



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Nov. 19, 2024

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

From: Deacon Sue E. Rothmeyer, secretary

Subject: Report of Church Council Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions, Synod Resolutions, and Previous Church Council Actions (Nov. 14–17, 2024)

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Ill., Nov. 14–17, 2024. The following is a summary of Church Council responses to previous actions along with background information.

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I. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

A. HOLY COMMUNION PRACTICES

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.05n]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Holy Communion Practices in Unusual Circumstances and in Pandemic Times” from the Pacifica Synod;

To request that the Worship team of the Christian Community and Leadership home area, in collaboration with the Conference of Bishops, the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and teaching theologians, facilitate continued conversation and study regarding Holy Communion practices; and

To request that a report be provided to the Church Council no later than its Fall 2024 meeting.

*Response from the Worship Team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2024)
[The Worship Team moved from the Christian Community and Leadership home area to the Office of the Presiding Bishop]*

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced online worship to many congregations and worshiping communities for the first time. The pandemic also introduced a time when it was not safe to participate in the sacrament of Holy Communion in many places for a lengthy period. Congregations experimented in how to offer worship, sacraments, and pastoral care during trying times. Questions about whether it is appropriate to have Holy Communion in online situations quickly became at the forefront of congregations, pastors, bishops, and church leaders around the world. These questions continue even beyond pandemic times as some worshiping communities continue to experiment with online sacramental practice.

The ELCA is grounded in the Lutheran Confessions that define the church as “the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”¹ “The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament,” adopted by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly, continues to guide the practice of Word and Sacrament in the ELCA. However, neither this statement nor the confessions offer explicit guidance for the questions at hand.

Early in the pandemic, Bishop Eaton and the Worship Team of the churchwide organization organized a conversation among liturgical scholars. Based on that consultation, a statement was issued encouraging congregations to fast from the sacrament for what was thought would be a short time. As the pandemic continued to lengthen, many pastors (who, in conversation with their councils and under the supervision of their bishops, bear the ultimate responsibility of Word and Sacrament ministry in their context) experimented with diverse ways to offer Holy Communion mediated by video technology. Bishops, leaders, and liturgical scholars from the ELCA and among ecumenical and global partners offered a wide variety of opinions and guidance. Disagreement among leaders and liturgical scholars often led to confusion and frustration for those desiring to make informed decisions while navigating unprecedented circumstances.

The ELCA Conference of Bishops engaged in conversation about sacramental practice since early in the pandemic, long before this 2022 memorial. Similar conversations have occurred among other connected groups, including those convened by ELCA seminaries, the Lutheran participants in the North American Academy of Liturgy, ecumenical partners, and others. These dialogues continue to raise important questions and acknowledge that this is a topic that will not be settled quickly.

There are multiple areas of discernment about online Holy Communion, like layers of an onion. Once one peels back one layer of the conversation, another theological question or concern becomes apparent. Certain “layers” may be theological “sticking points,” while others may be seen as opportunities for further conversation and study. These areas of conversation among theologians and the Conference of Bishops include:

- **Defining the Christian Assembly:** Principle 39 of “The Use of the Means of Grace” states that “The gathered people of God celebrate the sacrament.” There are differing views as to what constitutes a gathered assembly. If God promises to show up and encounter people where they are, many conclude that God is fully present in the assembly gathering for worship mediated in an online format. Others note that being connected electronically is meaningful and important, but not the same “assembly.”
- **Technology Format:** Is online Holy Communion possible in more participatory, synchronous situations (i.e., on the Zoom platform) vs. less participatory or asynchronous situations (i.e., watching a YouTube livestream or recording)?
- **Elements:** There are concerns about the choice of elements used by individuals in online communion. Are only bread and wine/juice acceptable?
- **Experience and Community:** Does online-only community lead to isolation? How does the sacrament create community? What is the community missing if online Holy Communion is not offered?
- **Pastoral Care:** Is there adequate pastoral care in online-only worshiping communities? How do online worship opportunities replace or supplement the church’s ministry of providing for the sending of communion from the gathered [onsite] assembly to the absent (See ELCA Worship FAQ: “How can we provide for communion of the ill, homebound, and imprisoned?”)?

¹ Augsburg Confession, Article VII, from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 42. This Article is quoted from an older translation as Principle 3 in “The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament” (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997).

- **Normative Practice:** Are there circumstances when online Holy Communion is the best thing this church can do? Are “emergency” situations treated differently than “non-emergency” times? Is there an expectation that online communion is always required or necessary?
- **Justice:** Who is excluded in online communion? Who is excluded without online communion? For example, what about those who lack access to the Internet?
- **Role of the bishop** as the synod’s pastor... to “administer the sacraments” ... and with “primary responsibility for the ministry of Word and Sacrament in [the] synod and its congregations.”² How might a synod bishop teach about sacraments? How does a bishop oversee sacramental practice in their synod?
- **Other rites of the church:** How does this conversation affect other rites that call for some level of physical proximity such as Holy Baptism and ordination?

While this list is not exhaustive, it demonstrates some of the complex questions and concerns that arise when discerning sacramental practice in online situations.

Following multiple presentations and discussions among the Conference of Bishops, a poll in Fall 2023 gauged bishops’ positions on the acceptability of online Holy Communion. Among fifty votes, 34% leaned “Strongly toward yes,” 42% leaned “Strongly toward no,” and 24% were “Somewhere in the middle.” These results reveal a wide diversity of thought within the conference, as in other church leadership, regarding online communion. Some bishops noted that the idea of “leaning” on this issue might itself be problematic, highlighting an underlying concern that the sacrament is sometimes viewed as “our own thing” rather than a shared holy practice. While some bishops call for further conversation and education, encouraging physical gathering, when possible, others consider online Holy Communion potentially acceptable in “emergency” situations—noting that the “emergency” period has ended. Some lean “no” but remain open to further discussion, while others struggle to reconcile online communion with the church’s confessions. Concerns were raised about the implications of online communion, with some arguing that it assumes privilege, fosters individualism, and contributes to fragmentation. Meanwhile, those with a strong leaning toward “yes” advocate for best practices, such as ensuring synchronous, two-way participation in online worship.

