Peterson and Denseley argue that mass shooters typically share four characteristics: (1) childhood trauma, (2) an identifiable crisis point, (3) a script to follow and someone to blame, and (4) opportunity. Research shows the rate of childhood trauma among U.S. mass shooters to be three times higher than in the general population.

³³ ELCA social message “Community Violence” (1994), 1-2, 4.

³⁴ *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013), 9, 21-2.

³⁵ ELCA social message “Community Violence” (1994), 6.

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³⁷ *For Peace in God’s World* (1995), 7-8.

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⁴⁷ Gun-culture and gun-violence research is growing after 20 years of government-related decline, and stable resources are returning to encourage scholars to dedicate their careers to this field, such as the recently formed Research Society for the Prevention of Firearm-Related Harms. Meanwhile, respected institutes such as the Pew Research Center and programs such as RAND Corporation's Gun Policy in America provide nonpartisan information that serves peacemaking today.

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⁵³ *The Church and Criminal Justice: Hearing the Cries* (2013), 9.

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**Amendments to Proposed Social Message on Gun-related Violence & Trauma
- as approved by FSIC on April 12, 2024**

Recommended

Item 1 – Shift of language regarding childhood trauma

L166 Rationale

- Part of the suggested replacement duplicates the line just before, but the recommended redline textual insertion sharpen the description of trauma’s impact on children and more clearly points to the citation which makes this point.

Item 2 – Alter wording that could contribute to reinforcing racial stereotypes

L253 Rationale

- These paragraphs are rewritten to make clearer their original intent regarding community trauma on two points:
 - 1) to correct a widespread public perception that gun violence is evenly distributed across U.S. communities or that most Americans are generally at risk. This perception, often promoted by gun businesses and gun rights groups is used to support growing defensive gun ownership.
 - 2) to help our church and the public to understand that acute gun-related violence concentrated in marginalized neighborhoods can lead to trauma that affects whole communities as well as individuals. It seeks to illuminate the effects of community trauma in places where gun violence tends to be concentrated.
- To address the concern that former lines 258-261 may unintentionally reinforce racial stereotypes and bias, they are removed to the endnotes, with citations already there.
- Importantly, the subsequent paragraphs point out that these same U.S. communities traumatized by gun violence have the capacity to, and are increasingly doing so, counter risk and harm through community-based violence intervention programs. These programs are among the most promising preventive strategies currently. The resilience of these communities is cause for hope. See lines 270 and following.

Item 3 – Concern about intimidated partner violence

L. 332 Rationale

- This new paragraph with a footnote signals awareness of harm caused by guns in domestic violence and points individuals to the social message that deals at length with gender-based violence.

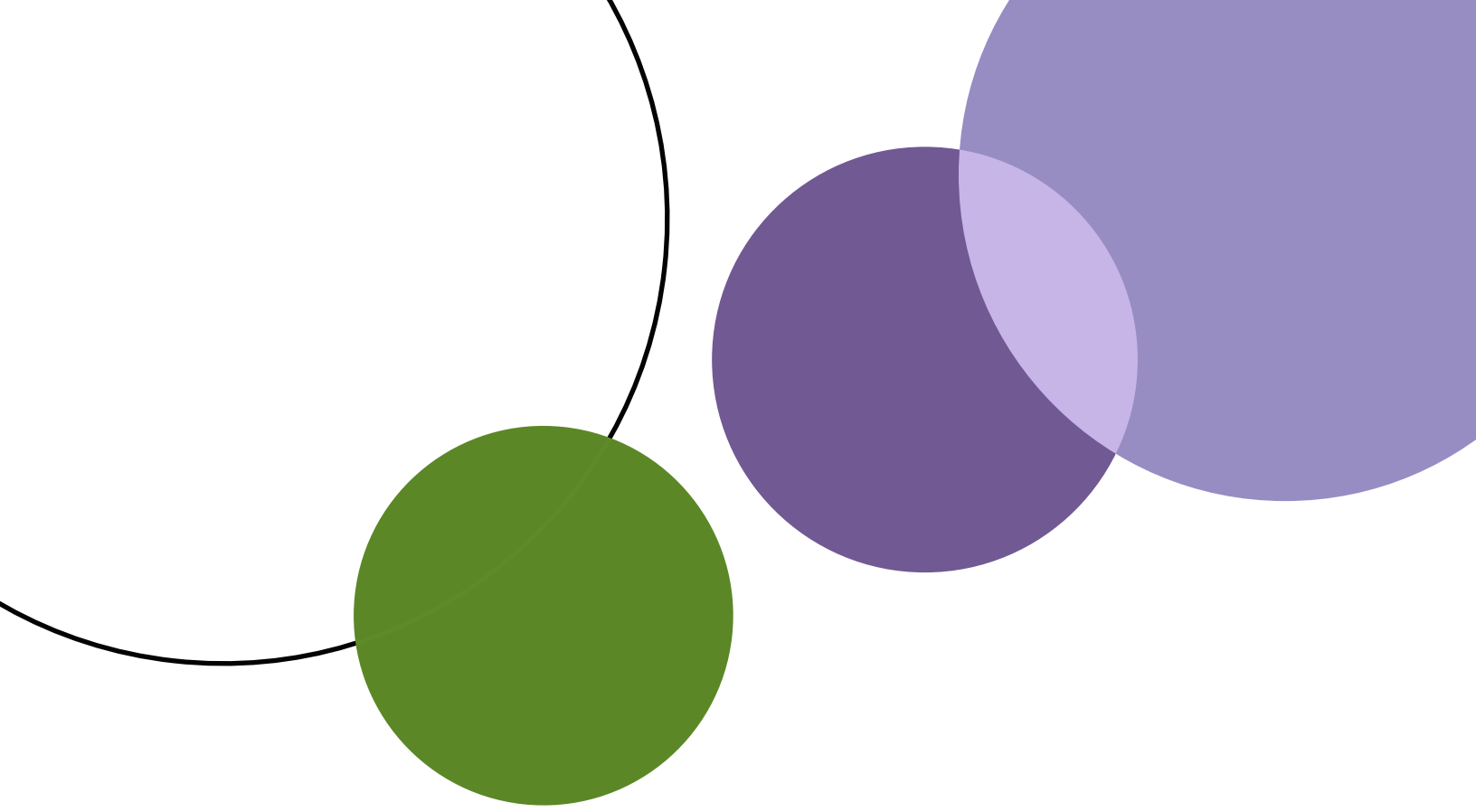
Item 4 – Strengthen the wording for peacemaking in law enforcement practice (see also 5)

L430 Rationale: see item 5.

Item 5 – Strengthen peacemaking in law enforcement practice (see also 54)

L627 Rationale for 4 and 5:

- These two specifications in wording clarify the meaning of the sentences involved and strengthen the emphasis on police reform toward better peacemaking practices.



DRAFT OF A SOCIAL STATEMENT ON CIVIC LIFE AND FAITH

A document for public comment provided by the
ELCA Task Force for Studies on Civic Life and Faith



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INTRODUCTION TO THE DRAFT AND COMMENT PROCESS

This Draft of a Social Statement on Civic Life and Faith is not an official or final word of our church. Rather, it is intended for comment, and you are invited to join in this exercise in discernment. There is an online survey and there will be hearings during 2024 within synods for those who are interested. (For more information about both means of participation, go to [ELCA.org/civicsandfaith](https://www.elca.org/civicsandfaith).)

This Draft is the result of three years of study by the ELCA Task Force for Studies on Civic Life and Faith. Members of the task force have worked diligently to provide this Draft as a test case for your response. Task force members might personally favor alternative wording at selected points, but they are in consensus that this document is ready for wider input from our church. That is, they support releasing this draft as a communal expression that faithfully represents their work. That work has included listening sessions, hours of reading and study, preparation of a study, and constant grappling with these critical, contemporary, and vexing matters in search of common convictions and expression. It is shared in this spirit of discernment.

To share your feedback with the task force, go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NCTT8ZV>. For information on mailing in a paper survey, go to [ELCA.org/civicsandfaith](https://www.elca.org/civicsandfaith).

Your feedback is welcomed through September 30, 2024. The task force will then edit the draft in light of the public input. Then, the task force will submit a proposed version of the social statement to the ELCA Church Council, who will vote on sending it to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly in 2025 for consideration. If adopted by a 2/3's margin, the social statement will become official social teaching of this church. As such it will govern church teaching, policies, and ministries. It will also serve as a discernment tool for ELCA members as they think about civic life.

A word about this "two version" social statement. Civic life is a broad and complex dimension of society. In order to cover the many element needed, and to make it accessible to the various types of audiences who use social teaching, the draft uses a "small catechism" and "large catechism" approach. The entire statement is captured in summary by the "Short Version" that leads off the draft and is designed to be read from beginning to end. The "Full Version" provides detail for those who wish to go deeper into a particular article or group of articles in search of rationale, supporting documentation, and full explanation.

May God's Spirit that seeks the well-being of all in civic life guide you in your reading, reflection, and response.

*Rev. Roger A. Willer, PhD
Director for Theological Ethics*

49 Article 6) God’s people approach civic life with abounding trust in God and, at the same time, with
50 measured realism and humility about human efforts. God’s two-handed strategy is necessary because of
51 sin, which means people of faith live in a continual tension. Some ways of civic life should be affirmed as
52 better than others in serving the common good. Yet the presence and promise of God’s reign make the
53 church inevitably restless with respect to life in society, and Christians thereby live simultaneously with
54 hope and striving, realism and restlessness.

55
56 Article 7) God’s response to sin calls people to delight in the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:1-2) and provides
57 tools for seeking civil well-being. The uniquely Christian proclamation, the gospel, does not introduce
58 any new laws to govern the civil order but urges us to obey just laws and motivates us to seek greater
59 well-being for all. While the Holy Scriptures provide the fundamental norm, our human faculties--such as
60 reason, experience, knowledge, and imagination--have crucial roles in discerning better, and worse, ways
61 of running a human society.

62
63 Article 8) The ELCA recognizes a history in which Lutheran churches, despite some important
64 exceptions, have too often failed to make a priority of the civic common good. However, Lutherans
65 affirm that civic institutions remain God’s gifts even as we admit our compromises and failures. This
66 church’s work includes acknowledgment of past failures and a repentance that turns to holding
67 accountable civic leaders and those in positions of political authority for the common good.

68
69 Article 9) To “walk humbly” with God (Micah 6:8) must include welcoming and acknowledging the
70 ideas, values, and contributions of all people, regardless of their religious tradition or worldview.
71 Christians, as individuals or as the church, have no guaranteed higher or better reasoning than other
72 people in religious or nonreligious communities. This does not mean Christians do not have contributions
73 to make, nor that they should avoid drawing from their faith, values, and insights in discussing public
74 matters. The Christian vocation to serve God and the neighbor may be fulfilled in civic places of
75 responsibility.

76 77 II. The Calling to Robust Civic Participation

78
79 Article 10) Civic life entails activities and institutions across all public life, from one’s local
80 neighborhood to matters of national and international concern. Participation in civic organizations comes
81 in many shapes and sizes, and the recent decline of civic participation in the United States is especially
82 troubling. Our church affirms that anyone who seeks the community’s well-being through civic
83 participation is, knowingly or not, using the gifts God provides. They are acting as channels of God’s
84 concern for human life.

85
86 Article 11) Christian worshiping assemblies are grounded in the living Word of God’s law and gospel,
87 which empowers them to be centers supporting civic participation. This is evident in how liturgy prepares
88 us to join God’s work in civic life. As expressed in the ELCA constitution and social teaching, this church
89 expects that each worshiping community will be engaged in forms of active civic participation as one
90 element of life in Christ’s church.

91
92 Article 12) The ELCA reaffirms that civic service can represent a place to carry out one’s calling from
93 God to civic participation. Public servants should be held to high expectations, and the larger community
94 should give government officials the dignity and respect owed for good and just work. At the same time,
95 citizens are expected to hold the government and its officials accountable.

96
97 Article 13) Religion can create divisions in civic life or can contribute to mending the torn social fabric
98 and reconciling divided peoples. This church urges all people of faith to seek a constructive role that

99 counters growing polarization, distrust, and ill will. Religious traditions can offer particular gifts of moral
100 vision, inclusion, and compassion sorely needed in U.S. civic life.

101
102 Article 14) The ELCA and other religious bodies have a particular calling to encourage discernment and
103 provide spaces for difficult conversations. For Christians, discernment is enabled by the gift of unity that
104 Christ gives. Discussion about tough issues among God’s people is a witness that counters the forces of
105 social division and distrust. The ELCA’s identity as a community of moral deliberation is one into which
106 our church continues to grow, and which is increasingly crucial in a society so divided.

107
108 Article 15) The biblical witness teaches that, among other roles and aims, there is a prophetic task for
109 those who follow Jesus (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 42:7). The church’s prophetic presence in civic life calls for
110 holding civic leaders accountable, taking constructive action, and lifting up a vision for improved social
111 well-being. It is part of this church’s work under the left hand of God as a contribution to society, and it
112 needs to be done with both vitality and great care.

113
114 Article 16) The ELCA encourages individuals and worshipping communities to work together toward a
115 civic life that better reflects God’s vision for a more just and reconciled world. The various forms of
116 advocacy offer ways to press civic leaders and public policy makers to respect the needs and dignity of all
117 persons and our common home, with special concern for the vulnerable. Such faith-rooted advocacy is
118 born from relationships of service and solidarity, is guided by ELCA social teaching, and requires
119 different practices in different contexts. Flowing from trust built through one-to-one relationships, faith-
120 based organizing seeks to spur action by building coalitions of like-minded people in mostly local
121 contexts. Faith-informed advocacy of various kinds can play a transformative role in a polarized political
122 world by bringing people together to work toward the common good in public life.

123
124 Article 17) Was Jesus “political”? The Scriptures are clear that he was not political in the sense of
125 affiliation with a political party, a partisan movement, or a designer of civic legislation. However, the
126 biblical claim that “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 10:36) is simultaneously a political and religious statement. In
127 addition, Jesus called government leadership to accountability to such an extent that he was executed as a
128 political criminal. Today, concern for the neighbor and the common good means the church is called to
129 follow Jesus’ example by engaging appropriate issues with care that are in the political arena. Political
130 partisanship is not proper for the church, even while we engage in issues that have political elements.

131
132 Article 18) The ELCA also has a standing commitment to civic life, exercised through synods and the
133 churchwide expressions of our church. The 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran
134 Perspective* details the nature of this institutional witness.

135
136 Article 19) Civic participation necessarily involves matters of government and political life. The word
137 “politics” often is used today to express disgust with dishonest practices, partisan shenanigans, power
138 grabs, ploys of deceit, and the sinful use of authority. “Politics” in this statement, however, is understood
139 as the negotiation of how the benefits, burdens, rights, and responsibilities of living in a society are
140 shared. Politics, rightly understood and practiced, then, is essential to civic well-being and of concern to
141 God’s people. It is important to distinguish between politics and ethics and to ensure that political
142 concerns are guided by ethical discernment. This church’s body of teaching addresses civic life ethically,
143 which includes the relation of communities of faith to political authority, to government. As an example,
144 ethics presents the principle of self-determination as a primary value of a healthy political community
145 because it encourages the idea of sharing power.

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III. Assessing the U.S. Constitutional Form of Government

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150
151 Article 20) Political authority is one way that God protects and promotes the well-being of human society.
152 Political authority is also human and social, permeated by sin. Some governments and societies fulfill
153 God's intent for political authority better than others. In the Lutheran tradition the question to ask of
154 government is "How faithful is it to God's purposes of well-being, including caring for the most
155 vulnerable members of the community?" Lutherans ought to live in troubled restlessness with all
156 government, both supporting political authority and criticizing its misuse, as appropriate.
157

158 Article 21) To determine how the well-being of the neighbor is being served by political authority, criteria
159 for assessment are necessary. God's power sustains and gives power to creation. Therefore, the principal
160 criterion used to assess governmental and political authority is whether it increases power and its
161 beneficial use among the people governed. Power expressed as mutual self-determination enhances
162 people's lives and is a presumption that should be encouraged and respected by government and others.
163 Both the model of divine power and the political presumption of self-determination include a criterion of
164 fostering plurality.
165

166 Article 22) In the United States, the Constitution is the federal framework of political authority. When it
167 was written, the Constitution was unique in some ways, including its neutrality in matters of religion and
168 its making "we the people" politically sovereign. The Constitution's separation of powers and their
169 checks and balances were designed in part to prevent the monopolization of sovereignty by any branch or
170 locale of government. The Constitution is both grounding and aspirational; that is, it did not fulfill its own
171 objectives completely. The Constitution's preamble (or preface) expresses this government's purpose.
172 The values expressed in the preamble can be used to assess whether the government is serving the
173 purpose that its own Constitution has laid out.
174

175 Article 23) The most radical feature of the Constitution is its first three words: "we the people."
176 Politically, the people are sovereign, not a monarch or other authority imposing a government on its
177 people. The ratification of the Constitution itself enacts a preference for self-determination. Its enactment
178 was deeply flawed, since the enfranchised "people" in the late 1700s were largely limited to white,
179 property-owning males. The subsequent history of amendments to the Constitution have expanded "we
180 the people" to include people of color, women, and younger adults.
181

182 Article 24) The Constitution explicitly supports religious neutrality and diversity by forbidding religious
183 "tests" for U.S. officeholders. Had it not done so, the country would have been deprived of the service of
184 many, including notable U.S. presidents. The Constitution's choice was for religious self-determination.
185 The later First Amendment to the Constitution expressed neutrality toward religion, thereby encouraging
186 plurality of religion in society.
187

188 Article 25) Governmental action can be evaluated by how well it grants power to those subject to it,
189 including the aim of mutual self-determination. Legitimate government action therefore includes both
190 coercive action and the positive production of power for its citizens. There are many examples of this.
191 This article identifies specific questions that we might ask when evaluating particular governmental
192 policies at the local, state, or federal levels.
193

194 Article 26) The United States is not a "Christian nation." It was not founded on specifically Christian
195 principles, though Christians and Christianity did influence its ethos. The premise of the Constitution and
196 its ratification is that the sovereign is "we the people," not "we the Christians."
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IV. Religion and the First Amendment

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Article 27) The First Amendment to the Constitution begins: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” 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. Though these clauses are sometimes in tension, they both foster religious plurality, despite some exceptions in historical practice in the United States.

Article 28) The establishment clause mandates the institutional distinction between religious bodies and the state. The state may acknowledge the distinctiveness of religion but may not favor or disadvantage religion generally, or one religion in relation to another. There are two main traditions of interpreting “nonestablishment,” and the ELCA takes no position on either while affirming the institutional distinction between government and religion.

Article 29) The Constitution’s prohibition against establishment of religion clears the ground for the free exercise of religion secured by the free exercise clause (second clause). The two clauses together promote religious plurality in the United States. Free exercise means that religious people may enter public debate and decision-making with their religious convictions, as many abolitionists and civil rights leaders and advocates have done. Free exercise is different than Christian freedom, which, for Lutherans, arises solely from God’s promise of salvation and does not depend on any specific political arrangement. Christian freedom is a matter of the gospel; free exercise of religion is a matter of human law.

Article 30) The free exercise clause of the Constitution is a political good that, for the church, is consistent with our belief in the creation of humans in the image of God. The free exercise clause ensures the right to worship (or not) as each person desires. There are limits to free exercise, including that a person’s free exercise does not unduly damage important public interests. At the same time civic life is complex enough that sometimes it may require that civil laws and regulations “accommodate” a religious adherent’s practice that would otherwise violate civil law.

Article 31) The First Amendment does not prohibit or discourage the application of religious convictions to public life. The phrase “separation of church and state” is not found in the First Amendment and usually is shorthand for nonestablishment. Nonestablishment, however, was not meant to prevent the free exercise of religion. Instead nonestablishment allows each person, without fear of negative legal consequence, to determine for themselves their religious practice, including in civic life. The two clauses of the First Amendment do not contradict each other. If nonestablishment meant that religious commitments should not enter public life, religious people would be uniquely harmed. They would be the only people not allowed or encouraged to bring their highest commitments to bear on public questions.

V. Describing the Constructive Relationships of Religious Organizations and Political Authority

Article 32) The ELCA holds that the constructive relationship of religion and political authority is summarized by the phrase “work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of religious organizations and institutions in a relation of functional interaction.” This summary description (codified in the ELCA constitution) provides guidance for the ELCA’s corporate life and for individuals.

Article 33) The directive to “work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor” follows from both our faith’s commitment to join God’s work in civic life and the sovereignty of “we the people.” The

249 purpose of citizenship is summed up in the preamble to the Constitution—to promote the general welfare.
250 “Working with” seeks to address human needs, which can involve critical challenges such as advocating
251 for change in policies and programs that harm people or God’s creation.
252

253 Article 34) The phrase “maintaining institutional separation of church and state” does not point to an
254 absolute separation of public (government) versus private (religious) arenas. Rather it points to the
255 importance of preserving the functional integrity of independent political authority and religious
256 institutions. Christ’s church should not bless any particular political theory; no political system or theory
257 is final or ultimate. To the extent that U.S. government is formed for the general welfare and guided by
258 good principles, whether rooted in Christian ideas or not, it should be affirmed. It is for these reasons that
259 our church objects to religious bodies endorsing or supporting candidates or parties, or exercising
260 partisanship in any way. At the same time, religious bodies and individuals have a responsibility to call
261 government to account, especially when it fails in its function to provide for all peoples such “goods” as
262 human rights, economic justice, and the like.
263

264 Article 35) Rostered ministers face particular issues regarding the relationship of the church and political
265 authority because of their divine office to preach and teach both law and gospel. Rostered ministers also
266 are public figures because they lead public institutions and have a valuable role to play as leaders in civil
267 society. The ELCA affirms these intersecting roles as right and salutary while also recognizing that any
268 given scriptural text or any given social and political situation is complex and multilayered and requires
269 discernment from multiple perspectives. Rostered leaders, then, should be attuned to their community or
270 public setting in offering guidance and aiding discernment practices as assemblies determine how to
271 participate in civic life. When they speak on public issues, their words should be rooted in the Scriptures
272 and are to be governed by official ELCA teaching. Though there necessarily is a public face to the
273 rostered role, this does not justify partisanship, such as telling members how to vote. Our church provides
274 guidance for churches and congregations regarding participation in the electoral process.
275

276 Article 36) The directive to “work with civil authorities ... in a relationship of institutional separation,
277 with functional interaction” suggests a constructive relationship but must be guarded by neutrality among
278 partners. It also is commended as a public proposal for a healthy approach between all religious bodies
279 and political authority in the United States.
280

281 Article 37) The ELCA understanding of civic life and faith is at odds with Christian nationalism because
282 the latter seeks to fuse the exercise of political authority with a selected set of supposed “Christian”
283 ideals. It also asserts that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United States. Such core
284 beliefs represent a political ideology of religious nationalism, whether explicitly acknowledged or not. In
285 its hardline strains, only white, U.S.-born, Christian believers are considered genuine U.S. citizens.
286 Christian nationalists pledge allegiance to their version of the United States, first making the U.S. into an
287 idol and seeing God’s plan in U.S. society as including only those whose religious beliefs fuse with a
288 certain view of that society.
289

290 VI. Addressing Selected Contemporary Concerns in Civic Life

291
292 Article 38) The following articles address selected contemporary issues about civic life, grounded in the
293 themes and insights above. These do not revisit questions the ELCA has already addressed in existing
294 statements or messages and are not intended to be comprehensive. Some articles here offer definitive
295 conclusions whereas others establish parameters that enable continued discernment on the part of our
296 church.
297

298 Article 39) Hyper-partisan polarization is rampant in the United States, harming both individuals and the
299 social fabric. The U.S. political system appropriately involves, of course, the presence and efforts of
300 partisan activity. Unfortunately, today, social dynamics have taken partisanship to unhealthy levels that
301 damage democratic interaction rather than foster respectful, responsible give and take. Many accept this
302 winner-take-all approach as right or as, at least, unavoidable. Such approaches threaten the fabric of our
303 nation and the lives of those in it. These threats are often felt most keenly by the marginalized. The ELCA
304 calls for a different approach as both necessary and possible for a vital common life in which all can
305 participate.

306
307 Article 40) Civic leaders bear a particular responsibility to seek constructive debate and solutions. Civic
308 leaders include a wide array of individuals beyond just elected officials or heads of media. To bring
309 people together, these leaders must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse that hinders careful
310 listening among neighbors. They should offer models of vigorous and constructive civic leadership.

311
312 Article 41) Robust and constructive civic engagement in today's society depends on clear distinction
313 between fact and various forms of misinformation, from falsehoods to exaggeration. Avoiding forms of
314 false statement is a civic responsibility for both providers and users of social media. Christians should be
315 "innocent as doves" when it comes interpreting the intentions of the neighbor but "wise as serpents"
316 (Matthew 10:16) when it comes to discerning what information they encounter in any media. For the sake
317 of U.S. civic life, the ELCA calls upon social media platforms to take responsibility to align policies and
318 procedures worldwide with the most comprehensive and rigorous online protocol available.

319
320 Article 42) Financial contributions to political campaigns are a form of free speech protected by the First
321 Amendment and a significant part of campaigning that demonstrate a level of commitment consistent with
322 the donor's views. The ELCA affirms that every citizen should have the opportunity to play a free and
323 active part in the foundation of our communities. Therefore, we are concerned that being heard should not
324 be effectively limited to those individuals and organizations who have overwhelming financial wealth and
325 resources at their disposal. The ELCA urges legislation by state and federal lawmakers to set reasonable
326 limits on campaign contributions and increase transparency in our elections and financial reporting by
327 public officials.

328
329 Article 43) This statement recognizes that governmental policies, statutes, regulations, and judicial
330 opinions sometimes do more harm to the well-being of all than to promote it. Harm results from poorly
331 conceived and implemented policies and from intentional actions that discriminate against some in favor
332 of others. All public servants have a duty to ensure that government remains true to its purpose of
333 protecting and fostering the good of all. Citizens and residents also have an obligation to seek reform
334 through the procedures of democratic self-rule.

335
336 Article 44) The ELCA has members in Washington, D.C., and in several of the U.S. territories. For this
337 reason our church is attuned to the problematic relationship between the United States and its
338 nonincorporated territories. We recognize complicating factors that include a legacy of racism because the
339 vast majority of local residents in the territories belong to racially minoritized groups. We also recognize
340 that the issues are complex. The principle of mutual self-determination dictates humble, intentional
341 listening as the first step toward justice and healing.

342
343 Article 45) American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians have a unique, historical, and
344 nation-to-nation trust relationship with the United States that should acknowledge the sovereignty of
345 tribal nations and Indian self-determination and self-governance. There are many layers to the often
346 horrid history of treatment of indigenous peoples, but it is imperative to acknowledge the relationship has
347 been grounded in the Doctrine of Discovery that codified both colonialism and religious intolerance. The
348 ELCA has repudiated explicitly this European-derived doctrine as a theological framework that supported

349 racism, colonialism, and the annihilation of Indigenous people. Our church also has acknowledged and
350 called for repentance for this church’s complicity in the colonialism that continues to harm tribal
351 governments and tribal members. This statement reaffirms the ELCA’s need for continued attention to
352 just policy via advocacy in the areas of treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, and other matters that affect the
353 well-being of Native Americans. It also calls upon both U.S. residents and U.S. governments to honor the
354 trust relationship and the sovereignty of tribal nations as well as to be guided by just principles supporting
355 Indian self-determination and well-being.

356
357 Article 46) The ELCA calls for renewed emphasis on comprehensive civics education as an essential
358 element for robust and revitalized civic life. Such education should teach the whole story of U.S. history
359 in its aspirations, successes, and failures so that it might shape well-informed, thoughtful, and wise
360 citizens.

361
362 Article 47) No single solution will reduce the increasing, fevered polarization or mend the damage that
363 endangers the U.S. social fabric as a representative democracy. However, robust civic participation is
364 critical for democratic self-governance, for support of public servants, and for well-crafted policies. The
365 ELCA urges both its members and all U.S. residents to renew their efforts toward such a robust civic
366 participation, guided by concern for the well-being of all.

367 368 Conclusion

369
370 Article 48) “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven” is both our prayer as a church and our calling into
371 civic life for the well-being of all. May we, as forgiven people in Christ’s church, respond boldly and join
372 all others of goodwill to work toward the aspiration and responsibility of “we the people” through wise
373 civic participation.

374
375

376 **A Draft ELCA Social Statement on Civic Life and Faith**
377 **Full Statement**

378 Terms underlined in the text are defined in the concluding glossary.
379

380 **Introduction**
381

382 **Article 1) Daily we are to pray as Jesus taught: “Your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us**
383 **today our daily bread.” These words teach us that God’s will seeks the well-being of creation and**
384 **all aspects of human life, including civil society. The Scriptures remind us that God’s Spirit**
385 **empowers Jesus’ disciples through God’s will for human society (Micah 6:8) and the blessings of**
386 **the gospel to join God’s work in society. Previous ELCA social teaching speaks to elements for**
387 **faithful participation in civic life, whereas this social statement provides a comprehensive address.**
388 **It gives special attention to matters related to faith and political authority.**
389

390 We are to pray daily as Jesus taught, saying, “May your kingdom come, may your will be done on earth
391 as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread” (Matthew 6:11). What does this mean? The Lutheran
392 catechisms say that daily bread means “everything included in the necessities and nourishment for our
393 lives such as food, drink, ... upright and faithful rulers, good government ... good friends, faithful
394 neighbors and the like.”¹ The catechisms, which explain biblical ideas, teach that the Triune God sustains
395 creation and seeks human well-being through civic life. The Spirit empowers us as Jesus’ disciples
396 through God’s will for human society (including the law²) and the blessings of the gospel. “He has told
397 you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness
398 and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).
399

400 Previous ELCA social statements and messages express elements of a Lutheran understanding of civic
401 life relevant to their themes. This social statement comprehensively addresses civic life, with particular
402 attention to a Lutheran perspective on political authority. The six sections draw from the Scriptures, the
403 wellspring of Lutheran theological themes, and contemporary social science to clarify theological themes
404 and the calling to civic participation (sections I, II), consider the meaning and significance for people of
405 faith of the founding documents of the United States (III, IV), sketch a constructive relationship of
406 religious organizations and political authority (V), and address some pressing contemporary issues (VI).
407
408

409 **I. Fundamental Teaching: God’s Activity Toward Well-being Through Civic**
410 **Life**
411

412 **Article 2) In the biblical word *shalom* (Hebrew word) the Scriptures depict God's goal for creation**
413 **and point to the nature of God’s ongoing active engagement with it. God’s power and love seeks**
414 **shalom, the fullness of peace, well-being, goodness, truth, beauty, justice, freedom, wholesomeness,**
415 **and love woven together for all. This statement is undergirded by that biblical term but in the**
416 **context of civic life employs other terms such as “the well-being of all” or “the common good”**
417 **because they are earthly measures toward God’s intention. God’s sovereignty brings forth and**
418 **sustains the universe and grants creatures their power, even though it often is hidden to human**

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 The law is a summary term for God’s directives for human living, such as the Ten Commandments, that describes “what is right and God-pleasing and rejects everything contrary to God’s will.” Charles P. Arand, James A. Nestingen, and Robert Kolb, *The Lutheran Confessions: History and Theology of The Book of Concord* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 198.

419 **view. God intends that humans use and share the gift of power so that human structures and**
420 **systems serve the intended well-being of all with good order and justice.**
421

422 The Scriptures tells us that “the earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it” (Psalm 24:1) and reveal God’s
423 tender care for all creation (Psalm 145:15). In what Christians call the Old Testament the single word
424 *shalom*³ epitomizes the rich fullness of that loving aim of the Creator for all creation. Shalom describes
425 God’s intention in creation for the abundance of peace, well-being, goodness, truth, beauty, justice,
426 freedom, joy, wholeness, and love woven together. This statement is undergirded by that biblical
427 term but in the context of civic life employs other terms such as “the well-being of all” or “the common
428 good” because they are earthly measures toward God’s intention.

429 The ELCA witnesses to the Holy Trinity in the unity of the three persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)
430 whose power is expressed in offering abundant life now and eternally. We teach that God is all-powerful
431 in that only God is the source of all power. God’s power alone brings forth and sustains the universe,
432 redeems the sinner, and promises creation’s ultimate fulfillment.

433
434 In God’s activity that seeks the well-being of all, we encounter a use of power that is unlike many human
435 practices of power (Matthew 20:25-26). God is sovereign, but God’s sovereignty *gives* power to creatures
436 rather than depriving them of it. In contrast to the usual political “zero-sum” understanding of power (if I
437 gain power, you lose it), God gives freely, sharing abundantly without loss. God’s sovereign power
438 produces human power; it does not diminish it. However, humans are given their power in order to serve
439 God, creation, and their fellow humans.

440
441 God’s power is often hidden from human view. Sometimes God’s power is experienced as disruption and
442 judgment, as the tearing down of human structures and misplaced values (Jeremiah 6:14). God’s power is
443 experienced in varied and surprising ways that can be beautiful or painful. This is described by Martin
444 Luther’s teaching about the struggles of faith and the “theology of the cross.” When human beings expect
445 domination, God’s power appears in weakness (1 Corinthians 1:25). When we are overly confident, God
446 unsettles our presumptions. In the fullness of time and the light of faith, we see that God’s purpose and
447 power always move toward the divine promise of the full well-being of all people.

448
449 At the end of the Lord’s prayer, we affirm that “the power, the honor and the glory are yours.” Not ours!
450 When Christians forget that all power belongs to God, they risk creating other “gods” (idols) such as
451 wealth and power itself, but also country, race, party, or ideology. God’s power in Jesus Christ redirects
452 forgiven ones from such idolatry and shapes the way we use the power entrusted to us.

453
454 This church bears witness to God’s purpose and power in the world. As human expressions of power,
455 civic activity and political power are sustained by divine power. God intends that humans use and share
456 such power so that human structures and systems serve the well-being of all with good order and justice.⁴

457
458 **Article 3) Both the biblical witness and human history make clear that human beings are inherently**
459 **social creatures and necessarily political beings. God’s intent is for human beings to use knowledge,**

³ The Scriptures use the Hebrew word *shalom* to refer to God’s goal of healthy, peaceful, just, joyful, wholesome relations for all creation. Christians should take seriously the comprehensive vision embedded in this fundamental biblical term and what it means for our calling. But the term itself also has a long, rich history as a central concept within Judaism, and it is best for Christians not to co-opt this rich post-biblical Jewish tradition. Instead, the two religious communities should explore together how best to understand the biblical concept and, on this basis, find ways to work together to advance the divine intention for humans and for the entire created world.

⁴ The Augsburg Confession, XVI, BC 2000, 48.

460 **wisdom, and power to foster the common good. When that is done by institutions through policies**
461 **and regulations, or by individuals in acts of caring, then humans are fulfilling their God-given**
462 **human vocation to join God’s activity in the world.**

463
464 The Scriptures (Genesis 1:27) teach that human beings are made in the image of God (*imago dei*). One
465 way to understand this image is as the gift of human vocation to participate in God’s work of fostering the
466 well-being of social and political communities, as well as in care of the earth.⁵ Genesis tells of God
467 creating human beings from soil and tasking them with tilling and caring for the garden together (Genesis
468 2). From the beginning, there is shared activity, life together arranged in ways that require social
469 cooperation, conversation, and coordination. Even in the narrative of the fall (Genesis 3-4) we see the
470 value of social and political life, as human beings move from honesty and care into fear and disobedience,
471 no longer trusting God or one another. This church celebrates that humans are relational beings and live in
472 social and political communities.⁶

473
474 The Christian faith sees God’s power and compassion revealed in the ministry, death, and resurrection of
475 Jesus. There is no neighbor, no enemy, no politician for whom Christ did not die. The Christian practice
476 of baptism affirms this ongoing work of Christ and its connection to our vocation. This church teaches
477 that “the gifts of the Spirit form and transform the people of God for discipleship in daily life.”⁷ The
478 baptismal liturgy includes a vow to “care for others and the world God made, and to work for justice and
479 peace.”⁸

480
481 Correctly understood as a calling to serve, the human vocation does not invite arrogance and misplaced
482 pride, nor does it tolerate the domination of others. Human beings respond to what God is doing through
483 God’s orderings of creation. In Lutheran theology, these orderings are often referred to as the three estates
484 of government, church, family, and economy. All people depend upon these social relationships,
485 institutions, and structures of communal life that provide scaffolded sites of growth and responsibility.
486 Because these are dynamic structures, their precise form, arrangement, and values vary across time and
487 place, and they are open to ongoing revision and change.

488
489 In this sense the Lutheran tradition speaks of humans serving in civic life as “channels of God’s work.”⁹
490 Humans should use their knowledge, wisdom, and power to foster the common good. When that is done
491 by institutions through policies and regulations, or by individuals in acts of caring, humans are fulfilling
492 their vocation to serve God’s activity in the world.

493
494 **Article 4) Human sin is human brokenness and disorder and it distorts the calling to work for the**
495 **well-being of all. It is sin when God’s gifts to humans are not used for the neighbor’s good and the**
496 **self is turned in on itself (Matthew 22:36-40). Sin is expressed both personally and in human**
497 **systems. It is expressed in actions we commit individually and is also embedded throughout larger**
498 **institutions and systems. The examples of sin in civic life are many.**

⁵ God assigns human beings both the tasks of ruling, as with the sun and moon, and of being fruitful, as with other living creatures. Taken together, these tasks imitate what God does toward earth’s abundance. See further explanation in the ELCA social statement *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2011), 10, www.elca.org/socialstatements.

⁶ *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2019), II.14, 5, www.elca.org/socialstatements.

⁷ *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1991), 4, www.elca.org/socialstatements.

⁸ “Affirmation of Baptism” in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship: Pew Edition* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 236.

⁹ This statement will employ the term “channel” rather than the traditional Lutheran term “mask” because the latter today suggests passivity and duplicity.

499 God’s intention for joyous well-being is too often not enacted or experienced in the world. Many religious
500 traditions discuss human brokenness and disorder. The Lutheran tradition speaks of sin in various ways
501 but fundamentally understands sin to be the condition of human existence in which we fail to love and
502 trust God above all else. Martin Luther understood sin to be an excessive focus on the self at the expense
503 of the neighbor.¹⁰ Human sin breaks a right relationship with God and others, damaging the well-being
504 that God intends for all creation.

505
506 The pervasiveness and complexity of sin that damages human well-being must be understood. Sin is
507 present in our continual unwillingness to accept our human vocation to serve as creatures created by God.
508 Sin can also take the insidious form of self-denial and a lack of self-love when, for example, we diminish
509 our contributions and deny our ability, dignity, and value as fellow human beings created in God’s image.
510 Sin is expressed both personally and collectively, which means social and political institutions are bound
511 in sin just as individuals are. There are manifold examples of this in civic life.

512
513 It is sin when the power of social structures, like government, are not used for the common good of
514 neighbors and creation (Matthew 22:36-40). For instance, the individual domination of one person by
515 another was multiplied in the social structure of slavery supported by laws, policies, religious beliefs, and
516 cultural practices in the United States. Such systemic sins are particularly horrendous because the things
517 done and left undone dramatically deepen the oppression of other people.

518
519 It is sin when we use civic or political power at the expense of others. One group’s self-interest cannot
520 justify denying the humanity or dignity of others. The need for order cannot justify subjugation,
521 marginalization, or tyranny. The need for a government cannot justify the idolatrous worship of a nation.

522
523 It also is sin when we completely avoid civic life and thereby do not work to serve neighbor justice
524 through it. At the same time, it is sin when we support leaders who put their own power and self-interest
525 above the needs of their constituents. It is sin when we uncritically support a member of a political party
526 because of party affiliation or for our own personal gain. We see sin at work when we demonize others’
527 motives while glorifying and sanctifying our own.

528
529 **Article 5) God’s loving and just response to human sinfulness includes both law (God’s directives)**
530 **and gospel (God’s mercy). While distinct in function and purpose, they are not independent and**
531 **can be thought of as two strategies working together for the single goal of well-being for all. The**
532 **Lutheran tradition teaches there are different uses for God’s law, such as the Ten Commandments.**
533 **The law curbs evil through coercive power and offers directives for a good and just society. The law**
534 **also reveals the deep, often unconscious, corruption of human motives and actions. In this way it**
535 **drives people to contrition and prepares them for repentance. The gospel proclaims God’s**
536 **unfathomable mercy and God’s loving desire of abundant life for all. Together law and gospel are**
537 **the power of God bringing about God’s purpose for the well-being of humanity and all creation.**

538
539 Lutherans teach that we come to know both our sin and God’s grace as God comes to us. God reveals and
540 gives the divine self to restore right relationships with God, our neighbors, and ourselves. The Scriptures
541 teach about different strategies God uses to achieve this, and we call these “law” and “gospel.” This
542 church understands the law (God’s directives) and gospel together as expressing the living Word of God
543 for human life and well-being. The law addresses our relationships and actions before others in this

¹⁰ 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.

544 mortal life. The gospel, by contrast, proclaims our relationship or standing before God from now into
545 eternity.

546
547 God uses the law to sustain life and its needs for the good of all. The law has different functions, or
548 uses.¹¹ The civil use of the law governs our behavior toward one another in human communities. In
549 contrast, the theological use of the law accuses and convicts humans of sinfulness, even if that wrong is
550 allowed by a government's law or not covered by human laws. God's directives are realistic about human
551 beings. They reveal the corruption of many human motives, drive people to contrition, and prepare them
552 for repentance.

553
554 The gospel is the good news of God's love in Christ, given by grace alone and received in and through
555 faith alone. The gospel arrives as a blessed surprise, an unexpected gift that frees us from efforts to earn
556 God's love or forgiveness. The gospel has the liberating power to convert, transform, and re-create us in
557 heart, mind, and spirit. Thus, Lutherans assert that the life of a Christian is described paradoxically as
558 being simultaneously saint and sinner.

559
560 The Lutheran tradition commonly describes these two strategies of law and gospel by using the analogy
561 of God's two hands.¹² Through God's "left hand," God's power acts through the law to curb, restrain, and
562 lead people toward goodness and justice. Through God's "right hand," God's power acts through the
563 gospel to draw, transform, and re-create people in heart, mind, and soul. Both hands serve God's purposes
564 of well-being through both spiritual and social means to bring a rightly ordered life of peace and
565 flourishing.

566
567 While distinct in function and purpose, the law and the gospel are not independent, and both flow from
568 God's power and for God's purposes. God's left-hand work should not be identified solely with political
569 authority or the state. It encompasses culture, family, economics, and all aspects of daily life.

570
571 There is a substantive discussion about the appropriate interaction in civic life of these two strategies in
572 the ELCA social message "Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in Democracy"
573 (www.elca.org/socialmessages, p. 4). The dangers of misuse are also described there. These include
574 teaching that God's two strategies are unrelated, dismissing civic life and government as evil, or claiming
575 an identification of God's will with a particular nation, political strategy, or civil institution.¹³

576
577 **Article 6) God's people approach civic life with abounding trust in God and, at the same time, with**
578 **measured realism and humility about human efforts. God's two-handed strategy is necessary**
579 **because of sin, which means people of faith live in a continual tension. Some ways of civic life**
580 **should be affirmed as better than others in serving the common good. Yet the presence and promise**
581 **of God's reign make the church inevitably restless with respect to life in society, and Christians**
582 **thereby live simultaneously with hope and striving, realism and restlessness.**

¹¹ The Formula of Concord asserts a "third function [use] of the Law," (FC Ep. VI and FC SD VI), but debate continues in Lutheran circles on whether a third use is redundant. Some hold to the formula's position as important to assert that the externals of the law are 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.

¹² Other analogies and phrases also are used in the Lutheran tradition. One common term has been "Two Kingdoms," but in the New Testament, "kingdom" is reserved for the coming reign of God alone. The reformers' insight that God works through two different strategies is vital, but the term "Two Kingdoms" is poor terminology for our times. 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).

¹³ "Government and Civic Engagement in the United States: Discipleship in a Democracy" (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2020), 6ff, www.elca.org/socialmessages.

583 While we are called to do justice and love kindness (Micah 6:8), it is not always clear what that means in
584 any particular situation. God’s people approach the present world with abounding trust in God’s coming
585 reign and, at the same time, measured realism and humility about human efforts to create a just society.
586

587 Through faith, God’s church already takes part in the coming reign of God announced by and embodied
588 in Jesus. As the social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* explains, “The church
589 still awaits the resurrection of the dead and the fulfillment of the whole creation in God’s promised future.
590 In this time of ‘now ... not yet,’ the church lives in two ages—the present age and the age to come. In this
591 sense, the church is ‘in’ the world but not ‘from’ the world.”¹⁴ Christians have simultaneous memberships
592 in God’s temporal and eternal work. It is unavoidable that Christians live in the temporal order, with all
593 its questions, ambiguities, and tensions.
594

595 Neither the law nor the gospel allows the church to accommodate easily the way civic life often unfolds.
596 Some of those ways should be affirmed as better expressions of good than others and as more productive
597 means toward well-being. Yet the presence and promise of God’s reign makes the church inevitably
598 restless and discontented with society’s continual brokenness and violence. We are called to work for a
599 better world. We should support and commend civic and political efforts that bring better measures of
600 order, justice, and harmony. However, even those best efforts require revision and, by God’s grace,
601 improvement. Christians are simultaneously people of hope and courage, realism and restlessness.
602

603 **Article 7) God’s response to sin calls people to delight in the law of the Lord (Psalm 1:1-2) and**
604 **provides tools for seeking civil well-being. The uniquely Christian proclamation, the gospel, does**
605 **not introduce any new laws to govern the civil order but urges us to obey just laws and motivates us**
606 **to seek greater well-being for all. While the Holy Scriptures provide the fundamental norm, our**
607 **human faculties--such as reason, experience, knowledge, and imagination--have crucial roles in**
608 **discerning better, and worse, ways of running a human society.**
609

610 God provides multiple tools for striving toward social well-being. Because the Scriptures are the norm for
611 faith and life, all Christian efforts are judged according to its central proclamation. The Lutheran
612 theological tradition also looks to the insights from the Book of Concord, grounded first in articles 6, 16,
613 and 28 of the Augsburg Confession, as faithful, if historically conditioned, interpretations of the
614 Scriptures.
615

616 Our church teaches that God also provides human reason as a gift for seeking justice and social harmony.
617 Lutherans have sometimes used the language of “natural law” to describe shared values and ends that are
618 given by God, individually and collectively, to direct human beings. At its most basic, this has referred to
619 an inherent human principle that the good is to be done and the bad is to be avoided. It also is expressed
620 by the exhortation of the Golden Rule or as the basic expectation to do no harm.¹⁵ This explains the
621 sentiment in the Book of Concord that, to some extent, the Ten Commandments are something “written in
622 the hearts of all [people].”¹⁶
623

624 The character of natural law has been misunderstood and has too often been weaponized against people
625 deemed different, especially already marginalized and oppressed groups. This has been done by picking
626 particular laws from the Scriptures and imposing them on others, which is to misuse the function of law in
627 the Scriptures. The natural law is not a set of specific rules or unchanging social mores. The rightful

¹⁴ A fuller description of this tension appears in the ELCA social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, 3, www.elca.org/socialstatements.

¹⁵ This is common phrasing found in Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Philip Melancthon.

¹⁶ Large Catechism, third article of the Creed, Article 3, para. 67, BC 2000, 492.

628 attention to shared human principles can be only one part of the ongoing work of communal deliberation
629 and conversation.

630

631 Because law is God’s gift, the Scriptures exhort God’s people to “delight ... in the law of the Lord”
632 (Psalm 1:1-2). The Lutheran tradition also appreciates the gifts of human capacities that include many
633 areas of expertise and inquiry. These include reason, emotion, experience, imagination, and the many
634 areas of expertise and fields of study that society engages in, such as the political and social sciences. All
635 human efforts are dimmed and distorted by sin. Nevertheless, these tools provide a common basis for
636 Christians to work with others of good will toward the well-being of society.

637

638 The social teaching of this church is normed by the Scriptures and seeks to employ the many gifts of
639 human capacity to address contemporary social life.¹⁷ Though these govern and guide as this church’s
640 official teaching, Lutherans recognize the possibility for continuing rethinking and revision through
641 discernment as a community together.

642

643 **Article 8) The ELCA recognizes a history in which Lutheran churches, despite some important**
644 **exceptions, have too often failed to make a priority of the civic common good. However, Lutherans**
645 **affirm that civic institutions remain God’s gifts even as we admit our compromises and failures.**
646 **This church’s work includes acknowledgment of past failures and a repentance that turns to**
647 **holding accountable civic leaders and those in positions of political authority for the common good.**

648

649 Since the Reformation many of the historically dominant expressions of Lutheran theology and churches
650 have, despite some important exceptions, too often failed to make a priority of the civic common good.
651 We have not, as Lutheran Confessions teach, given “this righteousness of reason the praise it deserves, for
652 our corrupt nature has no greater good than this ... God even honors it with temporal rewards.”¹⁸

653

654 An understandable desire to avoid “works righteousness” has led Lutherans too often to unjustifiable
655 passivity and a failure to act in the public arena, thus not holding governments or each other accountable.
656 An understandable desire for peace and for order has led Lutherans to remain complacent or even to
657 support oppressive regimes and systems. At other times Lutherans have exhibited triumphalism or
658 intolerance in taking political action.

659

660 This church acknowledges past failures and is committed to a repentance that turns toward holding civic
661 leaders and those in positions of political authority accountable in appropriate ways. Under normal
662 circumstances acting for accountability means making use of the tools of democratic process. That
663 process implies an ongoing relationship between those in positions of authority and their constituents.

664

665 Those in authority owe an account of how they are using the power and resources that have been
666 entrusted to them. On occasion, holding those in authority to account will mean engaging in nonviolent
667 public protests or even, in rare instances, acts of civil disobedience. Even when use of these tools is
668 necessary, such actions must always be guided by an ethic of love and a spirit of upbuilding the common
669 good.

670

671 **Article 9) To “walk humbly” with God (Micah 6:8) must include welcoming and acknowledging the**
672 **ideas, values, and contributions of all people, regardless of their religious tradition or worldview.**
673 **Christians, as individuals or as the church, have no guaranteed higher or better reasoning than**
674 **other people in religious or nonreligious communities. This does not mean Christians do not have**
675 **contributions to make, nor that they should avoid drawing from their faith, values, and insights in**

¹⁷ See www.elca.org/socialstatements.

¹⁸ Apology, Article IV, 24, BC 2000, 124.

676 **discussing public matters. The Christian vocation to serve God and the neighbor may be fulfilled in**
677 **civic places of responsibility.**

678
679 As Lutherans participate in civic life for the well-being of all, we recognize that this work is neither
680 unique to nor possessed by Christians alone. To “walk humbly” with God (Micah 6:8) must include
681 welcoming and acknowledging the ideas, values, and contributions of all people, regardless of their
682 religious tradition or worldview. Christians, as individuals or as the body of Christ in the world, have no
683 guaranteed higher or better reasoning than other religious or nonreligious communities. This means that
684 Lutherans reject the claim, explicit or assumed by some, that Christians have revelatory knowledge or
685 saving insight into civic and political matters.

686
687 This does not mean Christians do not have contributions to make, nor that they should not draw from their
688 faith, language, and traditions in discussing public matters. God’s grace received in faith empowers
689 people to action. Our calling comes with a sharpened commitment to the dignity of all because all are
690 God’s children and created in God’s image. Our actions come with an awakened sense of God’s biblical
691 call for justice and hearts changed for compassion and care. Love of God is embodied in neighbor justice
692 by providing for their daily bread and practicing the forgiveness Christians have received in Christ.

693
694 Liberated from the burden of seeking eternal salvation through our own efforts, we can join God’s efforts
695 to create and re-create the institutions and communities of human social life. The power of God moves us
696 to provide food, shelter, play, safety, education, and many other material and social benefits. Sin is
697 prevalent, but Lutherans call upon the Scriptures, find aid in their theological heritage, and use human
698 reason and practices of discernment to seek the means to participate wisely and critically in the civic life
699 God intends. Our baptismal vocation to serve God and neighbor can be lived out in civic places of
700 responsibility.

701
702

703 **II. The Calling to Robust Civic Participation**

704
705 **Article 10) Civic life entails activities and institutions across all public life, from one’s local**
706 **neighborhood to matters of national and international concern. Participation in civic organizations**
707 **comes in many shapes and sizes, and the recent decline of civic participation in the United States is**
708 **especially troubling. Our church affirms that anyone who seeks the community’s well-being**
709 **through civic participation is, knowingly or not, using the gifts God provides. They are acting as**
710 **channels of God’s concern for human life.**

711
712 Civic life involves activities and institutions across all public life, from one’s local neighborhood to issues
713 of national and international concern. Participation in civic organizations comes in many shapes and sizes,
714 such as coaching soccer for a community center, attending PTA meetings, providing meals for seniors,
715 participating in peaceful demonstration, volunteering one’s business acumen toward a community
716 development initiative, or participating in international “sister city” programs. The social fabric of a
717 democracy depends upon intelligent, prudent, vigorous, and broad participation. It is a medium through
718 which people deepen relationships, create opportunities, and hold one another accountable. This makes
719 the recent decline of civic participation in the United States¹⁹ especially troubling.

720

¹⁹ 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.

721 Our church affirms that anyone who seeks the community’s well-being through civic participation is,
722 knowingly or not, using the gifts God provides. There is no single or required way to live this out. The
723 Christian faith celebrates the multitude of ways that God calls people into lives of service and community
724 for the sake of the common good.

725
726 This statement relies on social teaching on civic life found in previous ELCA statements and messages
727 with both domestic and international implications.²⁰ The particular calling to be an active and informed
728 citizen in relation to political life is most fully articulated in the social message “Government and Civic
729 Engagement in the United States.”²¹ It affirms, for example, the need to pray for civic and political
730 leaders (1 Timothy 2:12), the responsibility to vote and participate in political life, and the need for
731 collective action toward fair and compassionate government.

732
733 **Article 11) Christian worshiping assemblies are grounded in the living Word of God’s law and**
734 **gospel, which empowers them to be centers supporting civic participation. This is evident in how**
735 **liturgy prepares us to join God’s work in civic life. As expressed in the ELCA constitution and**
736 **social teaching, this church expects that each worshiping community will be engaged in forms of**
737 **active civic participation as one element of life in Christ’s church.**

738
739 Congregations, synod-authorized ministries, campus ministries, and other recognized worshiping
740 assemblies are to be grounded in the living Word of God’s law and gospel, which also means they are
741 centers for civic participation. Rooted in Word and Sacrament, almost everything in worship, from the
742 gathering to the sending, prepares us to join God’s activity in civic life. The dynamic movement of the
743 liturgy allows Christians to rest in God’s mercy and be restored in hope but, at every turn, prepares them
744 to be sent forth into the world to work for the community’s good, both local and beyond.

745
746 There are many examples. Besides preaching, the church’s prayers lift up social issues and ask guidance
747 for those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1f) The peace of Christ is a sign of our unity in God and a reminder
748 that we are sent to share this experience of peace with the world. The offering is collected to support the
749 assembly and to share with other people in need, locally and around the globe.

750
751 There are many types of worshiping communities. They may draw from the most local to broad regions.
752 In all cases, as expressed in its constitution and social teaching, the ELCA expects that each worshiping
753 community will be engaged in forms of active civic participation as one element of life in Christ’s church.
754 This is one vital way that God’s people serve neighbors in human society.

755
756 **Article 12) The ELCA reaffirms that civic service can represent a place to carry out one’s calling**
757 **from God to civic participation. Public servants should be held to high expectations, and the larger**
758 **community should give government officials the dignity and respect owed for good and just work.**
759 **At the same time, citizens are expected to hold the government and its officials accountable.**

760
761 Lutherans historically have encouraged individuals to use their gifts for civic and political service
762 faithfully at the local, state, national, or international level. Examples include those who work in civil
763 service, public safety, health care, or education. Other examples include military personnel, judges,
764 legislators, and appointed officials. These and many others are essential in making possible the effective
765 functioning of government services. Those called to such public service are urged to work toward justice
766 and the common good, and never for dominating power or gain for themselves, or for particular groups
767 with which they identify.

²⁰ The first ELCA social statement, *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, sets the foundation for this. It is cited above.

²¹ “Government and Civic Engagement,” cited above.

768 Civil service includes more than work in a legislature or on the national stage, and this church encourages
769 all people to explore service in state, county, and municipal branches including through various boards,
770 agencies, and committees. It is critical to support and guide youth and young adults in this church to
771 consider taking up such places of responsibility.

772
773 Christians are encouraged to take an initial stance of respect for neighbors who work in government at all
774 levels—local, state, and national—and in each of the three branches of government. Unfortunately, in this
775 society, there is a common caricature of government workers as lazy, incompetent, or troublesome
776 bureaucrats. This image is grossly misleading. It misrepresents the complexities of civic life and
777 government service, and from a Christian perspective, it violates the Eighth Commandment, against
778 bearing false witness against another.

779
780 Government employees are not above reproach, and they may and do fail in their responsibilities.
781 However, the default stance toward them should be dignity and respect, not slander and suspicion. In fact,
782 this devaluation of government service, officials, and workers reveals deep problems with prejudices and
783 distorted hierarchies of the value of each human being. When local trash collectors, postal workers, and
784 county officials are not given honor for their work, this reveals one way in which we fail to see their labor
785 and service as God does.

786
787 At the same time, citizens are expected to hold the government and its officials accountable. Government
788 workers should do their jobs with integrity and fairness and in ways that serve the common good.
789 Government institutions, programs, and policies must be held to high standards as a sign of their
790 importance and impact. Courts must apply the law in accordance with precedent and with fairness, equity,
791 and impartiality in order to preserve public trust. We should judge individual cases of government failure
792 carefully, avoiding generalizations that are unfair and that fail to help identify areas where improvement
793 is genuinely needed.

