



**Response of the Church Council  
to the Recommendations in the  
Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church  
and the  
Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church**



Evangelical  
Lutheran Church  
in America



## **Response of the Church Council to the Recommendations in the Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church**

The 2022 Churchwide Assembly took action to create the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC), giving it the following mandate:

**“To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.” [CA22.01.06]**

The CRLC has now completed its work, and its findings and recommendations will be shared with the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, to be held this summer in Phoenix, Ariz.

Similar to the process for forwarding social statements to the assembly, the work of the commission needed to be presented to the Church Council for consideration and possible action. Many of the CRLC’s recommendations called upon the Church Council to establish task forces, direct development of various resources, adopt continuing resolutions, establish policy measures, and recommend certain constitutional amendments to the Churchwide Assembly.

The Report of the CRLC (attached to this document) included 13 recommendations. Recommendations 7, 8, and 10-12, which involve constitutional matters, were received by the council at its November 2024 meeting, and resulted in proposed constitutional amendments that were forwarded to the synods in January, as required by the ELCA Constitution. These amendments will be considered by the Churchwide Assembly this summer. Action was taken to defer consideration of Recommendation 13 until after the assembly.

At its April meeting, the council received and responded to Recommendations 1-6, taking the actions detailed in this document. The council also responded to Recommendation 9, related to the Association of Synod Vice Presidents, by adopting a continuing resolution establishing the association.

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

**To receive with appreciation “Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism” Recommendation 1 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, which urges the creation of mutual accountability measures and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive centering of dismantling racism within the denomination;**

**To authorize the Executive Committee of the Church Council to consult with the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity (STAD) Advisory Team and their resource staff to review the purpose of the advisory team;**

**To request the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Christian Community and Leadership and Service and Justice home areas, to identify possible individuals for service on the STAD Advisory Team and to provide those names to the Executive Committee;**

**To authorize the Executive Committee to appoint members, including a bishop and a Church Council member, to the STAD Advisory Team;**

To authorize the Executive Committee to identify persons from the Church Council to work with the STAD Advisory Team to create an ELCA handbook, including recommended diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) standards for congregations;

To commit the Church Council to continue to work on cultural competency training in every official meeting of the Church Council;

To encourage the Conference of Bishops to work on creating DEIA standards for synods (including synod staff and councils), and to continue to work on cultural competency training within the conference;

To request the senior director, diversity, equity, and inclusion to report annually to the spring meeting of the Church Council regarding diversity of the synods and of the churchwide organization relative to historically underrepresented groups and assessments of initiatives that enable and advance anti-racism and diversity measures across all expressions of this church; and

To designate financial and human resources to incentivize engagement in multicultural educational events and creation of materials for ongoing leadership development (rostered and lay) across this church.

*Church Council action:*

To receive with appreciation “Accountability within the ELCA” Recommendation 2.1 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To direct the Office of the Secretary to continue to explore collaboration with this church’s full-communion partners to develop processes for conflict resolution within this church that are endorsed by, but independent of, the churchwide organization and which are responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups, referring, as appropriate, to the considerations outlined in the rationale of “Accountability within the ELCA;” and

To consult with the Conference of Bishops on such resources and present a report by the Fall 2026 meeting of the Church Council.

*Church Council action:*

To receive with appreciation “Accountability within the ELCA” Recommendation 2.2 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To request that the Committee on Appeals:

- a. develop resources to help synods identify candidates with the appropriate spiritual gifts and demonstrated competencies in working with varied ethnic backgrounds to serve on synod consultation committees, referring, as appropriate, to the considerations outlined in the rationale of “Accountability within the ELCA;” consult with the Conference of Bishops on such resources; and present a report by the Fall 2026 meeting of the Church Council;
- b. develop resources for training synod consultation committees in conflict resolution, referring, as appropriate, to the considerations outlined in the rationale of “Accountability within the ELCA,” consult with the Conference of Bishops on such resources, and present a report by the Fall 2026 meeting of the Church Council; and

To direct the Office of the Secretary and the Christian Community and Leadership home area to provide staff support to the Committee on Appeals for such work.

*Church Council action:*

To receive with appreciation “Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose” Recommendation 3 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To establish a task force on interdependence and purpose that will be grounded and rooted in our faith in Jesus Christ and guided by Scripture and our theological discernment as we live into the gospel through the leading of the Spirit. The task force will consist of no more than 14 voting members, at least four of whom shall be members of historically underrepresented groups, and of whom no more than five shall also have been voting members of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, and include the presiding bishop and secretary of this church;

To direct the Executive Committee of the Church Council to appoint the task force, fulfilling the responsibilities of the Church Council related to nominations in accordance with 14.41.01.c.;

To populate the task force according to the representational principles of this church;

To request the appointment process be completed prior to the November 2025 Church Council meeting;

To direct the task force to undertake the following:

- Assess the adequacy and clarity of the several purpose statements in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* and make recommendations for modification;
- Assess the impact of the current governance structures and interdependence of the three expressions of this church on the fulfillment of its mission, and in so doing, develop recommendations for governance improvements; and
- Consider how existing governance structures have (or may have) perpetuated systemic inequalities, and in so doing, develop recommendations to promote inclusion and equity;
- Evaluate the current structure of the synods (including number, geographic boundaries, governance structure, and other relevant factors) and make recommendations for change;

To direct the task force to consult with the Conference of Bishops regarding its work;

To direct the task force to present its report and recommendations to the Fall 2027 meeting of the Church Council;

To direct the task force to make periodic progress reports to the Executive Committee as the committee may request from time to time;

To direct the Office of the Presiding Bishop and Office of the Secretary to provide staff support to the task force; and

To invite this church to join us in prayer as this church embarks on this process.

*Church Council action:*

To receive with appreciation “Financial Coordinating Task Force” Recommendation 4 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To authorize the Executive Committee to create a Financial Coordinating Task Force by the Spring 2026 Church Council meeting that will be composed of no more than eight members with financial expertise representing all three expressions of this church, including a synod bishop and at least half from historically underrepresented communities. In addition, a member of the Budget and Finance or Audit committees will be appointed as a member. The ELCA treasurer will be an *ex officio* member. Staff support will be provided by the Office of the Treasurer and the Office of the Presiding Bishop;

To request that the task force, guided by the Holy Spirit:

- a. review existing resources of the ELCA or educational institutions which support financial management;
- b. explore opportunities where greater collaboration or shared processes/resources among the financial functions of the three expressions of this church may be beneficial;
- c. commit to sharing best practices, resources, and tools related to financial management;

- d. affirm the commitment of the financial separately incorporated ministries (ELCA Foundation, Mission Investment Fund, Portico Benefit Services) to continue collaboration amongst themselves and to identify possible ways to enhance operational efficiencies, to leverage synergies, to align strategic initiatives, and to identify opportunities for cost savings and to receive a report from the financial separately incorporated ministries to the Financial Coordinating Task Force by December 2026; and
- To present a report on the work of the task force at the Spring 2027 Church Council meeting.

***Church Council action:***

To receive with appreciation the “Creation of a Task Force to Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit and Orientation Program” Recommendation 5 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To encourage rostered ministers, congregations, and synods to identify and share knowledge of existing congregational management and governance resources from the churchwide organization, seminaries, and the Publishing House of the ELCA, but to decline the establishment of a task force.

***Church Council action:***

To receive with appreciation “Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and Service” Recommendation 6 from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church;

To affirm the vocation of ministers of Word and Service to equip the baptized for ministry in daily life and to serve this church’s mission in the world through teaching, advocacy, and service;

To affirm the existing educational resources about the theology and practice of Word and Service ministry;

To direct the churchwide organization to post such educational resources on the ELCA website; and

To encourage congregations and synods to provide education about the role of ministers of Word and Service and the varied contexts in which they serve, emphasizing their contributions to this church’s mission and ministry.

***Church Council action:***

To adopt the amendments in Chapter 10 of the *Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* as described in “Proposed Amendments–Continuing Resolutions” as amended.

- 10.31.B25      Association of Synod Vice Presidents: *The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the synod vice presidents of this church. The churchwide vice president shall be a member with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. Triennially, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall elect a chair and vice chair to preside at meetings.*
- a. *The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall provide to synod vice presidents opportunities for orientation, worship, spiritual renewal, continuing education, collaboration, and leadership development. To fulfill these responsibilities, the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall:*
    - 1) *meet at every Churchwide Assembly and may hold one additional in-person meeting each triennium and periodically gather informally as desired;*
    - 2) *provide a forum in which goals, objectives, and strategies concerning lay leadership may be developed and shared;*

- 3) *participate in cultural competency training at each in-person meeting;*
  - 4) *serve as a resource for training and guidance in the governance of this church;*
  - 5) *assist the vice presidents in their role as collaborative leaders with bishops in fostering the work of the synods; and*
  - 6) *when requested, provide advice and counsel to the Church Council and others holding leadership positions in this church.*
- b. *The Association of Synod Vice Presidents may establish committees as the members from time to time may determine to assist in fulfillment of its responsibilities.*
  - c. *Staff services for meetings of the Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be provided by the synod relations staff in the Office of the Secretary.*

***Church Council action:***

To receive with gratitude the findings and recommendations from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) to be shared with the 2025 Churchwide Assembly;

To give thanks to God for the faithful, dedicated, and conscientious members of the CRLC who gave tirelessly of their time and energy to the commission's mandate "to reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism;" and

To encourage the members, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, and related institutions, organizations, and ministries of this church to use this report in their continued discernment and engagement to live more fully into God's mission in this changing world.



Date: 26 March 2025

To: The 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly  
From: The Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon Schwartz, Co-Chairs  
Subject: Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

The 2022 Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly passed the following:

“To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.”

Subsequently, a commission of 34 individuals was assembled that represented the diversity of ELCA membership in age, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, education, economic status, ability, geographic location, and experience. We are lay and rostered leaders. We are experienced in campus, global, camp, nonprofit, stewardship, and congregational ministry, among others. We are united in deep love for God’s people, commitment to a Lutheran theological understanding of Scripture, faith, grace, salvation through Christ and glory to God alone, and proactive desire for an ELCA that understands and integrates best practices to address the faithful expression of a timeless Church in a current context.

Beginning in July 2023 and concluding in March 2025, the CRLC gathered, united in a strategy that involved education around the constitutional structure and governance of the ELCA and the historical, cultural, and logistical motivation behind its development. A season of listening engaged synods and congregations across the country as well as gatherings of synod vice presidents, the ELCA Church Council, the Conference of Bishops, the ELCA Youth Gathering, the ELCA ethnic associations and Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities, ELCA churchwide organization staff, and leaders from ELCA-affiliated organizations and ecumenical partners, among others. Independently evaluated findings repeatedly called for paths of renewal that included increased accessibility and accountability, a firm commitment to equity and justice across all three expressions of the ELCA, empowerment of lay leadership, and deepened relationships with areas of innovation and faith formation beyond the three expressions, among other potential areas of reform and renewal.

Attached are the findings and recommendations of the CRLC, following prayerful discernment and diligent striving grounded in our seasons of learning and engaging. We have attempted to provide thoughtful and thorough rationale, alongside additional information to help provide the context and history of the commission’s efforts and time together, recognizing that the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, which we were modeled after, was a more than six-year effort, and that much work, gathering of voices, assessment of needs and realities, and prayerful discernment remains before us. The CRLC acknowledges that renewal for this church mirrors the daily renewal we each have available to us through our baptism. The determination, hope, and love we receive through our Savior, Jesus Christ, guides us and leads us through these infinite cycles of reformation.

We commend this report to you as a guide for your reflection and action in determining the path forward for the ELCA.



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# Executive Summary: Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

## The Imperative for Renewal and Reformation

In the life of the Church, renewal is not merely an administrative task but a Spirit-led response to God's continuous call for discernment and reformation. As a community rooted in faith, guided by Scripture, and committed to living out the gospel, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) understands renewal as an essential, ongoing process. This process is deeply embedded in our theological and organizational framework as reflected in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*, which articulates how we organize ourselves to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, share the sacraments, reach out to our neighbors with good news, and express God's love in the world.

Each expression of this church—the churchwide organization, synods, and congregations—is held together in a relationship of interdependence, encouraging responsiveness to contextual needs. This interdependence reflects our dedication to listening anew to the Holy Spirit and reevaluating how our structures, practices, and missions align with God's calling in a rapidly changing world.

The clarion call for the church to be “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”—a church always being reformed—underpins our ongoing discernment. This call reminds us that reform and renewal are not isolated historical events but continuous imperatives, driving us toward greater faithfulness and vibrancy in our witness and service. We commend this church for its commitment to revisit and renew these guiding documents. In faithfully engaging this work, we live more fully into our vision of a world transformed by God's grace and love in Christ for all people and creation.

## The Purpose and Scope of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) was convened in response to a directive from the 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA, following receipt of ten similar synod memorials. Composed of 34 members of the ELCA from diverse backgrounds, the CRLC was tasked with evaluating and addressing this church's purpose, structure, and future direction. The CRLC conducted extensive consultations across the three expressions and with related institutions, organizations, and ministries to gather diverse insights and perspectives. Amid many expectations for the outcomes of its work, members of the CRLC navigated these alongside the ongoing work of different task forces, committees, and working groups addressing various church opportunities. Throughout this time, we called ourselves to the text of the action that resulted in the establishment of the CRLC:

### 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action

“...To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.” [CA22.01.06]

We recognize that the work conducted by the CRLC may inspire a number of responses. Some will say that we have gone too far, while others will say not far enough. We offer this work as part of the ongoing efforts of this church to more fully live out the mission of sharing the love of God for all. We encourage this church to continue discernment and taking action related to our purpose, mission, structure and longing for the love and equality of all people.

## Methodology

Over the last two years, the commission has endeavored to ground its work deeply in the understanding of our theology and Lutheran heritage. As we engaged with Scripture, history, and our shared Lutheran culture, the CRLC implemented a broad engagement strategy involving surveys and listening sessions across the ELCA. These sessions included diverse groups such as laity, rostered leaders, youth and young adults, and historically marginalized communities. This inclusive process aimed to gather comprehensive feedback on the existing church structure and assess its alignment with both contemporary and future needs.

Throughout the work of this commission, we have maintained regular consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council of the ELCA, ensuring that our efforts resonate with broader church leadership. We extend our gratitude to the multitude of voices that have enriched this process through their input, shared resources, and prayers.

It is crucial to highlight that our commission has sustained a dedicated focus on our fundamental commitment to dismantling racism, a mandate clearly articulated by the Churchwide Assembly. In our pursuit to cultivate an anti-racist church, we have expanded our awareness to address other forms of exclusion within this church. We encourage all ELCA Lutherans to actively embody their faith by advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. This call to action reaches beyond our formal governance and organizational structures, urging each individual to honor the dignity of every person, particularly those marginalized, akin to the Samaritans among us.

## Key Findings

The commission's key findings can be found in the Observations section of this report and represent the breadth of issues facing the ELCA today. Most of these issues need further reflection as the church considers structural and governance reform:

### *Governance and Structural Matters*

The commission noted the many ways our current governance models across the ELCA vary in their reflection of and service to the diversity of its membership.

### *Administrative Opportunities*

The commission acknowledges the variety in administrative management, coordination of services, and opportunities for effectiveness in the way that each of the expressions carries out its purpose and ministry.

### *Interdependence of this Church*

Throughout our discussions, the commission identified how changes in our structure, governance, and ministries would be impacted by the interdependence of the three expressions of this church. Our call for ongoing discernment and careful consideration is a direct result of our shared ministries and connection within the three expressions as well as related institutions and other ministries connected to this church.

### *Commitment to the Dignity of All People*

Throughout its history the ELCA has articulated a commitment to respect the dignity of all individuals. This is evidenced in various declarations, apologies, and social statements. We acknowledge this church has not always succeeded in honoring the inherent value of all people. The pursuit of inclusion is ongoing; this church must continually endeavor to recognize and prevent harm.

## Recommendations

The CRLC could not and did not attempt to address every issue with a specific recommendation. However, several recommendations have been advanced across a few strategic themes:

### *Governance and Structural Considerations*

These recommendations focus on enhancing governance clarity, accountability, and operational efficiency through revisions to governing documents and procedures. Key actions include the establishment of task forces dedicated to examining interdependence and purpose, financial coordination, and the simplification of the process for amending church documents.

