

November 18, 2009

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
Members of the Cabinet of Executives
Regional Coordinators

FROM: David D. Swartling, secretary

SUBJECT: Report of Responses by the Church Council to Synodical Actions
(November 13–15, 2009)

I. RESPONSE TO A SYNODICAL LETTER

The following letter from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council was treated as a resolution for the purpose of response by the Church Council.

**A. IMPLEMENTATION OF REVISED MINISTRY POLICIES
Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (8B)**

**A Word to the Church Council of the
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
from the Synod Council
of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod.
Adopted September 25, 2009**

This synod, at our June Synod Assembly, expressed its desire to reject the Proposed Social Statement and the Ministry Policies Recommendation in assembly action. That action was based on a conviction held by many in this synod that the language of the social statement that allows divergent conclusions of “bound conscience” to be recognized as valid expressions of this church’s faith and teaching is both internally inconsistent with other language of the social statement and unfaithful to Scripture, the Ecumenical Creeds, and the Lutheran Confessions.

We, the Synod Council of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod, find the term “bound conscience” to be an inadequate basis on which this church took action to change its ministry policies and approve a teaching document. The resulting actions, with no firm foundation underneath, have left many in this synod confused, feeling hurt, angry, and betrayed, and moved to react in bold ways. Lifetime members are leaving our congregations; faithful and active congregations are withholding their mission support; pastors are disassociating themselves

from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or considering affiliating with associations like Lutheran CORE; congregation members are losing their trust in their pastors who either do express their convictions powerfully or who refrain from doing so out of respect for the various positions in the social statement; some among us who have felt marginalized institutionally now feel marginalized personally and emotionally; the ministry of the gospel to which we have been called is already suffering and is in danger of being put to the side as long as this question remains unresolved for us. This is a deeper reality for us than simple disagreement. It is the great stress of trying to live in a structure that has a foundation too weak to support it.

The particular expression of the “bound conscience” approach found in the ministry policies action creates so troublesome an ecclesiology that its logical conclusion seems to be one of these two: either that the synods, congregations, pastors and lay members of this church re-arrange themselves into new groups (as many as four, based on the social statement list?) in which each group can believe, teach and confess with internal integrity; or that this church become a collection of so many “bound consciences” that it has no teaching voice on the matter of the authority of scripture, except that voice which demands the recognition of each one’s “bound conscience” by all the others. We do not believe that either of these alternatives is a faithful and sustainable one for our synod or for the ELCA.

Our synod bishop has counseled patience, love and respect for each other, and a renewed study of Scripture, Creeds, and Confessions, as we wait to see how the churchwide assembly actions may be put into practice. For the moment, that patience has been exercised. We do not believe it can be exercised widely in this synod for

very much longer, and for some it has already been too long. We do not wish to create in this synod the same deep marginalization of some voices among us that others in this synod have newly felt resulting from Churchwide Assembly actions.

This Synod Council is aware that some members of this synod are requesting a churchwide referendum on the actions taken in August concerning sexuality, because they believe that the convictions of the membership of this church were not faithfully reflected in the actions of the assembly. Others among us desire to call a Special Synod Assembly to make a formal response to the Churchwide Assembly actions. It is the sincere desire of this Synod Council for the members of this synod to remain in the ELCA, and it is our deep hope to resist a reactionary path that dishonors other members of the Body of Christ or compromises our church's ministry. But we also deeply desire to remain faithful to the witness of Scripture, Creeds, and Confessions, which we believe the "bound conscience" language of the assembly actions (more so than the actual outcomes) has made very difficult if not impossible to do.

We urge the program units of the Churchwide Organization, the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council not to make the current situation more difficult, but to act with deliberate restraint and with respect for those in this church who are still waiting to see clear scriptural, creedal, and confessional warrant to be established as the foundation underneath the assembly actions. In particular, we counsel the following:

- Please hear that this part of our church is struggling very deeply to love and respect each other, to remain faithful to the source and norm of our faith, and to exercise patience in responding to the Churchwide Assembly actions.
- Please do provide a succinct summary of the scriptural basis on which the assembly actions were taken, that can be distributed to our congregations.
- Please discontinue the use of the phrase "bound conscience." We encourage this church to take up the task of finding words that can provide a much more secure foundation on which to build a rationale for making difficult choices about which members disagree, and we offer ourselves to help in the service of that task.
- Please do not move quickly to admit, transfer, or reinstate to this church's roster those who have been removed from the roster for reasons of discipline, or who underwent candidacy and ordination outside this church's recognized procedures, without using great care and collaborative decision making.

Thank you for your consideration of these things.

Response to the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council:

Overview

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been involved in conversations about human sexuality and about the rostering of those in same-gender relationships since it became a church body. Those 20 years of thoughtful, passionate, and sometimes painful and contentious conversations among faithful members of this church culminated in the approval by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" as a social statement of this church. The assembly also approved four resolutions related to the ministry policies of this church. Conversation in this church about these issues is not at an end, however. In continuing the conversation, the ELCA has committed itself to "bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all."

