




Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

November 18, 2015

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 of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Administrative Team of the churchwide organization
 Chief executive officers of separately incorporated ministries
 Seminary presidents
 Regional coordinators

FROM: 
 The Rev. Wm Chris Boefger, secretary

SUBJECT: Report of Church Council Responses to Synod Resolutions
 and Churchwide Assembly Actions (Nov. 12-15, 2015)

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I. RESPONSES TO SYNOD RESOLUTIONS

A. U.S. Government Aid to the State of Israel Metropolitan Chicago Synod (5A) [2015]

RESOLVED, that members of the congregations of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod be encouraged to contact their congressional representatives and their senators to encourage their support and action to terminate U.S. financial aid until the state of Israel seeks a peace agreement, ends its occupation of Palestinian territory and enables an independent Palestinian state; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Assembly through the Synod Council make this resolution known to members of the Illinois Congressional delegation who serve citizens living in our synod and the public at large; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Assembly direct the Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council for consideration and possible action.

Executive Committee action [EC15.08.14]

To receive the resolution from the Metropolitan Chicago Synod concerning U.S. Government Aid to the State of Israel; and

To refer the resolution to the Global Mission unit, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Response from the Global Mission unit (November 2015)

This church encourages ELCA members on a near-monthly basis to be in touch with their elected officials with regard to the importance of reaching a just peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. Often the importance of ending

the occupation and the need for a two-state solution are included. The ELCA has raised the issue of U.S. financial aid to Israel and the need for it to be used consistent with human rights provisions in U.S. law from time to time, most notably in an October 2012 letter to Members of Congress and most recently in an August 2015 action alert. Other related memorials have already been forwarded to the Office of the Secretary, and this matter will be considered among the memorials being sent to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council action:

To receive the response from the Global Mission unit related to the resolution of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod concerning U.S. Government Aid to the State of Israel;

To note that this matter will be considered along with other memorials on Israel and Palestine already addressed to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly as the response of Church Council to the resolution of this synod; and

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

B. Strategic Plan

Southeastern Minnesota Synod (3I) [2015]

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod, in assembly, ask the ELCA Church Council to initiate, in partnership with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the synodical expression of this church, a thorough assessment of all churchwide and synodical ministries:

1. to identify and review which ministries each expression is doing individually, cooperatively and in partnership with other agencies;
2. to identify any additional ministries each expression should be doing;
3. to evaluate the importance and effectiveness of those ministries to the mission of this church; and
4. to develop an opinion about which ministries can be done most effectively by each expression individually, cooperatively or in partnership with other agencies; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod request that, on the basis of that assessment, the Church Council develop funding proposals for those ministries including new mission support goal percentages; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod ask the Church Council to present recommendations arising from this strategic plan to the 2016 Churchwide Assembly for action.

Executive Committee action [EC15.07.12c]

To receive the resolution from the Southeastern Minnesota Synod concerning a strategic plan for this church; and

To refer the resolution to the Office of the Presiding Bishop for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2015)

At the April 2015 meeting of the Church Council, it took action on a number of mission funding matters. It acknowledged that the “uniform percentage guidelines for mission support are no longer appropriate across all synods” (CC15.04.11). Further, it approved “the development, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Office of the Presiding Bishop, of a contextually sensitive, substantive and collaborative process which will result in synod-specific percentage goals for each of the 65 synods by no later than the April 2018 meeting of the Church Council” (CC15.04.11).

In addition, Church Council asked the presiding bishop to convene a team “to sharpen the priorities of this church and bring greater clarity about what this church will do and will not do in order to serve God’s mission more faithfully and effectively in the years to come” (CC15.04.10).

Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton has been working with a consultant on this request and has developed a process design to address strategic directions for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She has consulted with the Administrative Team, the Executive Committee of the Church Council and the Conference of Bishops regarding this possible process and has received positive feedback. Church Council will be discussing the process design at its November 2015 meeting.