### *Strategic Initiatives for Long-Term Impact*

These recommendations underscore the importance of strategic planning with a concentrated effort on dismantling racism and deeply integrating diversity and equity principles consistent with Lutheran theology into this church's activities and policies. The recommendations call for both immediate and long-term actions, potentially including constitutional changes to support these goals.

### *Respecting the Dignity of All People*

Proposals under this theme aim to mirror God's call to love your neighbor. Recommendations include steps that can be taken for immediate action as well as the development of educational resources and support systems to empower all church members, particularly those from historically underrepresented groups.

## Conclusion

The CRLC's findings and recommendations are framed to guide the ELCA towards a more inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused future. These recommendations, rooted in a vision of continuous transformation, are offered with the hope that their adoption will empower the three expressions of this church to better serve our diverse membership. By embracing these ongoing changes, we align ourselves more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This process fosters a church that is not only adaptable and accountable but also fully equipped to meet the challenges of our time while remaining steadfast in our theological convictions. Our enduring commitment to reformation and renewal underscores our role in God's world, reminding us that our efforts are not solely for the church's benefit but are crucial for the broader realization of God's kingdom on earth. This is an everlasting endeavor. While the work of the commission concludes, we encourage the church to continue in its efforts for renewal in all matters.



# Process and Work of the Commission

## Origin and Formation

The August 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten synods titled “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA.” These memorials included common themes related to an overall decline in membership and numbers of congregations since the ELCA was created in 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA’s governing documents to meet new challenges, the desire for a “well-governed, connected, and sustainable church,” and the need to dismantle racism and acknowledge this church’s complicity in related trauma and harm. The Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC) toiled for several years during the 1980s, eventually leading to the creation of the ELCA. The establishment of the CRLC marked the first major review of the governance and polity of the denomination since its creation.

The following resolution, as amended, was adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly by a 738-72 vote:

**“To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.” [CA22.01.06]**

The ELCA Church Council was charged with establishing the CRLC. Since there was no precedent for such an entity, it was the Church Council’s responsibility to determine the size and selection of the commission membership. In April 2023, the Church Council appointed 34 individuals to the commission and appointed two members as co-chairs. The commission membership represented broadly diverse perspectives across the ELCA’s three expressions; the churchwide organization, synods, and congregations, and beyond. The members of the CRLC all served in a volunteer role. While supported by resource staff, the CRLC did not have full-time dedicated staff support or engage any significant consulting efforts.

## The Work Begins

The first meeting of the CRLC was held in July 2023 at the ELCA churchwide organization offices in Chicago, nearly a full year after the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. This meeting focused on grounding the work of the commission in Scripture, introducing the members to each other, and understanding the concerns and hopes that led to the formation of the CRLC. One of the first tasks the commission undertook was to speak with key leaders from each of the synods that had adopted the memorials that led to the creation of the commission to better understand their motivation. Major themes of these conversations included:

1. Structural concerns and the need to “right-size” this church.
2. Racial and economic disparities impacting the candidacy process and management of rostered leaders.
3. Overwhelming passage of the memorials at the synod level indicating a broad appetite for change in this church and a sense of urgency.
4. The need to commit to being an anti-racist institution and related examination of our governing documents.
5. Concern for accountability and results in the broader church and a desire for the commission to recommend tangible action steps for consideration.

6. Collaboration with our full communion partners for theological education and mission work should be encouraged.
7. Maintain congregational independence to choose their calls.
8. A growing focus on concerns about transparency, accountability, and governance.
9. Achieving a common understanding of the commission's task was an early challenge among the members of the commission.

Individuals worked together to share their interpretation and the ways it might inform the commission's collective work. Significant time was spent reviewing and then unpacking the charge given to the CRLC by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. In particular, the development of the language of our "shared commitment to dismantle racism" in the memorial was noted. In our third meeting, CRLC3, the members thoroughly discussed the memorial, "Restructure the Governance of the ELCA" and its mandate. After much discussion, the commission voted to approve the mandate focus as follows:

1. "shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church" [churchwide organization, synod, congregation]
2. [shall reconsider] "the principles of its organizational structure"
3. [shall reconsider] "all matters pertaining thereunto" [as it relates to governance]
4. "being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism" [as it relates to governance]

In addition to seeking a common understanding of the mandate, an early task of the commission was to clarify the timeline of activities and associated milestones. There were two such major milestones identified. First, any recommendations for constitutional changes to be considered for adoption at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly were to be provided to the Church Council prior to its November 2024 meeting. Second, the CRLC final report needed to be provided to the Church Council in the early spring of 2025 so that it could be included in the packet of materials distributed to voting members of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The CRLC recognized the tight timeline and structured its work accordingly. The timeline proved to be a distinct challenge, as it required the early prioritization of recommendations for constitutional changes, resulting in a limited capacity in early meetings for conversations of a more transformative and generative nature. The timeline prescribed by this church's current governing documents proved to be a repeated challenge to the commission's work.

## Learning, Listening and Consulting

Early in our time together it became clear that not everyone was starting from the same place of understanding of the operation of the denomination, its formation, the constitution, or its history. Meetings in 2023 focused heavily on creating a foundation of understanding among members regarding the polity and current governance structures of the ELCA as well as a brief overview of this church's ecclesiology. The commission was blessed with a diverse membership with a variety of skills, gifts, and experiences. Several members of the commission invested in the creation of resources to provide all CRLC members with a better understanding of ELCA governance, polity, and ecclesiology. In addition to CRLC members, resource persons and other churchwide organization subject-matter experts, especially those whose work focuses on racial equity, were essential to building a common understanding and foundation. At every full commission meeting and almost every committee meeting, resource persons were available and in attendance to answer questions, provide feedback, and serve as a conduit to the churchwide organization. The CRLC understood that it was not only necessary to have a strong grounding in the past, but also necessary to have exposure to current on-going efforts within the church and requested a list of such efforts from the churchwide organization. Presentations to the CRLC were provided by staff involved in the Vision Team and the God's Love Made Real initiative. It was a challenge to identify and engage with the wide variety of ongoing efforts due to the limited time available and the peripheral nexus of some of the efforts with the work of the CRLC. This multifaceted engagement offered vital insights into the current and future needs of this church.

To inform its work, the CRLC engaged in an extensive listening process, both formal and informal. The formal efforts included online surveys of ELCA members (both laity and rostered ministers), with special surveys of youth and historically marginalized communities. Additionally, listening sessions were held across the denomination, hosted by CRLC members. Informal listening was a constant source of feedback for each CRLC member as they personally, and in some cases professionally, engaged with others.

The memorial creating the CRLC directed the commission to be in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council. The presiding bishop and the secretary of the ELCA, members of both the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, served as resource persons. The Conference of Bishops was represented on the CRLC by two bishops. One commission member was a member of the Church Council. Additionally, resource persons from the Church Council included the chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and the treasurer of the ELCA.

Written materials as well as in-person presentations were provided to the Conference of Bishops and Church Council. Verbal and written feedback was received from both bodies. This wide-ranging engagement provided invaluable perspectives, fostering a collaborative approach as the CRLC prepared its findings and recommendations for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The CRLC also engaged in consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders including rostered ministers, ethnic associations, synod vice-presidents, members of the ELCA Larger Church Conference, and others.

## **Committee Work and Focus**

In late 2023, at the third meeting of the CRLC, seven committees were chartered. There were four committees focused on a particular aspect of the commission's mandate and three primarily operational committees. The initial focus for all the committees was the first timeline milestone of identifying any recommendations for constitutional changes to be provided to the Church Council prior to its November 2024 meeting. This timeline allowed for such changes to be available for possible consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Following that meeting, the CRLC's focus shifted to the milestone of generating a final report with findings and recommendations to be presented to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The emphasis shifted to examination of fundamental issues such as the interdependence of the three expressions, subsidiarity, and the flow of funds within the denomination. In late 2024, in response to feedback from consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council and in line with this shifted emphasis the Setting the Table committee was formed. Additionally, the Who Are We Committee and Why and What Committee were combined into the 3-4 Committee. These two committees had an overlap in focus and the formation of this new committee allowed for emphasis on interdependence and purpose statements. The committees worked tirelessly as they identified and debated substantive issues and performed operational tasks. Committees met on their own schedule and were provided with agenda time on full CRLC meetings to provide status reports, seek feedback, and make recommendations. The work of each committee ebbed and flowed depending on the specific work of that committee.



Following are the committees and their associated purposes as stated in their charters:

<b><i>All Ears Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>All Ears Committee</i></b> exists to collect data from a wide range of constituents, through both live listening sessions and electronic surveys, in order to inform the work of the CRLC. Additionally, this committee will serve as a liaison to other data collections groups in the ELCA, particularly Future Church. Finally, this committee will oversee data analysis and present a report of its findings to the CRLC.
<b><i>Communications Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Communications Committee</i></b> exists to share the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, providing transparency for the commission's actions to the wider ELCA. The committee will inform the wider ELCA of the commission's purpose and the commission's progress towards our mandate goals.
<b><i>Dismantling Racism Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Dismantling Racism Committee</i></b> will provide oversight of the entire work of the CRLC to ensure it is viewed through an intersectional lens of dismantling racism.
<b><i>How We Are Governed Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>"How We Are Governed" Committee</i></b> exists to reconsider the organizational structure and governance of the ELCA, being particularly attuned to dismantling racism, and to provide recommendations for the future governance of this church, including potential modifications to governing documents.
<b><i>Planning and Report Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Planning and Report Committee</i></b> exists to ensure project management, coordinate resources and provide for a final report to be presented to the Church Council in April of 2025 in preparation for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.
<b><i>Who Are We Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Who Are We Committee</i></b> exists to examine the historical definitions of this church, how it is lived out today, and how to visualize it for the future. Following the completion of that work, the committee will then consider the question of whether the denomination name "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" will be changed.
<b><i>Why and What Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Why and What Committee</i></b> exists to review the purpose statements for the three expressions of this church as set forth in their constitutions and to make recommendations concerning changes to those statements.
<b><i>3-4 Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>3-4 Committee</i></b> combines the purposes of the Who Are We Committee and the Why and What Committee with a special focus on the interdependence among the three expressions of the church and their purpose statements.
<b><i>Setting the Table Committee</i></b>	The <b><i>Setting the Table Committee</i></b> 's purpose is to draft a document listing the presenting issues facing this church that the CRLC identified through its listening efforts.

## Challenges

The work of the CRLC faced a variety of challenges, including logistical, structural, and environmental. The fact that the ELCA had not created such an entity since its inception nearly two generations ago meant there was no template. The most analogous entity was the original Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC). Yet the tasks were significantly different: creating a new denomination versus examining an existing denomination's governance and structure. The CNLC performed its work over the greater part of a decade. The CRLC was limited to less than two years of actual meeting time. This meant that a process for responding to the mandate was created in tandem with the actual work of responding to the mandate. A lack of precedent in process was a notable challenge.

The size and diversity of the CRLC was both a challenge and a strength. There was strength in the wide variety of gifts, experiences, and perspectives of the members. There was also a challenge in engaging and ensuring that all members had an opportunity to fully participate in a group of 34 people.

The CRLC was composed entirely of volunteers. Thus, the membership was confined to those who had the time and means to do the work. This reality is indicative of a larger systemic challenge across the structure and leadership of this church, inherently limiting the full participation of the diversity represented in this church.

An additional and significant challenge was the wording of the mandate. There were a variety of interpretations of the memorial language, with some arguing for a narrow scope and others seeking a broad interpretation. The CRLC voted on an understanding of the mandate in our third meeting.

However, there still exist varying opinions of the mandate across the spectrum of people and groups within the ELCA. This challenge consumed valuable time and energy of the CRLC members and supporting resource persons.

The CRLC was intentionally created to consist of members from all three expressions of the ELCA as well as related institutions, organizations, and ministries. Logistically, the CRLC was created by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and established by the ELCA Church Council. It was important that the CRLC not appear to be driven in its work by any particular expression of this church. In some cases, this led to a lack of awareness of or confusion regarding already existing projects and activities in the broader church. It was a challenge for the CRLC members to be knowledgeable of such efforts and their potential nexus with the CRLC.

From a timeline perspective, the CRLC was always challenged. The first CRLC meeting was in the third quarter of 2023. The CRLC held two additional meetings in 2023 and primarily used them to coalesce, build understanding, and agree on the mandate. The current process for amending the church's governing documents, especially the constitution, is time consuming and lengthy. Potential changes needed to be presented to the Fall 2024 Church Council with prior consultation with the Conference of Bishops in September 2024. Proposed specific constitutional changes along with conceptual work on revised purpose statements were reviewed by the COB at their Fall 2024 meeting. Subsequent versions were submitted to the Church Council. Once the deadline for proposed changes to the constitutions had passed the CRLC took a deeper look at the presenting issues facing the ELCA. In an ideal world this deeper dive would have occurred before any specific recommendations were presented; however, primarily due to the timeline, this did not occur.

# Survey and Listening Sessions Summary

The following pages present a snapshot of the results from the listening sessions, the General Survey, the Ethnic Associations Survey, the 25 Years and Under Survey, and the Youth Survey. Additionally, cross-tabulations are displayed for the results of the General Survey by age, race, gender and education. Along with a demographic breakdown of the respondents, the snapshot highlights the most frequent responses of participants in the listening sessions and surveys and qualitative responses where noted.

The survey questions include:

## Listening Sessions:

What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current constitutional language?

What does a renewed church look like to you? What are your hopes for the ELCA?

What elements of the Statement of Purpose do you believe are vital to the ELCA, and what do you believe should be modified?

Are there ways in which the ELCA could be better structured to support the three expressions of the church for the sake of the gospel in the world?

Describe a time/situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA supported the flourishing of the gospel in your context, and/or describe a time/situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA inhibited the flourishing of the gospel in your context.

## General and Ethnic Associations Surveys:

Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose are vital to the ELCA's future?

Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose need to be modified?

Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose are vital for the ELCA's future?

Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose need to be modified?

Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose are vital to the ELCA's future?

Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose need to be modified?

The ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide organization) help to promote racial diversity.

## 25 Years and Under and Youth Surveys:

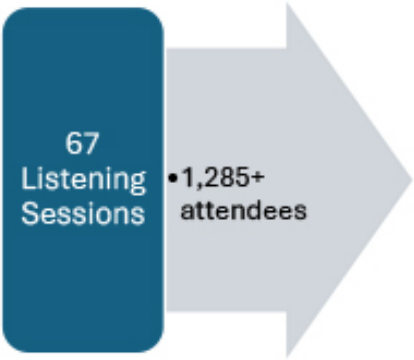
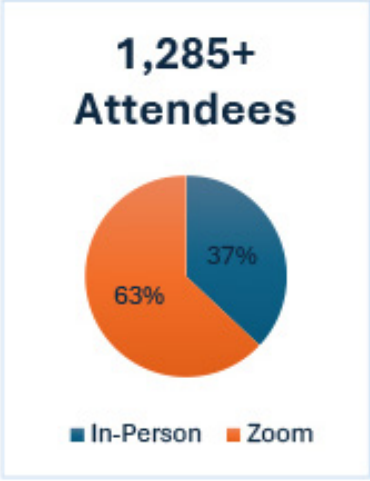
Does the ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide organization) help promote racial diversity?

Identify the most important things about the ELCA that will encourage them to remain in the church in the future.

Responses for each question in the General Survey are arranged by general results and cross-tabulations. For example, the responses to question 1 (congregation purpose, that which is vital and that which should be modified) contain the most frequent survey responses plus the most frequent survey responses from cross-tabulations for age, race, gender and most frequent responses.



Please note the following abbreviations: NA = Not Available, BIPOC = Black, Indigenous and People of Color, CT = Cross Tabulation, NW = Northwestern, Minn = Minneapolis, SEPA = Southeastern Pennsylvania, N/W L. MI = North/West Lower Michigan, and Mts. = Mountains.

