



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

April 9, 2025

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 (April 3–6, 2025)

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met at the Lutheran Center in Chicago, Ill., April 3–6, 2025. 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. PROPOSED SOCIAL STATEMENT ON *FAITH AND CIVIC LIFE: SEEKING THE WELL-BEING OF ALL*

Churchwide Assembly action [CA19.05.29]

To receive with gratitude the memorial from the Minneapolis Area Synod requesting a social statement on the role of government, the nature of civic engagement, and the relationship of church and state; and

To authorize the development of an ELCA social statement on government, civic engagement, and the relationship of Church and state that will allow thorough attention to scriptural, historical, theological, and social issues as a means to probe, share convictions, and establish this church's comprehensive teaching in accordance with the "Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns" (2018); and

To urgently request the ELCA Church Council to authorize a social message as a priority in the development of a social statement. This message would elaborate in one place what this church already holds regarding issues such as

public church, the vocation of citizenship, and the relation of church and state in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

Church Council Action [CC19.11.47w]

To authorize the development of a social message on the vocation of citizenship, civic engagement, and Church and state as requested by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly, in light of existing social teaching, 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.

Work of the Task Force on Studies on Civic Life and Faith

The ELCA Task Force on Studies on Civic Life and Faith began work in the fall of 2020. This work included listening events, creation of a study for use throughout this church, posting a draft from January to October 2024, and hosting approximately 50 hearings on the draft. The task force revised the draft in light of feedback and proposed adoption of the social statement *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All*.

Church Council action:

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

To adopt the proposed social statement “Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-Being of All” as a social statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

Church Council action:

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

1. To urge members of this church to pray, participate in, and advocate for civic life in the United States that reflects God’s activity and call seeking the well-being of all people and creation marked by justice and peace;
2. To encourage members to draw inspiration from the ELCA social message on Government and Civic Engagement: Discipleship in a Democracy, which highlights the call to embrace daily our baptismal vocation through active participation in self-governance;
3. To reaffirm and encourage use across our church of other existing social teaching and policy documents that promote robust and wise civic participation, such as those that address matters of voting, campaign finance, public service, nonviolent protest, and the like;
4. To recognize with deep appreciation the commitments and efforts by those in this church—including but not limited to churchwide organization teams such as Witness in Society and Building Resilient Communities, as well as the many church-related social ministry organizations and educational institutions—that contribute to healthy civic life through service, advocacy, or education;
5. To call upon all members of this church to intentionally evaluate the dangers of polarization and the threats posed by disregard for democratic practices and self-government;
6. To encourage ELCA worshiping assemblies and ministries to build bridges, foster reconciliation, practice communal discernment, provide opportunities for difficult conversations, and address polarization constructively in their communities;
7. To encourage synod leaders, in collaboration with other appropriate bodies, to explore creating or expanding state public policy advocacy in their domains as part of the ELCA Witness in Society network, similar to those already existing in several states;
8. To direct the churchwide office, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, the theologians, and ethicists, rostered leaders, as well as elected lay leaders, to develop guidelines and protections consistent with this social statement regarding the roles in civic life of representatives of this church with official responsibility to preach, teach, and lead on behalf of our church;
9. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to consider the need for civics education curricula, civic participation guidance, and related theological reflection, and to create these in multiple formats, including multimedia and online;
10. To call upon the publishing and educational ministries of this church, including but not limited to Augsburg Fortress Publishers, to explore the need for resources dedicated to nonviolent resistance and

peaceful engagement in civic life, with special concern for materials dedicated to religious and political histories, liturgical guidance, and training for rostered and lay leaders;

11. To direct the Witness and Society Team of the churchwide organization and call upon all expressions of this church in their advocacy efforts to support and advocate for policies and laws consistent with this social statement and to give sustained attention to the fresh convictions and commitments found here in its creation of programs and projects;
12. To direct the Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop to share this statement as a resource for dialogue, discernment, and collaboration with ecumenical and inter-religious partners toward the well-being of all people and creation from within the U.S. context;
13. To urge faculty, staff, and administrators of ELCA-related colleges, universities, and seminaries to renew and emphasize education toward callings in public service and to model and encourage dynamic civic participation among their students;

To direct appropriate units in the churchwide organization, coordinated by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to establish or oversee processes for implementation of these resolutions, with an initial report to the fall meeting of the ELCA Church Council in 2027.

B. PROPOSED EDITED SOCIAL STATEMENT *HUMAN SEXUALITY: GIFT AND TRUST* (2009)

Churchwide Assembly action [CA22.01.07]

To receive with gratitude the memorials on “Review and Revision of LGBTQIA+ References in the ELCA Social Statement *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*” from the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Southeastern Synod, and Florida-Bahamas Synod;

To authorize a social statement reconsideration to revise *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) so that its wording reflects current church understanding, church policy, civil law, and public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender non-conforming couples in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the ELCA for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018). While references would be reviewed throughout the whole statement, the following sections are designated for reconsideration as described here:

- “Marriage: shelter and context for trust” p.15. This would not reconsider the idea of marriage as shelter and context for trust but would consider the import that marriage legally is now a covenant between two individuals;
- “Lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships” p.18 *ff*. Revision here would not change this church’s current understanding that recognizes four identified positions of bound conscience within its life, p.19, but would review wording about “publicly accountable, lifelong monogamous same-sex relationships” in light of public acceptance of marriage of same-gender and gender-non-conforming couples;
- “Loving families: ground and source for social trust” p. 21 *ff*. Review here would consider references to diversity of family configurations; and

