



# Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Nov. 20, 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:** The Rev. Lucille “CeCee” Mills, secretary

**Subject:** Report of Actions of the Church Council (Nov. 12, 2025)

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met electronically on Nov. 12, 2025. The following is a summary of Church Council actions along with background information.

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## **1. ELECTION OF CHURCH COUNCIL MEMBER TO FILL A VACANCY**

### *Background:*

The Rev. Daniel Collins, West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod [8H], resigned from the Church Council in September 2025, and a vacancy was declared by the secretary. The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod Council nominated a rostered minister, the Rev. Ralph Dunkin, former bishop of the synod, to fulfill the remainder of the term ending in 2031. The Executive Committee forwarded the nomination for the Church Council’s consideration.

### *Church Council action:*

To elect the Rev. Ralph Dunkin, Wheeling, W.Va. [8H], to the Church Council for a six-year term ending in August 2031.

## **2. RESPONSES TO THE REPORT OF THE EDUCATIONAL DEBT TASK FORCE**

### ***Background:***

At its Spring 2022 meeting, the Church Council authorized the creation of the Educational Debt Task Force [CC22.04.05]. The task force was 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. Periodically, the task force has provided progress reports to the Executive Committee of the Church Council. The final report of the task force and related actions recommended by the Executive Committee were shared with Church Council members electronically prior to the meeting.

### ***Church Council action:***

**To receive the report and recommendations from the Educational Debt Task Force and thank the members of the task force for their care and due diligence in the work;**

**To request that the churchwide organization reimagine and enhance programming and fundraising efforts (e.g., Fund for Leaders) to include a debt reduction dimension that would reduce the educational debt incurred by current rostered ministers of this church, especially for rostered ministers of color and ministers ordained between the mid-1990s and the late-2010s;**

**To direct that the churchwide organization explore the feasibility of convening a specific task force to focus on the unique challenges faced by historically underrepresented groups;**

**To direct that the Strategic Communications Team, in consultation with the appropriate units in the churchwide organization, promote the research findings from the task force and provide congregations and synods with information about the importance of supporting educational debt reduction, including information about the state of educational debt among ELCA rostered ministers;**

**To request that the appropriate churchwide organization units convene quarterly meetings with the financial Separately Incorporated Ministries to share learnings and collaborate on the financial well-being of rostered ministers with respect to educational debt;**

**To direct that the Office of the Secretary Research and Evaluation team conduct further analysis on the impacts of educational debt on historically underrepresented groups and the unique challenges faced by these groups for the purposes of moving beyond narrative to reliable evidence, particularly as it relates to intersectionality;**

**To direct that the Office of the Secretary Research and Evaluation team evaluate and measure the ongoing progress of educational debt reduction programs; and**

**To call upon the Office of the Bishop, in collaboration with appropriate units in the churchwide organization, to establish and oversee processes for implementation of and accountability for these directives and to report to the fall meeting of ELCA Church Council in 2027.**

### ***Church Council action:***

**To encourage synods to support churchwide and synod-specific educational debt reduction efforts for current rostered ministers and to evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts to attract and retain rostered ministers;**

**To call upon synods to communicate with their rostered ministers and congregations about educational debt reduction programs and educate lay leaders on the importance of financially supporting rostered ministers; and**

**To urge synods that do not have educational debt reduction opportunities to include questions about seminary debt in their annual questionnaires to learn more about the educational debt among the rostered ministers in their synod.**

### ***Church Council action:***

**To urge congregations to educate their members by sharing information on the educational debt challenges faced by rostered ministers, including rostered ministers of color and people with additional intersectionality, and the need to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion in congregational call processes; and**

**To call upon congregations to actively support their rostered ministers through such ways as participating in churchwide and synod-specific efforts for educational debt reduction for current rostered ministers.**

### ***Church Council action:***

**To call upon this church's colleges, universities, seminaries, and related institutions, organizations, and ministries to create, provide, and prioritize grants and scholarships for undergraduate students pursuing theological education, especially for historically underrepresented groups;**

To encourage undergraduate students and seminarians to consider the type of theological education needed to be effective in ministry and to include financial education, counseling, and debt impact awareness throughout their discernment process; and

To call upon all expressions of this church to support, strengthen, and promote, when appropriate, alternative and bi-vocational ministry learning programs, such as Theological Education for Emerging Ministries (TEEM) and certificate programs as means of equipping congregational leaders in the midst of a changing church landscape.

