



Oct. 15, 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 (Oct. 2–3, 2025)

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met in the Symphony III Room of the Hilton Minneapolis Hotel in Minneapolis, Minn., Oct. 2–3, 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. RECONSIDERATION OF THE SOCIAL MESSAGE ON END-OF-LIFE DECISIONS

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06y]

To receive with gratitude the memorial on “Reconsideration of the Social Message on End-of-Life Decisions” from the Saint Paul Area Synod;

To forward this memorial to the ELCA Church Council, acting in consultation with the Theological Discernment staff of the Office of the Presiding Bishop, as the appropriate body to authorize a reconsideration; and

To identify the section titled “Physician-Assisted Death” for a substantive reconsideration in light of legal, medical, and social changes in end-of-life care and medical assistance in dying. While focused on that section, other references connected to that topic in the social message could be reconsidered.

Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop, Theological Ethics (October 2025)

The concern for development or reconsideration of a social message (like “End-of-life Decisions”) is expressed by the Churchwide Assembly (CWA) as a request. As the next step, the director for theological ethics will consult

with leadership groups, such as a committee of the Conference of Bishops, to assess and provide recommendations to Church Council (CC) about the timing and kind of development process, in consideration of other pending requests and in consultation with stakeholders. CC makes those decisions in their role of oversight of the ELCA.

Due to limited staff capacity (and church capacity), social teaching development is managed carefully. The current practice is to develop or reconsider one social message per year, alongside one social statement development (a five-year process.) Current projects for 2026 include:

- Reconsideration of the social statement on *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust*;
- Development of study materials related to a social message on Child Protection;
- Development of study materials related to the new social statement on *Faith and Civic Life: Seeking the Well-being of All* (2025); and
- Follow-up work related to 2025 CWA actions, including Motion J (Resolution on AI in the Church).

There is capacity (both of staff and of the church, which participates through communal discernment) to act on *one* request in 2026. This request for a reconsideration of “End-of-life Decisions” is now to be evaluated along with two other pending requests:

- Development of a new social message on confronting white supremacy; and
- Reconsideration of the social message on “Homelessness.”

There is no financial cost for evaluation of a social message request. Development or reconsideration of a social message generally costs \$10,000–12,000. This includes hiring a contract writer, research-related expenses, data analysis, translation, and printing.

The director for theological ethics will bring to the November 2025 CC meeting a recommendation about which of the pending requests should be authorized for 2026. The request for reconsideration of “End-of-Life Decisions” will either be accepted and authorized for 2026 or will remain in the pool of requests for future evaluation. If this request is left as pending, Theological Discernment will maintain a list of individuals who have expressed interest in aiding the process as consultants and of individuals whose expertise is a significant gift to the church’s discernment of this social teaching.

Church Council action:

To receive the timeline on “Reconsideration of the Social Message on End-of-Life Decisions” from the Office of the Presiding Bishop;

To anticipate a recommendation for which social message will be authorized for 2026 at the November 2025 Church Council meeting; and

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

B. REVIEW OF ELCA INVESTMENTS AND PROCUREMENT

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06t]

To reaffirm this church’s commitment to using the tools of corporate social responsibility to call corporations to treat people fairly and with dignity and create sustainable communities through the screening of social purpose funds through social criteria investment screen; and

To direct the Service and Justice unit and ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team to provide guidance in regard to current concerns and advice on best practices to encourage responsible and just corporate behavior and provide to the ELCA Church Council a summary of findings and options for action.

Response from Service and Justice unit, Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team (October 2025)

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the ELCA uses the tools of screening of investments, shareholder advocacy, and community investing to work with corporations, calling them to ensure that people are treated fairly and with dignity and to create sustainable communities. The CSR program is guided by staff in the ELCA’s Service and Justice unit and a team of advisors with experience in CSR or expertise in the topic at hand. The team meets regularly to discuss drafts of documents and possible topics for CSR work. The ELCA Constitution places CSR oversight with the Church Council, which “may direct the churchwide organization to exercise the corporate social responsibility of this church by filing shareholder resolutions, casting proxy ballots, and taking other actions as it deems appropriate” (14.21.14.).