ELCA global companions and ecumenical partners are engaging in similar discernment regarding online communion, though direct guidance has been limited, with only a few instances of clear prohibitions. The ELCA’s discernment on this issue also has potential implications for its relationships with Catholic and Orthodox dialogue partners. Insights from ecumenical and global partners will continue to offer insight and foster mutual respect for diverse theological perspectives.

“The Use of the Means of Grace” notes that the statement itself “seeks to encourage unity among us in the administration of the means of grace and to foster common understanding and practice. It does not seek to impose uniformity among us” (Principle 4). Further, this statement “does not address our practice of Word and Sacrament out of antiquarian or legalistic interests but rather to ground the practice of our church in the Gospel and to encourage good order within our church” (Application 4A). Although much has been learned regarding online worship experiences in this time since the COVID-19 pandemic, there is not a clear consensus on the implications of online Holy Communion. Along with this church’s global and ecumenical partners, it will take time to seek unity in the administration of the means of grace in online and other situations.

The memorial to the Churchwide Assembly asked the ELCA “to consider with great faith, flexibility, and theological reflection how to speak, write, and teach about Holy Communion concerning participants who are worshipping online remotely, and other alternative communion practices.” The memorial did not direct the church to reach a decision one way or another at this time. As the church continues to learn from those within the ELCA and this church’s partners, it is clear that this deeply complex conversation and discernment will continue.

Appendix: A sampling of resources on the topic of online Holy Communion:

- *Currents in Theology in Mission*, Vol. 50 No. 1 (2023): “Eucharist and Online Worship: Toward Extended Theological Reflection”
- *CrossAccent*, Vol 28 No 2 (2020): “In the Emptiness, God Is”
- Dirk G. Lange, “Digital Worship and Sacramental Life in a Time of Pandemic,” The Lutheran World Federation website
- Deanna A. Thompson, “Christ is Really Present Virtually: A Proposal for Virtual Communion,” The Lutheran Center for Faith, Values and Community at St. Olaf College

² ELCA *Constitution for Synods*, S8.12.a; S8.12.b

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Holy Communion Practices” from the Worship Team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop;

To thank those who contributed to the conversation including teaching theologians, the Conference of Bishops, and others;

To commend congregations and worshiping communities for their ongoing care of the ministry of Word and Sacrament, and especially for the flexibility and resilience required during the COVID-19 pandemic; and

To encourage continued dialogue and discernment on sacramental practice, especially as it relates to online Holy Communion, throughout this church and with global and ecumenical partners; and

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

B. MOTION I: NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS PROCESS

Submitted by: The Rev. Kathy Gerking [Nebraska Synod, 4A]

RESOLVED, that the Church Council 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 be it further

RESOLVED, that the Task Force report to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council in sufficient time that potential governing document amendments and/or a report on best practices can be prepared in time for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Churchwide Assembly action [CA22.04.27]

To adopt Motion I as submitted.

Executive Committee action [EC22.09.23b11]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Motion I: Nominations and Elections Process” to the Office of the Secretary for a report or a timeline on when this will receive further attention.

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2022)

The Office of the Secretary plans to provide a report to the Church Council in November 2023, with a final report and recommendations to be brought to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.w.]

To receive the timeline on “Motion I: Nominations and Elections Process” from the Office of the Secretary on when the resolution will receive further attention; and

To request a progress report by the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting, with a final report and recommendations by the Fall 2024 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

At its November 2023 meeting, the Church Council authorized the Executive Committee to appoint members to the task force [CC23.11.20q] and the individuals were appointed at the December 2023 meeting of the Executive Committee [EC23.12.57].

The Task Force on Synod Nominations and Elections met over the past several months to consider the nominations and elections process currently outlined in the governing documents and policies, including the question of use of the ecclesiastical ballot. Included in the consideration were questions of pre-identification processes for nominees that are being used by synods and the Churchwide Assembly. After much discussion, the task force determined that no changes to the existing process will be recommended at this time. Members of the task force, all of whom have served as leaders in their own synods’ elections, are compiling a set of best practices regarding discernment processes, nominations, pre-identification, and education of voting members that will be published as a standalone document as well as being incorporated into the Bishop Election Toolkit that will be made available to all synods as they prepare for their synod assemblies.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Motion I: Nominations and Elections Process” from the Office of the Secretary;

To thank the Task Force on Synod Nominations and Elections for their diligent exploration and analysis of nomination and election processes used by synods; and

To commend to synods the document on best practices regarding discernment processes, nominations, pre-identification, and education of voting members for their use in nominations and elections processes.

C. SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES AND ON-LEAVE-FROM-CALL STATUS*

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.26]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Southwest California Synod, South Dakota Synod, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Northern Illinois Synod, La Crosse Area Synod, Indiana-Kentucky Synod, Northwestern Ohio Synod, and Lower Susquehanna Synod concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status;

To direct the Church Council to direct the appropriate churchwide unit to initiate a review process of the “Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” and the constitutional provisions and policies and procedures as they relate to interim, transition, bridge, specialized, non-parish-based, and innovative calls, as well as on-leave-from-call status, protocols for removal from the rosters, and communication protocols;

To direct the Church Council to ensure that this review process include in its scope of inquiry, but not be limited to: the time limits given for on-leave-from-call, steps for requesting a roster status, and a process by which an action or lack of recommendation from a bishop may be appealed, including the possibility of an appeal in a judicatory other than the synod from which they were removed from the roster;

To require that those involved in the review process include a diverse group representing both the roster of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Word and Service who are or have recently been involved in specialized ministries (e.g., interim, transition, campus, outdoor, college or seminary faculty, chaplains, mission developers, etc.), and those currently or recently on leave from call for a variety of reasons (e.g., between calls, family, disability, study, healing from abuse, etc.);

To urge bishops and synod councils to use sparingly any action by which a minister is removed from the roster for non-disciplinary reasons, unless the minister requests removal, until this review is complete, especially for those serving contract calls, as supply preachers, and in other ELCA ministries that don't qualify as a call; and

To require that the appropriate unit of the churchwide organization prepare a report and recommendations for consideration by the fall 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

*Report and recommendations to include above as well as response to the following resolutions:

- “Guidance on Retired or Retiring Ministers for the Roster of the ELCA” (CC22.11.34.ee.)
- “Extending Pastoral Counseling through Private Practice” (CC22.11.34.gg.)
- “Providing for Ordination of Candidates serving as Interim Pastors” (CC23.11.20cc)
- “Revisions to Roster Manual” regarding roster appeals (EC23.11.53c1)
- “Extending OLFC to six years” (EC22.03.10c); and
- recommendations to current discipline process shared by Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color (CC23.04.05)

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

A Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries was appointed by the Executive Committee of the Church Council [EC23.09.40] to initiate the review process. The task force was also requested to address related topics as cited in the various resolutions listed above.

The Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries has prepared a preliminary report and recommendations that are included in the materials for this meeting of the Church Council, along with proposed amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* for presentation by the Church Council to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. (The proposed amendments are included as an appendix to the task force's report and also appear among the amendments proposed by the Office of the Secretary, which will be offered to the Church Council at this meeting by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee.)

The current recommendations relate to the questions concerning On Leave from Call (OLFC) protocols and protocols for granting and continuing retired status that are included in the memorial and in the various resolutions listed above. They also were informed by and respond to the recommendations that came from the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color, as the recommendations of that task force included reform of the protocols for granting OLFC and retired status, given that the existing protocols hold potential for unfair application. The recommendations propose substantive changes to the existing policy, some of which will be addressed through bylaw changes while others will be addressed through policy changes to the *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters* that will be presented for approval following successful adoption of the revised bylaws by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Still to be addressed in the next few months are questions related to specialized ministry. In January, the task force will be convening listening sessions with rostered ministers engaged in specialized ministry, with a further report and recommendations to be presented to the Conference of Bishops for consultation at its February 2025 meeting and

a final report and recommendations to be presented to the Church Council at the April 2025 meeting. The issues concerning pastoral counseling through private practice will be part of those recommendations, as will the question of allowing for candidates to be ordained to interim ministry.

Church Council action:

To receive the response and preliminary report on the memorial concerning specialized ministries and on-leave-from-call status from the Office of the Secretary and the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call and Specialized Ministries;

To thank the Task Force on On-Leave-from-Call Status and Specialized Ministries for their faithful work in the review process;

To affirm the recommendations for On-Leave-from-Call Status, interim ministry, retired roster status, and average time requirements for calls that are identified in the preliminary report;

To anticipate another report and recommendations regarding specialized ministries to be presented at the April 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

D. 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	

Church Council Action [CC24.04.09g]

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.

Response from the Service and Justice home area (November 2024)

Below is a final proposal from the Service and Justice (S&J) home area for the strengthening of advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants, including cost estimates

Proposal

A) Advocacy

ELCA advocacy is led through the Witness in Society Team, which works for national and international public policy change based on the experience of Lutheran ministries, programs and projects around the world, including Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation, and Opportunities (AMMPARO).

To strengthen and support advocacy around Black Migrants, it is recommended:

- 1) Witness in Society will continue to advocate for just and humane immigration laws and policies in consultation with global companions and partners and in collaboration with national ecumenical and interfaith partners.
- 2) Witness in Society will continue to vigorously pursue legislation and policies supported by ELCA social teaching, resolutions, and actions impacting migrants that may include immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, in collaboration with Black immigrant-led organizations such as UndocuBlack, Haitian Bridge Alliance, African Communities Together, Cameroonian Advocacy Network, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, and others.
- 3) Witness in Society will continue to encourage local advocacy by international partners and companions as well as contribute to advocacy in solidarity with these partners and companions, including by utilizing the Lutheran Office for World Community to promote civic society engagement on Black migrants' issues at the multi-lateral level.
- 4) Witness in Society will continue to provide advocacy information and advocacy opportunities through action alerts, blogs, social media, and network updates so that ELCA members can become more informed about Black migrants, in the U.S., and around the world.
- 5) Witness in Society through the Program Director for Migration Policy will initiate a regular consultation process with stakeholders such as African Descent Ministries, Latino Ministries, AMMPARO, African National, African Descent Strategy Team, African Descent Lutheran Association, and the Association of Latino Ministries of the ELCA, and others to inform advocacy strategies that incorporate information of relevance on Black migrants.
 - a. Others: Association of Liberian Lutherans in the Americas (ALLIA); ELCA African Nationals Caucuses
- 6) To further protect and accompany Black migrants, Witness in Society will recommit to advocating for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), especially for Haitian migrants, for those unable to safely return to their homelands. The Secretary of Homeland Security can designate a country for TPS if the country is

experiencing ongoing armed conflict, natural disaster, or other extraordinary and temporary conditions. TPS allows its beneficiaries to stay in the U.S. during the designation period and receive work permits. Sending these migrants back to their country of origin, if TPS were to be terminated or not extended, would be dangerous for their safety and impact their current community.

There are **no additional financial costs** associated with these activities, which will be handled as part of existing responsibilities.

B) Protection

Protection may refer to protection provided to people outside of their country of origin, ratified by international legal instruments and treaties, and reinforced through advocacy from civic society. Per the United Nations, all migrants are entitled to the protection as well as respect and fulfillment of all human rights, regardless of status, with only narrowly defined and limited exceptions. Advocating for the basic human rights and protection of migrants is a just response to the plight of people forced to flee their countries of origin. It is also well-recognized, through research and anecdotal evidence collected through years of engaging with partners on the ground, that people of African descent often face disproportionate obstacles availing of protection and avoiding discrimination in immigration processes. Everyone should be able to enjoy the fulfillment of their God-given dignity without prejudice.

To strengthen and support advocacy around Black migrants, it is recommended:

- 1) Witness in Society will continue to advocate to strengthen the human rights of migrants in countries of origin, transit, destination, and return and will work to prevent systematic discrimination, including racism, xenophobia, and intolerance toward migrants in federal migration management, as well as internationally.

To strengthen and support protection for Black migrants in the U.S.,

- 1) AMMPARO has and will continue to encourage congregations and synods to sponsor Black migrant families through their asylum process.

There are **no additional financial costs** associated with these activities, which will be handled as part of existing responsibilities.