794
795 **Article 13) Religion can create divisions in civic life or can contribute to mending the torn social**
796 **fabric and reconciling divided peoples. This church urges all people of faith to seek a constructive**
797 **role that counters growing polarization, distrust, and ill will. Religious traditions can offer**
798 **particular gifts of moral vision, inclusion, and compassion sorely needed in U.S. civic life.**

799
800 Religious organizations must discern when and how to constructively engage in civic life. We must be
801 attentive to contexts and what specific roles and actions are called for. Religions can create divisions in
802 civic life or can contribute to mending the social fabric and reconciling divided peoples. This church
803 urges all people of faith to seek constructive roles to counter growing hyper-partisan polarization, distrust,
804 and ill will.

805
806 The ELCA constitution and our church’s social teaching lift up a moral vision for civic life that reflects
807 both the depth of sin in human fallenness and the heights of hope in God’s redemption. This church’s
808 moral vision does not mean we expect to bring God’s kingdom on earth—only God can do that—but it
809 does give witness to the biblical idea of God’s intention for shalom and thereby encourages us to stand for
810 both justice and reconciliation in this time of divisiveness and acrimony.

811
812 This moral vision is held in tension with the realism of human nature’s fallenness but reminds us that all
813 human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. The moral vision also reminds us that,
814 contrary to the common assumptions and painful actions in civic life, all stand equally before God. There
815 is no neighbor or stranger, no political ally or opponent for whom Christ did not die. As a community of
816 inclusion, a people of every race and tongue (Acts 2, Revelation 7:9), we are drawn by our civic
817 engagement into wider inclusion and dignity for all.

818

819 The ELCA has committed itself to helping in the reconciliation and healing of communities and civic
820 life.²² We are expected to respond with compassion and imagination, drawing from experience and
821 innovating new ways to address civic challenges. For example, social ministries in the community are a
822 means of civic participation and are widely affirmed by this church. Care facilities, food pantries, housing
823 programs, and refugee resettlement efforts are but a few examples of types of responses found in
824 individual congregations and among the members of Lutheran Services in America, one of the largest
825 social service organizations in the United States. This church has a responsibility, working with all people
826 of goodwill, to mediate conflict and to advocate just and peaceful resolutions while supporting institutions
827 and policies that seek the well-being and power of all.

828
829 **Article 14) The ELCA and other religious bodies have a particular calling to encourage**
830 **discernment and provide spaces for difficult conversations. For Christians, discernment is enabled**
831 **by the gift of unity that Christ gives. Discussion about tough issues among God’s people is a witness**
832 **that counters the forces of social division and distrust. The ELCA’s identity as a community of moral**
833 **deliberation is one into which our church continues to grow, and which is increasingly crucial in a**
834 **society so divided.**

835
836 Discerning a best course of action requires considering many different sides of an issue. Because we
837 recognize that every person is one for whom Christ died, we must seek to be a safe space for challenging
838 conversations. A safe space does not mean a space where all agree; it means a space where all are
839 honored and valued regardless of what they believe as worshiping communities struggle together to
840 discern the common good.

841
842 In a polarized environment, the practice of communal moral discernment is an evangelical witness to
843 God’s intention for humans to respect others and the good use of reason. Fulfilling a wide spectrum of
844 callings and coming from a diversity of experiences, Christians will often disagree passionately on social
845 questions. Because they share common convictions of faith, they are free, indeed obligated, to deliberate
846 together on the challenges they face in the world even when consensus is not reached. United in baptism
847 with Christ and all believers, Christians should welcome and celebrate their diversity and remain in
848 conversation.

849
850 Since the 1991 adoption of the social statement *Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*, the idea of
851 our church as a safe space for discernment has been formally part of the ELCA’s identity as a community
852 of moral deliberation. It is an identity that our church continues to grow into. As a church, we recognize
853 our many failures to live out this identity; at the same time, we give thanks that we may renew and build
854 upon this heritage.

855
856 **Article 15) The biblical witness teaches that, among other roles and aims, there is a prophetic task**
857 **for those who follow Jesus (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 42:7). The church’s prophetic presence in civic life**
858 **calls for holding civic leaders accountable, taking constructive action and lifting up a vision for**
859 **improved social well-being. It is part of this church’s work under the left hand of God as a**
860 **contribution to society, and it needs to be done with both vitality and great care.**

861
862 Looking to the biblical witness, the church has long affirmed that one means of discipleship and ministry
863 involves civic participation as a prophetic presence. With Mary, the mother of Jesus, the church sings of
864 God’s action to bring down the proud and lift up the lowly (Luke 1:51-53). The church hopes to follow
865 Christ, who boldly declared a calling to proclaim good news to the poor, release to the incarcerated,
866 healing for the sick, and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18, Isaiah 42:7). The prophetic role envisions
867 and points us toward a better future of well-being.

²² *The Church in Society*, 4.

868 This prophetic role includes “the obligation to name and denounce the idols before which people bow, to
869 identify the power of sin present in social structures, and to advocate in hope with poor and powerless
870 people.”²³ In its ordination rites, this church has consistently affirmed the expectation “to give faithful
871 witness in the world through word and deed” and “to serve the needy, care for the sick, comfort the
872 distressed.”²⁴ Though these expectations are made explicit for rostered ministers, they are part of this
873 church’s calling shared by all, irrespective of particular offices and roles within the church.²⁵
874

875 This role of holding civic leaders accountable applies to both religious and secular institutions when they
876 abuse or overreach their authority. This church says, with Martin Luther, that “to rebuke” those in
877 authority “through God’s Word spoken publicly, boldly and honestly” is “not seditious” but “a
878 praiseworthy, noble, and ... particularly great service to God.”²⁶
879

880 Efforts toward justice-seeking, advocacy, social change, and addressing all forms of civic life require
881 care, patience, and wise distinctions. Civic participation in these forms may be controversial, and
882 worshiping communities need to take time to discern and identify common parameters for action. Each
883 service ministry, advocacy effort, or social change ministry warrants careful selection.
884

885 Theologically it is important to recognize that the exertion of social power when addressing or
886 challenging civic life is part of this church’s work under the left hand of God.²⁷ Though the church’s
887 message of the gospel is sure, we cannot know what the outcomes of exerting social power in public
888 actions will be. We must consistently evaluate whether neighbor justice, especially for the marginalized,
889 is being served by the prophetic presence of this church.
890

891 **Article 16) The ELCA encourages individuals and worshipping communities to work together**
892 **toward a civic life that better reflects God’s vision for a more just and reconciled world. The**
893 **various forms of advocacy offer ways to press civic leaders and public policy makers to respect the**
894 **needs and dignity of all persons and our common home, with special concern for the vulnerable.**
895 **Such faith-rooted advocacy is born from relationships of service and solidarity, is guided by ELCA**
896 **social teaching, and requires different practices in different contexts. Flowing from trust built**
897 **through one-to-one relationships, faith-based organizing seeks to spur action by building coalitions**
898 **of like-minded people in mostly local contexts. Faith-informed advocacy of various kinds can play a**
899 **transformative role in a polarized political world by bringing people together to work toward the**
900 **common good in public life.**
901

902 The challenge to improve civic life, to provide a prophetic presence, or to address complex social issues is
903 daunting. Our church encourages individuals and communities to find ways to work with others toward a
904 civic life that better reflects God’s vision for a more just and reconciled world.
905

906 Advocacy comes in many forms, from institution-based efforts to more local forms sometimes called
907 “faith-based organizing.” The point is to press civic leaders and public-policy makers to respect the needs
908 and dignity of all people and our common home, with special care for the vulnerable. Advocacy comes

²³ *The Church in Society*, 4.

²⁴ See “Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament,” adapted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 3, tinyurl.com/bdeyuk3p, and “Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Service,” adapted from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship Occasional Services for the Assembly* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), 7, tinyurl.com/2p9w4sfw.

²⁵ *ELW*, 236.

²⁶ Cited in *The Church in Society*, 4. The source is Martin Luther, “Commentary on Psalm 82” (1530) in *Selected Psalms II, Works*, vol. 13., ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1956).

²⁷ See articles 5-7 of this document, above.

909 from the Latin *vocare* (to call), the root word for voice and vocation, two important elements of our
910 witness in society.

911
912 Institutional advocacy is a stewardship of the ELCA’s voice and is grounded in the ELCA’s constitution.
913 That document calls the ELCA to:

- 914 • Empower members to engage with systems and processes to promote the well-being of the human
915 community and creation in the public square, local and federal government, and the international
916 community.
- 917 • Equip and encourage members to seek dignity and peace.
- 918 • Advance justice in response to human suffering, marginalization, and exclusion.
- 919 • Promote equality, justice, and respect for the value of every person to reduce the systemic
920 injustices impacting communities and societies.
- 921 • Exercise corporate social responsibility through environmental, social, and justice principles to
922 create a just and sustainable society.²⁸

923
924 Such faith-rooted advocacy is born from relationships of service and solidarity. It is an expression of both
925 individual discipleship and our life as a church together. It grows most powerfully out of ministries
926 among people and communities that have been denied their human dignity or are seeking greater justice.
927 Advocacy supports and amplifies these voices. Though sometimes advocacy is described as providing “a
928 voice for the voiceless,” we must be careful to identify and support opportunities for people to speak for
929 themselves.

930
931 The ELCA’s corporate witness is governed by ELCA social teaching,²⁹ and advocacy occurs in both
932 domestic and global accompaniment with people and communities. Likewise, advocacy is enriched and
933 strengthened through ecumenical and interreligious collaboration.³⁰ The united witness of the faith
934 community builds and depends upon relationships of trust and communal discernment.

935
936 Moving people of varying interests to act for the common good may require different practices in
937 different contexts. Building relationships and sharing vision can involve letters, calls, and meetings with
938 elected leaders and their staff. It can involve invitations for them to visit communities and ministries. It
939 involves building public awareness from editorials to rallies and protests, earned and paid media, public
940 testimony, community organizing, and more.

941
942 Using the trust of one-to-one relationships, faith-based organizers seek to spur action by building
943 coalitions of like-minded people in mostly local contexts. Faith-based community organizing roots itself
944 in shared values and commitments, in congregations and other institutions, often across denominations
945 and religious boundaries.

946
947 Faith-informed advocacy can play a transformative role in a polarized political world by bringing people
948 together to work toward the common good in the public square.

949
950 **Article 17) Was Jesus “political”? The Scriptures are clear that he was not political in the sense of**
951 **affiliation with a political party, a partisan movement, or a designer of civic legislation. However,**
952 **the biblical claim that “Jesus is Lord” (Acts 10:36) is simultaneously a political and religious**

²⁸ ELCA Constitution 16.12.D21, p. 118.

²⁹ The ELCA’s corporate witness is expressed, for instance, in the work of the Witness in Society team or the occasional filing of amicus briefs. See elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church.

³⁰ Such collaborations are specifically recognized in the ELCA’s ecumenical and interreligious policy documents. See, for example, [Inter-Religious Policy Statement REVISED_0919_v2.indd \(elca.org\)](#), 11 (especially commitments 7, 8, and 9), and [Microsoft Word - EcumenicalVision.doc \(elca.org\)](#), 6 (point number 4).

953 **statement. In addition, Jesus called government leadership to accountability to such an extent that**
954 **he was executed as a political criminal. Today, concern for the neighbor and the common good**
955 **means the church is called to follow Jesus' example by engaging appropriate issues with care that**
956 **are in the political arena. Political partisanship is not proper for the church, even while we engage in**
957 **issues that have political elements.**
958

959 There are debates about whether it is right to call Jesus "political." The two millennia that separate us
960 from Jesus' social context make it difficult to appreciate the political dimensions of Jesus' ministry. Jesus
961 was not political in the sense of affiliation with a particular political party, movement, or leadership
962 circle. He did not negotiate or legislate civic laws and regulations. Nevertheless, the Scriptures attest that
963 "Jesus is Lord," (Acts 10:36, Philippians 2:11), and that was and is both a theological and a political
964 statement. Moreover, Jesus made political authorities uncomfortable enough to execute him because he
965 called them to a higher accountability and claimed a power broader and greater than that of imperial
966 Rome.

967
968 If Jesus' ministry was political in this sense, then disciples today also have a related task. If Jesus is
969 Ruler, then no nation, constitution, or government, even a democratic one, can have our ultimate loyalty.
970 God's demands have singular priority for Christians and, ultimately, are not to be equated with worldly
971 structures such as a government or a nation. As with Jesus, however, these demands pull us not out of
972 society but into it.

973
974 When God's people join God's efforts in society, they must sometimes address issues in the political
975 arena if they are to hold government accountable, oppose social oppression, seek various kinds of
976 liberation, and work toward the common good. Political engagement in this sense is a manifestation of
977 serving God's love through civic participation. In this sense, then, addressing issues that are in the
978 political arena is an element of a Christian's, and this church's, calling. Political partisanship is not
979 (Article 35). Any engagement of issues can be interpreted, criticized, or even rebuked as being partisan,
980 but careful discernment and clear criteria (see articles 21 and 25, for example) provide the necessary
981 guardrails for risking this participation in God's work.

982
983 **Article 18) The ELCA also has a standing commitment to civic life, exercised through synods and**
984 **the churchwide expressions of our church. The 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A***
985 ***Lutheran Perspective* details the nature of this institutional witness.**
986

987 The ELCA also serves God and neighbor in civic life through its synods and the churchwide organization.
988 These long-standing commitments are detailed in the 1991 social statement *The Church in Society: A*
989 *Lutheran Perspective* (pp. 8-9).³¹ Some examples from that document, among others, illustrate our
990 church's civic contributions as part of our social witness:

- 991 • Supporting church-related economic, educational, and social ministry organizations in their
992 service to human need.
- 993 • Speaking on timely, urgent issues on which the voice of this church should be heard and which
994 have clear and specific grounding in ELCA social teaching.
- 995 • Working with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using moral
996 persuasion to advocate that political and economic decision-making bodies develop policies that
997 advance justice, peace, and care of creation.
- 998 • Providing for federal chaplains in military and federal prisons.
- 999 • Supporting the Lutheran Office for World Community at the United Nations.

1000

³¹ The reader can find the full list there, many of which relate to civic participation. See *The Church in Society*, 8-9.

1001 **Article 19) Civic participation necessarily involves matters of government and political life. The**
1002 **word “politics” often is used today to express disgust with dishonest practices, partisan**
1003 **shenanigans, power grabs, ploys of deceit, and the sinful use of authority. “Politics” in this**
1004 **statement, however, is understood as the negotiation of how the benefits, burdens, rights, and**
1005 **responsibilities of living in a society are shared. Politics, rightly understood and practiced, then, is**
1006 **essential to civic well-being and of concern to God’s people. It is important to distinguish between**
1007 **politics and ethics and to ensure that political concerns are guided by ethical discernment. This**
1008 **church’s body of teaching addresses civic life ethically, which includes the relation of communities**
1009 **of faith to political authority, to government. As an example, ethics presents the principle of self-**
1010 **determination as a primary value of a healthy political community because it encourages the idea of**
1011 **sharing power.**
1012

1013 The Christian vocation to serve the neighbor through our common civic life has multiple facets, but
1014 inevitably it involves some participation in the essential civic dimension of government and politics. The
1015 word “politics” often is used today to express disgust with dishonest practices, partisan shenanigans,
1016 power grabs, ploys of deceit—with authority being used in a sinful way. These practices take place, but
1017 politics, rightly understood, is a necessary and beneficial gift. God creates humans as political beings. In
1018 the word’s original and fullest meaning, it describes action in the *polis* (Greek), a state or society
1019 especially when characterized by a sense of community.
1020

1021 “Politics” then, describes a necessary and positive aspect of human life. It describes negotiating how the
1022 benefits, burdens, rights, and responsibilities of living in a society are shared. Politics, in this sense,
1023 happens whenever two or more people are gathered to live in community together. (This includes life in
1024 the family and the church!) It describes the activity in which each person’s interests and the well-being of
1025 the community are navigated and negotiated. Politics is an essential and good thing because it is vital to
1026 self-governance.³²
1027

1028 Politics is always complicated and messy because it involves diplomacy, compromise, persuasion, and
1029 sometimes coercion. The reality is that living in community requires scrappy negotiations about the
1030 ongoing (re)distribution of resources, rights, responsibilities, opportunity, access, and all other things that
1031 are needed to form a healthy community. It includes legislation (law-making), enforcement, judicial
1032 evaluation, community planning and organization, advocacy, and distribution of goods and services (such
1033 as postal delivery, overseas aid, etc.).
1034

1035 It is important to distinguish between politics and ethics. Ethics is careful discernment about what is right,
1036 good, or appropriate. It asks what ought to be done (or not), what we should value (or not), and who we
1037 should be (or not) as a community. In other words, ethics seeks to guide what we (as a community and
1038 members of it) will seek, be, and do to form a community of well-being. ELCA social statements are
1039 ethical documents that provide this church’s teaching for addressing civic life.
1040

1041 Politics and ethics are necessarily related. Ethics discerns; politics implements. As an example, ethics
1042 presents the principle of self-determination as a primary value of a healthy political community because it
1043 encourages the idea of sharing power. Government and political activity can be evaluated then by how
1044 well they foster mutual self-determination for each community in a society (Article 21). The following
1045 sections turn to the principles and assessments of our church on the essential element of civic life of
1046 political authority.
1047
1048

³² “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy,” 2.

III. Assessing the U.S. Constitutional Form of Government

1049
1050
1051 **Article 20) Political authority is one way that God protects and promotes the well-being of human**
1052 **society. Political authority is also human and social, permeated by sin. Some governments and**
1053 **societies fulfill God’s intent for political authority better than others. In the Lutheran tradition the**
1054 **question to ask of government is “How faithful is it to God’s purposes of well-being, including**
1055 **caring for the most vulnerable members of the community?” Lutherans ought to live in troubled**
1056 **restlessness with all government, both supporting political authority and criticizing its misuse, as**
1057 **appropriate.**

1058
1059 The Lutheran Confessions affirm the principle of political authority and good government³³ as one way
1060 the Triune God protects and coordinates the complex web of social and economic relationships for human
1061 well-being. Over time, Lutherans have come to understand that we ought to live with a troubled
1062 restlessness about all forms of government. Some provide better measures of well-being than others even
1063 though sin permeates every human intention and structure.

1064
1065 In the Lutheran theological tradition, the question is how faithful government is to God’s purposes of
1066 justice and good order, especially in caring for the most vulnerable members of the community. The
1067 reformers of the 16th century directed attention to those who held positions of responsibility in civic
1068 institutions, including government, the church, and the household.³⁴

1069
1070 Such discernment about political authority reaches as far back as Luther’s catechisms. The Large
1071 Catechism says, “It would therefore be fitting if the coat of arms of every upright prince were emblazoned
1072 with a loaf of bread instead of a lion or a wreath of rue [a medicinal herb], or if a loaf of bread were
1073 stamped on coins.”³⁵ Rather than conquering more land or gaining more wealth, the role of government
1074 should be focused on ensuring that each person received all the necessities for daily well-being.

1075
1076 The Lutheran tradition supports an attitude of respect for and cooperation with political authority, but also
1077 maintains that there is a responsibility to assess and call individuals and institutions to account. Because
1078 government is an indispensable structure of society, Lutherans have historically called for great deference
1079 and obedience to civil authorities and institutions, in line with Romans 13. The Lutheran heritage contains
1080 examples of people denouncing the misuse of those institutions and also cooperating with them when
1081 appropriate.

1082
1083 **Article 21) To determine how the well-being of the neighbor is being served by political authority,**
1084 **criteria for assessment are necessary. God’s power sustains and gives power to creation. Therefore,**
1085 **the principal criterion used to assess governmental and political authority is whether it increases**
1086 **power and its beneficial use among the people governed. Power expressed as mutual self-**
1087 **determination enhances people’s lives and is a presumption that should be encouraged and**
1088 **respected by government and others. Both the model of divine power and the political presumption**
1089 **of self-determination include a criterion of fostering plurality.**

³³ Apology, Article 16, BC 2000, 231.

³⁴ This tradition goes back to the work of the reformers, such as Johannes Bugenhagen, Luther’s pastor, who was deployed to various 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 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.

³⁵ Large Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Article IV, para. 75, BC 2000, 231.

1091 Human social life is an arena of multiple forms of power. This church teaches that an essential assessment
1092 for any use of power, whether in law, policy, or action, is whether it amplifies the power that God intends
1093 for people and groups. This assessment is especially important with those who have been denied power
1094 historically or marginalized by social systems.

1095
1096 As the source of all that is, God *is* sovereign. But God’s sovereignty brings forth creatures who are not
1097 God, and God gives power and sustenance to creatures. God’s power creates their power rather than
1098 depriving them of it (Article 2). Divine, self-giving power is always and everywhere plural, producing not
1099 one center of power but multiple transmissions of power.

1100
1101 As such all power can be assessed by its adherence to the divine creative and self-giving purpose or by
1102 the extent to which it is distorted and misused for the sake of domination and exploitation. This is true
1103 whether in politics, civic life, religious organizations, business, law enforcement, society, or the family.

1104
1105 To the extent that human power is directed solely or primarily to the control or domination of others, it is
1106 a sinful distortion of the purpose of power. Dominating power, intentionally or unintentionally, ultimately
1107 destroys the independent power of others rather than increases or intensifies God’s gift of creative,
1108 sustaining power. Power exercised as domination hollows out those who are subject to it, whereas those
1109 in control lose the vitality that allows them to adapt.

1110
1111 Like all power, governmental power is subject to sinful impulses and systemic distortions. This is the
1112 case, in part, because those in government, like all other people, are sinners. Governmental actors,
1113 however well-meaning, are also subject to limitations of knowledge and the temptation to not
1114 acknowledge those limits. Government, too, may often seek its own advantage or that of its most
1115 influential constituencies at the expense of many of its people. This is especially likely if one thinks of
1116 politics and civic engagement as merely a collection of warring interest groups, battling in a zero-sum
1117 game of wins and losses.

1118
1119 There are circumstances that may require the use of dominating power to overcome others who are doing
1120 immense harm—such as another government. In certain circumstances, even war might be legitimate, for
1121 example, to defend one’s country against existential threats or to oppose totalitarian regimes. Under such
1122 circumstances, dominating power can be justified in good conscience to counter immense harm. This idea
1123 has been expressed in the Lutheran tradition as “the strange work of love to destroy what is against
1124 love.”³⁶ Even there, however, Christians and others believe there are constraints. For example,
1125 noncombatants and former combatants should be treated with care, as God’s creatures, not mere objects
1126 of control or domination.

1127
1128 God’s self-giving creative and sustaining power gives human creatures agency, the ability to set their own
1129 course. In addition to creating plurality, the gift of power therefore includes a presumption for self-
1130 determination. An important criterion for assessing government action is whether it extends the self-
1131 determination of the people—and thus *their* power.

1132
1133 Practically, this means that the necessary starting point for considering what is good for others should be
1134 what those others believe is good for them. Consequently, whether government action extends the mutual
1135 self-determination of its people—and thus *their* power—is an important criterion to assess government
1136 action. A national government may be far removed from certain local realities. Local or state
1137 governments may be more removed from the effects of their actions on those outside their jurisdiction.
1138 That distance increases the possibility for error in determining what will lead to another’s well-being and

³⁶ Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, and Justice: Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications* (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 49.

1139 what will damage another’s self-determination and power. This is not a value judgement but a mere
1140 description of the limits of government, even in a representative democracy.

1141
1142 These possibilities in turn mean government and the governed must ask what level of government is most
1143 appropriate and how best to design policies that foster self-determination. That is also why it is important
1144 to create opportunities for those who will be most directly affected by those decisions to participate and
1145 be heard seriously in the process of making the decision.

1146
1147 A presumption is, however, not a rule, and self-determination is not an absolute value. It is a *presumption*,
1148 a guardrail. Sometimes laws and regulations might oppose what people believe to be their own good.
1149 Individuals and groups can also mistake what is good for them.

1150
1151 The presumption for self-determination is especially necessary when what seems good for my group
1152 significantly harms others and their self-determination. This is because self-determination directly implies
1153 a norm of reciprocity. As a *universal* presumption deriving from God’s creative and sustaining power, it
1154 gives priority to others’ self-determination as well. Self-determination *always* includes mutual or plural
1155 self-determination. It does *not* mean doing whatever one wants at the expense of others. Self-
1156 determination is necessarily mutual self-determination. To rephrase this for ethics in the form of the
1157 Golden Rule: I should extend to others their self-determination just as I wish to have it extended to me
1158 (Matthew 7:12).

1159
1160 Both the model of divine power and the political presumption of self-determination include a criterion of
1161 fostering plurality. These are indispensable elements for thinking through the nature and purpose of the
1162 government of the United States as the country where most ELCA congregations operate.

1163
1164 **Article 22) In the United States, the Constitution is the federal framework of political authority.**
1165 **When it was written, the Constitution was unique in some ways, including its neutrality in matters**
1166 **of religion and its making “we the people” politically sovereign. The Constitution’s separation of**
1167 **powers and their checks and balances were designed in part to prevent the monopolization of**
1168 **sovereignty by any branch or locale of government. The Constitution is both grounding and**
1169 **aspirational; that is, it did not fulfill its own objectives completely. The Constitution’s preamble (or**
1170 **preface) expresses this government’s purpose. The values expressed in the preamble can be used to**
1171 **assess whether the government is serving the purpose that its own Constitution has laid out.**

1172
1173 In the United States, the Constitution (ratified in 1788) provides the federal framework of what political
1174 authority may and may not do with respect to its citizens and other governmental and nongovernmental
1175 institutions.³⁷ It provides for a national government consisting of three authorities with distinct roles and
1176 power sharing—executive, legislative, and judicial. It reserves certain matters to the states and others to
1177 citizens of the country regardless of the state in which they live. It also acknowledges Indigenous
1178 sovereign governments.

1179
1180 The U.S. Constitution was not utterly unique. There are precedents in human history for what we
1181 recognize as “democracy” or “a republic.” The Constitution was not even the first governing framework
1182 of the fledgling United States. That distinction belonged to the Articles of Confederation, adopted by the
1183 Continental Congress in 1777 (and ratified by the 13 states in 1781).³⁸ But within a few years, it became

³⁷ 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).

³⁸ 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).

1184 clear that the young country likely would not survive under the Articles of Confederation. There was no
1185 effective executive power to enforce the national Congress' decisions, and the nation was in danger of
1186 defaulting on its debts. The states had separate, often conflicting, policies (sometimes aimed at other
1187 states) as well as separate currencies. These and other failures gave rise to the Constitution.

1188
1189 The Constitution *was* unique in crucial ways. The 1788 Constitution makes no mention of God or religion
1190 except to prohibit requiring religious tests for holding federal office. And for the first time in recorded
1191 history, the governing document of a people had to be adopted (ratified) by people it would govern rather
1192 than be imposed by a monarch, a sovereign state, or religious authority (Article 23).

1193
1194 The Constitution also strives against the monopolization of power and pure self-interest by instituting
1195 checks and balances across institutions and with the states. The structure of the new government was
1196 explicitly designed to combat extreme self-interest, which the drafters had experienced both under a
1197 parliamentary monarchy and among the states included in the Articles of Confederation.

1198
1199 It was controversial to provide for a strong executive, as the Constitution did. Because of that, the framers
1200 limited the executive branch, reserving certain matters for the legislature or the judiciary. Similarly, the
1201 Constitution provides for an executive not elected by Congress, to limit Congress's power and influence.
1202 In addition to reserving some areas of authority for states, the Constitution provided all states with equal
1203 representation in the U.S. Senate to combat the fear that the larger states would ignore or destroy the
1204 vitality of smaller states. The courts were established to settle disputes and interpret laws. The authority of
1205 the courts was also checked by certain legislative and executive means.

1206
1207 The Constitution is both grounding and aspirational. It serves as an example *and* points this society to
1208 values and practices that the nation has fulfilled incompletely. Its preamble (or preface) clearly expresses
1209 this government's purpose and provides a reference for assessing national faithfulness to that purpose:

1210
1211 We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union,
1212 establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence,
1213 promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves
1214 and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States
1215 of America.

1216
1217 These are secular standards for evaluating government that also give specificity to the
1218 Christian question "Is the neighbor's well-being served?"

1219
1220 **Article 23) The most radical feature of the Constitution is its first three words: "we the people."
1221 Politically, the people are sovereign, not a monarch or other authority imposing a government on
1222 its people. The ratification of the Constitution itself enacts a preference for self-determination. Its
1223 enactment was deeply flawed, since the enfranchised "people" in the late 1700s were largely limited
1224 to white, property-owning males. The subsequent history of amendments to the Constitution have
1225 expanded "we the people" to include people of color, women, and young adults.**

1226
1227 The most radical feature of the Constitution is its first three words: "we the people." Never before had
1228 those who would be governed been required to vote their government into effect, to "ordain and
1229 establish" it. "The people" would determine how they would be governed (and that vote was close in
1230 some of the original 11 ratifying states). A clear preference for self-determination was inherent in the
1231 Constitutional process, as much as or more so than in the Constitution itself.

1232
1233 Much of the subsequent history of amendments to the Constitution made this preference for mutual self-
1234 determination more explicit. At the time of ratification, "the people" were largely limited to free white

1235 men. Many states also imposed a property-owning qualification on the right to vote. Slavery was
1236 recognized and accepted by the Constitution. Indeed, slaveholding states received additional
1237 congressional representation through the constitutional clause counting slaves as three-fifths of a person,
1238 even though those states denied slaves' personhood legally and gave them zero-fifths of a vote.

1239
1240 Most members of Indigenous nations, who were noncitizens of the United States until 1924, had no say in
1241 representation. Though American Indian sovereignty is recognized in the Constitution, that commitment
1242 was blatantly ignored as states and the federal governments violated treaty after treaty, and it remains a
1243 source of struggle today. Women had no universal right to vote in the United States until 1920.

1244
1245 The preference for self-determination was thus partly realized in the Constitution and partly unrealized.
1246 Amendments to the Constitution have tended to make that aspiration more effective by reducing the
1247 number of groups who were "governed" without their "consent" (for instance, expanding the right to
1248 vote).

1249
1250 Regarding citizens of African descent, the Reconstruction amendments essentially said that the 1787
1251 Constitution's "grand bargain" to preserve slavery got wrong who "we the people" should be. Later
1252 amendments guaranteed the vote to women (1920) and young adults ages 18-20 (1971). Levying any tax
1253 as a condition to vote was prohibited (1964). Except for the soon-repealed Prohibition amendment (1919,
1254 the Eighteenth Amendment), every amendment related to the ability of citizens to participate in civic life,
1255 or determine how they will live their own lives, has expanded, never limited, citizens' capacity for mutual
1256 self-determination.

1257
1258 **Article 24) The Constitution explicitly supports religious neutrality and diversity by forbidding**
1259 **religious "tests" for U.S. officeholders. Had it not done so, the country would have been deprived of**
1260 **the service of many, including notable U.S. presidents. The Constitution's choice was for religious**
1261 **self-determination. The later First Amendment to the Constitution expressed neutrality toward**
1262 **religion, thereby encouraging plurality of religion in society.**

1263
1264 The 1788 Constitution made a firm decision for religious **pluralism**—the right of each person to practice
1265 the religion of their choice—in Article VI: "No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to
1266 any Office or public Trust under the United States." That was a radical choice because 11 of the 13 states
1267 at that time had religious qualifications for public officials. The same attitude of neutrality and plurality
1268 regarding religion was expressed in the very first words of the First Amendment to the Constitution
1269 (discussed in Section IV), ratified as part of the Bill of Rights in 1791.

1270
1271 The Constitution's choice to forbid religious tests was historically novel and has had momentous
1272 consequences. For example, neither Thomas Jefferson nor Abraham Lincoln had any institutional
1273 religious affiliation. A religious test would have left the country without their service and that of others
1274 from non-Christian faith traditions or no faith tradition. The United States opened public offices to people
1275 of all religions, as well to the nonreligious, and limited the ability of government to interfere with self-
1276 determined religious choice.

1277
1278 **Article 25) Governmental action can be evaluated by how well it grants power to those subject to it,**
1279 **including the aim of mutual self-determination. Legitimate government action therefore includes**
1280 **both coercive action and the positive production of power for its citizens. There are many examples**
1281 **of this. This article identifies specific questions that we might ask when evaluating particular**
1282 **governmental policies at the local, state, or federal levels.**

1283
1284 The framers of the Constitution recognized that self-dealing by states under the Articles of Confederation
1285 was already destroying the country and the states themselves. Humans continue to demonstrate, in greater

1286 or lesser measure, the tendency to want to dominate and control, to seek our advantage over our neighbor,
1287 not for their power but, in the end, for our own. Theologically, this is part of the meaning we Lutherans
1288 recognize in teaching that even the justified are also sinners.

1289
1290 Article 21 explains that government is subject to the same impulses. Accordingly, governmental action
1291 should be subject to the presumption that those governed have a right to identify what they see as their
1292 needs. Here, too, that presumption can be overcome, and government can act coercively upon those who
1293 are subject to it, particularly where those subjects are needlessly damaging others' capacity for self-
1294 determination. That assessment is the source of much criminal law, for example.

1295
1296 As the government acts to prevent harmful behavior, the government should also seek to share power in
1297 ways to promote the common good. Examples of this communication of power and well-being include
1298 compulsory school attendance, Social Security, regulations to incentivize accomplishing social goals, and
1299 many more.

1300
1301 A few of the questions to assess a government at federal, state, and local levels include: Has this act
1302 opened room for the self-determination of those in its jurisdiction? Has this coercive authority adequately
1303 protected valuable mutual self-determination to a reasonable extent? Has this regulatory authority made
1304 the operation of the economy smoother than it otherwise would have been, so that those affected can live
1305 their lives more fully? Has this action assisted or encouraged those who want to participate in civic life to
1306 do so? Will the act do these things in the future? Does it effectively rectify failures of the past, especially
1307 failures to include the marginalized?

1308
1309 All of these are examples of asking whether, on balance, an action has increased or will increase the
1310 power, mutual self-determination, and well-being of those affected by a government. The answers to
1311 these questions provide the means for people of faith, and others, to enter into important civic
1312 conversations about what is taking place in U.S. civic and political life.

1313
1314 **Article 26) The United States is not a “Christian nation.” It was not founded on specifically**
1315 **Christian principles, though Christians and Christianity did influence its ethos. The premise of the**
1316 **Constitution and its ratification is that the sovereign is “we the people,” not “we the Christians.”**

1317
1318 The religious diversity and neutrality of both the original Constitution and its First Amendment (see
1319 Section IV) clearly reject past or present claims that the U.S. was founded as a “Christian nation.” During
1320 George Washington’s first term this claim was explicitly addressed in a treaty, an act of state. It reads,
1321 “The government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian
1322 Religion.”³⁹

1323
1324 Many people involved in the movement for U.S. independence and the ratification of the Constitution had
1325 devout Christian faith, though others did not. The dominant religious practice of the times were certainly
1326 Protestant, and this helped weave the founding social fabric with a Christian ethos. However, it must be
1327 recognized that many who lived in and contributed to the establishment of the United States were not
1328 Christian. They included people of various religions and worldviews.

1329
1330 The ELCA gives thanks for many of the ways in which God worked through Christian individuals and in
1331 that ethos. In this sense it is possible to speak of Christianity as contributing to the founding of this
1332 country and to claim that the original U.S. ethos was influenced by Christianity. However, this church

³⁹ Article 11 of the Barbary Treaties, signed at Tripoli on November 4, 1796. Accessed September 1, 2023, avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/bar1796t.asp. Though not a constitution or amendment, such treaties are official declarations that help articulate a country’s self-understanding.

1333 rejects the baseless claims that the U.S. was founded on specifically Christian beliefs or that the U.S.
1334 Constitution is a result of special revelation, thus establishing a Christian nation. The Constitution
1335 established that the nation’s sovereign is “we the people,” not just “we the faithful” or “we the
1336 Christians.”

1337 1338 1339 **IV. Religion and the First Amendment**

1340
1341 **Article 27) The First Amendment to the Constitution begins: “Congress shall make no law**
1342 **respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The first clause**
1343 **(“no law respecting an establishment of religion”) is known as the establishment clause. The second**
1344 **clause (“no law ... prohibiting the free exercise thereof”) is known as the free exercise clause.**
1345 **Though these clauses are sometimes in tension, they both foster religious plurality, despite some**
1346 **exceptions in historical practice in the United States.**

1347
1348 The U.S. should never be claimed as a Christian nation. Yet the ELCA gives thanks that the founding
1349 documents of our country do not exclude religious commitments from public life. The First Amendment
1350 to the Constitution (ratified in 1791) begins: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of
1351 religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

1352
1353 The amendment’s first clause (“shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”) or
1354 “establishment clause” was cut from the same cloth as the Constitution’s prohibition against religious
1355 tests for public office. Government is not the church, and the church is not the government. Government
1356 must not select one faith as “official” nor promote religion in general. Support for religion arises from the
1357 people, not the government. Nonestablishment undergirds a vibrant religious plurality in the U.S., despite
1358 historical examples of religious discrimination.

1359
1360 The establishment clause also bars excessive government entanglement in religious institutions. For
1361 example, the government has no authority to decide who is a fit minister or teacher of a faith or to
1362 micromanage the governance of religious institutions. It does not say that a person’s religious
1363 commitments cannot or should not be shared or visible in that individual’s civic life.

1364
1365 The amendment’s second clause (“no law ... prohibiting the free exercise [of religion]”) or “free exercise
1366 clause” means that government cannot prohibit individuals from worshiping, or not, in the manner each
1367 sees fit.

1368
1369 The establishment and free exercise clauses are sometimes in tension, and there are complex and
1370 sometimes contradictory assertions about the nuances of their meaning. Nevertheless, their general intent
1371 is clear. Government by the people means there is no favored religion. At the same time, government
1372 cannot prohibit people from practicing their religions. The two clauses establish self-determination in
1373 religious matters.

1374
1375 As with all expressions of self-determination, there are limits to free exercise of religion. Free exercise is
1376 not an absolute right. Otherwise, individuals and groups could claim anything they do as religious. There
1377 are no general religious exemptions from laws designed for public safety or against harm to others, for
1378 example. Religious liberty does not include the ability to injure the neighbor or violate the neighbor’s
1379 civil rights.

1380
1381 **Article 28) The establishment clause mandates the institutional distinction between religious bodies**
1382 **and the state. The state may acknowledge the distinctiveness of religion but may not favor or**

1383 **disadvantage religion generally, or one religion in relation to another. There are two main**
1384 **traditions of interpreting “nonestablishment,” and the ELCA takes no position on either while**
1385 **affirming the institutional distinction between government and religion.**

1386
1387 The ELCA is aware of a society wide concern about a shift in the interpretation regarding the
1388 establishment clause. It is a contemporary struggle of traditions about the distinction between religion and
1389 the state.

1390
1391 Historically, the tradition of robust “separationism” prevailed during the life of ELCA predecessor bodies,
1392 1960-1987, and is evident in their social teaching.⁴⁰ This separationist perspective emphasized the need
1393 for government to act with secular purpose only.⁴¹ A second historical interpretation focused on a
1394 different U.S. tradition in which civil government promoted “non-sectarian Protestantism.” This view
1395 contributed to the practice of establishing school prayer in “common” (public) schools. It is sometimes
1396 called a “religionist” tradition and contends that the religion clauses should take into account a
1397 community’s deeply held and widely shared religious convictions.

1398
1399 The church’s fundamental concern in this social statement is not whether it should support either tradition
1400 but that the critical distinctions between religion and civil society are always maintained. The state is not
1401 an instrument of a common religion or tradition. The state may acknowledge the wide variety of religious
1402 expression but is not responsible for, or a participant in, preserving and transmitting a particular religious
1403 tradition.

1404
1405 **Article 29) The Constitution’s prohibition against establishment of religion clears the ground for**
1406 **the free exercise of religion secured by the free exercise clause (second clause). The two clauses**
1407 **together promote religious plurality in the United States. Free exercise means that religious people**
1408 **may enter public debate and decision-making with their religious convictions, as many abolitionists**
1409 **and civil rights leaders and advocates have done. Free exercise is different than Christian freedom,**
1410 **which, for Lutherans, arises solely from God’s promise of salvation and does not depend on any**
1411 **specific political arrangement. Christian freedom is a matter of the gospel; free exercise of religion**
1412 **is a matter of human law.**

1413
1414 The relationship between faith and public life is more the focus of the free exercise clause. That
1415 relationship is less constrained than the one between the state and established religions. In fact,
1416 prohibiting the establishment of a religion clears the ground for plurality. Nonestablishment allows people
1417 of various faiths to determine their own best way of connecting faith with their own public lives. It opens
1418 space for self-determination. Prohibiting the practice of sharing religious values publicly would also have
1419 deprived the U.S. public of much of the basis for the abolition of slavery and for the civil rights
1420 movement, to name just two examples.

1421
1422 It is critical to distinguish Christian freedom from the religious liberty guaranteed in the U.S.
1423 Constitution. For Lutherans, the distinction is one between gospel and law. Christian freedom, given
1424 through Christ, is a gift of God received by faith and does not depend on any particular political
1425 arrangement. Arising from God’s promise of salvation, this is an eternal freedom from condemnation by

⁴⁰ 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.

⁴¹ *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602 (1971) was widely regarded as establishing a standard for analysis of establishment clause cases. It identified a three-pronged test: whether the law or government action has a legitimate secular purpose, does not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion, and does not result in an excessive entanglement of government and religion. *Lemon* was overruled by *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District*, 597 U.S. ____ (2022),

1426 the demands of God that we do not fulfill. It also gives us the positive freedom to love God and neighbor.
1427 Christian freedom has only indirect significance for organizations and individuals in the civil realm.⁴²
1428

1429 The Lutheran tradition teaches that Christian freedom includes the presumptive duty to obey civil law.
1430 There are exceptions, such as circumstances when the law has become tyrannical and abusive, especially
1431 to the most vulnerable. Then love may require something other than obedience to civil law.⁴³ But in
1432 normal situations, Christians obey for the sake of the neighbor—for the sake of good civil order.
1433

1434 **Article 30) The free exercise clause of the Constitution is a political good that, for the church, is**
1435 **consistent with our belief in the creation of humans in the image of God. The free exercise clause**
1436 **ensures the right to worship (or not) as each person desires. There are limits to free exercise,**
1437 **including that a person’s free exercise does not unduly damage important public interests. At the**
1438 **same time civic life is complex enough that sometimes it may require that civil laws and regulations**
1439 **“accommodate” a religious adherent’s practice that would otherwise violate civil law.**
1440

1441 Religious liberty (or religious freedom) as asserted in the First Amendment is a political term describing a
1442 civil liberty. Historically, the ELCA considers it a gift from God developed through common human
1443 faculties but with grounding in our creation in the image of God. Christians and other traditions together
1444 assert the value of religious liberty in society as a political good. The idea of religious liberty thus
1445 connects both of the religion clauses in the First Amendment.
1446

1447 The free exercise clause assures individuals and religious communities the right to believe and worship,
1448 or not, as they choose (provided that the form of worship does not unduly burden important public
1449 interests). In addition, it assures the right to be free from compulsory statements of faith as a condition of
1450 holding civil positions (public office tests were already forbidden in the 1788 Constitution). It also grants
1451 freedom from religion-based discrimination that would bar people from receiving general public benefits
1452 like public education or participating in general public programs operated on behalf of the state for a wide
1453 range of human care programs, including adoption and foster care.
1454

1455 In the complexity of civil life, the concept of religious liberty may sometimes require that civil laws and
1456 regulations “accommodate” a religious adherent’s practice that would otherwise violate civil law. An
1457 accommodation may be affirmative—one that permits the adherent to do something otherwise
1458 prohibited.⁴⁴ Or the accommodation may be negative—one that allows the adherent to avoid performance
1459 of some required act. Not all requested accommodations are justifiable, nor must all laws contain a
1460 religious accommodation. Nonetheless, the idea of accommodations, when justifiable, plays a role in
1461 religious liberty.
1462

1463 **Article 31) The First Amendment does not prohibit or discourage the application of religious**
1464 **convictions to public life. The phrase “separation of church and state” is not found in the First**
1465 **Amendment and usually is shorthand for nonestablishment. Nonestablishment, however, was not**
1466 **meant to prevent the free exercise of religion. Instead nonestablishment allows each person, without**
1467 **fear of negative legal consequence, to determine for themselves their religious practice, including in**
1468 **civic life. The two clauses of the First Amendment do not contradict each other. If nonestablishment**
1469 **meant that religious commitments should not enter public life, religious people would be uniquely**

⁴² Other faiths or others who depend on natural moral knowledge express a different understanding of spiritual freedom.

⁴³ Apology, Article 16, BC 2000, 231.

⁴⁴ For example, churches were exempted from the Eighteenth Amendment during Prohibition so they could use wine for communion.

1470 **harmed. They would be the only people not allowed or encouraged to bring their highest**
1471 **commitments to bear on public questions.**

1472
1473 On the basis of the First Amendment, some, including religious people, believe that religious
1474 commitments and claims stemming from religious values are out of bounds in public life. This can
1475 include claims that there should be no interaction with or funding of religious organizations by the
1476 government, or that discussion of government policies or political matters should never happen within
1477 assemblies of believers.

1478
1479 For support, some invoke the phrase “wall of separation” of church and state. This phrase, however, is not
1480 in the Constitution⁴⁵ and should not be substituted for what the Constitution actually says.

1481
1482 Though “separation” is an accurate description of the proper distinction between the roles of state and
1483 church (see Section V), the Constitution does *not* suggest that religious individuals or communities should
1484 keep their deepest beliefs out of public life. Not only would that suggestion conflict with the free exercise
1485 clause, but it would also uniquely disadvantage religious people in that they—and they alone—would be
1486 unable to bring their deeply held convictions to bear on public issues. Public life would be impoverished.
1487 We need only recall the specifically religious invocations of many slavery abolitionists and participants in
1488 the civil rights movement for example.

1489
1490 We should not, then, reduce the proper relationship of personal religious commitment to political and
1491 civic life merely to the proper relationship of “church” (or other religious institutions) and state. At the
1492 same time, personal religious commitment may be guided in civic life by the constructive relationships
1493 that religious organizations hold with political bodies. The next section addresses the character and
1494 boundaries of such constructive relationships.

1495 1496 1497 **V. Describing the Constructive Relationships of Religious Organizations** 1498 **and Political Authority**

1499
1500 **Article 32) The ELCA holds that the constructive relationship of religion and political authority is**
1501 **summarized by the phrase “work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining**
1502 **institutional separation of religious organizations and institutions in a relation of functional**
1503 **interaction.” This summary description (codified in the ELCA constitution) provides guidance for**
1504 **the ELCA’s corporate life and for individuals.**

1505
1506 As God’s people pray for God’s will to be done on earth, it is necessary to set forth ELCA teaching about
1507 the constructive relationship of religious organizations to political authority and as a guide for individuals
1508 in their civic life. The U.S. Constitution, including the First Amendment, neither prohibits nor requires
1509 that religious institutions actively engage in civic and political life. The Constitution leaves those
1510 decisions mostly to religious institutions themselves.

1511
1512 What is the ELCA’s view of its relationship with government? This church holds that the holistic
1513 Christian message, comprising law and gospel, includes a message to be spoken to public matters as well
1514 as private life.⁴⁶ The social statement *The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective* expressed this living

⁴⁵ This famous metaphor seems to have originated with Roger Williams and was then used, more famously, by Thomas Jefferson in his personal writings.

⁴⁶ *The Church in Society*, 1.

1515 tension: As a church (and as Christian citizens) who are dwelling in, but are not of, this society, we also
1516 take to heart God’s gift that earthly sovereignty resides in “we, the people.”

1517
1518 These beliefs intersect to undergird the ELCA’s contemporary understanding that God calls us to “work
1519 with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor, maintaining institutional separation of church and state
1520 in a relation of functional interaction.”⁴⁷

1521
1522 That summary phrase reinforces the idea that the functions of religious organizations and of political
1523 authority are distinct: the state does not run religious institutions and religious institutions do not control
1524 the state. At the same time, religious organizations and institutions share spaces of mutual concern and
1525 action with government. The ELCA holds that the functional interactions should be governed by
1526 institutional boundaries created on the one side by the particular purpose and competence of government
1527 and on the other side by the particular purpose and competence of religious faith and institutions.

1528
1529 **Article 33) The directive to “work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor” follows from**
1530 **both our faith’s commitment to join God’s work in civic life and the sovereignty of “we the people.”**
1531 **The purpose of citizenship is summed up in the preamble to the Constitution—to promote the**
1532 **general welfare. “Working with” seeks to address human needs, which can involve critical**
1533 **challenges such as advocating for change in policies and programs that harm people or God’s**
1534 **creation.**

1535
1536 The phrase “work with civil authorities in areas of mutual endeavor” makes clear that the church should
1537 deal with political authority actively and flexibly. Theologically, “work with…” points to the Lutheran
1538 understanding of God’s two hands in which God calls religious organizations to join divine activity in
1539 society. The Triune God, our all-encompassing source and commitment, works in society and calls us to
1540 public action.

1541
1542 The relationship with political authority is not cozy. Sometimes, to be sure, “working with” affirms the
1543 mutual endeavor of addressing human needs. Sometimes, however, “working with” entails critical
1544 challenges such as advocating for change in policies and programs that harm people and the earth.

1545
1546 This church also understands “work with” as grounded in the foundational commitment that sovereignty
1547 in the United States rests in “we the people.” It is fair to say that the purpose of citizenship is summed up
1548 in the preamble to the Constitution—to promote the general welfare.⁴⁸ These constitutional underpinnings
1549 allow the people and their social institutions to work with governing authorities to that end. Citizenship
1550 implies a promise and opportunity to seek both the welfare of all residents at every level of civic life.

1551
1552 **Article 34) The phrase “maintaining institutional separation of church and state” does not point to**
1553 **an absolute separation of public (government) versus private (religious) arenas. Rather it points to**
1554 **the importance of preserving the functional integrity of independent political authority and**
1555 **religious institutions. Christ’s church should not bless any particular political theory; no political**
1556 **system or theory is final or ultimate. To the extent that U.S. government is formed for the general**
1557 **welfare and guided by good principles, whether rooted in Christian ideas or not, it should be**
1558 **affirmed. It is for these reasons that our church objects to religious bodies endorsing or supporting**
1559 **candidates or parties, or exercising partisanship in any way. At the same time, religious bodies and**
1560 **individuals have a responsibility to call government to account, especially when it fails in its**
1561 **function to provide for all peoples such “goods” as human rights, economic justice, and the like.**

⁴⁷ “Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” (2022), 4.03.n., www.elca.org/constitution.

⁴⁸ Preamble to the U.S. Constitution, constitution.congress.gov/constitution/preamble.

1562 The phrase “maintaining institutional separation of church and state” does not point to the separation of
1563 public (government) versus private (religious) arenas. Rather it points to preserving the functional
1564 integrity of both independent political authority and religious institutions, based on their distinctive
1565 purposes and organization principles and their powers and competences.
1566

1567 The integrity of the phrase “in a relation of functional interaction” depends on this understanding of
1568 proper function and jurisdiction. Civic institutions have no competence to teach religion, no authority to
1569 coerce faith in God. Conversely, religious faith does not provide revelatory or other special knowledge
1570 beyond common human faculties regarding the practical policies or means for government’s work. To the
1571 extent that the U.S. government is formed for the general welfare and guided by good principles, whether
1572 rooted in Christian ideas or not, it should be affirmed.
1573

1574 Religious organizations, then, cross the boundaries of their role when they campaign for parties or
1575 candidates or assert specific legislation or policies as if these were God’s plan. Religious communities are
1576 mistaken when they identify a particular political movement as God’s or claim divine revelation for the
1577 Constitution, or identify the U.S. experience with salvation history. No political system or theory is divine
1578 or ultimate. This teaching applies to Christianity, the dominant religious expression in the United States,
1579 and also to other religious traditions.
1580

1581 For these reasons, this church, unlike some Christian churches, teaches that it is not the church’s role to
1582 endorse candidates or parties. The ELCA also recognizes the legal soundness of the Johnson
1583 Amendment⁴⁹ in prohibiting religious bodies or their representatives from verbally or financially
1584 supporting candidates or parties. Individual parishioners may, of course, advocate for specific candidates
1585 and parties on the basis of religious values and common criteria but should not claim to do so as
1586 spokespeople for a church.
1587

1588 At the same time, this dynamic, function-driven approach *encourages* the public contribution of religious
1589 values for the sake of society’s good. The ELCA teaches that religious communities may speak publicly
1590 about their values to express support for policies and legislation that seem to support the well-being of all
1591 better than alternative legislation or policy. This church, for example, assesses and speaks to how policies
1592 will affect those who are hungry (Matthew 25:35).
1593

1594 **Article 35) Rostered ministers face particular issues regarding the relationship of the church and**
1595 **political authority because of their divine office to preach and teach both law and gospel. Rostered**
1596 **ministers also are public figures because they lead public institutions and have a valuable role to**
1597 **play as leaders in civil society. The ELCA affirms these intersecting roles as right and salutary**
1598 **while also recognizing that any given scriptural text or any given social and political situation is**
1599 **complex and multilayered and requires discernment from multiple perspectives. Rostered leaders,**
1600 **then, should be attuned to their community or public setting in offering guidance and aiding**
1601 **discernment practices as assemblies determine how to participate in civic life. When they speak on**
1602 **public issues, their words should be rooted in the Scriptures and are to be governed by official**
1603 **ELCA teaching. Though there necessarily is a public face to the rostered role, this does not justify**
1604 **partisanship, such as telling members how to vote. Our church provides guidance for churches and**
1605 **congregations regarding participation in the electoral process.**

1606 The tasks of maintaining institutional separation in a relation of functional interaction create particular
1607 issues for rostered ministers entrusted with the ministries of Word and Sacrament or Word and Service
1608 because of their calling to preach and teach both law and gospel. This living word, through the power of
1609 the Holy Spirit, can transform lives as Christ begins to take shape in us. The theological (second use) of

⁴⁹ 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.

1610 the law convicts us of our individual *and* collective sins, and that includes naming social and structural
1611 evils. Preaching and teaching the civil (first) use of the law necessarily raises questions about whether a
1612 society—individually and corporately—is failing to fulfill the common good. The gospel frees us to serve
1613 the neighbor through civic participation.

1614
1615 In this sense it is the calling of rostered leaders (deacons, pastors, and bishops) to connect the meaning of
1616 the faith and contemporary issues. There are necessarily, then, appropriate kinds of civic and political
1617 implications to their calling, as was true of Jesus (Article 17). The ELCA affirms this as right and salutary
1618 while also recognizing that any given scriptural text and any given social and political situation is
1619 complex, multilayered and requires discernment from multiple perspectives.⁵⁰ The rostered minister’s
1620 calling is not limited to preaching alone. Adult forums and the like provide valuable occasions for
1621 injecting biblical and church social teaching into discussion and discernment.

1622
1623 The ELCA’s role in civic and political involvement depends significantly on laypeople in their lives as
1624 citizens and the ways they bring their discipleship into civic life. At the same time, rostered ministers are
1625 public figures because they lead public institutions and have a valuable role to play as leaders in civic life.
1626 They often serve as the public face of their worshiping assembly and have the responsibility to represent
1627 the assemblies’ life experiences and perspectives, woven together with their pastoral experiences and
1628 theological training.

1629
1630 Rostered leaders, then, should be attuned to their community or public setting in offering guidance and
1631 discernment practices as assemblies determine how to participate in civic life. They also are charged to
1632 speak on public issues as rooted in Scripture and governed by official social teaching. Though there
1633 necessarily is a public face to the rostered role, this does not justify the practice of partisanship, such as
1634 telling members how to vote regarding candidates or parties. Our church provides guidance for churches
1635 and congregations regarding participation in the electoral process.⁵¹

1636
1637 **Article 36) The directive to “work with civil authorities ... in a relationship of institutional**
1638 **separation, with functional interaction” suggests a constructive relationship but must be guarded**
1639 **by neutrality among partners. It also is commended as a public proposal for a healthy approach**
1640 **between all religious bodies and political authority in the United States.**

1641
1642 The consistent principle of the ELCA has been to “work with civil authorities ... in a relationship of
1643 institutional separation, with functional interaction.” Our church is grateful for the interaction with
1644 government that is possible because of religious liberty. It should be noted that the church and other
1645 nonprofits in the U.S. have become increasingly dependent on aid from public entities. The crucial
1646 criterion for maintaining the appropriate relationship is that selected government support for faith-based
1647 social services is possible when religious organizations serve people without regard to their faith. ELCA
1648 ministries meeting this criterion include chaplaincy in armed services, correctional institutions, hospitals,
1649 and other care facilities.

1650
1651 “Institutional separation” maintains a complicated protection that enables support while insisting on the
1652 distinction between religion and civil authority. This is not a “wall of separation,” but to maintain the
1653 distinction, the ELCA holds that:

- 1654 • Government must not fund programs that discriminate between religions in providing their
1655 services and benefits.

⁵⁰ See Leah D. Schade, *Preaching in the Purple Zone: Ministry in the Red-Blue Divide* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019) as one example that takes into account the complexity of this task for preaching.

⁵¹ See download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Being_A_Public_Church.pdf.

- 1656 • Government must not fund programs that require recipients to participate in religious activities as
1657 a condition of receiving a public service.
- 1658 • Government must treat program service providers equally—on religious and other grounds—and
1659 selection of funded service providers must be based solely on nonreligious outcomes identified in
1660 publicly available criteria.

1661
1662 This dynamic, function-driven interactionist relationship⁵² has guided constructive, valuable interactions
1663 between the ELCA and political authority. Our church will continue to be so guided. As a church we also
1664 commend this approach as salutary for consideration by other religious bodies in interaction with political
1665 authority in the U.S.