<b>CRLC</b> Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church		<b>SNAPSHOT OF THE LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEY RESULTS</b>
<b>Understanding the Scope of Research Findings</b> <b>Caveat:</b> It is important for readers to recognize that the research observations and survey responses included in this report reflect the perspectives of those who participated and do not represent the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) community. While this data has been valuable in informing the CLRC's discussions and decision-making processes, we acknowledge that it is not a statistically representative sample. As such, the findings should be interpreted as informative observations rather than predictive of broader trends within the ELCA. We encourage readers to view these responses and data as one part of a larger conversation rather than definitive conclusions about our church as a whole.		
<b>LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS</b>		
Demographics N = 1,285+		
<b># Attendees</b>	<b>Setting: In-person vs. Zoom</b>	<b>Respondents</b>
 <p>67 Listening Sessions → 1,285+ attendees</p>	 <p>1,285+ Attendees</p> <p>63% In-Person 37% Zoom</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rostered ministers</li> <li>• Retired ministers</li> <li>• Synod councils</li> <li>• Congregations</li> <li>• Young adults</li> <li>• LGBTQIA+</li> <li>• People with disabilities</li> <li>• Deacons</li> <li>• Exec. Directors of related institutions, etc.</li> </ul>
<b>Key Themes</b>		
<b>Purpose:</b>	While some respondents saw the congregation-centered approach as a strength and that the existing purpose statements were clear and well-defined, other participants expressed dissatisfaction with how the current language fails to resonate with diverse communities or reflect modern values and concerns, e.g., inclusivity and relevance.	
<b>Organization Structure</b>	The congregation-centered nature of the ELCA was frequently mentioned as a strength, with a focus on local congregations being a vital part of the church's identity. However, there was also a call for better alignment and support from the churchwide and synod levels to the congregational level.	
<b>Dismantling Racism:</b>	A recurring theme was the desire for the ELCA to be more inclusive, welcoming diverse communities and ensuring that all voices are heard and represented. Participants also emphasized the need for the church to stay relevant in contemporary society by addressing current social issues and adapting to changing cultural contexts.	

## GENERAL SURVEY RESULTS

Demographics N = 1,264

Synod	Age	Race	Gender
NW Ohio 7%	<p> <span>Under 18</span> <span>18-24</span>  <span>25-34</span> <span>35-44</span>  <span>45-54</span> <span>55-64</span>  <span>65 and over</span> </p>	<p> <span>White</span>  <span>Black/AA</span>  <span>Hisp/Lat</span>  <span>Am...</span> </p> <p><b>Education</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>90% bachelor's degree or above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>51% Cisgender women</li> <li>45% Cisgender male</li> <li>4% Non-cisgender</li> </ul>
Minn Area 5%			
SEPA 4%			
N/W L. MI 4%			
Nebraska 4%			
Rocky Mts 3%			

Responses to each question are arranged by General Survey results and cross-tabulations.

**KEY: (A) = General Survey Results, (B) = CT by Age, (C) = CT by Race, (D) = CT by Gender, and (E) = CT by Education**

### Q1 Purpose Statement — Congregation

Key	Vital	Modify
<b>A</b>	"Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered."	"Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of the synod and the churchwide organization."
<b>B</b>	"Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry."	"Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered."
<b>C</b>	"Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society."	"Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry."
<b>D</b>	"Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered."	"Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization."
<b>E</b>	"Challenge, equip, and support all members in carrying out their calling in their daily life and in their congregation."	"Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered."

Q2 Purpose Statement — Synod		
Key	Vital	Modify
A	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”
B	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.”
C	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”
D	“Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”
E	“Strengthen interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners.”	“Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod.”
Q3 Purpose Statement — Churchwide		
Key	Vital	Modify
A	“Provide resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve, and witness in their ministry in daily life.”	“Determine and implement policy for this church’s relationship to governments.”
B	“Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.”	“Establish and reflect this church’s ecumenical stance and its relationship to other churches and direct this church’s policy for relationship with persons of other faiths.”
C	“Witness to the Word of God in Christ by united efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, responding to human need, caring for the sick and suffering, working for justice and peace, and providing guidance to members on social matters.”	“Provide for a comprehensive financial support system for this church’s mission and for the administration of financial resources necessary for fulfillment of the particular responsibilities of the churchwide organization.”
D	“Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.”	“Provide for the rostered ministers for this church.”
E	“Support and establish policy for this church’s mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.”	“Support and establish policy for this church’s mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.”

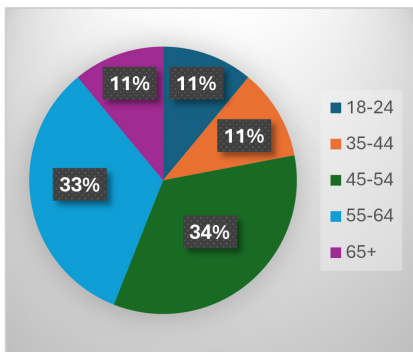
Q4 Promotes Racial Diversity			
Key	Strongly Disagree + Disagreed	Strongly Agree + Agreed	Neutral
A	N = 498 or 36.5%	N = 301 or 22.1%	N = 437 or 32%
B	35-64 year olds	18-24 year olds	N/A
C	10.3% Whites 21.8% BIPOC	N/A	N/A
D	65.9% Non-cisgender 40.6% Cisgender women 33.9% Cisgender male	N/A	N/A
E	N/A	Bachelor's degree Professional degree Master's degree	N/A

#### Qualitative Data Results

Organization Structure	Dismantling Racism	Other
Recognize the distinct needs of metropolitan and rural congregations.	Distribute resources more equably.	Improve diversity and organizational structure.

### ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS RESULTS

Demographics N=9

Geographic Dist.	Age	Gender
Southwestern Texas 11%		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Male 34%</li> <li>Woman 33%</li> <li>Queer 11%</li> <li>Cisgender 22%</li> </ul>
Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast 11%		
Southeast Michigan 11%		
Metropolitan New York 11%		
Caribbean 56%		
		<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Master's degree 45%</li> <li>Bachelor's degree 22%</li> </ul>

### Key Themes

	Vital	Modify
Q1 Congregation Purpose Statement	"Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society." (N=9)	"Respond to human need, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society." (N=5)
Q2 Synod Purpose Statement	"Provide for pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers in the synod." (N=6)	"Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations." (N=6)
Q3 Churchwide Purpose Statement	"Foster interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to implement the mission of this whole church." (N=5)	"Oversee and establish policy for this church's relationship to seminaries, colleges, universities, schools, and other education endeavors, and provide support as appropriate." (N=4)



	Agree	Disagree	Neutral/DKN
Q4 Promote Racial Diversity	NA	N=5	N=3/1
Info Accessible in Spanish	N=1	N=5	N=3
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 7 (press releases and leadership spaces)		
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 6 (information/national assembly et.al.)		

Organizational Structure Changes	Dismantling Racism
“Flexibility and process streamlining (policy statements), e.g., shifting the focus from institutional policies to people and ministries.”	“Create a Latino Synod.”
“Decentralization of power and opening the church to external solutions rather than internal ones.”	“Let the Latino community make decisions for themselves.”

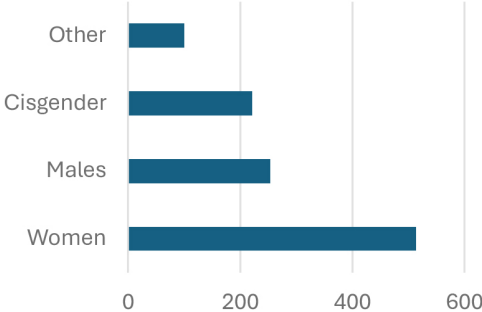
## 25 YEARS AND UNDER RESULTS

### Demographics N=360

Age	Race	Gender
Under 18 years = 28%	<p>■ White ■ Other</p> <p>87% 13%</p>	<p>200 150 100 50 0</p> <p>Women Man Cisgender Other</p>
18–25 years = 72%		

### Key Themes

Promotes Racial Diversity (N= 364)				Drivers to Remain in Church
Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	
N = 256	N = 49	N = 37	N = 22	Inclusivity and Acceptance
				Community and Fellowship
				Youth Engagement and Activities
				Social Justice and Advocacy

YOUTH SURVEY RESULTS				
Demographics N = 1090+				
Race				Gender
White 88%				
BIPOC 12%				
Key Themes				
Promotes Racial Diversity				Drivers to Remain in Church
Agree/ Strongly Agree	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Don't Know	<div></div> <div>Inclusivity and Acceptance</div> <div>Social Justice and Advocacy</div> <div>Theological Grounding</div> <div>Community and Relationships</div>
420	371	210	98	

The following QR Code will lead you to an in-depth video overview of the survey results.



# Observations

The following represent the findings of the CRLC. The Church currently is navigating unprecedented challenges, both internally and externally. The findings outlined below have emerged from our listening and survey sessions, as well as the ongoing work of the commission. Our activities and focus have been guided by the Church's mission as stated in Chapter 4.01 of the ELCA Constitution, which defines the Church as "a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world." In order to fulfill this mission fully we seek to use the following to inform this church of what it means to be welcoming to all of God's children.

## Identified Areas of Need

### 1. Structural Concerns and Governance

- 1.1 **The Tension: This church is a ministry:** All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under his rule and authority. [ELCA constitution 3.01]. It is also a non-profit organization, legally registered in the state of Minnesota [Article 2, Article 5]. For the sake of good stewardship, we utilize governance processes across the three expressions that blend non-profit structures with ecclesiastical structures. Through our listening we have found areas in all three expressions of the church where the governance structures are not serving the purpose of this church, nor are we modeling good stewardship of the tasks and resources entrusted to us, the people. Tension also lies in the need to clearly define the purpose of this church, to ensure governance and resources are appropriately aligned.
- 1.2 **Challenges in Governance Model:** The current governance models in all three expressions have weaknesses. Leadership recruitment, leadership diversity, and intentional and meaningful representation in many synods and congregations are currently highly dependent on passive inbound application, versus a blend of intentional recruitment and open and welcoming invitation. Additionally, there is a wide variance in the implementation of governance practices across congregations and synods which result in unintentional inequities.

In both the synod and churchwide expressions, executive power—encompassing the authority to govern and administer—is fully vested in the bishop [13.31, S8.12]. All other elected officials, including the single constitutionally required lay leader, are directed by the bishop. The staff, led by the bishop, have the full responsibility to manage and lead the organization.

There are notably wide differences in the implementation of governance practice across the 65 synods, leadership recruiting and election practices, frequency of meeting, term-limit variations, and volunteer turn-over, all of which have an impact on the effectiveness of governance. This variety, while reflecting in part the context of each synod, provides a challenge for the persons, related institutions, organizations and ministries who may have to adjust to these varied circumstances.

Additionally, the current practice of allocating seats on national boards and councils based on a rotation among all synods is not a representative method for such allocations and limits this church's ability to improve diversity and inclusion. Any consideration of representation should ensure a balance of representation from synods while not prohibiting the abilities of people to serve this church.

- 1.3 Challenges in Administration and Management:** Throughout the ELCA's existence, it has been challenging to effectively coordinate leadership across the three expressions of this church. Born in part out of the varied practices of the over 130 predecessor bodies to the ELCA, this disconnect challenges the ability of the ELCA to function as a unified body, creating wide variations in governance, policy application, ministry practices, and resource allocation. Examples of this include pastoral roles on congregation councils and application of policies and rules by bishops.

The current structure has enabled inconsistent practices that challenge the unity and purpose of the ELCA. More clearly delineated roles, responsibilities and mechanisms for accountability, transparency, and strategic oversight, help ensure that the ELCA's leadership structures reflect its theological commitments and operational needs.

These issues are directly connected to the flow-of-funds issues mentioned below.

- 1.4 Interdependency and funding models:** The interdependency of the three expressions has been challenged throughout the ELCA's existence by the tension between the funding model (congregation to synod to churchwide organization) and the inaccurate subsidiary perception of many local leaders that churchwide organization controls synods, which in turn control congregations. This lends itself to misaligned expectations of responsibility across each expression and hampers generosity in today's philanthropic environment.

Currently, congregations collect funds which are then shared with the synod, which in turn shares it with the churchwide organization expression. This model can be impacted by feelings of alienation and disaffection at various points in time.

As the landscape of the local congregation has changed, the capacity or desire to share resources across the three expressions has also changed. This is in part due to a governance structure that depends highly on the historic governance, program, and staffing models of this church which require resources locally for facilities, staff, and program.

Additionally, national trends in charitable giving impact our model. The days of unquestioned giving to the trusted institution, church or otherwise, are gone. Today's congregation and donors have the capacity to respond to the call to be good stewards by determining where resources make the most impact.

- 1.5 A Misperception of Authority:** The current model of governance and the authorities of the congregation, synod, and churchwide organization expressions have existed in tension since the creation of the ELCA. Historic differences in governing practices between the three merging church bodies still exist today, specifically at the congregational level.

Our current governing documents, in reference to one church in three interdependent expressions, state in ELCA 5.01.c. that the governance of this church is one in which all three expressions are "interdependently...sharing responsibility in God's mission." It goes on to state that "whenever possible, the entity most directly affected by a decision shall be the principal party responsible for decision and implementation, with the other entities facilitating and assisting."

Many perceive or expect that decisions and authority solely lie with the churchwide organization and synod expressions as they would in a "diocesan" model of governance.



- 1.6. **Role Clarification Across Expressions:** Feedback from surveys and listening sessions highlights the need for clearer role definitions among the three expressions. This includes distinct yet interdependent roles to enhance both accountability and autonomy, thereby fostering a unified mission. This need for clarification stems from unaddressed issues in the formation of the ELCA and the “dynamic of dissonance” between the hierarchical and congregational models of governance that were present in the varied approaches of the predecessor church bodies.
- 1.7 **Balancing Authority with Accountability:** A recurring challenge identified by the CRLC is achieving clear, consistent authority across church expressions while upholding accountability. The tension between autonomy and accountability for congregations has been present since the inception of this church. Likewise, authority and accountability are also in tension for rostered ministers serving congregations and bishops giving leadership to synods. Proposed structural adjustments must aim to clarify roles and enhance oversight. Further, current accountability structures must be reviewed to consider their practicality, speed, and equitable application.
- 1.8 **Needed Adaptability and Structuring for Today:** Many of the structures of this church within each expression were built in a time of larger participation. Today, the ELCA is reducing in membership by about 110,000 people per year. In this reality, congregations are forced at a ground level to change structures to match the realities of reduced membership. They are experiencing closures, mergers, and re-imaginings. (134 ELCA congregations closed or disaffiliated in 2023.– [ELCA Form A Summary of Congregational Statistics 12/31/23]

Similarly, structural and operational changes have been made in the synod and churchwide organization expressions. However, for all three expressions often the response has been to do the same work or more with fewer resources, which is inequitable to those doing the work. There is an urgent need to step back and consider fundamental purpose, and strategically structure for that core purpose. The three expressions must have the flexibility to size and structure in order to meet the missional needs of the church in their context.

The speed of adaptation required in today’s context demands crystal clarity of purpose, and governing documents and practices that allow for responsive and adaptive change while protecting core values. There is often a conflict between the desire for rapid change and the prescribed processes of discernment.

For example, one reason presented by some of the synods who sent memorials to the Churchwide Assembly in 2022 that called for creation of the CRLC was to address the number of synods. The original number was a compromise between the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). However, the current division of 65 synods no longer provides appropriate representation or good stewardship of resources.

### ***Congregational Distribution***

- **Top 5 Largest Synods (by congregations):** Synods 3D, 8D, 4A, 3F, and 7E collectively have 1,131 congregations.
- **Smallest 16 Synods (by congregations):** Synods 7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 8G, 5L, 8A, 5G, 2D, 1C, 1D, 4D, 1B, 4F, and 2C together have a total of 1,104 congregations.
- **Comparison:** The largest single synod, 7E, alone hosts 240 congregations, while the combined total for the six smallest synods (7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 8G) is only 259 congregations.

### *Active Participant Distribution*

- **Largest Synod (by active participants):** Synod 3G has 96,792 active participants.
- **Smallest 13 Synods (by active participants):** Synods 7G, 9F, 8H, 4C, 1A, 8A, 8E, 8C, 5G, 4D, 1D, 1F, and 1C together have a total of 92,983 active participants.

In some cases, synods may need to merge, in others split. Current governing documents require approval of the Churchwide Assembly to make this happen, which can prove cumbersome.

Current governance structures require funding at a level that is no longer available, due to the reduction in size of this church. Ministries at the margins, such as those coming from our ethnic-specific tables, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, and service learning ministries are underfunded. Critical evaluation of priorities is necessary to ensure the essential work of this church is funded and following its mission.

- 1.9 Governance Adaptations:** As previously stated, the CRLC has identified the need for governance updates to enhance adaptability and streamline responsibilities across the churchwide organization, synod and congregation expressions. These updates aim to establish a more cohesive, mission-oriented framework.