The process will deliver:

- A directional statement on the identity of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and high level priorities that provide a sharpened and common focus for leadership of the church. This would be linked to and help to interpret Bishop Eaton's four emphases: We are Lutheran; We are church; We are church together; and, We are church for the sake of the world;
- Ownership of the directions and priorities by church leaders, especially the Conference of Bishops and Church Council;
- Motivation and renewed energy across this church to serve God's mission faithfully and more effectively and to work together to build a thriving, connected and sustainable church; and
- A common strategic framework for other levels of planning, including operational planning by the churchwide organization and synodical mission planning.

Bishop Eaton is seeking broad participation across this church, including the Southeastern Minnesota Synod. As was intended in the Church Council action, the "Future Directions Table" will have a role in generating and drawing together thinking as the process moves forward. A range of processes and mechanisms would be used to achieve engagement and generate conversations.

It is proposed that the directional statement will be launched as part of the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. This provides an ideal opportunity for all church leaders to communicate a shared vision for the future of this church. It is an ambitious process that will require bold leadership, tight management and a very clear communication strategy.

Church Council action:

To receive the response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop related to the resolution of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod concerning a strategic plan for this church;

To note that this matter is currently being initiated through the presiding bishop's process design; and

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

C. Amending the "Model Constitution for Congregations" Regarding Discipline Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod (1D) [2015]

RESOLVED, that the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod Assembly recommend changes in the congregational disciplinary process (C15.01., ff.) laid out in the latest iteration of the "Model Constitution for Congregations of the ELCA" either to return to the previous wording, which has Congregational Councils part of the process, or to find language which puts Congregational Councils back into the currently prescribed system; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod Assembly direct the Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council's Executive Committee for referral and disposition to the appropriate unit or office of the churchwide organization in accordance with the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Executive Committee action [EC15.07.12c]

To receive the resolution from the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod concerning amendments to the "Model Constitution for Congregations" regarding discipline; and

To refer the resolution to the Office of the Secretary for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2015)

The previous wording that is requested by this resolution had the congregation council acting in multiple roles in the process of the discipline of congregation members. It also allows the member who might be under discipline to appeal to the Synod Council. The current process does not remove the congregation council from the process. The congregation council, instead of being the recipient of the charges, now is the body that prepares the charges for submission to the appropriate synod committees and represents the congregation throughout the process.

In fact, the previous system did not work to resolve conflicts in part because the congregation council was placed in an impossible situation. The current process has the council taking a significant role, but not the role of determining the outcome. The current process seeks to establish a method of hearing the complaint and deciding on possible discipline while allowing the council to continue to function in providing leadership for the whole congregation. It is the opinion of the secretary that this resolution's proposed change should not be made.

Church Council action:

To receive with thanks the resolution of the Eastern Washington-Idaho Synod concerning constitutional amendments in the congregational disciplinary process;

To receive the response from the Office of the Secretary related to the resolution;

To decline to amend the "Model Constitution for Congregations"; and

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

D. Solar Power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia

Northeastern Minnesota Synod (3E) [2015]

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod endorse the Phebe Hospital solar energy project and encourage the intentional efforts of each congregation throughout the synod to raise awareness and funding for this project in the month of August; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod call upon the other synods in Minnesota and across the ELCA to embrace the "Solar August" awareness and funding opportunity; and be it further

RESOLVED that the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly direct the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council's Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Solar Power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia

Northwestern Minnesota Synod (3D) [2015]

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly answer the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly's call and stand with its brothers and sisters in faith to support the Phebe Hospital solar energy project and encourage the intentional efforts of each congregation throughout its synod to raise awareness and funding for this project in the month of August; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly direct the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Council to unite with the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Council in forwarding this resolution to the Church Council's Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Solar Power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia

Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod (7E) [2015]

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly answer the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly's call and stand with its brothers and sisters in faith to support the Phebe Hospital solar energy project and encourage the intentional efforts of each congregation throughout this synod to raise awareness and funding for this project in the month of August; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Assembly direct the Northeastern Pennsylvania Synod Council to unite with the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Council in forwarding this resolution to the Church Council's Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Solar Power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia

Upper Susquehanna Synod (8E) [2015]

RESOLVED that the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly answer the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Assembly's call and stand with its brothers and sisters in faith to support the Phebe Hospital

solar energy project and encourage the intentional efforts of each congregation throughout its synod to raise awareness and funding for this project in the month of August, and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly direct the Upper Susquehanna Synod Council to unite with the Northeastern Minnesota Synod Council in forwarding this resolution to the Church Council's Executive Committee.