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council is continuing the conversation in a letter to the Church Council, which describes the depth of reaction to the Churchwide Assembly's action on the social statement and its decisions on ministry policies. The letter articulates the sense of the Synod Council that the term "bound conscience" is "an inadequate basis on which this church took action to change its ministry policies and approve a teaching document." The letter also asks for the following:

- A succinct summary of the scriptural basis for the assembly's actions that can be distributed to congregations to assist in further conversations;
- Cessation of the use of the phrase "bound conscience" and development of a stronger "rationale for making difficult choices about which members disagree." The synod also offers its help in this work; and
- "Great care and collaborative decision-making" in the process of implementing the assembly's decisions on the ministry policies of this church.

The background information that follows was prepared in response to the synod's letter by the Church in Society program unit and the Vocation and Education program unit.

Response from the Church in Society program unit: Perspectives provided by existing documents

The social statement "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" outlines four perspectives, based in Scripture, on

same-gender sexual behavior that “with conviction and integrity” are held in this church:¹

Two broad categories of faithful viewpoints—advocates for continuing what had been the existing policy until the 2009 Churchwide Assembly and advocates for changing the existing policy—and their scriptural basis are outlined in the Report of the Task Force on ELCA Studies on Sexuality:

For nearly all who support the existing policy, Scripture is the decisive concern. They believe that change would subordinate the Word of God to the vagaries of cultural customs and human opinion. The specific features of Scripture that are considered decisive vary somewhat on the impact of the seven texts which they believe express the will of God for human behavior. They believe these texts are binding on Christians today in much the same way as they were on their original audiences. Others focus more on the early chapters of Genesis, recognizing that natural reasoning is a part of Lutheran heritage. In those chapters they see a heterosexual intention in creation that shapes their interpretation of human sexuality and the institutions of marriage and family. Whether focusing on the biblical prohibitions or the heterosexual order of creation, these Lutherans read these texts in light of the Gospel, in the context of larger themes, and with compassion for individuals and communities, but always with the conviction that where the Word of God is clear and unified, it provides the only relevant measure of godly and acceptable behavior. . . .²

Advocates for change affirm the strong witness of the same seven biblical texts that refer to same-gender sexual conduct in their literary, historical, and theological contexts. They also understand, however, that the witness of these texts is to condemn abusive or coercive sexual behavior, or sexual behavior that expresses a rejection of God's sovereignty. In interpreting the seven texts, advocates for change conclude that these scriptures oppose unhealthy and unfaithful conduct by people oriented to the same gender. They believe the texts do not in fact address the contemporary situation of

people seeking to live in lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships marked by the same levels of mutuality, love, and trust as are found in heterosexual marriages. They believe these texts and others convey neither a rejection of those Christians whose orientation is to people of the same gender nor a rejection of publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships that bless the world.³

The same section of the report also cited other biblical passages sometimes referenced in support of understanding same-gender sexual relations:

Some advocates for change place primary emphasis on the biblical message that each Christian is called to loving service in all circumstances of her or his life. They note that the reformers argued against the requirement of celibacy among clergy and that the Apostle Paul, though he favored singleness for Christians, nevertheless gave great weight to the human realities of longing and loneliness, writing, “It is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Corinthians 7:9). Advocates for some level of change say that the Christian community must help each individual discern in his or her own life what constitutes sinful rebellion against God and what constitutes faithful obedience.⁴

As part of the task force’s early work, biblical scholars Arland Hultgren and Walter Taylor wrote an essay in which they examined in some detail the seven texts referring directly to same-gender sexual conduct. This essay is available at www.elca.org/faithfuljourney.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the ELCA’s social statement, “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” lays a biblical and confessional foundation for understanding same-gender sexual relations out of concern for the good of the neighbor. The statement includes the following section:

Lutheran theology prepares us precisely to hold in creative tension the paradoxes and complexities of the human situation. This is also the case with regard to human sexuality. God has created human beings as part of the whole creation and with the intention that we live

¹ These four positions are described in “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” pages 11-12.

² Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, lines 122-133.

³ Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, lines 169-178.

⁴ Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, lines 193-199.

actively in the world (Romans 12-13; Ephesians 5-6).