ELCA CSR staff consult the CSR Review Team regularly on the topics of screening, shareholder advocacy, and boycotts, with the goal of supporting Portico Benefit Services in its endeavor to encourage responsible corporate behavior.

ELCA CSR does not determine procurement on the part of the ELCA; however, CSR has cooperated with ELCA IT on its AI policies, and IT has consulted with CSR on its buying guides.

At the October 2025 and the January 2026 meetings of the CSR Review Team, the group will consider whether additional resources are needed to fulfill this directive from the Churchwide Assembly and report back to the Church Council in the spring of 2026.

Additional costs, if any, would be related to any resources recommended by the CSR Review Team, or would be related to publicizing of current resources such as the shareholder advocacy issue papers and ELCA consumer purchasing guides.

Church Council action:

To receive the timeline on “Review of ELCA Investments and Procurement” from the Service and Justice unit and to anticipate a response at the Spring 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

C. INDIAN BOARDING SCHOOL REMEMBRANCE

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.07]

- Observe the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually on or near September 30;
- Urge Augsburg Fortress and the Service and Justice unit, in consultation with other appropriate churchwide organization home areas, to create adult and children/youth educational programs and materials concerning Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools to broaden and deepen awareness at congregations, synods, and ministries affiliated with or related to the ELCA; and to consistently publish articles in all of this church’s publications;
- Locate all known records related to the ELCA’s predecessor bodies’ involvement with Indian boarding and day schools and to educate others about Indian boarding schools;
- Encourage ministries affiliated with or related to the ELCA to commit to learning the truth of their involvement with Indian boarding schools, in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative and to responsibly create paths to healing and repair;
- Organize and care for all information in the ELCA’s possession that was recorded about Indian boarding and day schools and the students who attended them, forcibly or otherwise; carry out this work in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative and the ELCA Archives;
- Recognize that this information belongs to and is a source of healing for student survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations;
- Ensure that the records and research are made accessible to Indian boarding school survivors and their families in a responsible manner;
- Identify the revenue source(s) to sufficiently support research and organizing efforts, and to sufficiently support digitization and labeling of all Indian boarding school records in the Archives.

Response from Service and Justice unit (October 2025)

1. *Observe the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools annually on or near September 30;*
 - The ELCA churchwide organization has worked to observe the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools every year since 2021. This has been done at the encouragement and guidance of ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations in partnership with ELCA Strategic Communications and has been accomplished through *Living Lutheran*, sharing information with synod communicators for their sharing with their audiences/congregations, and social media posts.
 - The communication produced is educational and promotes observing the National Day by wearing orange shirts and encouraging personal social media posting.
 - It is the hope of the Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative (TSTTI) that all ELCA units, teams, council, committees, and expressions participate in the observance by promoting participation, sharing educational materials, and wearing orange.
 - These are continual actions.
2. *Urge Augsburg Fortress and the Service and Justice unit, in consultation with other appropriate churchwide organization home areas, to create adult and children/youth educational programs and materials concerning Christian and Lutheran roles in Indian boarding schools to broaden and deepen awareness at congregations, synods, and ministries affiliated with or related to the ELCA; and to consistently publish articles in all of this church’s publications;*
 - Deadline for first round of materials will be May 2026 to begin deeper education before the National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools in 2026.

- Continued publishing of articles will prayerfully happen leading up to National Day of Remembrance for Indian Boarding Schools in September 2026.