1666
1667 **Article 37) The ELCA understanding of civic life and faith is at odds with Christian nationalism**
1668 **because the latter seeks to fuse the exercise of political authority with a selected set of supposed**
1669 **“Christian” ideals. It also asserts that Christianity should be a privileged religion in the United**
1670 **States. Such core beliefs represent a political ideology of religious nationalism, whether explicitly**
1671 **acknowledged or not. In its hardline strains, only white, U.S.-born, Christian believers are**
1672 **considered genuine U.S. citizens. Christian nationalists pledge allegiance to their version of the**
1673 **United States, first making the U.S. into an idol and seeing God’s plan in U.S. society as including**
1674 **only those whose religious beliefs fuse with a certain view of that society.**

1675
1676 In contrast to the constructive approach used by the ELCA, which balances institutional separation with
1677 functional interaction, there is a distorted approach gaining traction at the time of this writing: Christian
1678 nationalism. In public forums this term is used to mean various things, but among its core beliefs are
1679 that.⁵³

- 1680 • The government should advocate or legislate certain Christian values, often selectively
1681 interpreted from parts of the Scriptures.
- 1682 • Christianity should be a privileged religion in the U.S.
- 1683 • The U.S. has privileged status in God’s eyes, and its success is part of God’s plan.
- 1684 • True patriots are those who hold certain Christian beliefs and adhere to certain Christian
1685 practices.

1686
1687 The constellation of such beliefs represents a political ideology of religious nationalism, whether
1688 explicitly stated or not. Christian nationalist belief seeks to fuse selected Christian ideas about what
1689 should be the national way of life with a comprehensive cultural framework. That framework incorporates
1690 selective narratives, practices, symbols, and value systems. “In a Christian nation, social power is placed
1691 in the service of the Christian religion,”⁵⁴ and Christian nationalism seeks to legislatively implement its
1692 framework.

1693
1694 The supporters of Christian nationalism may not identify with every belief or perspective in this holistic
1695 ideology, but they are adamant about many of these values and beliefs. Conversely, acceptance of an idea
1696 also held by Christian nationalists does not make one a Christian nationalist. For example, one might
1697 believe that God’s providence includes a role for one’s country without being a Christian nationalist. That
1698 can be true if one also believes (against Christian nationalism) that other nations have equally valuable
1699 roles and that, therefore, God’s will cannot be reduced to special privilege for one’s own nation.

1700

⁵² 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.

⁵³ These illustrations are adapted from the research reported in Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry, *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 7.

⁵⁴ Stephen Wolfe, *The Case for Christian Nationalism* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2022), 208.

1701 Proponents or benign supporters of Christian nationalism range from those who believe Congress should
1702 declare the U.S. a Christian nation (approximately 29% of the U.S. population⁵⁵) to those people involved
1703 in more virulent strains that are overtly racist, patriarchal, and authoritarian.⁵⁶ In hardline strains only
1704 white, U.S.-born, Christian believers are considered genuine U.S. citizens. Christian nationalism, thus,
1705 denies the U.S. motto, *e pluribus unum* (out of many, one.) Hardline Christian nationalism effectively
1706 substitutes “we the (self-declared) true Christians” for “we the people.”
1707

1708 Christian nationalism does not reflect Christlike values or other values found throughout the Scriptures. It
1709 fuses a particular form of human government and a nation (and sometimes a race) with a vision of God’s
1710 ultimate will, something Jesus explicitly rejects (John 18:36). It perverts the Christian message in cherry-
1711 picking texts that interpret the Scriptures in ways that connect it to domination, even coercion.
1712
1713

1714 VI. Addressing Selected Contemporary Concerns in Civic Life

1715
1716 **Article 38) The following articles address selected contemporary issues about civic life, grounded in**
1717 **the themes and insights above. These do not revisit questions the ELCA has already addressed in**
1718 **existing statements or messages and are not intended to be comprehensive. Some articles here offer**
1719 **definitive conclusions whereas others establish parameters that enable continued discernment on**
1720 **the part of our church.**
1721

1722 As we pray to discern God’s will for today, our church addresses particular issues in contemporary civic
1723 life through its social teaching. For example, the 2020 social message “Government and Civic
1724 Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy,” requested as a resource for use during election cycles, dealt
1725 with contemporary problems such as the widespread breakdown of trust in government and provided
1726 criteria for assessing the work of government, among other concerns.
1727

1728 Since 1988 social statements have addressed nearly every facet of contemporary life: economics, criminal
1729 justice, science and human power, war and the military-industrial complex, sexuality and family, health
1730 care, and others (visit www.elca.org/socialstatements). ELCA social messages have spoken to civic and
1731 political concerns such as human rights, terrorism, community violence, and others
1732 (www.elca.org/socialmessages). ELCA social policy resolutions, adopted by ELCA assemblies, have
1733 addressed narrow policy questions. Some, for instance, speak to voter apathy, racially motivated
1734 restrictions to voting, and gerrymandering (www.elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society).
1735

1736 The issues addressed in this section do not revisit questions the ELCA has already addressed and
1737 therefore are not intended to be comprehensive. Rather they supplement the existing teaching of this
1738 church, grounded in the themes, insights, and criteria developed earlier in this statement.
1739

1740 **Article 39) Hyper-partisan polarization is rampant in the United States, harming both individuals**
1741 **and the social fabric. The U.S. political system appropriately involves, of course, the presence and**
1742 **efforts of partisan activity. Unfortunately, today, social dynamics have taken partisanship to**
1743 **unhealthy levels that damage democratic interaction rather than foster respectful, responsible give**
1744 **and take. Many accept this winner-take-all approach as right or as, at least, unavoidable. Such**
1745 **approaches threaten the fabric of our nation and the lives of those in it. These threats are often felt**

⁵⁵ Whitehead, 6, cited from the 2017 Baylor Religion Report.

⁵⁶ For a psychologist’s discussion of how and why people are drawn in by extremist belief, see Pamela Cooper-White, *The Psychology of Christian Nationalism: Why People Are Drawn In and How to Talk Across the Divide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2022).

1746 **most keenly by the marginalized. The ELCA calls for a different approach as both necessary and**
1747 **possible for a vital common life in which all can participate.**
1748

1749 One widespread and troubling reality in the United States at this time is hyper-partisan polarization,
1750 which continues to increase and does significant damage to individuals and the social fabric. The U.S. has
1751 seen times of acute polarization in its past and experienced immense harm. The Civil War is an example.
1752

1753 What seems on the rise when compared to our recent past is a type of separation and opposition for which
1754 this statement uses the term “hyper-partisan polarization,” which is different from the simply partisan.
1755 The U.S. political system has almost always included the active presence and work of partisan activity.
1756 Though parties are fallible, the system itself provides an avenue for organizing, educating, and advocating
1757 for issues of political concern. In much of U.S. history and the recent past, this partisanship did not bar
1758 cross-party work or even friendships. Parties commonly formed coalitions, made compromises, and could
1759 work together toward their overlapping views of the common good. Working together often forged more
1760 effective ideas than working alone.
1761

1762 At the time of writing, a quite different hyper-partisan polarization is widespread and at work even in
1763 normal government efforts. Political identity now is often closely linked with other identifications such as
1764 ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, race, urban or rural residence, cable news preference, and even
1765 restaurants and stores frequented. Overlapping interests are increasingly overwhelmed by rigid us-versus-
1766 them identities. It is harder to create collegial—and even familial—relationships despite political
1767 difference, or to recognize commonalities despite differences in political affinity. Our social linkages
1768 become constellations of identifications and may be designated “mega-identities.”⁵⁷
1769

1770 These mega-identities take partisanship to new levels—to hyper-partisanship—reinforced by cable news
1771 preference, social media echo-chambers, the assertions of elected officials (especially at the federal level),
1772 and other factors. Those reinforcements are also accompanied by a “nationalization” of issues and an
1773 oversize focus on those issues. Local campaigns are becoming overwhelmed by outside money and,
1774 though there is a lot of vibrant discussion of, say, zoning policy at the local level, those vibrant
1775 democratic discussions get little play in the media.
1776

1777 The result is that loyalty to hyper-partisan identities becomes absolute. These identities are considered
1778 necessary to one’s family safety, to protection from “them,” to the survival of core values or “our way of
1779 life.” Not incidental is the frequent assumption of my or my group’s innocence and the guilt, even evil, of
1780 those not part of that identity. Sin is no longer widespread; it is almost exclusively “over there.”
1781

1782 The problem is that loyalty to a mega-identity has become oversize and has taken on huge emotional
1783 stakes. Crucially, hyper-partisan polarization is practiced as “zero-sum power,” as a winner-take-all
1784 struggle for domination. Those with alternative perspectives are designated as enemies rather than fellow
1785 citizens with a different view.
1786

1787 Many today are cynical, as if polarization is unavoidable. It is certainly a reality, and many accept such
1788 outsized loyalty and harsh practices as necessary, or even right and good. Such hyper-partisan animosity
1789 threatens the fabric of our nation and the lives of those in it, especially the marginalized.
1790

1791 The ELCA teaches that a different approach is both possible and necessary for a productive common life
1792 in which all can participate. There is a better path forward than one motivated primarily by fear of others

⁵⁷ The term “mega-identities” is used by a number of writers, but for more see Ezra Klein, *Why We’re Polarized* (New York: Avid Reader Press, 2020).

1793 (and belief in the greater purity of one’s own group) or one practiced in rancorous attack and hyper-
1794 partisan animosity. These are vices to be confronted, both within the church and within the wider society.
1795

1796 This alternative approach is not primarily about tolerance but about respectful engagement. Article 14
1797 describes how practicing discernment together is a gift for civic life and a witness to God’s love because
1798 it models how people with opposing views can give priority to the practice of careful listening and
1799 respect.

1800
1801 For Christians, our identity in Christ as forgiven sinners undercuts any polarization and urges love for
1802 every person as a creature of God who is not to be dominated and whose well-being we should try to
1803 improve. Our Christian identity encourages us to take seriously both our well-considered perspectives *and*
1804 the limitations of our knowledge, thoughtfulness, empathy, and goodwill.

1805
1806 Therefore, our identity in Christ encourages careful listening to others who also have well-considered
1807 perspectives, which may be quite different from our own. The presumption of self-determination and the
1808 criterion of mutual self-determination similarly require the starting point of listening (Article 21). These
1809 are comparable to values aspired to in the U.S. Constitution—truly democratic values, commitment to
1810 diversity, and the public good of all. The objective is to search for and find constructive ways to enhance
1811 the well-being of human society and the wider creation.

1812
1813 On that basis, the ELCA calls for an end to the practices that contribute to hyper-partisan polarization.
1814 We, both as a society and as a church, must end any winner-take-all mindset, which approaches our
1815 common life together as if it were a football game. We must not accept hyper-partisan polarization and its
1816 practices to be inevitable. Political opponents are not enemies simply because they have a different
1817 opinion of what is the best course forward for a specific issue or because they travel in different social
1818 circles.

1819
1820 It is possible to face difference without aggression and with an eye to the common good. It is even
1821 possible to close gaps between us by an exchange of values and ideas that changes *all* participants for the
1822 better. The solutions we come up with together are often better because of collaboration. Most of us know
1823 that from personal and social experience—there is no reason our political experience should be different.
1824

1825 **Article 40) Civic leaders bear a particular responsibility to seek constructive debate and solutions.**
1826 **Civic leaders include a wide array of individuals beyond just elected officials or heads of media. To**
1827 **bring people together, these leaders must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse that**
1828 **hinders careful listening among neighbors. They should offer models of vigorous and constructive**
1829 **civic leadership.**

1830
1831 In our current polarized context, civic thought and opinion leaders and information sources bear a
1832 particular responsibility to work toward constructive debate and solutions. While this is the responsibility
1833 of each of us, individuals and groups look to thought and opinion leaders and information sources to
1834 negotiate life in a fast-paced, information-saturated society. U.S. residents look to both certified and
1835 unconventional experts, and both are influential in shaping the values and behaviors of the public.

1836
1837 Civic thought leaders do not always see themselves as such, but leadership comes in many forms and
1838 exists in many forums. Elected and publicly appointed leaders are obvious. However, civic thought
1839 leaders include community league coaches, social media influencers, news reporters, religious ministers,
1840 activists, think tank staff, the heads of nonprofit and volunteer organizations, and many others.

1841
1842 A healthy society requires such leaders to be models of vigorous and constructive participation. To bring
1843 people together, these leaders must renounce misleading and inflammatory discourse that hinders

1844 conscientious listening among neighbors. Civil disagreement about issues and the interpretation and
1845 relative importance of facts is important, but inflammatory rhetoric and personal attacks have no place in
1846 the public arena. Our society needs to be a place of informed public dialogue enabling people to hear one
1847 another and find solutions.

1848
1849 The ELCA commends leaders that model such practices, which are essential to honest analysis and
1850 creative solutions to social problems. Our church also encourages associations, think tanks, and other
1851 sources of analysis and information to seek to understand cultural and political differences as a crucial
1852 step toward building political accommodation and fact-based negotiation.

1853
1854 **Article 41) Robust and constructive civic engagement in today’s society depends on clear distinction**
1855 **between fact and various forms of misinformation, from falsehoods to exaggeration. Avoiding**
1856 **forms of false statement is a civic responsibility for both providers and users of social media.**
1857 **Christians should be “innocent as doves” when it comes interpreting the intentions of the neighbor**
1858 **but “wise as serpents” (Matthew 10:16) when it comes to discerning what information they**
1859 **encounter in any media. For the sake of U.S. civic life, the ELCA calls upon social media platforms**
1860 **to take responsibility to align policies and procedures worldwide with the most comprehensive and**
1861 **rigorous online protocol available.**

1862
1863 The saying is hundreds of years old that “falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it,”⁵⁸ but it is
1864 widely acknowledged that the spread of lies, rumor, and ignorance in civic life has reached new levels
1865 today, particularly through social media. In one study, researchers found that falsehoods were 70% more
1866 likely to be re-shared on a social media platform (X, formerly Twitter) than true statements. Moreover,
1867 people were more likely to repeat or amplify a false statement than automated bots were.⁵⁹

1868
1869 Robust and constructive civic engagement in today’s society depends on clear distinction between fact
1870 and various forms of misinformation, from falsehoods to exaggeration. The reach of social media, the
1871 lack of clarity about the origins of many of its posts, and the ability of AI to conjure utterly false images
1872 and video all necessitate strong self-regulation by social and other media platforms. If self-regulation is
1873 not sufficiently robust, government intervention may be appropriate.

1874
1875 The Eighth Commandment directs people of faith to exert efforts against bearing false witness. The
1876 Catechism teaches that “we are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors,
1877 betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of
1878 them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.” Our church, then, encourages us all to
1879 ask, in every personal interaction and on social media, whether our words or those we repeat represent the
1880 best possible understanding of our neighbor.

1881
1882 We should be “innocent as doves” when it comes interpreting the intentions of our neighbor but “wise as
1883 serpents” (Matthew 10:16) when it comes to discerning what information we encounter in any media. We
1884 should not share:

- 1885
- Sensationalist headlines.
 - Insulting memes.
 - Information whose source we cannot verify.
 - Information from sources whose purpose or chief likely effect is to stir up anger or hate and
1888 to undermine, rather than foster, our civic unity.
- 1889

⁵⁸ This saying is attributed to satirist Jonathan Swift, Anglican cleric (1667-1745).

⁵⁹ 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. Other studies have broadened and generally supported this study, which was limited to the platform X, formerly Twitter.

- 1890 For the sake of U.S. civic life, the ELCA also calls upon social media platforms to:
- 1891 • Align policies and procedures worldwide with the most comprehensive and rigorous online
 - 1892 safety regulations available,
 - 1893 • Regularly assess and publicly disclose the extent to which their platforms may be involved in
 - 1894 violations of civil and human rights,
 - 1895 • Allow oversight of operations in human rights hotspots,
 - 1896 • Allow transparency in their algorithms and advertisements,
 - 1897 • Regularly assess, report on, and address hate speech and misinformation on their platforms,
 - 1898 removing such hate speech and misinformation as quickly as possible.
 - 1899

1900 **Article 42) Financial contributions to political campaigns are a form of free speech protected by the**
 1901 **First Amendment and a significant part of campaigning that demonstrate a level of commitment**
 1902 **consistent with the donor’s views. The ELCA affirms that every citizen should have the opportunity**
 1903 **to play a free and active part in the foundation of our communities. Therefore, we are concerned**
 1904 **that being heard should not be effectively limited to those individuals and organizations who have**
 1905 **overwhelming financial wealth and resources at their disposal. The ELCA urges legislation by state**
 1906 **and federal lawmakers to set reasonable limits on campaign contributions and increase**
 1907 **transparency in our elections and financial reporting by public officials.**
 1908

1909 In the political sphere, money plays an indispensable role. Individuals, corporations, lobbyists, PACs,
 1910 super PACs, nonprofits, and interest groups spend money to influence political campaigns. Contributions
 1911 may be disbursed in a variety of ways including political advertising to influence public opinion on
 1912 candidates and ballot measures. Public officials are generally required by law to report on their personal
 1913 finances to ensure that ethical guidelines are followed. So-called “dark money,” or funds raised by
 1914 nonprofit organizations that are not required to disclose the identities of their donors, is known to be spent
 1915 to influence elections, public policy, and political discourse.
 1916

1917 The ELCA recognizes that financial contributions to political campaigns are a form of free speech
 1918 protected by the First Amendment. Publicly accountable contributions are both legal and a significant part
 1919 of campaigning that demonstrate a level of commitment consistent with the donor’s views. Historically,
 1920 laws have included reporting requirements that may require disclosure of a contributor’s name, address,
 1921 and occupation. Individuals who choose to engage in contributing are expected to adhere to the
 1922 appropriate laws and consider the implications such disclosures could have with their employer(s) or
 1923 other entities. While some federal, state, and local laws continue to limit the sources and contribution
 1924 limits for elections at their respective levels, it is widely recognized that recent Supreme Court rulings
 1925 have altered the system of campaign finance.⁶⁰
 1926

1927 The ELCA affirms that every citizen should have the opportunity to play a free and active part in the
 1928 foundation of our communities. This ability should not be effectively limited to those individuals and
 1929 organizations who have overwhelming financial wealth and resources at their disposal. Democracy is
 1930 threatened if only those with the most means (disposable income and time) have the dominant voice with
 1931 politicians while others, especially those who are less well off, are effectively silenced. Free speech does
 1932 not include the right to drown out the speech of one’s neighbors. To do so is to violate God’s intention for
 1933 abundant life for all.
 1934

1935 This church urges legislation by state and federal lawmakers to set reasonable limits on campaign
 1936 contributions and increase transparency in our elections and financial reporting by public officials. It is up

⁶⁰ For example, in *Citizens United v. FEC*, 558 U.S. 310 (2009), the U.S. Supreme Court held that corporations are protected by the First Amendment’s right to free speech and that statutes restricting corporations’ campaign contributions are unconstitutional.

1937 to legislators to take steps that limit the hidden and overpowering corporate and super PAC money given
1938 to political action committees that distort the political debate and influence our representatives. Our
1939 church urges policies and reforms that help:⁶¹

- 1940 • Enhance transparency and increase public awareness of campaign contributions and financial
- 1941 reporting by public officials.
- 1942 • Expand access for citizens across the economic spectrum to run for political office.
- 1943 • Reduce the influence of money in shaping political debates and media, including political
- 1944 advertising.

1945
1946 **Article 43) This statement recognizes that governmental policies, statutes, regulations, and judicial**
1947 **opinions sometimes do more harm to the well-being of all than to promote it. Harm results from**
1948 **poorly conceived and implemented policies and from intentional actions that discriminate against**
1949 **some in favor of others. All public servants have a duty to ensure that government remains true to**
1950 **its purpose of protecting and fostering the good of all. Citizens and residents also have an obligation**
1951 **to seek reform through the procedures of democratic self-rule.**

1952
1953 ELCA teaching has long held that it is the proper concern of government to regulate aspects of social life
1954 in order to provide for the safety and well-being of its people. For example, government must serve as a
1955 referee in economic life to protect consumers and check harmful inequalities of wealth and power.⁶²

1956
1957 This statement recognizes that sometimes government policies, statutes, regulations, and judicial opinions
1958 harm well-being more than they promote it. Harm results from poorly conceived and implemented
1959 policies and from intentional actions that discriminate against some in favor of others.

1960
1961 There is a critical distinction between fallible structure and structured oppression. Government is fallible
1962 because it is made up of humans. It has not served its purpose when its goals, policies, and programs are
1963 poorly designed or implemented, or cause undue waste or hardship. In contrast, government becomes
1964 oppressive when its goals, policies, and programs are designed or transformed into vehicles for
1965 oppressing the neighbor—such as voter suppression laws and gerrymandering.

1966
1967 All public servants have a duty to ensure that government remains true to its purpose of protecting and
1968 fostering the well-being of all. Public partnerships between nonprofits (including faith-based
1969 organizations) and the private sector can be means to enhance the work of both partners when dedicated
1970 to the common good. Finally, citizens and residents have an obligation to seek reform when government
1971 goes astray through the procedures of democratic self-rule.

1972
1973 It is not possible for this church, or any civic actor, to identify a complete set of ethical norms that apply
1974 in all cases for discerning failures in civic and political life. Some criteria for discernment are elaborated
1975 in Articles 25 of this statement and in previous ELCA social messages and social statements.⁶³ However,
1976 at a minimum, discernment regarding these everyday but weighty questions should strive to include the
1977 perspectives of those affected as well as fair representation of those served, because that is the starting
1978 point for mutual self-determination and deciding whether the neighbor is being well-served.

1979

⁶¹ For more see the ELCA document at download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCAvotesMoneyReissue.pdf?_ga=2.187824555.2057898085.1695207063-2124814884.1671473207.

⁶² See, for example, the ELCA social statement *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*, cited above, 7-10.

⁶³ See, for example, the discussion of criteria in the social message “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy,” 13, or various social statements as they address economic life, health care, and others, at www.elca.org/socialstatements.

1980 **Article 44) The ELCA has members in Washington, D.C., and in several of the U.S. territories. For**
1981 **this reason our church is attuned to the problematic relationship between the United States and its**
1982 **nonincorporated territories. We recognize complicating factors that include a legacy of racism**
1983 **because the vast majority of local residents in the territories belong to racially minoritized groups.**
1984 **We also recognize that the issues are complex. The principle of mutual self-determination dictates**
1985 **humble, intentional listening as the first step toward justice and healing.**

1986
1987 The ELCA has significant membership in Washington, D.C., and several of the U.S. territories, e.g.,
1988 Guam, Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands.⁶⁴ The
1989 ELCA's Caribbean Synod, in fact, consists largely of these territories. This fact and the lives of millions
1990 of people in these areas urge our church to discern the responsibility of the United States for these areas
1991 under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Congress as possessions or unincorporated territories.⁶⁵ The ELCA
1992 recognizes that issues pertaining to the relationship between these territories and the wider U.S. society
1993 are manifold and complex, but they must not be ignored.

1994
1995 Many view the political relationship between the U.S. government and its nonincorporated territories as
1996 problematic because of the inherent inequality between the territories and the states. There is also the
1997 specter of continued colonial-style relationships in which territories lack any real power for self-
1998 determination. Territories get a representative in Congress with voice but no vote, despite residents being
1999 required to sign up for military selective service and having a long and distinguished record of service to
2000 the U.S. in general. Territorial residents pay taxes but do not have equitable representation. Many believe
2001 that the U.S. Congress has actually undermined the democratic processes in the territories.⁶⁶

2002
2003 This church recognizes complicating factors. One of those is the legacy of racism involved since the vast
2004 majority of local residents in all the territories belong to racially minoritized groups—historically Black,
2005 Indigenous, Latiné, and Pacific Islander people. The relationship between U.S.-based churches and the
2006 territories is also complicated because the churches sometimes were complicit in the colonizing of
2007 territories, including stripping ancestral inhabitants of their traditional religions.⁶⁷ The goal was to replace
2008 those religions with Christian faith, but that faith was deeply entangled with U.S. expansionist ideology.
2009 Though we should acknowledge that good was done, the ELCA also bears some responsibility to help
2010 repair the harm also done. We believe, as Lutherans, that the Holy Spirit brings faith to people—it should
2011 not be forced or coerced by human action.

2012
2013 An intentional, humble listening is the starting point of the principle of mutual self-determination and is
2014 the first step on the path toward justice and healing. This process of careful listening can be difficult and
2015 challenging, yet when rooted in sincerity and a genuine willingness to understand each other, it can lead

⁶⁴ According to the Department of the Interior, an unincorporated territory is “a United States insular area in which the United States Congress has determined that only selected parts of the United States Constitution apply” (Department of the Interior, “Definitions of Insular Areas of Political Organization. www.doi.gov)

⁶⁵ 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), elca.org/Resources/Faith-and-Society#Socialresolutions.

⁶⁶ 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.

⁶⁷ See José David Rodríguez, *Caribbean Lutherans: The History of the Church in Puerto Rico* (Fortress Press, forthcoming).

2016 to new possibilities of reparation, healing, and wholeness.⁶⁸ In collaboration with ecumenical partners and
2017 others of good will, we believe it is possible to foster and facilitate processes of listening and
2018 accountability between the territories and those in positions of power over them in the U.S. government.

2019
2020 Consistent with the principle of mutual self-determination (article 21), the ELCA is committed to
2021 advocating for equality in government representation for the District of Columbia and U.S. territories for
2022 economic and social equity, and for their right of self-determination.

2023
2024 **Article 45) American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians have a unique, historical, and**
2025 **nation-to-nation trust relationship with the United States that should acknowledge the sovereignty**
2026 **of tribal nations and Indian self-determination and self-governance. There are many layers to the**
2027 **often horrid history of treatment of indigenous peoples, but it is imperative to acknowledge the**
2028 **relationship has been grounded in the Doctrine of Discovery that codified both colonialism and**
2029 **religious intolerance. The ELCA has repudiated explicitly this European-derived doctrine as a**
2030 **“theological framework that supported racism, colonialism, and the annihilation of Indigenous**
2031 **people.”⁶⁹ Our church also has acknowledged and called for repentance for this church’s complicity**
2032 **in the colonialism that continues to harm tribal governments and tribal members. This statement**
2033 **reaffirms the ELCA’s need for continued attention to just policy via advocacy in the areas of treaty**
2034 **rights, tribal sovereignty, and other matters that affect the well-being of Native Americans. It also**
2035 **calls upon both U.S. residents and U.S. governments to honor the trust relationship and the**
2036 **sovereignty of tribal nations as well as to be guided by just principles supporting Indian self-**
2037 **determination and well-being.**

2038
2039 American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians have a unique, historical, and nation-to-nation
2040 relationship with the United States. In terms of the official relationship, it is a trust relationship
2041 acknowledging the sovereignty of tribal nations and Indian self-determination and self-governance. This
2042 relationship is based on Indian treaties, the U.S. Constitution, and Supreme Court decisions.

2043
2044 It is a relationship in which treaties and other legal guarantees have repeatedly not been honored by those
2045 who began settling in the 1600s and swept across the continent. It is also a relationship in which Native
2046 people endured racial, social, and economic oppression during some of the darkest chapters of American
2047 history. The ELCA, with many others in this country, recognizes that this history must be acknowledged,
2048 the status of Native Americans in the United States protected, and efforts at reconciliation and justice
2049 increased.

2050
2051 There are many layers to this history, but it is imperative to acknowledge that it is grounded in the
2052 Doctrine of Discovery that codified both colonialism and religious intolerance through the
2053 pronouncement of several papal bulls in the 15th century. It specifically was introduced into United States
2054 municipal law by U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall in *Johnson v. McIntosh* (1823). In
2055 Marshall’s formulation of the doctrine, discovery of territory previously unknown to Europeans gave the
2056 discovering nation title to that territory against all other European nations, and this title could be perfected
2057 by possession.⁷⁰

2058

⁶⁸ This is illustrated by the Truth and Healing Movement, launched by the ELCA with the American Indian and Alaska Native people. For more information see www.elca.org/truthandhealing.

⁶⁹ “A Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian Alaska Native People” (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2016), 2.

⁷⁰ One easily accessible discussion of the complex meaning and history may be found in en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discovery_doctrine (accessed November 19, 2023).

2059 The doctrine was, and is, not only political but also explicitly theological, Christian legal discourse.
2060 Though global in scope, this principle undergirded the actions of religious and nonreligious bodies that
2061 made claims to Native land in North America.⁷¹ Supported by this doctrine, those who moved across
2062 North America, including predecessors of this church, claimed Indian land as their own property.

2063
2064 The ELCA has acknowledged that the Doctrine of Discovery “created a theological framework that
2065 supported racism, colonialism, and the annihilation of Indigenous people. Today it continues to support
2066 those evils and injustices found in our church, U.S. law, and legal interpretation.”⁷² The ELCA has joined
2067 other religious bodies in explicitly repudiating this European-derived doctrine, calling it an “improper
2068 mixing of the power of the church and the power of the sword.”⁷³ It has acknowledged and called for
2069 repentance in this church’s complicity in the colonialism that continues to harm tribal governments and
2070 tribal members.⁷⁴

2071
2072 Early in its life this church named and acknowledged the sovereignty of Native American tribes and
2073 committed to speaking out for their just treatment.⁷⁵ This social statement reaffirms that acknowledgment
2074 and the need for the practices of accompaniment in so doing. It calls for continued attention to supporting
2075 just policy via advocacy in the areas of treaty rights, tribal sovereignty, religious freedom, and other
2076 matters that affect the well-being of Native Americans. It calls upon both residents and all governments in
2077 the United States to:

- 2078 • Honor the trust relationship acknowledging the sovereignty of tribal nations and Indian self-
2079 determination and self-governance.
- 2080 • Be guided by concerns for justice, reconciliation, visibility, equity, and healing as central to these
2081 sovereign relationships.
- 2082 • Prioritize consultation with tribal nations that ensures equity and honors parity with tribal nations.
- 2083 • Give particular attention to policies and legislation that increase Native American self-
2084 determination.
- 2085 • Support efforts to increase voter registration and access to polling places and early voting while
2086 opposing state efforts to raise barriers to the ballot box.
- 2087 • Engage in careful listening and consultation with Native Americans on matters with
2088 environmental impact affecting their sovereign lands.

2089
2090 **Article 46) The ELCA calls for renewed emphasis on comprehensive civics education as an essential**
2091 **element for robust and revitalized civic life. Such education should teach the whole story of U.S.**
2092 **history in its aspirations, successes, and failures so that it might shape well-informed, thoughtful,**
2093 **and wise citizens.**

2094
2095 Comprehensive, honest civics education is an essential element for robust and revitalized civic life. It
2096 provides the building blocks of a society. The ELCA has addressed the social institution of education in
2097 the United States and is on record that “schools, therefore, ought to teach the principles and virtues of
2098 living together in responsible freedom in a democratic society, which includes respect for the diverse
2099 cultures and beliefs of their students.”⁷⁶

2100

⁷¹ “Declaration,” 2.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, Augsburg Confession Article XXVIII, Latin text.

⁷⁴ ELCA Social Policy Resolution CA16.02.04., “Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery.”

⁷⁵ ELCA Social Policy Resolution CA91.5.28., “1992: Year of Remembrance, Repentance, and Renewal.”

⁷⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Our Calling in Education* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2007), 26ff.

2101 A comprehensive, honest civics curriculum must teach the whole story of U.S. history in its aspirations,
2102 successes, and failures. It should emphasize the values inherent in the U.S. Constitution. It should draw
2103 upon what the community holds in common and explore in a fair and impartial way those issues on which
2104 the community is divided. To have a strong democracy, its citizens must know how it is supposed to
2105 function and how they are called to participate.
2106

2107 **Article 47) No single solution will reduce the increasing, fevered polarization or mend the damage**
2108 **that endangers the U.S. social fabric as a representative democracy. However, robust civic**
2109 **participation is critical for democratic self-governance, for support of public servants, and for well-**
2110 **crafted policies. The ELCA urges both its members and all U.S. residents to renew their efforts**
2111 **toward such a robust civic participation, guided by concern for the well-being of all.**
2112

2113 No single solution will reduce the increasingly fevered polarization or repair the damage that endangers
2114 our social fabric and democratic republic. One fundamental element is a renewed, constructively
2115 grounded, and thoughtful commitment to civic life across this nation. Hyper-partisan polarization is, in
2116 part, the result of individuals withdrawing from robust participation in civic life. This church holds that a
2117 return to robust civic engagement that seeks the public good is the responsibility of all residents of this
2118 country and is our calling as Christians.
2119

2120 The social message “Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy” addresses at
2121 greater length the nature and purpose of a robust civic engagement, especially in relation to citizenship.⁷⁷
2122 Among other elements, that message teaches that civic engagement takes numerous forms—informed
2123 voting, attending public meetings, holding public office, political party involvement, policy advocacy,
2124 community organizing, and nonviolent protest.
2125

2126 The message points out that civic engagement arises both from concern about disorder and injustice and
2127 from hope for the well-being of all. It affirms elements of a robust civic engagement such as democratic
2128 self-governance, support for public servants, and well-crafted policies that foster justice, racial and social
2129 equity, and reconciliation. The ELCA urges its members and all residents of this society to contribute to
2130 and urge robust civic participation.
2131

2132 **Conclusion**

2133
2134 **Article 48) “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven” is both our prayer as a church and our**
2135 **calling into civic life for the well-being of all. May we, as forgiven people in Christ’s church,**
2136 **respond boldly and join all others of goodwill to work toward the aspiration and responsibility of**
2137 **“we the people” through wise civic participation.**
2138

2139 “Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.” As Jesus taught the disciples,
2140 so we pray in this church. We do so in concert with Christians down through the ages and into the future,
2141 who, in the Spirit, offer witness to God’s will for just peace and well-being. We do so in faith,
2142 understanding that God’s creative power is shared throughout all creation and is given to human beings to
2143 use in civic life for the good of all.
2144

2145 May we as your church live wisely by your law as a guide for joining your work in human society. May
2146 we walk humbly with you as we strive for justice, kindness, and peace. May we as your people join all
2147 others of goodwill in the work of government as gift, aspiration, and responsibility to serve the common
2148 good of “we the people.” May we, as your forgiven ones, be empowered by your gracious word and
2149 sacraments and boldly seek the good of the neighbor through our participation in civic life.

⁷⁷ “Government and Civic Engagement,” 14.

Glossary

All terms are **underlined** when introduced in the text.

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Book of Concord: A collection of writings from 1580 that were subscribed to by some 80 princely and municipal governments. They were published on the 50th anniversary of the 1530 Augsburg Confession and are generally understood as authoritative documents of 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 certain Christian views with American civic life. This nationalistic ideology believes, 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, or anti-democratic.

Church: 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 church is universal (catholic), describing all believers in their individual capacity as followers of Christ. The also is used to designate large Christian bodies or institutions but also local congregations, as in “going to my church.” In this statement regarding civic life, “this or our church” refers to the ELCA as one body that is part of the Church Catholic.

Common good: Has various philosophical definitions but is used here to denote what is beneficial for all or most members of a given community. In particular it conveys that the purpose of government is to seek the general welfare of all members of the public. While imperfectly achieved, the common good can be sought through collective action, citizenship, and other forms of active participation in the realms of politics and civic life.

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. Its roots are found in Reformation writings such as the Smalcald Articles of the Book of Concord that spell out the marks of the church, one of which is “the mutual conversation and consolation of brothers and sisters.”

Confessions: Has wider meanings in Scripture and historical theology, but in this study it designates the ELCA’s authorized teaching standards. (See “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.

2200 **Discernment:** As used here, the practice of evaluating multiple factors in an issue so as to find an
2201 appropriate response that seems God-pleasing. It generally implies active theological or ethical
2202 reflection involving study, prayer, and dialogue. It seeks wisdom through God’s Spirit and reaches
2203 decisions not according to individual desires but, as much as possible, according to God’s will as
2204 understood through a community process (Romans 12:1-2). (See also “Community of moral
2205 deliberation/discernment.”)
2206

2207 **Establishment clause:** The first clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. It states that
2208 government “shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion.” This means that government
2209 cannot establish a state/national religion or impose any form of worship or devotion upon its citizens. It
2210 does not mean that a person’s religious commitments cannot or should not enter into or influence their
2211 public life in the form of political activity or broader civic engagement. (See also “Separation of church
2212 and state” and “Free exercise of religion.”)
2213

2214 **Ethics:** The science and art of asking “How then shall we live?” or “What is the good?” Ethics
2215 implies extended reflection and dialogue toward defining, negotiating, structuring, and critically
2216 engaging what ought to be or what ought to be done. It is a practice done as individuals and as a
2217 community. It often involves analyzing a current, accepted moral idea to determine its rationale or
2218 ways it should be altered. The terms “ethics” and “**morals**” are somewhat different but are often used
2219 interchangeably. (See “Morality.”)
2220

2221 **Ethos:** The distinguishing web of largely implicit cultural practices, social assumptions, values, and
2222 guiding beliefs of an organization or a society.
2223

2224 **Faith:** Has many meanings and uses, but the fundamental Lutheran emphasis is a trusting response
2225 to and trusting relationship with God. This relationship of trust is expressed through means such as
2226 active participation in religious communities and attention to key teachings of the church universal.
2227

2228 **Free exercise clause:** The second phrase in the First Amendment (“Congress shall make no law
2229 prohibiting the free exercise [of religion]”) focuses on the relationship between faith and public/civic
2230 life. The first clause, prohibiting establishment of a state religion, clears the ground for the faithful to
2231 determine their own best way of exercising faith in their own public life. (See “Establishment clause”
2232 and “Separation of church and state.”)
2233

2234 **God’s sovereignty:** Has had multiple meanings in Christian thinking but fundamentally describes
2235 God’s supreme power or God’s rule and reign over and in the universe. This statement speaks
2236 theologically of God’s sovereignty as the source of all power and thus of political sovereignty. Both
2237 power and sovereignty are fundamental to civic life. (See “Power.”)
2238

2239 **Justice:** Generally, an underlying sense of fairness, right treatment, and reciprocity. This statement
2240 emphasizes the aspects of justice that include fair and equal treatment under the law, ending
2241 oppression based on power differences, and, as emphasized in the Scriptures, a right and wholesome
2242 relationship with God and within community.
2243

2244 **Law and gospel:** Expresses the key Lutheran emphasis that God’s word and work in human society
2245 occur under different means. “Law” is understood to have two forms: (1) as a directive and
2246 corrective for society (first, or civil, use) and (2) judgment on sin (second, or theological, use). The
2247 law is a summary term for God’s directives for human living, such as the Ten Commandments.
2248 “Gospel” is the good news of God’s mercy, received in faith on account of Jesus Christ.
2249
2250

2251 **Luther, Martin (1483-1546):** German priest, theologian, author, and professor. Luther was a seminal
2252 figure in the Protestant Reformation and is the namesake of Lutheranism.
2253

2254 **Mega-identity:** An interlocking set of social identifications: ethnic, religious, urban/rural,
2255 conservative/liberal. When these identifications cohere in a set that is semifixed and loaded with huge
2256 emotional stakes, they become a mega-identity that walls off people from others, especially those who
2257 don't share the same characteristics or beliefs.
2258

2259 **Morality/morals:** Originates from the Greek word "mores," which designated the binding customs of
2260 a culture or society related to what is good or right. It designates an existing or already negotiated
2261 moral structure. In every society, certain actions, goals, and character traits are considered moral,
2262 immoral, or some combination thereof, according to established norms. "Ethics" and "morals" often
2263 are used interchangeably, but see "Ethics."
2264

2265 **Neighbor:** A member of one's community. This could be someone in a person's local neighborhood
2266 or town but can also refer to members of the global community.
2267

2268 **Neighbor justice:** Meeting neighbors' needs in public life. Though rooted in the biblical directive to
2269 "love your neighbor as yourself," the term expresses how faith active in love requires seeking justice
2270 in relationships and in the structures of society.
2271

2272 **Partisanship:** Strong loyalty and, often, blind adherence to a specific party, group, faction, set of beliefs,
2273 or person.
2274

2275 **Polarization:** As used in this study, a partisanship so strong that partisans are rigidly set apart from other
2276 groups, whose beliefs and views are considered utterly opposite and most often inferior, dangerous to
2277 society, and unworthy of consideration. There is no value of or respect for "those people." In everyday
2278 speech such polarization is often expressed in the saying "my way or the highway."
2279

2280 **Politics:** From the Greek term "*polis*," for the city or place of the people. As used here,
2281 designates the activities of deciding how to govern and order life in community. Politics in this
2282 sense is the activity through which people exercise decisions about "who gets what, when,
2283 where, and how" to fulfill the purpose that all may flourish. It is the necessary art of guiding or
2284 influencing government to seek the common good. (See "Common Good.")
2285

2286 **Power:** Most fundamentally, the ability to make something happen or the capacity to affect,
2287 even if minimally, an outcome. In civic life the idea of power carries the implication of
2288 authority, control, or influence upon social activity, whether that indicates power over others or
2289 the ability to control the outcome of actions. Theologically, all power is based *in divine power,*
2290 *which creates, sustains, and redeems creatures who are not God. Power that is only dominating*
2291 *distorts the fulfilled divine power on which it is based.*
2292

2293 **Religious pluralism:** The state of affairs in which more than one religion operates openly in the same
2294 community. In the United States the term generally indicates a situation in which the society sees the
2295 value of each person having their own religious beliefs and practicing them openly and safely. This
2296 includes the freedom to practice no religion.
2297

2298 **Self-determination:** Most basically, the ability of people or communities to determine their own
2299 objectives and actions with minimal external compulsion. In terms of political authority, it means that
2300 people have the right to freely choose their government.
2301

2302 **Self-governance:** The ability of people to play a fundamental role in the functioning of their
2303 government.
2304

2305 **Separation of church and state:** Often used as shorthand for the establishment clause of the U.S.
2306 Constitution, which forbids state-sponsored religion. The applied meaning of the phrase is contested.
2307 For example, many people believe it means that religious convictions or religious institutions should
2308 have no real role in political life. The ELCA constitution, on the other hand, endorses institutional
2309 separation with functional interaction and argues that the church as a civic body should avoid
2310 partisanship but engage in civic life because God calls people of faith to join God’s activity there.
2311

2312 **Shalom:** The Scriptures use the Hebrew word *shalom* to refer to God’s goal of whole, healthy, peaceful,
2313 joyous, just relations among all elements in God’s creation. It is often translated as “peace,” but it means
2314 far more than mere peace of mind or absence of violence. In the Scriptures shalom indicates universal
2315 well-being and wholeness—a state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts
2316 fruitfully employed. Though the term appears in what Christians call the Old Testament, it also has a
2317 long, rich history as a central and complex concept within Judaism that Christians should acknowledge
2318 and respect.
2319

2320 **Sin:** Expresses the human proclivity for being in opposition to God. Sin is variously described as
2321 disobedience, lack of trust, self-centeredness, pride, or complacency, among other things. Sin occurs in
2322 an individual’s thoughts and actions but also is expressed in organizations, institutions, and systems. In
2323 the last three cases it is often termed “structural” or “systemic” sin.
2324

2325 **Solidarity:** A kinship within all of nature that issues from God’s creative activity. The term expresses the
2326 contention that the interests of the entire community of life should be legitimate concerns when decisions
2327 are made and actions evaluated.
2328

2329 **Systemic sin:** Argues that social and political systems are developed by humans and that, because of this,
2330 the sin embedded in them is greater than the sin of any individual action. For instance, consider a society
2331 where a racial minority has dramatically less access to political power because of laws or widespread
2332 discrimination and that, therefore, has less chance of living and thriving. All political systems are flawed
2333 but can be assessed by the extent of inequality or inequity that perpetuates harm.
2334

2335 **Theology:** Can indicate academic or abstract reflection, but in this study the term generally refers to
2336 faithful talk about anything related to God. Every person of faith, therefore, engages in theology when
2337 expressing thoughts about God, the church, God in relation to civic life, etc.
2338

2339 **Theology of the cross:** Coined by Martin Luther to refer to theology that sees “the cross” (that is, divine
2340 self-revelation) as the only source of ultimate knowledge concerning who God is and how God saves. It
2341 is contrasted with the “theology of glory,” which places great emphasis on human capacity and human
2342 reason to know who God is and how God saves.
2343

2344 **Three estates:** Used to designate the broadest divisions of social structures in Christendom (Christian
2345 Europe) from the Middle Ages to early modern Europe. While there is some variation in meaning, the
2346 three overarching divisions (estates) in the Reformation period were identified as the church, the
2347 government, and the family (which included all economic functions).
2348

2349 **Two kingdoms:** A traditional theological term from the Reformation regarding the distinction between
2350 God’s activity in the world through secular means, such as government, and God’s gracious activity in
2351 the church. ELCA teaching describes this as God’s two ways or two hands rather than as two kingdoms.
2352 God’s “right hand” conveys the tangible power of God’s love and forgiveness to people of faith, which

2353 stirs us to forgive others, to express mutual love and care, and to strive for justice. God’s “left hand”
2354 works through human roles, structures, and institutions to foster the social well-being of the people and
2355 the world God creates. The ELCA teaches that God’s two ways of governing are both necessary and that
2356 they are interrelated.

2357
2358 **Vocation:** In this statement, a calling from God that comes both as gift and responsibility. The ELCA
2359 understands baptismal vocation as fundamental; it is God’s saving call lived out in joyful response
2360 through service to the neighbor in daily life. This overarching vocation is expressed in multiple
2361 callings (or specific vocations) such as being a responsible citizen, parent, student, worker, etc.

2362
2363 **Word:** Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom God’s message to us as both law
2364 and gospel reveals God’s judgment and mercy. The ELCA constitution holds that the word is
2365 expressed in creation and in the history of Israel but is centered in all its fullness in the person and
2366 work of Jesus Christ. The canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament and New Testament are the written
2367 word of God in the sense that they are inspired by God’s Spirit in the writers as they describe and
2368 announce God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Through them God’s Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain
2369 Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.

2370
2371 **Works righteousness:** As conceived during the Reformation period, describes the practice or belief
2372 that some level of right activity, belief, or character is required to achieve righteousness in God’s
2373 eyes. The Lutheran tradition encourages people to seek righteousness (right action, character, and
2374 relationship) in civic life but emphasizes the biblical idea that works righteousness cannot achieve
2375 God’s salvation (Romans 3:21). Rather, righteousness is given by God’s mercy as a gift on account of
2376 Christ, and is received by faith.

Regarding Next Cycle of Social Message Development

Background & Recommendation stemming from Churchwide Assembly Action [CA19.05.29]

This background provides necessary information to aid the April 2024 Church Council in its determination of what social message should be authorized for development beginning in 2024. (Actionable language is included below conclusion.)

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

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

The general capacity of the Theological Ethics desk, in terms of human and financial resources, for writing projects during any given year is that of work on one social statement, one social message, and one study resource. Recommendations for social message development also considers the capacity of review bodies such as the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council.

The Theological Ethics team is currently leading the development of a new social statement on “Civic Life and Faith” and will lead another task force in reconsiderations of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) beginning in late Spring 2024. Given this, the Theological Ethics team envisions that the next proposed social message or social message reconsideration be anticipated for consideration at the Fall 2025 Church Council meeting. That timing would mean no overlap for comment periods or review processes with the work of the two social statement task forces.

There are currently three requests for social message development:

- Development of a new social message on child protection and maltreatment;
- Reconsideration of “Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990); and
- Reconsideration of one element of “Message on End-of-Life Decisions” (1992)

The recommendation of the director for theological ethics, as spelled out below in actionable language, is to authorize a social message on child protection and maltreatment. This recommendation follows extensive conversations with various stakeholders, including other churchwide organization staff, the Theological Ethics Advisory Working Group, and the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee of the Conference of Bishops.

The primary factors that support this recommendation include:

- The capacity level indicated above, which means only one social message can be initiated in 2024;
- The extent of the problem of child maltreatment and abuse in society and the church, largely hidden to general awareness;
- The overwhelming urgency expressed by stakeholders for the development of this social message; and
- The absence ELCA has for social teaching and policy on this topic.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

To authorize the development of a social message on child protection and maltreatment as requested by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly [CA19.05.29], in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

Summary of Plan Amendments

ELCA Church Council - April 2024

The ELCA Church Council shall approve plan amendments involving a significant change in policy or a significant change in cost or benefits and shall approve trust amendments initiated by Portico Benefit Services. When the ELCA Church Council, in its sole discretion, deems it appropriate, proposed amendments shall be submitted to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly for final action.

Portico Benefit Services' proposed changes received the approval of the Board of Trustees at the meeting on February 23, 2024. In accordance with the approval requirements, the changes are summarized below for approval of the ELCA Church Council.

PLAN AMENDMENTS

ELCA Retirement Plan and ELCA Retirement Saving Plan

Amendment: Add Roth as an option for member elective contributions for the plan year beginning January 1, 2025. Amendments attached as exhibit.

Description: Roth contributions to a 403(b) plan are made with income that's already been taxed, and upon meeting certain requirements, may be withdrawn upon retirement without additional federal income tax. This may be advantageous to certain members in the retirement plans and, beginning next year, members will have the option to make Roth elective contributions. Members may make this election during annual enrollment in the 4th quarter of 2024 to begin contributions January 1, 2025.

Exhibit
Services and Solutions Committee
Plan Amendments

ELCA Retirement Plan

REASON: Adding Roth Contributions and related accounts to the ELCA Retirement Plan
APPROVAL LEVEL: BOT

Effective January 1, 2025

Section 2.25 **Housing Equity Contributions.** “Housing Equity Contributions” are those contributions made for the Plan pursuant to the provisions of Section ~~5.05~~ 5.04.

Section 2.26 **In-Plan Roth Rollover.** An “In-Plan Roth Rollover” means a Roth rollover made to the In-Plan Roth Rollover Account from another account in this Plan in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.27 **In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions.** “In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to an In-Plan Roth Rollover in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.28 **In-Plan Roth Transfer.** An “In-Plan Roth Transfer” means a Roth transfer made to the In-Plan Roth Transfer Account from another account in this Plan in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.29 **In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions.** “In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to an In-Plan Roth Transfer in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.44 **Roth Contributions.** “Roth Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to the provisions of Section 5.04 that are:

- (a) designed irrevocably by the Member in the Member’s contribution agreement as a Roth Contribution that is being made in lieu of all or a portion of the Member’s eligible Member Pretax Contributions; and
- (b) treated by the Employer as includible in the Member’s income at the time such Member would have received that amount if the Member had not entered into a contribution agreement.

Section 2.45 **Roth Rollover Contributions.** “Roth Rollover Contributions” are the amounts of elective deferrals, within the meaning of Code § 402A, which are directly transferred to the Plan in an eligible rollover distribution described in Article VII.

Section 4.01 **Eligible Employees.** The following individuals shall be Eligible Employees for purposes of participation in this Retirement Plan:

[(a)-(e) omitted]

An Eligible Employee of a Non-Qualified Church Controlled Organization described in Section 2.20(d), may elect to defer a portion of her/his Defined Compensation and have the Participating Employer make Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions on her/his behalf in accordance with the provisions of Sections 5.03 and 5.04. Such Eligible Employee shall become a Member in the

Plan on the date that Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions are first made to the Plan, but shall not be eligible for Employer ~~Required~~ Contributions or Employer Matching Contributions unless s/he is sponsored by her or his Participating Employer.

[balance omitted]

Section 5.02 **Amount of Employer Contributions.**

[(a)-(b) omitted]

(c) Participating Employers may make additional post-employment non-elective contributions for former Sponsored Members. The amount of such contribution shall not exceed the limit described in Code § 415(c)(1). Post-employment contributions may be made through the fifth for up to five (5) years following the year of a former Sponsored Member's Separation from Service. Such contributions may be designated as Housing Equity Contributions as described in Section ~~5.045.05~~.

Section 5.04 Roth Contributions. Roth Contributions shall be subject to the following:

(a) Sponsored Members may elect to defer a portion of Defined Compensation which the Sponsored Member would have received except for the deferral election as a Roth Contribution.

(b) A Sponsored Member's deferral election shall be made pursuant to a written, legally binding contribution agreement between the Sponsored Member and the Participating Employer which satisfies the requirements of Code § 403(b). A contribution agreement shall apply only with respect to compensation for services rendered to the Employer by the Sponsored Member which is not currently available prior to the effective date of the contribution agreement. Subject to the limitations in the preceding sentence, a Sponsored Member may enter into more than one contribution agreements each year; provided, however, the Participating Employer can, at its option, limit the number of contribution agreements that can be entered into each year. A contribution agreement may be terminated at any time with respect to future compensation not currently available.

(c) All Roth Contributions shall be paid by the Participating Employer to the Custodian and credited to the Roth Account not later than the fifteenth (15th) business day of the month following the month in which such amounts would otherwise have been payable to the Sponsored Member in cash.

(d) Roth Contributions will be treated as direct or indirect "elective deferrals" within the meaning of Code § 402(g)(3)(C).

(e) Separate Accounting.

(i) Contributions and withdrawals of Roth Contributions shall be credited and debited to the Roth Account maintained for the Member under the Plan.

- (ii) A record of the amount of Roth Contributions in each Roth Account shall be maintained by the Agent.
- (iii) Gains, losses, and other credits or charges must be separately allocated on a reasonable and consistent basis to each Member's Roth Account and the Member's other Accounts.
- (iv) No contributions other than Roth Contributions and properly attributable earnings shall be credited to a Member's Roth Account.
- (v) The balance in each Member's Roth Account shall be fully vested at all times and shall not be subject to forfeiture for any reason.
- (vi) Roth Contributions shall be subject to the requirements of Code § 402A and shall further be subject to any regulatory guidance issued by the IRS with respect to Code § 402A.

Section 5.05 **Housing Equity Contributions.** A Participating Employer may make additional Housing Equity Contributions on behalf of a Sponsored Member who is a minister of the gospel, in accordance with Code § 107, subject to the following:

- (a) All Housing Equity Contributions made pursuant to this Section ~~5.04~~ shall be paid by the Participating Employer to the Agent and credited to the Sponsored Member's Housing Equity Account.
- (b) Such Housing Equity Contributions may not be direct or indirect "elective deferrals" within the meaning of Code § 402(g)(3)(C).

Section 5.07 **Limitation on Allocations.** Notwithstanding any provisions of the Retirement Plan to the contrary, allocations to the Accounts of a Sponsored Member under this Retirement Plan shall not exceed the maximum allocation allowable under Code § 415. It shall be the responsibility of the Sponsored Member and the Participating Employer to ensure compliance with the limitations in this Section ~~5.06~~ and neither Portico Benefit Services nor the Agent shall be liable to any Sponsored Member for any failure to so comply.

Section 5.08 **Limitation on Elective Deferrals.** Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions, except for those elective deferrals described under Code § 414(v), shall not exceed the limitations of Code § 402(g). To the extent that the contribution limitation under Code § 402(g) is violated, such violation shall affect only the individual Sponsored Member with respect to whom the excess contribution is made and shall not affect any other Sponsored Member.

The sum of any elective contributions described under Code § 414(v) for a Plan Year shall not exceed the contribution limit under Code § 414(v).

Section 5.09 **Distribution of Excess Deferrals.** Notwithstanding any other provisions of the Retirement Plan, Excess Deferrals and income allocable thereto shall be distributed no later than April 15 to Sponsored Members who claim such Excess Deferrals for the preceding calendar year, subject to the following:

- (a) For purposes of this Section ~~5.08~~, “Excess Deferrals” means the amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions for a calendar year that the individual claims pursuant to the procedure set forth in subsection (b) because the total amount deferred for the calendar year exceeds the limit imposed on the Sponsored Member for that year under Code § 402(g); provided, however, Excess Deferrals shall not include any contributions described under Code § 414(v).
- (b) For purposes of this Section ~~5.08~~, Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions in excess of the limits under Code § 402(g) shall first be treated as Code § 414(v) contributions to the extent that the Sponsored Member is eligible to make such contributions under the requirements of Code § 414(v) and to the extent that the excess Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions do not exceed the Code § 414(v) limit for the tax year, reduced by any other elective deferrals previously treated as Code § 414(v) contributions for the tax year.

[(c)-(d) omitted]

(e) For any Plan Year in which a Sponsored Member may make both Member Pretax Contributions and Roth Contributions, Portico Benefit Services may implement an ordering rules procedure for the distribution of excess contributions. Such ordering rules may specify whether the Member Pretax Contributions or Roth Contributions are distributed first to the extent such type of elective deferrals were made for the year. Furthermore, such procedure may permit the Member to elect which type of elective deferrals shall be distributed first.

Section 5.11 **Catch-up Contributions.** Amounts in excess of the Code § 402(g)~~(7)~~ limitation shall be allocated to the age fifty (50) catch-up contribution under Code § 414(v). However, in no event can the amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions for a year be more than the Sponsored Member’s taxable compensation for the year before such contributions are taken into account.

Section 5.13 **Automatic Contribution Arrangement.**

- (a) If the Participating Employer has elected the automatic contribution arrangement option, the provisions of this Section ~~5.12~~ shall apply and, to the extent that any other provision of the Plan is inconsistent with the provisions of this Section ~~5.12~~, the provisions of this ~~S~~section shall govern. A Participating Employer electing the automatic contribution arrangement must signify its intent to do so pursuant to a written or electronic form, and subject to the rules and procedures established by Portico Benefit Services for such purpose. The automatic contribution arrangement shall be effective as of the date specified by the Participating Employer in the written form referenced above.
- (b) Default Elective Deferrals will be made on behalf of Covered Employees who do not have an affirmative election in effect regarding Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions. The amount of Default Elective Deferrals made for a Covered Employee each pay period is equal to the Default Percentage specified below multiplied by the Covered Employee’s compensation for that pay period. If the Member has not designated an Investment Fund for contributions, Default Elective Deferrals will be deposited in a default Investment Fund pursuant to Section 8.03.

- (c) A Covered Employee will have a reasonable opportunity after receipt of the notice described in Section ~~5.12(e)~~5.13(e) below to make an affirmative election regarding Member and/or Roth Pretax Contributions (either to have no Member and/or Roth Pretax Contributions made or to have a different amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made) before Default Elective Deferrals are made on the Covered Employee's behalf. Default Elective Deferrals being made on behalf of a Covered Employee will cease as soon as administratively feasible after the Covered Employee makes an affirmative election.
- (d) **Definitions.**
- (i) An "automatic contribution arrangement" is an arrangement under which, in the absence of an affirmative election by a Covered Employee, a certain percentage of compensation will be withheld from the Covered Employee's compensation and contributed to the Plan as a Member Pretax Contribution.
- (ii) A "Covered Employee" is a Sponsored Member who has not made an affirmative Elective Deferral Election and whose Participating Employer has elected the automatic contribution arrangement option in Section ~~5.12(a)~~5.13(a).
- (iii) "Default Elective Deferrals" are Member Pretax Contributions contributed to the Plan under the automatic contribution arrangement on behalf of Covered Employees who do not have an affirmative election in effect regarding Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions.
- (iv) The "Default Percentage" is the percentage of a Covered Employee's compensation contributed to the Plan as a Default Elective Deferral for a Plan Year. The Default Percentage is three percent (3%).