To authorize the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Church Council to approve the parameters and expense budget of this process and identify the revenue source(s) to provide for this revision to be considered as early as the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Churchwide Assembly action [CA22.03.24]

To authorize a possible revision of the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* which reconsiders this church’s current concept of the four positions of bound conscience. This revision would focus on pages 19–21 (“lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships”) and any other references to the four positions of bound conscience.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.32]

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop to manage the initiation of work on the reconsideration of *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009), per authorization of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly, by delaying task force initiation to 2024 due to timing, budgetary, and leadership capacity demands.

Executive Committee Action [EC(ES)24.04.20]

To appoint the following individuals to serve on the Task Force on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* Reconsiderations:

... ; and

To request that the task force present a proposal on Reconsideration #1 [CA22.01.07] to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting and a proposal on Reconsideration #2 [CA 22.03.24] to the Church Council no later than its April 2028 meeting.

Work of the ELCA Reconsiderations Task Force

The ELCA Reconsiderations Task Force began its work in 2024. Consistent with other social statement processes, the task force heard from experts, prepared a draft edited social statement, and collected public comment on the draft edited social statement from October 2024 through January 2025. At its February 2025 meeting, the task force considered the public feedback and made revisions in light of this feedback.

Church Council action:

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

To adopt the identified changes to the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* (2009) as an editorial update to bring wording up to date, to clarify, and to bring it into congruence with subsequent social teaching, as authorized by 2022 Churchwide Assembly action CA22.01.07.

C. FORTIFYING URBAN MINISTRIES

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.08]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Fortifying Ministries in Underserved Urban Areas” from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod;

To affirm the strategic direction of the ELCA Fund for Leaders ministry to enhance the capacity of people of color through its disbursement of scholarships to Theological Education for Emerging Ministries candidates;

To refer this memorial to the Congregational Vitality Training and Development Team in the Christian Community and Leadership home area to create a churchwide Urban Ministry group, in partnership with the appropriate leaders in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod, to accompany ELCA synods in their urban strategies that lead to the enhancement of congregational vitality and ministry sustainability in the urban context. The group will 1) collaborate with other studies already underway, 2) resource synods by gathering best practices in urban ministry and emerging ideas in the care and creative use of church facilities, 3) identify supportive networks within this church and among ecumenical partners, and 4) encourage piloting innovative ways to address the realities and complexities of urban ministry, including enhancing urban internship opportunities. The group may consider additional topics as needed;

To request that the churchwide Urban Ministry group consult with and provide regular reports to the Church Council to ensure that the purposes and objectives of this memorial are being fulfilled; and

To provide a final report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly on the results of its study, new urban initiatives, and ways for this church to fortify the witness and service among people and communities in underserved urban areas.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b3]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Fortifying Urban Ministries in Underserved Urban Areas” to the Christian Community and Leadership home area for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership home area (November 2022)

The responsibility for the implementation of this memorial has been assigned to the Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) home area. The Rev. Sandra Chrostowski, senior director, congregational vitality and new ministry training and development, and the Rev. Ruben Duran, senior advisor for new ministry development, have been appointed as conveners of a churchwide organization group to address this memorial on urban ministry, in partnership with leaders in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod who sent this memorial forward and who also passed a similar resolution on urban ministry for their synod.

Two initial action steps have been taken:

1. An initial consultation with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod staff has taken place. The synod has appointed the Rev. Regina Goodrich, pastor of Mediator Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, Penn., and dean of the synod's Central Conference, and the Rev. Brian Penman, the synod's director for evangelical mission, as *ad hoc* members of the Synod Task Force for Urban Ministry. They are identifying members for this task force and are planning to meet for the first time in early November.

2. Pastors Chrostowski and Duran have begun to develop criteria for the selection of participants for the churchwide group on urban ministry, including representation from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod leadership. The intention is to have group membership finalized in December and to begin convening in early 2023.

Response from the Christian Community and Leadership Home Area (April 2024)

In the beginning of 2023, Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) experienced a leadership transition and team realignment. Late in June the new senior director, the Rev. Miguel F. Gómez-Acosta, was hired. Pastor Gómez-Acosta was able to touch base with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod Bishop Patricia Davenport at the November 2023 Conference of Bishops meeting to identify who on her staff was the contact person for the Fortifying Urban Communities synod task force. However, due to other priorities having to do with budget cuts and responding to requests for ministry reviews, he was not able to connect with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's director for evangelical mission (DEM), the Rev. Bryan Penman, until February 2024.

At that meeting, staff were notified that the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's task force has been meeting since 2022. As part of their work, they partnered with Innovation Lab to conduct surveys of their urban congregations. Pastor Penman agreed to serve on a churchwide organization team to discuss the issue and agreed to invite two other members from the task force to be a part of the national conversation.

Pastor Gómez-Acosta also followed up with the executive director for Innovation, Mr. Iain Chester. Mr. Chester reported that surveys and visitations were conducted in 2023. His team has a list of learnings that was shared with the local task force and has agreed to share those findings at the first meeting of the churchwide organization's Fortifying Urban Ministries team. Currently staff are in the process of identifying other DEMs to serve on this team.