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul testifies that the foundation of Christian identity is what God has done for us through Christ (Galatians 2:20; 3:24-28). Luther echoes this affirmation in his treatise, “The Freedom of the Christian,” claiming that Christians are at one and the same time radically freed by the Gospel and called to serve the good of the neighbor: A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.⁵

Luther believed that these two affirmations were the key to understanding the entirety of Christian life in the world. Following Paul, he understood freedom to be the basis for Christian life and ethics.⁶

Finally, the social statement presents a biblical and confessional way to live and serve together in the midst of disagreements about, among other things, “the interpretation of the Bible, including not only the contemporary meaning of particular passages, but also how the Bible guides our lives”⁷ This way draws upon Paul’s teaching in Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 8:10-14, and 1 Corinthians 10:23-30, as well as Reformation practice: “. . . if salvation is not at stake in a particular question, Christians are free to give priority to the neighbor’s well-being and will protect the conscience of the neighbor who may well view the same question in such a way as to affect faith itself”⁸

For its part, the 2009 Churchwide Assembly recognized the diverse views of members of this church as it took action on the recommendation on ministry policies. The action included the following resolutions:

⁵ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* in *Luther’s Works* 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 344. This treatise is also available as part of *Three Treatises*, a printing of three key essays from 1520 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 277.

⁶ Luther wrote that this book “contains the whole of Christian life in a brief form, provided you grasp its meaning.” *Ibid.*, 343. See also the editor’s introduction, 329.

⁷ Report and Recommendation on Ministry Policies from the Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, lines 78-79.

⁸ “Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,” footnote 26.

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make provision in its policies to eliminate the prohibition of rostered service by members who are in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America make provision in its policies to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship

Bound conscience

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council has expressed deep concern that the term “bound conscience,” used both in the social statement and in the report and recommendations on ministry policies has created confusion and presents “an inadequate basis on which this church took action to change its ministry policies and approve a teaching document.”

It is the case that many ELCA members find the concept of bound conscience new and sometimes confusing or troubling. While respect for other peoples’ consciences—bound to different understandings of the Scriptures—is a call to honor one another’s convictions and bear the burden of these differences, the term sometimes is being used inappropriately to belittle the other. At the same time, others in this church affirm the concept as both biblical and confessional.

Given all these factors, it is clear that the term and the concept “bound conscience” requires intentional reflection, scholarship, and explanation in order to develop broader understanding and right use. The Church Council, at its November 2009 meeting, responded to Motion F of the Churchwide Assembly, which called for this church “. . .to undertake a study of the concept of ‘bound conscience’ . . .” [CA09.06.39c], with a proposal for a theological conversation on foundations for decision-making. The Church Council will request that a response, including a proposed plan, be brought to the April 2010 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from the Vocation and Education program unit: Implementing changes in candidacy and rostering

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council writes, “Please do not move quickly to admit, transfer, or reinstate to this church’s roster those who have been removed from the roster for reasons of discipline, or who underwent candidacy and ordination outside this church’s recognized procedures, without using great care and collaborative decision making.”

The Vocation and Education unit, the Office of the Secretary, the Committee on Appeals, the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council all have roles in the implementation of these Churchwide Assembly actions. The first three, by assembly action and because of ELCA bylaws, have the responsibility to draft amendments to key documents, including “Vision and Expectations” for rostered leaders, “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline,” the “Candidacy Manual,” and the “Manual for the Management of the Rosters of the ELCA.”⁹ Those drafts are to be prepared in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and approved by the Church Council.

Initial work has begun on amendments directed by the assembly. The first drafts were prepared by the staff and presented for discussion at the Conference of Bishops at its October 2009 meeting. As second drafts are ready, they are being posted for broad comment on the website cited in footnote 5. The Church Council considered the drafts at its November 2009 meeting and made suggestions for further revision. The Church Council also approved a protocol to guide the process from November 2009–April 2010, acknowledging the request that the Conference of Bishops have an opportunity to consider again all the re-drafted documents in March 2010. Thus, with the exception of the policy on reinstatement to the roster, action will not be taken on these matters before the April 2010 meeting of the Church Council.

Due to the nature of the policy and procedure documents, it is not anticipated that the documents themselves will define or make much explicit use of the term “bound conscience.” Rather, the documents will attempt to show carefully how the mandated changes can be made so that there is uniform policy for this whole church, as is now the case, and to show ways in which other positions can be acknowledged without violating the governing documents of this church.

Other related questions about process also are being discussed carefully, including the one mentioned in the synod council’s letter: the means by which persons ordained through Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries (ELM) could come onto the clergy roster of the ELCA.

The intent of this careful process laid out in bylaws, assembly actions, and Church Council actions is to accomplish precisely what the synod’s letter requests: policies and procedures developed with great care and collaborative decision-making. The expectation of the council and others working in drafting and consultation is that this church can implement well and carefully the

actions of its assembly—both the mandate to allow rostered service by women and men in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships and the mandate to respect the convictions of those who disagree with the decisions. Though it is certainly appropriate to move forward to implement the actions of the Churchwide Assembly, it is equally important to take the time needed to do that in ways that will be responsible and faithful.