Executive Committee action [EC15.05.09]

To receive the resolution from the Northeastern Minnesota Synod concerning solar power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia; and

To refer the resolution to the Global Mission unit for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Executive Committee action [EC15.07.12c]

To receive the resolutions from the Northwestern Minnesota, Northeastern Pennsylvania, and the Upper Susquehanna Synods concerning solar power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia; and

To refer the resolutions to the Global Mission unit for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Response from the Global Mission unit (November 2015)

The Global Mission unit is working with Women of the ELCA, which is coordinating the fund-raising effort to bring solar power to Phebe Hospital in Liberia. A Global Mission staff member in Liberia, who has an engineering background, is liaising with the Rural Renewal Energy Alliance for the planning and anticipated implementation phases of the project. Therefore, Global Mission expects to have this staff expertise continue to be available to help oversee the project's implementation if and when the required funds have been received.

Church Council action:

To receive the response from the Global Mission unit related to the resolutions of the Northwestern Minnesota, Northeastern Minnesota, Northeastern Pennsylvania and Upper Susquehanna synods concerning solar power at Phebe Hospital in Liberia;

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

II. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

A. Israel and Palestine

The Report of the Memorials Committee of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly includes the full text of the synodical memorials to that assembly under category C1: Israel and Palestine.

Churchwide Assembly action [CA13.06.27]

To receive with gratitude the memorials of the Southwestern Texas, Saint Paul Area, Rocky Mountain, Southeast Michigan, Oregon, Sierra Pacific, Northwest Washington, Greater Milwaukee, Southwest California, Metropolitan Chicago, Southeastern Iowa, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Indiana/Kentucky, New England, Lower Susquehanna, Upper Susquehanna, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis Area synods related to Peacemaking with Justice in Israel and Palestine;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to:

1. Continue its awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;
2. Learn more about the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians and their mutual fears, aspirations, and hopes;
3. Work to convey the concerns and perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis that dispel stereotypes and caricatures and promote better understanding;
4. Lift up the voices within both communities, especially those of victims of violence, that seek peace with justice through nonviolent responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
5. Continue to help alleviate the humanitarian needs of all of those affected by the conflict;

6. Support U.S. funding that promotes peace and cooperation for all parties to the conflict; and
7. Continue to pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land and our brothers and sisters in the Middle East;

To reaffirm the 2011 Churchwide Assembly action [CA11.04.27] to receive, read, and discuss the Kairos Palestine document as an “authentic word from our brothers and sisters in the Palestinian Christian community” that “warrants our respect and attentiveness;”

To reaffirm the 2011 Churchwide Assembly action [CA11.04.27] “to commend the policy, ‘ELCA Economic Social Criteria Investment Screens,’ to the members, congregations, synods, and agencies of this church; and to decline to undertake a review of the investment of funds managed within the ELCA but to commend these recommendations to the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, and the ELCA Board of Pensions for consideration;”

To encourage this church’s members, congregations, synods, and agencies to call on the President of the United States and their representatives in Congress to commit to a goal of facilitating a just and peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and

To refer to the Global Mission unit, the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, the Office of the Secretary, the Office of the Treasurer, and Portico Benefit Services the matter of evaluating possibilities for investing in specific Palestinian economic endeavors and other projects that would promote peace and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians; and to provide a report with recommendations to the April 2014 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from Global Mission unit (April 2014)

At this time, conversations are ongoing with the various churchwide units as well as Portico Benefit Services. The Global Mission unit would appreciate the opportunity to make a fuller report, including a comprehensive strategy, to a subsequent meeting of the Church Council.