Church Council Action [CC24.04.09e]

To receive the response on "Fortifying Urban Ministries in the Underserved Urban Areas" from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To request a final report on the work by the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

Report from the Christian Community and Leadership Home Area (April 2025)

The Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force addressing this memorial would like to respectfully note concerns regarding the ELCA's previous approach to this issue, which has primarily focused on studies and discussions with limited actionable outcomes. Additionally, the preliminary work has revealed that the allocated timeframe is impossible given the complexity of the matter. The scope extends beyond simply 'supporting urban ministries,' as it necessarily involves addressing underlying systemic factors including racism, classism, and other structural barriers that impact this task force's ability to effectively comprehend and respond to the needs of urban congregations.

Since the last report to the April 2024 meeting, the task force has convened three times. The task force began by reviewing the original intent of the memorial through interviews with individuals who assisted in drafting it for the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. Next, the task force examined previous urban ministry initiatives by surveying the varied experiences of each task force member in their respective urban contexts. The most notable initiative was In the City for Good, which was launched at the 1998 Churchwide Assembly and operated for approximately a decade. Finally, the task force consulted with the Innovation home area regarding its 2023 project with the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod. Their report on urban ministry visits within the synod revealed four significant findings:

1. **Serving Neighbors:** Every congregation, regardless of size, engages with their immediate community in meaningful ways. This was particularly evident in the prevalence of food ministries across nearly all congregations. For most, this community service forms a central element of their organizational identity.
2. **Building Challenges:** Facility size and/or maintenance presents significant challenges for all congregations surveyed.
3. **Attendance Trends:** The majority of congregations reported experiencing declining attendance, with common themes including challenges in returning to in-person worship and overall membership reduction.
4. **Collaboration Opportunities:** Congregations are developing innovative solutions to their challenges and envisioning new ministry possibilities. However, these efforts often remain isolated within individual communities. Neighboring congregations may be addressing identical challenges without awareness of potential synergies or shared learning opportunities within the broader community.

Based on these meetings, the task force has developed several initial recommendations, while recognizing that additional time would be beneficial to comprehensively address the complex issues at hand. Recommendations include:

1. **Regular Network Establishment:** The churchwide organization should establish a consistent networking forum (Network for Urban Ministries) where congregational and judicatory leaders can access support and exchange ideas to strengthen urban ministries. This could also serve as a platform for documenting and sharing effective evangelism, stewardship, and discipleship practices occurring within urban congregations.
2. **Resource Coordination:** The churchwide organization would benefit from considering a staffed resource center where urban ministries can access information and assistance regarding funding opportunities such as grants. The designated staff member would be responsible for gathering and distributing relevant information to directors for evangelical mission (DEMs), assistants to the bishops, and ministry leaders.
3. **Inclusive Definition:** The ELCA would benefit from expanding its definition of urban ministries to better reflect the diverse populations encompassed by this memorial. Urban ministries frequently extend beyond communities of African descent to include varied ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds.
4. **Messaging Strategy:** Christian Community and Leadership home area should collaborate with DEMs to develop a communication approach that reinforces the core identity of urban ministries as Jesus-centered communities serving the world. Through this messaging, DEMs can inspire urban congregations they engage with across the synod.
5. **Property Resource Utilization:** The ELCA should leverage the recently launched Church Property Resource Hub to facilitate discussions with urban ministries regarding property utilization and maintenance challenges.

Church Council action:

To receive the final report on “Fortifying Urban Ministries in the Underserved Urban Areas” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To thank the members of the Fortifying Urban Ministries Task Force for their faithful and comprehensive work in finding ways for this church to fortify the witness and service among people and communities in underserved urban areas;

To affirm the recommendations outlined in the final report and urge the churchwide organization to explore ways to implement them; and

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

D. LAND BACK

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.03.14]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from Northwest Washington Synod, Oregon Synod, and Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod concerning the Land Back movement;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to explore including land acknowledgements which center Native voices as part of their public gatherings;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners to become educated about the Indigenous peoples who thrived, prior to European contact, on the land they currently inhabit;

To learn about, learn from, and be in deepening relationship with Indigenous people and tribal nations;

To encourage all ELCA members, congregations, synods, ministries, colleges, campus ministries, seminaries, camps, associated organizations, and partners, to support creative programs of restorative justice in partnership with Indigenous people, including, but not limited to, whenever considering a transfer or sale of real property, including returning land (and any structures built on it) after satisfying any financial obligations, to the appropriate Native nations, and when direct return is not feasible or not desired by the Indigenous people, to return the proceeds from the sale of the land to the ELCA Native American Ministry Fund or other local Indigenous led ministries or organizations;

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to work collaboratively with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners to explore sources and needs in funding for the more than 30 ELCA Indigenous congregations and service ministries; and

To direct the Resource Development and the Budget and Finance Committees of the Church Council to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these congregations and service ministries; and for these synods, home areas, offices, and committees to present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

To call upon the appropriate home areas and offices of the churchwide organization to first engage with the relevant local synods and their local Indigenous partners whenever planning or considering work related to Indigenous people or ministries.