Church Council Action:

To receive with deep gratitude the letter from the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council;

To acknowledge the painful theological, moral, and institutional struggle of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council, congregations, and members as a result of the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on the social statement on human sexuality and the recommendation on ministry policies;

To honor the Synod Council’s efforts to communicate this struggle and practice leadership in the face of disagreement and to encourage its “effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3);

To note that many of the concerns of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council are shared by others in this church and are acknowledged in the work of the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality;

To emphasize this church’s commitment to recognize the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship as it implements the decisions of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly on the social statement on human sexuality and the recommendation on ministry policies;

To affirm that Scripture, the Confessions, and theology are foundational in this church’s decision-making;

To acknowledge that the scriptural, theological, and confessional foundations that underlie the decisions of the assembly, as well as the concept of “bound conscience,” continue to require explanation, theological exploration, deeper and broader conversation, and more extensive communication;

To respond, therefore, to the request of Motion F of the 2009 Churchwide Assembly “to undertake a study of the concept of ‘bound conscience’” and “to disseminate widely through appropriate mechanisms the results of this study” with a commitment to a theological conversation on the foundations of this

⁹These documents can be accessed at www.elca.org/ministrypolicies.

church's decision-making, the results of that conversation to be disseminated to this church;

To refer the conversation to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in collaboration with the Church in Society program unit, the Vocation and Education program unit, and Lutheran teaching theologians of the ELCA;

To solicit and encourage the active involvement of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod and the rest of this church in the conversation; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action, providing the background information above as part of the response of the Church Council to the Synod Council's letter.

II. RESPONSES TO SYNODICAL RESOLUTIONS

A1. BENEFITS FOR DOMESTIC PARTNERS

South-Central Synod of Wisconsin (5K)

WHEREAS, the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin adopted the "Resolution on ELCA Board of Pensions and Domestic Partners" at its 2008 assembly; and

WHEREAS, economic impacts have only worsened in that time; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA Board of Pensions has not changed its policy of unjustly preventing unmarried partners to "unbundle" pensions from other parts of the program; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the 2009 Assembly of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to call on the ELCA Board of Pensions to change the policies of the Pension and Other Benefits Program to more justly support domestic partners by allowing them to opt out of health benefits in the same fashion as current policy allows for married participants; and be it further

RESOLVED that the bishop of this synod report to the 2010 Synod Assembly how the president and trustees of the ELCA Board of Pensions have responded to this concern.

A2. BOARD OF PENSIONS HEALTH PLAN

New England Synod (7B)

RESOLVED, that the Board of Pensions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) shall offer health and benefit packages for same-sex domestic partners that are equal in value and coverage to those plans offered to heterosexual spouses, and that the ELCA Board of Pensions consult with its insurance contractors to determine how best to accomplish this mandate in a timely and equitable fashion; and

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

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC09.08.24]:

To receive the resolutions of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin and the New England Synod related to benefits for same-gender domestic partners and other health care issues;

To acknowledge that pending actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly may inform response to these resolutions;

To refer the resolutions to the ELCA Board of Pensions in consultation with the Office of the Secretary with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

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

Response from the ELCA Board of Pensions:

It should be noted that the Board of Pensions initially responded to the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin regarding the memorial to the Churchwide Assembly prior to the August Churchwide Assembly.

Following the affirmative action of the Churchwide Assembly on "Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust" and, specifically, Implementing Resolution #7, "To call upon the ELCA to amend the eligibility provisions of the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program, consistent with the policies of this church," the staff of the Board of Pensions has been researching the implications of this resolution, fully aware that the Churchwide Assembly action requires "policies of this church" to be developed and approved by the ELCA Church Council. Specifically, policy changes to ELCA documents, "Vision and Expectations" and "Definition and Guidelines for Discipline" are to be approved by the ELCA Church Council. It is important that amendments to the ELCA Pension and Other Benefits Program be consistent with the policy changes.

Preliminary work on plan amendments already has commenced, and introductory discussions were held at the October–November 2009 Board of Trustees' meeting.

While it is challenging to draft plan amendments prior to the approval of policy changes by the ELCA Church Council, the Board of Pensions intends to draft provisional amendments for the February–March 2010

Board of Trustees' meeting, with the understanding that this time line precedes the spring 2010 Conference of Bishops and Church Council meetings. The Board of Pensions has been and intends to continue working with the ELCA Office of the Secretary and the Vocation and Education unit in order to be informed and updated with pertinent policy change recommendations as they develop.

Consequently, plan amendments approved by the Board of Trustees in February–March 2010 will be viewed as preliminary and subject to further revisions as necessitated by actions of the 2010 Conference of Bishops and Church Council meetings.