[(e) omitted]

(f) **Withdrawal of Default Elective Deferrals.**

[(i)-(iii) omitted]

- (v) Default Elective Deferrals distributed pursuant to this Section ~~5.12~~ are not counted towards the dollar limitation on Elective Deferrals contained in Code § 402(g).

Section 6.01 **Accounts.** The Agent shall establish and maintain for each Sponsored Member one (1) or more of the following types of Accounts under the Plan, which collectively shall constitute the Sponsored Member's Account:

[(a)-(b) omitted]

- (c) **Rollover Account.** A "Rollover Account" shall be established for any Member for whom Rollover Contributions are made under this Retirement Plan pursuant to Section 7.04, and shall include any earnings from time to time credited to such Account.

- (d) **Roth Account.** A “Roth Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom Roth Contributions are made pursuant to Section 5.04, and earnings thereon.
- (e) **Roth Rollover Account.** A “Roth Rollover Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom Roth Rollovers to Plan are made under this Retirement Plan pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon.
- (f) **In-Plan Roth Rollover Account.** An “In-Plan Roth Rollover Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom In-Plan Roth Rollovers are made pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon. To the extent necessary, a sub-account under this account may be established based on the source of the In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions.
- (g) **In-Plan Roth Transfer Account.** An “In-Plan Roth Transfer Account” shall be established pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon. To the extent necessary, a sub-account under this account may be established based on the source of the In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions.
- (h) **Housing Equity Account.** A “Housing Equity Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom Housing Equity Contributions are made under this Retirement Plan pursuant to Section ~~5-045.05~~. Any amounts credited as of December 31, 2002 to the Employer Optional Account under the ELCA Regular Pension Plan or the Employer Optional Account under the ELCA Optional Pension Plan on behalf of a Sponsored Member who is a minister of the gospel as defined in Code § 107 shall also be credited to the Housing Equity Account. A Sponsored Member’s Housing Equity Account shall include any earnings from time to time credited to such Account.

[balance omitted]

Section 7.04 **Direct Transfer of Eligible Rollover Distributions.**

(a) **Rollovers from Plan.**

(i) Subject to the withdrawal and distribution limitations in Article IX, including but not limited to the limitations in Section 9.02(b), notwithstanding any provision of the Plan to the contrary that would otherwise limit a Distributee’s election under this Section, a Distributee may elect, at the time and in the manner prescribed by Portico Benefit Services or its Agent, to have any portion of an Eligible Rollover Distribution paid directly to an Eligible Retirement Plan specified by the Distributee in a Direct Rollover, provided that the Eligible Rollover Distribution is not less than two hundred dollars (\$200).

(ii) Rollover of Roth Contributions

(A) A Direct Rollover of a distribution of Roth Contributions from a Member’s Account shall only be made to another Roth elective deferral account under an applicable retirement plan described in Code § 402A(e)(1) or to a Roth IRA described in Code § 408A, and only to the extent the rollover is permitted under the rules of Code § 402(c).

(B) The Plan will not provide for a Direct Rollover (including an automatic rollover) for distributions of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account if the amounts of the Roth distributions that are Eligible Rollover Distributions are reasonably expected to total less than \$200 during a year. In addition, any distribution of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account is not taken into account in determining whether distributions of non-Roth amounts from a Member's Account are reasonably expected to total less than \$200 during a year. However, Eligible Rollover Distributions of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account are taken into account in determining whether the total amount of the Member's Account under the Plan exceeds \$1,000 for purposes of payments of small amounts from the Plan described in Section 9.10.

(b) Rollovers to Plan.

- (i) An Eligible Employee, Sponsored Member or former Member may, in accordance with rules, regulations and procedures adopted by Portico Benefit Services and subject to any limitations imposed under the Code, roll over into the Plan all or part of an Eligible Rollover Distribution from an Eligible Retirement Plan in a Direct Rollover. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a former Member may only roll-over funds to the ELCA Retirement Plan if the amount is \$20,000 or greater. Effective January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2024, an Eligible Rollover shall also include recontributions of COVID-related distributions from a qualified Member ~~as defined in Section 9.04 (b)~~, in accordance with the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).
- (ii) The Plan will accept a rollover contribution to a Roth Rollover Account only if it is a Direct Rollover from another Roth elective deferral account under an applicable retirement plan described in Code § 402A(e)(1) and only to the extent the rollover is permitted under the rules of Code § 402(c).
- (iii) A rollover of an Eligible Rollover Distribution that includes Roth elective deferrals will only be accepted if Portico Benefit Services obtains information regarding the Member's tax basis under Code § 72 in the amount rolled over.
- (iv) Separate accounts shall be established and maintained for the Member for any Eligible Rollover Distribution, as well as for the after-tax portion of any such Eligible Rollover Distribution, paid to the Plan. All contributions made pursuant to Section 7.04(b)(i) shall be credited to the Member's Rollover Account. All contributions made pursuant to Section 7.04(b)(ii) shall be credited to the Member's Roth Rollover Account. The balance in a Member's Rollover Account and Roth Rollover Account shall be fully vested at all times and shall not be subject to forfeiture for any reason.

(c) **Section 7.04 Definitions.**

[(i)-(iii) omitted]

- (iv) Distributee. A Distributee includes a Member, a Member's Designated Beneficiary, ~~a Member's former spouse who is~~ an Alternate Payee under a QDRO, or a Member's Surviving Spouse.

Section 7.05 In-Plan Roth Rollovers and Transfers.

- (a) In-Plan Roth Rollover. An In-Plan Roth Rollover is an amount that a Member elects to transfer from a Plan Account, other than a designated Roth Account, into an In-Plan Roth Rollover Account, in accordance with Code § 402A(c)(4)(E). A Member may elect to make an In-Plan Roth Rollover from all or a portion of the Member's vested Account that is eligible for distribution. In-Plan Roth Rollovers will be administered as provided by IRS guidance and the provisions of this Section.
- (b) In-Plan Roth Transfer. An In-Plan Roth Transfer is an amount that a Member elects to transfer from a Plan Account, other than a designated Roth Account, into an In-Plan Roth Transfer Account, in accordance with Code § 402A(c)(4)(E). A Member may elect to make an In-Plan Roth Transfer from all or a portion of the Member's vested Account that is not otherwise distributable. In-Plan Roth Transfers will be administered as provided by IRS guidance and the provisions of this Section.
- (c) Member includes certain Alternate Payees. For purposes of eligibility for an In-Plan Roth Rollover/Transfer, the Plan will treat a Member's Alternate Payee who is not an Eligible Employee as a Member.
- (d) Withdrawal of In-Plan Roth Rollovers or Transfers. A Member may withdraw amounts from the Member's In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer Account only when the Member would have been eligible for a distribution from the Account which was the source of the In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer. In-Plan Roth Rollovers and Transfers do not accelerate or eliminate any distribution rights or restrictions on amounts that a Member elects to treat as an In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer.

Section 7.06 Allocations of Transfers and Rollovers. All amounts transferred to this Retirement Plan or credited to this Retirement Plan in an Eligible Rollover Distribution shall be allocated among the following Member Accounts, based upon the rules, regulations, and procedures from time to time established by Portico Benefit Services:

- (a) Member Pretax Account;
- (b) Rollover Account;
- (c) Roth Rollover Account;
- (d) In-Plan Roth Rollover Account;
- (e) In-Plan Roth Transfer Account; and
- (f) After-Tax Rollover Account.

Such allocation shall be made in a manner that is consistent with the distribution restrictions, if any, associated with the amounts transferred or rolled over.

Section 9.01 **Withdrawals Prior to Separation from Service.** A Sponsored Member shall be entitled to make withdrawals from her/his Employer Account, ~~and~~ Member Pretax Account, and Roth Account prior to Separation from Service, only in accordance with the provisions of Sections 9.02, 9.03 and 9.04. With respect to all other Accounts, a Sponsored Member may receive a distribution at any time, in accordance with the provisions of Section 9.05.

Section 9.02 **In Service Withdrawals After Attainment of Age Fifty-Nine and One-Half (59½).** A Sponsored Member shall be entitled to make withdrawals from her/his Employer Account, ~~and~~ Member Pretax Account, and Roth Account upon the attainment of age fifty-nine and one-half (59½), whether or not the Sponsored Member s/he has had a Separation from Service, in accordance with the following provisions:

- (a) Subject to the limitations of Section 9.02(b), wWithdrawals under this Section 9.02 may be made in one (1) or a combination of the following forms:
- (i) Payment in such amounts and at such times as the Sponsored Member may request.
 - (ii) Payment in a series of monthly, quarterly, semiannual or annual periodic payments of a specified dollar amount.

(b) With respect to the withdrawal of any amounts in a Sponsored Member's Employer Account, the total of all withdrawals in a calendar year shall not exceed the greater of twenty percent (20%) of the sum of such Account determined as of December 31 of the preceding year, or twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000). A Sponsored Member who is entitled to make a withdrawal pursuant to this Section may elect instead to transfer the amount eligible for such withdrawal to her/his Rollover Account.

This subsection (b) shall not apply to Members over age seventy-five (75), Designated Beneficiaries, or to a Sponsored, Disabled or Retired Member who submits a doctor's statement or other evidence acceptable to Portico Benefit Services certifying that the Member is terminally ill and death is expected within twelve (12) months.

Section 9.03 **Withdrawals in the Event of Disability.** A Sponsored Member who has not yet attained age fifty-nine and one-half (59½) shall be entitled to make withdrawals from all or a portion of her/his Employer Account, ~~and~~ Member Pretax Account, and Roth Account if such Sponsored Member is Disabled.

- (a) Subject to the limitations of Section 9.03(b), wWithdrawals pursuant to this Section 9.03 may be made in one (1) or a combination of the following forms:
- (i) Payment in such amounts and at such times as the Sponsored Member may request.
 - (ii) Payment in a series of monthly, quarterly, semiannual or annual periodic payments of a specified dollar amount.
- (b) With respect to the withdrawal of any amounts in a Sponsored Member's Employer Account in the event of Disability, the provisions of Section 9.02(b) shall apply; provided,

however, that the Sponsored Member shall not be entitled to transfer any amounts to her/his Rollover Account.

Section 9.04 **Hardship Withdrawals.** ~~A Member may make a hardship withdrawal from her/his Employer Account and Member Pretax Account pursuant to the following requirements:~~

~~(a) Immediate and Heavy Financial Need.~~ A Member may make a hardship withdrawal from her/his Employer Account, ~~and Member Pretax Account, and Roth Account~~ (excluding any interest credits or earnings attributable to any amounts in her/his Member Pretax Account and Roth Account) in the event of an immediate and heavy financial need arising from:

[(i)-(vii) omitted]

Distribution of Amount Necessary to Meet Need. A Member must represent that s/he has insufficient cash or other liquid assets to satisfy the immediate and heavy financial need for a distribution included under this Section 9.04(a). The Plan Administrator can rely on the Member's representation unless there is actual knowledge to the contrary.

A hardship distribution included under this Section 9.04(a) must be no more than the amount necessary to satisfy an immediate and heavy financial need. A distribution is deemed necessary to satisfy an immediate and heavy financial need of a Member if the distribution is not in excess of the amount of the immediate and heavy financial need of the Member. The amount of an immediate and heavy financial need may include any amounts necessary to pay any federal, state, or local income taxes or penalties reasonably anticipated to result from the distribution.

With respect to a hardship withdrawal of any amounts in a Member's Employer Account, the provisions of Section 9.02(b) shall not apply; provided, however, that the Member shall not be entitled to transfer any amounts to her/his Rollover Account.

~~(b) Coronavirus-Related Distributions.~~ ~~Coronavirus-related distributions up to \$100,000 are permitted for qualified Members during the 2020 calendar year under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). A qualified Member is a Member who meets at least one of the following criteria:~~

- ~~(i) A Member who is tested and diagnosed with COVID-19;~~
- ~~(ii) A Member whose spouse or dependent (as defined under Code § 152) is tested and diagnosed with COVID-19; or~~
- ~~(iii) Due to COVID-19, the Member is experiencing adverse financial consequences as a result of the Member, the Member's spouse, or an individual in the Member's household:~~
 - ~~a. being quarantined, furloughed or laid off, or having work hours reduced;~~
 - ~~b. being unable to work due to lack of childcare;~~
 - ~~c. having to close or reduce hours of an owned business;~~
 - ~~d. having a reduction in pay or self-employment income; or~~
 - ~~e. having a job offer rescinded or start date for a job delayed.~~

~~_____ The Administrator may rely on an individual's certification that the individual satisfies the conditions to be a qualified individual in determining whether a distribution is a coronavirus-related distribution, unless the Administrator has actual knowledge to the contrary.~~

~~_____ As soon as practicable after the Agent's receipt of an acceptable request from the Member, the Agent will pay to the Member the amount requested by the Member.~~

Section 9.06 **Withdrawals Upon Separation from Service**. A Sponsored Member may elect to have payments from her/his Member's Account under this Plan commence as of any date that is at least thirty (30) days after Separation from Service or Retirement, unless the Member confirms the receipt and reading of the special tax notice and provides a waiver of the thirty (30) day waiting period.

- (a) Subject to the limitations of Section 9.06(b), pPayment of benefits under this Section 9.06 shall be made in one (1) or a combination of the following forms:
- (i) Payment in such amounts and at such times as the Member may request.
 - (ii) Payment in a series of monthly, quarterly, semiannual or annual periodic payments of a specified dollar amount.
- (b) With respect to withdrawals of any amounts in a Member's Employer Account, the provisions of Section 9.02(b) shall apply.

Section 9.14 **Required Minimum Distributions**. Notwithstanding any provisions in Article IX or X to the contrary, payments under the Retirement Plan to a Member must commence in accordance with the requirements of Code § 401(a)(9) by April 1 of the calendar year following the calendar year in which the Member attains age seventy-three (73) for Members who attain age 72 after January 1, 2023, or, if later, April 1 of the calendar year following the calendar year in which the Member retires. The Retirement Plan will apply the minimum distribution requirements and regulations of Code § 401(a)(9) in accordance with Code § 401(a)(9), notwithstanding any provision of the Plan to the contrary. Roth accounts are exempt from pre-death Required Minimum Distribution requirements.

Section 12.18 **Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994**. Notwithstanding any provision of this Plan to the contrary, contributions, benefits and service credit with respect to qualified military service will be provided in accordance with Code § 414(u). Affected Sponsored Members may elect to make additional Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions upon resumption of employment with the Participating Employer up to the maximum Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions that the Sponsored Member could have elected during that period if the Sponsored Member's employment with the Participating Employer had continued (at the same level of compensation) without the interruption, reduced by the Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions, if any, actually made for the Sponsored Member during the period of interruption. Except to the extent provided under Code § 414(u), a rehired Sponsored Member with qualified military service has up to three (3) times the period of the interruption - not to exceed five (5) years - to make up missed Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions.

ELCA Retirement Savings Plan

REASON: Adding Roth Contributions and related accounts to the ELCA Retirement Savings Plan

APPROVAL LEVEL: BOT

Section 2.10 **Disability.** “Disability” or “Disabled” shall mean disability as determined by the Participating Employer; provided, however, that with respect to any distributions ~~of Member Pretax Contributions~~ under Section 9.03, “Disability” shall be determined in accordance with Code § 72(m)(7).

Section 2.21 **Highly Compensated Employee.** “Highly Compensated Employee” for any Plan Year means an individual described in Code § 414(q). For purposes of the preceding sentence, “Highly Compensated Employee” shall include both Highly Compensated active Employees and Highly Compensated former Employees. Each employee who meets one of the following requirements is a “Highly Compensated Employee”:

[(a)-(d) omitted]

(e) For purposes of this Section, “compensation” means a Sponsored Member’s total compensation from the Participating Employer for purposes of Code § 415(c)(3). Compensation shall also include the Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions to this Plan, any elective deferrals as defined in Code § 402(g)(3), and any amount which is contributed or deferred by the Participating Employer at the election of the Sponsored Member and which is not includible in the gross income of the Sponsored Member by reason of Code §§ 125, 132(f), or 457.

[balance omitted]

Section 2.22 In-Plan Roth Rollover. An “In-Plan Roth Rollover” means a Roth rollover made to the In-Plan Roth Rollover Account from another account in this Plan in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.23 In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions. “In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to an In-Plan Roth Rollover in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.24 In-Plan Roth Transfer. An “In-Plan Roth Transfer” means a Roth transfer made to the In-Plan Roth Transfer Account from another account in this Plan in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.25 In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions. “In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to an In-Plan Roth Transfer in accordance with the provisions of Article VII.

Section 2.38 Roth Contributions. “Roth Contributions” are those contributions made to the Plan pursuant to the provisions of Section 5.02 that are:

- (a) designed irrevocably by the Member in the Member's contribution agreement as a Roth Contribution that is being made in lieu of all or a portion of the Member's eligible Member Pretax Contributions; and
- (b) treated by the Participating Employer as includible in the Member's income at the time such Member would have received that amount if the Member had not entered into a contribution agreement.

Section 2.39 Roth Rollover Contributions. "Roth Rollover Contributions" are the amounts of elective deferrals, within the meaning of Code § 402A, which are directly transferred to the Plan in an eligible rollover distribution described in Article VII.

Section 4.05 **Enrollment as a Sponsored Member.**

[(a) omitted]

- (b) An Eligible Employee of a Non-Qualified Church Controlled Organization described in Section 2.17(c) who does not meet the requirements of subsection 4.05(a) may elect to defer a portion of her/his Defined Compensation and have the Participating Employer make Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions on her/his behalf in accordance with the provisions of Section 5.01 or 5.02 if such Eligible Employee is regularly scheduled to work twenty (20) or more hours per week (or any lesser number of hours specified in the Adoption Agreement). Such Eligible Employee shall become a Sponsored Member in the Plan on the date that Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions are first made to the Plan, but shall not be eligible for Employer Required Contributions or Employer Matching Contributions unless s/he meets the requirements of Section 4.05(a).

Once an Employee of a Non-Qualified Church Controlled Organization becomes eligible to have Elective Deferrals made on her or his behalf under the Plan, the Eligible Employee cannot be excluded from eligibility to have Elective Deferrals made on her or his behalf in later years, except in accordance with the "once-in, always-in" rule described in Treasury Regulations § 1.403(b)-5(b)(4)(iii)(B).

Section 5.02 Roth Contributions. Roth Contributions shall be subject to the following:

- (a) Each Eligible Employee may elect to defer a portion of her/his Defined Compensation which s/he would have received except for the deferral election as an election as a Roth Contribution.
- (b) An Eligible Employee's deferral election shall be made pursuant to a written, legally binding contribution agreement between the Eligible Employee and her/his Participating Employer which satisfies the requirements of Code § 403(b). A contribution agreement shall apply only with respect to compensation for services rendered to the Employer by the Eligible Employee which is not currently available prior to the effective date of the contribution agreement. Subject to the limitations in the preceding sentence, an Eligible Employee may enter into more than one contribution agreement each year; provided, however, the Participating Employer can, at its option, limit the number of contribution agreements that can be entered into each year. A contribution agreement may be terminated at any time with respect to future compensation not currently available.

- (c) All Roth Contributions shall be paid by the Participating Employer to the Custodian and credited to the Sponsored Member's Roth Account not later than the fifteenth (15th) business day of the month following the month in which such amounts would otherwise have been payable to the Sponsored Member in cash.
- (d) Roth Contributions will be treated as direct or indirect "elective deferrals" within the meaning of Code § 402(g)(3)(C).
- (e) Separate Accounting.
 - (i) Contributions and withdrawals of Roth Contributions shall be credited and debited to the Roth Account maintained for the Member under the Plan.
 - (ii) A record of the amount of Roth Contributions in each Roth Account shall be maintained by the Custodian.
 - (iii) Gains, losses, and other credits or charges must be separately allocated on a reasonable and consistent basis to each Member's Roth Account and the Member's other Accounts.
 - (iv) No contributions other than Roth Contributions and properly attributable earnings shall be credited to a Member's Roth Account.
 - (v) The balance in each Member's Roth Account shall be fully vested at all times and shall not be subject to forfeiture for any reason.
 - (vi) Roth Contributions shall be subject to the requirements of Code § 402A and shall further be subject to any regulatory guidance issued by the IRS with respect to Code § 402A.

Section 5.03 **Automatic Contribution Arrangement (ACA).**

- (a) Employer Election of ACA Option. If the Participating Employer has elected the ACA option in the Adoption Agreement, the provisions of this Section ~~5.02~~ shall apply for the Plan Year and any partial Plan Year (if the ACA option is elected mid-year) and, to the extent that any other provision of the Plan is inconsistent with the provisions of this Section ~~5.02~~, the provisions of this Section shall govern.
- (b) Default Member Pretax Contributions. Default Member Pretax Contributions will be made on behalf of Covered Employees who do not have an affirmative election in effect regarding Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions. The amount of Default Member Pretax Contributions made for a Covered Employee each pay period is equal to the Default Percentage specified in the Adoption Agreement multiplied by the Covered Employee's Defined Compensation for that pay period. If the Participating Employer has so elected in the Adoption Agreement, a Covered Employee's Default Percentage will increase by one percentage point each Plan Year, beginning with the second Plan Year that begins after the Default Percentage first applies to the Covered Employee. The increase will be effective beginning with the first pay period that begins in such Plan

Year or, if elected in the Adoption Agreement, the first pay period in such Plan Year that begins on or after the date specified in the Adoption Agreement.

- (c) Right to Make Affirmative Election. A Covered Employee will have a reasonable opportunity after receipt of the notice described in Subsection 5-025.03(f) to make an affirmative election regarding Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions (either to have no Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made or to have a different amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions) before Default Member Pretax Contributions are made on the Covered Employee's behalf. Default Member Pretax Contributions being made on behalf of a Covered Employee will cease as soon as administratively feasible after the Covered Employee makes an affirmative election to not have Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made or to have a different amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made.
- (d) Definitions.
- (i) Automatic Contribution Arrangement (ACA). An "Automatic Contribution Arrangement" or "ACA" is an arrangement under which, in the absence of an affirmative election by a Covered Employee, a certain percentage of the Covered Employee's Defined Compensation will be contributed to the Plan as a Member Pretax Contribution in lieu of being included in the Covered Employee's Defined Compensation, that satisfies the uniformity requirement in Subsection 5-025.03(e) and the notice requirement in Subsection 5-025.03(f).
- (ii) Covered Employee. A "Covered Employee" is a Participant identified in the Adoption Agreement as being covered under the ACA.
- (iii) Default Member Pretax Contribution. "Default Member Pretax Contributions" are the Member Pretax Contributions contributed to the Plan under the ACA on behalf of Covered Employees who do not have an affirmative election in effect regarding Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions.
- [(iv) omitted]
[(e) omitted]
- (f) Notice Requirement.
- (i) Timing of Notice. Within a reasonable period of time before Default Member Pretax Contributions begin after the ACA option is first elected by the Participating Employer and thereafter, within a reasonable period of time before the beginning of each Plan Year, the Participating Employer will provide each Covered Employee with a notice of the Covered Employee's rights and obligations under the ACA as described in paragraph (ii) below, written in a manner calculated to be understood by the average Covered Employee.
- (ii) Content of Notice. The notice must accurately describe:

- (A) The amount of Default Member Pretax Contributions that will be made on the Covered Employee's behalf in the absence of an affirmative election;
- (B) The Covered Employee's right to elect to have no Member Pretax Contributions made on his behalf or to have a different amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made;

[balance omitted]

Section 5.06 **Employer Matching Contributions.** The Participating Employer may elect to provide Matching Contributions with respect to Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions made to the Plan on behalf of Sponsored Members who meet the requirements of Section 4.01. Matching Contributions shall be credited to the Sponsored Member's Matching Account and shall be subject to the following:

- (a) The Participating Employer shall make Matching Contributions to the Plan for each of its Sponsored Members who is eligible to receive Matching Contributions in accordance with the provisions of the Adoption Agreement.
- (b) Matching Contributions shall be made by the Participating Employer only on Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions (i) made on behalf of Sponsored Members covered under Section 4.01, and (ii) attributable to pay periods in which the individual is regularly scheduled to work for the Participating Employer the minimum number of hours per week specified in the Adoption Agreement for purposes of Section 4.01.
- (c) Matching Contributions shall not be direct or indirect "elective deferrals" within the meaning of Code § 402(g)(3)(C).
- (d) All Matching Contributions shall be paid by the Participating Employer to Portico Benefit Services or the Agent by the later of: (i) the date the Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions on which such Matching Contributions are based are paid to Portico Benefit Services or the Agent, or (ii) the fifteenth (15th) business day following the date upon which the Sponsored Member becomes eligible to receive such Matching Contributions, in accordance with the provisions of subparagraph (f) below.
- (e) Any Matching Contributions which are made with respect to a Member Pretax and/or Roth Contribution which is refunded in accordance with Section 5.11 shall be held in a suspense account on behalf of the Participating Employer and applied against future Matching Contributions made by that Participating Employer.
- (f) If elected by the Participating Employer in the Adoption Agreement, a Sponsored Member shall be eligible to receive a Matching Contribution only if s/he is a common law employee of the Participating Employer on December 31 of the Plan Year and/or completes one thousand (1,000) hours of service for the Participating Employer during the Plan Year. Notwithstanding the preceding sentence, a Sponsored Member shall be eligible to receive a Matching Contribution for that portion of the Plan Year prior to her/his Separation from Service if the Separation from Service is due to her/his (i) death, (ii) Disability (as determined by the Employer in its sole discretion), or (iii) Retirement.
- (g) Average Contribution Percentage (ACP) Safe Harbor Contribution. If the Participating Employer has elected the ACP safe harbor option in the Adoption Agreement, the provisions of this Section shall apply for the Plan Year and any provisions relating to the ACP test described in Code § 401(m)(2) and Section 5.12 of the Plan shall not apply. To the extent that any other provision of the Plan is inconsistent with the provisions of this Section, the provisions of this Section govern.

(i) **Safe Harbor Contribution.** Unless the Participating Employer elects one of the alternatives in the Adoption Agreement, the Participating Employer will contribute for the Plan Year a safe harbor matching contribution to the Plan on behalf of each Eligible Employee equal to:

- (A) One hundred percent (100%) of the amount of the Employee's Member Pretax **and/or Roth** Contributions that do not exceed three percent (3%) of the Employee's Defined Compensation for the Plan Year, plus
- (B) Fifty percent (50%) of the amount of the Employee's Member Pretax **and/or Roth** Contributions that exceed three percent (3%) of the Employee's Defined Compensation but that do not exceed five percent (5%) of the Employee's Defined Compensation.

The Sponsored Member's accrued benefit derived from safe harbor contributions must be immediately one hundred percent (100%) vested and may not be distributed earlier than severance from employment, age fifty-nine and one-half (59½), death, disability, or termination of the Plan without the establishment or maintenance of another defined contribution plan.

(ii) **Notice Requirement.** At least thirty (30) days, but not more than ninety (90) days before the beginning of the Plan Year, the Participating Employer will provide each Eligible Employee a comprehensive notice of the Employee's rights and obligations under the Plan, written in a manner calculated to be understood by the average Eligible Employee. If an Employee becomes eligible after the ninetieth (90th) day before the beginning of the Plan Year and does not receive the notice for that reason, the notice must be provided no more than ninety (90) days before the Employee becomes eligible but not later than the date the Employee becomes eligible.

(iii) **Election Periods.** In addition to any other election periods provided under the Plan, each Eligible Employee may make or modify a Member Pretax **and/or Roth** Contribution election during the thirty (30) day period immediately following receipt of the notice described in subsection (ii) above.

Section 5.10 **Limitation on Elective Deferrals.** Member Pretax **and/or Roth** Contributions, except for those elective deferrals described under Code § 414(v), shall not exceed the limitations of Code § 402(g). To the extent that the contribution limitation under Code § 402(g) is violated, such violation shall affect only the individual Sponsored Member with respect to whom the excess contribution is made and shall not affect any other Sponsored Member.

The sum of any elective contributions described under Code § 414(v) for a Plan Year shall not exceed the contribution limit under Code § 414(v).

Section 5.11 **Distribution of Excess Deferrals.** Notwithstanding any other provisions of the Retirement Plan, Excess Deferrals and income allocable thereto shall be distributed no later than April 15 to Sponsored Members who claim such Excess Deferrals for the preceding calendar year, subject to the following:

- (a) For purposes of this Section ~~5.08~~, “Excess Deferrals” means the amount of Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions for a calendar year that the individual claims pursuant to the procedure set forth in subsection (b) because the total amount deferred for the calendar year exceeds the limit imposed on the Sponsored Member for that year under Code § 402(g); provided, however, Excess Deferrals shall not include any contributions described under Code § 414(v).
- (b) For purposes of this Section ~~5.08~~, Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions in excess of the limits under Code § 402(g) shall first be treated as Code § 414(v) contributions to the extent that the Sponsored Member is eligible to make such contributions under the requirements of Code § 414(v) and to the extent that the excess Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions do not exceed the Code § 414(v) limit for the tax year, reduced by any other elective deferrals previously treated as Code § 414(v) contributions for the tax year.

[(c)-(d) omitted]

- (e) For any Plan Year in which a Sponsored Member may make both Member Pretax Contributions and Roth Contributions, Portico Benefit Services may implement an ordering rules procedure for the distribution of excess contributions. Such ordering rules may specify whether the Member Pretax Contributions or Roth Contributions are distributed first, to the extent such type of elective deferrals were made for the year. Furthermore, such procedure may permit the Member to elect which type of elective deferrals shall be distributed first.

Section 6.01 **Accounts.** The Agent shall establish and maintain for each Sponsored Member one (1) or more of the following types of Accounts under the Plan, which collectively shall constitute the Sponsored Member’s Account:

[(a)-(d) omitted]

- (e) **Roth Account.** A “Roth Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom Roth Contributions are made pursuant to Section 5.02, and earnings thereon.
- (f) **Roth Rollover Account.** A “Roth Rollover Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom Roth Rollovers to Plan are made under this Retirement Plan pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon.
- (g) **In-Plan Roth Rollover Account.** An “In-Plan Roth Rollover Account” shall be established for any Sponsored Member for whom In-Plan Roth Rollovers are made pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon. To the extent necessary, a sub-account under this account may be established based on the source of the In-Plan Roth Rollover Contributions.
- (h) **In-Plan Roth Transfer Account.** An “In-Plan Roth Transfer Account” shall be established pursuant to Article VII, and any earnings thereon. To the extent necessary, a sub-account under this account may be established based on the source of the In-Plan Roth Transfer Contributions.

[balance omitted]

Section 7.04 **Direct Transfer of Eligible Rollover Distributions.**

(a) **Rollovers from Plan.** ~~Subject to the withdrawal and distribution limitations in Article IX, including but not limited to the limitations in Section 9.02(b),~~

(i) Subject to the withdrawal and distribution limitations in Article IX, and notwithstanding any provision of the Plan to the contrary that would otherwise limit a Distributee's election under this Section, a Distributee may elect, at the time and in the manner prescribed by Portico Benefit Services, to have any portion of an Eligible Rollover Distribution paid directly to an Eligible Retirement Plan specified by the Distributee in a Direct Rollover, provided that the Eligible Rollover Distribution is not less than two hundred dollars (\$200).

(ii) Rollover of Roth Contributions.

(A) A Direct Rollover of a distribution of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account shall only be made to another Roth elective deferral account under an applicable retirement plan described in Code § 402A(e)(1) or to a Roth IRA described in Code § 408A, and only to the extent the rollover is permitted under the rules of Code § 402(c).

(B) The Plan will not provide for a Direct Rollover (including an automatic rollover) for distributions of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account if the amounts of the Roth distributions that are Eligible Rollover Distributions are reasonably expected to total less than \$200 during a year. In addition, any distribution of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account is not taken into account in determining whether distributions of non-Roth amounts from a Member's Account are reasonably expected to total less than \$200 during a year. However, Eligible Rollover Distributions of Roth Contributions from a Member's Account are taken into account in determining whether the total amount of the Member's Account under the Plan exceeds \$1,000 for purposes of mandatory distributions from the Plan described in Section 9.10.

(b) Rollovers to Plan.

(i) An Eligible Employee, Sponsored Member or former Member may, in accordance with rules, regulations and procedures adopted by Portico Benefit Services and subject to any limitations imposed under the Code, roll over into the Plan all or part of an Eligible Rollover Distribution from an Eligible Retirement Plan in a Direct Rollover. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a former Member may only roll over funds to the ELCA Retirement Savings Plan if the amount is \$20,000 or greater. Effective January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2024, an Eligible Rollover shall also include recontributions of COVID-related distributions from a qualified Member, in accordance with the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act).

(ii) Roth Rollovers to Plan. The Plan will accept a rollover contribution to a Roth Rollover Account only if it is a Direct Rollover from another Roth elective

deferral account under an applicable retirement plan described in Code § 402A(e)(1) and only to the extent the rollover is permitted under the rules of Code § 402(c).

- (iii) Information Regarding Member or Former Member Basis Required. A rollover of an Eligible Rollover Distribution that includes Roth elective deferrals will only be accepted if Portico Benefit Services obtains information regarding the Member's tax basis under Code § 72 in the amount rolled over.
- (iv) Separate Accounts. Separate accounts shall be established and maintained for the Member for any Eligible Rollover Distribution, as well as for the after-tax portion of any such Eligible Rollover Distribution, paid to the Plan. All contributions made pursuant to Section 7.04(b)(i) shall be credited to the Member's Rollover Account. All contributions made pursuant to Section 7.04(b)(ii) shall be credited to the Member's Roth Rollover Account. The balance in a Member's Rollover Account and Roth Rollover Account shall be fully vested at all times and shall not be subject to forfeiture for any reason.

[balance omitted]

Section 7.05 In-Plan Roth Rollovers and Transfers.

- (a) **In-Plan Roth Rollover.** An In-Plan Roth Rollover is an amount that a Member elects to transfer from a Plan Account, other than a designated Roth Account, into an In-Plan Roth Rollover Account, in accordance with Code § 402A(c)(4)(E). A Member may elect to make an In-Plan Roth Rollover from all or a portion of her/his vested Account that is eligible for distribution. In-Plan Roth Rollovers will be administered as provided by IRS guidance and the provisions of this Section.
- (b) **In-Plan Roth Transfer.** An In-Plan Roth Transfer is an amount that a Member elects to transfer from a Plan Account, other than a designated Roth Account, into an In-Plan Roth Transfer Account, in accordance with Code § 402A(c)(4)(E). A Member may elect to make an In-Plan Roth Transfer from all or a portion of her/his vested Account that is not otherwise distributable. In-Plan Roth Transfers will be administered as provided by IRS guidance and the provisions of this Section.
- (c) **Member includes certain Alternate Payees.** For purposes of eligibility for an In-Plan Roth Rollover/Transfer, the Plan will treat a Member's Alternate Payee who is not an Eligible Employee as a Member.
- (d) **Withdrawal of In-Plan Roth Rollovers or Transfers.** A Member may withdraw amounts from the Member's In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer Account only when the Member would have been eligible for a distribution from the Account which was the source of the In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer. In-Plan Roth Rollovers and Transfers do not accelerate or eliminate any distribution rights or restrictions on amounts that a Member elects to treat as an In-Plan Roth Rollover or Transfer.

Section ~~7.05~~ **7.06** **Allocations of Transfers and Rollovers.** All amounts transferred to this Retirement

Plan or credited to this Retirement Plan in an Eligible Rollover Distribution shall be allocated among the following Member Accounts, based upon the rules, regulations, and procedures from time to time established by Portico Benefit Services:

- (a) Member Pretax Account;
- (b) Rollover Account;
- (c) Roth Rollover Account;
- (d) In-Plan Roth Rollover Account;
- (e) In-Plan Roth Transfer Account; and
- (f) After-Tax Rollover Account.

Such allocation shall be made in a manner that is consistent with the distribution restrictions, if any, associated with the amounts transferred or rolled over.

Section 9.01 **Withdrawals Prior to Separation from Service.** A Sponsored Member shall be entitled to make withdrawals from her/his vested Account prior to Separation from Service only as provided below:

- (a) **Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions.** A Sponsored Member may receive a distribution from her/his Member Pretax and/or Roth Account prior to Separation from Service, in the event of Disability as provided under Section 9.03, hardship as provided under Section 9.04, or after attainment of age fifty-nine and one-half (59½) as provided under Section 9.02.

[balance omitted]

Section 9.02 **In Service Withdrawals After Attainment of Age Fifty-Nine and One-Half (59½).** A Sponsored Member shall be entitled to make withdrawals from her/his vested Employer Required Account, Employer Matching Account, and Member Pretax and/or Roth Account upon the attainment of age fifty-nine and one-half (59½), whether or not s/he has had a Separation from Service. Withdrawals may be made in such amounts and at such times as the Sponsored Member may request.

Section 9.03 **Withdrawals in the Event of Disability.** A Sponsored Member who has not yet attained age fifty-nine and one-half (59½) shall be entitled to make withdrawals from all or a portion of her/his Employer Account and Member Pretax and/or Roth Accounts if such Sponsored Member is Disabled.

[balance omitted]

Section 9.04 **Hardship Withdrawals.** A Member may make a hardship withdrawal from her/his Employer Account and Member Pretax and/or Roth Accounts pursuant to the following requirements:

- (a) **Immediate and Heavy Financial Need.** A Member may make a hardship withdrawal from her/his Employer Account and Member Pretax and/or Roth Accounts (excluding any interest credits or earnings attributable to any amounts in her/his Member Pretax

and/or Roth Accounts) in the event of an immediate and heavy financial need arising from:

[balance omitted]

Section 12.19 **Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994**. Notwithstanding any provision of this Plan to the contrary, contributions, benefits and service credit with respect to qualified military service will be provided in accordance with Code § 414(u). Affected Sponsored Members may elect to make additional Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions upon resumption of employment with the Participating Employer up to the maximum Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions that the Sponsored Member could have elected during that period if the Sponsored Member's employment with the Participating Employer had continued (at the same level of compensation) without the interruption, reduced by the Member Pretax Contributions, if any, actually made for the Sponsored Member during the period of interruption. Except to the extent provided under Code § 414(u), a rehired Sponsored Member with qualified military service has up to three (3) times the period of the interruption - not to exceed five (5) years - to make up missed Member Pretax and/or Roth Contributions.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Welcome

Welcome to the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. We are pleased that you have joined our staff. We hope you will find your job challenging, enjoyable, and rewarding, and we wish you success. We believe each employee contributes to this church's ministry and mission, and we hope you will take pride in being a member of the churchwide organization.

Please read these policies carefully. We have tried to anticipate questions you may have about your benefits and opportunities as well as our policies and procedures. Do not hesitate to raise any questions you may have.

1.2. Nature and Purpose of This Church

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is part of the universal Church of Christ. 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. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of the Church are to be carried out under his rule and authority.

1.3. About the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a nationwide church dedicated to the propagation of the Christian faith in the Lutheran tradition. It began its existence on January 1, 1988, following the merger of three predecessor Lutheran bodies. The name "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" refers, in general references, to this whole church, including its three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. The name Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is also the name of the corporation of the churchwide organization, which is the employer. The churchwide organization is a Minnesota nonprofit corporation headquartered at 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, Illinois. The 65 separately incorporated synods of the church constitute the second expression. The thousands of congregations that are separately incorporated constitute the third expression of this church.

The relationships between the three expressions of the ELCA are ecclesiastical in nature. Under the civil law, the churchwide organization, each synod, and each congregation is separate and distinct from the others. This separate legal status allows each entity to function in the secular world by engaging in activities such as making contracts, hiring employees, and owning property. While legally separate, the three expressions together constitute this church.

The ELCA is committed to fostering, cultivating and preserving a culture of diversity, equity and inclusion.

1.4. Important Notice About the Personnel Policies of the Churchwide Organization These policies have been approved by the ELCA Church Council, which is the board of directors of the churchwide organization. Included here are significant policies, practices, and procedures followed by the churchwide organization with regard to the organization's employees. Additional specific policies and practices are provided to employees on the ELCA intranet. Employees who have questions that are not answered in this document or on the intranet should address those questions to their supervisor or People Solutions. Different policies may apply to some employees serving as missionaries or to certain deployed staff. These policies do not apply to employees of any of the ELCA's synods or congregations, nor to other agencies or affiliated organizations.

This document is designed to provide employees with information about working conditions, employee benefits, and important policies affecting employment. These policies are published to provide a convenient resource for all employees, to assist in the orientation of new employees, and to promote consistency in the administration of

1 the services provided by the ELCA. Employees are expected to read, understand, and comply with all provisions
2 in this document.

3
4 No set of personnel policies can anticipate every circumstance or question or summarize every policy. Therefore,
5 these policies are not intended to create, nor do they create, contract rights. Notwithstanding any provision of
6 these policies, the churchwide organization has the right to make employment-related decisions on a case-by-case
7 and at-will basis. Similarly, this church has the right to revise, supplement, or rescind any policy or portion of
8 these policies from time to time as it deems appropriate, in its sole discretion and without advance notice. Any
9 such changes shall apply to both current and future employees. The ELCA will seek to make sure that a current
10 copy of the Personnel Policies is available to all employees. If any provision of these policies is inconsistent with
11 a third-party benefit plan, such as those of Portico Benefits Services or an ELCA governing document, the
12 applicable benefit plan or ELCA governing document will ordinarily be controlling.

13
14 As a religious institution, the ELCA has certain protections and rights under the free exercise and
15 establishment clauses of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution and similar provisions of state
16 constitutions. Additional rights are granted religious organizations by certain federal and state statutes. These
17 protections are a key element of American law, and nothing in these policies constitutes a waiver of such
18 protections and rights.

19
20 The applicability of these policies to ministers rostered by the ELCA or another church body depends on the
21 particular circumstances. Churchwide employees, rostered or otherwise, whose duties are ministerial in nature are
22 not covered by employment discrimination laws or related regulations. The same is true for applicants for
23 employment in such ministerial positions. Further, depending on the particular circumstances, such ministerial
24 employees and applicants for employment may not be covered by other employment-related laws.

25
26 In addition, a rostered minister is subject to the standards established and administered by the ELCA and the
27 appropriate synod in their respective governing documents. Because of the nature of the ministerial office, the
28 application of these policies to ministers generally is subject to the following guidelines:

- 29 • To the extent that a rostered minister functions as a supervisor of other employees, that minister is
30 expected to follow the guidelines of the Personnel Policies relating to supervision.
- 31 • This document describes certain benefits and practices—for example, paid vacation, leave benefits, and
32 holidays—available to all employees of the ELCA, and those benefits will generally be available to
33 rostered ministers as well.
- 34 • This document also describes certain policies—for example, no-smoking policies, policies relating to
35 computer and email usage and other electronic communications, and policies describing on-the-job
36 behavior and conduct— that are considered applicable to all employees regardless of the ministerial
37 nature of their work.

38
39 Nothing in these Personnel Policies, however, is intended to detract from a person’s obligations and
40 responsibilities as a rostered minister, including but not necessarily limited to rights and responsibilities under a
41 letter of call or imposed by reason of the governing documents of the ELCA.

42 43 44 **2. RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT**

45 **2.1. Nature of Employment**

46 Employment with the ELCA is voluntarily entered into, and unless a specific written contract containing different
47 terms has been agreed upon, the employment relationship is “at will.” This means that subject to applicable legal
48 provisions and governing document requirements, the employment relationship can be terminated at any time by

1 either party for any reason, with or without cause or notice. The employee is free to resign at any time. Similarly,
2 the church may terminate the employment relationship at any time.
3

4 Nothing in these Personnel Policies creates contractual obligations or rights on the part of the churchwide
5 organization. By way of illustration, the churchwide organization retains the following rights:

- 6 • To determine the necessary qualifications for employment, and to recruit, select, and hire employees;
- 7 • To determine both the extent and the type of work to be performed by all employees and to establish and
8 maintain efficient procedures, standards, and methods necessary to achieve the work;
- 9 • To determine the design and size of the workforce, to assign work, and to transfer employees from job to
10 job;
- 11 • To classify, promote, and assign employees;
- 12 • To take disciplinary action when necessary or appropriate, which may include termination of
13 employment; and
- 14 • To determine work schedules, to implement layoffs, and to make all other management decisions.
15

16 **2.2. Application Form**

17 All applicants for employment with the ELCA must complete the application procedure as specified by People
18 Solutions as well as all forms necessary to complete required background/reference checks.
19

20 An applicant who is rostered must ensure that their Rostered Minister Profile is current.
21

22 **2.3. Management Philosophy**

23 Experience has shown that dealing openly and directly with employees enhances the work environment. This
24 church values and respects integrity, excellence, and interdependence, and believes these values give a sense of
25 shared purpose and help everyone focus on the needs of the people and institutions we serve. Employees are
26 encouraged to ask questions about their jobs and to express any concerns about job-related issues directly to their
27 supervisor.
28

29 **2.4. Equal Employment Opportunity**

30 The ELCA is an equal opportunity employer committed to employing individuals who are qualified to meet the
31 responsibilities of their jobs. Therefore, the church's policy is to employ, retain, promote, and terminate
32 employees and applicants for employment on the basis of merit, qualifications, and competence. Subject to
33 Section 1.4 above and the following paragraph, this policy of nondiscrimination governs all aspects of
34 employment, including selection, job assignment, compensation, discipline, termination, and access to benefits
35 and training.
36

37 However, as discussed in Section 1.4, under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and similar provisions
38 in state constitutions, federal, state, and municipal antidiscrimination laws and regulations, as well as other
39 employment laws, do not apply to ministerial positions or employees, whether or not rostered. In addition, certain
40 positions require ordination, Lutheran theological training or experience, or membership in an ELCA
41 congregation. The ELCA expressly reserves the right to discriminate on these or similar grounds. Therefore, this
42 equal opportunity policy will be interpreted and applied in accordance with those constitutional and statutory
43 provisions applicable to churches and other religious organizations. Nothing in these Personnel Policies waives
44 any of this church's constitutional or statutory rights.
45

46 Any employee with questions or concerns about discrimination in the workplace is encouraged to bring these
47 issues to the attention of their immediate supervisor, any other supervisor, or any People Solutions employee.
48 Employees can raise concerns and make good-faith reports without fear of reprisal.
49

2.5. Accommodations

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires employers to reasonably accommodate qualified individuals with disabilities. It is the policy of the ELCA to comply with all federal and state laws concerning the employment of persons with disabilities. As stated in Section 1.4, however, these laws may not apply to churchwide organization employees, rostered or otherwise, whose duties are ministerial in nature. This church aims to make reasonable accommodations for known disabilities of qualified applicants or employees that can perform the essential functions of a job. Generally, any such accommodation must permit applicants or employees to perform the jobs held or applied for without causing an undue hardship for the church. All accommodation decisions are made by People Solutions on a case-by-case basis, taking into account applicable legal and constitutional requirements, the qualifications and particular circumstances of the individual in relation to job-related criteria, and this church's resources.

All employees are required to comply with safety standards. Applicants who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of themselves or other individuals in the workplace, which threat cannot be reduced to a level that eliminates the direct threat through reasonable accommodation, will not be allowed to actively work and may not be hired. Current employees who pose a direct threat to the health or safety of themselves or other individuals in the workplace will be placed on appropriate leave until an organizational decision has been made in regard to the employee's immediate employment situation. Reasonable accommodations will be reviewed to determine what, if anything, can be done to continue the employment relationship.

2.6. Hiring Procedures

2.6.1. Role of People Solutions

People Solutions must be notified in advance of all vacancies, transfers, promotions, demotions, or terminations.

All discussions with prospective or current employees regarding pay, relocation, or benefits require advance consultation with People Solutions.

People Solutions makes all offers of employment.

No commitments or representations that are inconsistent with these hiring procedures may be made without the advance written approval of the executive for People and DEI. In the absence of such advance written approval, any offer, commitment, or representation inconsistent with these hiring procedures is null and void.

2.6.2. Letters of Call

Letters of call will be prepared and sent by the Office of the Secretary to rostered ministers called to serve in positions in the churchwide organization. Such letters will be prepared by the Office of the Secretary in conjunction with offer letters prepared by People Solutions.

2.6.3. Restrictions Applicable to Certain Positions

Except for the salaried officers, employees of the churchwide organization and those currently serving under a purchase of service agreement, may not serve as voting members of the Churchwide Assembly, as voting or advisory members of the Church Council, or as voting or advisory members of the boards of separately incorporated ministries, the Committee on Appeals, the Committee on Discipline, the Committee of Hearing Officers, and the Nominating Committee. (The preceding provision, as it relates to Church Council advisory memberships, is effective January 1, 2025.) Employees may serve as advisors or staff support to any such board, however, or as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly, as provided in the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA.

The churchwide organization will not hire a person for a position with financial oversight responsibility if,

1 during the previous three years, the person was directly or indirectly involved in an independent audit of the
2 organization or an affiliated entity or had a financial interest in the firm performing the audit.

3
4 ~~Members of the Church Council and members of a board or advisory committee will be required to resign
5 from such membership prior to accepting a position with the churchwide organization.~~

6
7 Vacancies in certain executive positions are filled in accordance with applicable governing documents.

8
9 ~~The eligibility of a candidate for remote or hybrid positions may also depend on the residency of the candidate,
10 and the budget for the role, including salary or pay, insurance coverage, and/or tax burden. In general,
11 candidates must reside within the United States to qualify.~~

12 13 **2.6.4. Work Authorization and E-Verify**

14 ~~Except for certain Mission Developer positions, eligible candidates for employment must be authorized to work
15 lawfully in the United States. In compliance with federal law, all persons hired will be required to verify
16 identity and eligibility to work in the United States and to complete the required employment eligibility
17 verification documents (Form I-9) upon hire. Generally, the churchwide organization does not commence
18 (“sponsor”) an immigration case (for example, H-1B or other employment-based immigration case) in order for
19 a candidate to attain employment-based visa status.~~

20
21 ~~The churchwide organization cannot lawfully retain an employee whom it knows to be unauthorized to work in
22 the United States or who does not fulfill Form I-9 documentary requirements. This includes presenting required
23 documentation for examination. Employers are required to complete Form I-9 for all new hires, including the
24 requirement to physically examine identity and work authorization documents. An employee who is unable or
25 refuses to complete the employee portion of the Form I-9 before the end of the first day of employment (but not
26 before accepting a job offer), or to present the required identity and employment authorization document(s)
27 within three business days after the first day of employment, will be placed on unpaid leave. If these
28 requirements are not met within two weeks of the start of this unpaid leave, the employee will be terminated.~~

29
30 ~~The churchwide organization participates in E-Verify, the federal program for electronic verification of
31 employment eligibility, and trained People Solutions personnel will provide the federal government with a
32 newly hired or re-hired employee’s Form I-9 information to confirm authorization to work in the United States.
33 If E-Verify cannot confirm that an employee is authorized to work, the churchwide organization is required to
34 provide the employee with written instructions and an opportunity to contact the Department of Homeland
35 Security (DHS) or Social Security Administration so the employee can begin to resolve the issue before the
36 churchwide organization can take any action, including termination of employment. The churchwide
37 organization may only use E-Verify once a job offer is accepted and the Form I-9 is complete. An employee
38 who believes that the churchwide organization has violated its E-Verify responsibilities may contact DHS at
39 888-897-7781 or dhs.gov/e-verify.~~

40 41 **2.7. Job Posting**

42 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to provide current and prospective employees an opportunity
43 to indicate their interest in open positions. While job openings are normally posted, People Solutions may decide
44 that a particular opening will not be posted. Posted job openings will normally remain open until filled. Each job-
45 posting notice will normally include the dates of the posting period, job title, essential duties, ~~minimum salary,~~
46 ~~salary range, benefits,~~ job location and hybrid/remote details, and required qualifications and skills.

47
48 Job posting is only one way to inform current and prospective employees of openings and to identify qualified and
49 interested applicants who might not otherwise be known. Other recruiting sources may also be used to fill open
50 positions.

51 52 **2.8. Personal Relationships in the Workplace**

1 A relative of a current employee may not occupy a position in which they will directly supervise or be supervised
2 by that employee. An individual involved in a dating relationship with a current employee will not be permitted to
3 supervise or be supervised by that employee. The church also reserves the right to take appropriate action if an
4 actual or potential conflict of interest arises involving relatives or individuals in a dating relationship.

5
6 If a family relationship or dating relationship exists between employees who are in a supervisory situation as
7 described above, the supervisor and the supervised employee involved in the relationship must disclose the
8 existence of the relationship to People Solutions.

9
10 If a conflict or potential conflict arises because of a relationship between employees, even if there is no
11 supervisory relationship, the employees may be separated by reassignment or have their employment terminated.

12 **2.9. Allegations of Misconduct**

13 Whenever there is any indication that a candidate being seriously considered for employment has been the subject
14 of allegations including criminal conduct, substance abuse, financial misconduct, sexual misconduct, or sexual
15 harassment, the executive for Administration and the general counsel will be notified before any offer of
16 employment is extended to the candidate. This requirement is in addition to, and not in lieu of, any other
17 procedures applicable to the hiring of an individual for the position to be filled. Being “seriously considered for
18 employment” means that the candidate is the only individual or one of the finalists being considered for the
19 position.

20
21
22 The notice required under the previous paragraph must be given in all cases where the candidate, if hired, will be
23 an employee of the churchwide organization, and without regard to the home area involved, the full-time or part-
24 time nature of the position, and the persons involved in the decision-making process. The procedure will also be
25 followed if the particular individual would be an independent contractor rather than an employee.

26
27 If the candidate is or was rostered, additional requirements apply:

28
29 A currently rostered candidate’s Rostered Minister Profile will be requested from the appropriate synod bishop
30 for dissemination, in accordance with established procedures, to the head of the home area for which the
31 candidate applied.

32
33 If the candidate experienced a break in service—any extended period of time when the candidate was without a
34 call or was not on the roster—all the relevant facts and circumstances must be reviewed and a satisfactory
35 explanation provided if the candidate is to be further considered.

36 **2.10. Ethical Conduct**

37 The ELCA’s reputation for integrity and excellence requires careful observance of the spirit and letter of
38 applicable laws and regulations, as well as due regard for ethical behavior, standards of conduct, and personal
39 integrity. The church expects its employees to conduct themselves in accordance with the letter, spirit, and intent
40 of relevant laws, regulations, and ELCA procedures and to refrain from any illegal, dishonest, or unethical
41 conduct.

42
43
44 The mission and ministry of the ELCA also depend on the trust and confidence of synods and congregations.
45 Employees are expected to act in a way that will merit the continuation of this trust and confidence. All funds
46 and property received and administered by the churchwide organization are entrusted to the organization by
47 God through the faithful financial support of ELCA members and friends. All employees are held to high
48 standards of stewardship and fiduciary responsibility with regard to the receipt, reporting, and use of funds,
49 property, and time.

1 All employees must sign an acknowledgement of personnel policies during the onboarding process, which
2 includes the matters detailed below.

3 4 **2.10.1. Duties of Loyalty and Due Care**

5 Each employee is responsible for acting in the best interests of the churchwide organization. All employees
6 are expected to make reasonable efforts to inform themselves of the mission and ministry of the ELCA and to
7 act as a reasonable employee would act under the same or similar circumstances.

8 9 **2.10.2. Avoiding Conflicts of Interest**

10 Employees are expected to perform their duties in a way that avoids actual or potential conflicts of interest as
11 well as the appearance of conflicts of interest. A “conflict of interest” means any situation in which the
12 employee may be influenced or appear to be influenced in decision-making or business dealings by any
13 motive or desire for personal advantage other than the success and well-being of the churchwide organization.
14 “Personal advantage” means a financial interest or some other personal interest, whether present or potential,
15 direct or indirect. This standard applies to both actual and contemplated transactions.
16 All present and potential conflict-of-interest issues must be disclosed.

17
18 Employees are required to disclose, in writing, matters and relationships that might appear to conflict with
19 business dealings of the churchwide organization. Examples include, but are not limited to, financial
20 interests or leadership roles with vendors or other organizations doing business with the organization. The
21 head of the employee’s home area will evaluate disclosures and determine the appropriate action to be
22 taken.

23
24 Business dealings with friends and family are particularly sensitive and are to be disclosed and carefully
25 evaluated because they can create the appearance of impropriety or of tangible or intangible personal
26 advantage. The mere existence of a family relationship or friendship that may be considered an actual or
27 potential conflict of interest does not violate this policy if the employee involved promptly discloses that
28 family relationship or friendship to their supervisor and appropriate safeguards are followed. Any doubts
29 should be resolved in favor of disclosure.

30
31 If the actual or potential conflict of interest is known in advance of any meeting, business transaction,
32 contract, or other activity at which issues may be discussed or on which the issues may have a bearing on the
33 employee’s approach, whether directly or indirectly, the conflict must be disclosed prior to the meeting.
34 Normally disclosure is to be made in writing to the employee’s supervisor.

35
36 If the conflict is not known in advance, it must be disclosed as soon as it becomes apparent.

37
38 When conflict-of-interest issues relate to a particular meeting, disclosure should be made to the person in
39 charge of the meeting and, at the discretion of that person, to all participants in the meeting. The employee
40 must leave the meeting room to avoid all discussion, voting, and deliberation on the issue. Following full
41 disclosure, the other people attending the meeting may decide that no conflict of interest exists and invite the
42 employee to participate. All actions relating to the disclosure and action taken must be recorded in the
43 meeting minutes.