Church Council action (CC14.04.13e)

To receive the response from Global Mission and to grant an extension for a final report and possible recommendations; and

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

Response from the Global Mission unit (April 2015)

The 2013 Churchwide Assembly action (CA13.06.27) requested, among other things, that a number of churchwide offices and units evaluate “possibilities for investing in specific Palestinian economic endeavors and other projects that would promote peace and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians.” The offices and units were the Global Mission unit (convener), the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, the Office of the Secretary, the Office of the Treasurer and Portico Benefit Services. Global Mission convened representatives of these entities and the Mission Investment Fund on March 9, 2015.

In addition to those entities mentioned above, Global Mission requested a member of its staff with accounting expertise and who resides in Jerusalem to undertake an initial informal survey of Palestinian investment possibilities. Other Global Mission and Congregational and Synodical Mission staff collected information about the activities of other churches and church-related organizations with respect to Palestinian investment. The information and findings were shared with those attending the March 9, 2015, meeting.

Staff also held an initial conversation with Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) in January and consultation will continue with him prior to the preparation of a final report. Among the topics discussed on March 9 were: background on earlier policy statements about economic measures; definitions of “investment” (economic, social, etc.) in this context; the range of recent financial support to the region by the ELCA; a continuum of possible economic instruments or measures that should be examined; and an outline of investment initiatives by other church-related entities in the region.

Staff of the Global Mission unit will continue to study these and other topics, and in the context of a small working group, craft language for the representatives of this ad hoc committee to review and discuss for a final report.

In consultation with Bishop Younan of the ELCJHL, the *ad hoc* committee, through the Global Mission unit as convener, will bring a final report and possible recommendations to the Church Council meeting in fall 2015.

Church Council action (CC15.04.31i)

To receive the progress report from the Global Mission unit regarding Israel and Palestine; and

To request that a final report with possible recommendations be presented to the Church Council at its November 2015 meeting.

Response from the Global Mission unit (November 2015)

The Global Mission unit was designated to take the lead in preparing a response to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly memorial. After meeting with representatives from all of the ELCA units referenced in the memorial, the Global Mission unit-based steering committee pursued four areas of inquiry:

1. engaged in conversation with Bishop Munib Younan and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) throughout the process, exploring “positive investment” vehicles in addition to the Global Mission unit’s current financial commitments. A colleague based in Jerusalem, with accounting expertise, consulted Palestinian entrepreneurs and financial institutions, such as the Bank of Palestine.
2. interviewed each partner named in the memorial, the Mission Investment Fund and other stakeholders to understand their definitions of investment (economic, social, other) in Palestine. Staff of the Global Mission unit also interviewed representatives of units and organizations that oversee ELCA fund management to better understand their fiduciary duty in seeking a market rate of return.
3. reviewed the work of other denominations, specifically the Presbyterian Foundation and The Episcopal Church.
4. reviewed the range of past and current financial commitments with the ELCJHL, Lutheran World Federation (LWF) – Jerusalem and other partners.

In January 2015, staff met with Bishop Younan to brief him on the task assigned to the Global Mission unit, seek his advice on the possibilities available for “positive investment,” and describe plans for response.

Determining possible parameters of “investment” was critical to the process, and staff of the Global Mission unit examined a continuum of investment options available to the ELCA. They began by looking at traditional (financial) investment practices as well as the possibilities for other forms of economic investment (such as micro-finance and online commerce). They examined social investment or philanthropy; that is investing in the lives of people and communities without expectation for a financial return. In a related development, Portico has revealed a new initiative, Social Impact First, in the fall of 2015. For this report, the Global Mission unit speaks of social investment as philanthropy, and Portico identifies social investment as one that provides a financial return. Traditional and social investments are both options for the ELCA.

The Global Mission unit interviewed staff of Portico, the Mission Investment Fund, Mission Advancement and Office of the Treasurer to understand their specific charters and financial responsibilities. All of these ministries implement ELCA guidelines for socially responsible investing along a continuum, while maintaining their fiduciary responsibility to be effective stewards of the funds entrusted to them. Portico’s Social Impact First investing strives for greater social impact, by accepting when necessary, a slightly lower return and/or slightly higher risk (for up to 10 percent of assets in existing social purpose funds).