### **3. RESPONDING TO A REQUEST FROM THE ENDOWMENT FUND OF THE ELCA**

#### *Background:*

In 2017, the Church Council approved a governance structure for the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (also known as the ELCA Foundation), but changes since then have prompted the Resource Development Committee, which reports to the Budget and Finance Committee, to recommend further review. A joint committee, consisting of representation from the Foundation and the churchwide organization, was approved at the October 2024 meeting of the Executive Committee [ECES24.10.36]. The joint committee was charged with reviewing Foundation compliance with Church Council action CC17.11.21, which states, “To approve the proposed governance structure and organizational structures by functions as outlined in the ‘Report of the Task Force on the Structure and Governance of the ELCA Foundation.’”

The Foundation currently uses the ECIS database for donor management but has expressed a desire to move forward with HubSpot, a customer relationship management system. At its October 2024 meeting, the Executive Committee requested that the ELCA Foundation cease activity related to implementation of HubSpot until such time as the report and recommendations were received from the joint committee.

The joint committee developed a report, provided at the May 2025 meeting of the Executive Committee, but progress on the action items within the report has been minimal. During its meeting on Nov. 4, 2025, the Executive Committee received an additional update. The Foundation has indicated it no longer desires access to ECIS and has requested a one-time transfer of a limited amount of donor information from ECIS, as well as the creation of a separate website domain apart from the ELCA.

Presiding Bishop Curry and Treasurer Fedyk stated that they intend to meet with Foundation leaders for further discussion. After that discussion, the Executive Committee may be able to take more informed action, pending authorization from the Church Council.

#### *Church Council action:*

**To authorize the Executive Committee to act on behalf of the Church Council pertaining to a request from the Endowment Fund of the ELCA (dba ELCA Foundation) for transfer of specified ECIS data.**

### **4. REVISION OF THE 2026 FISCAL YEAR SPENDING AUTHORIZATION**

#### *Background:*

At its April 2025 meeting, the Church Council approved and forwarded to the Churchwide Assembly a recommended spending authorization for FY2026. The recommended budget for 2026 was approved at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The ELCA constitution authorizes the Church Council, upon recommendation of the Budget and Finance Committee, to approve modified spending authorizations subsequent to those that were approved at the most recent churchwide assembly.

Since August, revisions of projected churchwide organization revenues and spending for fiscal year 2026 make it appropriate to revise the spending authorization for fiscal year 2026.

#### *Church Council action:*

**To increase the Unrestricted (Current Fund) 2026 fiscal year spending authorization from \$61,500,000 to \$63,150,000.**

### **5. REVISION OF THE MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR MANAGEMENT OF THE ROSTERS OF THE ELCA**

#### *Background:*

The *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Roster Manual) is a governance document that outlines the policies, procedures, and standards for managing this church's rostered ministers. It governs how individuals are admitted to, maintained on, and removed from the

roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of the ELCA. It also includes information on non-roster related matters such as synod-authorized ministry.

The manual was last updated in 2022. Proposed changes for 2025 include:

1. clarifying how to request exceptions to the initial congregational service bylaw for ministers of Word and Sacrament, and
2. adding a new section outlining policies on supply ministry calls for ministers of Word and Sacrament.

These revisions are based on recommendations from the Task Force on On Leave and Specialized Ministry, whose report was submitted to the Church Council at its November 2024 and April 2025 meetings. The revisions have been reviewed by the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops and have been subject to consultation with the full conference. The proposed revisions reflect changes made to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The new policies in the revised Roster Manual will take effect upon ratification by the Church Council.

***Church Council action:***

**To approve the updated *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* for use by synod bishops, synod staff members, and others who hold responsibilities for such matters in this church;**

**To authorize the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to provide periodic updates reflecting new or revised policies subsequently adopted by the Church Council; and**

**To authorize the Office of the Secretary to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.**

## **6. UPDATES TO ELCA CHURCHWIDE ORGANIZATION PERSONNEL POLICIES**

***Background:***

Revisions to Section 4.1. (Core Hours) and 4.7 (People First Hybrid Workplace Model) are being proposed for the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies. Employees of the churchwide organization of the ELCA, including contracted employees, are expected to read, understand, and comply with the Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies, which are adopted by the Church Council in accordance with bylaw 14.21.06.