Response from Churchwide Organization (April 2025)

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas have visited on site, alone or together, several native ministries for the purpose of listening and developing a better understanding of their funding and leadership strategies. This includes 16 out of the 24 Native ELCA Ministries listed below:

Our Saviour Lutheran Church, Rocky Boy, Mont.
Navajo Evangelical Lutheran Mission, Rock Point Ariz.
House of Prayer Lutheran Church, Rock Point, Ariz.
Alaska Native Lutheran Church, Anchorage, Alaska
Our Saviors Lutheran Church, Nome, Alaska
Kingigin (formerly Thornton Memorial) Lutheran Church, Wales, Alaska
Shishmaref Lutheran Church, Shishmaref, Alaska
Brevig Memorial Lutheran Church, Brevig, Alaska
Teller Lutheran Church, Teller, Alaska
Lutheran Church of the Great Spirit, Milwaukee, Wis.
* Woyatan Ministry, Rapid City, S.D.
* Wambli Ska (Woyatan Ministry), Rapid City, S.D.
* Lutheran Lakota Shared Ministry, (OLUTEP), Pine Ridge, S.D.
* Pine Ridge Reconciliation Center, Pine Ridge, S.D.
Open Circle, Portland, Ore.
Native American Urban Ministry, Phoenix, Ariz.

(*planned but not yet completed at the writing of this report)

The Office of the Treasurer worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations to request copies of budgets from these ministries for the purpose of understanding their financial needs. Here is a summary of what has been received.

13 ministries submitted both revenue and expenditure budgets

5 ministries submitted expenditure budgets only

2 ministries declined to participate

4 ministries did not respond

The executive directors of Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas worked with the Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations and the Office of the Treasurer to develop a historic understanding of what resources each Native American Ministry has received since the start of the ELCA in 1988 from all sources that staff could identify. The table below summarizes these grants.

Years	Grant money provided to ELCA Indigenous Ministries by:			Programmatic Staff Support	Totals
	Churchwide	Synods	Other		
1988–2013	\$7,261,299	No info	-	\$1,442,389	\$8,703,688
2014–2022	\$3,523,343	\$2,176,132	-	\$1,075,393	\$6,774,868
2023–2024 *	\$933,378	\$599,857	\$256,000	\$656,023	\$2,445,258
Total	\$11,718,020	\$2,775,989	\$256,000	\$3,173,805	\$17,923,814

* Represents years since 2022 CWA Action

An **additional \$2.1 million** in grants have been provided to other organizations that relate to these Indigenous ministries including Thunder Valley/Community Development Corporation (Pine Ridge), Council for Native Hawaiian Advancement, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Pacifica Synod, and Oglala Lakota Housing Authority. Of this \$2.1 million in grants to other organizations, \$1.65 million has been given in 2023 and 2024. This brings the total support to **\$20.0 million since 1988** based on data that staff could recover.

Ongoing Support

In reviewing the thirteen complete budgets that were submitted, the range of annual support needed to breakeven ranged from \$0 - \$307,000 annually. Here is a breakout:

Annual Profit/Loss	Number of Respondents
Breakeven or better	5
Deficit less than \$10,000	2
Deficit between \$30,000 - \$60,000	3
Deficit between \$70,000 - \$100,000	2
Deficit over \$300,000	1

The Director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations has reported that the two ministries that declined to respond have annual combined budgets of well over \$1 million but does not know their revenues. The churchwide organization intends to continue supporting these 24 ELCA Indigenous ministries through a combination of current fund (unrestricted), World Hunger, and Lutheran Disaster Response funds. Given the current declines in both unrestricted revenues and World Hunger revenues, there is not current capacity to increase the funding support at this time without significantly compromising other work that the churchwide organization does on behalf of the ELCA.

In addition to the support provided by the churchwide organization, there are currently two endowments (one is permanently restricted with a fair market value of over \$1.7 million and the other is temp restricted with a fair market value of over \$676,000) held at the ELCA Foundation. Distributions from these endowments are 4% annually. Currently that income of just under \$100,000 annually is reinvesting but could be utilized. Withdrawals could also be made from the temp restricted endowment provided the donor restrictions have been met. As far as is known, no withdrawals have been made since 2020.

The churchwide organization currently solicits grants from external agencies to support the work. Typically, these agencies do not allow for passthrough grants to other organizations; however, the churchwide organization staff is willing to provide assistance to the 24 ELCA Indigenous Ministries including alerts to potential funding opportunities, training on researching and writing grant applications, and review of applications prepared by these ministries.

The churchwide organization continues to pray for these communities and provide resources on the elca.org website.

Church Council action:

To receive the report on the “Land Back” memorial from the churchwide organization regarding its findings of possible funding for ELCA Indigenous congregations and services ministries;

To acknowledge the diminishing revenues to increase funding during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle;

To encourage the Service and Justice home area to utilize the available funds in the two identified endowments as a sustainable source of income to support the initiatives of ELCA Indigenous congregations and services ministries;

To urge the churchwide organization staff to provide assistance as requested to the identified ELCA Indigenous Ministries by providing training, offering training on research and grant-writing applications and review of applications prepared by these ministries, and developing fundraising trainings that respond to the realities of each unique ministry context; and

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

E. SPECIALIZED MINISTRIES AND ON-LEAVE-FROM-CALL STATUS

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.26]

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

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

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

To require that those involved in the review process include a diverse group representing both the roster of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Word and Service who are or have recently been involved in specialized ministries (e.g., interim, transition, campus, outdoor, college or seminary faculty, chaplains, mission developers, etc.), and those

currently or recently on leave from call for a variety of reasons (e.g., between calls, family, disability, study, healing from abuse, etc.);

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

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

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

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

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

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

Still to be addressed in the next few months are questions related to specialized ministry. In January, the task force will be convening listening sessions with rostered ministers engaged in specialized ministry, with a further report and recommendations to be presented to the Conference of Bishops for consultation at its February 2025 meeting and a final report and recommendations to be presented to the Church Council at the April 2025 meeting. The issues concerning pastoral counseling through private practice will be part of those recommendations, as will the question of allowing for candidates to be ordained to interim ministry.