Church Council Action:

To receive the update provided by the Board of Pensions as the initial response to the resolutions of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin related to benefits for domestic partners and the New England Synod related to the Board of Pensions health plan for same-sex domestic partners;

To authorize a delay in the final response to these resolutions until the April 2010 meeting of the Church Council; and

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

B. HEALTH CARE

New England Synod (7B)

RESOLVED, that the New England Synod join with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in acknowledging the issue of affordable healthcare coverage for all as a justice issue that calls for action and that guidance for such action is found in the 2003 social statement on health and healthcare; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the New England Synod direct the ELCA Board of Pensions to re-evaluate its policies and procedures for the purpose of providing support to rostered leadership with benefit coverage that is equalized and affordable; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the New England Synod further direct the ELCA Board of Pensions to develop a program that empowers rostered leadership to better health without infringing on their individual rights or using information for data gathering; and be it further

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

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC09.08.24]:

To receive the resolutions of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin and the New England Synod related to benefits for same-gender domestic partners and other health care issues;

To acknowledge that pending actions of the 2009 ELCA Churchwide Assembly may inform response to these resolutions;

To refer the resolutions to the ELCA Board of Pensions in consultation with the Office of the Secretary with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

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

Response from the ELCA Board of Pensions:

The Board of Pensions already fulfills the stated request of this resolution by providing equalized benefit coverage in accordance with current ELCA policies and procedures as adopted by the Church Council, and as applied to the question of benefit eligibility.

In addition, the ELCA Medical Dental Benefits Plan provides a single health benefits plan to all active, sponsored plan members (clergy and lay) who have ELCA-primary coverage. This single benefit plan approach is consistent with the ELCA's philosophy of benefits since it provides equal coverage to all enrolled plan members regardless of their age, gender, health status, or geographic location. In the past, the Board of Pensions has examined benefit designs that vary in relation to member compensation but concluded that significant administrative and other challenges associated with maintaining fairness under such an approach are too great to work effectively.

The ELCA Medical Dental Benefits Plan has been designed so that, on average, members pay about 20 percent of the allowable medical, pharmacy, and mental health charges through the mechanism of plan deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments. Compared to health plans offered by many other U.S. employers, the ELCA health benefit is considered to be moderate, or about average. Even so, the average cost of coverage under the plan is higher than other employers primarily because of the advanced average age and health status of the membership. For comparable benefits and age, the ELCA Medical Dental Benefits Plan is competitively priced with commercial insurer alternatives. The Board of Pensions has implemented several benefits and

supportive programs to engage plan members in the act of improving and maintaining their health. In fact, members' health status already has shown measurable improvement. These benefits and supportive programs enhance members' ability to fulfill their calling and ultimately affect the collective ability to manage the cost of health care.

The Board of Pensions has implemented several programs that empower all plan members to lives of better health. In delivering these programs, the Board of Pensions is careful to maintain a participating member's confidentiality and does not have access to individual member health data emanating from any health enhancement program. Whether or not individuals participate in health enhancement programs is not shared with employers or synod bishops; neither is individual health data shared with the Board of Pensions, an employer, or a synod bishop.

It is critical however, that the Board of Pensions be able to gather aggregate data from which benefit decisions can be made to further enhance the health of plan members. To that end, health data is currently sent from the plan's various benefit administrators to a data warehouse where it is de-identified. The Board of Pensions staff accesses this information on an aggregated basis to perform necessary analyses.

The Board of Pensions has clearly stated—both in printed form and on its Website—the following information regarding health assessment results, always maintaining member confidentiality.

- Mayo Clinic Health Solutions will use your information to customize your view of the web portal, allowing it to be more interactive and useful for you.
- The data may be forwarded to Ingenix, a health information company hired by the Board of Pensions, where it is de-identified (any information connecting the data to an individual is removed) and aggregated into statistics so we can assess the health strengths and risks of our member population as a whole.
- Your de-identified information may also be forwarded to The Health Institute, a division of Clinical Care Research, Tufts-New England Medical Center, an organization contracted by the Board of Pensions to analyze and assess the impact of health on workplace productivity.

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the New England Synod related to health care and to acknowledge the information above, provided by the Board of Pensions, as the response of the Church Council to the synod's action; and

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

C. INCREASING CHURCH INVOLVEMENT IN MENTAL ILLNESS

Central States Synod (4B)

WHEREAS, in Matthew 14:14 we read, "When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (NIV), and in Luke 4:40 we read, "When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each, he healed them" (NIV), which shows that Jesus had compassion on the sick and healed them—the blind, the deaf, the lepers, the lame, and many other sicknesses, even those who were possessed with demons, who would likely today have their illnesses diagnosed as schizophrenia or companion brain disorders; and

WHEREAS, one of five families cope with mental illness, and individuals and families affected by mental illness are members of our congregations; and

WHEREAS, mental illness is a disease of the brain, similar to and yet unique compared to many physical illnesses; and

WHEREAS, mental illness is often a sickness that is no fault of the patient, yet the stigma associated with mental illness continues to deter individuals and their families from seeking timely treatment; and