***Church Council action:***

**To approve the amended Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies; and**

**To authorize the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with Human Resources in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to make any necessary editorial corrections for accuracy.**

## **7. SOCIAL MESSAGE ON CHILD PROTECTION**

***Background:***

ELCA social teaching and policy result from an extensive, inclusive, and accepted process of deliberation throughout this church. The development, adoption, application, and interpretation of social teaching entails a shared responsibility across all three expressions of this church in which various actors carry out specific roles as spelled out in “Policies and Procedures for Addressing Social Concerns of the ELCA” (2018).

The development of a social message on child protection and maltreatment was authorized by the Church Council at its Spring 2024 meeting (CC24.04.05). The council’s Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee reviewed the proposed social message and provided a recommendation for the council’s consideration. The proposed social message and related materials were shared with council members electronically prior to the meeting, and council members were invited to send concerns or recommended amendments related to the social message to the director for theological ethics by Nov. 5, 2025.

***Church Council action:***

**To adopt “Child Protection,” as amended, as a social message of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.**

## **8. RECONSIDERATION OF SOCIAL MESSAGE ON HOMELESSNESS AND DEVELOPMENT OF STUDY RESOURCES RELATED TO WHITE SUPREMACY**

***Background:***

ELCA social teaching and policy result from an extensive, inclusive, and accepted process of deliberation throughout this church. The development, adoption, application, and interpretation of social teaching entails a shared

responsibility across all three expressions of this church in which various actors carry out specific roles as spelled out in “Policies and Procedures for Addressing Social Concerns of the ELCA” (2018).

The ELCA Church Council’s role in the development of social messages includes oversight and is proactive, since the Church Council serves as the ELCA’s interim legislative body. Social messages may be requested by several leadership bodies but are adopted by council action and the council’s responsibility includes determination both of whether and when requests will be authorized.

The general capacity of the Theological Ethics team for writing projects during any given year is work on one social statement, one social message, and one study resource. Recommendations for social message development also take into account the capacity of review bodies such as the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council.

There are currently three requests for social message development that have been approved by the Church Council:

- Development of a new social message on confronting white supremacy;
- Reconsideration of the social message on “Homelessness” (1990); and
- Reconsideration of one element of “Message on End-of-Life Decisions” (1992)

The Theological Ethics team prepared recommendations following discussions with churchwide organization staff, the Theological Ethics Advisory Working Group, the Theological and Ethical Concerns Committee of the Conference of Bishops, and the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee of the Church Council.

***Church Council action:***

To authorize the substantive reconsideration of the sections on “Remembering the Reality” and “Walking with People Who Are Homeless” and other relevant references in “A Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990) with attention to contemporary and systemic issues affecting housing in the United States and impacting individuals experiencing homelessness. These issues may include, though are not limited to, matters such as the definition of homelessness, the right to housing, the needs and responsibilities of local communities, intersectional issues impacting homelessness, and the calling of this church. This work shall be done in light of existing social teaching and in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” (2018).

***Church Council action:***

To direct the Theological Discernment team to begin development of study resources for this church on the issue of white supremacy. These efforts would call on such resources as insight from the Racial Justice team, diverse networks within the ELCA, the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, and others in order to engage this whole church in communal moral discernment and learning, with a report on progress to the Church Council in April 2026.

## **9. BYLAW AMENDMENTS**

***Background:***

Amendment of the continuing resolution related to the Association of Synod Vice Presidents was recommended by leaders within the association. In addition, when ELCA governing documents were revised to allow baptized members of synod-authorized worshiping communities to serve on committees and boards of this church, one instance was inadvertently omitted; an amendment was proposed to rectify this oversight.