C) Accompaniment

At the ELCA, accompaniment is defined as “walking together in a solidarity that practices mutuality and interdependence in mission.” The AMMPARO strategy is uniquely positioned to be a strategy to advocate with, support, and encourage others to walk with Black migrants, who may include immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers at various stages of the migrant journey. Since its inception in 2016, AMMPARO has strived to live out these values with ELCA welcoming and sanctuary congregations, synod immigration taskforces, and international synodical companions and partners. Increasingly, AMMPARO is engaged with more ELCA companions and partners around the world as the strategy goes global. An accompaniment model is especially important in building relationships that honor, promote, and maintain the dignity of marginalized people, including Black migrants. The culture and values of accompaniment are crucial to reflect in current and future work surrounding Black migrants with global companions and partners.

Specific ELCA supported activities to accompany Black migrants:

- 1) For the 2021-2024 and renewing proposal for 2025-2027 in 2025, Fundación de Education Popular en Salud (EPES) with support from ELCA AMMPARO carried out various activities and projects to support the integral development and psychosocial needs of Haitian migrants in Chile, particularly children and women in the El Bosque community in Santiago.
- 2) For the 2021-2026 period, Pastoral de Migracion, Iglesia Luterana Mexicana, with support from ELCA AMMPARO, provided know-your-rights information, assisted with basic needs, and led worship and Bible studies to address racism and xenophobia in Mexico.
- 3) For a significant period of time to 2025, St. Andrew’s Refugee Service, Cairo, Egypt, has accompanied Black migrants from Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and other countries on the continent of Africa with integrated services including psychosocial and legal support. These services are offered to families, individuals, and a significant number of unaccompanied minors.
- 4) Through World Hunger support, several organizations in the European context have accompanied Black migrants, some as they decide to remain in various European countries and others in transit.

To strengthen and support accompaniment around Black migrants, it is recommended for:

- 1) Service & Justice to continue to invest in programs and initiatives led by companions and partners, through the AMMPARO strategy, that accompany migrants in country of origin, transit, destination, and return.

- 2) AMMPARO to develop resources, documents, and other materials to assist ELCA members and asylum-seeker co-sponsoring congregations to become more strongly aware of anti-Black racist and xenophobic rhetoric, how to address it, and how to accompany migrants.
- 3) AMMPARO to identify additional places for information sharing, capacity building, and scaling up of initiatives brought under AMMPARO with companions and partners.
- 4) Service & Justice to utilize social media and traditional media to raise awareness about the stories of Black migrants and the work of companions and partners with ELCA members and other audiences.
- 5) ELCA to promote advocacy among ELCA members as a vehicle to support public policy change to improve the lives and conditions of people before they have to migrate, as well as after they do. The aim is for would-be migrants to be free to remain in their homeland, support their families, and contribute to their communities.

For AMMPARO to further support initiatives and partners serving all populations, but especially African and African-descent migrants, **a sustained investment** is necessary to cover the associated activities.

New Funding

With additional funding, the Service and Justice home area could facilitate additional spaces to strengthen advocacy, protection, and accompaniment of Black migrants.

Proposal #1: Contractor/organizer/advisor to help facilitate a panel or webinar conversation with policy experts and community members to review the issues that are important to Black migrants.

Possible Outcomes: Policy recommendations; create a training/toolkit for action for advocates; letter writing campaigns.

Estimated Cost: This is a contractor position with compensation of \$5,000 for the work necessary to create one event and one impact report.

Proposal #2: Contractor/organizer to help facilitate community-led discussions about how the ELCA can better support African and African-Descent migrants and refugees.

Possible Outcomes: Create several virtual or in-person spaces for dialogue; collect and create resources concerning legal services, social services, mental health services, and more; create guidance for rostered ministers to directly spiritually and emotionally support/accompany Black migrants and refugees; and/or create a toolkit for local advocacy for local community development, housing, and human needs of newcomers and residents.

Estimated Cost: This is a contractor position with compensation of \$15,000 for the work necessary to organize several small-group conversations, and create one public event, one resource, and one impact report.

Definitions

Immigrant: In common usage, immigrants may refer to all newcomers who now live in this country.

Migrant: There is no universal, legal definition of a 'migrant'. 'Migrant' is thereby used as a neutral term to describe a group of people who have in common a lack of citizenship attachment to their host country. It is without prejudice to the protection regimes that exist under international law for specific legal categories of people, such as refugees, stateless persons, trafficked persons, and migrant workers.

Refugee: Persons who have "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion." This definition from the United Nations' 1951 "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees" was adopted by the United States in the Refugee Act of 1980.

Asylum-Seekers: Persons who have fled their country because of personal danger, who arrive in the United States without legal protection, and who must prove a "credible fear of persecution" to receive an opportunity to seek legal protective status or asylum.

Church Council action:

To receive the response and proposal with cost estimates on "ELCA Strategy Regarding Black Migrants" from the Service and Justice home area;

To affirm the recommended strategies and activities for strengthening and supporting advocacy, protection, and accompaniment around Black Migrants as identified in the proposal;

To refer the proposed cost estimates to the Office of the Treasurer and the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Service and Justice home area, to determine the necessary additional funding to cover the associated activities; and

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

E. COMMISSION FOR A RENEWED LUTHERAN CHURCH

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.06]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, Metropolitan Chicago Synod, Northeastern Ohio Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Allegheny Synod, Lower Susquehanna Synod, Delaware-Maryland Synod, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod, and West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod concerning the restructure of the ELCA's governance; and

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 thereto, 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.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.38]

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

- 3 voting members from each region for a total of 27, two of whom will be selected from nominations received by each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee and one of whom will be received through an open nomination process;
- Each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee will be invited to submit two potential nominees;
- Up to 8 at-large voting members will be selected from either the synod nominations or the open nomination process;

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

To request the nomination process be completed prior to the April 2023 Church Council meeting, presenting a slate of nominees to the Church Council for action; and

To invite this church to join us in prayer as this church embarks on this process of renewal.

Response from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (Oct. 2024)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended amendment of the Articles of Incorporation and *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*.

Church Council action:

To recommend the following for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

To adopt, *en bloc*, with the exception of such amendments as may be considered separately, certain amendments recommended by the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to the Articles of Incorporation and *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; and

To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make appropriate changes in the *Constitution for Synods* and the *Model Constitution for Congregations* congruent with the ELCA Constitution as amended.

II. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSES TO SYNOD RESOLUTIONS

A. ELCA NAME CHANGE

Southwest California Synod (2B) [2022]

(The Southwest California Synod Assembly ran out of time to act on the "ELCA Name Change" as a memorial. Therefore, the Southwest California Synod Council has forwarded it as a synod council resolution to the Church Council for its action.)

WHEREAS, the word "evangelical" appears in the name of our denomination (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: ELCA) and our primary worship book (Evangelical Lutheran Worship: ELW); and

WHEREAS, the constituting members of the ELCA and the Commission for a New Lutheran Church which led into the ELCA's formation held to the historic view and value of the word "evangelical" as meaning "pertaining to the Gospel;" and

WHEREAS, the word "evangelical" was hoped to be maintained in its historic usage and sense at the time of the ELCA's formation; and

WHEREAS, the word "evangelical" has become culturally synonymous in the U.S. with a religious expression and belief that is not compatible with the ELCA; and

WHEREAS, the word "evangelical" in the U.S. now culturally refers to fundamentalist Christianity including many forms of exclusion which we find to be contrary to the "evangel" (gospel) including the ordination of women and LGBTQ persons; and

WHEREAS, the word "evangelical" is now representative of a narrow swath of conservative Christian denominations and sects rather than a broad notion of being Gospel-centric and inclusive of all persons; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the word "evangelical" be discontinued in use and stricken from the name of our denomination and future books of worship; and be it further

RESOLVED that ELCA Church Council determine the nature of the transition in the use of the word "evangelical" in our denominational title leading up to the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Southwest California Synod memorialize the 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to discontinue the use of the word "evangelical" in our denomination name and to adopt a new name for the denomination which more faithfully reflects its identity in the U.S.

Executive Committee action [EC22.06.19c8]

To refer the "ELCA Name Change" resolution from the Southwest California Synod to the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Office of the Secretary for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention, particularly in light of certain memorials that are coming before the 2022 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary (November 2022)

On April 6, 2018, *Living Lutheran* published an [article](#) written by the Rev. Robert C. Blezard titled, "The 'e' word: Why does the ELCA have the word 'evangelical' in its name?" where he addressed the historical significance of using the word "evangelical" in this church's denominational name and the challenges of using a word where society and culture has shifted the word's original meaning.

In light of the pending work to be accomplished with the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Office of the Secretary recommends the reconsideration of a denominational name change be given to the commission.

Church Council action [CC22.11.34.cc.]

To receive the response on "ELCA Name Change" from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary;

To request the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consider the question of whether the denomination name, "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," should be changed;

To anticipate a recommendation when the commission presents its findings for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (November 2024)

In 2022, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a resolution leading to the creation of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) and charged it with addressing issues relating to the ELCA Constitution. The CRLC was later asked to consider an additional question, whether the name "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" should continue to be utilized for this church body. [CC22.11.34.cc.]

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

In the end, no strong consensus emerged among members of the CRLC as to whether the name ELCA should be changed.

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

Others, however, support maintaining the term "evangelical" because of its deep scriptural and theological roots (the term comes from the root word of "gospel" and literally means, "good news"), and argue that to eliminate the term "evangelical" would actually diminish the church's core identity and mission. The term also connects the ELCA

with the larger global Lutheran communion: the large majority of individual LWF church bodies utilize “Evangelical” in their names.

While the CRLC did not come to consensus on this matter, they make the following observations:

- The CRLC believes that this question reflects larger issues of identity. Changing the name alone will not address deeper issues within the denomination and may in fact lead to unintended consequences for various groups.
- If a change of name is to be considered, the Commission recommends engaging a broader range of voices in deeper conversation about the church’s core identity before making final recommendations.
- If, after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA is kept, the CRLC would recommend an effort to lean more intentionally into our understanding and definition of what it means to be “evangelical,” and that new branding might assist with this emphasis.
- If, after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA were to be changed, a possible approach might be to consider retaining the legal name of the ELCA, while creating a new name under which it would be known (a “Doing Business As” [DBA]).
- Discussions regarding a name change should be separated from the work of the CRLC to avoid distraction from the original charge given to the CRLC.
- The CRLC will present a summary of this issue to the Church Council.

Overall, the CRLC acknowledges the complexities surrounding the term “evangelical” and its implications for this church’s identity, emphasizing that thoughtful dialogue and understanding are essential before any decisions are made on this significant matter. The document “Historical Reflections on the Name, ELCA” was appended to the CRLC report.

Church Council action:

To receive with gratitude the response on “ELCA Name Change” from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To defer consideration of the question of whether the denomination name, “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” should be changed until after the 2025 Churchwide Assembly when at such time a task force may be authorized to address the matter; and

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

B. CONCURRENT CALLING OF PASTORS BY MORE THAN ONE CONGREGATION

Upstate New York Synod (7D) [2022]

WHEREAS, ELCA Constitution 7.44A19 “Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament” b. “Table of Sources of Calls for Ministers of Word and Sacrament” 1.2 reads:

Setting	Calling Body
1.2 Multiple-congregation parish	Congregation meetings, acting on a common proposal
1.21 Pastor	One of the participating congregations
1.22 Other pastoral arrangements and	One of the participating congregations;

WHEREAS, pastors more and more are being asked to serve more than one congregation; and

WHEREAS, each congregation, as a place where the Promises of Jesus are proclaimed to gathered people, has the authority to call a person to be their proclaimer of those promises of Jesus; therefore, be it

RESOLVED that the ELCA Church Council work up a resolution to be presented at the next ELCA Churchwide Assembly that allows more than one congregation concurrently to call the same person as pastor, and to make all necessary changes to its constitution.

Executive Committee action [EC22.06.19c3]

To refer the “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” resolution from the Upstate New York Synod to the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the appropriate churchwide organization office or home area, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2022)

This question will need to be discerned with the Conference of Bishops, in consultation with the Leadership Committee and the Roster Committee of that body. Any change would require amendments to the governing documents and revision of the roster manual.

After discussion with the Christian Community and Leadership home area, the Office of the Secretary plans to bring a report and proposed timeline to the Church Council at its November 2023 meeting, with a final report and recommendations to be brought to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC22.11.34. ff.]