- Locate all known records related to the ELCA's predecessor bodies' involvement with Indian boarding and day schools and to educate others about Indian boarding schools;*
 - This work has begun by the TSTTI and records from the Bethany Indian Mission/boarding school Wittenberg, Wis., have been catalogued and relocated from Region 3 archives to the ELCA Archives where they are being scanned, cared for, and organized digitally.
 - This work is continual and research on additional boarding and day schools is being performed by TSTTI.
- Encourage ministries affiliated with or related to the ELCA to commit to learning the truth of their involvement with Indian boarding schools, in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative and to responsibly create paths to healing and repair;*
 - Potential deadline for encouraging affiliate ministries is April 1, 2026.
- Organize and care for all information in the ELCA's possession that was recorded about Indian boarding and day schools and the students who attended them, forcibly or otherwise; carry out this work in partnership with the ELCA Truth-Seeking and Truth-Telling Initiative and the ELCA Archives;*
 - The partnership between the TSTTI and ELCA Archives is a strong one. The support offered by ELCA Archives has been tremendous.
 - This work and partnership are continual and long term.
- Recognize that this information belongs to and is a source of healing for student survivors, their descendants, communities, and Tribal Nations;*
- Ensure that the records and research are made accessible to Indian boarding school survivors and their families in a responsible manner;*
 - The TSTTI and ELCA Archives will work to ensure any records located will be cared for and shared appropriately.
- Identify the revenue source(s) to sufficiently support research and organizing efforts, and to sufficiently support digitization and labeling of all Indian boarding school records in the Archives.*
 - BUDGET IMPLICATION**—The work of the TSTTI for the past four years has been performed by lay and clergy volunteers. Funding to support the work related to continued organizing, professional research, educational materials and programs, ELCA Archives needs to care for and digitize records. These are only initial needs with further development to be considered. An initial proposed amount is \$25,000 for FY2026.
 - BUDGET IMPLICATION**—The ELCA Archives does not have extra funds to complete the digitization of 12 large-sized ledger books, five large-sized photographs, and six reels of 16mm motion picture film.

Estimated digitization costs:

2,538 pages to digitize with estimated price/page range of \$1.75/page–\$2.75/page = \$4,441.50–\$6,979.50*

Six reels (three-inch diameter) of 16mm film, vendor cost estimate = \$1,348.50

Five oversized photographs at \$6/photograph = \$30*

Total estimated cost: \$5,820–\$8,358

Total estimated cost including 10 percent contingency: approximately \$6,402.00–\$9,194.00

*Cost is an approximation and is not based on official estimates obtained from third party vendors. Actual costs may be higher depending on quote from third party vendor, the final page count, condition of materials, and/or any special treatment records might need (e.g., special handling or repair).

Timeline:

- April 2026: As work directed is continual and prayerfully lasting, updates related to each “Resolved” can be made to Church Council.
- April 2026: ELCA Archives will be able to provide the Church Council an update on the digitization of the records of the Bethany Indian Mission.
- November 2026: As work directed is continual and prayerfully lasting, updates related to each “Resolved” can be made to the Church Council.
- November 2026: ELCA Archives will be able to provide the Church Council an update on the metadata (labeling) of the digitized Bethany Indian Mission collection.

- November 2026: ELCA Archives will be able to provide the Church Council an update on locating any records in the ELCA Archives related to ELCA predecessor church bodies' involvement with Indian boarding and day schools.

Church Council action:

To receive the response and timeline on “Indian Boarding School Remembrance” from the Service and Justice unit;

To request progress reports be provided to the Service and Justice Committee and to anticipate a final response at the Spring 2027 Church Council meeting; and

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

D. MISSING AND MURDERED INDIGENOUS WOMEN (MMIW)

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06c]

- Direct the churchwide organization to address the MMIW crisis by the following: Encourage congregations, synods and the churchwide organization to observe annually MMIW Awareness Day on May 5 and to promote the wearing of red to raise awareness of MMIW;
- Strengthen education by urging Augsburg Fortress, the ELCA World Hunger Education and Network's team, and ELCA Service and Justice unit staff to work together to develop educational resources about the prevalence and origins of this crisis;
- Increase awareness by requesting the ELCA Strategic Communications team to promote participation in educational opportunities and advocacy opportunities for missing and murdered Indigenous women;
- Lament and repent by urging Augsburg Fortress and the ELCA Worship team to work together to provide worship resources to include prayers of repentance and intercession for congregation and synod use;
- Plan a public service at the 2028 Churchwide Assembly of lament and repentance that leads to further actions toward healing people;
- Advance partnership by requesting the ELCA Service and Justice unit staff to collaborate with governmental, ecclesiastical, and non-profit organizations to increase public awareness and provide concrete ways for congregations to support affected families through prayer, search efforts, and appropriate outreach; and
- Advance advocacy by requesting the ELCA Witness in Society team to support legislation at state, local, and national levels addressing MMIW.