WHEREAS, persons suffering from mental illness sense being shunned by society and thus tend to isolate themselves from social contacts, which results in the loss of a support system that can be an essential part of a treatment plan; and

WHEREAS, health care professionals may treat the physical and psychological aspects of mental illness but are ill prepared to treat the spiritual or to be available outside of scheduled structured appointments; and

WHEREAS, a 2008 study by the Rand Corporation shows that nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan—300,000 in all—report symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or major depression; and

WHEREAS, this same report states if PTSD and despair go untreated or are undertreated, there is a cascading set of consequences—drug use, suicide, marital problems, and unemployment—which affect a widening circle of people in our congregations and communities; and

WHEREAS, the Healthcare Clinicians Network of the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council states, "It is an outrage that here in America—the wealthiest country on earth in the year 2000—so many people who suffer from mental illness remain homeless. . . . These individuals are among the most vulnerable, not only to multiple co-morbidities including substance abuse, but also to stigmatization, exploitation, and brutal victimization. Consequently, they are at highest risk for prolonged homelessness. . . ."; and

WHEREAS, great progress to improve the quality of life has been made in treatment of persons afflicted with mental illness and even more can be made; and

WHEREAS, Jesus has directed us to care for the sick and homeless and all of the "least of these"; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Central States Synod in assembly recommend to its congregations:

1. That they become “the rod and the staff” that “comfort” all persons who suffer from illnesses, including the individuals and families who cope with mental illness;
2. That they designate and make known to the congregation a member (preferably a volunteer) to be the liaison for the congregation on matters related to mental illness who will help members understand mental illness and be a source of information on where individuals and families who cope with the illness can get treatment and find a support group;
3. That they seek opportunities for pastors, pastoral ministry associates, parish nurses, and other interested members to receive training for their unique role in providing spiritual guidance to individuals even as they are being treated by mental health professionals who might not recognize that the patient’s faith is important to the patient and should be considered when developing a treatment plan;
4. That the church provide a non-judgmental meeting place for persons who avoid being seen in public places because of their illness;
5. That the congregation in its role of supporting members with mental illness communicate to its legislative representative the need for increased funds and resources that will help people access mental health services; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Central States Synod in assembly

1. memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) to direct development of a social statement on mental illness to serve as a companion to “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor,” a 2003 social statement on health, healing, and health care; and
2. direct the Central States Synod Council to refer this resolution to the ELCA Church Council, requesting that it direct development of congregational resources for use in ministry to those afflicted with mental illness, in addition to those resources currently available from the Lutheran Network for Mental Illness/Brain Disorders.

NOTE: The Central States Synod requests that this action be treated as a resolution since the social statement “Caring for Health” addresses issues of mental illness.

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC08.10.22a]:

To receive the resolution of the Central States Synod requesting increasing ELCA involvement in mental illness through the development of a social statement on mental illness;

To refer the resolution to the Church in Society unit in accordance with the “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns” and to request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

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

Response from the Church in Society unit:

The medical understanding of mental illness as a disease of the brain has made immense strides since the 1990s (often called the Decade of the Brain) and new means of treatment show hopeful signs. At the same time, it now is estimated that as many as one out of five families cope with mental illness and that members of the military returning from war zones may suffer post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at a rate as high as 20 percent. Despite the possibilities of better medical response and new awareness of the widespread presence of mental illness in our society, individuals with mental illness and their families continue to experience considerable suffering—including homelessness and victimization for some—and isolation. The social stigma, lack of access to health care, reduction of social services in this economic climate, and especially the general lack of understanding, deter individuals and their families from seeking treatment or experiencing appropriate support and care, both in society and in ELCA congregations and at other ministry sites.

Biblical injunctions and Jesus' example of care for the mentally ill, as well as the ELCA's social statement on health care, “Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor,” provide firm grounding for the development of a message on mental illness. Such a message should provide a focus for teaching, deliberation, engagement, and action within this church that will enable a deeper understanding of current needs and issues, as well as the means to address mental illness for individuals and as a social concern.

Cost and timeline

The development of an ELCA message requires approximately \$17,000 in order to hold a small consultation, provide for miscellaneous expenses, and print and mail the document. It requires the quarter-time commitment of a studies staff member for about six

months. Staff time and dollars should become available for such work in the middle of 2010, permitting a proposed message to be brought to the spring 2011 meeting of the Church Council. It is anticipated that it would be formatted for both Web and print distribution by late spring of that year.