***Church Council action:***

To adopt *en bloc* amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as follows:

**10.31.B25.** *Association of Synod Vice Presidents: The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the synod vice presidents of this church. The churchwide vice president shall be a member with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. **Triennially Annually**, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall elect a chair and vice chair to preside at meetings **for one-year terms with the possibility of re-election for a second year. Terms begin September 1 of the year of election. The persons who would make themselves available for election as chair or vice-chair would have at least two years remaining in their term.***

**14.41. H22H25. Resource Development Committee**

.... Non-Church Council members, each of whom shall be a voting members of an ELCA congregation or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community....

**10. AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT**

*Church Council action:*

To receive the draft minutes of the ELCA Audit Committee describing their approval from June 2025 of the audited financial statements for the churchwide organization's fiscal year ended Jan. 31, 2025.

**11. ENGAGEMENT OF AUDIT FIRM**

*Church Council action:*

To assign responsibility for the engagement of an audit firm to perform the audit service plan for the churchwide organization's fiscal year ending Jan. 31, 2026, to the Executive Committee.

**12. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO PORTICO BENEFITS SERVICES RESTATED BYLAWS**

*Background:*

The Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA (Portico Benefit Services) provide that its bylaws can be amended only with prior approval of the Church Council or the Churchwide Assembly.

At its November 2025 meeting, the Portico Benefit Services Board of Trustees approved a resolution to amend Section 4.3 of the Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA pending ratification by the Church Council.

*Church Council action:*

To approve the proposed amendments to the Restated Bylaws of the Board of Pensions of the ELCA as identified in the "Portico Bylaw Changes November 2025" document.

**13. IMPLEMENTATION OF PORTICO BENEFITS CHANGES**

*Background:*

At its meeting on Feb. 20, 2025, the Board of Trustees of Portico Benefit Services endorsed the recommendation resulting from Benefits reExamined research and consultation. The board also directed Portico to take actions that are necessary to present the recommendations to the Church Council for approval and move forward with implementation and communication plans pending approval by the Church Council.

The Church Council endorsed the changes at its April 2025 meeting [CC(ES)25.04.02]. The Legal and Constitutional Review Committee reviewed the resulting amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plans that are consistent with the recommendations presented in April 2025.

*Church Council action:*

To receive the recommendations of Portico Benefit Services' board of trustees endorsing and recommending approval of ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits plan amendments implementing four new health plan benefit options, as presented to the Church Council at its April 2025 meeting;

To express gratitude and appreciation to the *Benefits reExamined* task force, staff, and board of trustees of Portico Benefit Services for their continued faithfulness and compassion in designing, testing, rolling out, evaluating, and anticipating the implementation of four new health plan benefit options, which both reflect the principles underlying the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits and recognize the complexities of health care changes; and

To approve the four new health plan benefit options, identified and described as the Select Copay 2000, Select HDHP 2000, Value Copay 4000, and Value HDHP 4000 plan options, and the proposed amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan identified in "Portico Benefit Services Explanation of Plan Amendments" document, effective Jan. 1, 2026.

## **14. CHURCH COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS**

### *Background:*

Pursuant to provision 14.22. and bylaw 8.21.03. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, the Church Council is to elect nominees to vacancies on boards and committees of the churchwide organization as well as boards of seminaries of this church.

### *Church Council action:*

**To appoint the following individuals to serve on the Audit Committee for a two-year, renewable term: Mr. Kevin Anderson, Ms. Patricia P. Harper, Mr. Rindra Josoa, Ms. Tami Jo McHugh, and Ms. Terri L. Robertson.**

### *Church Council action:*

**To elect to the board of directors of Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University to a term beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2028: the Rev. Anthony Scott and Ms. Jill M. Meuser.**

### *Church Council action:*

**To elect to the board of trustees of United Lutheran Seminary to a term beginning September 2025 and ending May 2027: Mr. Donald E. Barb.**

### *Church Council action:*

**To appoint Ms. Deidre D. Hayes to serve as Church Council liaison to the Corporate Social Responsibility Review Team for a term ending August 2031.**

### *Church Council action:*

**To elect the following individuals to serve on the Committee of Hearing Officers for a six-year term ending 2031: Ms. Aja M. Carr Favors, Mr. Adam B. Kuennen, Eric E. Nord, Tammy L. Pust, and Rev. Kim L. Lengert.**

### *Church Council action:*

**To elect the following individual to serve on the Committee on Appeals for a six-year term ending 2031: the Rev. Justin C. Boeding.**