Response from Service and Justice unit (October 2025)

1. *Direct the churchwide organization to address the MMIW crisis by the following: Encourage congregations, synods and the churchwide organization to observe annually MMIW Awareness Day on May 5 and to promote the wearing of red to raise awareness of MMIW;*
 - Suggested deadline for churchwide organization leadership to encourage observance is Lent 2026. Lent having been the most recent period promotion previously.
2. *Strengthen education by urging Augsburg Fortress, the ELCA World Hunger Education and Network's team, and ELCA Service and Justice unit staff to work together to develop educational resources about the prevalence and origins of this crisis;*
 - This work is continual and the suggested deadline for gathering the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery's Sub-Task Force on MMIW with appropriate churchwide organization staff is Jan. 31, 2026.
3. *Increase awareness by requesting the ELCA Strategic Communications team to promote participation in educational opportunities and advocacy opportunities for missing and murdered Indigenous women;*
 - ELCA Strategic Communications has actively worked to increase awareness and participation over the last three years, and this work will be continual.
4. *Lament and repent by urging Augsburg Fortress and the ELCA worship team to work together to provide worship resources to include prayers of repentance and intercession for congregation and synod use;*
 - Suggested deadline for gathering appropriate staff and partners is Jan. 31, 2026.
5. *Plan a public service at the 2028 Churchwide Assembly of lament and repentance that leads to further actions toward healing people;*
 - Planning for public service will begin in 2026 as the Churchwide Assembly Planning Team begins to plan for the 2028 Churchwide Assembly by the ELCA Worship team and partners.

6. *Advance partnership by requesting the ELCA Service and Justice unit staff to collaborate with governmental, ecclesiastical, and non-profit organizations to increase public awareness and provide concrete ways for congregations to support affected families through prayer, search efforts, and appropriate outreach;*
 - This work is continual and suggested deadline for gathering the Repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery's Sub-Task Force on MMIW with appropriate unit staff is Jan. 31, 2026. The MMIW Sub-Task Force already meets regularly.
7. *Advance advocacy by requesting the ELCA Witness in Society team to support legislation at state, local, and national levels addressing MMIW.*
 - Work is continual.

Timeline:

- April 2026: Report to Church Council related to promotion of May 5 MMIW Awareness Day; initial gathering of MMIW Sub-Task Force and appropriate churchwide staff; promotional and publishing opportunities by Strategic Communications; gathering of ELCA Worship, Augsburg Fortress, and appropriate churchwide staff and their initial discussions on worship resources; MMIW Sub-Task Force and unit staff's related to support of families and appropriate outreach.
- November 2027: Report to Church Council by Churchwide Assembly Planning Team on 2028 Churchwide Assembly and service of lament and repentance.

Church Council action:

To receive the response and timeline on “Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women” from the Service and Justice unit;

To request progress reports be provided to the Service and Justice Committee and to anticipate a final response at the November 2027 Church Council meeting; and

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

E. YOUTH GATHERING DEIA

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06d]

To reaffirm the commitment of the ELCA Youth Gathering Team to continue and expand DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures for the gathering staff, volunteers, and participant leaders;

To affirm the desire for a rapid response team for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering in partnership with the Minneapolis Area Synod and led by the ELCA director for racial justice, so that it will be replicated at all ELCA Youth Gatherings beyond 2027; and

To request the ELCA Youth Gathering Team explore options to implement a racial equity audit for the Youth Gathering that would address barriers for participation with the goal of increasing and strengthening the leadership of the youth participants with persons of color and intersecting identities.