Church Council Action:

To thank the Central States Synod for its concern for people with mental illness and their families;

To authorize staff of the program unit for Church in Society, in accordance with “Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns,” to initiate the development of an ELCA message on mental illness to be brought to the Church Council for adoption in April 2011; and

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

D. CREATION OF A DEPARTMENT OF PEACE IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT

Northwestern Minnesota Synod (3D)

WHEREAS, Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace, who calls us to love our neighbors and to be a peace with one another; and

WHEREAS, in our worship and liturgy we pray for peace on earth (Kyrie, Hymn of Praise, post-Communion canticle, hymns and songs of praise); and

WHEREAS, our baptismal covenant binds and calls us to “care for others and the world God made, and work for justice and peace” (*ELW*, baptismal order of service); and

WHEREAS, Scripture calls us to pursue what makes for peace (Romans 14:19), peace in marriage (1 Corinthians 7:15), peace in our relationships with others (2 Corinthians 13:11), and to strive for peace with all people (Hebrews 12:14); and

WHEREAS, Jesus admonishes us with the words, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God” (Matthew 5:9); and

WHEREAS, in the 109th Congress a resolution was introduced in the United States House of Representatives, and a companion bill was introduced in the United States Senate, to create a Cabinet-level Department of Peace and Nonviolence, and on February 5, 2007, the resolution was re-introduced in the House of Representatives of the 110th Congress as House Resolution 808 (HR808); and

WHEREAS, the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on August 20, 1995, adopted “For Peace in God’s World,” a social statement on the responsibility of the church to work for peace; and

WHEREAS, House Resolution 808 (HR 808) to create a Cabinet-level Department of Peace and Nonviolence would implement action in keeping with the goals stated in “For Peace in God’s World” (p.6; p. 73B bottom paragraph; p. 12 3rd paragraph); and

WHEREAS, the ELCA’s then Director for International Relations and Human Rights, the Rev. Dr. James Vigen, wrote in a letter dated November 14, 2005, that “The goals of the legislation [to establish a Department of Peace and Nonviolence in the U.S. government (now HR808)] are worthy and well in line with our ELCA social statements on seeking peace, and are certainly ones we would support”; and

WHEREAS, the 1999 Churchwide Assembly committed this church to work with other churches and organizations to build a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence in the decade of 2001-2010; and

WHEREAS, the mission of the Department of Peace and Nonviolence will be to work to reduce domestic and international violence, to gather and coordinate information and recommendations from America’s peace community, to teach violence prevention and mediation to America’s school children, to treat and dismantle gang psychology, to rehabilitate the prison population, to build peace-making efforts among conflicting cultures both here and abroad, and to support our military with complementary approaches to ending violence; and

WHEREAS, we applaud, support, and seek to augment the marvelous work the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) does to promote peace in our world; therefore; be it

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in Assembly, adopt this resolution in favor of enactment of HR 808 and the reintroduction of legislation in the Senate to create a Department of Peace and Non-Violence; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in Assembly, commend Rep. James Oberstar for being a co-sponsor and urge Rep. Collin Peterson to become a co-sponsor of HR 808 to create a Department of Peace and Nonviolence; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in Assembly, urge Senator Norm Coleman and Senator Amy Klobuchar to support the reintroduction of legislation in the Senate to create a Department of Peace and Nonviolence; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to support HR808 by encouraging the Church in Society unit to notify its co-workers in the nationwide network of state public policy advocacy offices, and the members of the United States House of Representatives of this church’s support for HR808; and be it finally

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in Assembly, memorialize the 2009 Churchwide Assembly to encourage the Communication Services unit to provide ELCA congregation members and staff, through the appropriate media, with information about HR808.

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC09.03.12]:

To receive the resolution of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod related to a Department of Peace within the U.S. government;

To refer the resolution to the Church in Society program unit with a request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

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

Response from the Church in Society unit:

The idea for a United States Department for Peace has been discussed for a number of years. Based on this discussion, a United States Institute for Peace was established to provide “the analysis, training and tools that prevent and end conflicts, promote stability and professionalize the field of peacebuilding” (<http://www.usip.org/about-us>). While the institute’s information and resources are made available both to the executive and legislative branches of the federal government and the general public, it lacks authority to be directly involved in the implementation of public policy.

Currently, the concept for a Department for Peace is promoted by a bill sponsored by Rep. Dennis Kucinich (D-OH). To date, this bill has not garnered bi-partisan sponsorship and is unlikely to move through legislative committees to final passage.

The goal of peacemaking, however, is of central concern for people of faith and one of several long-standing thematic foci for ELCA ministries, programs, and relationships. The ELCA has made a commitment to peacemaking in substantive ways. In 1995, the ELCA adopted the social statement, “For Peace in God’s World,” which recognizes “sin’s persistent, pervasive, and subtle power” to undermine peace, but declares that “God continues to work through people, their communities, and structures to make earthly peace possible” (p. 7). One implication of this faith is the task of building a culture of peace (p. 13). The social statement calls upon “nations to provide leadership, education, structures, and funds for the peaceful resolution of conflict” with “the same commitment that they prepare people to settle disputes with military force” (p. 15). Because of its commitment to peace-building, the 1999 ELCA Churchwide Assembly voted to participate in the United Nations Decade for a Culture of Non-violence (2000 to 2010). Lutheran Peace Fellowship, an independent Lutheran organization that relates to the

ELCA through the Church in Society unit, has provided resources, experiences, and advocacy for peace-building for nearly 70 years.