44 45 **2.10.3. Gifts**

46 To avoid the appearance of impropriety, any gifts, gratuities, or hospitality offered to an employee—such as
47 goods, free travel, or lodging—may be accepted and used only for the benefit of the organization. All gifts
48 must be reported to a supervisor. Minimal one-time gifts having a value of less than \$75 and given as part
49 of a special event or seasonal holiday are exempt from this reporting requirement. Gifts that benefit the
50 churchwide organization primarily and not an individual, such as gifts of hospitality given to the

1 churchwide organization by hotels, conventions, and conferences in relation to official churchwide
2 organization business, are also exempt. Employees may also participate in reasonable, normal relationship-
3 building activities such as meals, entertainment events, and similar activities. An employee must report such
4 participation to their supervisor.

5
6 Employees may not accept gifts from outside vendors or members of ELCA congregations. A gift from a
7 vendor is defined as anything offered to any employee directly by or on behalf of a vendor, other than the
8 purchase of a business-related meal and promotional materials of little value such as pens, pencils, calendars,
9 and similar items that are intended for wide distribution and bear the ~~donor company's name or slogan~~
10 vendor's brandmark. A gift from a congregational member is anything of value other than a personal trinket
11 or food item. Questions about a gift's propriety or appearance of impropriety should be directed to People
12 Solutions.

13 14 **2.10.4. Confidentiality**

15 Subject to applicable legal requirements, certain information must be held in confidence by all employees,
16 including allegations of misconduct under investigation; financial matters; medical, psychological, and family
17 matters pertaining to rostered ministers; and other sensitive information. All such confidential information is
18 not to be discussed with or divulged to anyone, within or outside the churchwide organization, unless
19 disclosure is required by law or limited disclosure is made for a compelling reason.

20 21 **2.10.5. Transactions and Reporting**

22 Each employee is required to prepare, process, maintain, and report complete, accurate, and timely records
23 pertaining to their duties, including but not limited to journal entries, expense reports, disbursement requests,
24 and payroll transactions. All employees required to record their working time must do so accurately, and all
25 employees are required to report all absences properly, regardless of the reason for the absence. Employees
26 must safeguard all physical, financial, informational, and other churchwide organization assets. In addition,
27 no undisclosed or unrecorded fund or asset will be established, and no artificial or false entries will be made
28 in the financial or other records of the ELCA. The use of the ELCA's funds for any unauthorized or unlawful
29 purpose is prohibited.

30
31 Employees are required to report all violations of this policy by themselves or by others, including
32 misconduct, fraudulent transactions, errors related to overpayment, or any other impropriety. Likewise,
33 employees should factually and objectively report any concerns about the appearance or possibility of
34 violation of this policy. There will be no adverse action for reports made in good faith or for an employee's
35 participation in a follow-up investigation.

36
37 Employees may make required reports to their supervisor, the executive for People and DEI, the Internal
38 Audit, the General Counsel, or an officer of the ELCA. All reports relating to accounting, internal accounting
39 controls, or auditing matters should also be forwarded to the Internal Audit for further action and reporting to
40 the Audit Committee.

41 42 **2.11. Introductory Period**

43 Most employees work on an introductory basis during their initial employment with the churchwide organization.
44 The introductory period is 90 days.

45
46 The introductory period is intended to give employees the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to achieve a
47 satisfactory level of performance and to determine whether their position meets their expectations. The
48 organization uses this period to evaluate employees' work habits and overall performance. During the
49 introductory period, an employee is expected to discuss their progress with the appropriate supervisor and to
50 ask questions about the duties they are performing. Each employee should receive a performance review near

1 the end of the introductory period. At the discretion of the supervisor, a second review may be conducted
2 upon the completion of an additional 90 days of employment.

3
4 Either the employee or the organization may end the employment relationship at any time during the
5 introductory period without regard to other provisions of the policies that may apply once the introductory
6 period has been successfully completed.

7
8 If the designated introductory period does not allow sufficient time to evaluate the employee's performance, the
9 introductory period may be extended with approval of People Solutions. Any absence will automatically extend
10 an introductory period by the length of the absence. Employees who are promoted or transferred within the
11 organization may be required to complete an additional introductory period.

12 13 **2.12. Performance Reviews**

14 After the initial review(s) referred to above, employees generally have their performance appraised on an annual
15 basis. Performance appraisals are used in all aspects of the employment relationship, including promotions,
16 training or retraining, reassignments, pay adjustments, and disciplinary and discharge decisions. Supervisors are
17 therefore required to use the performance appraisal process provided by People Solutions. There are no
18 requirements as to the distribution of ratings that would prevent a fair appraisal of performance in relation to
19 established standards.

20 21 **2.13. Employee Records**

22 **2.13.1. Access to Personnel Records**

23 People Solutions maintains an employment record on each employee. The employment record includes
24 information such as the employee's job application, résumé, records of training, hours worked and pay
25 information, and other pertinent employment information.

26
27 Home areas within the churchwide organization are required to forward all original employment records to
28 People Solutions.

29
30 Employment records are stored electronically by People Solutions on a secure file server and/or within the
31 Human Resources Information System. ~~stored both digitally within the human resource information system~~
32 and in a secure personnel file in People Solutions. All records are the property of the churchwide
33 organization, and access to the information they contain is restricted to the employee and People Solutions.
34 Records may be shared by People Solutions if legally required.

35
36 Original (paper) records are filed in People Solutions (Lutheran Center) and may not be removed from the
37 physical office. Any employment records on paper are filed with People Solutions at the Lutheran Center
38 and may not be physically removed from the office. Employees may review and obtain copies of their own
39 personnel documents in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

40 41 **2.13.2. Personal Data Changes**

42 An employeeEmployees must promptly enter into the current Human Resource Information SystemHR and
43 payroll self-service portal any changes in to their legal name, personalhome mailing address, email addresses,
44 telephone numbers, individuals to be contacted in the event of an emergencyemergency contacts, and similar
45 data.

46 47 **2.13.3. Accuracy of Information**

48 The churchwide organization relies on the accuracy of information contained in the employment application,
49 including the Rostered Minister Profile when applicable, and additional information provided by the employee
50 as part of the hiring process or during the employment relationship. Any individual who falsifies,

1 misrepresents, or omits material information may be rejected from hiring consideration or, if already hired,
2 terminated from employment.

3 2.13.4 Employment Verification

4 Requests for verification of employment or income should be directed to People Solutions.

5 **2.14. Reimbursable Travel Expenses**

6
7 Employees of the churchwide organization who are required to travel or expend funds in connection with the
8 performance of their work will be reimbursed for approved expenses, including transportation, food, and lodging
9 in accordance with the ELCA Corporate Travel Policy (available on the churchwide organization's intranet).
10 Travel expenses incurred by employees whose positions are classified as remote or hybrid are covered under
11 Personnel Policy 4.7.45, People First Hybrid Workplace Model.
12

13 **2.15. Children in the Workplace**

14
15 Employees are welcome to have their children visit the office for such purposes as lunch, a brief visit to a
16 workstation, or a special occasion when children are specifically invited. The hosting employee is
17 responsible for the children during such visits and should remain with them at all times. Children should
18 not be brought to the work site as a substitute for childcare arrangements. Temporary emergency situations
19 may be addressed by supervisors on a case-by-case basis.

20
21 Employees who work from home may modify their schedules to accommodate childcare needs with
22 supervisor approval, however, the focus of the arrangement must remain on job performance and outcomes.
23
24

25 **3. EMPLOYEE CLASSIFICATIONS**

26 The churchwide organization defines employment classifications so that employees understand their employment
27 status and benefit eligibility. These classifications do not guarantee employment for any specified period of time.
28 Unless otherwise required by law, these classifications are subject to change at the discretion of the organization.
29

30 As required by the Fair Labor Standards Act, all employees will be designated as either **nonexempt** or **exempt** for
31 purposes of overtime pay. Nonexempt employees will receive overtime pay at the rate of one-and-one-half times
32 their regular rate for hours worked in excess of 40 during a single workweek. The workweek begins on Sunday at
33 12:01 a.m. and ends the following Saturday at midnight. Exempt employees are not entitled to overtime pay.
34

35 All employees will also be classified in the employment categories described below:

36
37 **Full-time regular employees** are those not in a temporary status and regularly scheduled to work at least 40
38 hours per week. Generally, they are eligible to participate in the church's benefit programs, subject to the terms,
39 conditions, and limitations of each program.
40

41 **Part-time regular employees** are those regularly scheduled to work less than 40 hours per week. Part-time
42 regular employees regularly scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week are eligible for paid vacation on a
43 prorated basis and certain additional benefits. Other part-time regular employees are not eligible for vacation but
44 are eligible for certain other benefits, subject to the terms, conditions, and limitations of each benefit program.
45

46 **Specified-term employees** are those employed by the church for a specified time under terms and conditions set
47 forth in a written agreement. The agreement normally covers the beginning and ending dates of the employment
48 term, the services to be performed, reporting relationships, compensation, benefits (if any), expense

1 reimbursement, exempt or nonexempt status, and arrangements for performance review. Social Security
2 withholding applies to specified-term employees.

3
4 **Temporary employees** are individuals hired for temporary work. They may be full-time or part-time, exempt or
5 nonexempt. They are not eligible for any of the benefits summarized in this document. However, the pay of
6 temporary employees is subject to Social Security contributions. All arrangements for the retention of temporary
7 employees must be approved in advance by the executive for People and DEI.

8
9 **Independent contractors** are not employees of the ELCA. Their compensation is not subject to Social Security
10 withholding, and they are not entitled to workers' compensation or other benefits. As is the case with specified-
11 term employees, all arrangements made with an independent contractor must be set out in a written agreement.
12
13

14 4. WORKING HOURS

15 4.1. Core Hours

16 Employees are to organize their work schedules within the limits of specified hours, subject to the approval of
17 their home area. Full-time, ~~nonexempt~~ employees will normally work an eight-hour period between the hours of 7
18 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. Central Time, Monday through Friday. The hours of operation may change. Also, an
19 employee's hours may vary depending on particular assigned duties or flexibility of schedule approved by
20 supervisor during any given day.

21
22 The needs of the job must be given appropriate priority. Staff members are expected to be flexible in the
23 accommodation of workplace needs and work earlier or later when necessary.
24

25 4.2 Working Hours for Nonexempt Employees

26 4.2.1. Work Schedule

27 Nonexempt employees working outside their normal hours must have their time approved in advance by
28 their ~~immediate-appropriate~~ supervisor. Nonexempt employees will be paid for all hours worked.
29

30 4.2.2. Meal and Rest Breaks

31 Nonexempt employees are entitled to an unpaid ~~lunch~~ meal period of 30 minutes. Each employee scheduled
32 to work 7 ½ continuous hours or longer must take an unpaid and uninterrupted 30-minute meal period that
33 begins no later than five hours after the start of the work period. The churchwide organization will provide
34 employees with an additional 30-minute unpaid meal break for every 4 ½ hours worked beyond an initial 7
35 ½ hours. Thus, employees will be entitled to take a second 30-minute unpaid meal break at 12 hours of work
36 and a third 30-minute unpaid meal break at 16 ½ hours of work. The ~~lunch~~ meal break is not work time and
37 is therefore not part of the eight-hour workday.

38
39 Nonexempt employees may also take a paid, 15-minute rest break each morning and afternoon. These paid
40 breaks are part of the eight-hour day. They may not be taken at the beginning or end of the day but may be
41 added to the lunch period. Each home area should establish a schedule for ~~lunch~~ meal breaks and rest breaks
42 providing for the effective operation of the home area. Nonexempt employees must review any deviation
43 from the approved schedule with the appropriate supervisor.
44

45 Nonexempt employees are to be completely relieved from duty during their meal break, and should not
46 perform any work during their unpaid meal break. If an employee is required to perform any work duties
47 while on his or her meal break period, the employee must be compensated for the time spent performing
48 work duties. The time spent working during the meal break will be counted toward the total hours worked.
49

~~All employees required to record their working time must do so accurately, and all employees are required to report all absences properly, regardless of the reason for the absence.~~

~~Supervisors are required to approve and submit timesheets and time-off requests by the established payroll processing deadlines.~~

4.2. 4.2.3. Overtime

At times, job responsibilities may require an employee to work additional hours. Nonexempt employees who are required or permitted to work overtime will receive overtime pay in accordance with the requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act and applicable state law. Overtime pay is based on one and one-half of the employee's regular rate for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in each workweek (Sunday through Saturday). "Hours worked" means time actually spent on the job and therefore does not include vacation time, holiday time, sick time, or any other time spent on leave, whether paid or unpaid.

Nonexempt employees may not work beyond their normally scheduled hours without advance approval from their supervisor. A supervisor may grant a nonexempt employee time off in lieu of overtime pay on an hour-per-hour basis, but only if the time off is taken during the same workweek. For example, if a nonexempt employee worked 40 hours from Monday through Thursday, the employee may be authorized to take off Friday of the same week.

The churchwide organization intends to follow all applicable requirements of federal and state law concerning overtime pay. Supervisors and employees are encouraged to bring all questions relating to hours worked to the attention of People Solutions.

4.3. 4.2.4. Attendance and Overtime Records

All employees required to record time worked must do so promptly and accurately. Supervisors are required to approve and submit timesheets and time-off requests by the established payroll processing deadlines.

Proper recording of hours worked is especially important when working hours may vary from day to day or week to week. ~~The church is committed to paying employees properly and will promptly correct any errors in paychecks and reimburse employees as required. An employee who believes there has been an improper deduction or other pay error should promptly notify the appropriate supervisor or People Solutions.~~

People Solutions is responsible for maintaining attendance records suitable for payroll purposes and wage-and-hour requirements, including all overtime worked by each nonexempt employee.

4.3. Lactation Breaks

The churchwide organization will provide a reasonable amount of break time to accommodate a female employee's need to express breast milk for the employee's infant child up to one year. The break time should, if possible, be taken concurrently with other break periods and should avoid disrupting operations. The churchwide organization will also designate a private room or location that is free from intrusion from coworkers and the public (and is not a bathroom) for the employee to express milk in private.

Employees should notify their immediate supervisor and People Solutions to request time to express breast milk under this policy. The churchwide organization does, however, reserve the right to deny an employee's request for a lactation break if the additional break time will create an undue hardship for the churchwide organization.

4.4. Summer Flexible Schedule

Summer hours may enable eligible employees to enjoy additional personal time away from the office during the summer months by working additional hours on four days of the regular workweek. Depending on the number of

1 hours worked during the four-day period, the summer schedule may allow the employee to free up a full day or
2 half day every week. The hours worked during the summer flexible schedule must fall between 6 a.m. and 6:30
3 p.m.

4
5 Only full-time regular employees are eligible for a summer flexible schedule. To participate in a particular year,
6 the employee must obtain written approval of the supervisor in the applicable home area and submit the
7 completed approval form to People Solutions no later than one week prior to the first full week of June.
8 Employees who do not obtain the necessary approval will remain on their regular work schedules.

9
10 The examples below illustrate potential summer schedules. The first two schedules allow for a half day off each
11 week; the other two allow for a full day off.

- 12 • Working Monday through Thursday, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (30-minute lunch), and Friday, 7:30 a.m. to
13 11:30 a.m.
- 14 • Working Monday, 1 to 5 p.m., and Tuesday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (30-minute lunch).
- 15 • Working Monday through Thursday, 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (30-minute lunch), with every
16 Friday off.
- 17 • Every Monday off and working Tuesday through Friday, 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (30-minute lunch).

18
19 Employees on a summer flexible schedule will work a regular eight-hour day and five-day week during any week
20 that includes a paid holiday or approved vacation time.

21
22 The summer flexible schedule is generally available between the first full week in June and the last full week
23 in August. Each home area will manage the workweek in that home area. The summer flexible schedule is
24 not guaranteed and is subject to amendment or termination at any time.

25 26 **4.5. Exempt Employee Pay Policy**

27 In accordance with the Fair Labor Standards Act regulations, exempt employees who are required to be paid
28 on a salary basis may not have their pay reduced for variations in the quantity or quality of work performed.
29 Employees who feel their pay has been improperly reduced should report this immediately following the
30 procedures specified in Section 4.6.

31 32 Provisions Mandated by the Salary Basis Rules:

- 33
34 a) Exempt employees normally must receive their full salary for any week in which they perform any
35 work, without regard to the number of days or hours worked. However, exempt employees need not
36 be paid for any workweek in which they perform no work at all for the organization.
- 37
38 b) Deductions from pay cannot be made as a result of absences due to the circumstances listed below
39 provided that some work is performed in the workweek. Such improper pay deductions are therefore
40 specifically prohibited by churchwide organization regardless of the circumstances. Managers or
41 supervisors violating this policy will be subject to investigation of their pay practices and appropriate
42 corrective action in accordance with normal procedures.
 - 43
44 • Jury duty.
 - 45 • Attendance as a witness.
 - 46 • Temporary military leave.
 - 47 • Absences caused by the employer.
 - 48 • Absences caused by the operating requirements of the business.
 - 49 • Partial day amounts other than those specifically discussed below.

1
2 a. The few exceptions to the requirement to pay exempt employees on a salary basis are listed below.
3 In these cases, deductions may be permissible as long as they are consistent with other churchwide
4 organization policies and practices.

- 5
- 6 • Absences of one or more full days for personal reasons other than sickness or disability
7 (partial days must be paid).
- 8 • Absences of one or more full days due to sickness or disability.
- 9 • Fees received by the employee for jury or witness duty or military leave may be applied to
10 offset the pay otherwise due to the employee for the week.
- 11 • Deductions for the first and last week of employment, when only part of the week is worked
12 by the employee.
- 13 • Deductions for unpaid leave taken in accordance with a legitimate absence under the Family
14 and Medical Leave Act, if applicable.
- 15

16 **4.6. Wage and Hour Complaint Procedure**

17 The churchwide organization is committed to paying employees properly and will promptly correct any errors in
18 paychecks and reimburse employees as required.

19

20 Employees who believe they have been compelled to perform work without being properly compensated (including,
21 but not limited to, working off the clock, working through an unpaid break, missing a scheduled break, working
22 prior to or after an actual scheduled shift), their pay has been improperly reduced, there has been an improper
23 deduction, or has any other complaint or issue arising from their time record, paycheck, paystub, or any other pay
24 related matter of any kind should immediately contact People Solutions or their immediate supervisor to file a
25 complaint in writing (including dates of the alleged problem or issue) and request an investigation. The employee
26 will be asked to specify in writing, using the guidance in this Section 4, the circumstances of the pay and/or time
27 deduction or discrepancy and whether it has occurred on other occasions. Employees are encouraged to attach all
28 documents and records that support or are related to their complaint.

29

30 Upon receipt of the report/complaint, People Solutions will conduct a prompt investigation of the complaint
31 including, but not limited to, discussing the complaint with the employee, reviewing pay records, and interviewing
32 the supervisor or manager as well as the payroll representatives handling the employee's pay, to determine if the
33 allegation is correct.

34 If, upon investigation, it is determined that the employee's allegations are true and that the employee is owed for
35 uncompensated work time, an improper deduction, or otherwise has not been properly compensated, the affected
36 employee will be appropriately reimbursed as promptly as possible (but in no case longer than two pay periods from
37 the identification of the problem). The churchwide organization will also make a good-faith commitment to avoid
38 any recurrence of the error. The individual(s) responsible for the error will be investigated further to determine if
39 this was an isolated incident or a pattern of conduct that requires further action on the part of the churchwide
40 organization. If warranted, the responsible person(s) will be held accountable for the error(s) made consistent with
41 the churchwide organization's disciplinary policy. Following the identification of such a problem, the churchwide
42 organization may, as appropriate, establish a practice to regularly audit employee pay records to ensure no further
43 issues arise.

44

45 The resolution of the situation will be documented (including confirmation on the part of the employee that
46 the situation has been resolved) and placed with the employee's pay records.

47 **4.5. 4.7. People First Hybrid Workplace Model**

48 The churchwide organization has adopted the People First Hybrid Workplace Model as a way to engage together
49

1 in our work. The model focuses on people first—this includes our colleagues and those we serve. Although
 2 classifications of our jobs default toward being remote, the model also includes classifications for jobs that are
 3 location-dependent.

4
 5 Job classifications are determined by People Solutions and are as follows:

- 6 • Remote: Location independent. Current responsibilities of these positions do not involve any office-
 7 based duties.
- 8 • Hybrid: Location dependent. Position responsibilities currently include office-based duties that require
 9 less than 50% time in physical office.
- 10 • Office -Based: Location dependent. Work involves responsibilities that require being in the office more
 11 than 50% of the time.

12
 13 Employees whose jobs have been classified as remote or hybrid may request a change to hybrid or office based
 14 with the approval of the home area and People Solutions.

15 ~~4.5.1.~~ **4.7.1 Equipment and Supplies**

16 The home area, in consultation with People Solutions, Information Technology, and the affected employee,
 17 will determine the appropriate equipment needs for each employee.

18
 19
 20 The churchwide organization will arrange for maintenance of the equipment it provides. Such equipment is to
 21 be used for business purposes only. The employee is responsible for safeguarding the equipment and for
 22 returning it upon termination of the employment relationship.

23 ~~4.5.2.~~ **4.7.2 Secure Working Environment**

24 Employees are expected to secure work within their workplace, update passwords regularly, participate in
 25 data security trainings, and take other required actions to protect organizational information.

26
 27
 28 Employees must establish an appropriate work environment within the home or remote work location.

29 ~~Detailed processes regarding reimbursement for equipment and supplies are currently in development and~~
 30 ~~will be addressed in a separate memorandum to churchwide organization employees.~~

31
 32 Any injuries sustained by the employee while working at home or another remote work location in
 33 conjunction with regular work duties are normally covered by workers' compensation. The employee must
 34 promptly notify their supervisor or People Solutions of any such injury. The employee is liable for any
 35 injuries sustained by visitors to their home office.

36 ~~4.5.3.~~ **4.7.3. Working Hours**

37 Supervisors and employees will work together to determine the work schedule the employee will customarily
 38 maintain, and the manner and frequency of communication. Remote and hybrid employees are required to be
 39 accessible by telephone and email during the specified work schedule and to arrange to attend staff
 40 meetings—whether online or in-person—as specified by the home area.

41
 42
 43 As is the case for all nonexempt employees—~~see (refer to~~ Sections 3 and 4.2)—nonexempt
 44 employees are required to obtain advance approval for overtime work and to record all working
 45 hours accurately.

46 ~~4.5.4.~~ **4.7.4. Travel Expenses**

47 Occasionally, employees may be asked to travel ~~to one of the churchwide offices~~ for in-person onboarding
 48 and offboarding activities, meetings, or events. Employees whose jobs are classified as remote and ~~who live~~
 49 ~~outside a 50-mile radius of the office more than 50 miles from the travel destination~~ will be reimbursed for
 50

1 travel expenses. ~~If travelling by automobile, mileage reimbursement shall only be for travel in excess of 50~~
 2 ~~miles. Employees who travel by automobile will receive mileage reimbursement for travel in excess of the~~
 3 ~~50-mile radius only.~~

4
 5 Employees whose positions are classified as hybrid ~~or office-based but choose to live outside of the~~
 6 ~~geographical location of the office~~ will not be reimbursed for ~~expenses incurred for~~ travel ~~between the~~
 7 ~~employee's home and assigned work location, regardless of the distance. expenses for regular work. (Refer~~
 8 ~~also to Section 2.14.)~~

11 5. COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

13 5.1. Compensation Philosophy

14 The ELCA believes it is in the best interest of both the organization and its employees to compensate employees
 15 adequately for the value of their work. To the extent permitted by budgetary and funding constraints, the
 16 churchwide organization uses a compensation system that determines the current market value of a position based
 17 on the skills, knowledge, and behavior required of a fully competent employee. All compensation decisions
 18 require the approval of People Solutions.

19
 20 The system incorporates the following criteria:

- 21 • Local and industry-specific survey market data where such data is available, focusing primarily on not- for-
 22 profit organizations and addressing specialized job differences and market differences due to geographical
 23 location.
- 24 • An evaluation of external equity, which is the relative worth of an ELCA job directly compared to similar
 25 jobs in the local economic marketplace or with entities affiliated with the ELCA.
- 26 • An evaluation of internal equity, which is the relative worth of an ELCA job when comparing its required
 27 level of competency, formal training and experience, responsibility, and accountability to those of other
 28 jobs within the churchwide organization.
- 29 • Sufficient flexibility to permit the organization to recruit and retain a qualified workforce while providing
 30 the structure necessary to manage the overall compensation program.

32 5.2. Equal Pay Compliance Policy

33 ~~The churchwide organization is committed to providing equal pay for equal work in compliance with all applicable~~
 34 ~~federal, state, and local laws. The churchwide organization prohibits any pay decision based on gender or any other~~
 35 ~~unlawful basis.~~

36
 37 ~~The churchwide organization gathers information from a variety of sources, including wage, salary, and benefits~~
 38 ~~surveys to help determine appropriate and necessary levels of compensation and benefits.~~

39
 40 ~~The churchwide organization respects privacy concerns, is committed to complying with applicable data privacy~~
 41 ~~regulations, and does not disclose confidential pay information, except when required by law. In addition, we do not~~
 42 ~~require applicants to provide current or prior compensation as part of our recruiting process.~~

43
 44 ~~Pay disparity among employees performing the same or substantially similar work may be based on the following~~
 45 ~~non-discriminatory factors: a seniority system, a merit system, a system measuring earnings by quantity or quality~~
 46 ~~of production, or factors other than gender or other protected status. With that in mind, employees who have~~
 47 ~~concerns or complaints regarding their pay should contact People Solutions to request an investigation. The~~
 48 ~~employee will be asked to specify in writing the circumstances of their pay concerns. The churchwide organization~~
 49 ~~will perform an investigation of the employee's complaints. If the churchwide organization's investigation~~
 50 ~~identifies an improper pay disparity, the resolution of the situation will be documented and placed with the~~

employee's pay records. Any improper disparity found will be corrected in conformity with all applicable laws.

5.2.5.3. Pay Adjustments and Merit Pay

The churchwide organization evaluates employees' pay annually. Annual pay increases are not guaranteed. Any pay adjustment will be based on the individual's improved or sustained performance and the organization's financial resources. All adjustments require the approval of the home area lead and People Solutions.

- Employees who begin employment from February 1 through October 31 are eligible to receive annual merit pay (prorated if less than 1 year). Employees whose start date is on or after November 1 will not receive a merit adjustment until the following year.
- Promotional increases will normally result in a salary increase of 5% or the minimum of the new salary band, whichever is greater.

5.3. 5.4. Pay Periods

The churchwide organization has 24 pay periods per calendar year. The workweek begins on Sunday at 12:01 a.m. and ends the following Saturday at midnight. Employees are paid twice per month, on the 15th and 30th of each month except February, when the second payment will be on the 28th. If a scheduled payday falls on a nonworking day, employees will normally be paid on the last working day preceding the scheduled payday.

Direct deposit of pay is encouraged for all employees.

There will be no pay advances to any employee for any reason.

5.4. 5.5. Fees for Services and Honorariums

Full-time, nonexempt employees will be paid for part-time work performed in their off hours for another home area within the churchwide organization. If the nature of the part-time work performed for the second home area is similar to or an extension of the employee's regular job, the payment must be at one and one-half times the employee's regular hourly rate for all hours worked in excess of 40 during the workweek. If the part-time work is totally different from the employee's regular job responsibilities, then the employee and the second home area upon approval of the executive for People and DEI, may negotiate a fee for the part-time services.

Exempt employees will not be paid for part-time work performed for another home area within the churchwide organization if (i) the part-time work is similar to or an extension of the employee's regular job responsibilities, (ii) the part-time work is to be performed when the employee is carrying out their regular job responsibilities, or (iii) the part-time work becomes part of the performance expectations in the employee's work plan and performance review. If the part-time work is totally different from the exempt employee's regular job responsibilities, is carried out apart from the employee's regular work setting and is outside of the normal expectations for the employee's position, then the employee and the second home area, upon approval of the executive for People and DEI, may negotiate a fee for the part-time services.

An employee is not to expect additional income for performing the normal duties and responsibilities of their position. Any employee who receives an honorarium for performing such duties and responsibilities or for representing the churchwide organization is required to remit the honorarium to the Office of the Treasurer for crediting to the employee's home area.

5.5. 5.6. Garnishments and Wage Assignments

The churchwide organization must honor garnishments and wage assignments. A garnishment is a court order to withhold and pay out a specified amount from the employees' earnings. A wage assignment is a direction by the employee to the same effect. In either case the organization will comply with applicable legal requirements. The affected employee is responsible for seeking to obtain any desired release or adjustment and providing the

1 churchwide organization with required legal documentation.
2

3 **5.6. 5.7. Housing Allowance**

4 ~~An ordained employee rostered minister of Word and Sacrament employed by~~ of the churchwide organization
5 may request that a portion of their annual salary be designated as a housing allowance, in accordance with
6 Internal Revenue Service regulations. The employee assumes full responsibility for compliance with IRS
7 definitions of “costs to provide a home.” Requests for housing allowances, on the form provided, must be
8 forwarded to People Solutions annually for the ensuing year, with sufficient time allowed for the request to be
9 approved and recorded in the official files. Only exempt employees may request a housing allowance.
10

11 **5.7. 5.8. Employee Benefits—in General**

12 Several of the ELCA’s benefit programs are described below. Benefits involving time away from work are
13 described in Section 6.
14

15 The church provides a comprehensive benefit program, administered by Portico Benefit Services, for its full-time
16 employees and other employees who are regularly scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week (15 hours per
17 week for rostered employees) for six months or more per year. The program includes health coverage, the ELCA
18 Retirement Plan, a life insurance benefit, long-term disability benefits, and tax-advantaged accounts. Benefits
19 eligibility depends on a variety of factors, including employee classification. Further information is available
20 directly from Portico Benefit Services (~~www.~~ porticobenefits.org and 800-352-2876).
21

22 The ELCA has the right to change benefit programs or to modify eligibility requirements or coverage at any time.
23 Further, as stated in Section 5.15, the churchwide organization is not required to participate in unemployment
24 compensation insurance. Therefore, employees separated from employment with the churchwide organization are
25 not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits. Any benefits offered to an employee outside of the
26 normal hiring and employment practices of the churchwide organization or the summaries in these policies must
27 be in a written document approved in advance by People Solutions.
28

29 **5.8. 5.9. Health Coverage**

30 Through Portico Benefit Services, the ELCA offers health coverage, including hospital and medical, dental,
31 prescription, vision, and behavioral health, as well as an employee-assistance program. Separate plan documents
32 explain each benefit in detail, and the benefits are controlled by the language of the plan documents and summary
33 plan descriptions. The same is true for the ELCA’s long-term disability, flexible spending plans and health
34 savings plans.
35

36 **5.9. 5.10. Retirement Contributions**

37 The churchwide organization provides a retirement benefit for eligible employees through Portico Benefit
38 Services. Detailed information is available to all employees on the Portico website.
39

40 **5.10. 5.11. Death Benefit**

41 If an employee dies, four additional weeks of their salary will be added to their final paycheck.
42

43 **5.11. 5.12. Relocation Reimbursement**

44 An employee who accepts a position that requires they live in a specific geographic location will be eligible for
45 reimbursement of permitted relocation expenses if their current home is more than 50 miles from their assigned
46 work location. Current eligible relocation allowances are available from People Solutions. The relocation moving
47 expenses must be incurred within a “reasonable time” of the start of a new job, generally construed to be no more
48 than one year after the employee’s start date. Employees who hold jobs classified as remote are not eligible for
49 relocation reimbursement.

5.12.5.13. Training and Educational Opportunities

Heads of home areas are encouraged to promote opportunities for growth, both personal and professional, for ELCA employees. Discussion of ongoing educational needs and support should be part of employee performance appraisals. Educational opportunities are based on the need to enhance the work of the churchwide organization, the needs of the employee's home area, and the aptitude and skills of the employee. Necessary licensing, certification or re-certification requirements for certain employees and continuing education requirements for rostered ministers should also be considered. The head of a home area may, at their discretion, offer special training opportunities within that home area.

~~Refer to Section 6.17 for information on paid time off for the purposes of continuing education and professional development opportunities. Employees may contact People Solutions about taking a limited number of days off each year for continuing education if approved by their supervisor.~~ People Solutions may also offer matching funds for approved continuing education and professional development opportunities, up to an annual limit.

5.13. 5.14. Social Security

Consistent with the Social Security Act, the churchwide organization makes contributions based on the earnings of nonordained employees. No contributions are made for ordained employees, nor are ordained employees reimbursed for their own contributions.

5.14. 5.15. Workers' Compensation

The churchwide organization provides workers' compensation insurance coverage for all employees. Workers' compensation laws are designed to protect employees and their families from the financial consequences of accidental injury, disease, or death arising out of and in the course of employment. Workers' compensation laws vary from state to state, but in general they pay for medical expenses and a percentage of lost income while the employee is disabled, as well as death benefits and rehabilitation benefits. A waiting period will apply before income benefits are paid. The length of the waiting period depends on the state.

Employees who sustain work-related injuries or illnesses, no matter how minor, must inform their supervisor promptly. If necessary, an employee reporting an injury will be sent for medical treatment. The supervisor or the employee must promptly notify the director of facilities (Office of the Presiding Bishop) to complete the necessary documentation, which is also to be sent promptly to risk management (Office of the Secretary) and People Solutions.

The employee is responsible for providing the workers' compensation insurer with the treating physician's name and contact information and other information requested, such as medical bills and related information. The employee must also keep the supervisor and People Solutions informed of any temporary work restrictions and current medical status.

5.15. 5.16. Unemployment Insurance

As a religious, not-for-profit organization, the churchwide organization is not required to participate in unemployment compensation insurance. Therefore, employees separated from employment with the churchwide organization are not eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits.

6. TIME AWAY FROM WORK

6.1. Prompt Notification of Absence Required

1 An employee who expects to be absent from work for any reason must inform their supervisor as soon as possible
 2 of the nature and expected duration of the absence. All employees are required to report all absences properly,
 3 regardless of the reason for the absence. Employees must submit requests for paid time off from work in the HR
 4 and payroll self-service portal. Supervisors are required to approve time off requests by the established payroll
 5 processing deadlines. As specified in Section 10.5, an absence of three consecutive days without notification from
 6 the employee may be considered job abandonment.

7
 8 **6.1.1.**

9 ~~Exempt employees normally must receive their full salary for any day in which they perform any work,~~
 10 ~~without regard to the number of hours worked. Therefore, exempt employees may not take paid time off in~~
 11 ~~less than 8-hour increments.~~

12
 13 **6.2. Absence Due to Illness**

14 **6.2.1. Sick Leave**

15 Employees eligible to receive benefits will begin to accrue paid sick leave at the rate of one day per month,
 16 commencing on the first day of employment. Sick leave may accrue up to a maximum of 360 hours. Sick
 17 leave may be carried over from year to year, up to a 360-hour maximum. Employees will not be paid for
 18 accrued sick leave upon termination of employment. Sick leave accruals will be prorated for part-time
 19 regular employees based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week.

20
 21 An employee who is absent five or more successive business days due to an illness or injury must furnish a
 22 physician’s statement confirming the illness or injury to People Solutions on the day they plan to return to
 23 work. Failure to provide such a statement may result in the employee being sent home.

24
 25 Exempt employees must use sick leave in minimum increments of one hour. Nonexempt employees may
 26 use sick leave in any increment of time.

27
 28 **6.2.2. Family Illness**

29 An employee may use accrued sick leave to provide support due to the illness or injury of a member of the
 30 employee’s immediate family, but only if the employee’s absence is due to the necessity of providing care
 31 (including emotional support) to the family member who is ill or injured. The definitions of “family member”
 32 in Section 6.20 19 apply for purposes of this Section 6.2.2.

33
 34 **6.3. Paid Vacation**

35 The churchwide organization recognizes the need for time away from work for rest and relaxation. Paid vacation
 36 will accrue from the first day on the job. Vacation may be used for any reason, and an employee may not be
 37 required or asked to provide a reason for using vacation. Exempt employees must use vacation in minimum
 38 increments of one hour. Nonexempt employees may use vacation in any increment of time.

39
 40 Except for the heads of home areas and certain professional employees, full-time regular employees accrue
 41 vacation according to the following schedule:

42

| <u>Years of Service</u> | <u>Annual Vacation</u> | <u>Accrual</u> |
|---|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| First through second year <u>(0-24 months)</u> | 120 hours <u>(3 weeks)</u> | 5.0 hours per pay period |
| Third through fifth year <u>(25-60 months)</u> | 160 hours <u>(4 weeks)</u> | 6.67 hours per pay period |

Sixth year and beyond 200 hours (5 weeks) 8.33 hours per pay period
(61+ months)

When an employee reaches the anniversary of their hire date and completes their second or fifth year of service the employee will begin to accrue vacation at the next higher level. For example, beginning with the third year of service, the employee will move from 120 to 160 hours of annual vacation.

The amount of pay for a nonexempt employee on vacation is based on the employee's regular rate of pay exclusive of overtime.

The foregoing vacation allotments and accruals will be prorated for part-time regular employees based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week. For example, a new employee who regularly works 20 hours per week would be entitled to 60 hours of annual paid vacation, which would accrue at the rate of 2.5 hours per pay period. Nonexempt, part-time staff accrue time based upon the number of paid hours worked in a pay period.

Individuals who were employed by a region, synod, congregation, or institution officially affiliated with the ELCA within the ~~five~~one-year period preceding the commencement of their employment with the ~~ELCA-~~churchwide organization will have the number of years of all of such prior service with such employers counted for purposes of their vacation accrual with the churchwide organization. Only continuous years of service with such ELCA-affiliated employers will be counted. Except as described in ~~the preceding sentence~~this paragraph, no accrual of vacation time will be based on prior service to another organization.

Home area leads and executives accrue 200 hours of paid vacation annually from the commencement of employment.

Holidays observed by the churchwide organization during an employee's vacation time do not count against the employee's vacation allotment.

All staff members should schedule vacation as far in advance as possible and obtain their supervisor's approval for vacation absences. The supervisor has the right to deny a request for vacation based on business needs.

In the absence of special arrangements agreed to in advance and in writing, (i) up to a maximum of 80 hours of vacation not taken by the end of each calendar year will be carried forward to the following calendar year, and (ii) the maximum amount of vacation taken in any calendar year may not exceed 280 hours. Hours will be prorated for part-time regular employees based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week.

Employees are responsible for having their work in a satisfactory condition before leaving on vacation and for coordinating with other employees regarding coverage during their absence.

Employees who leave employment with the ~~ELCA-~~churchwide organization will normally be paid for accrued and unused vacation ~~up to the maximum accrual specified above.~~

This policy is in compliance with the paid leave provisions of the Illinois Paid Leave for All Workers Act (IPLAWA) and shall be credited against any paid leave entitlement the employee may have under the IPLAWA. Employees will not be eligible to earn any additional leave under the IPLAWA.

6.4. Paid Personal Days

Three paid personal days are allowed on an annual basis. ~~Persons employed on Jan. 1 or who begin employment with the churchwide organization during January, February, March, or April will be eligible for three personal~~

~~days for that year. Persons who begin employment during May, June, July, or August will be eligible for two personal days for that year. Persons who begin employment during September, October, or November will be eligible for one personal day that year.~~ All personal days must be approved in advance by the employee’s supervisor. Unused personal days do not accrue and may not be carried forward to the following year. Employees will not be paid for unused personal days upon termination of employment. Personal days will be prorated for part-time regular employees based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week. Persons who begin employment during a calendar year will be eligible for personal days in that year according to the following schedule:

| <u>Month Hired</u> | <u>Time Off</u> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>January – April</u> | <u>3 personal days</u> |
| <u>May – August</u> | <u>2 personal days</u> |
| <u>September – November</u> | <u>1 personal day</u> |
| <u>December</u> | <u>0 personal days</u> |

6.5. Paid Holidays

The Churchwide Office will be closed on the days listed below:

- New Year’s Day
- Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Maundy Thursday *(does not include staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- Good Friday
- Easter Monday *(does not include staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- -Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- -Independence Day
- -Day-Labor Day
- Indigenous Peoples Day *(does not include staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday preceding Thanksgiving Day ~~Week of Thanksgiving~~ *(does not include staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- Thanksgiving Day *(staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- Friday after following Thanksgiving Day *(staff of the Mission Investment Fund)*
- Christmas Eve
- -Christmas Day

Full-time regular employees will receive their regular rate of pay for eight hours for each paid holiday. Part-time regular employees who are regularly scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week will receive holiday pay based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week.

A holiday falling on Saturday will normally be observed on the preceding Friday. A holiday falling on Sunday will normally be observed on the following Monday.

If an employee’s religion requires the observance of a holiday other than those listed above and the employee is scheduled to work on that day, appropriate arrangements will be made on a case-by-case basis to accommodate the situation.

If business needs require an employee to work on one of the holidays listed above, an employee may make arrangements with People Solutions to take a different paid day off in the same or adjacent pay period, with the approval of the employee’s supervisor.

6.6. ~~Compassionate Leave~~ Family Bereavement Leave

An employee who must be absent because of the death of a member of their immediate family may be allowed a paid absence of up to five working days. The definitions of “immediate family” and “children” in Section 6.20 ~~19~~ apply for purposes of this Section 6.6.- Employees needing to request Family Bereavement Leave should contact People Solutions.

The ~~Illinois Support Through Loss~~ Family Bereavement Leave Act provides ten days of unpaid leave for employees who experience (1) the loss of a covered family member (as defined in Section 6.20) or (2) a miscarriage, an unsuccessful round of intrauterine insemination or other assisted reproductive procedure, a failed or non-finalized adoption match, a failed surrogacy agreement, a diagnosis affecting pregnancy or fertility, or a stillbirth. Employees may use a combination of compassionate leave, and other available paid time off to cover this time. Employees can also use this time off to support a spouse or partner experiencing one of these losses.

In the event of the death of more than one covered family member in a 12-month period, an employee is entitled to up to a total of 12 weeks of bereavement leave during the 12-month period. However, an employee who takes leave under the Child Bereavement Leave policy may not take leave under this policy for the death of the same child.

An employee is eligible for Family Bereavement Leave after 1,250 hours of service with the churchwide organization during the prior 12-month period.

The family bereavement leave must be completed within 60 days after the date employee receives notice of the death of the covered family member; miscarriage; unsuccessful round of intrauterine insemination or of an assisted reproductive technology procedure; failed adoption match or an adoption that is not finalized because it is contested by another party; failed surrogacy agreement; diagnosis that negatively impacts pregnancy or fertility; or stillbirth. The employee may be required to provide People Solutions with 48 hours of notice before taking the leave, unless it is not practicable. The churchwide organization may require documentation to verify the necessity of the leave.

Family bereavement leave may not be taken in addition to unpaid leave permitted under the Family and Medical Leave Act, 29 U.S.C. 2601 et seq. (FMLA), and may not exceed unpaid leave time allowed under that law (FMLA).

6.6.1. Child Bereavement Leave

Full-time employees who have worked for the churchwide organization for at least two weeks who suffer the loss of a child by suicide or homicide may be provided up to 12 weeks off without pay to grieve and attend to personal affairs. Leave may be taken in a single continuous period or intermittently in increments of no less than four hours. The leave must be completed within one year after the employee notifies People Solutions of the loss.

Employees may be required to provide at least seven days advance notice of the intention to take leave under this policy unless it is not practicable in which the notice must be provided as soon as possible.

Documentation to take leave may be requested by People Solutions. Such documentation may include, but is not limited to: a death certificate, a published obituary, or written verification of death, burial, or memorial services from a mortuary, funeral home, burial society, crematorium, religious institution, or government agency.

Employees may elect to substitute paid leave provided by the churchwide organization or under any other federal, state, or local law, if they so choose.

Upon completion of the leave, the employee will be restored to the position of employment held by the employee when the leave began or an equivalent position with equivalent employment benefits, pay, and other terms and conditions of employment. Taking leave under this policy will not result in the loss of any

employment benefit accrued prior to the date on which the leave began, but the employee is not entitled to accrue benefits while on leave.

Use of this leave will run concurrently with FMLA leave. Child bereavement leave may not be taken in addition to unpaid leave permitted under the Family and Medical Leave Act, 29 U.S.C. 2601 et seq. (FMLA), and may not exceed unpaid leave time allowed under that law (FMLA).

An employee who takes leave under this policy may not take leave under the family bereavement leave policy for the death of the same child.

6.7. Jury or Witness Duty

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

6.8. Maternity/Paternity and Adoptive Leave

The churchwide organization provides paid maternity/paternity and adoptive leave as set forth below. Such paid leave must be substituted for unpaid leave available under the Family and Medical Leave Act to the extent the employee is eligible for FMLA leave. The purpose of the leave must relate to the parenting of a newly born or newly adopted child within the first three months of the child's birth or placement and may be taken only by an employee who has completed at least six months of full-time or part-time employment. Leave benefits for part-time employees are based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week. Employees requesting leave under this Section 6.8 must provide their supervisors with as much advance notice as possible.

Eight consecutive weeks of paid maternity/paternity leave is available to a new parent following the birth of their child. If the expectant mother's physician determines that it is medically necessary for her to stop working prior to the anticipated delivery date, she will be permitted to use personal leave, accrued sick time, or accrued vacation time to cover the absence. If the expectant mother needs to be cared for by her spouse/partner, the employee may use accrued time off before the birth of the child (Section 6.10. Leave Under the Family and Medical Leave Act). Eight consecutive weeks of paid adoptive leave is available to a new parent or legal guardian beginning on the date of the child's placement.

6.9. Parental Leave

The churchwide organization will grant eligible nonexempt employees up to eight hours of unpaid leave per school year to attend primary or secondary school conferences or classroom activities that are related to the employee's children and cannot be scheduled during nonworking hours. To be eligible, an employee must have used all accrued vacation and personal days and must have worked at least 20 hours per week during the six-month period preceding the requested leave. An employee may take no more than four of the eight hours on any one day and will be required to provide verification of the school visit upon their return to work. The head of the employee's home area may allow a nonexempt employee to make up the leave time taken.

6.10. Leave Under the Family and Medical Leave Act

The Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA") provides an eligible employee with unpaid leave:

- Because of the birth of the employee's child;
- Because of the placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care;
- Because the employee needs to care for their spouse, child, or parent with a serious health condition;
- Because the employee is not able to perform job duties due to their own serious health condition;
- Because the employee needs to deal with certain exigencies associated with their spouse, child, or parent on active duty or called to active-duty status in the National Guard or Reserves in support of a

1 contingency operation; or

- 2 • Because the employee needs to provide care for their spouse, child, parent, or next of kin who has an
3 injury or illness incurred on active duty in the armed forces.

4
5 The FMLA sets forth detailed provisions relating to eligibility for leave, the definition of important terms, the
6 necessity of obtaining the certification of a health care provider, the scheduling of leave, the substitution of
7 accrued paid leave, the continuation of benefits during leave, and reinstatement upon the conclusion of leave.

8 These provisions are summarized in a separate policy posted on the HR and payroll [system-self-service](#)
9 [portal.dashboard](#).

10 11 **6.11. Personal Leave**

12 An employee who has exhausted all types of paid leave available may be considered for personal leave. All
13 personal leaves are unpaid. Whether such a leave is granted depends on the overall circumstances, including the
14 work requirements of the employee's home area. While the normal length of a personal leave is from one to three
15 months, a leave of up to one year may be granted in extraordinary circumstances.

16
17 If the employee has been on a personal leave for medical reasons, the employee's treating physician must provide
18 People Solutions a medical release confirming the employee's fitness to return to work.

19
20 An employee returning from an approved personal leave on a timely basis may be reinstated to the same or an
21 equivalent position. All decisions regarding a personal leave require the concurrence of the head of the
22 employee's home area and People Solutions.

23 24 **6.12. Sabbatical Leave**

25 The churchwide organization recognizes that employees need to increase and extend their knowledge and
26 competency in their fields of specialization. This may be accomplished through a sabbatical leave, normally a
27 period of one to three months, during which full salary and benefits would be continued.

28
29 Sabbatical leaves are restricted and are intended for use only by those employees (without regard to ordained
30 status) whose sabbatical leave will increase their value to the organization. An employee is eligible to request
31 a sabbatical leave after six years of full-time, [regular](#) employment with the churchwide organization.

32 Subsequent requests may be considered at six-year intervals. [Part-time regular employees who are regularly](#)
33 [scheduled to work at least 20 hours per week may request sabbatical leave on a prorated basis.](#)

34
35 Requests for sabbatical leave, including the proposed plan for professional development, must be submitted to
36 the head of the employee's home area. If approved, the request will be forwarded to the executive for People and
37 DEI at least one month before the proposed beginning of the sabbatical leave. Both the head of the employee's
38 home area and the executive for People and DEI must approve the proposed sabbatical leave. As an exception to
39 the preceding sentence, a request for sabbatical leave by a full-time officer of the ELCA must be submitted to
40 and approved by the Church Council's Executive Committee, whose action will be forwarded to the executive
41 for People and DEI.

42
43 Except for the presiding bishop, no employee may take a sabbatical leave at the completion of their service. The
44 granting of a sabbatical leave to all other employees will normally be contingent upon the employee's
45 commitment to a minimum of six months of service to the churchwide organization following the conclusion of
46 the leave. Any exceptions must be approved by the executive for People and DEI.

47
48 Sabbatical leave does not accrue. An employee whose employment terminates without the employee's having
49 taken sabbatical leave is not entitled to any sabbatical payment.

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6.13. Leave to Attend Synod Assembly

An ELCA-rostered employee of the churchwide organization is granted paid leave time to permit attendance on normal work days at the synod assembly of the synod in which their membership is maintained. A non-rostered employee who is elected by an ELCA congregation to serve as a lay voting member of a synod assembly will be granted paid leave time to attend the synod assembly on normal workdays. In both cases, the employee’s supervisor must grant approval prior to attendance at the synod assembly.

6.14. Military Leave

The churchwide organization grants military leave to employees who perform military service on a part-time and regularly occurring basis or who perform military service on a full-time but temporary basis. An employee with a military obligation should notify People Solutions and submit copies of military orders as soon as practical.

The churchwide organization complies with the requirements of the federal Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act, as applied to churches and religious organizations, and with applicable provisions of state law, as well as regulations adopted pursuant to the applicable federal and state laws.

6.15. Victims’ Economic Safety and Security Act Leave

The ELCA complies with all applicable requirements of the Illinois Victims’ Economic Safety and Security Act (“VESSA”). An employee may be eligible for leave under VESSA if they are a victim of domestic or sexual violence or have a family or household member who has been victimized by domestic or sexual violence. VESSA may provide eligible employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a 12-month period to seek medical attention or counseling, obtain assistance from service agencies, seek legal counsel, and participate in civil or criminal legal proceedings. Further information is available from People Solutions.

6.16. Community Service Day

Employees of the churchwide organization are encouraged to share their time, talents, and gifts by taking an active, visible role in volunteer activities. To that end, all full-time regular employees may take one day (eight hours) of paid leave each calendar year to use for volunteer activities. Part-time regular employees may take such leave on a prorated basis. No one may use more than one community service day in a calendar year. An unused community service day cannot be carried forward to the next calendar year.

An employee who wants to use community service leave must apply in advance and in writing to their supervisor and provide an explanation of the proposed activity, including the time, place, and sponsor. The supervisor has discretion to grant or deny the request.

6.17. Continuing Education Days

Up to 10 paid continuing education days are allowed on an annual basis. Refer to Section 5.12. for appropriate uses of continuing education days. All continuing education days must be approved in advance by the employee’s supervisor. Unused continuing education days do not accrue and may not be carried forward to the following year. Employees will not be paid for unused continuing education days upon termination of employment. Continuing education days will be prorated for part-time regular employees based on the ratio of their regularly scheduled hours to a 40-hour week. Persons who begin employment during a calendar year will be eligible for continuing education days in that year according to the following schedule:

| <u>Month Hired</u> | <u>Time Off</u> |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <u>January – April</u> | <u>10 continuing education days</u> |
| <u>May – August</u> | <u>6 continuing education days</u> |

| | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <u>September – November</u> | <u>3 continuing education days</u> |
| <u>December</u> | <u>0 continuing education days</u> |

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34.6. 6.18. Other Paid Leave

There may be circumstances where the best interest of the churchwide organization is to place an employee on paid administrative leave for a limited period of time. Such a decision can be made only by a churchwide officer or the executive for Administration, at the request of the head of the employee’s home area and the executive for People and DEI.

4.7. 6.19. Time Off for Voting

Work schedules normally permit adequate time for an employee to vote either before or after normal working hours. In unusual circumstances, however, an employee’s work schedule or work commitments may make voting during nonworking hours difficult or impossible. In such cases, the employee’s supervisor may approve up to two consecutive hours of paid time off for the purpose of voting in a national, state, or local election. The supervisor may specify the hours during which the employee will be absent in order to vote.

Before Election Day, the employee must notify the appropriate supervisor of the intended absence and provide a signed statement describing the specific circumstances that require time off. This statement is to be retained with the employee’s time records for the applicable month. The employee may also consider asking the appropriate governmental office about the possibility of voting early or by absentee ballot.

4.8. 6.20. Definitions Related to Covered Family Member and Immediate Relative for Purposes of Sick Leave and Compassionate Leave

“Immediate family” and “covered family member” generally refer to the employee’s spouse, partner, children, parents and parents-in-law, siblings, grandparents, grandchildren, and minors for whom the employee is the legal guardian.

The employee’s children include not only biological, adopted, or foster children but also legal wards and children and stepchildren for whom the employee provides care and financial support on a daily basis.

This list is descriptive, not exhaustive. The churchwide organization realizes that there are many nontraditional relationships that are equally important to our employees, Therefore, the definition may also apply to any individual related by blood or affinity whose close association with the employee is the equivalent of a family relationship.

7. PERFORMANCE AND BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

The policies set forth below apply to all ELCA employees and supplement, but do not supplant, the policies set forth elsewhere in these policies. Because these Personnel Policies cannot anticipate every circumstance or question that may arise or summarize every policy that might be necessary, the churchwide organization has the right to revise or add to these policies and adopt additional policies at any time.

7.1. Safety

Each employee is expected to obey safety rules, to exercise caution in all work activities, and to report promptly any unsafe condition to the appropriate supervisor.

7.2. Attendance and Punctuality

Absenteeism and tardiness place a burden on other employees. The ELCA expects employees to be reliable and punctual in reporting for scheduled work and, except for prior authorization or a legitimate reason, to remain throughout the scheduled shift. Employees who cannot avoid being late to work or who are unable to work as scheduled must notify their supervisor promptly, normally before their scheduled starting time.

Acceptable attendance is an essential requirement of every job, and absenteeism and tardiness problems are performance issues. All employees must establish and maintain acceptable attendance and punctuality standards. If attendance issues are due to a medical condition, the employee should contact People Solutions.

Depending on the circumstances, an employee who is absent five or more consecutive workdays may be required to present a statement from a health care provider before returning to work.

Employees are not permitted to work at home or away from the office without approval of the appropriate supervisor.

7.3. Personal Appearance, Grooming, and Fragrances

During regular business hours or when representing the church, all employees are expected to present a professional appearance and to dress according to the requirements of their positions. Generally, the churchwide office dress code is business casual.

Business casual dress is defined as follows:

Casual shirts: All shirts with collars, business casual crewneck or V-neck shirts, blouses, and golf and polo shirts. Examples of inappropriate shirts include shirts with inappropriate slogans, tank tops, muscle shirts and crop tops.

Pants/skirts/dresses: Casual slacks, trousers, skirts, dresses and jeans without holes, frays, etc.

Examples of inappropriate clothing include sexually provocative or revealing clothing, shorts, and pants worn below the waist or hip line.

Footwear: Casual slip-on or tie shoes, dress sandals, and clean athletic shoes.

A supervisor or employee who is unsure of what is appropriate should check with People Solutions.

Employees who work in one of the churchwide organization offices should also be aware that other individuals may suffer physical reactions to fragrances found in cologne, after-shave lotion, perfume, perfumed hand lotion, fragranced hair products, air fresheners and similar items. Therefore, employees are expected to be considerate and to refrain from using any ~~particular~~ products that irritate visitors or other employees.

If you have questions regarding casual dress, please contact People Solutions or your supervisor.

7.4. No Use of Tobacco, Vaping, or Cannabis in the Workplace

Smoking, vaping, or the use of any tobacco (including cigarettes, cigars, or hookah, and e-cigarettes, vapes, or any other electronic smoking device), ~~vaping~~, or cannabis products is not allowed in churchwide offices.

7.5. Safeguarding Property

Employees are responsible for safeguarding all property issued or otherwise made available to them by the churchwide organization during their employment, including computer hardware, software, and manuals; cell phones; and keys and access cards.

All incidents of theft or damage involving organizational or personal property should immediately be reported to a supervisor. All purses and valuables should be secured in a file or desk drawer during working hours.

On or before their last day of work, employees must return all property belonging to the organization. The organization may take all legally appropriate steps to recover or protect its property.

7.6. Inclement Weather or Emergency

~~7.6.1. Inclement Weather~~

~~Weather conditions such as snow, ice, and extreme cold are part of winter. Employees who are expected to be in the office should make every reasonable effort to report to work unless weather and road conditions indicate otherwise.~~

To determine if the Lutheran Center will be open or closed due to inclement weather or other emergency, an employee may call 773-380-2660 or 866-735-3522 after 6:30 a.m. A recorded message will provide information regarding the status of the office. Employees enrolled in the churchwide organization's emergency alerts system ~~who have indicated their Business Continuity Alert preference~~ will also be notified by telephone, email, or text message, depending on their indicated preference, should the Lutheran Center be closed. Should these contact points not be functional, employees may also call the Archives at 847-690-9410 for information during a declared emergency. Each employee is responsible for keeping up-to-date on developments during an emergency.

When the Lutheran Center or another churchwide office is closed for part or all of ~~a day~~the day due to weather conditions or other emergency, staff are expected to work remotely as they are able and to the extent that it is safe to do so. ~~All nonexempt staff who are unable to work from home will be paid for the time they would normally have worked. Exempt staff are expected to work remotely.~~

Weather conditions such as snow, ice, and extreme cold are part of winter. Employees who are expected to be in the office should make every reasonable effort to report to work unless weather and road conditions indicate otherwise. A nonexempt employee who makes a personal judgment not to come to the office due to weather on a day the office is open may use paid personal time or accrued vacation time to cover the hours missed, or may be allowed to make up the hours missed under arrangements approved by People Solutions.