Response from Christian Community and Leadership unit, Youth Gathering [October 2025]

The Youth Gathering team in the Christian Community and Leadership unit provided the following:

Timeline:

- **Fall 2025** – Gathering staff and senior director for discipleship and inclusive communities will host an initial conversation with churchwide staff, particularly the director for racial justice, senior director for diversity, equity, and inclusion, executive for theological discernment, coordinator for disability ministries, coordinator for deaf ministries, and the colleagues and director of ministries of diverse cultures and communities to discuss expanded *DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures* for the gathering staff, teams, volunteers, participants, and leaders and form a task force. This group will also discuss options to implement, and the costs associated with a *racial equity audit* for the Youth Gathering.
- **Fall 2025** – Gathering staff, the worship and chaplain team leader, and the operations team leader will host an initial conversation with Minneapolis Area Synod staff to discuss a *Rapid Response team for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering* and create a task force.
- **Spring 2026** – The Youth Gathering DEIA Task Force will determine and recommend *DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures* for the gathering staff, teams, volunteers, participants, and leaders. This group will also determine next steps regarding a *racial equity audit* for the Youth Gathering.

- **Spring 2026** – The *Rapid Response Task Force for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering* will develop training and recruit chaplains.
- **Summer/Fall 2026** – The Youth Gathering DEIA Task Force will create and implement *DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures* for the gathering staff, teams, volunteers, participants, and leaders.
- **Summer/Fall 2026** – The *Rapid Response Task Force for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering* in partnership with the Youth Gathering worship and chaplain team leader will train chaplains.
- **Spring 2027** – The Youth Gathering DEIA Task Force will launch *DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures* for the gathering staff, volunteers, participants, and leaders to be completed before June 2027.
- **Summer 2027** – The *Rapid Response Task Force for the 2027 ELCA Youth Gathering* will work with all Youth Gathering teams to provide care and support before, during and after the event.

DEIA-centered trainings, resources, policies, procedures, and structures

* *These prices are an estimate and will be firmed in Spring 2026.*

Item	Estimated Cost
Gathering Staff & Team Leader Training	\$3,000
Spanish Language Translation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Printed materials • Closed captions for videos 	\$7,000
Video Production	\$6,000
Resource Design	\$5,000
Content Writers	\$10,000
Participant Onsite DEIA Workshop	\$20,000
TOTAL	\$51,000

Rapid Response Task Force

Item	Estimated Cost
In-Person Meeting	\$3,000
Chaplain—Rapid Response Team Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flights (\$500 per person @ 3 people) • Housing (1 nights @ \$215 per room @ 3 rooms) • Meals (2 days @ \$75 per person @ 10 people) • Misc. Travel Expenses 	\$10,000
Rapid Response Team Onsite Expense <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing (6 nights @ \$215 per room @ 6 rooms) • Meals (7 days @ \$75 per person @ 6 people) • Misc. Travel Expenses 	\$12,000
Onsite Rapid Response Call Center <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase Zendesk Users • IT equipment • Space in Convention Center 	\$5,000
TOTAL	\$25,000

Racial Equity Audit

Item	Estimated Cost
Racial Equity Audit	unsure
In-Person Meeting	\$3,000
Implementing Racial Equity Audit	unsure
TOTAL	\$

Church Council action:

To receive the response and timeline on “Youth Gathering DEIA” from the Christian Community and Leadership unit;

To request progress reports be provided to the Christian Community and Leadership Committee and to anticipate a final response at the November 2027 Church Council meeting; and

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

F. INTERPRETATION FOR ELCA CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY AND YOUTH GATHERING

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06l]

To encourage use of local interpreters at Churchwide Assemblies and Youth Gatherings;

To direct the planning teams of the Churchwide Assembly and Youth Gathering to commit to investigating and finding the most responsible means to provide translation and interpretation services.

Response from Christian Community and Leadership unit, Youth Gathering (October 2025)

The Youth Gathering team in the Christian Community and Leadership unit provided the following:

Timeline:

- **Spring 2026** – In partnership, the Gathering staff, senior director for discipleship and inclusive communities, coordinator for deaf ministries, the colleagues and director of ministries of diverse cultures and communities,

the secretary, and their staff will host an initial conversation to discuss investigating and finding the most responsible means to provide translation and interpretation services.