As is often the case with organizations, our current systems tend to default to preserving the status quo. Given this reality, it is essential to evaluate roles and structures from an organizational perspective, separate from the individuals currently occupying those roles or the existing systems. This approach allows us to focus on what will be necessary to meet future needs effectively.

- 1.10 Representation:** Vital and important areas of our church's engagement in the world, such as social ministry organizations, campus ministries, outdoor ministries, non-traditional worshipping communities, and other ministries—often served by non-rostered professionals—lack formal recognition within the current structures. These ministries, which provide significant diversity and outreach, are asking for greater connection, a strength that is currently underutilized. Formal recognition might include institutional access to voice and vote in formal settings, addressing these gaps in representation in the current three expressions. Recognition of these ministries not represented by the three expressions would move us toward being a more equitable and inclusive church.

- 1.11 Lay Leadership:** Lay leadership has played a vital role in the ELCA and continues to grow in prominence today. Ensuring a balance of voices requires intentionality in how both lay and rostered leaders are equipped and empowered to contribute to the decision-making processes of this church.

The 40% maximum allocation for rostered ministers and the 60% minimum allocation for lay participants in synod and churchwide assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units provides a structural framework for representation. This allocation ensures that those called to pastoral and diaconal leadership—who are often deeply engaged in the theological and practical concerns of this church—have a meaningful voice, while affirming the critical role of lay leaders in this church's mission. However, challenges arise when we assume that simply meeting these numerical requirements guarantees equitable lay representation. Lay participation is often shaped by factors such as access to resources, time, and opportunities to develop the skills and confidence necessary for meaningful engagement in governance.

Representation must go beyond mere numbers; it must include people—both rostered and lay leaders—who are well-prepared to thoughtfully and faithfully engage in this church’s mission and governance. This involves identifying individuals who can offer diverse perspectives while addressing the complexities and opportunities facing the church today.

By fostering robust collaboration between rostered and lay leaders, we honor the significant Lutheran emphasis on the ministry of the baptized and create a decision-making body that reflects the fullness of the church’s gifts.

- 1.12 **Program Adaptability:** Survey data indicates that younger congregants prioritize flexible governance that fosters youth engagement and inclusive community practices. Congregations excelling in intergenerational ministry demonstrate adaptability, programmatic diversity, and a willingness to evolve in response to changing needs. These practices bridge generational divides, foster collaborative leadership, and share spiritual growth.
- 1.13 **Global Lutheran Communion and Ecumenical Relationships:** The ELCA is not a church on its own. It is part of the global Lutheran communion. The ELCA plays an important role in partnership and mutual support with the Lutheran World Federation and many of its member churches. Furthermore, the ELCA is actively engaged ecumenically, with several full communion relationships with other denominations and with ecumenical and interfaith dialogues. This all needs to be kept in mind as the purposes and structures of this church are considered.

## 2. Commitment to the Dignity of All People

- 2.1 **Biblical Grounding:** The core principles of the Lutheran understanding of the work of the Triune God undergird the ELCA support for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) policies and education. Creation stories tell of the goodness of the majestic diversity that flows from God’s creative and sustaining power. (Genesis 1, 2.) Jesus lived out God’s call to respond to the needs of anyone who is marginalized and unjustly treated. At Pentecost the Holy Spirit signaled the divine intention for the Church to be inclusive of all peoples and languages by making the disciples able to communicate in the plurality of languages of their world (Acts 2:4). Paul explains in his letter to the Corinthians that within the diversity of the body of Christ some priority is given to those whom society despises or marginalizes: (1 Cor. 12:22).
- 2.2 **Lutheran Heritage:** Martin Luther championed the freedom and responsibility of Christians within the community. The Lutheran Confessions (Book of Concord) hold the government and the Church responsible for the well-being of vulnerable members of the community. Furthermore, from the beginning of the Reformation the Lutheran tradition highlighted the need of diversity of languages and cultures (i.e., the vernacular) in the proclamation of the Word and in the worship life of the Christian community (Luther’s *An Open Letter on Translating* 1530 and also *Preface to The German Mass and Order of Divine Service* 1526).

From the perspective of Lutheran ecclesiology, the Church is not merely an organization but an *ekklesia*—the people called, gathered and enlightened by God (Small Catechism, Article 3). This calling is not for the Church to perpetuate its own existence but to bear witness (with words and actions) to the saving work of Jesus Christ, heralding the imminent realization of God’s realm. As such, the Church as a human organization is transient, its ultimate purpose fulfilled in serving God’s purpose toward the well-being of all. The proclamation of the law and the gospel is central to this witness. God’s law (first use) compels us toward the enactment of justice, which demands denouncing evil and injustice. The second use of God’s law calls to repentance for both systemic sin and individual sins, including racism and patriarchy (ELCA Social Statements *Race, Ethnicity, and Culture and Faith, Sexism and Justice*). The good news of Jesus Christ (gospel) sets us free to seek

(and delight in) the well-being of all people in the unique individuality in which God has created each one of us.

Moreover, the ELCA teaches that, “Faith is active in love; love calls for justice in the relationships and structures of society” (ELCA Social Statement *Church in Society, A Lutheran Perspective*) That is, as people justified by grace through faith, Lutherans are called to live out their faith in society by working toward a more just and inclusive world. This includes challenging systemic inequalities and ensuring that all members, regardless of race, ethnicity, sex, gender, or sexuality, are valued equally as part of God’s creation.

The impetus for DEIA initiatives is deeply biblical, belongs to the best of the Lutheran heritage, and to the essence of the Church, that is, of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28). The implementation of DEIA principles within this church’s governance and educational practices addresses current challenges in both Church and society and leverages them as opportunities to witness and live out both God’s law toward justice and the gospel’s embrace of all people.

- 2.3 DEIA Policies and Training:** The DEIA audit process was not initiated by the CRLC; however, we have received its findings and they have informed our work. This audit has recommended updated governance and personnel policies, DEIA training for leaders, and the inclusion of DEIA principles in theological education. These changes are seen as foundational to aligning church practices with the ELCA’s commitment to justice and inclusivity. Many of the challenges listed in the structural and governance section of identified challenges are disproportionately affecting the ethnic-specific ministries and historically marginalized groups of this church. All needed evolutions of the governance practices should consider both the theology and methodology necessary to truly bring everyone to the table.
- 2.4 Youth and Inclusivity:** Youth respondents from the 2024 National Youth Gathering, expressed strong support for the ELCA’s inclusivity regarding ethnicity, gender identity, and LGBTQIA+ rights. Many respondents reported social justice and advocacy as being essential to this church’s mission, and there was widespread support for DEIA as a core value important to young members .

### 3. Identity and Purpose Statements

- 3.1 Updating Purpose Statements:** Revisions to the Statements of Purpose in the ELCA Constitutions are needed to better reflect the ELCA’s mission in contemporary contexts and in light of existing resources. These updates must aim to ensure clarity in the roles of each expression, with a renewed focus and clarity on this church’s core mission, informed by the commission’s discernment about the essential and ancillary works of the Church.

Analysis of the laity and general population surveys reveals varied perceptions of the ELCA’s mission. Respondents call for this church to articulate its mission in ways that are clear, concise, and understandable to all, particularly around themes of social justice, peace, and inclusion, specifically as it relates to the proclamation of the core Lutheran proclamation of the gospel as the justification by grace through faith that is for everyone equally.

- 3.1.1.** The commission had significant debate and consideration of the current Statements of Purpose for each of the expressions of this church. We recognize that, while there may be changes needed in the operational execution of the purposes for each expression, the commission has not taken action to recommend changes to our Statements of Purpose, given the need for ongoing discernment and inclusion of other voices.



## 4. Theological and Ecclesiological Foundations

- 4.1 **Ecclesiology:** Concern has been expressed that the ELCA ecclesiology needs to be better understood across this church, both in its current and predecessor forms, in order to align any proposed changes with both theology and practical matters.
- 4.2 **Faith Formation and Mission:** Youth and lay respondents express a desire for the ELCA to be deeply engaged in spiritual formation, emphasizing faith in daily life, community, and outreach. This includes support for youth-focused and intergenerational ministry and proposals for curriculum updates that emphasize active discipleship and faith sharing.

## 5. Congregational Health and Vitality

**Congregational Ministry:** Congregational ministry across the ELCA reflects both enduring strengths and significant challenges. Many congregations are seen as trusted, welcoming communities that foster deep relationships and prioritize local service, particularly in areas such as food insecurity and community outreach. These congregations emphasize a sense of family, offering spaces for intergenerational connection and support. However, survey data and listening sessions reveal growing disparities in resources and programming between urban and rural congregations, and between large and small churches. There is also a recognized need across the ELCA for greater adaptability, with many members calling for governance structures that allow congregations to respond to their unique contexts. Despite high levels of openness to change, particularly among younger members, implementing substantial reforms remains a challenge. As a result, while ELCA congregations are deeply committed to their communities, many recognize the need for new strategies to engage younger generations, diversify leadership, and build a more inclusive church.

## 6. Vocational Leadership:

The current structures, governance process, and operational patterns of interconnectivity between communities, congregations, synods, and churchwide organization are highly dependent on rostered leadership. Rostered leadership shortages in certain regions, congregational capacity to afford rostered leadership, and call and ordination processes are all challenging the current operational practices.

Additional challenges include inconsistencies in all expressions of this church in call practices, including but not limited to, the varied recognition of those in specialized calls, assignment and approval of first call placements. These inconsistencies disproportionately affect our LGBTQIA+ and BIPOC leaders.

We note that a more flexible understanding of call and vocational preparation will likely be required for the future of this church. The boundaries of that flexibility must be clear and enforced equivalently. Changes to such processes should include diverse voices and experiences at the table.

## 7. Community and Relationship Building Across Expressions

- 7.1 **Enhanced Communication and Resource Sharing:** Listening sessions have identified the need for more effective communication and collaboration among congregations, synods, and churchwide leaders. The world has moved to an expectation of faster and more transparent communication. Historical models of slow response allow gaps which are filled by others and leave space for conflict, when clear timely responses could reduce the opportunity for conflict. This strategic shift in communication strategy is essential to support the ELCA's commitment to being an anti-racist church, ensuring that gaps do not lead to misunderstandings or conflicts that undermine this mission.

Suggested improvements arising from our listening include better resource-sharing platforms and consistent engagement channels to support unified and localized mission work. This is notably dependent on participants engaging in whatever channels and platforms are available.

- 7.2 Community Integration and Inclusivity:** The importance of community, belonging, and relationships is a consistent theme among laity and youth. Youth respondents particularly value intergenerational bonds and a sense of family within congregations, suggesting that these connections are crucial to this church's long-term vitality.

## **8. Perspectives in the Pew and Pulpit**

- 8.1 Openness and Urgency to Change:** While most ELCA congregations report openness to change, the CRLC notes a need for greater urgency and willingness to act in all expressions of this church. Lay and rostered leaders indicate a readiness to adapt but recognize a gap in implementing substantial changes. Current structures will not be supportable financially and may struggle to have sufficient volunteer and professional leadership in the near future.
- 8.2 Diversity of Perspective:** While the members of this church ostensibly share commitments to God's Word and the historic Lutheran confessions, they are not of one mind about many issues, including race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexuality. As this church expresses its voice in the world through leadership in the churchwide organization and synodical expressions and through Churchwide Assembly actions, often the membership of this church does not feel involved and may not agree with the statements made. Indeed, members of this church may not agree with one another. This impacts the funding models of this church, but the financial concern should not drive the voice of this church. While parts of this tension may be unavoidable, governance, structural, and operational changes may ease this tension.

## **9. Practical Concerns**

**Timing and Structural Constraints of the CRLC:** The notable speed of decline of the traditional membership model places an urgency on this work. The very structures we are considering themselves are a hindrance to timing. From its inception, the CRLC was challenged by time available to do the work we have been called to.

Further, the structure and timeline of the CRLC, fully dependent on volunteers who have the time and means to do the work, is indicative of the larger systemic challenges across the structure and leadership of the church, inherently limiting the full participation of the diversity represented in this church.

The continuation of this work and implementation of recommendations will be impacted by the elections of a presiding bishop and secretary by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Future work on these matters will require comprehensive coordination with other efforts of this church.

## Recommendations

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends several items for adoption or action by various bodies within the church. The recommendations, their status, and rationale are set forth below.

Recommendations 1-6 are addressed to the Churchwide Assembly or the Church Council as appropriate, based on the determination of the CRLC as to which body is the appropriate authority to implement the recommendation.

**Recommendations 1 and 2** call for action on changes to governing documents, policies, and procedures to improve accountability within the church, with particular intentionality around dismantling racism.

1. Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism
2. Accountability within the ELCA

**Recommendations 3-5** call for the creation of task forces to continue the work on issues of importance identified by the CRLC that the commission did not have time to complete between convening in July 2023 and preparing this final report in April 2025.

3. Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose
4. Financial Coordinating Task Force
5. Task Force to Develop Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit and Orientation Program

**Recommendation 6** calls for various policies and resources to clarify and uplift the ministry of ministers of Word and Service in the future life of this church.

6. Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and Service

**Recommendations 7-12** call for specific changes to the ELCA's governing documents, and they are listed here in the order in which they appear in our governing documents:

7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Changes to Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups
8. Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's Relationship with other Organizations
9. Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents
10. Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of Misconduct
11. Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing Documents
12. Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution Mandatory

Because the normal course for amendments to the ELCA's constitution and bylaws to be adopted by the Churchwide Assembly involves the Church Council recommending those changes at its November meeting preceding the assembly, recommendations 7-12 were all presented to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The council has already adopted the recommended continuing resolutions relating to the DEIA Audit (Recommendation 7), as continuing resolutions may be adopted by the Church Council without a vote of the Churchwide Assembly. Other recommended changes await further work before they can be implemented (e.g., the change to the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings in Recommendation 10 would not be adopted unless the corresponding bylaw is adopted by the Churchwide Assembly). Specific details of the status of each of these governing document changes appear after the text of the Recommendation below.

Finally, the Church Council referred a question concerning the name of the ELCA to the CRLC in its action CC22.11.34.cc. This is the only item specifically referred to the CRLC outside of its original mandate. Recommendation 13 contains the CRLC's response to this Church Council action.

### 13. ELCA Name Change



## Recommendation 1: Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism

*(Related to Observations 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends that the ELCA Church Council immediately begin identifying and acting upon mutual accountability measures and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive centering of dismantling racism within the denomination. These measures and incentives shall be guided by the recommendations outlined in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.

To ensure timely action, all constitution and bylaw amendments needed for the development and implementation of these accountability measures and compliance incentives must be developed and advanced in time for consideration by the 2028 Churchwide Assembly. If by that time such measures and incentives have not been adequately identified or enacted, we recommend the ELCA Church Council call for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to evaluate and enact necessary constitutional revisions that will enable and advance the ELCA's commitment to anti-racism work.

***Status:** This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

***Rationale:*** The Commission was charged with being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism. As a commission we took this directive to include this church's commitment to the dignity of all people; a commitment which is strongly rooted in Lutheran theology. (See *Observation 2.2*.)

The CRLC recognizes that there is racism within this church, and we further recognize that there exists within this church various forms of discrimination against other historically underrepresented groups as well. While the CRLC's mandate was specific to the charge of dismantling racism, we encourage the Church Council's to expand the work beyond dismantling racism to include dismantling discrimination against all historically underrepresented groups.

This church at its inception committed to goals around diversity [ELCA 5.01.A24. and following], and there has been significant frustration at the slow progress toward becoming a truly welcoming church and realizing authentic diversity that recognizes the dignity of all human beings.

In recent years significant effort has been undertaken in the completion of a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the creation of a Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity, but action to implement the outcomes of this work has not permeated the church.

The commission believes this work can wait no longer. This work is sufficiently important that it could necessitate a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to fundamentally address the way our governing documents impede this work. However, the commission believes a concerted effort should be made to advance this issue before and to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly. Specific measures should be presented to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly to center this work, and if sufficient actions cannot be identified and developed for that assembly, then it is the recommendation of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church that a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly should be called for revision to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA*.