~~7.6.2. Other Emergencies~~

~~If some other emergency occurs, employees may call 773-380-2660 or 866-735-3522 at any time to check on whether or when to report to work. Employees may also be notified of developments by telephone, email, or text message, or through www.elcawebstatus.org. Should these contact points not be functional, employees may also call Archives at 847-690-9410 for information during a declared emergency. Each employee is responsible for keeping up-to-date on developments during an emergency.~~

7.7. Dealing With the News Media

Only an authorized representative may speak to reporters on behalf of the ELCA. Reporters seeking a church representative must be referred to Strategic Communications (Office of the Presiding Bishop). Employees should attempt to alert Strategic Communications staff in advance that a reporter or media outlet is or may be seeking to contact them concerning a particular matter or issue.

7.8. Sexual Harassment and Other Inappropriate Behavior

A fundamental policy of the churchwide organization is that the workplace is for work. Our goal is to provide a workplace where employees behave courteously and professionally and feel safe at all times. Tension created by

1 conduct not related to work—including ethnic, racial, or sexual remarks, unwelcome sexual advances, requests
 2 for sexual favors, loud swearing or yelling, or similar conduct—does not belong in our workplace. Similarly,
 3 inappropriate displays of affection or sexually related conduct, even if welcome, are inappropriate at work and
 4 will not be tolerated.

6 **7.8.1. Harassment**

7 Harassment of employees or applicants for employment is prohibited. Harassment is defined as persistently
 8 bothering, disturbing, or tormenting another person. Harassment may be based on a variety of factors, such as
 9 race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or personal dislike. The reason for the harassment does
 10 not matter. The ELCA prohibits all forms of harassment, including but not limited to:

- 11 • Verbal and electronic communication harassment, such as making derogatory statements, name-
 12 calling, letters, jokes, epithets, or slurs to or about another person or group;
- 13 • Visual harassment, such as displaying offensive posters, cartoons, or drawings; and
- 14 • Physical harassment, such as threatening, assaulting, or physically interfering with another person or
 15 making other inappropriate or unwelcome physical contact.

16
 17 Harassment applies to the conduct of a supervisor toward a subordinate, an employee toward another
 18 employee, a non-employee toward an employee, an employee toward an applicant for employment, or an
 19 employee toward a third party or independent contractor. Harassment can apply to conduct outside the
 20 workplace as well as on the work site.

22 **7.8.2. Sexual Harassment**

23 Sexual harassment is unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, including sexual advances, requests for sexual
 24 favors, sexually motivated physical contact, and other verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature
 25 when:

- 26 • Submission to such conduct is explicitly or implicitly made a term or condition of employment;
- 27 • Submission or refusal to submit to such conduct is used as the basis for a tangible employment action;
 28 or
- 29 • Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work
 30 performance or work environment.

31
 32 Sexual harassment is prohibited. Individuals cannot be forced to submit to sexual harassment as a basis for
 33 any employment decision. In addition, the ELCA attempts to prevent and promptly eliminate any conduct
 34 that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment for our employees.

36 **7.8.3. Examples of Prohibited Conduct**

37 The following conduct, when occurring in the workplace or when it may adversely affect the work
 38 environment, will be considered to be harassment or inappropriate behavior:

- 39 • Sexually suggestive or off-color comments or jokes;
- 40 • Sexual flirtation, innuendo, advances, or propositions, or other sexual activities;
- 41 • Unprofessional touching, such as massages, or inappropriately putting an arm around another
 42 employee;
- 43 • Repeated and unwelcome invitations for social interactions outside of the workplace;
- 44 • Sexual or racial slurs, derogatory remarks, or offensive gestures;
- 45 • Swearing or loud yelling;
- 46 • Displaying or distributing sexually explicit or otherwise off-color materials, including books,
 47 magazines, articles, pictures, greeting cards, photographs, drawings, cartoons, and email messages;
 48 and
- 49 • Including or excluding any individuals from workplace activities, assignments, or responsibilities

1 based on their refusal to participate in or tolerate sexual or other forms of harassment or based on
2 other factors not related to job performance or legitimate reasons.

3
4 This list is not intended to be exhaustive.

5
6 A consensual relationship does not justify inappropriate displays of affection or other sexual statements or
7 activities during working hours or at work-related functions.

8
9 Any questions about whether particular conduct is prohibited under this policy should be discussed with the
10 appropriate supervisor or People Solutions.

11 **7.8.4. Reporting Harassment or Other Inappropriate Behavior**

12 If an employee believes that any sort of sexual or other harassment or other inappropriate conduct is
13 interfering with their work or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment, they are
14 urged to contact any supervisor or any People Solutions staff member and make a report. The employee may
15 be asked to sign a written complaint or other summary of the information reported.

16
17 Employees receiving a threatening telephone call or voicemail at work should attempt to get a caller ID
18 number and as much information as possible about the caller, and promptly notify their supervisor.

19 Employees receiving threatening emails, text messages, or letters should promptly notify their supervisor and
20 save copies of all such communications. Whenever threats are received by any means, reports may be made
21 to law enforcement authorities.

22 **7.8.5. Investigation and Follow-Up**

23
24 Complaints of harassment will be promptly and thoroughly investigated, and the reporting employee will be
25 advised of the results of the investigation. The churchwide organization understands these matters are
26 sensitive and will therefore attempt to keep all employee complaints and communications, such as interviews
27 and witness statements, in confidence.

28
29 The organization may take appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including discharge, against any
30 employee who engages in sexual or other harassment or who otherwise violates this policy. Further, the
31 organization may correct any adverse employment action any employee experienced due to conduct
32 forbidden by this policy.

33
34 If an individual involved in harassing or inappropriate conduct is not employed by the ELCA, the individual
35 will be informed of our policy and appropriate action will be taken in an attempt to prevent further
36 misconduct. In all cases, the churchwide organization will make follow-up inquiries to confirm that the
37 inappropriate behavior has stopped. If an employee is not satisfied with the results of the investigation or
38 follow-up action, or if further harassment or other unacceptable conduct occurs, they should contact any
39 supervisor or any People Solutions staff member.

40 **7.8.6. Retaliation Forbidden**

41 The churchwide organization will not tolerate retaliation against any employee who in good faith complains
42 of sexual or other harassment or who provides information in connection with any such complaint. If an
43 employee believes that they have been retaliated against for bringing a complaint or providing information
44 related to a complaint, the employee should report this to any supervisor or any People Solutions staff
45 member.

46 **7.8.7. Employee Responsibilities**

47 Employees of the ELCA are responsible for:
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49
50

- 1 • Behaving courteously and professionally toward fellow employees.
- 2 • Completing mandatory trainings regarding sexual or other forms of harassment and inappropriate
- 3 behavior provided by People Solutions
- 4 • Reading this policy and understanding fully its requirements.
- 5 • Refraining from conduct forbidden by this policy;
- 6 • Reporting promptly any incidents of sexual or other harassment or other inappropriate behavior; and
- 7 • Cooperating in any investigation conducted under this policy by providing accurate and complete
- 8 information about any incidents with which an employee is familiar.
- 9

10 **7.9. Use of Telephone and Mail Systems**

11 The ELCA needs to maintain effective telephone communications, and employees should always use an
12 approved greeting and speak in a courteous and professional manner.

13
14 The use of church-paid postage for personal correspondence is not permitted.

15 **7.10. Safe Use of Cell Phones, Computers, and Other Electronic Devices**

16 Whether their cell phone, tablet, computer, or similar electronic communication device is provided by the
17 ELCA or supplied personally, ELCA staff members are expected to observe the following guidelines in their
18 use of such devices for ELCA-related business:
19

- 20 • Employees are required to abide by the law or ordinance of a particular jurisdiction with regard to the use
21 of electronic communication devices while driving a motor vehicle, and will be solely responsible for any
22 traffic violations relating to such use.
- 23 • Safety must always be of paramount concern, and employees operating a motor vehicle should never
24 place themselves or others at risk to fulfill work-related needs.
- 25 • Employees should never attempt to send or review text or email messages while operating a motor
26 vehicle.
- 27 • Employees should place calls either prior to driving or while on rest breaks, and should drive to a safe
28 parking location before accepting a call.
- 29 • Employees should always be conscious of their surroundings and refrain from discussing confidential
30 matters in a public setting or under circumstances where their conversation could be overheard or their
31 electronic screen viewed by others.
- 32

33 **7.11. Electronic Communications Policy**

34 **7.11.1. Policy Overview**

35 The churchwide organization is committed to an environment that encourages the use of technical resources
36 and other forms of electronic communications as essential tools to support the ELCA's mission and
37 ministry. The term "technical resources" ~~includes, but is not limited to, all electronic communications-~~
38 ~~systems, computer hardware and software, smartphones, tablets, data, information, email, instant messages,~~
39 ~~social media sites, Intranet, Extranet and Internet services, domain name registrations, and related systems.~~
40 includes, but is not limited to, all hardware (including, but not limited to, desktop computers, laptop
41 computers, tablets, mobile devices, peripherals, printers, scanners, servers, telephones, tablets, smartphones,
42 faxes, computer systems); software; software/digital subscriptions; data; information; electronic mail; voice
43 mail; instant messages; telephony; online meetings; cloud-based storage; enterprise systems; virtual private
44 networks; intranet, extranet and internet web services and applications; social media, domain name
45 registrations; other cloud service providers; and related systems. All employees are required to abide by this
46 Section 7.11 in their use of the ELCA's technical resources as well as with Section 7.12, which deals
47 specifically with social media. In particular, technical resources are to be used in a manner that is consistent
48 with good stewardship and the mission and ministry of the ELCA; that is responsible, professional, and
49 legal; and that does not compromise the security or confidentiality of proprietary or other sensitive

1 information or the ELCA's technical resources.

2
3 Employees are expected to use their ELCA-provided email address only when representing the ELCA, unless
4 authorized by the executive for Information Technology. Employees are personally responsible for any
5 activities they conduct with an ELCA-provided email address, and for any of their activities that can be traced
6 back to the ELCA's domain or [assetstechnical resources](#).

7
8 Employees will be held responsible for their use of an ELCA-provided email address or ELCA technical
9 resources to engage in any social media or professional social-networking activity, including but not limited
10 to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, [Instagram](#), [TikTok](#), [YouTube](#), and personal blogs. Employees must obtain
11 written approval from the executives for People and DEI and for Information Technology before establishing
12 any external social media or professional social networks identified with or utilizing equipment or resources
13 of the churchwide organization. Employees should reference the electronic communication procedures on the
14 churchwide organization's intranet for further clarification.

15 16 **7.11.2. Acquiring Technical Resources**

17 All technical resources provided by or through the churchwide organization are assets of the ELCA and must
18 be acquired only by Information Technology or with the written approval of the executive for Information
19 Technology. No employee may load, download, or receive software on ELCA technical resources without the
20 prior written approval of the executive for Information Technology.

21 22 **7.11.3. No Expectation of Privacy**

23 ELCA employees do not have a personal privacy or proprietary right in any matter created, received, sent, or
24 stored on ELCA technical resources, telephones, or equipment, or on third-party resources used for work-
25 related matters, whether or not the matter is designated as private or confidential.

26
27 The ELCA has the right, at any time and without prior notice, to monitor employees and to read, listen to, and
28 copy all files or data contained on any technical resource, including but not limited to email messages, instant
29 messages, Internet access records, voice messages, faxes, official employee content on Internet discussion
30 groups, and personal file directories.

31
32 The ELCA also has the right in its complete discretion to access all technical resources for the purpose of
33 supporting its mission and ministry, complying with statutory requirements and internal policies regarding
34 internal investigations, and any additional issues that may arise in connection with the management of the
35 ELCA's electronic communications systems.

36 37 **7.11.4. Prohibited Activities**

38 The following behaviors are examples of previously stated or additional activities that are prohibited in the
39 use of ELCA equipment or technical resources. They include, but are not limited to:

- 40 • Violating any law, statute, regulation, or ordinance;
- 41 • Violating any ELCA policy or procedure or otherwise interfering with the mission and ministry of the
42 ELCA;
- 43 • Jeopardizing the [privacy](#), [safety](#), ~~and~~ [or](#) security of ELCA [donors](#), members, employees, or technical
44 resources;
- 45 • Jeopardizing the tax-exempt status of the ELCA, any ELCA synod or congregation, or any affiliate
46 listed under the ELCA group ruling for federal income-tax exemption, including transmission of
47 political or partisan campaign materials;
- 48 • Violating the legal rights of any person or entity;
- 49 • Stealing, using, or disclosing someone else's code or password without authorization;

- Copying, pirating, or downloading software and electronic files without approval;
- Creating unauthorized contractual liability for the ELCA;
- Giving the impression that personal views are those of the organization;
- Sending anonymous email messages;
- Sending or posting discriminatory, harassing, or threatening messages or images;
- Sending or posting chain letters, solicitations, or advertisements not related to business purposes or activities, or using the Internet for any sort of gambling;
- Sending or posting messages that defame any other individuals or organizations;
- Interfering with the use of ELCA technical resources or the technical resources of another person or entity;
- Attempting to break into the computer system of another person or organization; and
- Downloading or participating in the viewing or exchange of pornographic or sexually explicit materials unless specifically authorized for an investigation or other extraordinary, work-related purposes.

7.11.5. Avoiding Harassing Behavior

When communicating about the ELCA or ELCA-related matters, employees must never send or display any information that may be construed as offensive or harassing. Offensive or harassing messages include, but are not limited to, pornographic images; sexual references; racial slurs; comments regarding an individual's gender, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, national origin, disability, or any other characteristic protected by law; and comments that threaten or intimidate others.

7.11.6. Speaking on Behalf of the Organization

Unless specifically instructed or authorized, employees are restricted from speaking to the news media or others while purporting or appearing to represent the ELCA.

Employees are responsible for ensuring that all information they share in work-related Internet discussion groups, chat rooms, blogs, or social networking sites is accurate, and that any personal opinions they express are clearly identified as personal and not attributed to the ELCA.

7.11.7. Posting Recommendations for Colleagues

Online recommendations and comments about current and former churchwide employees could have unanticipated consequences, even if made personally by an employee and not on behalf of the organization. Therefore, employees must clear all potential recommendations and comments regarding current or former employees, council members, or committee members of the churchwide organization with the executive for People and DEI ~~if they refer to anyone who is or was ever associated with the churchwide organization.~~ Recommendations may not be written using on ELCA letterhead.

7.11.8. Safety and Mission

Electronic communications that negatively affect an employee's job performance, the safety of others, the ELCA's mission and ministry, or the business interests of the churchwide organization may be treated as employment-related, regardless of whether the communication took place during or outside of working hours.

7.11.9. Reporting Violations

Employees are expected to report any actual or perceived violations of this policy to any supervisor, the head of any home area, the executive for People and DEI, the executive for Information Technology, or the general counsel.

7.12. Social Media

1 The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America understands that social media can be helpful and rewarding ways
2 to share one’s life and opinions with family, friends, and co-workers around the world. Nonetheless, the use of
3 social media also presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. This policy, which applies to
4 all ELCA employees, is intended to assist employees in making responsible decisions about use of social media.
5 The churchwide organization has additional requirements for people who are employed to create and use social
6 media communications as part of their employment responsibilities.

7
8 For purposes of this policy, “social media” is defined as all means of communicating or posting information or
9 content of any sort on the Internet, whether or not associated with the ELCA, including postings to one’s own or
10 someone else’s blog, journal, diary, personal website, social networking or affinity website, web bulletin board, or
11 chat room.

12
13 The same principles and guidelines found in these Personnel Policies apply to activities online. Ultimately, each
14 employee is solely responsible for what they post online.

15
16 Maintain confidentiality. Never divulge information that would be considered confidential.

17
18 Observe all other policies of the ELCA. Refrain from postings that contain discriminatory
19 remarks,
20 harassment (sexual or any other type), or threats of violence, or that constitute inappropriate or unlawful
21 conduct.

22
23 Be respectful. Always be fair and courteous to fellow employees, members, suppliers, and other people who
24 work with the churchwide organization, synods, or congregations. Keep in mind that resolving work-related
25 complaints by speaking directly with co-workers or supervisors is more effective than by posting to a social
26 media outlet. Nevertheless, an employee who decides to post complaints or criticism must avoid posting
27 anything that reasonably could be viewed as malicious, obscene, threatening, or intimidating; that disparages
28 fellow employees or synods or congregations within the ELCA; or that might constitute harassment or
29 bullying. Examples of such conduct might include offensive posts meant to intentionally harm someone’s
30 reputation and posts that could contribute to a hostile work environment on the basis of race, sex, disability,
31 religion, or any other legally protected status.

32
33 Be honest and accurate. Make sure that posted information or news is honest and accurate, and if a mistake is
34 made, make sure that it is corrected quickly. Be open about any previous posts that have been altered.
35 Remember that the Internet archives almost everything; therefore, even deleted postings can be searched.
36 Never post any rumors or information known to be false about the churchwide organization, any synod or
37 congregation, or other employees.

38
39 Represent yourself accurately. When participating in an online community and commenting on topics related
40 to the ELCA, employees must make clear that they are speaking for themselves and not on behalf of the
41 church. Do not create a link from any blog, website, or other social media site to an ELCA website without
42 identifying yourself as an ELCA employee.

43
44 Do not post at work. Refrain from using social media while on work time or on ELCA equipment unless such
45 activities are related to your duties or have been specifically authorized by a supervisor. Employees may not
46 use their ELCA email address to register on social networks or other sites for personal use without approval.

47
48 Check comments by others. Any photos or messages that are linked or “tagged” from “friends” and attached
49 to employee site(s) or profile(s) that violate these guidelines are not permitted and, if not promptly removed
50 from the employee’s own page or site, will be attributed to the employee.

1 No Retaliation. The ELCA prohibits taking negative action against any employee for reporting possible
2 deviation from this policy or for cooperating in an investigation of a possible deviation.

3
4 ~~Nothing in this policy or any other ELCA policy should be interpreted in a manner that unlawfully prohibits any~~
5 ~~right employees may have to engage in protected concerted activity.~~

7.13. Use of Facilities and Property

8 Office supplies or equipment are not for personal use unless the employee has obtained advance written approval
9 from a supervisor.

10 Equipment, documents, official records, or other property belonging to the ELCA may not be removed from the
11 Lutheran Center for any reason without advance approval.

7.14. Security Inspections

15 The ELCA wishes to maintain a work environment that is free of illegal drugs, alcohol, firearms, explosives, or
16 other improper materials. To this end, the church prohibits the possession, transfer, sale, concealment or use of
17 such materials in the workplace.

18
19 Desks, file cabinets, and other storage locations may be provided for the convenience of employees but remain the
20 sole property of the churchwide organization. Employees should have no expectation of privacy with respect to
21 the contents of their desks or other storage locations on the organization's premises. Accordingly, any authorized
22 agent or representative of the organization may inspect such desks or storage locations, as well as any articles
23 found within them, at any time, either with or without prior notice.

24
25 The churchwide organization seeks to discourage theft or unauthorized possession of the property of employees,
26 vendors, and visitors. Any authorized ELCA agent or representative may also inspect people entering or leaving
27 the workplace and any packages, briefcases, backpacks, or other belongings in the possession of such people. Any
28 employee who wishes to avoid inspection of any articles or materials should not bring them to work.

7.15. Preventing Workplace Violence

31 All employees, visitors, guests, independent contractors, and other individuals should be treated with courtesy and
32 respect. Fighting, "horseplay," or other conduct that may be dangerous is prohibited. All threatened or actual
33 violence, both direct and indirect, should be reported as soon as possible to any supervisor or People Solutions
34 employee. This includes threats by employees, as well as threats by visitors, vendors, solicitors, or members of
35 the public. All suspicious individuals or activities should also be reported as soon as possible. When making such
36 a report, be as specific and detailed as possible.

37
38 The churchwide organization will promptly investigate all reports of actual or threatened violence and of
39 suspicious individuals or activities. The identity of the individual making a report will be protected to the
40 extent practical. To attempt to maintain workplace safety and the integrity of the ELCA's investigation, the
41 ELCA may suspend employees, either with or without pay, during any investigation.

42
43 The churchwide organization encourages employees to bring any disputes or differences with other
44 employees to the attention of their supervisors before the situation escalates into potential violence. The
45 Problem Resolution Procedure in Section 9 may be used as appropriate.

46
47 The churchwide organization will assist in the resolution of employee disputes and will not discipline
48 employees for raising legitimate or reasonable concerns.

7.15.1. Duty to Warn

In furtherance of this policy, employees have a “duty to warn” their supervisors, security personnel, or People Solutions of any suspicious workplace activity or situations or incidents that they observe or that they are aware of that involve other employees, former employees, constituents, or visitors and that appear problematic. This includes, for example, threats or acts of violence, aggressive behavior, offensive acts, threatening or offensive comments or remarks, and the like. Employee reports made pursuant to this policy will be held in confidence to the extent possible. The churchwide organization will not condone or tolerate any form of retaliation against any employee for making a report under this policy.

7.16. Weapons Policy

The churchwide organization prohibits weapons of any type on the premises of the Lutheran Center or any buildings owned or rented by the churchwide organization, or at any churchwide-sponsored event. This general prohibition includes visible or concealed weapons, even those for which the owner has a valid permit. This policy applies to all ELCA employees and also to contractors, vendors, and visitors. Prohibited items include any form of weapon, as well as any explosive that is illegal under federal, state, or local laws or ordinances.

To ensure that prohibited weapons and other contraband are not present on its property, the ELCA reserves the right to inspect work areas, desks, and personal belongings (including but not limited to employee packages, purses, backpacks, or lunch bags) when it has a reasonable suspicion of possession of prohibited weapons or substances.

Employees who observe or have knowledge of any violation of this weapons policy should immediately report it to any supervisor or any People Solutions employee.

7.17. Vehicle Use and Insurance

Employees who use their personal vehicles for churchwide organization-related business must first provide proof of adequate insurance coverage and maintain the appropriate driver’s license. Such employees must promptly inform People Solutions of any restriction or revocation of their driver’s license and of any cancellation or modification of their personal vehicle insurance coverage.

7.18. Drug and Alcohol Use

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America seeks to provide a drug-free, healthful, and safe workplace. To promote this goal, churchwide employees are required to report to work capable of performing their jobs in a satisfactory manner.

While working remotely or in the Lutheran Center or other churchwide office locations, no employee may abuse, possess, distribute, sell, or be under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, or illegal drugs. Illegal drug use includes the unauthorized use or possession of a legal drug as well as the unauthorized use or possession of a controlled substance. The legal use of prescribed drugs is permitted on the job only if it does not impair an employee’s ability to perform the essential functions of the job effectively and in a manner that does not endanger other individuals in the workplace. Depending on the circumstances, employees may consume alcoholic beverages at church-related functions but are expected to use common sense and to avoid intoxication. Notwithstanding the foregoing, the ELCA does endeavor in good faith to engage in the interactive reasonable accommodation process with any employee lawfully taking medication for an underlying medical condition, to the extent required or permitted by applicable disability laws.

Violations of this policy may lead to notification of the appropriate law enforcement authorities, disciplinary action up to and including discharge, or required participation in a substance abuse rehabilitation or treatment

1 program. Any illegal substances found in the workplace will be confiscated and turned over to the
2 appropriate law enforcement agency.

3
4 The ELCA believes it is in the public interest to provide a program to assist employees suffering from
5 alcoholism or other chemical dependencies, through proper referral to appropriate community and professional
6 agencies for help. Employees with drug or alcohol problems that have not resulted in or are not the immediate
7 subject of disciplinary action may request approval to take time off to participate in a rehabilitation or treatment
8 program. Sick leave may be granted if the employee agrees to abstain from use of the problem substance; if the
9 employee abides by the ELCA's policies, rules, and prohibitions relating to conduct in the workplace; and if the
10 leave will not cause undue hardship on the ELCA. An employee in these circumstances may be requested to sign
11 a conditions-of-continued-employment agreement.

12
13 No Alteration of At-Will Employment: Neither the adoption nor implementation of this policy shall be construed as
14 creating a contractual obligation or modifying the at-will employment relationship between the ELCA and its
15 employees. The ELCA also reserves the right to modify or rescind this entire policy in whole or in part at any time
16 with or without notice.

17
18 Employees with questions about either this policy or issues related to drug or alcohol use in the workplace should
19 contact their supervisor or People Solutions.

20 21 **7.19. Additional Employment**

22 Employees may not accept additional employment that will conflict with their present job responsibilities.
23 Employees may not conduct other business or employment during ELCA business hours, on churchwide
24 premises, or utilizing churchwide offices or equipment. Such inappropriate additional employment includes
25 employment that interferes with the efficient performance of the employee's duties or creates a conflict of
26 interest. Failing to disclose additional employment or continuing to work at an additional job that interferes with
27 employment with the ELCA may be determined to be a conflict of interest for purposes of Section 2.10.2.

28 29 **7.20. Solicitation Prohibited**

30 To provide a productive and harmonious work environment, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
31 prohibits nonemployees from soliciting or distributing literature in the workplace at any time for any purpose.

32
33 The churchwide organization recognizes that employees may have interest in events and organizations outside the
34 workplace. Nonetheless, employees may not solicit or distribute literature concerning these activities during
35 working time. (Working time does not include meal periods, work breaks, or any other periods in which
36 employees are not on duty.)

37
38 There are approved email addresses that allow staff who opt in to send and receive certain "solicitations."
39
40

41 **8. DISCIPLINE AND DISCHARGE**

42 **8.1. Progressive Discipline**

43 Disciplinary action ordinarily follows counseling by the supervisor and may call for any of four steps—verbal
44 warning, performance improvement plan, suspension with or without pay, and termination of employment—
45 depending on the severity of the problem and the number of previous occurrences.

46
47 With respect to most disciplinary problems, the four steps mentioned above will normally be followed:

- 48 • A first offense may call for a verbal warning;
- 49 • The next offense may be followed by a written performance improvement plan;

- 1 • Another offense may lead to a suspension; and
- 2 • Still another offense may then lead to termination of employment.

3
4 By using such progressive discipline, the churchwide organization seeks to correct most employee problems and
5 improve performance at an early stage. The policy of progressive discipline does not change the employment-at-
6 will relationship, however. The churchwide organization may bypass any one or more of the progressive
7 disciplinary steps. Problems that are serious enough to justify either a suspension or discharge will be dealt with
8 accordingly even if counseling or warnings were not previously given.

9
10 Generally, in the administration of discipline, the organization will give primary consideration to the
11 employee's disciplinary record for the past two years. Depending on the frequency, pattern, and seriousness
12 of previous violations, however, the organization may consider the employee's total employment record with
13 the organization.

14 15 **8.2. Grounds for Discipline or Discharge**

16 It is not possible to list all the forms of behavior that are not acceptable at work; many are detailed throughout
17 these policies. The actions listed below are additional examples of conduct that may result in disciplinary action
18 up to and including termination of employment. They include, but are not limited to:

- 19 • Unsatisfactory job performance;
- 20 • Unauthorized disclosure of any confidential information;
- 21 • Violating any of the ELCA's policies or rules, whether described in these Personnel Policies or
22 elsewhere;
- 23 • Excessive tardiness, absenteeism, or absence without call (no call, no show);
- 24 • Theft of, or inappropriate removal or possession of, property or money;
- 25 • Falsifying time records or other organization-related documents, including but not limited to an
26 application for employment, a request for a leave, or any business document;
- 27 • Violating safety or health rules at work;
- 28 • Working or attempting to work under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs;
- 29 • Possessing, distributing, selling, transferring, or using alcohol or illegal drugs at work, while on duty, or
30 while operating employer-owned vehicles or equipment;
- 31 • Fighting or threatening violence in the workplace;
- 32 • Boisterous or disruptive activity in the workplace, including malicious gossip;
- 33 • Negligence or improper conduct that causes or could have caused injury to other person(s) or damage to
34 property, equipment, or vehicles;
- 35 • Intentionally injuring or damaging, or attempting to injure or damage, other people or property,
36 equipment, or vehicles;
- 37 • Insubordination or other disrespectful conduct toward managers or supervisors;
- 38 • Smoking or using other tobacco products in the building;
- 39 • Sexual or other unlawful or unwelcome harassment or inappropriate behavior;
- 40 • Possession of dangerous or unauthorized materials, such as explosives or firearms, in the office;
- 41 • Unauthorized absence from your workplace during the workday;
- 42 • Unauthorized use of computers, telephones, the Internet, or other electronic communications systems, the
43 mail system, or other equipment; and
- 44 • Other unsatisfactory performance or conduct, whether or not described in these Personnel Policies.

45
46 This list is not comprehensive and does not alter the at-will status of churchwide employees. The ELCA has and
47 will exercise the right to take appropriate action based on the individualized circumstances of a particular case.
48 The ELCA's action may include any level of discipline up to and including discharge based on conduct that
49 warrants that action, whether or not the conduct is described in these Personnel Policies.

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9. PROBLEM RESOLUTION PROCEDURE

All ELCA employees are expected to treat each other with respect and to offer positive and constructive criticism. The churchwide organization encourages an atmosphere in which any job-related problem, complaint, suggestion, or question receives a timely response. Not every problem can be resolved to everyone's total satisfaction, but the organization will consider complaints in accordance with the following procedure.

Employees who disagree with established policies, practices, or rules of conduct, or a particular decision or action, may express their concern through the problem resolution procedure described below. No employee acting in a reasonable manner will be penalized for voicing a complaint or using this problem resolution procedure. The steps described below are intended to facilitate an informal resolution, and attorneys are not allowed to participate directly in the process.

Step 1. The employee describes the problem to the immediate supervisor within five days after the problem arises. If the supervisor is unavailable or is the source of the problem, the employee may describe the problem to any other supervisor. If the matter is not resolved to the employee's satisfaction, they may proceed to Step 2.

Step 2. The employee presents a written complaint to the supervisor within five days of the occurrence of the discussion referred to in Step 1. The supervisor has ten days to give a written reply. If the written reply does not resolve the complaint to the employee's satisfaction, they may proceed to Step 3.

Step 3. Within five days after receiving the written reply referred to in Step 2, the employee sends the written complaint and the reply to People Solutions with an explanation of why Step 2 is not sufficient or fully satisfactory. The executive for People and DEI (or their designee) will try to send a written reply to the employee within ten days. If the written reply does not resolve the complaint to the employee's satisfaction, they may proceed to Step 4.

Step 4. Within five days after receiving the written reply referred to in Step 3, the employee sends a written statement, together with all prior documentation, to the executive for Administration requesting their consideration of the complaint and reasons why there has been no satisfactory resolution or treatment. The executive for Administration may, but is not required to, consult with other members of the Administrative Team and may, but is not required to, meet personally with the employee and others while considering the matter. The executive for Administration will send a written decision to the employee normally within 30 days after the receipt of the employee's written statement requesting their consideration. The executive for Administration's decision is final.

10. ENDING THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP

This Section 10 reviews the various ways the employment relationship may come to an end. Regardless of the reason for termination, the churchwide organization requests that the employee cooperate in the transition process and participate in an exit interview. This is especially true when an employee resigns or retires. In addition, the organization asks that, on the effective date of the resignation or retirement, all work assignments be completed to the extent possible and all files be brought up to date.

Exit interviews provide a way for the employee to reflect on their experience at the churchwide organization and to offer comments, advice, or suggestions regarding the organization's policies and practices.

10.1. Resignation or Retirement

Resignation or retirement is a voluntary decision on the part of the employee to terminate the employment relationship. The churchwide organization asks that employees give at least two weeks' advance notice. The last day of employment must be a day on which the employee is working.

10.2. Completion of a Specific Term

Employees of the churchwide organization serving for a specific term—whether because of a term call, election to an office with a specific term, a written employment agreement for a specified time, or other reason—will be separated from employment at the end of that period. The preceding sentence does not preclude employment in a different capacity.

10.3. Discharge Based on Performance or Behavior

Subject to any applicable restrictions and procedures in the ELCA's governing documents, there may be situations where the ELCA decides the employment relationship must be terminated for disciplinary reasons. The organization's preference for progressive discipline (see Section 8) does not alter the existence of an at-will relationship or preclude the imposition of discharge if the organization determines that discharge is the appropriate action.

The ELCA considers employment-related decisions on a case-by-case basis, and these Personnel Policies cannot address every situation that may arise. Therefore, nothing in this document prevents the dismissal of an employee where dismissal is in the best interest of the church. For example, personal misconduct by an employee that could adversely affect the ELCA's relationship with its synods, congregations, or the general public or the ELCA's ability to communicate its mission and message would lead to the prompt termination of employment.

All involuntary terminations must be approved by the executive for People and DEI and the head of the affected home area. Depending on the particular circumstances, it is generally appropriate to consult with the executive of Administration or with an officer of this church.

10.4. Termination for Other Reasons

There may be situations where this church decides to separate an employee or group of employees based on program changes or budgetary reasons having nothing to do with job performance. This church recognizes the difficulty of such separations, especially because, as noted in Section 5.15, unemployment insurance benefits are not available. Therefore, this church will attempt to achieve mutually acceptable termination arrangements with the separating employee. Depending on the particular situation, such arrangements might include salary continuation for a specified period, a lump-sum payment, subsidized health benefits for a specified period, outplacement assistance, or a combination of such benefits.

10.5. Job Abandonment

If an employee fails to report to work or call their supervisor for three consecutive days when scheduled to work, the organization may determine the employee's job has been abandoned as of the first day of absence.

10.6. Rehire

A former employee's eligibility for rehire may depend on past performance. Former employees are not guaranteed rehire. Generally, rehired employees start over with respect to eligibility for benefits if the break in the employment relationship lasted more than a year.

10.7. Non-Disclosure Provisions

1 The ELCA limits the use of non-disclosure provisions to the small minority of cases in which they are truly
2 necessary to protect confidential and sensitive materials related to donors, personnel, legal, information
3 technology, and similar categories of information.
4
5

6 **11. BIOMETRIC INFORMATION SECURITY POLICY**

7 **11.1. Purpose**

8 The ELCA's Biometric Information Security Policy describes the ELCA's procedures for safeguarding, retaining,
9 and destroying biometric data.

10
11 The Illinois Biometric Information ~~Security~~-Privacy Act (BIPA) defines biometric identifiers as a retina or
12 iris scan, fingerprint, voiceprint, or scan of hand or face geometry.
13

14 The ELCA does not directly use or process the biometric information of its employees. However, third party
15 devices requiring or providing for the use of biometric identifiers (to gain access to those devices) are used
16 throughout the organization. This policy addresses the use of those devices by ELCA employees as it pertains to
17 the retention and deletion of biometric identifiers.
18

19 **11.2. Policy**

20 The ELCA's policy is to protect biometric data in accordance with applicable laws and industry standards,
21 including, but not limited to, the Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act.
22

23 An employee's biometric data will not be collected or otherwise obtained by the ELCA aside from the employee's
24 use of third-party devices and technology provided by the ELCA to the employee in furtherance of the
25 employee's work-related tasks.
26

27 In no event shall the ELCA willingly and knowingly provide an employee's biometric information to any
28 unauthorized third party. Nor, will the ELCA sell, lease, or trade any biometric information to any third
29 party, unless as required or authorized by law.
30

31 This policy does not govern the employee's use of personal technology or devices to perform work related tasks.
32

33 **11.3. Retention Schedule**

34 When the initial purpose for which one's biometric information was provided has passed, all biometric data are
35 permanently erased and are not archived or kept on ELCA servers or devices. In most instances, this means that
36 the ELCA's information technology team will wipe and reset all devices (i.e. mobile device, computers, etc.). As
37 such, an employee's biometric data will be permanently destroyed within one year of an employee's separation
38 from employment with the ELCA. In no event, shall any biometric information be kept more than 1 year following
39 an employee's last interaction with the ELCA.
40

41 **11.4. Guidelines for Storage and Permanent Destruction of Biometric Identifiers**

42 The ELCA will store, transmit, and protect biometric data using a reasonable standard of care and in a manner that
43 is congruent with or exceeds standards of care followed in maintaining other confidential employee information.
44

45 All biometric data stored on ELCA servers or devices are encrypted. Additionally, third party devices used by the
46 ELCA, requiring, or providing for the use of biometric information, are encrypted.
47

48 The ELCA will use industry accepted best practices to wipe devices and permanently delete and destroy biometric

1 information.

2

3 A copy of this policy shall be made available to the public at elca.org.

EMPLOYEE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

By signing this form, I acknowledge that as of the date of my signature as shown below, I have received a copy of the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies dated ~~November 2023~~ April 2024 and as updated from time to time, from my employer, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (referred to for convenience below as the “ELCA”). I understand that the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies describe important information about working for the ELCA and that it is my responsibility to read and become familiar with the contents of the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies and to comply with these policies. I also understand that the ELCA may change or add to these policies or adopt or change other policies as it deems appropriate, with or without advance notice, and it is my responsibility to become familiar with such revisions. I further understand that I should ask my supervisor or Human Resources any questions not answered in the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies.

I acknowledge that I have entered into my employment relationship with the ELCA voluntarily and that I am an employee at will. I understand that, subject to applicable law, the employment relationship of an employee at will can be terminated at any time for any legal reason, with or without cause or notice. I understand that no manager or supervisor has any authority to change this employment-at-will relationship.

I acknowledge that I have received the Biometric Information Security Policy and that I voluntarily consent to the collection, retention, disclosure, and destruction of my biometric data and biometric information as outlined in the Biometric Information Security Policy. I acknowledge I may revoke this consent by notifying People Solutions in writing and that I should discontinue the use of any biometric services offered on work-related applications on my personal devices at such time as I may revoke my consent.

If I am on an ELCA roster and I receive a call from the Church Council for churchwide employment, I understand that the Church Council has the right to terminate my roster status call and that it will terminate in any case whenever this employment terminates.

Furthermore, I acknowledge that the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies are not a contract of employment, and I understand that the ELCA has and will exercise the right to take necessary action, including discharge, for conduct that requires such action, whether or not such conduct is referred to in this document.

Employee’s Signature

Date Signed

Advisory Member Presentation Lunch Assignments
April 2024 Church Council Meeting

| Latino Ministries Association: <i>Pentecost</i> | American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association: <i>Advent</i> | Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage: <i>5th fl. Screening Room</i> | Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice: <i>10th fl. HR Training Room</i> | Asian and Pacific Islander Association: <i>6th fl. Planning Room</i> | African Descent Lutheran Association: <i>Epiphany I and II</i> | Reconciling Works: <i>Augsburg</i> |
|--|--|--|--|---|---|---|
| Lisa Ahlness | Kevin Anderson | Leroy Cannon | Benjamin Bergren | Nick Billardello | Susan Boxberger | Heather Brown |
| Jamie Brusehoff | Bill Callister | Kristy Henriksen | Divine | Joanne Engquist | Kerry Fehrman | Sheena Foster |
| Hans Giller | Emily Hartner | Mitch McCartney | Pamela Hoh | Cherrish Holland | Gwendolyn King | David Lenz |
| Tara Lynn | Olivia Martin-Call | Jennifer Trom | Joel Miller | Ethan Miller | Kari Olsen | Iván Perez |
| Linda Rivera | Noah Roux | Brenda Bos | Andraine Sinaga | Loren Solberg | Kjersten Sullivan | Loni Taylor |
| Christopher deForest | Laurie Jungling | Pedro Suárez | Craig Schweitzer | Keoni Newman | Amy Current | Suzanne Dillahunt |
| Mark Goodman | James Dunlop | Suzanne Burke | Tim Blevins | Scott Johnson | Linda Post Bushkofsky | Annette Shoemaker |
| | | | | David Quello | Linda Grainger | Betsy Miller |
| | | | | | | |
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| | | | | | | |

Ecumenical Visit Reports

Name: Kjersten Sullivan

Meeting: Reformed Church in America (RCA) General Synod Council meeting

Place: Zoom

Date: March 19-20, 2024

The RCA General Synod Council (GSC) met via Zoom in late March 2024.

After approving the agenda and minutes, the meeting began with appointing members to the Pastoral Formation Oversight Board and the Investment Advisory Committee.

The GSC then heard nominees for the moderator and vice moderator for the 2024-2025 year. The vote for moderator and vice moderator took place later in the meeting.

First on the agenda was a discussion of congregations requesting to be relieved of assessment responsibilities. Several were due to crises in the congregation. Longer discussion ensued over a congregation who had left the RCA.

Following were reports from the Investment Advisory Committee and the Audit and Risk Management Committee.

Executive Limitations – General Secretary Report

The GSC polity includes a series of Executive Limitations which provide a framework within which the General Secretary performs his work. The General Secretary reports on how (or if) he is in compliance with those limitations.

The General Secretary reports on a variety of these executive limitations throughout the year. At this meeting, the executive limitations reported on were:

- EL-1 Global Executive Limitation
- EL-2 Treatment of Staff
- EL-3 Financial Planning/Budgeting
- EL-4 Financial Condition and Activities
- EL-5 Financial Recording and Reporting
- EL-11 (special) – Relationships with Subsidiary Organizations

The RCA too is doing antiracism work among their denomination. The GSC heard a report from the director of diversity and belonging about a planned antiracism training at their upcoming General Synod.

Final action for the day was a check-in on the various commissions. Each commission receives a review every five years, with this year being the year for the Commission on Christian Action and Christian Unity. Members of the GSC checked in on and gave brief updates from the remaining eight commissions.

Day two began with the General Secretary giving reports on a variety of Ends according to their reporting schedule. Ends are foci of the RCA as an organization. The Ends reported on were:

- E-2 Transformed & Transforming
- E-3 Church Multiplication
- E-4 Global Mission
- E-5 Multicultural and Multiracial Future Freed from Racism

The afternoon was spent discussing plans for the annual General Synod (like Churchwide Assembly, but it happens every year), this summer in Tucson.

Like the ELCA, the RCA also has a variety of racial and ethnic councils. The Native American Indigenous Council is in the process of being reconstituted, and there was discussion around their proposed bylaws. Reports also were heard from the African American Black Council, the Council for Hispanic Ministries, and the Council for Pacific and Asian American Ministries.

Four churches requested and received permission to transfer from one classis to another. A classis is like a synod.

And finally, the GSC elected new leadership for the upcoming year. Judy Nelson was elected to be Moderator with Brian Engel being elected to serve as Vice Moderator.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the ELCA in this important role.

Synod Visit Reports

Name: Pr. Joanne Engquist
Synod Visited: Alaska Synod
Visit Date: March 23, 2024
Purpose of Visit: Synod Council Meeting (online)

What are the joys and opportunities happening within the Synod?

The synod is preparing for its assembly in April when a new bishop will be elected after the retirement of Bp. Shelley Wickstrom, who has served as bishop for 12 years. There was significant conversation about decreasing mission support because of decreased financial support from churchwide to the synod. The council seemed a bit concerned about how to budget compensation for 2024 and 2025 without knowing who will serve as bishop. They also discussed synod guidelines as a maximum amount of compensation which might be an area for conversation within the region or with churchwide leaders. There also were updates from their clusters detailing synod activities and transitions. A section of the meeting focused also on committees, task forces, and programming – and it was heartening to listen to reports of these missional activities.

How did the visit deepen the relationship between the Synod and the Churchwide Organization?

They were particularly interested in updates on the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC).

I found it striking to hear of the creative endeavors undertaken in the synod and some struggles within many of the synod's communities and congregations. I reflected back to the leadership that I heard the distinctiveness of their territory, and they named appreciation for a recognition of that. They also asked for additional information on equipping people for outreach in their communities and I pointed them to look for resources through the "God's Love Made Real" emphasis.

I assured the synod council of my ongoing personal prayers for the synod, as they enter holy week and continue their discernment for new ecclesial leadership.

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 work of the task force is organized into three phases: self-education; research; and communication of research findings.

The Educational Debt Task Force is currently in the research phase. This phase 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.

To address these objectives, the task force organized itself into two research-focused sub-teams: 1.) Synod Debt Reduction Programs; and 2.) Survey of Rostered Ministers.

Synod Debt Reduction Programs sub-team

The purpose of the Synod Debt Reduction Programs sub-team is to determine what activities are happening in ELCA synods around educational debt reduction. In November 2023, members of the sub-team identified five synod bishops and staff who were willing to discuss their synods' educational debt reduction programs. The sub-team sought to learn more about the parameters of the programs, as well as how the programs have been funded, evaluated, and sustained.

The information gathered through these conversations was used to develop a survey of synod bishops. The purpose of the survey was to determine the number of synods that had educational debt reduction programs for rostered ministers, to understand more deeply what those programs provided in the way of educational debt reduction, and to learn how synods evaluated the success of their programs.

The survey was conducted from Dec. 8-22, 2023. All synod bishops were invited to participate, whether their synod had an active educational debt reduction program or not. Bishops and staff from 48 synods provided responses. The sub-team is in the process of identifying a list of synods with whom to have more detailed conversation about the specifics of their programs. Ultimately, the goal is to share this information with all synods bishops and create resources to be used by synod staff, and ELCA candidates and rostered ministers.

Survey of Rostered Ministers

The purpose of the Survey of Rostered Ministers sub-team is to develop a survey to learn more about the extent, experience, and impact of educational debt on ELCA rostered ministers. In December 2023, the Survey of Rostered Ministers sub-team developed and tested its survey. The purposes of the survey were to:

- Gain a more comprehensive understanding of how educational debt is impacting our leaders, their families, their call processes, and their ministry;
- Provide quantitative data to accompany narratives we heard during in-person interviews;
- Gather information to address the pay equity analysis requested by the ELCA Church Council (CC23.04.08I)¹; and

¹ Several members of the sub-team are in the process of merging and analyzing data from Portico Benefit Services and data from the ELCA churchwide organization to further explore pay equity in the ELCA.

- Help shape recommendations of actions to be taken across the ELCA ecology to bring relief to as many rostered ministers as possible.

The survey was conducted from Jan. 25-Feb. 9, 2024. All rostered ministers, active and retired, were invited to participate, even if they no longer carried or never carried educational debt. In all, over 3,500 rostered ministers completed the survey. The responses are currently being analyzed.

White Lutherans Organize for Racial Justice

Release: March 5, 2024

Contact: michael.wilker@edlarj.org

White Lutherans from across the US gathered in Minneapolis March 1-3, to organize themselves to collaborate for racial justice in the church and society with leaders in the Global Majority. This group is one of six ethnic-specific associations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the whitest denomination in the US, according to the Pew Research Center.

To clarify the organization's purpose the Assembly dropped "European Descent" and renamed itself the ELCA Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice.

The Assembly elected Desta Goehner, an ELCA leader from Southern California, as its new president. Goehner said, "We wanted to be clear about our name and our work. In accountable relationships with the ethnic associations and the ELCA director for racial justice, Jen De Leon, we will be focused on dismantling white supremacy in ourselves, reducing the harm of racism in our ministries and congregations, and working toward the liberation of all people. We will follow and support these leaders of the Global Majority in the work they have already been doing."

The heart of the Assembly was a pilgrimage to the George Floyd Global Square, a living memorial for individuals and organizations to unite, remember, and resist racial injustice with victims and their families. Angela Harrelson, George Floyd's aunt, and five other community leaders shared with the assembly about how racial violence affects their families and neighborhoods.

Jenny Leenay, a community leader, fashion designer, and organizer of the People's Closet, told the Lutherans, "We already have a Savior. We don't need other saviors. We need resources and opportunities. We need people who want to make a friend, to know our names. People who want to have a conversation."

After the pilgrimage, the Assembly gathered at Say Their Names Cemetery, which commemorates the lives and deaths of over 100 Black and Brown people killed by police brutality and other violence, including George Floyd who was murdered on May 25, 2020.

From the cemetery, the Brass Solidarity Band led the Assembly in a procession past the place where George Floyd was killed to Calvary Lutheran Church. They sang African American spirituals "I Want Jesus to Walk with Me," "We Shall Not Be Moved," and "Not Going to Let Nobody Turn Me Around."

Outgoing president Shari Seifert said, "We are so grateful to George Floyd Global Memorial and the community members, Linda Taylor, Marquise Bowie, Jenny Leenay, Kia Bible, Georgio Wright, and Angela Harrelson who shared their stories, encouraged us to act in our communities, and guided us through a pilgrimage through George Floyd Square."

Seifert is also a resident of Minneapolis, a community member at George Floyd Square, and a member of Calvary Lutheran Church, one of the assembly's hosts.

At the worship service, the Rev. Dr. Jia Starr Brown preached. "In Micah 6:8, the prophet reminds us that God requires us to 'do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God.' The Hebrew word used for 'mercy' is *hesed* which translates to deep, loving relationship, loyal and unfailing."

"*Hesed* requires time, energy, commitment, and investment," continued Starr Brown. "'Doing justice' is a critical part of that. I do not enter into a *hesed* relationship with anyone who does not actively work for my overall good: defending my character and advocating for my justice when it is questioned, compromised, or stolen. And neither should you."

The day ended with an author event facilitated by Dawn Rundman, of 1517 Media, the ELCA publishing house. The Rev. Angela T. !Khabeb, the Rev. Jenny Sung, Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, Dr. Starr Brown, and Shari Seifert have each authored books and chapters calling white people to bear witness to racial violence and collaborate for racial justice. Seifert said, "I am deeply thankful to my fellow authors who showed up and shared their wisdom."

The Assembly also thanked outgoing Board members Kathy Long, the Rev. Kelly France, the Rev. Elizabeth Rawlings, the Rev. Andrew Tengwall, and Shari Seifert. Seifert describes herself as bi-vocational, "I sell houses and I dismantle white supremacy in the church."

"Leaders like Shari and the other board members have shown up for racial justice in our church," said Goehner, the new president of White Lutherans for Racial Justice. "They created this strong foundation and trustworthy relationships for us to keep building. The work they have done has set the tone for us to increase our capacity, network, and impact."

The Assembly elected new Board members and officers. Including Goehner, the new officers are the Rev. Michael Wilker, vice president; the Rev. Jennifer Thomas, treasurer; and the Rev. Dawn Roginski, secretary.

For more information see:

George Floyd Global Memorial, <https://georgefloydglobalmemorial.org/>

People's Closet on Instagram [@_The_PeoplesCloset](https://www.instagram.com/The_PeoplesCloset)

1517 Media <https://www.augsburgfortress.org/>

ELCA Racial Justice Ministries and Ethnic Specific Ministries

<https://www.elca.org/Our-Work/Congregations-and-Synods/Ethnic-Specific-and-Multicultural-Ministries>

Contact: Desta.Goehner@edlarj.org or Michael.Wilker@edlarj.org

En Bloc Items

I. Budget and Finance Committee

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

In April 2021, the Church Council adopted CC21.04.06a regarding the Appointment of Assistant Officers. A revision is being proposed to update the appointments. The proposed revisions are as follows:

1. Appointment of Assistant Officers

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

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

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

RESOLVED, that prior resolutions adopted by this Council, including CC21.04.06a and the prior actions identified in CC15.04.31b, are hereby rescinded and replaced by this action.

II. Executive Committee

III. Legal and Constitutional Review Committee

A. Pre-Assembly Identification Process for Nominees for Presiding Bishop Election

An amendment is being proposed to ELCA Constitution continuing resolution 19.01.A23. The change is to amend the timing for the release of nominee names from 60 days prior to the churchwide assembly to 30 days prior. This amendment allows for the completion of the synod assembly season before potential nominees are publicly identified.

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

Recommended:

To adopt the following amendment to the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

19.01.A234. *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 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 **60 30** days prior to the Churchwide Assembly, the biographical*

information received from those persons open to consideration shall be distributed to the voting members.

- IV. Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee
- V. Service and Justice Committee
- VI. Christian Community and Leadership Committee
- VII. Other Items

A. Approval of the Minutes

The minutes of the Church Council meeting on [Nov. 9-12, 2023](#) have been provided to council members electronically on Church Council Microsoft Teams.

The minutes of the council's Executive Committee meetings on [Nov. 9, 2023](#), [Dec. 12, 2023](#), [Jan. 17, 2024](#), [Feb. 20, 2024](#), and [March 19, 2024](#) have been provided electronically to members on Church Council Teams. Minutes for the Jan. 10, 2024 meeting held in executive session were added to the protocol file in the Office of the Secretary.

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. 9-12, 2023 meeting of the Church Council; and
To ratify actions of the council's Executive Committee as indicated in the minutes of the Nov. 9, 2023, Dec. 12, 2023, Jan. 10, 2024, Jan. 17, 2024, Feb. 20, 2024, and March 19, 2024 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 advisory board of directors of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary at Lenoir-Rhyne University to a first term beginning June 1, 2024, and expiring May 31, 2028: The Rev. Kenneth Charles Blyth, the Rev. Jennifer Goodwin Roberts, Deacon Tammy Jones West, and the Rev. Michael Lonny Rhyne;

To re-elect to the advisory board of directors of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary at Lenoir-Rhyne University to a term beginning June 1, 2024, and expiring May 31, 2026: The Rev. Richard Goeres; and

To re-elect to the advisory board of directors of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary at Lenoir-Rhyne University to a second term beginning June 1, 2024, and expiring May 31, 2028: The Rev. Angela Ford Nelson.

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, 2024, and expiring June 30, 2027: The Rev. Niklaus Christian Schillack and the Rev. Abraham D. Allende.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To re-elect to the board of directors of United Lutheran Seminary to a second term beginning July 1, 2024, and expiring June 30, 2027: Ms. Elizabeth Baran Wagner.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To elect to the board of trustees of the Publishing House of the ELCA – 1517 Media – to fill a vacancy with a term expiring in August 2025: Mr. Kurt Barneson Galvez.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To appoint to the board of directors of Mosaic, Inc. with a three-year term expiring in 2027: Mr. Peter J. Enko.

Publishing House (1517 Media) Board of Trustees

Mr. Kurt Barneson Galvez

Synod: Sierra Pacific Synod, ELCA, (2A)
Congregation: St John Lutheran Church (ID: 05136) - Sacramento, California
Birthdate: 02/05/1990 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

1701 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95811 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

1727 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95811 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 5626653381 (Cell) Alternate: 9169301286 (Work)

Email:

kbarneson@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Whitworth University (Double Major) (2009-2012): Bachelor Of Business Admin
Whitworth University (B.A. in Accounting) (2009-2012): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

Director of Finance (07/15/2015 - Present)
California Chamber of Commerce
Sacramento, CA

Previous Employment:

Gilbert CPA's - Senior Audit Associate (2012-2015)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

St. John's Sacramento - Church Treasurer (2020-2024)
St. John's Sacramento - Church Council Member (2019-2024)
St. John's Sacramento - Catechumenate Leader (2014-2024)

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

I have found the ELCA to be a place of welcome and refuge that has allowed me the time and safety to examine my faith and confirm that Christ's love and grace are indeed for me. To this board position, I would bring an inquisitive mind, a hunger for learning and a heart that wants the world to know the saving grace of Jesus. My career as a CPA has equipped me for this service. My 3 years as an auditor with Gilbert CPA's were spent auditing non-profit organizations, learning about their business structures, revenue streams and board management. The following 8 years have been spent working at the California Chamber of Commerce, whose business model includes publishing and distributing HR compliance materials to businesses throughout CA. I've been on the St. John's Church Council since 2019 and the Treasurer at St. John's since 2020, volunteer leadership positions that have given me insight into the world of church finance and the importance of honest and transparent leadership.

Reference: Frank Espegren **Phone:**9164440874 **E-mail:**frank.espegren@stjohnslc.org

Relationship: Pastor/Parishioner Relationship

1/27/2024 11:11:08 PM

Other committee or board

Mosaic, Inc.

Mr. Peter Jay Enko

Synod: Central States Synod, ELCA, (4B)
Congregation: Atonement Lutheran Church (ID: 10197) - Overland Park, Kansas
Birthdate: 01/29/1964 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)
10311 Sagamore Lane
Leawood, KS 66206 United States

Telephone:
Preferred: 8167219043 (Cell)

Email:
peter.enko@huschblackwell.com (Work)

Educational Institutions:
College of William and Mary (1982-1986): Bachelor Of Science
University of Virginia (1988-1990): Master Of Arts In Psychology
University of Virginia (1990-1993): Doctor Of Jurisprudence

Employment:
Partner (03/09/1998 - Present)
Husch Blackwell
Kansas City, MO

Previous Employment:
Missouri Department of Mental Health (1995-1998)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:
Portico Benefits Services Board of Trustees (2013-2022)

What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?
My involvement with the Mosaic Board of Directors is the continuation of a humbling spiritual journey during which I've been blessed with many opportunities to use my legal and healthcare industry knowledge in support of others. I'm honored to have the chance to work with such a tremendously talented group of individuals who live out Mosaic's credo to love and serve each day. Connecting with them has allowed me to grow as a husband, a father, a son, a co-worker and has drawn me closer to God. I'm hopeful that I can give back just a small portion of all that I have received during my association with this wonderful organization.

Reference: Jim Vos **Phone:**6128100604 **E-mail:**jvos@cresa.com
Relationship: Former Fellow Trustee for Portico Benefits Services

12/17/2023 10:21:21 PM

Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

The Rev. Kenneth Charles Blyth

Synod: Florida-Bahamas Synod, ELCA, (9E)
Congregation: St Armands Key Lutheran Church (ID: 10505) - Sarasota, Florida
Birthdate: 07/04/1965 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 9E **Leader Key:**
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Work)

40 N Adams Drive
Sarasota, FL 34236 United States

Residential Mailing Address:

6129 35th Ct E
Bradenton, FL 34203 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 9417240449 (Cell)
Alternate: 9413881234 (Work)

Email:

pastor@saklc.com (Work)

Educational Institutions:

University of St. Andrews (Scotland) (1993-1997): Bachelor Of Divinity
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (1997-2001): Master Of Divinity
Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary (2011-2017): Doctor Of Ministry

Employment:

Pastor (08/01/2018 - Present)
St. Armands Key Lutheran Church, Sarasota FL
Sarastoa, FL

Previous Employment:

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Hernando FL (2008-2018)
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Baldwinsville NY (2000-2007)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Secretary, Florida-Bahamas Synod (2018-)
Chair, Synod Governance Committee (2022-)
Secretary, ELCA Region 9 Council (2023-)

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

The skills/gifts which I bring to this position include: 1. A passion for seminary education & the process of pastoral formation. 2. Ability to work well within/lead a team. (I chair the Governance Committee of the F-BS.) 3. Understanding of the dynamics/challenges of change/transition. 4. Almost twenty-five years of ministry. 5. Experience serving in challenging situations, e.g. Bishop's Panel, Consultation Committee, & Vice President's Panel. 6. Understanding of the wider Church through my role as Secretary of the F-BS & Region 9 Council. 7. Experience with chaplaincy in the college setting through serving as President of the Association of Campus Ministry, overseeing the chaplaincy program at several Sarasota area colleges. 8. Ability to work with a diverse range of colleagues. I chair the Sarasota Ministerial Association's antibigotry task force combating racism and antisemitism. 9. Context: My son is an undergrad at SCF & my daughter is a doctoral student at LSU.