- **Fall 2026** – The Gathering staff, senior director for discipleship and inclusive communities, coordinator for deaf ministries, the colleagues and director of ministries of diverse cultures and communities will determine and recommend translation and interpretation services best suited for the Youth Gathering as it relates to print materials and simultaneous interpretation.
- **Spring-Summer 2027** – The Gathering staff and teams will implement throughout the cycle Spanish translation for printed materials such as core materials, curriculums, logos, and theme design and will strive to provide Spanish translation for on-site materials within the limited deadlines for the printing and production companies. The Gathering staff and teams will implement a plan to hire simultaneous Spanish and ASL interpreters for core program components such as Mass Gathering, MYLE programs, and worship.

Translation and Interpretation Services for Youth Gathering

** These prices are estimates and will be firmed in Spring 2026.*

Item	Estimated Cost
Spanish Translation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,000+ pages @ \$20 per page • 600+ signs @ \$20 per page 	\$32,000
ASL Interpretation – \$500 per day @ 7 days @ 6 people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honorarium • Meals • Travel • Hotel 	\$21,000
Spanish Interpretation – \$400 per day @ 7 days @ 6 people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Honorarium • Meals • Travel • Hotel 	\$16,800
TOTAL	\$69,800

The Churchwide Assembly Planning Team anticipates beginning the research work of investigating and finding the most responsible means to provide translation and interpretation services in late 2026.

The background information that was shared in the Report of the Memorials Committee for this memorial was, “CWA documents (900+ pages and 30+ event signs) can range from \$20 per hour to upwards of \$5 per minute. The estimate does not include the cost of additional design time and additional production costs if printing is involved, nor does it include any rush fees that might be needed to complete the work in a timely manner. Other factors that will increase costs are additional reviews for highly technical or theological documents. As a point of reference, The Episcopal Church provides reports to its General Convention, also known as the “Blue Book,” that cost approximately \$125,000 for translation....The cost for ASL interpretation services for a week-long event is approximately \$500 per day, per interpreter, plus travel, lodging, and meal expenses. The cost for Spanish interpretation for a week-long event is approximately \$10,000 for four interpreters, plus travel, lodging, and meal expenses.”

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Interpretation for ELCA Churchwide Assembly and Youth Gathering” from the Christian Community and Leadership unit and the Office of the Secretary;

To commend the planning teams of the Churchwide Assembly and Youth Gathering in their ongoing efforts to provide translation and interpretation services at churchwide assemblies and youth gatherings; and

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

G. RESTORATION OF FUNDING OF USAID

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06ff]

To direct the Witness in Society Advocacy Team to seek and promote occasions for timely and impactful advocacy on restoration of USAID, including opportunities for the presiding bishop to address this issue.

Response from Service and Justice unit, Witness in Society (October 2025)

The Trump administration's cuts to U.S. foreign assistance administered through USAID and the State Department have caused significant disruptions to humanitarian and development programs around the world. While USAID as an independent agency was dismantled, it still exists under the law. The remaining programs previously administered by USAID have been transferred to the Department of State, at significantly reduced capacity.

2025 ELCA advocacy priorities include restoration and support for humanitarian aid:

- Ensure that Congress appropriates and the executive branch distributes funds for lifesaving global health programs.
- Protect and strengthen foreign aid programs that reduce extreme poverty and hunger; enhance U.S. international food and nutrition programs authorized in the Farm Bill.
- Provide emergency support to countries facing natural disasters and humanitarian emergencies.

Since January, Witness in Society (WIS) staff have engaged in advocacy to push for restoration of terminated foreign aid programs and robust funding of these programs in the upcoming fiscal year (FY26), including:

- WIS staff engagement in regular meetings with congressional Republican and Democratic offices
- Leadership with interfaith partners to organize a September 2025 fly-in bringing global faith leaders to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers to make the case for foreign aid. Witness in Society funded and supported two leaders, a pastor from Indiana and a companion partner from Guatemala, who actively participated in this advocacy opportunity.
- Partnership with an ELCA bishop to write and transmit a letter in support of foreign aid to her senators, one of whom is the Senate Majority Leader.
- Invitation and facilitation of an advocacy visit of a leader from a global companion church who met with key Republican and Democratic congressional offices to push for restoration of an HIV/AIDS program that was terminated.
- Activation of ELCA advocacy network at strategic policy moments through action alerts to ensure members of congress hear of their constituents' support of foreign aid programs.