To receive the timeline on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary on when the resolution will receive further attention;

To request a progress report by the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting, with a final report and recommendations by the Fall 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2023)

The energy and focus of the Conference of Bishops (COB) and its Leadership Committee over the past year has been on the restructuring of the candidacy process. As that work is coming to fruition, it will be possible for the Leadership and Roster Committees of the COB to begin to address this question. Conversation with the bishops will be scheduled for the spring 2024 COB. As any change to these policies would require amendments to the ELCA Constitution, a report and recommendations will come to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC23.11.20z]

To receive the progress report on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary and to anticipate a report and recommendations at the November 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

Because of ongoing discernment about the candidacy process and about the protocols for leave, there has not been an opportunity for full discussion of the question of allowing for concurrent calls for rostered ministers. The question will be put before the Roster and the Leadership Committees of the Conference of Bishops in coming months. A report and recommendation will be made to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting.

Church Council action:

To receive the progress report on “Concurrent Calling of Pastors by More than One Congregation” from the Office of the Secretary;

To request a report and recommendation be presented at the April 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

C. NON-BINARY INCLUSION

Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod (8G) [2024]

(Originally submitted as a memorial to the Office of the Secretary, but the secretary has determined that the action should be reclassified as a resolution so the Church Council can consider it with other possible constitutional amendments.)

WHEREAS, in *Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action* and its accompanying implementing resolutions the ELCA is “To call upon rostered and lay congregational leaders, synodical and CWO staff, social ministry organizations, and faculty and staff at ELCA colleges, seminaries, and universities to renew their efforts to welcome, care for, and support the lives and gifts of LGBTQIA+ persons and to oppose discrimination against these persons so that they may live into the promise of gender justice envisioned in this social statement”; and

WHEREAS, the church representational principles of this church are: At least 60 percent of voting members shall be laypersons—as nearly as possible, at least 45% shall be women and, as nearly as possible, at least 45% shall be men. The percentage of laypersons not allocated to women or men may be allocated to persons who identify as gender non-binary, gender fluid, women, men, or other genders. About 40 percent or fewer shall be rostered ministers and shall include both women and men. Note that this category includes deacons. Ten percent of the voting members are to be persons of color or persons whose primary language is other than English; and,

WHEREAS, 24 of the 65 synods of the ELCA have less than 10 voting members allotted for Churchwide Assembly; and,

WHEREAS, a minimum of at least 10 members are necessary for a person who identifies as gender non-binary, gender fluid, women, men, or other non-cisgender to be considered for participation on assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units based on the current representative percentages; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has set a priority to “A Welcoming Church: Engaging new, young and diverse people” with the goal to “engage 1 million new, young, diverse members by the end of the decade”; and

WHEREAS, according to a Pew research study 5% of young adults in the U.S. say their gender is different than their assigned sex at birth; and

WHEREAS, “75% of LGBTQ youth reported that they had experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity at least once in their lifetime. More than half of LGBTQ youth reported that they had experienced discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity in the past year.”; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod in assembly memorializes the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to refine proportional representation to allow, as closely as possible, equal representation between male and female with space for gender non-conforming identities to serve as well.

Executive Committee action [EC24.07.26a2]

To refer the “Non-Binary Inclusion” resolution from the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod to the Office of the Secretary and the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee as it considers proposed constitutional amendments to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

The representational principles in Chapter 5 of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* are the subject of a number of recommendations coming both from the Office of the Secretary and from the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) audit that has been considered by both the Church Council and the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). Proposed amendments are included in the materials for this meeting. The Office of the Secretary would like to point out that provision 5.01.f. already has been amended to delineate gender representation on the basis of “as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent of the lay members ... shall be women and, as nearly as possible, at least 45 percent shall be men,” with 5.01.H21. further specifying that “the percentage of laypersons that is not allocated to women or men may be allocated to persons who identify as gender non-binary, gender fluid, women, men, or other genders.” In addition, among the recommended amendments being proposed is an expansion of the categories of gender identity that are currently listed.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Non-Binary Inclusion” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To acknowledge the action on the amendments to continuing resolutions in Chapter 5 of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* as the response of the Church Council to the resolution from the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod; and

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

D. SEASONAL MEMBERSHIP

Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod (8G) [2024]

(Originally submitted as a memorial to the Office of the Secretary, but the secretary has determined that the action should be reclassified as a resolution so the Church Council can consider it with other possible constitutional amendments.)

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Model Constitution for Congregations (MCC), Chapter 8, “Membership”, Section *C8.02.e, Seasonal, does not provide full privileged membership status for “Seasonal members”; and

WHEREAS, in an era of generational change for both the ELCA and the population of the United States, the generations born in the 1940-1950s have become a highly mobile, dual-location retiree population; and

WHEREAS, many ELCA congregations are experiencing declining membership and are increasingly dependent on “shared” members to provide a necessary pool of eligible members and participants to meet governance, operational, and functional requirements; and

WHEREAS, section C8.02.e. does recognize the existence of generational change, but otherwise fails to allow “Seasonal members” to share their talent, experience, and abilities in the crucial matter of congregational governance and for congregations to benefit from shared membership; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod in assembly memorializes the 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to amend section *C8.02.e (1-6) of the Model Constitution for Congregations to read:

“e. Seasonal members are voting members of other congregations of this church who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation, including exercising limited full voting rights in this congregation once acknowledgment is received from the home congregation. The Congregation Council may grant seasonal membership to such persons provided that this congregation is a member of a synod where the Synod Council has approved seasonal member voting on its territory. Seasonal members shall only be counted in the home congregation for ELCA membership statistics. Such seasonal members shall have all the privileges and duties of voting members except that:

- 1) they shall not be eligible for elected office in, or for membership on the Congregation Council or on a call committee of, this congregation;
- 2) they shall not have the right to vote on any matter concerning or affecting the call or termination of call of any minister of this congregation;
- 3) they shall not have the right to vote on any matter concerning or affecting the affiliation of this congregation with this church;
- 4) they shall not be eligible to serve as voting members from this congregation of the Synod Assembly or the Churchwide Assembly;
- 5) they shall not, even if otherwise permitted by this congregation, vote by proxy or by absentee ballot; and
- 6) they shall not, within any two calendar month period, exercise voting rights in this congregation and in the congregation where they remain voting members.”