Church Council Action [CC24.11.20s]

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

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

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

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (April 2025)

Following submission to the Church Council of a preliminary report in November 2024, the Task Force on On Leave from Call and Specialized Ministry turned its attention to the remaining issues raised by the original Churchwide

Assembly action, specifically those of specialized ministry and the three-year congregational service bylaw, as well as to remaining responses to the synod resolutions assigned to the task force by the council, including the questions of ordination directly to interim ministry and of calls to private pastoral counseling practice.

The final report of the task force was distributed to Church Council members prior to the meeting.

Church Council action:

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

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

To affirm the recommendations for on-leave-from-call status, steps for requesting a roster status, interim ministry, retired roster status, average time requirements for calls, specialized ministry, and exceptions to the three-year congregational service bylaw that are identified in the final report;

To affirm the report as the response to the following:

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

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

F. GREENHOUSE GAS REDUCTION

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.04.25]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Oregon Synod, Southwest California Synod, Northeastern Minnesota Synod, Minneapolis Area Synod, Saint Paul Area Synod, Southwestern Texas Synod, Northern Illinois Synod, Northeastern Iowa Synod, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Greater Milwaukee Synod, North/West Lower Michigan Synod, New England Synod, Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod, Northwestern Pennsylvania Synod, Central States Synod, and Delaware-Maryland Synod concerning greenhouse gas reduction;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to engage in creation care and advocacy based on the principles of sufficiency, sustainability, participation, and solidarity;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to advocacy and action in support of 50% reduction from 2005 levels in United States economy-wide net greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To direct the ELCA churchwide organization to set the goal of reducing its net greenhouse gas pollution 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its network ministry through the Creation Care Network to inform and guide this church in its efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;

To encourage congregants, rostered ministers, and bishops to commit themselves to education about the urgency of the climate emergency, the global opportunities of a just transition and to lift up loving our neighbor in response to the climate emergency through their preaching;

To affirm the Mission Investments Fund’s “Green Building” initiative and resources, and to encourage continued commitment to supporting ministries in caring for creation and addressing climate change;

To refer to the Service and Justice home area, Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary, and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for implementation consistent with the memorials; and

To request the churchwide organization provide a report to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly assessing the progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions across all three expressions and sharing lessons learned to help meet reduction goals.

Executive Committee Action [EC22.09.23b2]

To refer the 2022 Churchwide Assembly action on “Greenhouse Gas Reduction” to the Service and Justice home area, in consultation with the Office of the Treasurer, Office of the Secretary, and Office of the Presiding Bishop, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

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

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues facing all of God's creation. Leading scientists from around the world have confirmed that global average temperatures are growing warmer due to increasing levels of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases in the Earth's atmosphere. Human use of fossil fuels that release carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases (GHGs) into the air is the main source of the increase in these gases. As levels of carbon dioxide and other GHGs increase, more and more of the sun's heat is trapped by the atmosphere and less escapes back into space. The increase in trapped heat changes the climate, causing altered weather patterns, including multi-year droughts, extreme storms, flooding, and rising sea levels.

The memorials direct the ELCA churchwide organization to establish targets to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030, and achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. This target is consistent with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 report that states that, in order to prevent the worst climate damages, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) need to fall by about 45% from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching net zero around 2050. The ELCA has supported these targets in its advocacy and creation care education work.

Representatives of the Service and Justice home area, the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, and the Office of the Presiding Bishop met to discuss implementation of the memorial directive. This discussion noted that the churchwide organization has already achieved reductions through reduced travel, more online collaboration, and hybrid work plans. The work to establish a 2005 baseline and to create emission and energy use reduction targets will require expertise beyond current churchwide staff capacity. Funding for a half-time position has been set aside in the Service and Justice home area, beginning in 2023. The churchwide organization sees this initiative as a witness to ELCA commitments to care for creation, and an initiative that can model what synods and congregations can do. The churchwide organization supports the reconstituting of the Creation Care Network that is currently underway.

A progress report will be made to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC22.11.34.r]

To receive the response on "Greenhouse Gas Reduction" from the Service and Justice home area;

To urge the churchwide organization to continue its efforts to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and commend it for its initiatives and commitments to creation care and environmental advocacy;

To request a progress report be provided by the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting with a report expected for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

Response from Service and Justice (April 2025)

ELCA's churchwide response to this memorial has been ongoing as various ministry representatives continually participate in visioning and implementation of sustainability efforts. The churchwide organization's energy usage has been in a season of reduction as staff travel has been half as frequent since 2019. The main facility in Chicago remains in good standing with a 91% Energy Star rating as a LEED certified building. An institution-wide effort to consider human inclusivity and planetary health is expressed in a living reference document titled "Sustainable Event Guidelines" for use by all when planning gatherings.

Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) interviewed synod-wide leaders, reviewed reports from hundreds of congregations and a professional survey of over 593 members and identified numerous lessons learned in response to the call to action in this 2022 memorial (<https://lutheransrestoringcreation.org/climate-change-in-the-pews/>). While data shows that 74% of ELCA members want their church to do more for climate justice, many people are still unaware of available education and worship resources. Very few churches or synods have been able to measure their greenhouse gas emissions rates, even though there are free and affordable tools. Lack of time, expertise, and consistent recording-keeping is a commonly referenced hindrance. Suggested resources and networking support are offered by energy auditing organizations, but rather than hyper-focus on *output*, this church's faith-based work has been redirected to consistently implore a reduction of waste and share theological groundings for drastically reducing the collective input of energy pollution.

The World Hunger Education and Networking team has prioritized creation care and greenhouse gas reduction through two multi-year grants. One has gone to the Center for Climate Justice and Faith in support of their certificate programs for faith leaders (both rostered and lay-leaders) from around the world as they work to better understand how climate change disproportionately impacts communities that already are vulnerable to hunger, and that contributed to and benefitted the least from the greenhouse gas emissions that created the climate crisis. The second substantial multi-year grant was awarded to Lutherans Restoring Creation, a Social Ministry Organization of the ELCA, to support their stewardship as they host, manage, and report on the work of the ELCA's Creation Care Network.

Continued advocacy for reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions is encouraged and amplified by the full-time program director for environment and energy policy in the Service and Justice home area and colleagues throughout state public policy offices. This work and the related resources are continually updated on the website hub. ELCA Witness in Society team has taken numerous actions to support advocacy around creation care and the reduction of GHG emissions as well as events across the church to educate and equip congregants and rostered ministers to speak and act on the climate emergency. ELCA Climate advocacy works across various levels of government and institutions to call for change. Specifically, ELCA Witness in Society members work at the state level, across 16 states, on policies that address climate change. Federal policy staff in ELCA's Washington, D.C., office work directly with members of congress, across all 50 states and 4 territories, to advocate for policy to prevent climate change and promote climate justice. Additionally, the ELCA Witness in Society team addresses climate change by advocating at the global level through United Nations events, including UN General Assembly, UN Water Conference, UN High Level Political Forum, and the Annual United Nations Framework on Climate Change Conference of Parties. Each of these events reach all 193-member states of the United Nations.

Over the course of the last 5 years, the ELCA Advocacy offices in Washington, D.C., New York City, and across three states have dedicated substantial time and capacity toward advocating for policy-change in mitigating climate change (reducing GHG emissions). Here are examples of legislation or executive actions that have been worked on by ELCA advocacy staff and made significant headway politically.

1. Federal/International: Mitigation efforts include the Inflation Reduction Act, Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, Power Plant Regulations 2024, Vehicle Emissions Standards Rule, Methane Rule 2024, United States Updated GHG Reduction Commitment (NDC) 2025
2. States (California, Colorado, Wisconsin): 19 pieces of legislation to mitigate climate change

Witness in Society Federal staff have provided training on advocacy at various ELCA events including: Global Mission Summer Missionary Orientation, World Hunger Leaders Gathering, ELCA Youth Extravaganza, Lutheran Disaster Response Community of Practice Gathering, and the Youth Leadership Summit, reaching over 1,500 people at these events. Additionally, ELCA Witness in Society, collaborating with ELCA Young Adults, has organized an Advocacy Immersion trip as an annual gathering of young adults to discuss Climate Justice and engage in direct advocacy. This program has engaged over 35 young adults in the last two years. Finally, ELCA Witness in Society reaches people through State Public Policy Offices and their events on climate including annual Lobby Days that gather hundreds of Lutherans or Interfaith advocates to meet with state lawmakers about climate legislation.

The ELCA's Creation Care Network facilitates communication across all three expressions of the ELCA and ensures a spectrum of churchwide organization members and representatives from synods, congregations, and ecumenical organizations regularly assess emerging programs, event planning and procurement, and communications to consider long-term environmental impacts and opportunities for leveraging assets. Lutherans Restoring Creation (LRC) maintains an abundance of resources and data collection as they connect with congregations and constituents across the nation. They offer creation care coaching and training services, along with an online searchable database of local and regional actions that ELCA members and congregations have made nationwide. LRC also supports and amplifies theologically grounded courses, training and resources for both pastoral and lay-leaders on the just use and sharing of Earth's resources.

This work is increasingly collaborative amongst this church's international and interfaith colleagues as climate change is a threat multiplier. From disaster relief to migrant support, God's call to love neighbor does not stay within the confines of staff portfolio obligations. This summer the World Hunger Education and Network team set up experiential learning opportunities at the National Youth Gathering and included elements of climate induced disaster that participants navigated through, as it exacerbated hunger and poverty both domestically and internationally. They also sponsored Lutherans Restoring Creation to come and set up a reflective education space at the conclusion of the World Hunger learning journey where youth were exposed to composting, envisioning the future through art, and had an opportunity to make a climate commitment.

Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has provided technical and financial support to congregations working to transform their physical spaces into climate resiliency hubs. They also integrate climate awareness and ways to mitigate and prepare for the increasing frequency and intensity of storms as a standard discussion point in all disaster trainings. LDR financially supported and participated in workshops and conferences regarding disaster response to climate-induced storms, including the 2024 Mid-Atlantic Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster with the theme "Impacts and Implications of a Warming World."

In spring of 2024, the ELCA released a study guide called "Our Kairos Moment" to dive deeper into the *Message on Earth's Climate Crisis*. The four-session study guide is for small groups and is available to inspire learning and

action. It uses videos, storytelling, bible studies, and interactive activities to help groups explore the effects of climate change on communities in the United States and around the world and inspire one another to effective action.

Church Council action:

- To receive the report on “Greenhouse Gas Reduction” from the Service and Justice home area;**
- To command the initiatives and efforts supported through the Creation Care Network to engage in creation care and environmental advocacy to guide this church in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions; and**
- To request that the secretary inform the synods of this action.**

II. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSES TO SYNOD ACTIONS

A. 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 <i>Multiple-congregation parish</i>	<i>Congregation meetings, acting on a common proposal</i>
1.21 <i>Pastor</i>	<i>One of the participating congregations</i>
1.22 <i>Other pastoral arrangements</i>	<i>One of the participating congregations</i>

and

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

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

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

Executive Committee action [EC22.06.19c3]

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2022)

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

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

Church Council action [CC22.11.34,ff.]

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

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2023)

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

Church Council action [CC23.11.20z]

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2024)

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

Church Council action [CC24.11.20v]

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

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

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (April 2025)

More time is requested for full discussion of the question of allowing for concurrent calls for rostered ministers. The question will be put before the Roster and the Leadership Committees of the Conference of Bishops. Given the timing, the recommendation is for it to be considered along with other constitutional amendments that might be brought forward to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

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 the Office of the Secretary and the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee consider it along with the proposed constitutional amendments that will be brought to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

B. ENHANCING THE CALL PROCESS

Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J) [2024]

WHEREAS, the ELCA has created a system whereby candidates for call can see a 75-word summary statement about any congregation in the call process, which enhances their ability to pursue promising matches; and

WHEREAS, congregations would benefit from having a similar capacity to review potential candidates, thus streamlining and focusing their efforts during the call process; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Greater Milwaukee Synod Council be instructed to request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America consider creating and implementing as soon as possible a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site Profile, to review brief (up to 75 words) summary statements that do not contain identifying information from potential candidates for called positions, with the possibility of requesting additional information on suitable candidates from their synod.

Executive Committee Action [EC25.01.02]

To refer the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution from the Greater Milwaukee Synod to the Christian Community and Leadership home area, in consultation with the Office of the Secretary, for a report or a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from Christian Community and Leadership (April 2025)

On March 4, 2025, Christian Community and Leadership (CCL) home area called a meeting with IT and Office of the Secretary representatives to discuss the “Enhancing the Call Process” resolution [EC25.01.02]. While churchwide staff were sympathetic to the desire to offer ELCA congregations more agency in the call process, several concerns were raised with adding this functionality without wider due diligence. Namely, the concerns identified were with security for rostered ministers, lack of geographical screening, potential for coded language, increased ability to marginalize, and lack of buy-in from the Conference of Bishops. As a concession, staff wondered whether adding the

personalized ministry statement, which is already included in the Rostered Ministers Profile, could be added to the results page of the search function at the synod expression.

CCL contacted the Greater Milwaukee Synod to discuss this response. It was received well, and the identified concerns were affirmed. The recommendation is to not implement any changes based on this request.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Enhancing the Call Process” from the Christian Community and Leadership home area;

To decline to create and implement a procedure and system to allow congregations, after completing their Ministry Site Profile, to review brief summary statements from potential candidates for called positions; and

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

C. FULL FUNDING FOR ELCA MINISTRIES

Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod (4C) [2023]

[Originally submitted as a memorial to the Office of the Secretary but the resolution did not memorialize the Churchwide Assembly. The Secretary has determined that the action should be reclassified as a resolution.]

WHEREAS, at the 2022 Churchwide Assembly a memorial with regards to explore the sources and needs in funding for the various Indigenous ministries of the ELCA, to identify potential sources of sustainable funding for these ministries, and present findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

WHEREAS, there are numerous other ministry areas of the ELCA that are suffering from the lack of sustainable funding for their ministries; and

WHEREAS, these ministry areas are vitally important to the life of the mission and ministry of the ELCA; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that similar explorations of the sources and needs in funding for the ministries of the ELCA listed below and identification of potential sources of funding for these ministries with presentation of findings of possible funding of these ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2028 meeting with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for the funding of these ministries during the 2029–2031 triennium budget cycle: Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, Congregational Renewal ministries.