Advocacy on this issue has led to some level of congressional pushback on the Administration, particularly in the Senate. ELCA advocacy efforts will continue, including identifying opportunities for the presiding bishop to speak. Funding for advocacy on foreign aid restoration comes from the Witness in Society budget.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Restoration of Funding of USAID” from the Service and Justice unit;

To commend the Witness in Society staff for their continued advocacy efforts to seek and promote occasions to restore terminated foreign aid programs and support robust funding for humanitarian aid; and

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

H. PUBLIC DISCOURSE ABOUT PALESTINE-ISRAEL

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.01.06cc]

To command the recommendation from the 2022–2023 Review Summary and Recommendations on Israel and Palestine document for formal review and update of the “Strategy for Engagement in Palestine and Israel” (2005) and to present a timeline for the consideration of the updated strategy, encouraging continued collaboration between ELCA Sumud and the Office of the Presiding Bishop; and

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in partnership with ELCA Sumud, to convene a consultation with representatives of the ELCA Conference of Bishops, Church Council, Palestinian partners from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and other key stakeholders to discuss matters of language for addressing the injustice happening to the Palestinian people on the ground, and to report to the Church Council its findings and any recommendations.

Response from Service and Justice (October 2025)

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Team will form a committee to review, assess, and offer recommendations for the “Strategy for Engagement in Palestine and Israel” (2005) timeline.

Timeline:

- Committee formed by March 2026
- Review process completed and presented by end of 2026
- Final report to Church Council by March 2027.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Public Discourse about Palestine-Israel” from the Service and Justice unit;

To request progress reports be provided to the Service and Justice Committee and to anticipate a final response at the November 2027 Church Council meeting; and

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

I. STAND FOR PALESTINIAN RIGHTS AND END TO OCCUPATION OF PALESTINE

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA25.03.13]

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Witness in Society Advocacy Team, to write to the President and Vice President of the United States, the Secretary of State, and the majority and minority leaders of the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives calling on the U.S. government:

- to recognize and work to end the genocide against the Palestinian people, to halt military assistance to Israel used to devastate Gaza, and to investigate the use of U.S. military aid to Israel to ensure compliance with U.S. and international human rights law;
- to redouble its efforts to end human rights violations in Gaza and the West Bank, focusing on the most egregious and ongoing violations, including: indiscriminate and disproportionate bombing of Gaza resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of children, women, and men; deprivation of adequate access to drinking water, food, medical care, and electricity; destruction of buildings—including hospitals, places of worship, homes, and schools—and the destruction of electricity, sewage and water infrastructure essential for survival; and, the detention of hostages and political prisoners;
- to recognize Palestine as a sovereign state, and support Palestine’s full membership in the United Nations, and
- to reject proposals to remove Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank, to address the catastrophic living conditions that could force Palestinians to leave, and to work to end the rampant settler violence and vandalism against Palestinians in the West Bank;

Response from Service and Justice unit (October 2025)

The Witness in Society Team will prioritize these focus points for public policy advocacy and action:

1. Write letter from the presiding bishop to the White House as instructed (completed, August 2025).
2. Opposing unrestricted military aid to Israel
3. U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334
4. Upholding of Human Rights Law
5. U.S. government recognition of Palestinian Statehood in coordination with Lutheran Office for World Community (LOWC)
6. Protection of 1967 Borders and Territorial Integrity
7. Opposition to Settler Violence
8. Amplification of Palestinian Voices
9. Opposition to displacement/forcible transfer of Palestinians from Gaza and the West Bank
10. Continued support of financial security of Augusta Victoria Hospital
11. Review and consider the ELCA’s interfaith advocacy relationships—especially within the Jewish community—that would ensure values alignment of partnerships with the ELCA’s updated position on Israel-Palestine

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Team will engage these awareness focus points:

1. Education around U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 2334
2. History and significance of international definitions of military occupation and genocide
3. Education around displacement and forcible transfer
4. Distinction between Jewish siblings and government of Israel

5. Palestinian sovereignty
6. Accompaniment relationships with ELCA partners in Palestine/Israel
7. Building relationship and shared understanding of Palestine-Israel context with WCC statement on Gaza as baseline

The MENA Team will engage these accompaniment focus points:

1. Amplification of Palestinian Voices
2. Meeting with ELCJHL stakeholders and ALAMEH (Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage) to present resolution and hear feedback
3. Ensuring ongoing financial support to ELCJHL and local partners-March 2026

A final report to Church Council will be brought to its April 2026 meeting. There is no anticipated budgetary impact as the work will be done as part of existing staff portfolios.