To see if investing in Palestine might be feasible, Portico has been collaborating with ecumenical partners, including the Pension Board of the United Church of Christ and the General Board of Pension and Health Benefits of the United Methodist Church (Wespath), to learn more about potential investments in Palestine. However, it is uniquely challenging to uphold fiduciary responsibility while investing in Palestine. Given the volatility of the Middle East, the economic constraints inherent in the Occupation of Palestine, and the very low volume of options available, the financial return of investment in the region is well below market rate and considered high-risk. Therefore, because of the fiduciary duty of the aforementioned entities, opportunities for financial investment in Palestine are rather limited. Similarly, economic investment, as understood in a free market, is significantly restrained under the Israeli occupation where freedom of movement of people and goods is restricted; where access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities are restricted; and where access to and development of land is restricted. They also researched options in micro-finance (Oikocredit and Kiva) and online commerce (Indiegogo and Kickstarter). Neither Oikocredit nor Kiva offered designated investing in Palestine; and the projects seeking funding in Indiegogo and Kickstarter suit individual investors, not large scale investing.

Concurrently, staff of the Global Mission unit examined the Presbyterian and The Episcopal Church investment practices in Palestine. They reviewed the work of the Presbyterian Foundation’s Transformational Investment, where Presbyterian congregations and other Presbyterian-related entities are able to participate in the program through a revocable charitable trust of the Presbyterian Foundation. Currently, the Presbyterian Foundation and the Presbyterian

Mission Agency have committed to invest up to \$1.5 million. The Episcopal Church purchased, in 2013, a three-year certificate of deposit for \$500,000 in the Bank of Palestine. The investment will be for green loan programs and loans to help start and sustain small businesses. This investment was in response to a resolution at their 77th General Convention that affirmed positive investment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The ELCA is dedicated to long-term social investment with long-standing financial commitments to companion church and related partners in Palestine. Therefore, the ELCA definition of investment includes social return on the ELCA's engagement with the ELCJHL, LWF – Jerusalem, and other entities. From Fiscal Year 2012 to Fiscal Year 2014, the ELCA has given over \$2.2 million in grants to the ELCJHL, the LWF-operated Augusta Victoria Hospital, and to smaller initiatives like the Peace Center for the Blind. The Mission Investment Fund, reaching beyond its primarily domestic mission, loaned \$1.2 million to Dar Al-Kalima College (also a beneficiary of the Presbyterian Foundation) and \$1.5 million to the ELCJHL for the construction of the Baptismal Pilgrimage Site and Retreat Center at the Jordan River in Jordan. When reporting these financial commitments to those offices and units named in the memorial, many were impressed with the scope and depth of financial investment and encouraged that this information be shared.

In summary, the ELCA continues to stand with ELCJHL and ELCJHL's work to promote a just peace; the ELCA continues its long-term social investment in the region and the ELCA continues to advocate through the Peace Not Walls campaign for the end of the Occupation at which time a range of financial investments may be possible in a free market environment.

The Global Mission unit recommends that the Church Council:

- 1) commend the ELCA's current social investment commitments to the ELCJHL, the LWF and other companions in the region; and
- 2) consider this report as an appropriate response to the action of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly on this matter.

Church Council action:

To receive the report from the Global Mission unit in response to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly action related to the matter of evaluating possibilities for investing in specific Palestinian economic endeavors and other projects that would promote peace and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians;

To commend the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's current social investment commitments to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, The Lutheran World Federation and other companions in the region; and

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

B. Implementation of Social Statement "Genetics, Faith and Responsibility"

Churchwide Assembly action [CA11.04.17]

1. To call upon members of this church to pray, work, advocate and apply genetic knowledge and technology in ways that respect and promote the community of life justly and wisely;
2. To call upon congregations and other sites of ministry to give renewed attention to becoming places of koinonia in Christ that foster a deepened understanding of and commitment to baptismal vocation, everyday callings and moral formation and discernment;
3. To encourage leaders in conferences, synods or other appropriate bodies to compile lists of resources for their jurisdictions to which pastors, counselors and individuals can turn for help when seeking information or guidance in dealing with genetic issues;
4. To call upon this church's advocacy ministries to support and advocate for measures consistent with this social statement;
5. To affirm the study document "Genetics and Faith: Power, Choice and Responsibility" as a resource for ongoing deliberation and discernment, and to direct the Theological Discernment team of the Office of the Presiding Bishop to maintain its availability as long as demand continues;
6. To affirm the 2004 ELCA Social Policy Resolution "Genetically Modified Organisms in the Food Supply" and its continuing value for the mission and ministry of the ELCA;

