

EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA
CHURCH COUNCIL
Nov. 12, 2025
Virtual Meeting

AGENDA

Participants

Voting Members

Pr. Lisa Ahlness	Ms. Olivia Martin-Call
Pr. Ryan Anderson	Mr. Mitch McCartney
Pr. Heather Brown	Mr. Joel Miller
Ms. Jamie Bruesehoff	Pr. CeCee Mills, Secretary
Pr. Leroy Cannon	Pr. Alvaro Nova
Mr. Ben Caseley	Ms. Deb Nyquist
Bp. Yehiel Curry, Presiding Bishop	Deacon Kari Olsen
Pr. Ralph Dunkin (nominated; excused)	Pr. Moses Penumaka
Ms. Lori Fedyk, Treasurer	Mr. Iván Perez
Ms. Sheena Foster (<i>excused</i>)	Ms. Linda Rivera
Mr. Hans Giller	Ms. Terri Robertson
Ms. Jessi Grieser	Pr. Barbara Rossing
Ms. Pat Harper	Ms. Spencer Sanders
Ms. Deidre Hayes (<i>excused</i>)	Mr. Matt Schur
Ms. Kristy Henriksen	Mr. Imran Siddiqui, Vice President
Mr. Tim Hiller	Mr. Andrew Stevens
Pr. Chad Huebner (<i>excused</i>)	Ms. Jillian Stierwalt
Bp. Deborah Hutterer, Chair, COB (<i>excused</i>)	Ms. Jennifer Trom
Mr. Rindra Josoa	Mr. Christopher Vergara
Mr. Moses Kavishe	Ms. Emma Witt
Pr. Gwendolyn King	

Liaison Bishops

Bp. Laurie Larson Caesar, Region 1 (<i>in lieu of Bp. Manlove</i>)	Bp. Suzanne Dillahunt, Region 6
Bp. Brenda Bos, Region 2	Bp. Christopher deForest, Region 7
Bp. Craig Schweitzer, Region 3	Bp. Bill Gohl, Region 8
Bp. Scott Johnson, Region 4	Bp. Kevin Strickland, Region 9
Bp. Joy Mortensen-Wiebe, Region 5	

Resource People

Office of the Presiding Bishop

Pr. Wyvetta Bullock, interim executive for administration
Aaron Cooper, senior director, strategic communications
Ryan Cumming, director, theological ethics
Jennifer DeLeon, director for racial justice
Kathryn Lohre, executive, ecumenical and inter-religious relations
Mary Streufert, executive, theological discernment
Deacon John Weit, executive, worship (*excused*)
Rachel Wind, executive, development
Andrea Young, interim executive, human resources

Office of the Secretary

Thomas Cunniff, general counsel
Adam DeHoek, senior director, Research and Evaluation
Dan Eppley, manager for official documentation

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Pr. Keith Fry, executive, Office of the Secretary administration
Paul Irwin, associate general counsel
Deacon Mary Ann Schwabe, executive, synod relations
Jodi Slattery, executive, governance

Christian Community and Leadership

Pr. Sara Cutter, interim executive director

Service and Justice

Pr. Khader El-Yateem, executive director

Innovation

Rahel Mwitula-Williams, interim executive director

Press

Candice Hill Buchbinder, public relations manager

Separately Incorporated Ministries

Tim Blevins, president and CEO, Augsburg Fortress Publishers (*excused*)
Andrew DeYoung, president-elect and CEO-elect, Augsburg Fortress Publishers
Jennifer Hockenberry, interim executive director, Women of the ELCA
Christopher Johnson, president and CEO, Portico Benefit Services
Eva Roby, president and CEO, Mission Investment Fund
Annette Shoemaker, interim president and CEO, ELCA Foundation

Ecumenical Guest

Pr. Deborah Jackson, The Episcopal Church

Advisory Members

Pr. Alejandro Mejia, president, Latino Ministries Association
Pr. Joan Conroy, president, American Indian Alaska Native Lutheran Association
Ryan LaHurd, president, Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage
Desta Goehner, president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
Pr. Bimen Limbong, president, Association of Asian and Pacific Islanders
Pr. Jesse W Brown Jr, president, African Descent Lutheran Association
Aubrey Thonvold, executive director, Reconciling Works