Reference: Bp. Pedro Suárez **Phone:**9544807347 **E-mail:**PedroS@fbsynod.org

Relationship: He is my Bishop

Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

The Rev. Richard John Goeres

Synod: Virginia Synod, ELCA, (9B)
Congregation: Good Shepherd Lutheran Church (ID: 07686) - Raleigh, North Carolina
Birthdate: 12/26/1956 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 9A **Leader Key:** L007907
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

147 Dover Circle
Norfolk, VA 23505 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 5407581155 (Cell)

Email:

Rgoeres1112020@gmail.com (Work)

Educational Institutions:

Drew University (1992-1994): Doctor Of Ministry
LTSS (1980-1984): Master Of Divinity
JMU (1975-1979): Bachelor Of Science

Employment:

Senior Pastor (08/01/2010 - 10/31/2020)
First Lutheran Church
Norfolk, Va

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

LFSVA (2018-2024)
LTSS (2016-2024)
Roanoke College Board (2017-2021)

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

My Mission Statement Reflect the presence of God through my living and sharing so that as I walk with others they may be in awe of the Spirit's flame within them which guides, comforts and causes thanksgiving.

Reference: Charles Poston **Phone:**7576212322 **E-mail:**cposton46@gmail.com

Relationship: Friend

3/27/2024 10:32:47 AM

Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

The Rev. Angela Ford Nelson

Synod: The United Methodist Church
Congregation: Ecumenical
Birthdate: 04/23/1969 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** African American/Black Non-Hispanic
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

127 Spring Road
Walterboro, SC 29488 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 8647874633 (Home)

Email:

angelaforndnelson@yahoo.com (Work)

Educational Institutions:

(Date not specified.):

Employment:

Sr. Pastor (03/01/2021 - Present)
The United Methodist Church
Walterboro, SC

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

New Life UMC

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

I am an LTSS Alum and ordained elder serving the local church and beyond. It is my call and privilege to serve LTSS and it's constituents.

Reference: Rev. Joey McDonald **Phone:**8036711691 **E-mail:**wadistadmin@umcsc.org

Relationship: Colleague

Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

The Rev. Michael Lonny Rhyne

Synod: New England Synod, ELCA, (7B)
Congregation: Redeemer Lutheran Church (ID: 03524) - Bangor, Maine
Birthdate: 10/23/1974 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 7B **Leader Key:** L030758
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

525 Goosepecker Ridge Rd
Montville, ME 04941 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 2077459896 (Cell)
Alternate: 2079453166 (Work)

Email:

Revrhyne@fastmail.com (Work)

Educational Institutions:

United Lutheran Seminary (2023-2027): Doctor Of Ministry
Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (2005-2009): Master Of Divinity
University of Alabama (2001-2003): Master Of Fine Arts

Employment:

Pastor (10/01/2021 - 03/14/2028)
Redeemer Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Bangor, ME

Previous Employment:

Bishop - Allegheny Synod (ELCA) (2014-2021)
Pastor - Geeseytown/Newry Lutheran Parish (2009-2014)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Board Member - Camp Calumet ELCA - Freedom NH (2022-2025)
United Lutheran Seminary Board (2019-2021)
ELCA Synodical and Churchwide Relations Committee (2014-2021)

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

This chance to serve on the LTSS Advisory Council came unexpectedly. I recognize this is a time of new beginnings for LTSS. I believe my experience on the ULS board during a transition can be of help during this next chapter in the life of LTSS. Working with the ULS transition, I was reminded to trust God in the midst of uncertainty and when the way is not clearly laid out before you. Often that is all you can do. Working as Co-Chair of the Presidential Search that brought Dr Guy Erwin to ULS, reminded me how God will work for the good in all things. That search took place in the midst of the pandemic lockdown. Seeing the ULS transition and watching the LTSS/LR merger and the challenges that came from that, I have learned to have patience with institutions. I know that the way to bring about positive change is to take the long view, trust God, and keep moving in the direction you need to go. With God's help and guidance, I will work with colleagues toward that best future for LTS

Reference: Gary Gable **Phone:**8145926193 **E-mail:**gableelec@verizon.net

Relationship: Friend and former Synod Council President

Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

The Rev. Jennifer Goodwin Roberts

Synod: Southeastern Synod, ELCA, (9D)
Congregation: Lutheran Church of the Redeemer (ID: 05771) - Atlanta, Georgia
Birthdate: 03/26/1982 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 9D **Leader Key:** L040581
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

42 Mill Ridge Pl
Newnan, GA 30263 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 8652013631 (Cell)

Email:

jennifer.goodwin.roberts@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary (2016-2020): Master Of Divinity
Tusculum College (2009-2012): Master Of Arts In Education
East Tennessee State University (2005-2008): Bachelor Of Arts In Ed.

Employment:

Associate Pastor of Congregational Care (01/08/2024 - Present)
Lutheran Church of the Redeemer
Atlanta, GA

Previous Employment:

Resurrection Lutheran Church (Newnan, GA) (2021-2023)
Lutheran Church of the Epiphany (Winston Salem, NC) (2020-2021)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Southeastern Synod Stewardship, Youth, Vitality Teams (2021-)
St John's Lutheran (Clinton, SC) - Supply Vicar (2019-2020)
St. John's Lutheran Church (Knoxville, TN) - Cong. Leader (2007-2016)

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

As an alumni of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, I continue to be formed and form others utilizing the education, experience, and spiritual formation I received at LTSS. Theological education is an essential piece of the church's foundation, specifically as our leadership, preaching, and counsel communicate who God is, how God acts, who we are as Christ followers, and how we are called to act. This communication and formation begins to happen before, within, and following theological education. I believe as a rostered minister I can serve this committee by offering a perspective that values theological education, while also utilizing my experience as a new rostered minister through COVID and my passion about seeing the church hold tradition and transformation together as we move forward to form the church.

Reference: Bishop Kevin Strickland **Phone:**6158293981 **E-mail:**kstrickland@elca-ses.org

Relationship: Bishop Strickland is my bishop in the Southeastern Synod

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Other committee or board

Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary

Deacon Tammy Jones West

Synod: North Carolina Synod, ELCA, (9B)
Congregation: Morning Star Lutheran Church (ID: 04203) - Matthews, North Carolina
Birthdate: 11/20/1968 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 9B **Leader Key:**
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

1056 Barnette Farm Lane
Monroe, NC 28110 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 8283081362 (Cell)

Email:

tammyjoneswest@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Lenoir-Rhyne University (1987-1991): Bachelor Of Arts
Luther Seminar (2006-2008): Master Of Arts

Employment:

Director 2024 ELCA Youth Gathering (02/01/2022 - 10/31/2024)
ELCA
Chicago, IL

Previous Employment:

NC Synod (1996-2022)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Assistant to the Bishop, NC Synod (2017-2022)
Director of Operations, 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering (2016-2018)
Proclaim Story Team, 2015 ELCA Youth Gathering (2013-2015)

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

I was a little surprised to be asked to serve on this team as a graduate of another seminary. I do have a deep love of Lenoir-Rhyne and understand the connection my colleagues have to the place that formed them. I also understand the need for change in a world that doesn't look the same as it did when the ELCA was formed. I do have a good bit of relational capital built on my years of serving this church. I hope to bring a sense of trust to the process of moving forward in this new way.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Church Council
2. Board of Pensions (Portico Benefit Services)
3. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: Bishop Tim Smith **Phone:**7046334861 **E-mail:**tsmith@nclutheran.org

Relationship: Former staff

Other committee or board

Trinity Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Abraham D Allende

Synod: Northeastern Ohio Synod, ELCA, (6E)
Congregation: Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (ID: 04456) - Canton, Ohio
Birthdate: 10/31/1944 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** Latino/Latina
Rostered: 6E **Leader Key:** L027898
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)
6513 Strawberry Fields Cir NE
Canton , OH 44721 United States

Telephone:
Preferred: 3302093991 (Cell)
Alternate: 3304330316 (Home)

Email:
abraham.d.allende@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:
California University of Pennsylvania (1962-1966): Bachelor Of Science In Education
Kent State University (1967-1971): No Degree Earned
Trinity Lutheran Seminary (2000-2002): Teem Program

Employment:
Bishop (09/01/2014 - 11/30/2020)
Northeastern Ohio Synod
Cuyahoga Falls , OH

Previous Employment:
The Lutheran Church of the Covenant (2009-2014)
Iglesia Luterana la Trinidad (2003-2009)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:
Strategy for Authentic Diversity (2016-2019)
Strategic Diversity Advisory Team (2019-2022)
Trinity Lutheran Seminary Advisory Board (2021-2024)

What are the gifts, skills, experiences and areas of expertise that you would bring to this work?
As a person of color (Afro-Latino), I feel called to be a voice for the communities that worship in, as well as serve our congregations, and yet receive little to no recognition or acknowledgement as children of God.

Reference: The Rev Herb Garnes **Phone:**3303549467 **E-mail:**Herbsg3@gmail.com
Relationship: Friend

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Other committee or board

Trinity Lutheran Seminary

The Rev. Niklaus Christian Schillack

Synod: Southeast Michigan Synod, ELCA, (6A)
Congregation: Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church (ID: 11223) - Bloomfield Hills, Michigan
Birthdate: 10/10/1976 **Gender:** Man
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Rostered: 6A **Leader Key:** L027520
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

8914 El Dorado Drive
White Lake, MI 48386 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 2486607708 (Cell)
Alternate: 2486465041 (Work)

Email:

prnik@bslcmi.org (Work)

Educational Institutions:

Luther Seminary (2010-2015): Doctor Of Ministry
Trinity Lutheran Seminary (1998-2002): Master Of Divinity
Eastern Michigan University (1994-1998): Bachelor Of Business Admin

Employment:

Senior Pastor (04/01/2019 - Present)
Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church
Bloomfield Hills, MI

Previous Employment:

Samaritas (2015-2019)
Shepherd of the Lakes Lutheran Church, Walled Lake, MI (2011-2015)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

Trinity Lutheran Seminary Advisory Board (2021-)
Synod Council, Southeast Michigan Synod, ELCA (2021-)
Compensation Guidelines Task Force, Southeast Michigan Synod, ELCA (2009-)

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

It continues to be an honor to serve on the Trinity Lutheran Seminary Advisory Board, and as chair of that team, also to serve as a Trustee for Capital University. I see many opportunities for the seminary to interact synergistically with the rest of Capital University, the Columbus area community, and the whole ELCA to develop leaders for Christ's church in the world. In particular, my background in fundraising, accounting, and leadership development have been extremely helpful in these roles.

Alternate Committee Nominations:

1. Publishing House (1517 Media) Board of Trustees
2. Mission Investment Fund Board of Trustees
3. ELCA Foundation Board

Reference: The Rev, Christopher Carr **E-mail:** mchungajichris@gmail.com

Relationship: Colleague, Friend, and Former Classmate

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Other committee or board

United Lutheran Seminary

Ms. Elizabeth Baran Wagner

Synod: New Jersey Synod, ELCA, (7A)
Congregation: Prince Of Peace Lutheran Church (ID: 07190) - Princeton Junction, New Jersey
Birthdate: 09/18/1980 **Gender:** Woman
Primary Language: English **Ethnicity:** White
Willing to serve: Yes

Preferred Mailing Address: (Home)

34 Nassau Place
Princeton Junction, NJ 08550 United States

Telephone:

Preferred: 6099776732 (Cell)

Email:

elizbwagner@gmail.com (Home)

Educational Institutions:

Smith College (1998-2002): Bachelor Of Arts

Employment:

SVP & Director of Endowment, Foundations & Charitable (01/01/2019 - Present)
Bryn Mawr Trust
Berwyn, PA

Previous Employment:

Princeton Area Community Foundation (2010-2018)
J. C. Geever (2002-2010)

Congregational, Synod, or Churchwide Service Activities:

President, Church Council, Prince of Peace (Princeton Jct, NJ) (2020-2022)
Member, Church Council, Prince of Peace (2017-2022)
Chair (2021-2023) and Board Member, Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Service (2018-2023)

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

Professionally, I lead a practice group within a wealth management firm dedicated to endowment management and have worked with hundreds of institutions like ULS to build long-term financial sustainability. As a nonprofit leader, I teach Governance for the BoardConnect program in NJ, ensuring Boards have the governance expertise they need to fulfill their mandates. I also bring substantial experience and training in the field of leadership, all useful as seminaries evolve toward shaping leaders - whether with a global or local focus. I've served in several leadership roles within my own congregation (including Council President, Call Committee Chair) and on the Board of Global Refuge (including as Chair), formerly Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Reference: Rev. Peter Froehlke **Phone:**6097991753 **E-mail:**pastor@popnj.org

Relationship: He is my pastor

Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions

1. Mission Development Process

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.10]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Delaware-Maryland Synod;

To refer this memorial to the Congregational Vitality Training and Development team in the Christian Community and Leadership home area to establish a working group in partnership with the appropriate leaders in the Delaware-Maryland Synod to study and refine current ELCA guidelines and systems for appointments, calls, funds, and support mechanisms for mission developers and new ministries; and

To request that the working group consult with and provide regular reports to the Church Council beginning by Fall 2023 to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled.

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2022)

The ELCA Christian Community and Leadership home area Congregational Vitality Training and Development Team leaders have contacted Delaware-Maryland Synod staff to create a working group in partnership with Delaware-Maryland Synod leaders who composed this memorial. The Rev. Sandra Chrostowski, senior director, Congregational Vitality, and New Ministry Training and Development, and the Rev. Ruben Duran, senior advisor for New Ministry Development, have been appointed as conveners of this working group which will identify partners across this church for consultation and collaboration with the goal of scheduling an online meeting during the first quarter of 2023.

This working group will study and refine current ELCA guidelines and systems in place for appointment, calls, funding, and support mechanisms for mission developers and new ministries. The working group will also provide regular reports, beginning at the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting, to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.q]

To receive the progress report on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a progress report on the work by the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2023)

In the beginning of 2023, there was a leadership transition and team realignment. Late in June the new senior director was hired. With a new senior director came new priorities, one of which was to gain understanding of the grants and grants processes. An audit of the New Starts grants began in July and is nearing completion, then a team will evaluate and redesign the granting process. This team will be made of current Directors for Evangelical Mission, including the Rev. Alejandro Mejia of Delaware-Maryland Synod. The new grants process is scheduled to start next fiscal year. More will be reported by the next spring Church Council meeting.

Church Council Action [CC23.11.20o]

To receive the response on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a progress report on the work by the Spring 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (April 2024)

Audit of New Starts grants was finished at the beginning of November 2023. On Nov. 10, the audit results were presented to the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) Committee of the Church Council. Recruitment of team members was delayed due to the rolling out of the information so it could be shared with the Conference of Bishops (COB). On Feb. 8, 2024, the CCL Committee of the COB was briefed about the audit results and then shared with the whole COB.

On Feb. 22, 2024, the audit results were shared with the Directors for Evangelical Mission (DEMs). Once that was complete DEMs were identified who would be invited to be a part of the Grants Restructure Team. Those who accepted the invitation were the Rev. Alejandro Mejia (Delaware-Maryland Synod), Mr. Joey Ager (Southwestern Washington Synod), the Rev. Herb Shao (Northwest Washington Synod), Mr. Branden Dupree (Metropolitan New York Synod), the Rev. Rebel Hurd (Northwestern Minnesota Synod), the Rev. Matt Short (Greater Milwaukee Synod), and the Rev. Miguel F. Gomez-Acosta (CCL). Two bishops will be invited into the conversations but have yet to be identified. All team members have agreed to meet in fiscal year 2024 to have final results for fiscal year 2025.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the response on “Equity and Clarity in the Mission Development Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a final report by the Spring 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

2. 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.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.p.]

To receive the response on "Fortifying Urban Ministries in the Underserved Urban Areas" from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;
To request a progress report on the work by the Spring 2024 Church Council meeting; and
To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (April 2024)

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. Gomez-Acosta, was hired. Pr. Gomez-Acosta was able to touch base with Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Bp. 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 Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod 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. Pr. 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.

Pr. Gomez-Acosta also followed up with 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 were 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.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

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.

3. Right to Boycott

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.05e]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the New England Synod in relation to Palestinian human rights; and

To urge Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton and ELCA members to call on the president of the United States and the U.S. Congress to oppose legislation penalizing or criminalizing support for nonviolent boycotts, divestment, and/or sanctions on behalf of Palestinian human rights.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b5]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Right to Boycott” to the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice 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 synods of this action.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice home area (November 2022)

The Public Messages Working Group, an internal churchwide organization working group, reviewed the request for the presiding bishop and ELCA members to call on the U.S. President and Congress to oppose legislation penalizing or criminalizing support for nonviolent boycotts, divestment, and/or sanctions on behalf of Palestinian human rights.

Given the current election cycle, staff recommend the request be postponed until the new Congress is in session. The intention would be to link an ELCA letter with ecumenical efforts or with a calendar event like a United Nations day or discussion. In preparation, a template and initial draft will be undertaken so the letter may be quickly edited and released when the timing is appropriate. Church Council can expect a report on the outcomes by the April 2024 meeting.

Church Committee Action [CC22.11.34.t.]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Right to Boycott” to the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice 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 synods of this action.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice home area (April 2024)

The Public Messages Working Group has crafted a template and initial draft of an ELCA statement that would request the U.S. President and the U.S. Congress to oppose legislation penalizing or criminalizing support for nonviolent boycotts, divestment, and/or sanctions on behalf of Palestinian human rights. The intention would be to release the letter later this year, at a time when it will best benefit public conversation on this matter.

CC ACTION [EN BLOC]

Recommended:

To receive the response on “Right to Boycott” from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Service and Justice home area;

To commend the staff with releasing an ELCA letter to the U.S. President and the U.S. Congress to oppose legislation penalizing or criminalizing support for nonviolent boycotts, divestment, and/or sanctions on behalf of Palestinian human rights at a time when it will best benefit public conversation on this matter; and

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

4. Black Migrant Strategy

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.09]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “ELCA Strategy Regarding Black Migrants” from the Delaware-Maryland Synod;

To direct the Service and Justice home area, in consultation with the program directors for African Descent Ministries, African Nationals, and Latino Ministries; African Descent Strategy Team; African Descent Lutheran Association; Association of Latino Ministries of the ELCA; and Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities (AMMPARO), to prepare a proposal for the strengthening of advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants, that includes cost estimates, for Church Council consideration by its Spring 2024 meeting;

To strengthen the current protection and accompaniment of Black migrants through AMMPARO in partnership with ecumenical and interfaith partners both domestically and internationally;

To recommit this church to advocating for Temporary Protected Status and just and humane immigration policy

through the Witness in Society team within the Service and Justice home area; and

To encourage congregations to affirm the aims of the African Descent Strategy Implementation Plan for 2020–2025 and the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent.

Response from the Service and Justice home area (April 2024)

The Service and Justice (S&J) home area received the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action requesting the preparation of a proposal for the strengthening of advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants, including cost estimates, for Church Council consideration by its Spring 2024 meeting. However, upon further review of the strategy’s scope, it was determined that S&J would benefit from more input from stakeholders. It was clear that more time would be needed to prepare a well-rounded proposal. The program director for Migration Policy, in consultation with the Service and Justice interim executive director, and program director for African Descent Ministries, initiated a process to obtain more input from stakeholders with direct relationships with people and communities of African-descent. In November, S&J formally invited stakeholders from across the ELCA to form part of a task force dedicated to “advising, developing, and implementing” the Black Migrant Strategy.

As stated in the assembly action, representatives from these groups were invited to form part of the Black Migrant Strategy Task Force: African Descent Ministries, Latino Ministries, Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities (AMMPARO), African National, African Descent Strategy Team, African Descent Lutheran Association, and the Association of Latino Ministries of the ELCA. The task force met for the first time on Jan. 8, 2024. The first task force meeting set expectations for the work, provided an opportunity for participants to share why they were motivated to work on this proposal, and laid out the next steps.

The proposal will receive further attention at the next meeting of the task force this spring. The Program Director for Migration, in consultation with the task force, aims to provide a proposal for the strengthening of advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants, that includes cost estimates, for Church Council consideration by its Fall 2024 meeting. In the meantime, a report summarizing projects and programs, through AMMPARO, that address migrants of African-descent from 2021-2023 is being developed to share with the task force to aid the development of the proposal.

Proposal Timeline:

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Topic</u> | <u>Status</u> |
|----------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Nov. 10, 2023 | Initiate task force | Completed |
| Jan. 8, 2024 | Task force meeting | Completed |
| March 18, 2024 | Deadline for Church Council response | Completed |
| April-May 2024 | Task force meeting | |
| Summer 2024 | Draft Proposal | |
| Fall 2024 | Finalize Proposal | |

CC ACTION *[EN BLOC]*

Recommended:

To receive the response on “ELCA Strategy Regarding Black Migrants” from the Service and Justice home area;

To request a final proposal for the strengthening of advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants, including cost estimates, for Church Council consideration by its November 2024 meeting; and

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

Responses to Synod Actions

A. Addressing Anti-Semitism in Lectionary Readings

Northern Illinois Synod (5B) [2021]

WHEREAS, anti-Semitic words, deeds, and attitudes do real harm to our Jewish neighbors; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has repudiated anti-Semitism and expressed its desire to live in “love and respect for the Jewish people” (“Declaration to the Jewish Community,” 1994); and

WHEREAS, passages of the New Testament which can be interpreted as anti-Jewish or supercessionist (i.e. supporting the idea that God has rejected the Jews) are included in our lectionary; and

WHEREAS, in the time in which the New Testament was written, the word Ἰουδαῖοι (ee-oo-DIE-oy), was used as a marker of geographic and ethnic identity (that is, it denoted people from Judaea as distinct from Galilee, Samaria, or other parts of the world) and “Israelite” was used to identify the people who worshiped the God of Israel wherever they lived, that is the people whom we today would identify as “Jewish;” and

WHEREAS, the word “Jews” in the New Testament is usually an inaccurate translation of the Greek Ἰουδαῖοι, and

WHEREAS, the preferred translation used by Augsburg Fortress is the NRSV, which uses the inaccurate and potentially harmful translation “Jews” in almost every instance; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the preachers and teachers of the Northern Illinois Synod be encouraged to address the issues of anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish theology (such as the teaching that the Jewish people are responsible for the death of Jesus and/or the idea that God has rejected the Jews); and, be it further

RESOLVED, that preachers, teachers, and lectors of the Northern Illinois Synod be encouraged, when reading in public, to substitute a more appropriate translation of Ἰουδαῖοι where the English translation uses the word “Jews.” Examples include “Judaeans,” “Religious Leaders,” and “locals;” and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northern Illinois Synod Assembly direct the Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council’s Executive Committee for referral and disposition to the appropriate unit or office of the churchwide organization in accordance with the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church in order to address the issues of anti-Jewish language in this church’s lectionary and teaching materials.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.06.19c5]

To refer the “Addressing Anti-Semitism in Lectionary Readings” resolution from the Northern Illinois Synod to the Worship Team in the Christian Community and Leadership home area, in consultation with the 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 synod of this action.

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2022)

The concern about Anti-Jewish interpretations of biblical texts is not new and remains an important challenge for this church to address. Two issues are often at play. One is interpretation of translations of biblical texts (as this resolution identifies) and the other is how the readings are grouped together for public worship, for example in the Revised Common Lectionary.

Several resources are already available to help guide worship planners and preachers in navigating these important concerns. [Preaching and Teaching “With Love and Respect for the Jewish People”](#) is recently available from the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. This resource explores challenging topics, lectionary selections, and Bible passages to inform Christian preaching and teaching so that they respect the integrity of the Jewish tradition and avoid anti-Jewish interpretations of New Testament texts. Another key resource developed by the panel is “Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Jewish Relations,” especially [#5 on “Difficult Texts.”](#)

An essay titled, [“The Jews” in John’s Passion](#), was published in the 2020 edition of the Sundays and Seasons worship planning resource from Augsburg Fortress. This essay includes an emended translation of the passion according to John for use on Good Friday. This essay and emended text are now available both on [SundaysAndSeasons.com](#) and on [ELCA.org](#).

Similar emendation principles were used in *Readings for the Assembly*, a three-year lectionary resource published in 1995–1997. An emended edition of [Readings for the Assembly](#) is being made available on [SundaysAndSeasons.com](#) for provisional use beginning this Advent. The [Principles for Emendation](#) note alignment with guidance on “Language and the Christian Assembly” in the 2002 ELCA document [Principles for Worship](#), the updated edition of the NRSV ([NRSVue](#)) published in 2021, and follow the encouragement of [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#) (2019).

Ecumenical and full communion partners are having similar conversations regarding anti-Jewish interpretations of biblical readings. The Episcopal Church, at its general convention in July 2022, [adopted a resolution](#) that calls for a task force “to address both the anti-Semitic, anti-Jewish or supercessionist impact of lectionary readings, especially for Holy Week, and to develop proposals to mitigate that impact.” The ELCA is a member of the [Consultation on Common Texts \(CCT\)](#), which is an ecumenical consultation of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada. The CCT was instrumental in the development of the [Revised Common Lectionary](#). Ongoing conversation with these groups, and others, will be important as the ELCA considers future recommendations. The ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations is prepared to support ELCA Worship team’s participation in these efforts.

The ELCA Worship team will continue conversation with key stakeholders, such as the Worship Resource Development Working Group (the combined worship teams of the churchwide organization and 1517 Media/Augsburg Fortress), the Consultation on Common Texts; ecumenical partners such as The Episcopal Church, the Conference of Bishops; and, in consultation with the executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations and Theological Discernment and the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. In addition, the ELCA Worship team and the Worship Development staff at 1517 Media/Augsburg Fortress will ensure these topics are addressed when considering future resources such as preaching helps and worship formation.

Church Committee Action [CC22.11.34.z.]

To receive the progress report on “Addressing Anti-Semitism in Lectionary Readings” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request an update be provided by the Spring 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Worship Team (April 2024)

[The Worship Team moved from the Christian Community and Leadership home area to the Office of the Presiding Bishop]

In response to this resolution in the ELCA and a similar resolution in The Episcopal Church, The Consultation on Common Texts (CCT) met in May 2023 and voted to establish a working group on Anti-Semitism and the Lectionary. The working group, which is expected to bring an interim report to the April 2024 meeting of the CCT, will investigate three possible courses of action: offering alternative readings during Holy Week and certain other parts of the liturgical year, creating a statement about Jewish-Christian relations for use with the lectionary, and recommending specific translations for particular passages or words. The CCT is an ecumenical collaboration of liturgical scholars and denominational representatives from the United States and Canada who produce liturgical texts and curate a three-year lectionary for common use by Christian churches worldwide.

As the CCT continues its work and anticipates future recommendations in collaboration with the ELCA and other denominations, the ELCA Worship team will seek to educate within the ELCA on appropriate resources to address Anti-Jewish interpretations in the lectionary. Future posts on the [ELCA Worship blog](#) are planned as more consensus is made on appropriate next steps.

A review and evaluation of the provisional emended edition of [Readings for the Assembly](#) is planned in the next year. Although Anti-Jewish interpretation is only one principle being addressed in this work, the feedback gained in the review process will help inform future work in the ELCA and ecumenically.

Ongoing worship resource development in the ELCA, by both the ELCA Worship team and by Augsburg Fortress/1517 Media, will continue to address this topic as appropriate, such as in preaching essays or ideas for relevant days in the lectionary.

CC ACTION *[EN BLOC]*

Recommended:

To receive the update on “Addressing Anti-Semitism in Lectionary Readings” resolution from the Office of the Presiding Bishop;

**To commend the Worship team in its ongoing efforts to address this topic in collaboration with ELCA and ecumenical partners, and by distributing and contextualizing future resources from The Consultation on Common Texts and other sources; and
To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.**

**B. Support of Jubilee USA Network
Upstate New York Synod (7D) [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.]

RESOLVED, that the Synod Council of the Upstate New York Synod memorialize the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to reaffirm its support of the Jubilee USA Network in an updated Social Policy Resolution.

Executive Committee Action [EC23.11.53c2]

To refer the “Support of Jubilee USA Network” resolution from the Upstate New York Synod to the Witness and Society team in the Service and Justice home area 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 Service and Justice, Witness and Society Team (April 2024)

The ELCA is a [founding member](#) of the [Jubilee USA Network](#), a coalition of interreligious partners who work together to tackle the structural causes of poverty and towards canceling the debt of poor countries around the world so that resources may be redirected to reduce poverty and provide healthcare and education for those most in need.

In recent years, Jubilee USA won debt relief in Haiti and the three Ebola-impacted West African countries, bankruptcy legislation for Puerto Rico, three international agreements to promote responsible lending and stop predatory lending, two victories to keep student loan interest rates low, G7 and G20 agreements to curb tax evasion and corruption and promoted trade agreements that help end poverty. The work of Jubilee USA Network deepens and extends the advocacy work of the ELCA through providing expertise and capacity and targeted work on debt, tax, trade, and transparency policies that help end poverty.

Witness in Society (WIS) staff and Jubilee USA Network’s staff are in regular conversations and engage in joint advocacy efforts. In recent years, they have held joint advocacy meetings with various entities of the federal government and multilateral organizations, including with staff at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the International Monetary Fund, and the U.S. Federal Reserve. During the COVID-19 pandemic, WIS and Jubilee USA Network’s staff collaborated on advocacy efforts to ensure low-income countries had access to COVID-19 vaccines. This included facilitation of Bishop Eaton’s participation in a high-level meeting on global vaccine access with the U.S. Secretary of Treasury, Janet Yellen. Other advocacy activities have included joining together on targeted sign on letters to policymakers to highlight concerns related to structural causes of poverty and high levels of debt in low-income countries and Puerto Rico. In addition, WIS staff represent the ELCA on the Board of Directors for Jubilee USA Network. Jubilee USA Network receives an annual ELCA Advocacy Partnership Grant to support its advocacy activities.

The 1999 Churchwide Assembly [adopted a resolution](#) in support of the Jubilee 2000: USA Campaign.

The Witness in Society team recommends that the Church Council reaffirm the ELCA’s support of the Jubilee USA Network in a new Social Policy Resolution (SPR), in the spirit of the resolution by the Upstate New York synod council. All SPRs that are 25-year-old are reviewed and often archived and the Jubilee 2000: USA Campaign (CA99.03.06) SPR will automatically be reviewed because of its age. The Church Council would need to authorize the development of a new SPR. In consultation with Theological

Ethics in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, it has been determined that an April authorization could, likely, mean a resolution for consideration at the November 2024 Church Council meeting.

CC ACTION *[EN BLOC]*

Recommended:

To be resolved that a social policy resolution on affirming Jubilee USA Network to be presented to the November 2024 Church Council meeting in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018); and

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



Values

What are the values within the ELCA for gender justice in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*?

1. Use scriptural translations and interpretation that are not androcentric or that support a gender-based hierarchy and dichotomy.
2. Teach the faith in ways that highlight gender justice.
3. Use language for humans that is gender-inclusive and for God that is gender-inclusive and expansive.
4. Create, use, and account for church policies and practices that support gender justice.
5. Ensure that church economics are distributed in ways that are gender just and have the effect of supporting gender justice. (*FSJ*, pages 52-59)

What are the values for gender justice advocacy within society (in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice*)?

1. Support laws, policies, and practices that respect diverse bodies.
2. Address the effects *and* the roots of gender-based violence.
3. Call for equitable medical research and health care delivery and access.
4. Create equitable economic policies, regulations, and policies.
5. Foster and support diverse and multifaceted social and economic roles in all spheres of daily living.
6. Create and use resources, policies, and practices for all families to flourish.
7. Ensure legal reforms, humane policies, and adequate services for migrants.
8. Encourage and use portrayals of people that do not objectify or stereotype them.
9. Increase women's public leadership in all spheres. (pages 59-68)

Directives

Implementing Resolutions Specific to the ELCA Church Council from *Faith Sexism and Justice: A Call to Action Social Statement*:

- #1 "be guided by this statement's convictions and commitments to resist and dismantle patriarchy and sexism, and to transform life in the church and in society"
- #7 "address inequities . . . as well as the systemic causes of such inequities, for rostered and lay women of various backgrounds, identities, and personal experiences, and to advocate for adequate and equitable leave for all parents and families"
- #8 "use gender-inclusive and expansive language for God"
- #11. "recognize past and present CWO efforts to address institutional sexism and foster gender justice in this church, and to urge sustained devotion of resources, such as support for CWO's Justice for Women program"
- #15 "renew . . . efforts to welcome, care for, and support the lives and gifts of LGBTQIA+ persons and to oppose discrimination against these persons"
- #16 "embed and incorporate anti-sexism training and protocols in . . . ongoing work"
- #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"



Values

What are the values in *Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture* social statement for racial justice?

1. Remember unity and oneness is in Christ.
2. Hold multiculturalism as a given and a glimpse of the future.
3. Relativize the values and behavior of the predominant culture.
4. Recognize when white people and white culture are favored.
5. Resist cynicism.
6. Refuse to blame victimized people for their situations.
7. Assure the participation of all people.
8. Address the relationship between racism and social issues.
9. Communicate openly what the vision and responsibilities of this church are.
10. Practice moral deliberation.
11. Work for justice for all.

Directives

Commitments related to racial justice work:

“a two-day anti-racism training be required for all new churchwide staff and elected and volunteer leaders” (SPR CC01.11.52 (2002))

Regarding authentic diversity: “The Church Council should further empower this task force or create another external body to track this work, support the staff desk responsible for it, and assess the

intentional relationships between the areas doing this work, including:

The reporting and auditing process, and

Full accountability for the work of strategic authentic diversity in alignment with goal five of Future Directions 2025.”

(“How Strategic and Authentic is our Diversity: A Call for Confession, Reflection, and Healing Action,” page 13)

ELCA Church Council adopted the following actions on June 27, 2019:

“• To call this church into a time of study and to support the apology by encouraging congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to find ways to share this apology broadly;

• To encourage congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to observe an annual Day of Repentance;

• To affirm the Lutheran World Federation Council resolution “Commemorating the 2019 Quad-centennial of the Forced Transatlantic Voyage of Enslaved African Peoples to the Americas—Human Beings Not for Sale!”;

• To engage in anti-racism and racial justice work, work toward economic justice—including the study of reparations.

• To work to address and end modern forms of slavery and human trafficking” (CC19.06.23).

(Explanation of the declaration of the ELCA to People of African Descent, page 9)



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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**ELCA Church Council
Racial and Gender Justice Workshop
November 2022**

*Read through the following definitions and **circle** what stands out to you. Then **turn** to a neighbor and **share ONE** aspect that stood out to you and why.*

Gender Justice Vocabulary

Prepared by Mary J. Streufert

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: A Call to Action*, p. 4)

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

Gender justice is a form of neighbor love for everyone. Gender justice is a goal to make sure people do not experience discrimination or oppression based on sex (biological), gender (expression), and/or sexuality. It is both individual and systemic. (See pp. 14, 21, 76.)

Sex is a biological understanding and assignation. There are more than two sexes. (See p. 80.)

Gender is comprised of “identities, roles, behaviors, and attributes that cultures, societies, and individuals shape, most often linked to femininity and masculinity.” There are more than two genders (p. 76).

Sexuality is “[a] complex individual and social concept. Individually, sexuality includes the romantic and/or sexual feelings and desires that a person experiences” (p. 80).

Intersectionality describes the ways different forms of discrimination and systemic oppression affect each other and shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. All human identities and all forms of privilege and oppression are made up of many intersections” (p. 77).



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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Interpersonal and Group Dynamics
(in relation to decision-making)
Racial Justice and Gender Justice
Prepared by Jennifer DeLeon and Mary J. Streufert, 2022

Meeting: _____

Name at least one practice your group used to ensure that dialogue and interaction does not always begin with “whoever wants to speak first and fastest.”

What effect did your practice/s to ensure diverse dialogue and engagement have on your session or your meeting?

If your session’s or meeting’s dialogue was dominated by a few voices and/or did not have viewpoints from diverse persons (e.g., persons who are BIPOC, women, who identify as queer), name one thing you all can do together next time.

Item (policy, program, budget) discussed:

Who will benefit from or be burdened by this decision or action?

In particular, how will this decision or action affect persons and communities who are BIPOC, women, LGBTQIA+ or marginalized by race, sex, gender, and/or sexuality?



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WORKING DEFINITIONS

ELCA Racial Justice/Anti-Racism

(December 2008)

Race is a social “construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time.”¹

Racial formation refers to “the process by which social, economic, and political forces construct racial categories and meanings.”²

Ethnicity is a “social construct that divides people into social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history, and ancestral geographical location. Members of an ethnic group are often presumed to be culturally or biologically similar, although this is not in fact necessarily the case.”³

“To the geographic place of origin of an individual’s family and group identity” ethnicity can offer “a historical framework to understand an individual’s cultural context.”⁴

Ethnocentrism conveys “the cultural domination of a specific ethnic (often majority) group in a larger national context.”⁵

Ethnoreligious is a term used to “suggest the ‘intertwined and mutually reinforcing’ symbiosis between racial and ethnic attributions and religion, whereby religion is used to justify and mobilize ethnic aspirations, and ethnicity is seen as a ‘birthplace of religions’. In this sense, the term *ethnoreligious* conveys the coexistence of multiple identity categories – religion, ethnicity, race, and culture.”⁶

¹ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. Appendix 6B.

² Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. pg. 118.

³ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. Appendix 6B.

⁴ Derman-Sparks, Louise and Carol Brunson Phillips. *Teaching/Learning Anti-racism: A Developmental Approach*. (1997) New York: Teachers College Press. pg. 13.

⁵ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. pg. 250.

⁶ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. pg. 250.

Prejudice is a “prejudgment, often negative, about a person or group. Prejudice derives from making broad assumptions about people without taking into account their individual characters.”⁷

Discrimination is the “unequal treatment of people based on their membership in a group. Unlike prejudice, which is only cognitive, discrimination is *behavior*. Nonetheless, discrimination is based on prejudiced thinking. To discriminate is to turn prejudice into an action against an individual. Discrimination can either be *de jure* (*legal*, as in Jim Crow laws) or *de facto* (discrimination in fact, without legal sanction, as in job and housing discrimination).”⁸

Privilege is the “institutional power of individuals to construct systems based on their needs and values.”⁹

“Unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged social group membership.”¹⁰

White privilege is, “having a collection of benefits based on belonging to a group perceived to be white, when the same or similar benefits are denied to members of other groups, not because of one’s individual accomplishments or actions.”¹¹ White privilege is not earned; it can not be given away; and there is no choice of non-participation. It is the “spill over effect of racial prejudice and white institutional power.”¹²

White supremacy is “an integrated system of individual, institutional, societal, and civilizational racism in which whiteness...is seen as normative and superior. Those seen as ‘non-white’ are perceived as deviant or inferior, and commonly denied access to the opportunities and resources granted ‘white’ persons.”¹³

Racism is race prejudice combined with the misuse of institutional and systemic power. “An institutionalized system of economic, political, social, and cultural relations that ensures that one racial group has and maintains power and privilege over all others in all aspects of life. Individual participation in racism occurs when the objective outcome of behavior reinforces these relations, regardless of the subjective intent. Consequently, an individual may act in a racist manner unintentionally.”¹⁴

⁷ Parker, Robin and Pamela Smith Chambers. *The Anti-Racist Cookbook*. (2005) Roselle, NJ: Crandall, Dostie & Douglass. pg. 68.

⁸ Parker, Robin and Pamela Smith Chambers. *The Anti-Racist Cookbook*. (2005) Roselle, NJ: Crandall, Dostie & Douglass. pg. 68.

⁹ Kendall, Frances E. *Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race*. (2006) New York: Rutledge. pg. 59.

¹⁰ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. pg. 59.

¹¹ *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. 2005. MP Associates & Center for Assessment and Policy Development. pg 5.

¹² *Troubling the Waters for the Healing of the Church: A Journey From Privilege to Partnership for White Christians*. 2004. ELCA. pg 5.

¹³ *Disrupting White Supremacy from Within*. Eds., Jennifer Harvey, Karen Case and Robin Hawley Gorsline. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004. pg. 287.

¹⁴ Derman-Sparks, Louise and Carol Brunson Phillips. *Teaching/Learning Anti-Racism: A Developmental Approach*. (1997) New York: Teachers College. pg. 2.

It “is a power dynamic – a relationship between privilege and oppression – that advantages white people and disadvantages people of color. Key indicators of racism are inequities in power, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes across race – whether intentional or not.”¹⁵

It is “a system of advantage based on race and supported by institutional structures, policies, and practices that create and sustain benefits for the dominant white group, and structure discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from targeted racial groups. Racism is a social expression of power and privilege, the consequence of discriminatory policies in the past that endure, always adapting to new circumstances but ultimately prevailing through practices of inequality that continue and sometimes manifest in new but persistent ways.”¹⁶

It “infects and affects everyone. It deforms relationships between and within racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. It undermines the promise of community and exacerbates prejudice and unhealthy competition among these groups. It roes white people of the possibility of authentic relationships with people of color, and people of color of the possibility of authentic relationships with white people.”¹⁷

Structural racism includes “aspects of our history and culture that have allowed the privilege associated with ‘whiteness’ and the disadvantage of ‘color’ to endure and adapt over time. It points out the ways in which public policies and institutional practices contribute to inequitable racial outcomes. It lays out assumptions and stereotypes that are embedded in our culture that, in effect, legitimize racial disparities, and it illuminates the ways in which progress toward racial equity is undermined.”¹⁸ Structural racism plays out on three levels:

Institutional – “ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups. The institutional policies may never mention any racial group, but their effect is to create advantages for whites and oppression and disadvantage for people from groups classified as non-white.”

Cultural – “behaviors that reflect a worldview that overtly and covertly attributes value and normalcy to white people and whiteness, and devalues, stereotypes and labels People of Color as “other”, different, less than, or render them invisible. Many of the behaviors of institutions and individuals that we call ‘patronizing’ are in fact forms of cultural racism. The culture of a people determines the culture, language, and value systems of the institutions they create.”

Individual – “beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can be deliberate, or the individual may act to perpetuate or support racism without knowing that is what he or she is doing.”¹⁹

¹⁵ Applied Research Center. *Racial Justice Education and Action Manual*. 2002 revised 7/01/04. Attachment 3.

¹⁶ Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. (2007) New York: Rutledge. pg. 118.

¹⁷ ELCA Social Statement *Freed In Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture*.
<http://archive.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist/>, pg. 4.

¹⁸ *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. 2005. MP Associates & Center for Assessment and Policy Development. pg 38.

¹⁹ *Flipping the Script: White Privilege and Community Building*. 2005. MP Associates & Center for Assessment and Policy Development. pg 39-40.

Silent racism is comprised of “unspoken negative thoughts, emotions, and assumptions about black Americans that dwell in the minds of white Americans, including well-meaning whites that care about racial equality, some of which are called ‘new abolitionists’.”²⁰

Anti-racism is the “process of actively and consistently confronting racism” wherever it occurs.²¹

Racial justice is the approach or combined strategies that work to address the inequities of structural racism. It is “the proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes and actions that produce equitable power, opportunities, treatment, impacts and outcomes for all. Equitable impacts and outcome across race is the key indicator of racial justice.”²²

“Racial Justice is not the same as racial diversity. There can be diversity without equity...A ‘diversity’ focus primarily addresses the symptoms of racism – with the goal of minimizing racial tensions and maximizing people’s ability to tolerate difference and get along. A ‘racial justice’ focus primarily addresses the causes of inequality and the solutions and strategies for producing equity.

Racial Justice is not the same as multi-culturalism. Culture is only one aspect of race. Another, even more significant aspect of race is power...Efforts to promote cultural awareness, sensitivity and inclusiveness are important steps towards, but are not the same as, racial justice. If one ignores the dynamics of power and simply treats race as a cultural phenomenon, racism will be perpetuated, even if things appear to be more multi-cultural.

Racial Justice is not simply equity. Things can be equal, but still not fair. For example, schools with the highest concentrations of students of color, often have a disproportionate number of students who need subsidized meals, special education services and bilingual education services. These schools require more funding than schools that have more wealthy and white students. Rather than each school receive the same – or equal – funding, schools should receive fair or equitable – funding, based on need.

| | | |
|-----------|---|----------------------------------|
| Diversity | = | Variety |
| Equality | = | Sameness |
| Equity | = | Fairness, Justice” ²³ |

Internalized racial or racist oppression is “people of color believing the lie that they are less than because they are not White. Racism lies to people of color, making them believe that they are less than intelligent, less beautiful, less capable, and less worthy because they are who they are African American, Latino/Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, Arab American, or Pacific Islander. Internalized racial oppression is understanding this basic lie to be true and then living it out.”²⁴

²⁰ Trepagnier, Barbara. *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*. (2006) Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. pg. 15.

²¹ Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. 1996. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, B.C. pg. 211.

²² Applied Research Center. *Racial Justice Education and Action Manual*. 2002 revised 7/01/04. Attachment 4.

²³ Applied Research Center. *Racial Justice Education and Action Manual*. 2002 revised 7/01/04. Attachment 4.

²⁴ *Set Free: A Journey Toward Solidarity Against Racism*. de Leon-Hartshorn, Iris, Miller Shearer, Tobin and Shands Stoltzfus, Regina. 2001. Scottsdale, PA: Harold Press. pg. 20.

Diversity “includes all characteristics and experiences that define each of us as individuals.”²⁵

Culture can be described as the “attitudes and patterns of life.”²⁶

It is “...always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live or lived within the same social environment, which is where it was learned. It is *the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.*”²⁷

Multicultural is the “practice of acknowledging and respecting the various cultures, religions, races, ethnicities, attitudes and opinions within an environment.”²⁸

“Multiculturalism without attention to issues of wealth and power can become a collusion among professionals, both white and of color, to maintain control of the movement to end racism and to benefit themselves.”²⁹

Cultural competency simply stated is “the ability to understand another culture well enough to be able to communicate and work with people from that culture.”³⁰ More deeply, it is “a process of learning about and becoming allies for people from other cultures, thereby broadening our own understanding and ability to participate in a multicultural process. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.”³¹

Cultural proficiency relates to both “the *policies and practices* of an organization or the *values and behaviors* of an individual that enable that agency or person to interact effectively in a diverse environment.”³²

²⁵ “Best Practices in Achieving Workforces Diversity.” (2000) U.S. Department of Commerce and Vice President Al Gore’s National Partnership for Reinventing Government Benchmarking Study.

²⁶ ELCA Social Statement *Freed In Christ: Race, Ethnicity and Culture*.
<http://archive.elca.org/socialstatements/freedinchrist/>, pg. 3.

²⁷ Hofstede, Geert. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind Intercultural Cooperation and its Importance for Survival*. (1997) New York: McGraw Hill. pg. 5.

²⁸ National Association of Multicultural Education. <http://diversity.tamu.edu/dictionary/index.asp#M>. Retrieved 10 December 2008.

²⁹ Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. 1996. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, B.C. pg. 213.

³⁰ Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. 1996. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, B.C. pg. 207.

³¹ Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. 1996. New Society Publishers: Gabriola Island, B.C. pg. 209.

³² Robins, Kikanza Nuri, Randall B. Lindsey, Delores B. Lindsey, Raymond D. Terrell. Robins. *Culturally Proficient Instruction: A Guide for People Who Teach*. 2002. Corwin Press, Inc.: Thousand Oaks, CA. pg. 4.



ELCA Commission for a
Renewed Lutheran Church

COMMISSION FOR A RENEWED LUTHERAN CHURCH

2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.06]
“RESTRUCTURE THE GOVERNANCE OF THE ELCA”

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.

THE WORK BEGINS!



2023 into 2024

- We were united and engaged in intentional team building in July of 2023 and have now met 5 times (3 times in person and 2 times online)
- We engaged in peer led study and education around the Commission for a New Lutheran Church and ELCA constitutional process, structure, and governance.
- We held intentional dialogue and learning sessions with related work such as God's Love Made Real, Racial Justice Ministries, Ethnic Associations, and the 10 synods who initially submitted memorials.
- We hosted more than 65+ listening sessions, received 1400+ survey responses, and attended gatherings of specialized ministry groups such as synod Vice Presidents, military chaplains, and campus ministries.
- We created committees and begin meeting toward specific identified tasks.

“All Ears”

- The All Ears Committee presented the initial data from the survey and the listening session data collection tool. In the coming months, the committee will refine the survey data, and also take concrete steps to share the survey with underrepresented groups. Additionally, the committee is preparing a tool that can be used for Information Sessions that CRLC members will be holding with stakeholders in the coming months.

CRLC COMMITTEES



“Communications”

We create the CRLC's external communications to share updates about the Commission's work with the wider ELCA community through social media platforms, newsletters, emails, and articles.

“Dismantle Racism!”

We work across all committees to ensure we engage the analysis of structure and governance through an intersectional lens of dismantling racism.

CRLC COMMITTEES



“How Are We Governed?”

The Governance Committee examines the organizational structure of the ELCA, focusing on where authority, responsibility, and accountability reside and ways in which systemic racism is a part of the church's governance structure, with a goal to make recommendations to the full CRLC for any changes that would better align the church's functioning with its stated purpose and mission.

Our goal is to make recommendations to the full CRLC for any changes that would better align the church's functioning with its stated purpose and mission.

“Planning and Report”

The Planning and Report Committee is actively engaged in a multifaceted approach to develop a comprehensive report outline.

Our efforts are focused on meticulously gathering historical data from prior commission meetings to ensure a well-rounded perspective. Concurrently, we are dedicated to liaising with a diverse range of resources. This initiative aims to guarantee that the forthcoming report is not only inclusive, reflecting a wide spectrum of views and insights, but also accessible, facilitating engagement from all stakeholders.

CRLC COMMITTEES



“Who Are We?”

We recognize the necessity of embracing our Lutheran identity and providing comprehensive guidance to all members of this church in understanding and spreading the gospel. As ELCA Lutherans, the confessional writings of the Book of Concord serve as our interpretive lens.

“Why and What?”

We exist to review the purpose statements of the ELCA as a denomination, and the three expressions of this church, as set forth in the ELCA constitution as a necessary predecessor for proposing changes to the structure and governance of the denomination.

THE WORK CONTINUES...



Early themes emerging from our season of receiving include

- A desire to realign number/distribution of synods and their function including a possible separation of pastoral/congregational care and administrative responsibilities
- The balance between accountability and flexibility in relation to congregations and rostered leaders adherence to social statements, funding/sharing of resources, communication with congregations, issues of discipline etc.
- A desire to clarify purpose statements and constitutional language to increase accessibility of essential tasks and remove language that is not currently useful while uplifting core commitments of not only who we are but who we want to be which includes a resourced commitment to antiracism
- Prioritization of voice, vote, protection, resource, and recognition of the essential nature of RIOMs (Related Institutions, Organizations, & Ministries) as valid expressions of the church and centers of innovation, faith formation, and public witness



ELCA Commission for a
Renewed Lutheran Church

WHAT'S NEXT?

- We will be back in November, possibly with recommendations for constitutional changes going through the “normal process”
- We will be back in one year, to turn over our final report with recommendations to be included in the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Bulletin of Reports
- We will be present at the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to present our final report and recommendations

Budget Prioritization Task Force



Budget and Priorities Task Force

To create a task force to address the need for Council and Administrative Team (with advisors) to explore needed changes to budget work and priorities. This task force shall be composed of members of the Executive Committee (or designees of the committee chairs), the Administrative Team and its advisors, two members from the Church Council advisory members, and one liaison bishop. The task force shall report to the Church Council at its Spring 2024 meeting.



The purpose of the CWO

“In keeping with this church’s purposes, it shall develop churchwide policy, set standards for leadership, establish criteria for this church’s endeavors, and coordinate the work of this church. It shall be a means for the sharing of resources throughout this church and shall provide programs and services as determined by this church.”

(ELCA Constitution, Chapter 11).

Priorities of the Church

In **April 2020**, the Presiding Bishop appointed a **Future Church design team** and further narrowed the goals:

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



Step 1: Alignment of the Cost Centers to the Purpose

- **Goal: identify where our current work aligns with in the Purpose of the CWO (ELCA Constitution, Chapter 11)**
- **Started high level, with cost centers and basic understanding of the work**
- **AD Team and Advisors were put into Review Teams, designed to provide perspective and identify best fit in the Purpose.**



Step 2: Identifying areas outside the constitutional purpose for the work

- **Goal: While the CWO purpose in the Constitution gives us a starting point and direction for our work, it's not all encompassing.**
 - **Memorials and actions out of Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, DEIA efforts and supporting our synod and congregational partners are also an essential lens for our work.**
- **While not a “perfect” fit, it begins to help us identify where our work aligns and doesn't align to our called purpose.**



Step 3: Understanding the cost centers

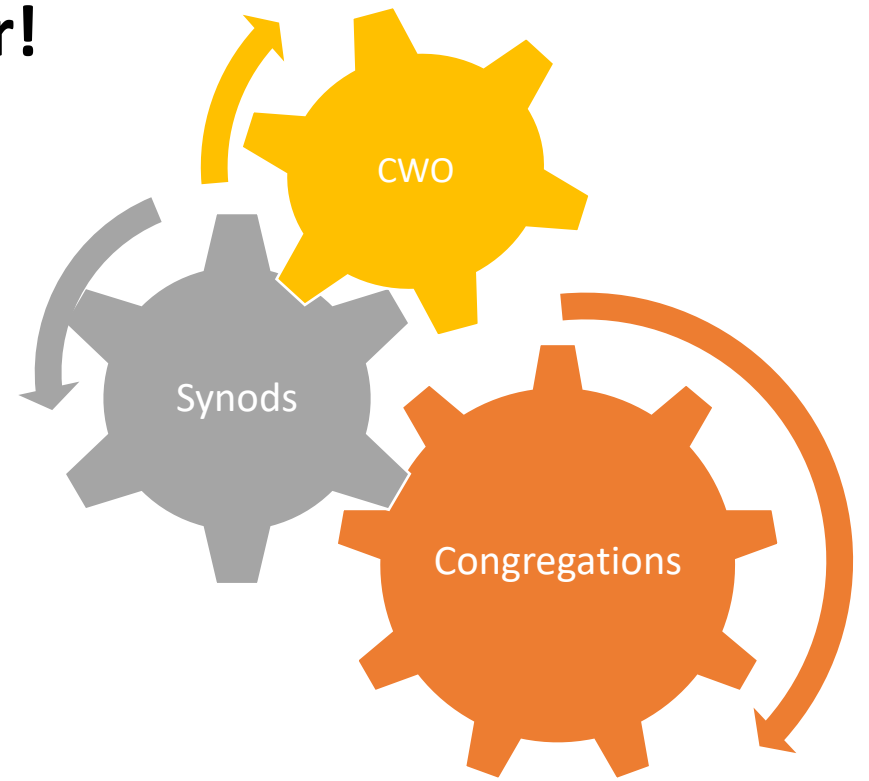
- **Goal: Granular approach to understanding the dollars, goals, metric and strategic plans of the cost center. To ensure accountability, equitability and faithful stewardship of both human and financial resources.**
- **Jackie Baumhover, Director for Strategy, will work with home area Executive Directors.**



Step 4: What's next

- Identifying what we are doing that's within and outside our purpose will help us add clarity to the purpose of the CWO.
- What needs to be added to our governance? What are we spending resources on that we shouldn't be? These are all things we will need your guidance on so that we can be Church Together!

8.11. This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in an *interdependent relationship with the others*.



ELCA Church Council

April 13, 2024



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

Future Church (God's Love Made Real) means understanding the needs of our *current* and *future* members; it's about *culture* and *structure*.

"...members, congregations, synods and the churchwide organization *must work together* to share a powerful witness of the Gospel in the world; *inviting* more new, young and diverse people to experience God's grace in action, while *engaging* our current members in new, innovative ways. It envisions a world experiencing the difference God's grace and love in Christ make for *all people and creation*."