Executive Committee action [EC23.07.35.d]

To refer the “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod to the Office of the Treasurer, in consultation with other appropriate churchwide units, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (November 2023)

The Office of the Treasurer will complete this exploration work in conjunction with the review of funding for indigenous ministries [CA22.03.13] with a full report for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council Action [CC23.11.20ee]

To receive the timeline on “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the Office of the Treasurer;

To request a report to present findings of possible funding of the Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latinx ministries, African descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and differently abled person ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, and Congregational Renewal ministries to the Church Council no later than its Spring 2025 meeting, with a commitment to implement proposed and sustainable actions for funding of these ministries during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle; and

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

Response from the Office of the Treasurer (April 2025)

The churchwide organization acknowledges that they do not fully understand how full funding of these ministries is defined and for what period this applies. The Office of the Treasurer reviewed the current work and a summary of the budgeted dollars to be spent on these ministries in FY2025 is shown below. This spending may come from more than one programmatic unit or office and includes spending from both unrestricted and restricted funds.

Ministry Area	FY25 Budgeted Spending in this area
Youth & Young Adults ministries	\$3,346,370
College/Campus ministries	\$1,246,801
Latin-x ministries	\$1,562,766
African Descent ministries	\$1,105,174
Arab & Middle Eastern ministries	\$262,303
Asian & Pacific Islander ministries	\$538,707
African Nationals ministries	\$175,143
Ministries of Diverse Communities and Cultures	\$1,448,895
Disabled and Differently Abled ministries	\$48,079
Education ministries	\$4,684,840
LGBTQIA+ ministries	\$118,750
Congregational Renewal, including urban ministries	\$5,738,851
New starts, including urban ministries	\$4,664,792
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility	\$468,443
Total	\$25,409,914

Ongoing Support

It is likely that these numbers may be even higher than presented because restricted funds, other than World Hunger, are not budgeted, so for most, staff were not able to identify what spending will be in FY25. Staff also did not include any withdrawals from endowments which may support this work.

Many of these categories are already a priority for the churchwide organization, not only for spending from the unrestricted budget but also for spending from donors. Here are some ways that churchwide organization is prioritizing these areas in 2025:

- Youth gathering is currently in reassessment and strategy creation, with the intent of finding ways to drive attendance at the gathering in 2027 and to identify ways to continue the momentum experienced at the 2024 gathering. For example, in 2025 and 2026, external funding has been secured to test hosting pop-up gatherings in a variety of locations.
- The Gather (online worshipping community) has set a goal to double participation from 1,000 to 2,000 within 2025. Various initiatives are underway to engage new individuals.
- The addition of a Young Adult Regional Representative position is being piloted in 2025. This individual will work with synod staff. One goal is to identify ways to coordinate effectively across regional networks for campus ministry, youth ministry, and young adult ministries.
- In 2025, directors in Ministries of Diverse Communities and Cultures are focused on setting clear strategies for their respective ethnic communities with a plan to host a full gathering for the associations in 2026 to expand this work.

It is hard to imagine that these categories will not remain priorities for the churchwide organization as the work is refined under the direction from a new presiding bishop and the Church Council. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that these ministries will continue to receive funding from the churchwide organization. The question that remains is whether this constitutes “full funding.” Regardless, given the current declines in both unrestricted revenues and World Hunger revenues, there is not current capacity to increase the funding support for all of these areas at this time without significantly compromising other work that the churchwide organization does on behalf of the ELCA.

There are other ways that the churchwide organization can support these ministries, including looking for other revenue streams. The churchwide organization currently solicits grants from external agencies to support the work. The churchwide organization staff is willing to provide assistance to diverse ELCA ministries including alerts to potential funding opportunities, training on researching and writing grant applications, and review of applications prepared by these ministries.

The churchwide staff trusts that their commitment to continue to fund these ministries is clear based on the current investments in the ministries.

Church Council action:

To receive the report on the “Full Funding for Churchwide Ministries” resolution from the churchwide organization;

To acknowledge the diminishing revenues to increase funding during the 2026–2028 triennium budget cycle;

To encourage the churchwide organization to look for additional revenue streams to continue its support of the work of the following ministries: Youth and Young Adult ministries, College ministries, Latin(-o, -a, -é, -x) ministries, African Descent ministries, Arab and Middle Eastern ministries, Asian and Pacific Islander ministries, Disabled and Differently Abled Persons ministries, Urban ministries, Education ministries, LGBTQIA+ ministries, and Congregational Renewal ministries;

To urge the churchwide organization staff to provide assistance as requested to diverse ELCA ministries through means such as notifying them of potential funding opportunities, offering training on research and grant-writing applications, reviewing of applications prepared by these ministries, and developing fundraising trainings that respond to the realities of each unique ministry context; and

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

III. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS CHURCH COUNCIL ACTIONS

A. EDUCATIONAL DEBT TASK FORCE

Church Council Action [CC22.04.05]

To authorize the creation of a task force charged with studying the issue of addressing educational debt among rostered ministers and developing a comprehensive strategy to provide educational debt relief to as many rostered ministers as possible;

To authorize the Executive Committee to appoint members to the task force composed of representation from across the ELCA ecology (e.g., the churchwide organization, synod staff to include bishops and/or directors for evangelical mission, congregations, seminaries, colleges/universities, Mission Investment Fund, Portico Benefit Services, ELCA Federal Credit Union, ELCA Foundation, etc.); and

To request that the first progress report be provided to the Fall 2023 Church Council meeting and a final report with possible recommendations be provided to the Spring 2025 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Educational Debt Task Force (April 2025)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Church Council action:

To receive the progress report from the Educational Debt Task Force and to postpone the final report with possible recommendations to the November 2025 Church Council meeting.