The proposed Department for Peace would include in its purview domestic issues and priorities, such as sentencing, domestic violence, criminal justice, and conflict resolution, as well as international and foreign policy priorities. In support of these, the ELCA has worked to address criminal justice and community and domestic violence. It has promoted peace abroad through inter-religious dialogue, multilateral peace-building efforts through the United Nations, sustainable development through the Lutheran World Federation and Lutheran World Relief, and poverty-focused foreign assistance, among other activities.

There is a convergence of the ELCA’s peace-building priorities with the constitutive goals of a United States Department for Peace worthy of further exploration by the ELCA’s expressions and affiliated and related independent organizations.

Church Council Action:

To thank the Northwestern Minnesota Synod for its support for peacemaking;

To acknowledge the response of the Church in Society program unit, including its ongoing peace-building priorities, as the response of this Church Council to the synod’s resolution;

To request that the Church in Society continue to monitor the convergence of the peace-building priorities of this church with the constitutive goals of a United States Department for Peace, but to decline specifically to support pending legislation on this issue;

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

**E. MISSIONARY FOR MOROGORO DIOCESE
Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod (4C)**

WHEREAS, the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod is in a companion-synod relationship with the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania; and

WHEREAS, the synod and the diocese currently are involved in joint ministries in the areas of evangelism, mission building (church construction), community health (e.g., basic sanitation, HIV and AIDS, malaria), water well development and maintenance, economic sustainability, and global awareness and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, the Morogoro Diocese has issued a request to the Global Mission unit of the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for a missionary to work in the area of evangelism; and

WHEREAS, the synodical Global Mission Committee has identified several ways both to strengthen and be supportive of these ministries with the Morogoro Diocese; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that each of the five conferences in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod be encouraged to establish an on-going relationship with districts of the Morogoro Diocese for the purpose of mutual support through prayer and development of a deeper understanding of one another's ministries, cultural context, concerns, and gifts; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod as a whole continue its relationship with the Mission District of the Morogoro Diocese; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Global Mission Committee of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod explore with Asbury Methodist Church, Tulsa, Oklahoma, the possibility of bringing a youth choir from the Morogoro Diocese to visit the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod and Asbury Methodist Church in 2009, possibly at the time of the 2009 Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED, that every congregation in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod be encouraged to become a Living Water Congregation through participation in the "Living Water: Small Change for a Big Change" campaign, which seeks to collect change (coins) for the water well and other water-ministry projects in the Morogoro Diocese; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod convey to the Global Mission unit of the churchwide organization its support in regards to the Morogoro request for a missionary for evangelism; and be it further

RESOLVED, that, in support of the work of said missionary, congregations and individuals in the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod be encouraged to raise up to \$20,000 to provide a vehicle for this missionary's ministry in the Morogoro Diocese; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod and its Global Mission Committee continue to invite and welcome other persons and parties beyond the synod to be in partnership with it in the companion relationship with and support of the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania.

Executive Committee Action:

The Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC08.06.11a]:

To receive the resolution of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod related to a missionary for the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania;

To refer the resolution to the Global Mission unit with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2008 meeting of the Church Council; and

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

Church Council Action:

The Church Council voted [CC09.03.35f]:

To authorize a delay in the response of the Global Mission unit to the resolution of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod related to a missionary for the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania;

To request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council;

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

Response from the Global Mission program unit:

The ELCA Global Mission program unit appreciates the commitment of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod to renew and extend its companion synod relationship with the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). It also appreciates the synod's intentional partnership with GM in exploring options relating to the placement of an ELCA missionary in that diocese.

As a result of creative three-way conversations among the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, the Global Mission unit, and the Arkansas-Oklahoma synod, the Rev. Joshua and Susan Magyar began their service as ELCA missionaries in July 2009, serving in a two-year placement in the Morogoro Diocese. Pastor Magyar was called by Global Mission to serve as pastor and leader of evangelism in the diocese. Under the guidance of Tanzanian church leadership, he will be working to strengthen the parishes and sub-parishes in the Mission District and engage in evangelical outreach and leadership development in new areas that have as yet not been reached with the Gospel.

Church Council Action:

To acknowledge the strong commitment of the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod to renew and extend its companion synod relationship with the Morogoro Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT);

To celebrate the partnership of the ELCT, the ELCA's Global Mission program unit, and the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod that has resulted in the placement of an ELCA missionary within the Morogoro Diocese as pastor and leader of evangelism; and

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