6:30 p.m. CST **Deadline for Removal of Items from *En Bloc* (send request to CeCee.Mills@elca.org)**
Deadline for New Business (send request to CeCee.Mills@elca.org)

PLENARY SESSION ONE
[Microsoft Teams Meeting Link](#)
Nov. 12, 2025
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. CST

Gathering Word and Prayer, led by Mitch McCartney

I.A Call to Order and Adoption of the Agenda

Agenda items have been distributed electronically. Additional items will be distributed at the meeting to the members of the Church Council and invited resource people. The times noted in the agenda are estimates and provided for information only.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

To adopt the agenda and to permit the chair to call for consideration of agenda items in the order the chair deems most appropriate.

I.B Adoption of the Standing Rules

The Church Council will conduct its business in this virtual meeting using standing rules. The document highlights deadlines for removal from *en bloc* and new business, instructions for Church Council members on how to ask a question or make a comment during the meeting, and the process for voting. The standing rules can be found [here](#).

CC ACTION

Recommended:

To adopt the standing rules for the November 2025 Church Council meeting.

I.C Report from the Officers

- I.C.1 Presiding Bishop**
- I.C.2 Secretary**
- I.C.3 Vice President**
- I.C.4 Treasurer**

I.D Report of the Executive Committee

I.D.1 Election of Church Council member

The Rev. Daniel Collins [8H] resigned from the Church Council in September 2025 and a vacancy was declared. The West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod Council will nominate a rostered minister to fulfill the remainder of the term ending in 2031. The Executive Committee will act to forward the nomination for Church Council's consideration.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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

I.D.2 Educational Debt Task Force

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, progress reports have been shared with the Executive Committee. The task force's final report and recommendations are [here](#).

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

I.D.3 ELCA Foundation

The ELCA Church Council approved a governance structure for the ELCA Foundation in 2017, but changes since then 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 Endowment Fund of the ELCA (dba ELCA Foundation) and the ELCA churchwide organization, was approved at the October 2024 Executive Committee meeting [[EC\(ES\)24.10.36](#)]. The joint committee was charged with reviewing compliance with the action taken by the ELCA Church Council, [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.'](#)” (pp. 269-293)

The Foundation currently uses ECIS for donor management but desired to move forward with HubSpot, a customer relationship management system, despite concerns from churchwide IT about integration, security, and contract compliance. At its Oct. 2024 meeting, the Executive Committee requested that the ELCA Foundation cease activity on the implementation of HubSpot until such time that the report and recommendations from the joint committee were received.

The joint committee developed a report, which was provided at the May 2025 Executive Committee meeting; however, progress on the action items within the report has been minimal. Since then, periodic updates have been provided to the Executive Committee on the developments.

During its November 4 meeting, the Executive Committee received an additional update. The Foundation has indicated they no longer desire access to ECIS and 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 ELCA. These requests have broader implications and require thorough review.

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

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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 the transfer of specified ECIS data.

I.E Report of the Budget and Finance Committee

The following report is provided by the Budget and Finance Committee. Additional items or revised actions may be distributed following the committee's meeting. Any *En Bloc* items will be acted upon later in the meeting. Background information can be located in the [Budget and Finance Committee section](#) of the Public Current Meeting channel in Teams.

I.E.1 [Revision of FY2026 Current Fund Spending Authorization](#)

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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

I.F. Report of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee

The following report is provided by the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee. Additional items or revised actions may be distributed following the committee's meeting. Any *En Bloc* items will be acted upon later in the meeting. Background information can be located in the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee section of the Public Current Meeting channel in Teams.

I.F.1 [Revision of Roster Manual](#)

The *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (aka the 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 official rosters of the ELCA, the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament and the roster of Ministers of Word and Service, and 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 has already been received by the council at its November 2024 and April 2025 meetings. They have been reviewed by the Roster Committee of the Conference of Bishops, and have been subject to consultation with the full conference. The 2025 Churchwide Assembly has already made the necessary constitutional changes to accommodate these policies, which are now being spelled out in the proposed revisions. The Church Council is responsible for

adopting updates to the Roster Manual. Once approved, the new policies will take effect. You can find the revisions [here](#).