While much that needs to be done to accomplish this work may be centered in our constitution and bylaws, which can only be amended by the Churchwide Assembly, the commission encourages the Church Council to act on continuing resolutions and policies that can advance this work before the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

## Recommendation 2: Accountability within the ELCA

*(Related to Observation 1.7)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends:

1. That the Church Council adopt a resolution instructing the Office of the Secretary to explore collaboration with our full-communion partners to develop processes for conflict resolution within the church that are endorsed by, but independent of, the churchwide organization, and ensuring that they are responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups.
2. That the Church Council adopt a resolution directing the Committee on Appeals to develop resources to help synods both (a) identify candidates to serve on Consultation Committees with the appropriate spiritual gifts and demonstrated competencies in working with varied ethnic backgrounds and (b) train them in conflict resolution.

**Status:** This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

**Rationale:** In other actions, the CRLC has recommended changes to improve synod bishops' access to professional investigatory services under supervision of the ELCA's general counsel through cost sharing between the synod and the churchwide organization. The CRLC has also brought forward recommendations concerning standardized training for congregation council members.

Other questions persist about accountability and how it is achieved in our church's governance system. There is the recurring challenge of achieving clear, consistent authority across church expressions while upholding accountability. Noting the timeless tension between autonomy and accountability, the CRLC sees that current accountability structures must be reviewed to consider their practicality, speed, and equitable application." *(Observation 1.7)*

A fundamental issue related to accountability systems in the Church, as well as the rest of society, is that people want others to be accountable more than they want to be held accountable themselves. Systems of accountability normally require parties to cede a portion of their authority to a system that may determine that some action they took crossed a boundary, norm, or rule and that there needs to be a "consequence" to that. Such consequences, broadly speaking, could include an apology, a repentance, or a change in behavior, not just some form of punishment. When an existing system is told that a new system of accountability should be considered for the good of the whole, the existing system often resists.

Accountability systems in our church primarily are governed by Chapter 20 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* and related documents, including Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline and the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings. These documents spell out a formal disciplinary process that has robust due process rights for the accused and can culminate in serious sanctions against the accused. That full disciplinary process is used in an exceptionally small number of cases. Prior to the disciplinary process, these matters must be referred to Consultation. The Consultation system does not have the ability to take formal action against a person in our church, and it "endeavors to resolve the controversy through recommendations that are pastoral and therapeutic and which, if accepted by the parties and others concerned would eliminate the necessity for [disciplinary] proceedings" [Rule D12 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings]. This Consultation process is intended to help achieve one of the Grounding Values articulated in Definitions and Guidelines, namely "the understanding that, following misconduct, the desired outcome is restoration of right relationships with God and with one another. This church embraces disciplinary processes which may include elements of counseling, admonition, and correction with the objective of healing and reconciliation."

**A. Causes for Concern:** Drawing from the listening sessions and the experiences of members of the CRLC, the CRLC identified that current accountability structures do not promptly resolve the various types of misconduct or harm to relationships that can come from interactions of members, rostered leaders, congregations, synods, bishops, and the churchwide organization. The CRLC identified the following issues with current systems:

**1. Formal processes for accountability outlined in the constitutions of the ELCA are cumbersome.**

First, formal processes for accountability (consultation or discipline) can only be initiated by a limited group of people. That is, there is no mechanism for an individual who feels he or she has been wronged by a part of our church (i.e., by a bishop, a rostered leader, or a congregation) to initiate a process that could lead to a third party helping to hold that person or congregation accountable.

Further, current disciplinary processes appropriately focus on due process and protecting the rights of the accused, but this causes the processes to require a substantial investment of time, energy, and financial resources. These formal disciplinary processes seem more appropriate to actions that border on criminal activity (e.g., certain types of sexual or financial misconduct) and less appropriate for other forms of relational violations (e.g., lying or misleading others, apparently discriminatory words or actions, actions contrary to this church's teachings). Thus, there is a gap in response for concerns raised that do not rise to the level of disciplinable offenses.

Consultation panels, while carrying fewer procedural formalities, are still a significant investment of time and energy by the bishop and others involved in the process.

**2. Current processes are too binary.**

There is a clear process for matters of discipline but no process or guidance for dealing with matters that may not rise to the level of discipline, yet still require accountability. (For example, requiring rostered ministers to complete boundaries training or requiring congregations or synods to file certain reports. These are expectations with no process for holding those who do not meet them accountable and limited to no consequences for failure to meet these expectations.) Formal disciplinary processes that could lead to significant consequences for rostered ministers should have significant protections built in, but a streamlined process oriented toward reconciliation and restoration could serve well for various forms of relational violations.

**3. Relationships can be confused.**

Often the one leading a process of accountability is also one who has authority or influence over the person in another sphere. (For example, a synod bishop may need to hold a rostered minister accountable but is also charged with that rostered minister's pastoral care. While there are workarounds to specific situations [e.g., the bishop can appoint an alternate person for pastoral care] the problem itself goes beyond those specific remedies.) Further, the synod bishop, or in the case of member discipline the synod vice president, often acts as both the "prosecutor" in disciplinary matters while also having a significant role in convening the adjudicatory body that will hear the case.

**B. Possible Ways Forward:** The identification of the above issues has led to the following considerations regarding possible ways forward:

**1. The role of an ombudsperson.**

How might a neutral third party be able to participate in systems of accountability that are not disciplinary? How would the neutrality of this person be assured? The CRLC recognizes both the merits of this possibility and the need for strongly articulated expectations and understanding of the role's independence and bounds of influence/authority. A role like this might function either (a) similarly to

the first level of complaints to the local Bar Association about attorney misconduct, with an “intake” process to determine which complaints appear to have sufficient merit to warrant further investigation; or (b) a person who can hear the concern and serve as an advocate to help guide the person making the complaint on options and appropriate next steps to take to navigate ELCA systems to bring a resolution to the concern.

The CRLC is aware of work that is ongoing concerning the creation of the position of a racial justice ombudsperson as supported by the Task Force on the ELCA Discipline Process for Rostered Ministers of Color. Such a position is still under consideration by the churchwide organization’s Administrative Team in consultation with the Conference of Bishops. The considerations of the CRLC in this section are similar to, but broader than, the ombudsperson position considered in that proposal. The ombudsperson contemplated here could and should be a resource for concerns of the kind articulated in the racial justice ombudsperson proposal, which is why it is important that this position be responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups. However, the ombudsperson contemplated by the CRLC could also be a resource for individuals harmed by a broader range of misconduct. Further, the CRLC believes it is important that this role have some measure of independence from the churchwide organization, which is why we believe collaboration with full-communion partners is appropriate.

## **2. An independent adjudicatory body.**

Could there be some kind of neutral adjudicatory body or deployed network of individuals with conflict-resolution skills who could be called upon to assist with disputes early on? Often, by the time a matter has reached a formal Consultation panel, the rifts are deep enough that reconciliation is not possible and the logical next step is, for example, resignation of the affected rostered leader. Perhaps having a resource of individuals trained in conflict resolution accessible earlier in the process could lead to reconciliation before the situation is too far gone.

If other full-communion partners were willing to participate, such dispute resolution specialists could be drawn from several denominations, giving them more credibility as a neutral party seeking mutually agreeable resolution. If this kind of structure were adopted, perhaps it makes more sense for the ombudsperson to function as in option (a) above, serving as the filter to help determine which concerns are significant enough to warrant access to the dispute resolution body. We believe there could be enough appetite for and benefit to a system that collaborates across denominations that it is appropriate for the Church Council to direct the churchwide organization to explore such possibilities.

## **3. Preventive Training.**

In what ways can the denomination provide standardized trainings for congregation, synod, and Church Council leaders? The CRLC recommends training to make Consultation Committees more properly selected for the gifts needed for the role and more trained and effective in dispute resolution.

## **4. Change in Terms.**

When is it appropriate to use the language of discipline and when might “softer” language concerning accountability and reconciliation be more beneficial? Speaking and thinking more in terms of “conflict resolution” may be beneficial to shift the mindset of this church toward the values of reconciliation and restoration on which our systems are based.

## Recommendation 3: Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose

*(Related to Observations 3, 3.1, 3.1.1., 5, 6,8.1)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) establish the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose to operate with the scope of work outlined below.

**Status:** This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

**Rationale:** In 2022, the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) was tasked with reevaluating the purpose statements of the three expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—with a focus on our commitment to dismantling racism. The complexity of this task has revealed that additional expertise and time are necessary to thoroughly address these critical issues.

### Scope of Work:

The primary charge of the TFIP will be to:

#### 1. Clarify Purpose Statements.

- Assess the adequacy and clarity of the purpose statements in the ELCA Constitution, the Constitution for Synods, and the Model Constitution for Congregations, building on the foundational work of the CRLC.
- Address the role and function of synods in relation to congregations and the churchwide organization, clarifying governance structures to ensure they support this church's mission.

#### 2. Analyze Structural Interdependence:

- Assess how current governance structures support or hinder the fulfillment of this church's mission.
- Explore opportunities to improve engagement, transparency, and effectiveness in governance.

#### 3. Promote Justice and Equity:

- Investigate how governance structures might perpetuate systemic inequalities and recommend changes to promote inclusion and equity.
- Define and codify the core values of this church in its governance documents to ensure they are upheld across all expressions of this church.

### Deliverables:

In the course of its work, the task force will present a report to the Church Council with its findings, including but not limited to:

- Recommendations, if appropriate, for constitutional revisions related to purpose statements.
- A comprehensive analysis of the current governance structures, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
- A framework of guiding principles for governance that aligns with this church's mission and values.



- Recommendations based on their findings, related to structural adjustments, or alternative governance structures.
- A framework for a strategic implementation plan related to any proposed changes, possibly across multiple Churchwide Assembly cycles.

### **Membership and Composition:**

The TFIP should consist of no more than twelve members, including at least five from the CRLC to maintain continuity. The task force should also incorporate new members, especially from historically underrepresented groups within the ELCA, to bring diverse perspectives to the table. Additionally, membership should include representation from related institutions and other ministries and individuals with expertise in church governance, history, and constitutional law.

### **Resources:**

The TFIP will have access to all research, work product and findings of the CRLC. Specifically, we call the task force's attention to *Appendix Three: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod Purpose and Structure* for consideration when undertaking its work.

## Recommendation 4: Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTF)

*(Related to Observations 1.3, 1.4)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the ELCA Church Council take action, or recommend that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly take action, to create a Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTF) as described below.

*Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025.*

**Rationale:** In an effort to most effectively and efficiently access, utilize, and manage financial resources across all entities within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a holistic perspective is needed. The current financial management and funding models for the ELCA denomination are disparate at best and have not evolved with societal shifts in financial management and funding. The current system is built in silos at different organizational levels and lacks coherence. There are four areas of focus that need to be addressed: revenues, expenditures, asset management, and overall financial management.

The flow of revenues involves any method of accessing funds to support both ongoing mission needs as well as one-time fundraising activities. These needs occur within every single ELCA entity, from the local congregation, through the synod, to the churchwide organization, and in the related institutions, organizations, and ministries (RIOMs). Much of the denominational funding still occurs through the collection plate. Stewardship materials and fundraising tools and techniques should continue to be provided, and a repository of best practices made available to support such revenues. However, methods of donation and donor reasoning have significantly evolved since the creation of the ELCA. The trend over the last few decades has been towards donors desiring more visibility of, if not control of, the use of donations. There are certainly stewardship resources available, but how well is this coordinated? There is some lament that the ELCA has an older demographic profile, but the silver lining is there are per capita more funds potentially available for donation. For the synods and churchwide organization, significant amounts of their revenues emanate from the congregations. The model for how these funds flow is outdated. A holistic view of all potential revenues should be taken to both maximize revenues and stabilize funding streams for predictability and sustainability.

Expenditures across all entities within the ELCA should always be tied to the purpose of the entity as budgeted within the context of a strategic plan. It is a core function of every governing body to ensure the development and implementation of a strategic plan. This plan is needed to ensure expenditures are allocated according to the organization's priorities. The tie between expenditures and strategic plans needs to be visible and shared. For example, the priority may be to address underfunded pastoral leadership, which especially affects non-white, non-male rostered ministers. Pastoral compensation is likely the major expenditure for most congregations. Just as with revenues, there need to be modern resources and best practices information made available to all entities related to expenditures. In addition, due to the multi-entity nature of the ELCA, priorities are wide-ranging and sometimes competing between entities. There needs to be a forum where discussion can occur to surface such issues and allow the various entities to better understand the actions of others and to identify potential areas of synergy.

Asset management across congregations, synods, other entities, separately incorporated ministries (SIMs), and the churchwide organization are not well coordinated. At the local level there are many asset pools that could benefit from being included in a larger asset pool. Decreased expenses, better risk management, and access to professional investment services are some of the benefits. At the national level, there are silos of assets managed by disparate entities and governed by typically non-communicating boards. The same types of benefits that exist at the local level can also be found at the national level with better coordination.

Financial management within the ELCA takes many forms. For members, the ELCA Federal Credit Union may be a vehicle of financial management. For most smaller congregations, financial management is an ongoing challenge. It is incumbent on the ELCA to provide financial management tools and best practices that offer support to such entities. The landscape of options has dramatically increased in the past two decades. For example, the ELCA could identify or even offer an outsourced financial management service for such entities. In the synod and churchwide organization expressions, financial management is fractured. Opportunities should be examined for how the sharing or pooling of systems and expertise or even commonality of charts of accounts might occur. Another aspect of financial management is financial reporting. It would also be valuable to see a summary level of financial reporting at the denominational level. It is always important to offer transparency into the finances of every entity. The need for financial audits exists for every entity. Again, sharing experiences and audit practices would be valuable.

To meet these coordination needs and opportunities, an ELCA Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTF) should be created under the auspices of the Churchwide Assembly. Membership of the FCTF should reflect the variety of entities in the ELCA. Therefore, each of the following entities would appoint one member: Portico Benefit Services, the Mission Investment Fund, and the ELCA Foundation. The ELCA treasurer would be an *ex officio* member. In addition, the ELCA Church Council would appoint one of its own members and two members of the ELCA who are financial experts or investment professionals. The Conference of Bishops would appoint a synod treasurer, the ELCA Larger Church Conference would appoint one member, and a small congregation treasurer would be appointed. Notwithstanding any other provision of the *ELCA Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions*, financial expertise shall be the determining factor in all of these appointments. Financially-related separately incorporated ministries of the ELCA and the Office of the Treasurer shall provide staff support and funding for the FCTF.

The purpose of the FCTF is to provide a forum for all entities within the ELCA to communicate and share best practices, resources, and tools related to financial management. In addition, the FCTF should develop a comprehensive financial strategic plan for the denomination. This plan would acknowledge the wide range of entities that form the ELCA and their roles in financial management. The plan should provide recommendations that clarify and improve revenue streams, target expenditures, coordinate asset management and in general, improve financial management across the ELCA.

Specifically, the FCTF shall develop the denominational plan by October 2026. In addition, the FCTF shall provide a recommendation by March 2027 of how to coordinate the governance and/or operations of the financially-related separately incorporated ministries and any other financially-related national level entity in an effort to reduce costs, share administration, and increase their value to the members and entities of the ELCA, while still ensuring appropriate liability protections. The FCTF shall report its activities to the ELCA Church Council and provide a report with findings and recommendations to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.

No changes are recommended to the *ELCA Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* at this time.

## Recommendation 5: Creation of a Task Force to Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit and Orientation Program

*(Related to Observations 1.6, 1.7, 1.11, 5, 6)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:

The Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA to establish a task force dedicated to developing a comprehensive congregational management and governance toolkit. This toolkit will integrate and enhance existing resources while tailoring additional tools to meet the diverse needs of all ELCA congregations. Additionally, the task force will design an orientation program framework for new congregation council members that synods can voluntarily implement to ensure these leaders are well-prepared for their roles.

*Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

**Rationale:** In the ELCA, our congregations face varied challenges and opportunities necessitating a unified yet adaptable resource for effective management and governance. Recognizing that there are some existing resources that align with the goal of this proposal, this toolkit and orientation program should standardize and consolidate those resources, identify existing best practices and result in the development of new resources while accommodating the unique contexts of our congregations, ranging from small, rural parishes to large, urban communities.

### Task Force Composition:

The task force will consist of representatives from:

- Small congregations
- Large congregations
- Synods
- Churchwide organization
- Conference of Bishops
- Synod vice presidents

This diverse group will ensure that the toolkit and orientation program incorporate a broad range of perspectives and meet the varied needs of our congregations. This group should be comprised in alignment with the stated representational goals of this church.