Church Council action:

To receive the response on “Stand for Palestinian Rights and End to Occupation of Palestine” from the Service and Justice unit;

To request a final response at the April 2026 Church Council meeting; and

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

II. CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSE TO SYNOD ACTION

A. ELCA MIDDLE EAST STRATEGY FOLLOW-UP

New England Synod (7B) [2025]

WHEREAS, the New England Synod is a companion synod with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) at its 2016 assembly passed “Justice for the Holy Land through Responsible Investment (Assembly Action CA16.06.27),” and

WHEREAS, this action directed “the ELCA’s Corporate Social Responsibility review team to develop a human rights social criteria investment screen based on the social teachings of this church and, in the case of Israel and Palestine, specifically based on the concerns raised in the ELCA Middle East Strategy.” And it encouraged “ELCA members, congregations, synods, agencies and institutions to engage in shareholder advocacy in support of human rights;” therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the New England Synod Council urge the Presiding Bishop of the ELCA to require the ELCA’s Corporate Social Responsibility review team to provide a public written report to the ELCA on the actions taken to adhere to the intent of the 2016 resolution as it pertains to the ELCA Middle East Strategy.

Executive Committee Action [EC25.05.26b]

To refer the “Board of Pension Investment Screening” resolution from the New England Synod to the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Corporate Social Responsibility review team for a response; and

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

Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop, Theological Ethics [October 2025]

This action seems to refer to social policy resolution CA16.06.31 (“Justice for Holy Land through Responsible Investment”), adopted by the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

“To direct the ELCA’s Corporate Social Responsibility review team to develop a human rights social criteria investment screen based on the social teachings of this church and, in the case of Israel and Palestine, specifically based on the concerns raised in the ELCA Middle East Strategy.”

The ELCA’s Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) develops investment screens and issue papers based on ELCA social teachings. These screens are developed in consultation with Portico, a separately incorporated ministry. The screens and issue papers are implemented by Portico through Social Purpose Funds and shareholder advocacy. This is done in consideration of Portico’s legally binding fiduciary duty to investors.

A public written report on actions related to the 2016 social policy resolution would require consultation with Portico and review of the implementation of the human rights investment screen, shareholder advocacy since 2018 (when the screen and an accompanying issue paper were approved), and corporate dialogues on these issues. This would also necessitate a review of the implementation of the human rights investment screen more recently, since a broadened human rights investment screen was approved in 2024 to include language that focuses on “egregious denials of human rights taking place in occupied or controlled territories.”

Such a report could include the number of companies that were screened out of Social Purpose Funds, positive investments made in response to the 2016 social policy resolution and accompanying CSR resources, the number of

shareholder resolutions filed by Portico, and the number of corporate dialogues Portico has participated in since 2016. Importantly, the report would be limited to information Portico can legally share about shareholder resolutions and dialogues.

Such a report would require time for information collection, consultation, and review, including review by legal counsel for both Portico and the ELCA. Because Portico is a separately incorporated ministry, collection of information would be a request rather than a directive, dependent on Portico's capacity. This report would require approximately 90–120 days to prepare from the date that the presiding bishop requires CSR to provide the report.

Church Council action:

To request that the presiding bishop consider directing the Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team to provide a public written report to the ELCA on the actions taken to adhere to the intent of the “Justice for Holy Land through Responsible Investment” social policy resolution [CA16.06.31] as it pertains to the ELCA Middle East Strategy;

To recognize that such a report would be limited to the information Portico Benefit Services can legally share about shareholder resolutions and dialogues and would require approximately 90–120 days to prepare from the date the presiding bishop requests such a report; and

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