Executive Committee Action [EC24.07.26a3]

To refer the “Seasonal Membership” resolution from the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod to the Office of the Secretary and the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee as it considers proposed constitutional amendments to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

The Office of the Secretary considered the proposed amendments to the existing provision of the *Model Constitution for Congregations* concerning seasonal membership that were forwarded by the Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod. The proposed amendments differ in two primary aspects from the existing provision: 1) a granting of “limited full voting rights” that requires receipt of acknowledgment from the home congregation and 2) specification of where membership is to be counted. The first includes an inherently contradictory designation of voting rights, which cannot be both “full” and “limited” at the same time; furthermore, the list of exclusions of voting rights already appears in the numbered list, so the proposed change is redundant and potentially confusing. The second is a matter that is best handled in the Annual Congregation Report and its instructions to congregations, as that is where it is most likely to be conveyed to those who maintain congregation records. The Office of the Secretary therefore declines to recommend these amendments.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Seasonal Membership” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To decline to propose the constitutional amendments to Chapter 8 in the *Model Constitution for Congregations* for the reasons stated in the response; and

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

E. INCLUDING CREATION CARE

Greater Milwaukee Synod Council (5J) [July 2023]

WHEREAS, the Greater Milwaukee 2023 Synod Assembly (Resolution 1) called for amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, to request the Church Council and the Office of the Secretary to develop amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* to be presented at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly that add “care for creation” to the purposes of this church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that these amendments should include adding the purpose “care for creation” to 4.02., 4.03., 7.31.02., 7.61.02., 9.41., 11.21., 16.12.D21., †S6.02., †S14.12., †S14.32., *C4.02., *C4.03., *C9.03., and *C9.23., as well as any other applicable places within the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; and be it further

RESOLVED, to request the Church Council and the Office of the Secretary add a new provision on “the purpose of membership” to “Chapter C8. Members” and/or amend *C8.04., the privileges and duties of members, to include the visions laid out in 4.03.b. of the Constitution, stating that members of this church will be equipped “to be stewards of the earth, their lives, and the Gospel”, and in the liturgies of baptism and affirmation of baptism as printed in Evangelical Lutheran Worship, especially the hope that the baptized will “care for others and the world God has made”.

Executive Committee action [EC23.09.41b]

To refer the “Including Creation Care” resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and the Office of the Secretary for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2023)

The question of amending constitutional provisions and bylaws to include “care for creation” among the purposes of this church will need to be discerned along with other constitutional amendment changes. The Office of the Secretary plans to include consideration of this request when it presents the slate of proposed ELCA Constitution amendments to the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee in the summer of 2024. The Church Council will forward proposed amendments to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC23.11.20aa]

To receive the response on the “Including Creation Care” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To anticipate possible amendments related to this resolution when the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee reviews proposed amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* at the November 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

Because the provisions and bylaws listed in the resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council generally fall within the definition of purposes of the expressions of this church, the Office of the Secretary is deferring this discussion to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to consider among its recommendations.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Including Creation Care” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To acknowledge the constitutional amendments identified in the resolution are under the general purview of the purposes of the expressions of this church and to refer this discussion to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church as it considers the purposes; and

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

F. SUPPORTING VULNERABLE YOUTH

Greater Milwaukee Synod Council (5J) [July 2023]

WHEREAS, the Greater Milwaukee 2023 Synod Assembly (Resolution 5) called for amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, to request the Church Council and the Office of the Secretary to develop amendments to 4.02.c., †S6.02.c., and *C4.02.d. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, as well as any other applicable places, to be presented at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly that adds “supporting children and vulnerable youth” to the purposes of this church.

Executive Committee action [EC23.09.41c]

To refer the “Supporting Vulnerable Youth” resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and the Office of the Secretary for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2023)

The question of adding “supporting children and vulnerable youth” to the purposes of all three expressions of this church will need to be discerned along with other constitutional amendment changes. The Office of the Secretary plans to include consideration of this request when it presents the slate of proposed ELCA Constitution amendments to the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee in the summer of 2024. The Church Council will forward proposed amendments to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly at its November 2024 meeting.

Church Council action [CC23.11.20bb]

To receive the response on the “Supporting Vulnerable Youth” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To anticipate possible amendments related to this resolution when the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee reviews proposed amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* at the November 2024 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

Because the provisions and bylaws listed in the resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council generally fall within the definition of purposes of the expressions of this church, the Office of the Secretary is deferring this discussion to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church to consider among its recommendations.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Supporting Vulnerable Youth” resolution from the Office of the Secretary;

To acknowledge the constitutional amendments identified in the resolution are under the general purview of the purposes of the expressions of this church and to refer this discussion to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church as it considers the purposes; and

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

G. AMENDING GENDERED CONSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE

Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J) [2022]

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

RESOLVE, that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider and recommend the following amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly; and authorize the Office of the Secretary to make appropriate changes in the *Constitution for Synods* and the *Model Constitution for Congregations* congruent with the ELCA Constitution as amended.

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

e. Except as otherwise provided in this constitution and bylaws, the appropriate office or unit of the churchwide organization, through the Church Council, shall establish processes that will ensure that at least 60 percent of the members of its assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units shall be laypersons; that, *as nearly as possible*, at least ~~45~~ ~~50~~ percent of the lay members of these assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units shall be *people who identify as: women, transgender, non-binary, gender queer, agender, bigender, gender non-conforming, or gender expansive* and, *as nearly as possible*, at least 45 percent shall be men, and that, *where possible*, the representation of *rostered ministers of Word and Sacrament* shall include *many genders*. ~~both men and women~~. At least 10 percent of the members of these assemblies, councils, committees, boards, or other organizational units shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English. Processes shall be developed that will assure that in selecting staff there will be a balance of *gender diversity women and men*, persons of color and persons whose primary language is other than English, laypersons, and persons on the rosters of this church. This balance is to be evident in the selection of staff consistent with the inclusive policy of this church.

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

5.01.H21. *For purposes of the representational principles set forth in 5.01.e. and f., the percentage of laypersons that is not allocated to women or men may be allocated to persons who identify as gender non-binary, gender fluid, women, men, or other genders.*

10.21.03. In strengthening interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and in fostering relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this

church as well as with ecumenical and global companions, the responsibilities of the synod include the following:

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

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

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

17.50.03. Constitutional provision 16.12. and bylaws 11.34.01., 14.21.02., and 14.21.06. shall apply to this organization. Bylaw ~~46.11.04~~ ~~15.21.03~~. shall apply to the women's organization with the exception of the balance provisions for ~~multiple genders~~ ~~women and men~~ and for laypersons and rostered ministers.