7. To encourage the churchwide organization to maintain a database of ELCA members with expertise related to genetic science and technology that can serve as a primary resource for consultation;
8. To direct the Theological Discernment team of the Office of the Presiding Bishop to assess the feasibility of developing a social message on regenerative medicine, including, but not limited to, a range of stem cell technologies; and to bring to the ELCA Church Council in November 2013 a report and possible recommendations, in accordance with Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns (Chicago: ELCA, 1997, revised 2011); and
9. To call upon the Office of the Presiding Bishop to establish and oversee a process of implementation and accountability for “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” and to report annually on implementation to the ELCA Church Council through November 2015, with progress reports made available through www.ELCA.org.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2015)

In recent social statements an implementing resolution has been included that directed or called upon units of the churchwide organization to provide for accountability and report on implementation. Resolution #9 of “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” (2011) called for an annual report to Church Council through the fall of November 2015. While there have been numerous activities to report in previous years, (see Fall Church Council reports 2012-2014), visible activity has waned in 2015 with some important exceptions.

Resolutions #1 and 2 of “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” are unquantifiable or difficult to assess, especially in terms of congregations seeking “to becoming places of koinonia in Christ.” Barring a churchwide survey, it also remains difficult to report accurately on what actions were generated by Resolution #3, which encourages church leaders “to compile lists of resources for their jurisdictions” that might help pastors and others seeking to deal with generic issues.

ELCA advocacy ministries (Resolution #4) have not placed a high priority on genetic issues in 2015 because other concerns have been more dominant across the country. Advocacy staff is familiar with the statement and indicate that they refer to it on occasion. Likewise, the study that led to the social statement remains available as directed in Resolution #5, but very few copies have been purchased. If staff capacity permits in 2016, a study guide will be created to fulfill ELCA protocol of providing a standing study guide to each social statement and this will replace the dated and lengthy study “Genetics and Faith: Power, Choice and Responsibility.”

Although activity has waned this year, there are two significant indicators of the statement’s efficacy. As ELCA social responsibility screens and issue paper are being revised, themes and commitments from “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” are altering or reinforcing commitments in those documents, as is evident this year in the case of the Corporate Social Responsibility documents on climate change and environmental. Most notably, The Episcopal Church at its July General Convention adopted resolutions and an action plan regarding genetically modified organisms that explicitly referenced the ELCA statement. The “Working Paper on Resolution A-013,” which led to the Convention’s actions, cites “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility” and “Genetically Modified Organisms in the Food Supply” [reaffirmed in Resolution #6] as source documents. Further, “Resolution A-013” expressly “commends the leadership of the ELCA [for its work.] Noting that the issues are complex, [it] calls upon the [Episcopal] Church to follow the example of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and other denominations in seeking to identify the moral, ethical and theological principles....the ELCA adopted in 2011 a social statement on genetics that reviews theological and ethical issues of genetic engineering in significantly greater depth and with an impressive sense for nuance.”

Resolution #7 encourages the churchwide organization to maintain a database of ELCA members with relevant expertise and an initial, brief list compiled in late 2011 remains available. No further efforts have been made to create an integrated database at Churchwide Organization as a matter of staff capacity. It is notable that not a single request has come asking for help in identifying expertise. Resolution #8 directs the theological discernment team in the Office of the Presiding Bishop to assess “the feasibility of developing a social message on regenerative medicine...” and to bring a report to the ELCA Church Council by November 2013, but an extension has been requested until November 2016.

Church Council action:

To receive the final annual report from the Office of the Presiding Bishop in response to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly action related to the implementing resolutions for the social statement, “Genetics, Faith and Responsibility.”