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

I.F.2 Updates to ELCA Churchwide Organization Personnel Policies

[Revisions](#) to Section 4.1. (Core Hours) and 4.7 (People First Hybrid Workplace Model) are being proposed for the Personnel Policies of the Churchwide Organization.

Employees of the churchwide organization of the ELCA, including contracted employees, are expected to read, understand, and comply with the Personnel Policies of the Churchwide Organization, which are adopted by the Church Council in accordance with 14.21.06.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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.

I.F.3 Amendments to ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan

At its meeting on February 20, 2025, the Board of Trustees of Portico Benefit Services endorsed the recommendation resulting from Benefits reExamined research and consultation. This board also directed Portico to take actions that are necessary to present the recommendations for approval by the ELCA Church Council and move forward with implementation and communication plans after approval from 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 will review the resulting amendments to the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan that are consistent with the recommendations presented in April 2025. The amendments are outlined [here](#).

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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 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 January 1, 2026.

10-minute Recess

I.G Report of the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee

The following report is provided by the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee. Additional items or revised actions may be distributed following the committee’s meeting. Background information is located in the Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee section of the Public Current Meeting channel in Teams.

I.G.1 Consideration of a Social Message on Child Protection

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 Faith, Society, and Innovation Committee will review the proposed social message and provide a recommendation for Church Council’s consideration. Council members were invited to send any concerns or amendments to the director for theological ethics by the deadline on Nov. 5, 2025.

The text of the proposed social message is restricted for council’s use and is not to be shared with any media organizations or posted to social media since it is not official ELCA social teaching until it is acted upon at this November meeting.

A report summarizing the results of public comment can be found online at ELCA.org/childprotection. The proposed social message can be found [here](#), along with an [FAQ](#).

CC ACTION *[Two-thirds approval required]*

Recommended:

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

I.G.2 Consideration of next social message

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 desk for writing projects during any given year, in terms of human and financial resources, 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:

1. Development of a new social message on white supremacy
2. Reconsideration of “Message on Homelessness: A Renewal of Commitment” (1990)
3. Reconsideration of one element of “Message on End-of-Life Decisions” (1992)

The director for theological ethics is preparing recommendations following extensive conversation with various stakeholders, including other 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.

CC ACTION

Recommended:

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).

CC ACTION

Recommended:

To direct the Theological Discernment team to begin development of study resources, drawing from existing social teaching, 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 the whole church in communal moral discernment and learning, with a report on progress to the Church Council in April 2026.

I.H Report of the Board Development Committee

The following report is provided by the Board Development Committee. The Church Council is planning a spring retreat for March 19-22, 2026, which will be held at the Q Center in St. Charles, Ill. Details regarding travel, agenda, and registration information will be communicated to members as plans are finalized. The retreat will offer council members a dedicated opportunity for deeper connection, strategic planning, and justice through faith education.

I.I New Business

I.J Consideration of Items Removed from *En Bloc*

I.K *En Bloc* Approval of Certain Items

The *en bloc* resolution includes agenda items judged to be non-controversial, so they may not require separate discussion or votes. Items marked [*En Bloc*] can be removed by members if they wish

to discuss them individually; otherwise, they remain in the *en bloc* resolution. Only items requested by the established deadline to be removed will be discussed separately. Those remaining are voted on together as one of the last items of council business.

CC ACTION [Two-thirds approval required]
Recommended:

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

Chapter 10.
SYNODS

10.30. OFFICERS

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.

Chapter 14.
CHURCH COUNCIL

14.40. CHURCH COUNCIL COMMITTEES

14.41.~~H22~~H25. Resource Development Committee
.... Non-Church Council members, each of whom shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation or a confirmed member of a synod-authorized worshiping community....

CC ACTION
Recommended:

To take action *En Bloc* on the remaining items listed in [En Bloc Items](#) and [Responses to Churchwide Assembly Actions](#).

I.L Closing Prayer and Adjournment