And, be it further,

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

Executive Committee action [EC22.02.06b]

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

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

Response from Office of the Secretary (Spring 2022)

The Office of the Secretary notes that the proposed amendments to constitutional provisions called for by the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council were received too late to meet the constitutionally mandated notification period detailed in 22.11.a. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*. For the Church Council to propose to the Churchwide Assembly an amendment to a provision, there must be official notice sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. Such amendments thus would have needed to be forwarded to the Church Council for consideration prior to its November 2021 meeting; if the Council chose to propose amendments to the Churchwide Assembly, notification would have had to be presented to the synods no later than Feb. 8, 2022. While bylaws and continuing resolution amendments function under different requirements, the language proposed in the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council resolution would require first that the constitutional provisions to which these refer be amended. The Office of the Secretary will take these proposed amendments under review for possible consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

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

Church Council action [CC22.04.17p]

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

The representational principles in Chapter 5 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* are the subject of a number of recommendations coming both from the Office of the Secretary and from the diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) audit that has been considered by both the Church Council and the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC). Proposed amendments are included in the materials for this meeting.

Church Council action:

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

To acknowledge the action on the amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* as the response of the Church Council to the resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod; and

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

H. 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 toward 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 by 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 conversation 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 the 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 years 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.

Church Council action [CC24.04.09i]

Resolved, that a social policy resolution on affirming Jubilee USA Network 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.

The social policy resolution was provided to Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

Church Council action:

To adopt the Social Policy Resolution on Jubilee Network USA.

III. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS CHURCH COUNCIL ACTIONS

A. CREATION OF A RACIAL JUSTICE OMBUDSPERSON POSITION

Church Council action [CC22.06.20]

To receive the request to explore creation of the position of a Racial Justice Ombudsperson with a report from the Office of the Presiding Bishop delivered to the Church Council at its Fall 2022 meeting;

To acknowledge the previous action of the council to create “a task force charged with reviewing the current process for discipline and its impact on persons of color and other historically marginalized groups, considering recommendations for staffing, community healing and restoration, and learning best practices from full communion partners” (CC22.04.04); and

To review the role and membership of the ELCA Response Team.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2022)

The Task Force Addressing Disciplinary Concerns of Leaders of Color held its first Microsoft Teams meeting on Oct. 4, 2022. Judith Roberts, senior director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, facilitated the conversation with task force members. The agenda opened with a devotion, prayer, an introduction of task force members, and a review of the 2019 Strategy Towards Authentic Diversity recommendation for the creation of an ombudsperson position within the churchwide organization. The conversation was followed by examples of the impact for leaders of color and communities they served when disciplinary actions occur. The task force received a brief presentation on the current churchwide DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) portfolios, and where an ombudsperson position might be housed within the current organization. The meeting concluded with a conversation regarding expectations of work, timeline for completion, and engagement with additional churchwide staff. The task force is scheduled to meet again virtually on Dec. 1, 2022.

Church Council action [CC22.11.34.x]

To receive the report from the Office of the Presiding Bishop concerning the exploration of a Racial Justice Ombudsperson position; and

To encourage the continued conversation within the Task Force Addressing Disciplinary Concerns of Leaders of Color.

Recommendations regarding the creation of an ombudsperson position/office:

The Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color supports the creation of an ombudsperson/office to help this church more faithfully demonstrate equity and justice in its dealings with rostered ministers, especially those within communities of color and LGBTQIA+ communities.

As this position/office is being considered, the following questions and issues should be addressed:

1. Where will this position/office be located in the churchwide organization structure?
2. What will be the areas of focus for this position/office?
 - a. Training and education (prevention)
 - b. Advice and accompaniment (guiding rostered ministers, bishops, and others as they navigate challenging situations)
 - c. Oversight and appeal (receiving and investigating complaints and working for resolution and adjudication)
 - d. Information and reporting (gathering data on allegations of discrimination experienced by rostered ministers and making recommendations for systemic changes)

3. How will rostered ministers have access to this position/office?

This task force also recognizes that situations in which conflict exists between a rostered minister and their congregation and/or the bishop's office or others are often complex, sensitive, and multi-faceted. Care and attention will need to be given to balance the demands of transparency, confidentiality, and integrity. Above all, this position/office should be dedicated to promoting reconciliation, healing, justice, and growth.

Church Council action [CC23.04.05]

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 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

....

Response from the Administrative Team (November 2023)

The Administrative Team consulted with the Conference of Bishops at the Fall 2023 meeting. More time is needed for conversation and research before the Administrative Team can decide on the creation of an ombudsperson position.

Church Council action [CC23.11.20t]

To receive the report from the Administrative Team regarding the creation of an ombudsperson position and to anticipate a report in 2024.

Response from the Administrative Team (November 2024)

The Administrative Team recommends further collaboration with the Conference of Bishops in 2025 to clarify the roles, responsibilities, and accountability of an Ombuds position within the churchwide organization.

In addition, the churchwide organization is beginning an investigative reporting hotline that allows employees to anonymously report fraud, ethics, and compliance issues 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with IntegraReport Powered by Forvis. This external whistleblower service works to maintain professional conduct in the workplace through confidential reporting of issues of harassment, discrimination, and misconduct in the workplace. Results from this service could assist in shaping the reporting of an Ombuds position that could serve as a resource for rostered ministers. The Administrative Team wishes to learn from this reporting tool and how it might be used to support the intent of the request for an Ombuds position, as it continues to dialogue with the Conference of Bishops regarding this matter.

Church Council action:

To receive the report from the Administrative Team regarding the ongoing conversation on the creation of an ombudsperson position;

To affirm the churchwide organization's efforts in utilizing an investigative reporting hotline to allow employees to anonymously report fraud, ethics, and compliance issues; and

To encourage the Administrative Team to research how such a reporting tool might be used to support the intent of the request for an ombudsperson position as it continues its dialogue with the Conference of Bishops regarding this matter.