### Objectives:

#### 1. Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit that includes:

- Guidelines on congregation council roles and responsibilities.
- Financial management and reporting best practices.
- Strategic planning and mission alignment resources.
- Conflict resolution and community engagement tools.
- Compliance guidelines for legal and ethical standards.
- Property management and utilization guidelines.

- Customizable templates and checklists for church operations.
- Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives to ensure they permeate all aspects of congregation life.

The task force should make an effort to review existing resources and incorporate current or revised versions of those resources in this toolkit.

## **2. Create an Orientation Program Framework for New Congregation Council Members that:**

- Provides an overview of ELCA structures and governance.
- Offers training on the legal and fiduciary duties of council members.
- Includes leadership and spiritual development modules.
- Teaches skills for effective communication and conflict resolution.
- Uses case studies for practical learning and application.
- Educates congregational leaders about existing resources for continuous support and development.
- Provides guidance to participants on local congregation lay leadership succession planning for congregation council and other leadership roles, with an aspiration toward our representational goals as a denomination.
- Promotes collaboration across ELCA churchwide expressions to foster a unified approach to church management.

The framework is designed by the task force, with the adaptation and execution owned by each synod, allowing for tailoring to meet local needs and contexts.

### **Implementation Timeline:**

- **Quarter 1:** Formation of the task force and initial scope and objective meetings
- **Quarter 2-4:** Research existing resources and development phase for the toolkit and orientation program
- **Quarter 4-6:** Pilot testing in selected synods
- **Quarter 7-8:** Evaluation and revisions based on feedback
- **Quarter 9:** Official rollout and distribution to all synods

### **Budget:**

A comprehensive budget will be allocated for task force meetings, resource development, pilot testing, and dissemination of the toolkit and orientation program.

### **Conclusion:**

This initiative aims to significantly enhance governance effectiveness across our denomination. By equipping new council members with essential tools and knowledge, and ensuring DEIA principles are embedded in all church activities, we can strengthen congregational leadership and foster healthier, more inclusive church communities.



## Recommendation 6: Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and Service

(Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 5)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, to complete the following:

1. **Establish Standards and Processes for Congregation Calls for Deacons, with Annual Reporting and Oversight:** Establish a policy to require synods to report regularly to the churchwide organization on their call processes for deacons. Creating a “repository” for this information would hopefully encourage consistency and help identify best practices.
2. **Define Baseline Compensation Guidelines**
  - **Minimum Compensation and Benefits:** Establish a policy to require synods to set compensation guidelines for deacons serving congregations. Deacons serving in non-congregational roles are varied and compensation guidelines are not easy to discern, but guidelines for deacons serving congregations should be easier to develop. These guidelines may be different from the guidelines for ministers of Word and Sacrament; however, careful attention should be given in their development, especially where the roster of deacons is primarily made up of people from marginalized groups.
  - **Housing Allowance Equivalence:** Church Council should direct the Office of the Secretary, or the appropriate churchwide unit, to undertake a review of tax law changes and determine whether changes to the description of the ministry of deacons are appropriate to enable them to take advantage of housing allowances allowed by the tax code. Churchwide organization legal staff should develop a “frequently asked questions” resource to explain the ELCA’s current legal understanding of this issue.
3. **Clarify Role and Sacramental Authority**
  - **Uniform Guidelines for Bishops and Synods:** Ask the Conference of Bishops to convene a table to develop guidelines to be followed across this church when interpreting deacons’ roles in worship leadership, including the ability of deacons to administer sacraments. Such guidelines would reduce interpretive disparities.
4. **Implementation Through Education and Training**
  - **Education for Congregation and Synod Leaders:** The Church Council should direct the appropriate churchwide unit or office to develop educational materials and resources for bishops, synod staff, and congregations about the theology and practice of Word and Service ministry.
  - **Transparency and Communication:** Encourage congregations and synods to educate congregations and their members about the role of deacons, emphasizing their contributions to this church’s mission and ministry.

**Status:** This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

## ***Rationale:***

**Introduction:** The Commission for a New Lutheran Church did not resolve all the issues surrounding the role of deacons in the new denomination. In recent years, the ELCA has taken significant steps to unify and clarify the roles of its rostered leaders. In 2016, a major structural transition consolidated several lay rosters into a single roster of ministers of Word and Service, commonly known as deacons. While this move was intended to streamline leadership structures and provide a clearer understanding of ministry roles, practical challenges remain. Deacons often experience inconsistencies in how they are called, compensated, and empowered for ministry. These discrepancies can arise from synodical autonomy, varying local interpretations, and the relative newness of the unified roster. The CRLC sees three key issues facing deacons—uneven treatment across synods, compensation inequities, and ambiguity regarding sacramental authority—and proposes possible ways to address them.

**Background:** The ELCA's governance structure is threefold: churchwide organization, synods, and congregations. The ELCA Constitution, alongside bylaws and continuing resolutions, establishes broad frameworks for rostered ministries. Synods, however, maintain significant latitude in implementing these frameworks, leading to variation in practice. The role of deacons, as detailed in the ELCA Constitution (notably in Chapter 7 and its related bylaws), is to equip the baptized for ministry in daily life, serve this church's mission in the world, and support congregations through teaching, advocacy, and service. Yet, the practical realization of this vision differs widely from one place to another, depending in large measure upon the theological understanding and interpretation of a synod bishop.

## **Key Issues:**

- 1. Inconsistent Treatment Across Synods:** Deacons encounter varying levels of recognition, authority, and support, depending on the synod in which they serve. Call processes lack uniformity, with some synods offering well-structured and transparent procedures while others rely on ad hoc practices. While this may also be true of call processes of ministers of Word and Sacrament, the impact on deacons (who are a minority in number and whose role is more widely misunderstood by congregations) is significant. As a result, deacons in certain synods may struggle to find opportunities for service or encounter a lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities.
- 2. Compensation and Benefits Inequities:** While ministers of Word and Sacrament often benefit from long-standing compensation guidelines and more standardized financial packages, deacons serving congregations frequently operate within less-established frameworks. This can lead to significant disparities in salary, housing allowances, and benefits. In some settings, deacons are undervalued financially despite their theological training and leadership responsibilities. Although some synods produce compensation guidelines for deacons, the absence of those guidelines for deacons serving in congregations results in a patchwork of standards.
- 3. Ambiguity in Sacramental Authority and Role Definition:** The constitution delineates the distinct ministries of Word and Service and Word and Sacrament, but the parameters for when and how deacons may administer sacraments are unclear in practice. Determining whether deacons may administer Holy Communion or Baptism in special circumstances often falls to the discretion of individual bishops. The inconsistency in the ability of deacons across the church to administer sacraments is said to be a theological issue on which bishops hold differing views. The resulting inconsistent interpretations can cause confusion and hinder the full integration of deacons' gifts into the life of this church. One practical outcome can be that some deacons find they are granted authority by a synod bishop to administer sacraments; but upon a change in bishop, find that they no longer can.

While there are many issues on which the church is not of one mind, this difference in views harms both the persons God has called to serve, as well as those who would otherwise benefit from their service. It should be noted that bishops and pastors varied in the use of the means of grace during COVID, and in current times—a theological view that the church has actually spoken about but apparently allows for varied implementation and does not enforce.

The mandate to the CRLC included reconsidering purpose and the organizational structures of the denomination and ensuring attention to commitments such as dismantling racism. One purpose of this church is to raise up leaders and deacons as part of that leadership structure. This recommendation aligns with the mandate by aiming to standardize and improve structures surrounding the roles of deacons, who often include individuals from, and those who serve, marginalized groups. By addressing the practical challenges deacons face—such as inconsistent call processes, varied compensation, and ambiguous roles—the ELCA can better live out its commitment to justice and equity. Moreover, these changes will strengthen this church’s mission by ensuring that all rostered ministers, regardless of their role, are supported and valued, enhancing this church’s ability to serve its diverse communities effectively.

The ELCA’s move to consolidate “lay rosters” into a single roster of ministers of Word and Service was a significant step toward recognizing the diversity and breadth of leadership in the church. Yet, the current constitutional framework does not fully ensure consistent treatment, adequate compensation, or a clear role definition for deacons. By taking additional steps outlined here, including establishing explicit guidelines for sacramental authority, the ELCA can strengthen its governance structures. Such clarifications will empower deacons to serve more effectively, foster greater equity and clarity, and affirm this church’s commitment to nurturing all forms of ministry for the sake of the gospel.

## Recommendation 7: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Changes to Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups

(Related to Observations 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 5)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:

Adopt new continuing resolutions 5.01.G24., 5.01.H24., 5.01.I24., and 5.01.J24., adopt new required synod bylaw †S6.04.02., and modify bylaw 12.41.11. as follows:

- 5.01.H24.** This church is dedicated to fostering a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that honors the diversity of God's creation so that as many people as possible have the opportunity to participate fully in the life and work of this church. None of the definitions in Chapter 5 shall be construed as limiting this church's commitment to inclusive participation in its life and work. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility shall have the following meaning:
- a. Diversity is a reality rooted in the variety found in the body of Christ: the wide range of communities and identities related to race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, age, background, ability, socio-economic status, culture, and perspective.
  - b. Equity means fair treatment of people according to their needs. The principle of equity takes into account that due to poverty, sexism, racism, and other factors individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do.
  - c. Inclusion means the proactive and meaningful engagement of diverse individuals in all aspects of church life, especially indecision-making processes and leadership roles, creating a church culture of welcome, respect, and value for unique perspectives and abilities.
  - d. Accessibility means aspiring to develop and maintain this church's physical infrastructure, information, communication technology, programs, and services to maximize participation in the life of this church.
- 5.01.I24.** This church commits to working to intentionally lift up voices from historically underrepresented groups in its assemblies, councils, committees, boards, and other organizational units. While specific identities are listed below, this church recognizes that humans have multiple aspects of their identities that are tied to systemic privilege and oppression that shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct ways. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, historically underrepresented groups shall be understood to include the following:
- a. Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English;
  - b. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual orientations;
  - c. Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income;
  - d. Persons living with disabilities;
  - e. Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens.

- 5.01.J24. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms above shall have the following meanings:
- a. **Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English** means African American, African Caribbean, African Descent, African National, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Latin(-o, -a, -é, -x), Hispanic, American Indian, Indigenous, and Alaska Native people, as well as multi- and bi-racial people.
  - b. **Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual orientations** means individuals who identify beyond the sex and gender binary, individuals whose gender identity may be fluid, and individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, or other sex, gender, and sexual identities that are more complex than sex, gender, and
  - c. **Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income** means individuals whose economic circumstances inhibit their ability to meet basic living needs according to their societal context and standards.
  - d. **Persons living with disabilities** means individuals who have physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder their full participation in church life.
  - e. **Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens** needs no additional clarifying definition.
- 5.01.K24. It is the goal of this church that at least 10 percent of the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, and churchwide boards and committees be members of historically underrepresented groups in addition to the required 10 percent representation of persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in 5.01.e. The Church Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.
- 12.41.11. In addition, each synod shall elect one additional voting member who is a youth or young adult at the time of the election and, one additional voting member who is a person of color or a person whose primary language is other than English, and one additional voting member who is a member of a historically underrepresented group. The Church Council may allocate up to 10 additional voting members [...]
- †S6.04.02. It is the goal of this synod that at least 10 percent of the voting members of the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, committees, and organizational units of this synod be members of historically underrepresented groups, in addition to the 10% representation of persons of color in †S6.04. The Synod Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.

**Status:** Continuing resolutions 5.01.G24, 5.01.H24, 5.01.I24, and 5.01.J24 (as amended) were adopted by the Church Council and are now part of the ELCA's governing documents. The proposed amendments to bylaw 12.41.11 and to required synod bylaw †S6.04.02 have been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, though the change to bylaw 12.41.11 has been included along with other recommended changes to that bylaw from the Office of the Secretary.



***Rationale:*** This set of changes is designed to implement many of the recommendations of the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility audit of our church's governing documents that was completed as a result of a memorial that came before the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. The audit recommended various changes to the governing documents, and members of the CRLC worked in conjunction with members of the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, which oversaw the work of the audit, to approve language to be recommended to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly to implement the concepts of some of the audit's recommendations, while using language more consistent with the ELCA's theology and social teachings.

The proposed changes to the governing documents have the effect of including definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the governing documents that can be used throughout the work of this church. In addition, they introduce the concept of "historically underrepresented groups," which are identified in 5.01.I24. and defined in 5.01.J24. The definition of "persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English" is largely the definition that previously existed as 5.01.C21., with some updates.

The definition of historically underrepresented groups is used in 5.01.K24. and †S6.04.02. to state a goal, but not a requirement, that in addition to the requirement that 10% of the composition of assemblies, Church Council, synod councils, and boards and committees be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, there is a goal that another 10% of such bodies will be from historically underrepresented groups. This language is modeled on the 10% goal for youth and young adult members. Further, the proposed change to 12.41.11. allows each synod that otherwise complies with the representational principles of 12.41.11. to bring one additional voting member from a historically underrepresented group to the Churchwide Assembly, in addition to the already permitted additional voting members who are persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English and youth and young adults.

## Recommendation 8: Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's Relationship with Other Organizations

*(Related to Observation 1.10)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:

Amend constitutional provisions 8.20. and 8.23. and bylaw 8.23.01. as follows:

- 8.20.        RELATIONSHIP WITH INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND AGENCIESMINISTRIES
- 8.23.        Institutions, Organizations, and AgenciesMinistries. This church shall seek to meet human needs through encouragement of its people to individual and corporate action, and through establishing, developing, recognizing, and supporting institutions, organizations, and agenciesministries that minister to people in their spiritual and temporal needs.
- 8.23.01.    ~~Social-ministry~~Related institutions, organizations, and ministries may affiliate with this church through criteria and policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit ~~and~~ through membership in Lutheran Services in America.

**Status:** *This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

**Rationale:** The changes to this provision are designed to emphasize the importance of the many and varied entities that work alongside this church in meeting human need, as well as to broaden the understanding of the many ways in which this work may be carried out. Only the revisions to provisions 8.20. and 8.23. originally came from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, and the recommended changes to bylaw 8.23.01. were added by the Office of the Secretary as the natural consequence to the proposed changes in 8.23.

## Recommendation 9: Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents

(Related to Observation 1.11)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends to the Church Council:

Adopt the following continuing resolution:

- 10.31.B25. Association of Synod Vice Presidents** *The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the vice presidents of the synods. The churchwide vice president shall be a member of the association with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the Association with voice but not vote.*
- a. *The association shall provide for orientation, continuing education, collaboration, and leadership development for synod vice presidents.*
  - b. *The association shall meet at least annually. In years in which churchwide assemblies are held, the association meeting may occur in conjunction with the assembly.*
  - c. *The association shall provide opportunities for worship, spiritual renewal, and leadership development for those elected to the office of vice president of a synod. To fulfill these responsibilities, the association shall:*
    1. *Be a forum in which goals, objectives, and strategies may be developed and shared concerning lay leadership for the synods;*
    2. *Offer programs for orientation and continuing education for vice presidents;*
    3. *Assist the vice presidents in their role as synod council chairs by being a resource for training and guidance in the governance of this church;*
    4. *Assist the vice presidents in their role as collaborative leaders with bishops in fostering the work of the synods; and*
    5. *Provide advice and counsel when requested by the Church Council or other church leaders.*
  - d. *The association may establish committees as its members may determine to assist in fulfillment of the Association's responsibilities. The Association shall elect a chair and vice chair, each of whom shall serve a term of three years.*
  - e. *Staff services for meetings of the association shall be provided by the Office of the Secretary. The executive for synod relations shall coordinate and support the operation of the association.*

**Status:** An earlier version of this recommendation was presented to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The Church Council declined to adopt it as presented, and members of the CRLC and the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee worked through potential revisions to the proposal. This revised proposal has been recommended to the Church Council for action at its April 3-6, 2025, meeting.

**Rationale:** In an effort to recognize, lift up and further develop the highest elected lay leaders in this church, a proposal to create an Association of Synod Vice Presidents is offered. The Association would allow for a more intentionally organized orientation, education and training of these leaders. The Association would elect its own chair and vice-chair to lead its efforts. The Association would meet at least annually.

There is no such formal gathering of the highest elected lay leaders in the church presently recognized in the governing documents. To the extent synod vice presidents gather (currently by Zoom meetings scheduled monthly), it is at their own initiative.