"We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road." –Martin Luther

Future Church is God's Love Made Real **AND** God's Love Made Real is the Vision

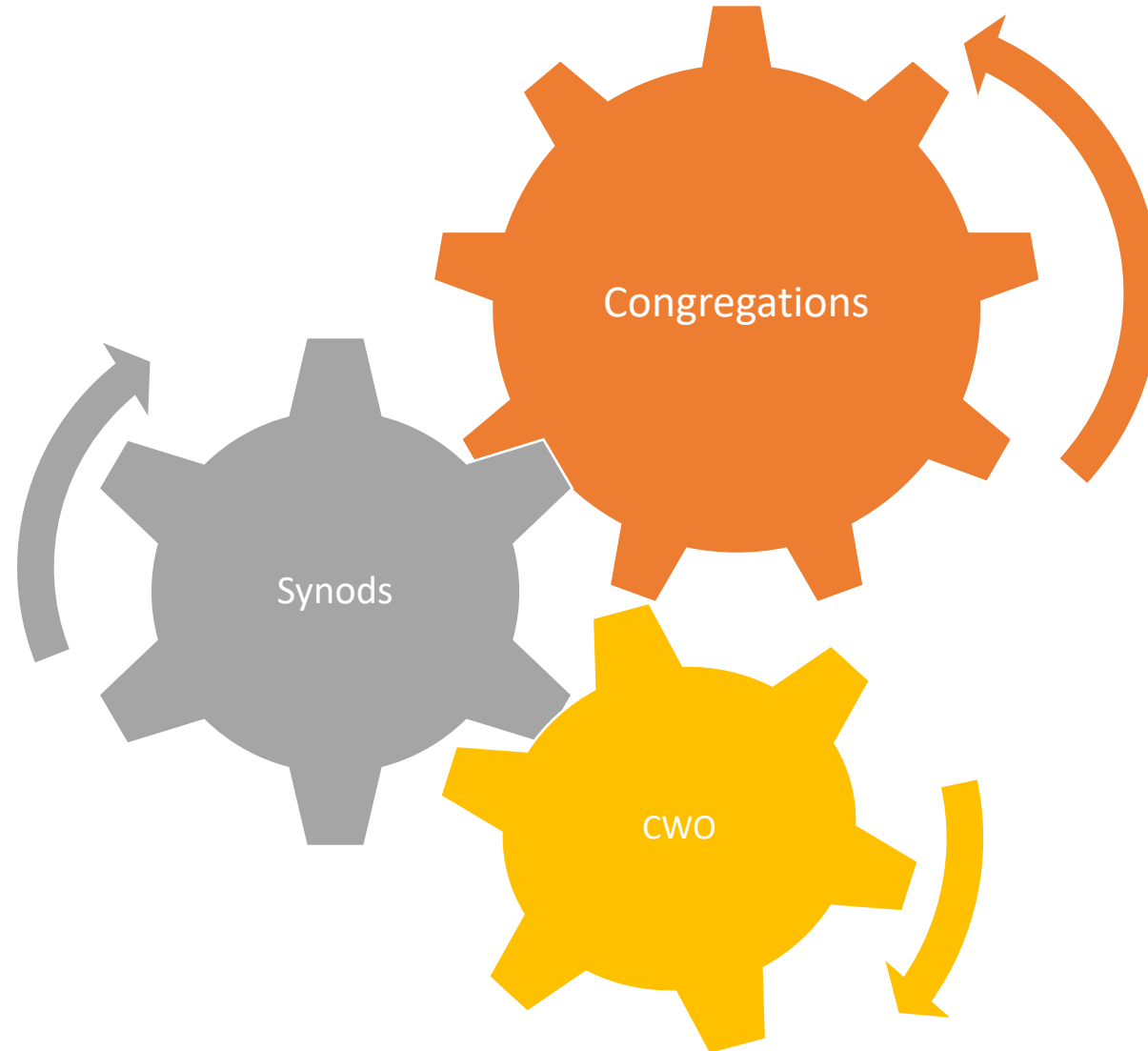
Vision applies to the entire denomination and informs the work of the Churchwide Organization (CWO), Synods and Congregations.

ELCA Vision Statement: "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.

God's Love Made Real is a way to refer directly to the Vision and the ways we seek to bring it to expression.



ELCA Constitution: 8.11. This church shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in an *interdependent relationship with the others*.



The Churchwide Organization (CWO)



Evangelical
Lutheran Church
in America

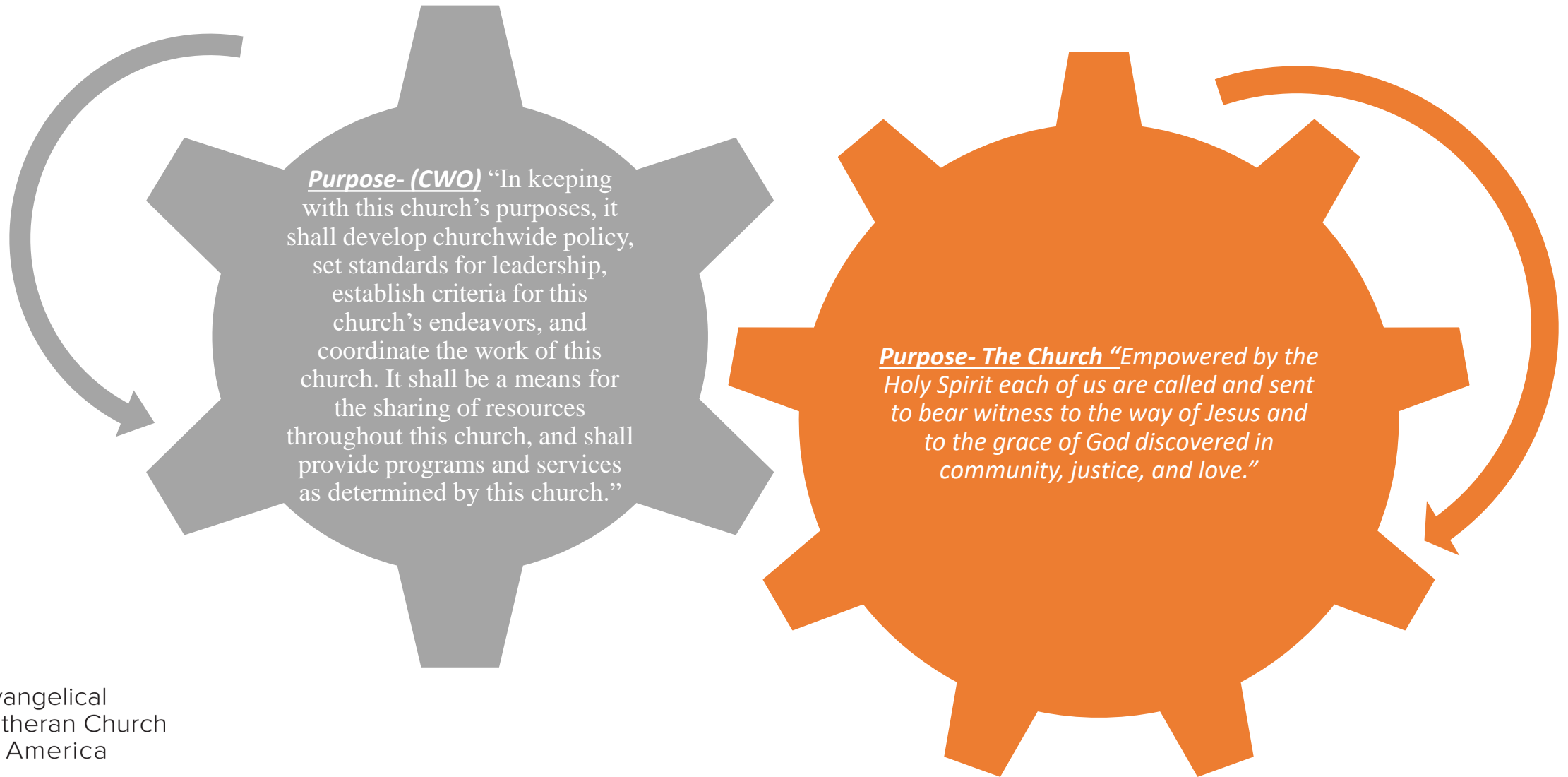


The purpose of the CWO

“In keeping with this church’s purposes, it shall develop churchwide policy, set standards for leadership, establish criteria for this church’s endeavors, and coordinate the work of this church. It shall be a means for the sharing of resources throughout this church and shall provide programs and services as determined by this church.”

(ELCA Constitution, Chapter 11).

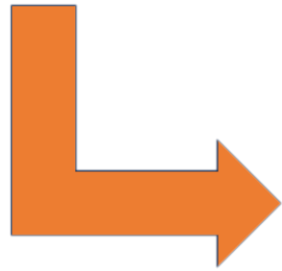
The CWO aids in the purpose of the CHURCH



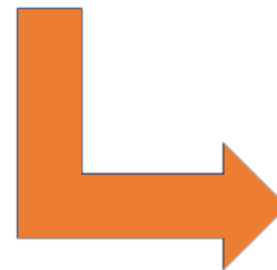


Goals of the CWO

November 2016: ELCA Church Council reviewed and unanimously approved *ELCA Future Directions 2025*.



April 2020: the Presiding Bishop appointed a Future Church design team and further narrowed the goals.



Fall 2020: the Future Church design team presented, and Church Council approved criteria for the ELCA Churchwide Organization



Goals of the CWO

ELCA Church Council reviewed and unanimously approved *ELCA Future Directions 2025* at its **November 2016** meeting [CC16.11.42]. These directions set forth five major goals: Becoming a:

- Thriving church,
- Equipping church,
- Inviting and welcoming church,
- Visible church for justice, peace and reconciliation; and
- Well-governed, connected, sustainable church

Goals of the CWO

In **April 2020**, the Presiding Bishop appointed a **Future Church design team** and further narrowed the goals:

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

Goals of the CWO

Fall 2020 the Future Church design team presented, and Church Council approved the following criteria:

- 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 Youth Institute

Keeping in mind the goals to “*Prioritize the engagement of new, young and diverse people*” and “*Act based on data and measurable impact,*” thanks to a generous gift, the CWO contracted with Barna and Fuller to do quantitative and qualitative research that will benefit both our shared work and the developing work of the Vision project. The research addressed these core questions:


- What is going on? (defining current reality)
- Why is this going on? (diagnosing the current reality)
- Where is God leading us? (theological imagination)
- How do we respond? (crafting a clear plan)

Vision Project

- This is Bishop Eaton's initiative, led by Rev. Louise Johnson. This effort seeks to support goals of the CWO and the Vision of the ELCA, God's Love Made Real
- The project is intended to work with partners within and beyond the ELCA
- This is an effort that is funded by a restricted gift from a donor.

Innovation Home Area and God's Love Made Real

- The Innovation Home Area was formed in 2021 as a part of the Future Church design.
- The Barna/Fuller research intersects with the Innovation Home Area's user-focused approach to our work at the Churchwide Organization.
- 64% of the Innovation Home Areas current projects incorporate users/constituents in the design process.



“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

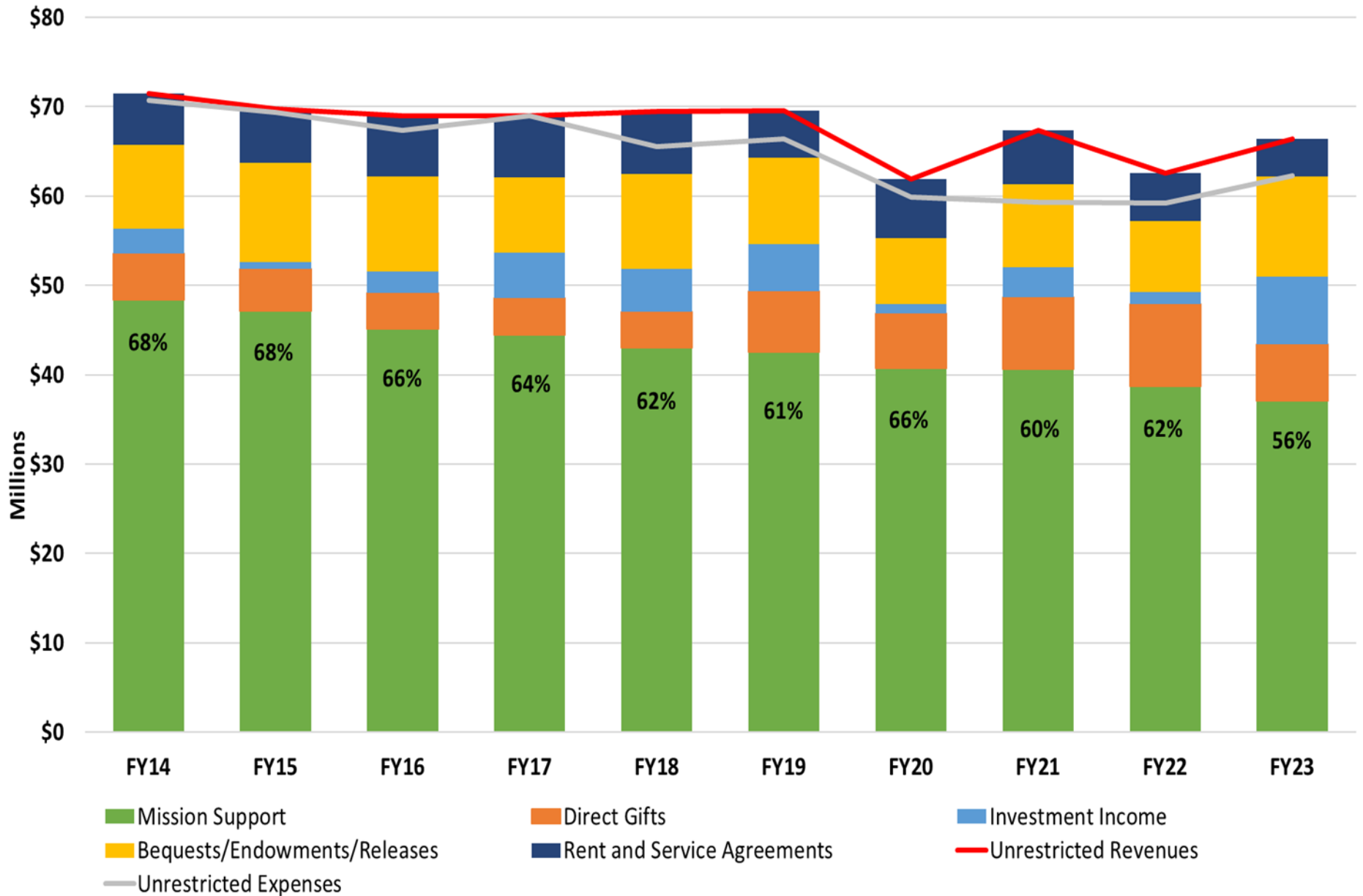


Questions?



ELCA Churchwide Organization
Office of the Treasurer
Spring 2024
Report to Church Council

Unrestricted Revenues and Expenses



Financial Results
as of January 31, 2024
Unrestricted Fund



Unrestricted Fund Results thru 1/31/2024

| (in \$000s) | 2023 Actual | 2023 Budget | 2022 Actual |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Revenue | | | |
| Mission Support | \$37,080 | \$38,000 | \$38,728 |
| Other | <u>28,033</u> | <u>23,507</u> | <u>23,043</u> |
| Total Revenue | 65,113 | 61,507 | 61,771 |
| Release of Desig/Restr Funds | 750 | 6,923 | 806 |
| Expenses | <u>(62,309)</u> | <u>(68,430)</u> | <u>(60,780)</u> |
| Revenues in Excess of Expenses* | \$3,554 | \$--- | \$1,797 |

* Includes \$2.4 million in unrealized gains on the investment portfolio

Certain Unrestricted Revenues

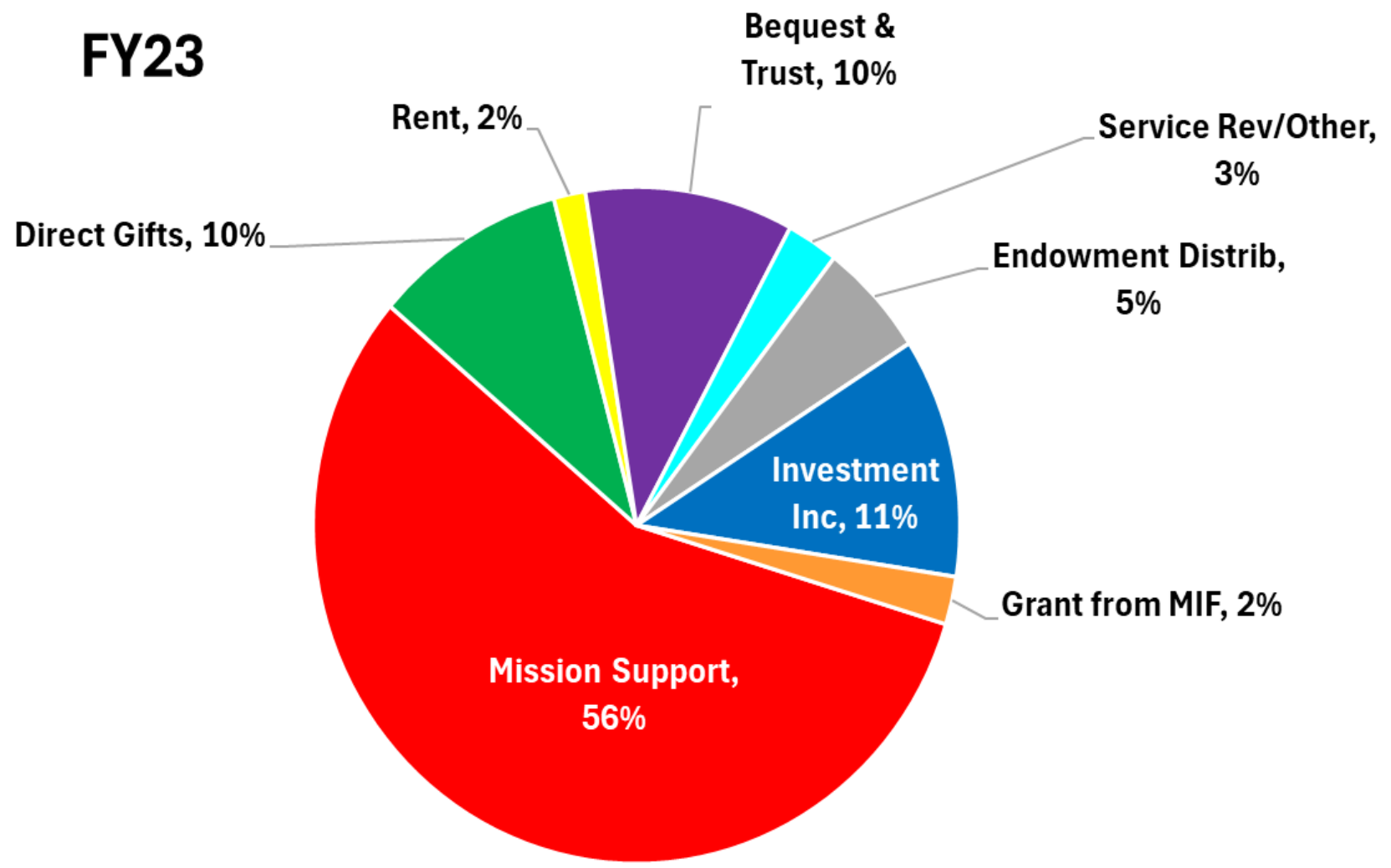
Year ended 1/31/24 (in Thousands)

| | 2023 Actual | 2023 Budget | 2022 Actual |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Mission Support | \$37,080 | \$38,000 | \$38,728 |
| Direct Gifts | <u>6,336</u> | <u>10,537</u> | <u>9,189</u> |
| “Core Support” | \$43,416 | \$48,537 | \$47,917 |
| | (10.6%) | | (9.4%) |
| Investment Income | 7,006 | 1,851 | 1,369 |
| Bequests & Trusts | <u>6,842</u> | <u>2,850</u> | <u>3,705</u> |
| “Other Income” | \$13,848 | \$4,701 | \$5,074 |
| Total – these categories | \$57,264 | \$53,238 | \$52,991 |

Certain Unrestricted Revenues – 1/31/24

| | FY 2023 Actual | FY 2023 Nov projection | FY 23 Through September |
|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Mission Support | \$37,080 | \$37,050 | \$23,032 |
| Direct Gifts | 6,336 | 6,850 | 3,101 |
| Investment Income | 7,006 | 3,000 | 2,790 |
| Bequest & Trust | 6,842 | 5,400 | 4,554 |
| Endowment | 3,606 | 3,600 | 2,703 |
| Rent | 1,041 | 1,300 | 850 |
| SLA/Other | 3,202 | 3,600 | 2,198 |
| Total | \$65,113 | \$60,800 | \$39,229 |

Unrestricted Revenues FY23



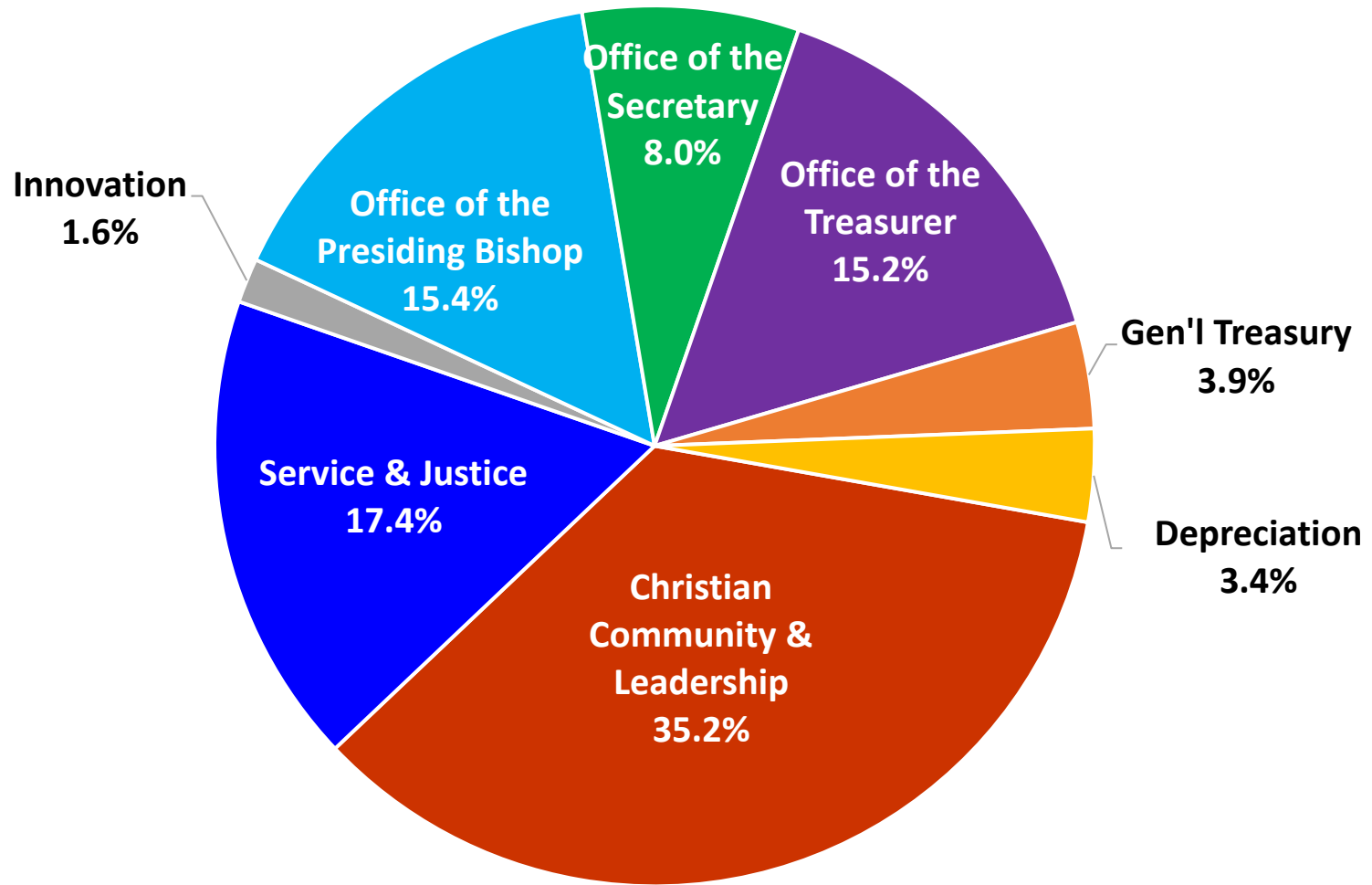
What if for 1/31/2024???

(in Thousands)

| | Actual | 5-year Avg Bequest Income | 5-year Avg Investment Income | Expenses at 97% | 5-year Avg Investment Income and 97% Exp |
|----------|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Revenues | \$65,863 | \$62,501 | \$62,055 | \$65,863 | \$62,055 |
| Expenses | <u>(a) 62,309</u> | <u>62,309</u> | <u>62,309</u> | <u>66,377</u> | <u>66,377</u> |
| Net | \$3,554 | \$192 | \$(254) | \$(514) | \$(4,322) |

(a) FY23 actual expenses were only 91% of budget.

Expenditures by Home Area/Office



FY24 Unrestricted Budget - High Level Summary

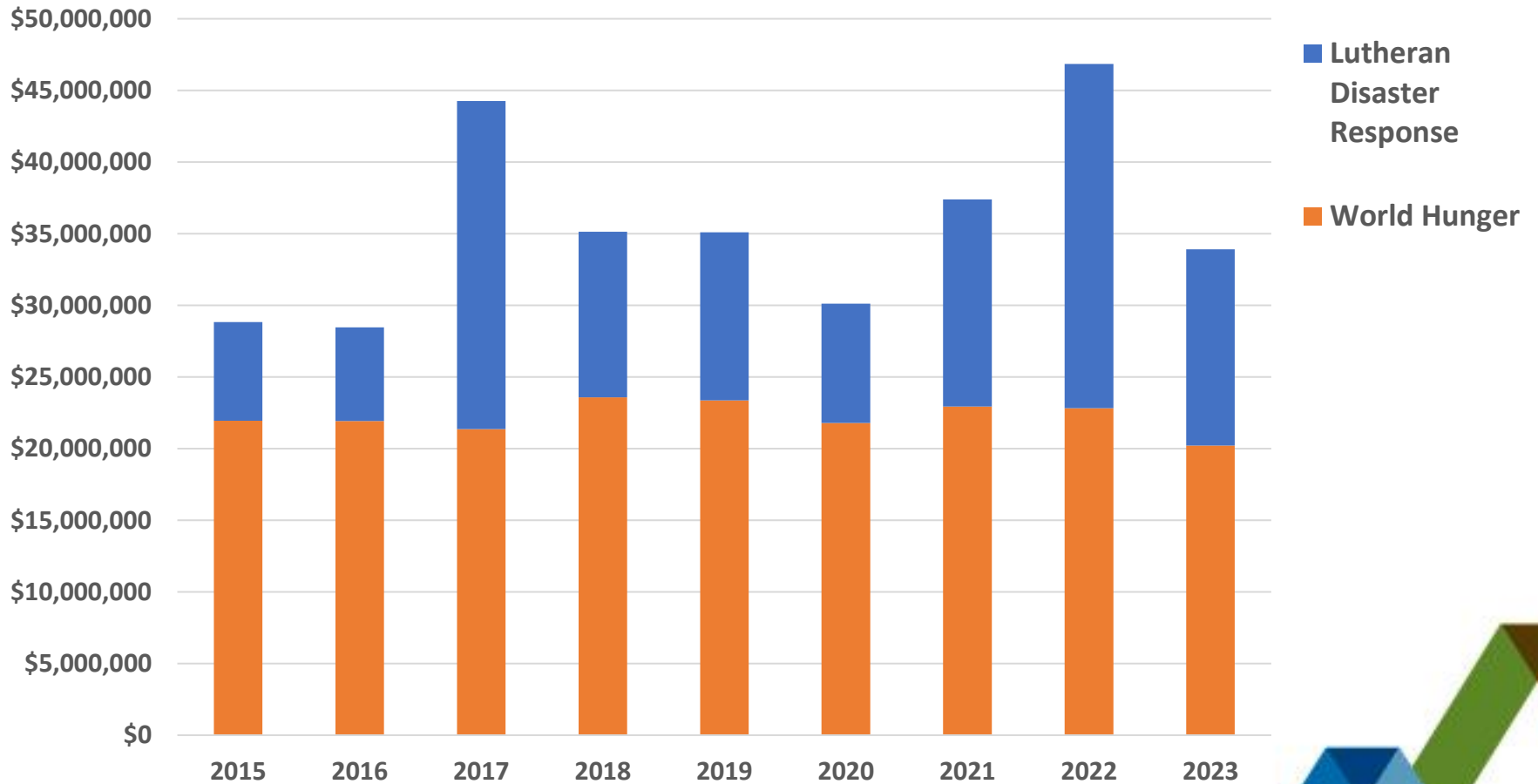
| | Fiscal Year 2024 | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| | <u>Churchwide Assembly Approved</u> | <u>Nov-23 Approved Budget</u> | <u>Additional Designated Funds to be Released (b)</u> | <u>Revised FY 24</u> |
| Proposed Revenues | \$65,384,000 | \$ 63,653,152 | \$ 4,281,889 | \$ 67,935,041 |
| Proposed Spending Authorization | <u>\$70,191,000</u> | <u>\$ 68,083,962</u> | - | <u>\$ 68,083,962</u> |
| Deficit | \$ (4,807,000) | \$ (4,430,810) | | \$ (148,921) |

No Action Required

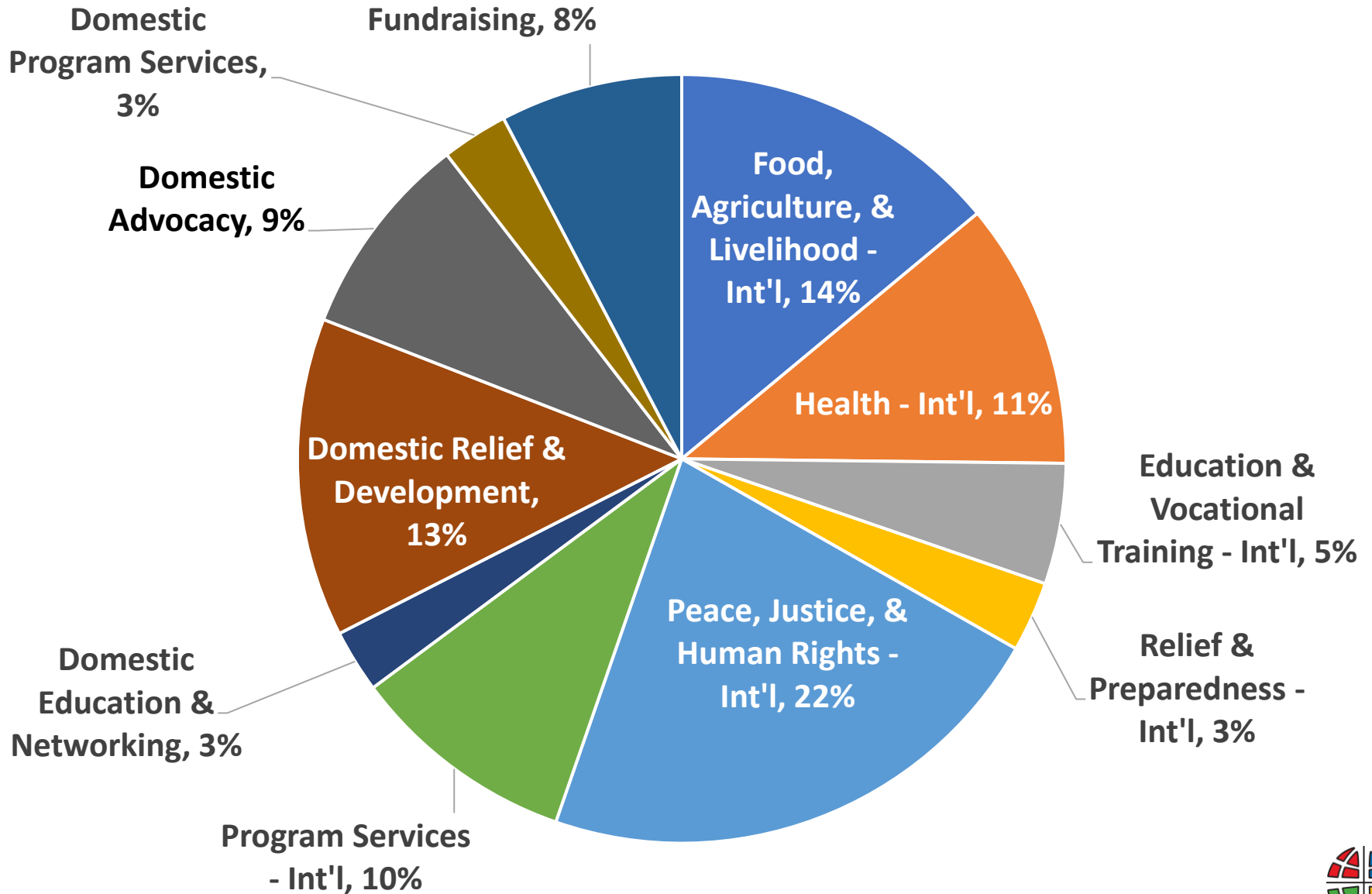


ELCA World Hunger and Lutheran Disaster Response

Combined Revenues



World Hunger Spending



ELCA World Hunger – FY24 Budget

| | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|---------------|-------------------------|
| | ACTUAL | APPROVED IN NOVEMBER |
| Beginning Fund Balance | \$ 13,007,464 | \$ 8,254,388 |
| REVENUES | | |
| Direct Gifts | \$ 17,280,796 | \$ 19,000,000 |
| Endowment Distributions | 990,873 | 1,000,000 |
| Bequests and Miscellaneous | 1,843,885 | 1,500,000 |
| Total ELCA World Hunger Income | \$ 20,115,554 | \$ 21,500,000 |
| EXPENDITURES | | |
| <i>WH Domestic Program</i> | 4,025,185 | 4,757,544 |
| <i>WH International Program</i> | 16,844,412 | 16,173,177 |
| <i>WH Witnessing in Society</i> | 2,162,207 | 2,979,279 |
| <i>WH Fundraising</i> | 1,923,005 | 2,090,000 |
| Total ELCA World Hunger Expenses | \$ 24,954,809 | 26,000,000 |
| End of Year Fund Balance | \$ 8,254,388 | \$ 3,754,388 |

Portico launching listening initiative to discern potential changes to the ELCA benefit program



BENEFITS reEXAMINED
Dialogue. Discern. Design.

- To continue to provide benefits that meet the evolving needs of this church and serve plan members and organizations in a flexible, affordable way
- To address growing affordability concerns for members and organizations:
 - ✓ Rising health care costs
 - ✓ Declining church attendance and financial giving
 - ✓ Aging and shrinking membership pool
 - ✓ Changing workforce
- To invite churchwide dialogue and discernment alongside the CRLC and Future Church initiatives

What to expect as Portico begins to seek input and perspective from across the church

- Starting with targeted individuals and groups
 - Stakeholder interviews in process
 - Bishop ideation session April 25
 - Larger Church Conference short survey May 6
 - Broader survey for plan members and organizations this summer
- Direct questions to project team members
 - Bishop Jim Dunlop
 - Lori Fedyk, ELCA Treasurer
 - Pastor Tara Lynn
 - Pastor Hans Becklin
 - Stacy Kruse, Portico Interim CEO
 - Lindsey Holman, Portico Sr. Director of Products
 - Kent Roepke, Portico Actuary
- Potential changes will follow Portico's normal governance process



BENEFITS reEXAMINED
Dialogue. Discern. Design.

A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Budget & Finance Committee

Information Items

- Reviewed financial performance for Unrestricted and ELCA World Hunger for FY23.
- Reviewed the balance sheet as of 1/31/24, including balances due from separately incorporated ministries.
- Reviewed FY24 budget for unrestricted. No action required.
- Reviewed cash and investment balances for compliance with policy and approved minor policy changes.
- Received a report from our investment advisors on core and operating investments.
- Received a report from the Sr. Director for Mission Support
- Received a report from the Resource Development Committee.



En Bloc Items

- Authority to Act in Financial Matters

This recommendation from Budget and Finance Committee is an *en bloc* action for Church Council approval.

Action will come during Plenary Session 6 on April 14.



FY24 World Hunger Spending Authorization

CC Action

To request the Office of the Treasurer, in consultation with the appropriate churchwide organization home areas, to review the FY24 revenue and expense performance of ELCA World Hunger through May 2024 and to share any recommendations with the Budget and Finance Committee; and

To authorize the Executive Committee to approve any necessary revisions to the FY24 Spending Authorization in ELCA World Hunger if recommended by the Budget & Finance Committee.



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Thank You



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Legal and Constitutional Review Committee

April 13, 2024

Information Items

- Potential DEIA-related amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*
- Proposed amendments to CBCR Chapter 7 from the Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group
- Three action items (following slides)



En Bloc Item

- Pre-Assembly Identification Process for Nominees for Presiding Bishop Election

19.01.A234. 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 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 ~~60~~ 30 days prior to the Churchwide Assembly, the biographical information received from those persons open to consideration shall be distributed to the voting members.

These recommendations from the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee are *en bloc* actions for Church Council approval.

Action will come during Plenary Session 6 on April 14.



Consideration of Roth Option for ELCA Retirement Plans

CC Action

To approve adding Roth as an option for member elective contributions for the plan year beginning January 1, 2025;
and

To approve the proposed amendments by the Portico Benefit Services, as outlined in the “Summary of Plan Amendments” and “Plan Amendments” documents.

Amendments to ELCA Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies

CC Action

To approve the amended Churchwide Organizational
Personnel Policies; and

To authorize the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with
People Solutions in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to
make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.

A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Thank You



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Christian Community and Leadership Committee

Information Items

CCL exists to recruit, train, and send leaders who establish and grow Christian communities

Goals

- 1) Help the ELCA engage new, young, and diverse folk
- 2) Develop new leaders to do the engaging
- 3) Measure, assess, and feedback as part of the process -
Make sure we know what we're doing, how it's working, and how we could be improving it



Information Items

Grants

- Significant part of the CCL budget (51.7%)
- Currently studying effectiveness for future ministries
 - New Start Grants (Evangelism)
 - Campus Ministry



En Bloc Items

- CA22.01.08: Fortifying Urban Ministries
- CA22.01.10: Mission Development Process

These recommendations from CCL are *en bloc* actions for Church Council approval. (see “Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions”)

Action will come following this brief update from committees.



Network of ELCA Colleges & Universities Celebrations



- Waldorf University: Forest City, Iowa
 - Received as the 27th College/University in NECU
 - Went from for profit to non-profit
 - No official action needs to be taken by Church Council



- Valparaiso University: Valparaiso, Indiana
 - Received as an Associate Member of NECU
 - Previously “Lutheran” without affiliation to the ELCA



To be continued...

Candidacy Working Group

- Update of current work
- Approved recommended updates to chapter 7 of Constitution



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Thank You



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Service and Justice Committee

Information Items

- Connected with new exec director, Rev. Khader El-Yateem
- Reviewed the SJ mandate and reviewed team structure
- Received reports of directors
 - Lutheran World Federation / LSA
 - Global Services, Global Engagement, Global Personnel
 - Lutheran Disaster Response
 - Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities
 - Witness in Society
- Engaged in conversation about connecting with synods and congregations



A WELCOMING CHURCH

A THRIVING CHURCH

A CONNECTED AND SUSTAINABLE CHURCH

Request:

increased communication resources

Thank You



ELCA Foundation Report

Submitted by Annette C. Shoemaker, Interim President and CEO

Overview

As mentioned in the Fall report, 2023 saw meaningful improvements in process, procedures and systems. Work continues with our internal auditor, Forvis, to tighten internal controls and we carry on the critical work of documenting operational policies and procedures. Implementation of the online client portal is progressing on schedule with a positive internal “Go Live” achieved at the beginning of this year. We have been running parallel since then with a successful upload of January statements. The accounting staff has been trained in the process of uploading statements manually, although we are simultaneously working on an interface with Workday that will allow statements to be uploaded to the portal automatically beginning with the March statements.

In January, during a meeting of the full gift planning staff, gift planners heard from our strategic planning consultant, and several Foundation trustees, the plans to update and upgrade the gift planner strategy. The strategy will focus on two key areas—managing partner relationships, the churchwide organization being one of the primary partners, and serving as strategic advisors to donors in the area of gift planning. The goals for gift and asset expansion are aggressive and require a focused approach and strict accountability. Simultaneously, the entire Foundation team continues the important work of implementing infrastructure upgrades, strengthening asset management policies and procedures, and rebranding the identity and image of the Foundation’s work all with an eye toward supporting significant asset and gift development growth.

We continue to optimize and promote the on-line planned giving Resource Hub. Since being launched last May, the resource hub has received nearly 1,200 visits. We believe this tool, along with increased communication through all mediums—written and on-line—will allow us to dramatically expand the number of donors who wish to support ELCA ministries. In conjunction with this work, the Foundation implemented and promotes Giving Docs, a secure, online estate planning resource that allows ELCA members to create wills and complete other estate planning documents at no cost. To date, the site has generated 101 account activations, 40 completed documents, and seven completed gifts.

Other tools being implemented to help expand giving opportunities to our constituents include a new stock transaction system that will allow donors to give gifts of appreciated securities at no cost; and the additional capability of accepting and disbursing Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs).

Last year ended with total assets under management rebounding in the fourth quarter, meeting the previous record achieved at the end of 2021. Additions to the fund, although significantly backing off during the fourth quarter, came in at \$45.6 million for the year—a level not seen since 2018. Total distributions to ministry, \$60.4 million, for the year from both the fund, \$38.1 million and realized gifts, \$22.3 million—with half of that amount, \$11.1 million, going to churchwide—achieved a new high. This continues a three-year upward trend of increased distributions for both churchwide and other ELCA ministries.

Total gifts and managed assets developed during the year were on par with 2022—\$116.3 million versus \$116.1 million. Planned gifts made up \$62.5 million of that total, with an additional \$8.8 million in currently funded gifts such as charitable gift annuities and named endowments.

ELCA Foundation Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Annette C. Shoemaker, Interim President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: March 22, 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 AND APPROVED:

FO.24.03.02 To approve the minutes of the Sept. 15, 2023 ELCA Foundation Board of Trustees.

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

VOTED AND APPROVED:

FO.24.03.03 To approve the updated Investment Policy Statement and the new Strategic Asset allocation for the ELCA Endowment Fund Pooled Trust's Ministry Growth Fund.

Mission Investment Fund Report

Submitted by Eva M. Roby, President and CEO

Undoubtedly, 2023 was a year marked by unprecedented economic hurdles and unforeseen outcomes. Despite these adversities, the Mission Investment Fund (MIF) has remained steadfast and stable while navigating these turbulent times. Our commitment to proactive measures within our Enterprise Risk Management Program has been key in weathering the storm, as has our years-long discipline of building resilience within our organization. By prioritizing sound asset/liability management, risk assessment, and strategic decision-making, we have thrived amidst adversity, and achieved excellent outcomes for our 2023 Key Strategic Initiatives. I would like to highlight the results for two key initiatives as part of this report.

We significantly advanced our modernization project in 2023. We launched a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, and began five additional system implementations, including those for core banking and loan origination. This work is key to our commitment to harnessing technology to enhance our operations and meet the challenges of the future. We also defined a customer-first mindset to ensure that customer needs are at the forefront of every decision and action we take both during the modernization process and beyond.

In addition, we made excellent progress in our initiative related to our social ministry organization (SMO) business strategy. We filled the new position of Vice President of Business Development. A specific responsibility of this position is developing a comprehensive strategy for how to serve the SMO market. Our initial efforts are focused on serving the organizations that comprise the membership of Lutheran Services in America (LSA), and we initiated efforts to reach out to them to share information and build relationships. Through this work, we identified the borrowing needs of these organizations, and then designed and launched new product offerings tailored to their needs.

MIF's financial position helps ensure our ability to meet our obligations and offer security to our investors. Our financial strength and stability continue to anchor us during these challenging times – and, most importantly – form the foundation that allows us to accompany and assist ELCA congregations and ministries in carrying out their mission. MIF remains sound and healthy, with all key success indicators within target ranges. We are well-equipped to continue our mission of supporting and empowering congregations, ministries, and the church in all its lived expressions.

Going forward, we will continue to maintain a long-term perspective and prioritize sustainability. Furthermore, we will proceed on the path laid out for us in our strategic plan, confident that its long-term goals are the right ones for us as we look ahead.

Mission Investment Fund Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Eva Roby, President and CEO

Meeting Date: March 21, 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.)*

- Elected officers and committee members
- Approved:
 - Revision to the Asset Liability Management Policy
 - The audited financial statements for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2023

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

None

Portico Benefit Services Report

Submitted by Stacy Kruse, Interim President & CEO



March 2024 — Over the last decade, Portico has learned well how to navigate change from a place of stability. We are well-positioned to support the ELCA as we work together to become the church God is calling us to be, and are continuing to introduce strategic, responsible change. Read on for early information on the Roth addition to the ELCA Retirement Plan and upcoming Portico listening sessions.

Update on Implementation of Roth Option

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted last September to refer the June 2023 “Roth Tax Option for ELCA Leaders” resolution from the North Carolina Synod to Portico. This resolution requests: 1) that ELCA Retirement Plan members be given the option to choose a Roth for their individually-elected retirement contributions, and 2) that the Church Council recommend that Portico implement this option.

We’re designing the Roth option to be available to ELCA Retirement Plan members for elective deferrals next year. Portico’s Board of Trustees approved Roth-related plan amendments in February, and this council will vote on whether to add Roth at the upcoming meeting. Pending approval, Roth will be an Annual Enrollment option this fall, to take effect Jan. 1, 2025. Members will be offered educational opportunities later this year to help them understand this new option and consider whether it’s beneficial for their situation.

Implementation and ongoing costs include:

- Changes to billing systems, benefit systems, and our proprietary retirement planning tool
- Plan member education to ready members to make the choice that best supports their needs — including direct communications, online resources, and increased access to our financial planners
- Separate recordkeeping for the life of Roth assets to reflect their unique tax treatment

Preparing to Launch ELCA Listening Sessions

To keep our benefits aligned with the needs of an evolving church, Portico maintains an ongoing line of sight to the needs and wants of those we serve. As the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church and God’s Love Made Real initiatives guide the ELCA into a new phase of discernment, it’s more important than ever that Portico, too, leans in to listen and discern.

We are well aware of declining church membership and financial giving, as well as congregations increasingly voicing concern about their ability to afford benefits. Given these important concerns, Portico is planning a series of listening sessions to take place in late spring and summer of 2024. We intend them to inform our work as we: 1) revisit the benefits structure to help meet the evolving needs of the Church, and 2) continue to serve our members in a flexible and affordable way.

The listening sessions project team is cross-functional, including Portico staff and representation from the Conference of Bishops, members in our plans, the Church Council, and the churchwide organization. Together with Bp. James Dunlop, Conference of Bishops advisor to Portico’s Board of Trustees, and Rev. Tara Lynn, ELCA Church Council member and Portico regional representative, Portico will provide you with regular updates as this work progresses.

Growing Popularity of Our Wellness Podcast

Portico’s Being Here podcast, hosted by the Rev. Melissa Pohlman, focuses on current issues impacting the faith leadership community. Our product manager, Ashley Brennan, shared with me why these podcasts are resonating with rostered leaders:

“A podcast is an easy way to delve into a polarizing, stressful topic without having to take a side. It opens up space to explore the topic without judgement. Our goal isn’t to provide answers, just a safe opportunity for learning. And our numbers tell us that ELCA-Primary health plan members are appreciating this kind of support.”

- Total listens jumped nearly 40% last year, from 724 in 2022 to 1,092 in 2023.
- “Gender Identity and the Church” generated the most listens of all our episodes.

Portico recently emailed members a heads-up about a [two-part Being Here podcast](#) on generational differences and how churches can meaningfully serve the Gen Z community. In the two weeks following the announcement, the set generated 127 listens.

2023 Being Here Podcast Listens

| Total | 1,092 |
|--|-------|
| Gender Identity and the Church* | 398 |
| Preaching in the Gray* | 250 |
| Creation Care in the Church | 121 |
| Growing Closer to God in Grief | 99 |
| Racism as a Public Health Crisis | 68 |
| Retirement: Navigating your Next Chapter | 36 |
| Creative Approaches to Innovative Ministry | 28 |
| Protecting Yourself from Burnout | 23 |
| Overcoming Compassion Fatigue | 21 |

* Released in 2023

Update on Helping Members Spend Down PWA Balances

Due to the ongoing cost of administering personal wellness account (PWA) balances, Portico decided in 2022 that members with a balance and no longer eligible to receive PWA contributions needed to incur claims by Dec. 31, 2023, and submit expenses for reimbursement by April 30, 2024, or forfeit it. We began communicating this change to members early in September 2022, and increased communication during and leading up to the Dec. 31, 2023, deadline. We are encouraged by the progress members have made and are hopeful that a final Portico email reminder in early April to members with a balance triggers more requests for reimbursement.

U.S. Government Report Had No Direct Impact to Portico

The U.S. Government Accountability Office’s study of church plans reviewed the protections afforded members, in part, given the ERISA exemption for church plans, and defined benefit plan funding. The report was released last December and focused only on defined benefit pension plans. Because the ELCA Retirement Plan is a defined contribution plan, the report had no direct impact on Portico.

Year-End Market Update

Fortunately for investors, both the fourth quarter of 2023 and full year 2023 performance of both stocks and bonds far exceeded most investors’ expectations. The S&P 500 was up 11.7% for the quarter and 26.3% for the year, while investment-grade bonds were up 6.8% for the quarter to bring the full-year return to 5.5%. A key driver was decreasing inflation readings which led to expectations that the Federal Reserve is done raising interest rates and is closer to cutting them in 2024. Also driving strong returns were strong corporate earnings results and excitement about potential productivity gains from artificial intelligence.

Portico Benefit Services Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Stacy A. Kruse, Interim President and CEO

Meeting Dates: February 22-23, 2024

Category 1: *(Policies with an impact beyond the unit which require Church Council approval.)*

February 2024 Resolutions/Actions

Portico Benefit Services' proposed plan amendment changes to add the Roth contributions and the Roth accounts received the approval of the Board of Trustees at the meeting on February 23, 2024.

Category 2: *(Policies related to the day-to-day functioning of the unit or to the specific mandate of the unit.)*

February 2024 Resolutions/Actions

Approved the Social Purpose Guiding Policies of the Investment/Corporate Social Responsibility Committee.

PLAN AMENDMENTS

Approved plan amendments as recommended by the Services & Solutions Committee.

ELCA Retirement Plan

SECURE 2.0: Adding Roth contributions and Roth accounts

Sections 2.25, 2.26, 2.27, 2.28, 2.29, 2.44, 2.45, 4.01, 5.02, 5.04, 5.05, 5.07, 5.08, 5.09, 5.11, 5.13, 6.01, 7.04, 7.05, 7.06, 9.01, 9.02, 9.03, 9.04, 9.06, 9.14, 12.18

ELCA Retirement Savings Plan

SECURE 2.0: Adding Roth contributions and Roth accounts

Sections 2.10, 2.21, 2.22, 2.23, 2.24, 2.25, 2.38, 2.39, 4.05, 5.02, 5.03, 5.06, 5.10, 5.11, 6.01, 7.04, 7.05, 7.06, 9.01, 9.02, 9.03, 9.04, 12.19

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

November 2022 Resolutions/Actions

Received the report on 2024 Trustee Conflict or Duality of Interest and Code of Conduct.

Received the Resolution accepting the resignation of trustee, Krista M. Harris.

Received the Resolution accepting the resignation of advisor, Judith G. Berg.

Received the 4Q2023 Portico Benefit Services Management Report.

Approved minor revisions to the Committee Charter and Calendars for the Finance Committee.

Approved the selection of an executive search firm to search for the new Portico President and CEO as recommended by the Executive Committee.

Publishing House of the ELCA (1517 Media) Report

Submitted by Tim Blevins, President and CEO

The publishing activities of 1517 Media 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 initiatives 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. Over the past six months we have had many opportunities to engage with our customers to learn more about how we can continue to best serve them.

In January, we were thrilled to connect in person with 800 children, youth, and family ministry leaders at the ELCA Youth Ministry Network's annual **Extravaganza**, held in New Orleans. Hundreds of people visited our booth where they talked with us about our wide array of titles and their Sparkhouse Digital subscriptions. We also hosted author signings for mainstage speakers Ross Murray (Fortress) and Jamie Brueshoff (Broadleaf), and an evening gathering for Sparkhouse author Joe Davis, who read his poems with his frequent collaborator, musician Tyra Dennis. Dr. Dawn Rundman, director of congregational development and marketing, led three workshops.

Also at the Extravaganza, our marketing consultant Mark Howell held five focus groups with 40 participants, showing resource prototypes and gathering inputs to help us determine what resources we will begin to develop with funds from our **Unbridled Presence** grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc.

A series of **targeted surveys** over the past months have asked our congregational customers about:

- their practices and needs around adult Bible study;
- whether and how they plan to adopt the New Revised Standard Version updated edition (NRSVue) Bible in the next 18 months;
- how their experience with the first real post-pandemic Sunday school program year is impacting their needs and plans for next year; and
- what they most value and expect in SundaysandSeasons.com, our online worship planning tool.

Engagement with these types of surveys is always high—the SundaysandSeasons.com survey alone elicited more than one thousand responses in two weeks.

Also of note:

- In late November almost 50 people gathered at Moon Palace Books in Minneapolis to hear from authors Shari Seifert, Rev. Angela T. !Khabeb, Rev. Priscilla Paris-Austin, and Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, contributors to our new **Mouth House** book series. We are so excited that the world gets to read *Ashes to Action* and *Call to Allyship* by these talented authors.
- In February, we recorded 22 new **choral pieces** for Fall, Advent, and Christmas. It took 10 hours over two days, 17 singers, one organist/pianist, three conductors, a violinist, and an oboist.
- We hosted the ELCA's European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice (EDLARJ) at our offices in Minneapolis's North Loop for a portion of their March meeting, where we also offered a pop-up bookstore of resources curated from all five of 1517 Media's imprints.

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)

Our Trespasses: White Churches and the Taking of American Neighborhoods. Greg Jarrell, foreword by Chanequa Walker-Barnes.

Caribbean Lutherans: The History of the Church in Puerto Rico. José David Rodríguez, foreword by Idalia Negrón, afterword by Luis N. Rivera-Pagán.

Luther for Everyone: Who He Was and Why He Still Matters. Hans Schwarz.

The Emancipation of God: Postmarks on Cultural Prophecy. Walter Brueggemann, ed. Conrad Kanagy.

BROADLEAF BOOKS (broadleafbooks.com)

Black Women, Ivory Tower: Revealing the Lies of White Supremacy in American Education. Jasmine L. Harris.

A Different Kind of Fast: Feeding Our True Hungers in Lent. Christine Valters Painter.

A Faith of Many Rooms: Inhabiting a More Spacious Christianity. Debie Thomas.

Surviving God: A New Vision of God through the Eyes of Sexual Abuse Survivors. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Susan M. Shaw.

BEAMING BOOKS (beamingbooks.com)

Remembering Sundays with Grandpa. Lauren H. Kerstein and Nanette Regan.

Milkweed for Monarchs. Christine Van Zandt and Alejandra Barajas.

Mara Hears in Style. Terri Clemmons and Lucy Rogers.

Easter on the Farm. Phyllis Alsdurf and Lisa Hunt.

1517 Media Organizational Matters

After 18 years of dedicated service, CFO John Rahja will retire from 1517 Media on June 30. We are deeply grateful for John's precise and prudent management of our financial resources and the generosity with which he shares his expansive knowledge and experience. A solid transition plan is well underway, including a transfer of some of John's responsibilities to our Publishing Operations team, others to Finance and Accounting. A new accounting manager joined our staff in March.

In December, longtime employee Dr. Dawn Rundman was promoted to director of congregational development and marketing. At this critical time in the life of the ELCA, she will direct an integrated approach to development, promotion, and customer engagement that responds to our core market and their current needs around worship, music, Sunday school, and confirmation.

Since January 1, we have also welcomed two production editors to our Books team, and a senior marketing and publicity specialist to Beaming Books.

After the headwinds in the book industry in 2022–2023, buying patterns by major booksellers such as Amazon are normalizing. We are encouraged that the books segment continues to perform well ahead of plan and last year for both trade and Fortress Press. For trade, the year-over-year improvement stands out, as we restructured the trade program at the end of fiscal year 2023, with the significant financial benefit recognized in the current year.

We strive to collaborate with partners in ministry across the ELCA as we work together toward the future into which God is calling us. Thank you for your continuing interest and support! If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at blevinst@1517.media.

1517 Media Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Tim Blevins, President and CEO

Date of Board Meeting: November 2, 2023

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.)*

Executive Session actions

Voted to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2023 Board of Trustees meeting in executive session.
(PH/ES.23.11.03)

Voted that the 1517 Media Board of Trustees approves that Tim Blevins, the President and CEO of 1517 Media, be elected to a third four-year term as President and CEO, beginning effective September 1, 2026; and that the Chair of the Board of Trustees, in consultation with the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA, prepare and execute a contract for the service of Tim Blevins as President and CEO for the period commencing September 1, 2026. (PH/ES.23.11.04)

Voted that the Executive Committee explore ways to identify and recruit diverse candidates for top leadership. (PH/ES.23.11.05)

Category 3: *(Other procedures and board actions.)*

Voted to approve the minutes of the June 9, 2023 Board of Trustees meeting in open session.
(PH.23.11.03)

Women of the ELCA Report

Submitted by Linda Post Bushkofsky, 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. Here are some highlights of activities of the churchwide women's organization:

Anti-trafficking

During the four weeks leading up to February's Super Bowl, the women of the organization spent time in prayer for all involved in human trafficking. [Specific prayers were prepared and distributed such as these for week one](#). Since at least 2005, Women of the ELCA participants have been actively working to end human trafficking. Some participants work on education and awareness, in the church, in school settings, in the community. Others provide support to agencies helping women to leave or who have left human trafficking. Still others are working to change laws that criminalize the victims of trafficking.

Bold Women's Day

Women across the church celebrated [Bold Women's Day](#) on March 3, lifting up bold women within their congregations and communities. The celebrations echo the organization's mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

Scholarships

The organization's annual scholarship program is designed for women who have had their post-secondary education interrupted or for those who match the particulars of certain scholarship funds. The application period is now open and closes April 15. [Learn more online](#).

\$1 million campaign for Katie's Fund

2122: Growing Katie's Fund for the next 100 years is a campaign to raise \$1 million for the Katharina von Bora Luther Endowment Fund, fondly known as Katie's Fund. The primary communication hub for the campaign is welca.org/katiesfund. The organization is more than one-third of the way towards its goal.

Non-participants in Women of the ELCA might consider making a gift to the campaign in honor or in memory of someone who made a difference in their spiritual journey. [Gifts can be made online](#) or [sent by mail](#).

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](#). You can also [subscribe](#) to the organization's monthly e-newsletter [Bold Connections](#).

Women of the ELCA Digest of Board Actions

Submitted by: Linda Post Bushkofsky, Executive Director

Date of Board Meeting: No meeting held since October 2023 to report on

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