## Recommendation 10: Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of Misconduct

(Related to Observations 1.7, 6)

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:

Amend bylaw 20.22.04. and amend Rule D2 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings as follows:

**20.22.04.** When there are indications that a cause for discipline may exist, the bishop of the synod may request, and the general counsel of this church shall make available, resources for investigation into the facts surrounding the alleged misconduct that gives rise to the potential cause for discipline. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized professional services. The cost of such investigation shall generally be borne one-half by the churchwide organization and one-half by the synod of the bishop requesting such investigation. Procedural details relating to such investigations shall be set forth in the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings. ~~and b~~ Before charges are made, efforts shall be made by the bishop of the synod to resolve the situation by consultation; for assistance in these efforts, the bishop may utilize either a consultation panel or an advisory panel as herein provided:

**Rule D2** In addition to, or in lieu of, a consultation panel or an advisory panel, a synod bishop may utilize the assistance of one of the synod bishop's assistants or other staff persons or any other individual appointed by the synod bishop for this purpose. In addition, a bishop may request investigatory assistance under 20.22.04., which may include, but is not limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized professional services.

- a. Any contractors providing services in such investigations will work under the supervision of the general counsel.
- b. The result of such investigation shall be the preparation of a written report delivered to the general counsel and to the bishop requesting the investigation.

**Status:** *The recommended change to 20.22.04 has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. If the recommended change to 20.22.04. is adopted, the Committee on Appeals will be asked to recommend a change to Rule D2 in accordance with this recommendation to present to the Church Council for approval.*

**Rationale:** These amendments provide for equal cost-sharing between the churchwide organization and the synods of professional expenses related to misconduct investigations.



## Recommendation 11: Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing Documents

*(Related to Observations 1.8, 1.9, 7.1)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:

Amend provision 22.11., concerning amendments to the ELCA Constitution, and 22.21. concerning amendments to the ELCA bylaws as follows:

- 22.11. This constitution may be amended only through either of the following procedures:
- a. The Church Council may propose an amendment, with an official notice to be sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. The adoption of such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the members of the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting.
  - b. An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more members of the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed amendment shall be referred to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation, following which it shall come before the assembly. If such an amendment is approved by a two-thirds vote of members present and voting, such an amendment shall become effective only if adopted ratified unchanged by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at the next regular Churchwide Assembly or a subsequent two-thirds vote of the members of the Church Council taken within 12 months of adoption by the Churchwide Assembly.
- 22.21. Bylaws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or amended at any regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly when presented in writing by the Church Council or by at least 15 members of the assembly. An amendment proposed by at least 15 members of the assembly shall immediately be submitted to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation. An amendment may not be placed before the assembly for action sooner than the day following its presentation to the assembly unless it has been presented in writing by the Church Council and sent with an official notice to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting shall be necessary for adoption.

***Status:** This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

***Rationale:*** Currently, constitutional provisions and bylaws may only be changed by the Church Council providing notice of proposed changes at least six months before the Churchwide Assembly and adoption by the assembly or by action on the floor of the assembly that is ratified by the next regular Churchwide Assembly. The change to 22.11.a. would allow for the possibility of a special assembly amending the Constitution in a single step, following recommendation of amendments proposed by the Church Council.

The changes to 22.11.b. would allow amendments introduced on the floor of the Churchwide Assembly to be ratified unchanged by a 2/3 vote of the Church Council within 12 months of the assembly, instead of waiting three years for the next Churchwide Assembly. The change to 22.21. would allow for bylaw amendments by a special assembly, not only by a regular assembly.

## Recommendation 12: Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution Mandatory

*(Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9)*

The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:

To make the following provisions that are currently required in the Constitution for Synods now non-required:

- †S9.02. concerning requirement of majority vote in Synod Assembly elections other than for bishop
- †S10.01. concerning composition of the Synod Council
- †S11.04. concerning the synod's Mutual Ministry Committee
- †S15.01. concerning the synod's fiscal year
- †S15.12. concerning the synod's budget

**Status:** *The Church Council has recommended that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly make †S9.02. and †S11.04. non-required provisions. The Church Council has declined to recommend the remainder of this recommendation.*

**Rationale:** Certain provisions in the Constitution for Synods are marked with a “dagger” symbol indicating that they are required provisions that automatically are to be incorporated into each synod's constitution without change by the synod secretary when they are adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. Such provisions leave no room for a synod to organize its business in any varied way. A subcommittee of members of the CRLC involved in synod leadership reviewed the required provisions and the CRLC adopted their recommendations that certain provisions be left in the *Constitution for Synods* but no longer be marked as required provisions.

## Recommendation 13: ELCA Name Change

*(Specifically referred to the CRLC by the Church Council in CC22.11.34.cc)*

**The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) declined to make a recommendation about whether the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) should be changed.**

***Status:*** This decision was transmitted to the November 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

***Rationale:*** In 2022, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a resolution leading to the creation of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) and giving the CRLC its mandate. The ELCA Church Council later asked the CRLC to consider an additional question, whether the name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” should continue to be utilized for this church body.

The CRLC engaged in significant discussion of a possible change of name. As the members of the CRLC considered this issue, the conversations highlighted a range of opinions about the significance of the term “evangelical” and the larger implications that any new name might create.

In the end, no consensus emerged among members of the CRLC as to whether the name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” should be changed.

Some participants maintain that the term “evangelical” has shifted significantly in meaning in the present day and may hinder the proclamation of the gospel, due to its associations with more conservative forms of Christianity and even, in some quarters, with Christian nationalism. Eliminating the term “evangelical,” they believe, would avoid these initial negative perceptions and indicate a more welcoming stance.

Others, however, support maintaining the term “evangelical” because of its deep scriptural and theological roots (the term comes from the Greek word for “gospel” and literally means, “good news”), and argue that to eliminate the term “evangelical” would actually diminish this church’s core identity and mission. The term also connects the ELCA with the global Lutheran communion: The majority of Lutheran World Federation member churches have “Evangelical” in their names.

While the CRLC did not come to consensus on this matter, it makes the following observations:

- The CRLC believes that this question reflects larger issues of identity. Changing the name alone will not address deeper issues within the denomination and may in fact lead to unintended consequences for various groups.
- If a change of name is to be considered, the commission recommends engaging a broader range of voices in deeper conversation about this church’s core identity before making final recommendations.
- If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA is kept, the CRLC would recommend an effort to lean more intentionally into our understanding and definition of what it means to be “evangelical,” and that new branding might assist with this emphasis.
- If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA were to be changed, a possible approach might be to consider retaining the legal name of the ELCA, while creating a new name under which it would be known (“Doing Business As” (DBA)).

Overall, the CRLC acknowledges the complexities surrounding the term “evangelical” and its implications for this church’s identity, emphasizing that thoughtful dialogue and understanding are essential before any decisions are made on this significant matter.

## Issues for Continued Reflection

The section entitled “Issues for Continued Reflection” identifies a wide array of matters that the CRLC heard or became aware of in the course of its work. At a macro level, it is important to remember that the CRLC was *not* tasked with addressing every problem or issue raised, no matter the asserted merit. Its mandate, as the commission defined it, was significant, but not boundless. The committee structure it established enabled robust discussions and ideas to surface in smaller groups. Defining the presenting issues was a key part of each committee’s work. Committees lifted up various proposals to the full CRLC, not all of which were deemed ready for recommendation. Still, the CRLC wishes to preserve some of these concepts in an effort to provide possibilities for future reflection in the unending work of meaningful reformation, as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

### Dismantling Racism

As we have completed our work, the commission has taken a variety of actions, as outlined in this report, in an effort to respond to God’s call for radical inclusion. Even with these recommendations, the commission recognizes that the work of full inclusion of all of God’s beloved children in the life and leadership in the church is never truly finished. This work is not just personal; it is also institutional and systemic. One example of this is the misuse of the categories of law and gospel, whereby the gospel message of grace and forgiveness is twisted to perpetuate systems of oppression and bondage.

As a church rooted in diverse origins, we call ourselves to remember the story of Pentecost. In Acts, people speaking many languages were gathered. The Holy Spirit appears and enables them to hear each other in their own languages about the great deeds God has done. Filled with the Spirit (and not wine!), and eventually listening to Peter, they were baptized and began the fellowship that we today would call “church.” The miracle of Pentecost calls us forth and inspires our diverse selves to live in community. Today, we continue to remind each other that God intends our diversity to be a celebrated part of our lives together as children of God.

The commission knows that the work of dismantling racism continues in various ways in the church. The ELCA’s ethnic associations, its Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities, Racial Justice unit, and other task forces and committees strive to identify, name, and correct racist elements of this church, but they alone are not responsible for the act of justice, equity and reconciliation. It is valuable and often life-saving work. But that work is often under-resourced, siloed, and is invisible to the wider church. Synods vary widely in their resourcing and efforts to make progress in meeting the diversity goals this church has established for itself.

The work to dismantle racism is ongoing work. Overt and subtle forms of racism must be identified, named and challenged in our congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization expression.

While there are institutional and systemic realities within this church that allow for and perpetuate racism, this commission also recognizes the need for transformation within and among the people in our pews. To continue to become an anti-racist church, this church must pay attention to both systemic racism and the necessary Spirit-empowered and inspired transformation of individual hearts and minds. It will take a commitment of all members of the ELCA to learn, repent, and grow in living into the fullness of God’s wildly diverse community. Like the persons gathered at Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit inspire our efforts to really see, hear and value each other as God’s beloved children.

## Governance Matters

The Governance Committee discussed an array of structural and governance related challenges and possible options for change.

### Governing Boards/Administration

The Governance Committee noted that governing boards are generally weak in all three expressions, due in part to the lack of experience, training, and understanding of some lay people, and the inherent imbalance of power between laypersons and rostered ministers. Governing boards in this church mix their roles as “boards of directors” vs. “interim legislative authority,” sometimes resulting in confusion and inconsistency. The infrequency of meetings, particularly in the synod and churchwide organization expressions, often caused by financial and logistical concerns, limits a council’s ability to govern as effectively as other non-profit boards do. These councils are very dependent on staff, which makes it hard to hold staff accountable.

The idea of separating the “board of directors” function from the legislative/policy authority was explored. Such a separation allows for a more nimble governance structure. In the churchwide organization expression, a very large Church Council which only meets twice a year makes it very dependent on staff and often blurs the line between interim legislative and business functions. While an Executive Committee meets at least monthly, communication gaps were identified as a particular shortcoming in allowing the Church Council to be most effective.

A proposal to revise the Church Council was discussed by the committee, and the CRLC sent this concept to the Conference of Bishops (COB) and the Church Council as part of the consultation process. In summary, it would have streamlined the council so it could focus on its “interim legislative authority” and would have established a more robust Executive Committee. The Executive Committee would function more like the “board of directors” of a non-profit. Council members would serve 6-year terms, with eligibility to serve two terms. A lay “Church Council chair” would be elected by the Churchwide Assembly (akin to the current vice president). The proposal did not draw discussion at either the COB or the Church Council, largely, it seems, due to at least one other proposal forwarded to them. Still, because it would take time to transition any change to the council structure, further reflection on clarifying its scope of responsibilities and optimizing its ability to fulfill them effectively is worthy of further reflection.

At the same time, the CRLC forwarded a proposed change to the executive structure of the churchwide office. At the executive level, the Governance Committee/CRLC suggested clarifying the scope of the role of the presiding bishop. In brief summary, it would center the ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and theological leadership of the denomination in the role of the presiding bishop. The presiding bishop would still be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. A chief executive officer (CEO) position would be created and hired by and be accountable to the Church Council. This would be in lieu of and different from the current executive for administration position, which reports to the presiding bishop. Persons to fill the offices of secretary and treasurer would be recommended by the CEO to the Church Council, which would select those offices. Duties and committee assignments would be allocated between the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the CEO. (The treasurer is already selected by the council; the secretary presently is elected by the Churchwide Assembly).

The proposal to revise the executive structure received questions and much criticism from current officers, the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council. Without responding to the questions or making revisions to the proposal, the Governance Committee acknowledged that this restructuring (which would not have altered the process for election of officers by the 2025 Assembly) would be a significant change and a very heavy lift. And while the goal of finding a more streamlined, responsive, and effective governance structure remains, the Governance Committee recommended to the CRLC that it take up other governance matters, and not pursue the matter further at this juncture. The CRLC considers it a matter for further reflection.



## **Rostered Ministries Matters, including Pay Inequity**

Broadly speaking, how this church employs and compensates rostered ministers surfaced during listening sessions and affects the governance structure of the denomination. The CRLC is aware of pay inequity in and between worshipping communities, especially as it affects persons of color, differing abilities, different genders and sexual orientations, and mission developers. Paying rostered ministers by congregations may also foster a concern that a rostered leader is beholden to the largest checkbook (e.g., “preaching the Beatitudes or lifting up systemic racism may cost me my job.”)

All solutions are not structural. Some may require policy changes. In addition, there is work being done elsewhere in the church on parts of this issue (e.g., the Quality of Call Initiative and the work around matters relating to First Call). We did not seek to influence or impede that work and commend efforts to tackle these matters in meaningful ways while engaging the persons most affected.

In a “big-picture” sense, the Governance Committee discussed a new model of having rostered leaders employed by a third-party entity that would handle all payroll, benefits, and HR matters for persons called to a congregation. It also discussed setting up a fund, modeled after the Fund for Leaders, that would help deal with inequities. Settings such as rural congregations, those in economically-challenged areas, as well as strategic outreach ministries and non-congregational faith formation communities that are vibrant but may never be “self-sustaining,” could benefit from this fund. These and other ideas all have pros and cons, and the legal questions that arise would need to be thought through. This issue is also tied to the funding and financial issues identified by the CRLC. While we believe this to be a governance structure issue in part, further comprehensive work on these matters seems called for at this point. The work of the recommended Financial Coordinating Task Force, as well as that of the Ongoing Work to Understand Synod Purpose and Structure may lay some of the necessary groundwork. Continued reflection on the impact of pay disparity on the health and vibrancy of leaders and congregations is suggested.

## **Related Institutions, Organizations, and Ministries (RIOMs):**

The commission sought to lift up the role of institutions, organizations, and ministries that are, or seek to be, related to the ELCA. Work related to this is included in recommendations that were recommended by the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting for adoption at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

In addition, the commission believes that there is work to be done along these lines:

- Institutions, organizations, and ministries may relate to this church through criteria and policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit. Depending on the circumstances, such relationships may with the congregations, synods, or churchwide organization expression.
- The appropriate churchwide unit should maintain a directory of the related institutions, organizations, and ministries.
- This church recognizes the importance of “faith formation ministries,” such as campus and outdoor ministries, for the vitality, resilience, and future of this church. This church should be strategic in supporting the staffing and budget of such ministries, as well as in providing for accountability for those rostered ministers and others who are called for leadership in such ministries.

## Conclusion

Empowered by the hopeful message of the resurrection, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is called to recognize its imperfections and actively engage in both individual and collective renewal.

This report, while highlighting areas for potential renewal, also honors the vital, life-affirming work undertaken by communities across the ELCA. These communities exemplify the Spirit's transformative power through worship, service, advocacy, and discipleship, illustrating that renewal encompasses more than structural change—it is about continuous transformation that embraces inclusivity and collaboration.

The CRLC's recommendations are designed to steer the ELCA toward a future that is more inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused. By adopting these changes, we enable all three expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—to better serve our diverse membership and align more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This ongoing process not only makes our church more adaptable and accountable but also equips us to meet contemporary challenges while remaining firm in our theological convictions.

As we consider these recommendations, we recognize the range of responses they may elicit. Some in our community will see these recommendations as a pathway to a stronger, more faithful church, while others might view them as unsettling or insufficient. We embrace this diversity of perspectives and commit to a process of faithful deliberation, rooted in prayer, humility, and open dialogue.

Inspired by Psalm 51:10-12, *“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,”* we seek a renewal of heart and spirit, ensuring that our actions reflect our commitment to God's mission. We urge this church to integrate proactive reflection and renewal into the fabric of our daily lives, understanding that the work of renewal is not a once-in-a-generation task but an ideal we strive for each day. This work is not finished and should not end with this commission. This ongoing commitment to reformation and renewal is a testament to our role in God's world, emphasizing that our efforts extend beyond the church to touch the broader expanse of God's kingdom on earth.

**“Create in me a pure heart,  
O God, and renew a  
steadfast spirit within me.”**

—Psalm 51:10-12

In all we do, we trust in God's continual guidance and inspiration, leading us toward ever more faithful and effective expressions of our shared mission.

## Acknowledgments

The CRLC wishes to acknowledge the many people and entities that supported, contributed to, and prayed for us during our sojourn. We are thankful for the ten synods that submitted memorials, catalyzed by the work of Bishop Jim Dunlop, to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly and to that body for their understanding and action in creating the CRLC. We thank the ELCA Church Council, especially the Executive Committee, for establishing the CRLC, a difficult task since there was no template. We thank the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council for their counsel as they provided guidance and feedback.

The CRLC was privileged to have Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Secretary Sue Rothmeyer accompany us as resource persons on our journey. Other resource persons included: Lori Fedyk, ELCA treasurer; Kevin Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee of the ELCA Church Council; Judith Roberts, ELCA senior director for Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion; Jennifer DeLeon, ELCA director for Racial Justice; the Rev. Nicolette Peñaranda, program director for ELCA African Descent Ministries; Tom Cunniff, ELCA general counsel; and Presiding Bishop *pro tempore* Michael Burk. The Rev. Alejandro Mejía provided a valuable link as the representative of the ELCA ethnic associations. National Bishop Susan Johnson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, provided spiritual grounding and facilitation for the early meetings of the commission.

We also extend gratitude to our Office of the Secretary staff support, including the Rev. Keith Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration; Dan Eppley, manager for official documentation; our technical support, Joseph Schmidt, administrative services coordinator; and our hospitality team for CRLC meetings, Dana Adams, director, meeting management; Christina Ptack, meetings and events manager; and Rosa Pérez, meeting planner.

A special thank you goes to Jodi Slattery, ELCA executive for governance and the primary support person for the CRLC, for her gentle guidance and tireless support.

The CRLC is indebted to every member of the commission for their volunteer time and effort. Each one of them loves the ELCA. Finally, we acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit who moved through and among the commission, thanks be to God!

## A Prayer for the Church's Renewal

God of resurrection and renewal,

You have called Your Church into being, not for its own sake, but to bear witness to Your creative, redeeming, and sanctifying work in the world. We give thanks for the faithfulness of those who have carried this mission before us, and we pray for the wisdom and courage to carry it forward with integrity and boldness.

*Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.*

Where we have clung to structures that no longer serve Your mission, give us the courage to reimagine. Where we have been slow to act, stir us to faithful urgency. Where voices have been silenced, open our ears to hear the full breadth of Your people's wisdom.

As we reflect on the findings and recommendations of this report, we acknowledge that there will be differing responses: affirmation, concern, hope, hesitation, and even opposition. In the midst of these varied perspectives, bind us together in the unity of Christ. Give us patience to listen deeply, humility to learn from one another, and faith to trust that You are working in and through this process.

*Do not cast us away from Your presence, but guide us with Your Holy Spirit.*

May Your Spirit lead us into the hard work of transformation, binding us together as one Church in the midst of change, disagreement, and discernment. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation, that we may embrace this renewal not as a burden but as a gift—an opportunity to more fully reflect Your justice, mercy, and love.

We give thanks for the congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries that are already engaged in life-giving and sustaining work to renew this church. Through their faithfulness in worship, service, and mission, we see the Spirit's movement and the power of Your grace at work. Strengthen them in their calling and inspire us to walk alongside them, that together we may be a church continually renewed by Your love.

*Send us forth with willing hearts, strengthened by Your grace and emboldened by Your call.*

We entrust the future of this church to You, knowing that You are already at work making all things new.

**In the name of Jesus Christ, our hope and our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.**

## Signature Page

Below is the Signature Page, which includes the names of the chairs followed by members who have given their full consent, listed alphabetically for clarity. For those providing partial consent, their names are listed alphabetically along with specific sections from which they have expressed dissent, as exemplified by “[Name] provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Section [X] of the report.” It is important to note that commission members who have dissented entirely from the report are not listed below.

**THE REV. CARLA CHRISTOPHER** (Co-Chair)  
Lower Susquehanna Synod [8D] – St. James  
Evangelical Lutheran Church

**LEON SCHWARTZ** (Co-Chair)  
Southeastern Iowa Synod [5D] – St. Paul Lutheran  
Church

**Alexandra Mack**  
New Jersey Synod [7A] – Holy Trinity Evangelical  
Lutheran Church

**Antoine Cummins**  
Pacifica Synod [2C] – Shepherd of the Valley  
Lutheran Church

**Anthony Ormsbee-Hale**  
Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod [4D] –  
Messiah Lutheran Church

**The Rev. Charlene Giuliani**  
Greater Milwaukee Synod [5J] – Incarnation  
Lutheran Church

**Cheryl Stuart**  
Florida-Bahamas Synod [9E] – St. Stephen  
Lutheran Church

**Deacon Dallas Shealy**  
South Carolina Synod [9C] – Summer Memorial  
Lutheran

**David Lenz**  
Northeastern Ohio Synod [6E] – Messiah Lutheran  
Church

**Deacon Don Corson, Ph.D.**  
Southwestern Washington Synod [1C] –  
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church

**The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman**  
Southeast Michigan Synod [6A] – Lord of Light  
Lutheran Church

**Evan Moilan Jr.**  
Southwestern Texas Synod [4E] – Good Shepherd  
Lutheran Church

**Felecia Boone**  
Minneapolis Area Synod [3G] – Calvary Evangelical  
Lutheran Church

**The Rev. Gail Hagerty**  
Western North Dakota Synod [3A] – Heart River  
Lutheran Church

**The Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Ph.D.**  
Northeastern Iowa Synod [5F] – St. John’s  
Lutheran Church

**Linda Timmons**  
Nebraska Synod [4A] – St. Thomas  
Lutheran Church

**Melody Stachour**  
Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod [8G] –  
St. Matthew’s

**Michael Chan, Ph.D.**  
Northwestern Minnesota Synod [3D] – Good  
Shepherd Lutheran Church

**Ralston Deffenbaugh**  
Rocky Mountain Synod [2E] – Shepherd of the  
Mountains Lutheran Church

**Roberto Lara-Aranda**  
Metropolitan New York Synod [7C] – Saint Peter’s  
Church, Manhattan



**Ryan Johnson**

Western Iowa Synod [5E] – Our Saviors  
Lutheran Church

**Ruth Ellen Howard**

Central States Synod [4B] – St. Mark Hope and  
Peace Lutheran Church

**Sarah Morris**

Grand Canyon Synod [2D] – Our Savior's  
Lutheran Church

**The Rev. Sean Avery**

Alaska Synod [1A] – Joy Lutheran Church

**Stacy Kitahata**

Northwest Washington Synod [1B] – Immanuel  
Lutheran Church

**Susan McArver, Ph.D.**

South Carolina Synod [9C] – Incarnation Lutheran  
Church

**Thelma Jacks**

Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod [7F] – Saint Luke  
Evangelical Lutheran Church

**Thomas Madden**

Upstate New York Synod [7D] – Lutheran Church  
of the Incarnate Word

**The Rev. Tiffany Chaney**

Southeastern Synod [9D] – Gathered by Grace

**The Rev. Adam Sornchai**

Northwestern Ohio Synod [9D] – St. John Lutheran  
Church (Windfall)

Provided partial consent and expressed dissent  
from Recommendation 4 and Recommendation 11b  
of the report.

**Laurel Muhly-Alexander**

West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod [8H] –  
St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Provided partial consent and expressed dissent  
from Recommendations 1, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13;  
Governing Boards/Administration

**Bishop Regina Hassanally**

Southeastern Minnesota Synod [3I] – St. John's  
Lutheran

Provided partial consent and expressed dissent  
from Observations: 1.2 (in part), 1.3 (in part) 5 (in  
part) and Recommendation 4 (in part).

**Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.**

North/West Lower Michigan Synod [6B] –  
Immanuel Lutheran Church

Provided partial consent and expressed dissent  
from Observations

# Appendix

## CRLC Committees

### Origin and Formation of the CRLC

### Reference Material for Synod Evaluation

## Appendix 1: CRLC Committees

In late 2023, during the third meeting of the CRLC, seven committees were established. Four of these were tasked with addressing specific aspects of the Commission's mandate, while three served operational functions. Initially, all committees focused on the urgent goal of proposing any necessary constitutional amendments to the Church Council by November 2024, to ensure consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. After achieving this milestone, the CRLC's attention turned to preparing a final report, outlining key findings and recommendations for presentation to the 2025 assembly. This phase involved deep dives into critical issues such as the interdependence of this church's three expressions, the principle of subsidiarity, and the denomination's financial flow.

Following consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council—and aligning with the revised focus—late 2024 saw the formation of the Setting the Table Committee. Additionally, the Who Are We and Why and What Committees were merged to form the “3-4 Committee,” addressing overlapping areas concerning interdependence and purpose. This restructuring enabled more streamlined and focused discussions on these fundamental topics.

The committees operated autonomously, setting their schedules and contributing to full CRLC meetings by presenting updates, soliciting feedback, and submitting recommendations. Following are descriptions of each committee's purpose (taken from their charters) and a listing of the members of each committee.

### All Ears Committee

The All Ears Committee exists to collect data from a wide range of constituents, through both live listening sessions and electronic surveys, in order to inform the work of the CRLC. Additionally, this committee will serve as a liaison to other data collections groups in the ELCA, particularly Future Church. Finally, this committee will oversee data analysis and present a report of its findings to the CRLC.

#### *CRLC Membership:*

The Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnson Largen, *chair*  
Susan McArver, Ph.D.  
Ryan Johnson  
Michael Chan, Ph.D.  
Sarah Morris  
Roberto Lara Aranda

Thelma Jacks  
The Rev. Carla Christopher, *CRLC co-chair,*  
*ex officio*

*Resource person:*  
Sean Zimny, *contract researcher*

## Communications Committee

The Communications Committee exists to share the work of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, providing transparency for the commission's actions to the wider ELCA. The committee will inform the wider ELCA of the commission's purpose and the commission's progress towards our mandate goals.

### *CRLC Membership:*

Alexandra Mack, *chair*  
The Rev. Gail Hagerty  
Laurel Muhly-Alexander  
Ryan Johnson  
The Rev. Tiffany Chaney  
The Rev. Carla Christopher, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

*Resource person:*  
Candice Buchbinder, *ELCA public relations manager*

## Dismantling Racism Committee

The Dismantling Racism Committee will provide oversight of the entire work of the CRLC to ensure it is viewed through an intersectional lens of dismantling racism.

### *CRLC Membership:*

Melody Stachour, *chair*  
Antoine Cummins  
Stacy Kitahata  
Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.  
Alexandra Mack  
The Rev. Tiffany Chaney  
The Rev. Char Guiliani  
Felecia Boone  
The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman

Ruth Ellen Howard  
Linda Timmons  
The Rev. Carla Christopherson, *CRLC co-chair ex-officio*

*Resource persons:*  
Judith Roberts, *ELCA senior director, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*  
Jennifer De Leon, *ELCA director, Racial Justice*

## How We Are Governed Committee

The How We Are Governed Committee exists to reconsider the organizational structure and governance of the ELCA, being particularly attuned to dismantling racism, and to provide recommendations for the future governance of this church, including potential modifications to governing documents.

### *CRLC Membership:*

Cheryl Stuart, *chair*  
Sarah Morris  
The Rev. Sean Avery  
Bishop Regina Hassanally  
Anthony Ormsbee-Hale  
Deacon Dallas Shealy  
David Lenz  
Thomas Madden  
Melody Stachour  
Evan Moilan  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

*Resource persons:*  
Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*  
Tom Cunniff, *ELCA general counsel*  
Paul Irwin, *ELCA associate general counsel*  
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

## Planning and Report Committee

The Planning and Report Committee exists to ensure project management, coordinate resources, and provide for a final report to be presented to the Church Council in April 2025 in preparation for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

### *CRLC Membership:*

Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, *chair*  
Evan Moilan  
David Lenz  
Antoine Cummins  
Cheryl Stuart  
Thelma Jacks

Bishop Regina Hassanally  
Ralston Deffenbaugh  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

### *Resource person:*

Jodi Slattery, *ELCA executive for governance*

## Who Are We Committee

The Who Are We Committee exists to examine the historical definitions of this church, how it is lived out today, and how to visualize it for the future. Following the completion of that work, then the committee will consider the question of whether the denomination name “Evangelical Lutheran Church in America” will be changed.

### *CRLC Membership:*

The Rev. Adam Sornchai *chair*  
Laurel Muhly-Alexander  
Susan McArver, Ph.D.  
The Rev. Char Guiliani  
Thomas Madden  
Deacon Dallas Shealy  
Bishop Matthew Riegel  
Linda Timmons

Michael Chan, Ph.D.  
Ralston Deffenbaugh  
Don Corson  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

### *Resource person:*

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, *ELCA presiding bishop*

## Why and What Committee

The Why and What Committee exists to review the purpose statements for the three expressions of this church as set forth in their constitutions and to make recommendations concerning changes to those statements.

### *CRLC Membership:*

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, *chair*  
Felecia Boone  
Stacy Kitahata  
The Rev. Sean Avery  
The Rev. Gail Hagerty  
Ruth Ellen Howard  
Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.  
Bishop Matthew Riegel

The Rev. Adam Sornchai  
Deacon Don Corson  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

### *Resource persons:*

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*  
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

### 3-4 Committee

The 3-4 Committee combines the purposes of the Who Are We Committee and the Why and What Committee with a special focus on the interdependence between the three expressions of this church and their purpose statements.

#### *CRLC Membership:*

The Rev. Adam Sornchai, *chair*  
Laurel Muhly-Alexander  
Susan McArver, Ph.D.  
The Rev. Char Guiliani  
Thomas Madden  
Deacon Dallas Shealy  
Bishop Matthew Riegel  
Linda Timmons  
Michael Chan, Ph.D.  
Ralston Deffenbaugh  
Deacon Don Corson  
Roberto Lara Aranda  
The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman  
Felecia Boone

Stacy Kitahata  
The Rev. Sean Avery  
The Rev. Gail Hagerty  
Ruth Ellen Howard  
Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

#### *Resource persons:*

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, *ELCA presiding bishop*  
Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary*  
Kevin Anderson, *chair, Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, Church Council*

### Setting the Table Committee

The Setting the Table Committee's purpose is to draft a document listing the presenting issues facing this church that the CRLC identified through its listening efforts.

#### *CRLC Membership:*

Evan Moilan, *chair*  
Linda Timmons  
Ruth Ellen Howard  
Antoine Cummins  
Anthony Ormsbee-Hale

Ralston Deffenbaugh  
Don Corson  
Alexandra Mack  
Carla Christopherson, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*  
Leon Schwartz, *CRLC co-chair, ex-officio*

## Appendix 2: Origin and Formation of the Commission

The August 8-12, 2022, Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten synods concerning the topic “Restructure the Governance of the ELCA.”

The recitals to the memorials included common themes regarding an overall decline in membership and numbers of congregations since 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA's governing documents to meet new challenges, the desire for a “well-governed, connected, and sustainable church” and the need to dismantle racism and acknowledge the church's complicity in related trauma and harm.

In its pre-assembly report, the Memorials Committee recommended to the assembly the following action in response to these memorials:

*To refer the memorials to the Church Council for further deliberation and definition, specifically to determine the goals and boundaries of any proposed changes to the constitution, especially those related to Chapters 4 and 5; the need for a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church; and the need and scope of any proposed reconstituting convention, with recommendations to be presented to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

In its supplemental report of Tuesday August 9, 2022, the Memorials Committee proposed to amend the above resolution by substituting:

*To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.*

This recommendation was placed on the floor of the assembly on Tuesday afternoon. There was one amendment offered on the floor, to insert the word “possible” in front of “reconstituting convention” in the second-to-last line above, which was adopted by a 748-36 vote. The following resolution, as amended, was adopted by the assembly by a 738-72 vote:

*To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly.*

With the adoption of this resolution by the assembly, it was the Church Council's responsibility to determine the size and selection of the commission. The Church Council's first meeting after the 2022 Churchwide Assembly was its regularly scheduled fall meeting, which was held in-person at the churchwide offices on November 10-13, 2022. Prior to that meeting, the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and Executive Committee had considered possible timelines for the Council's work in establishing the commission and the work of the commission itself. It was noted by the Executive Committee that the assembly



action calling for the creation of the commission placed relatively few constraints on the commission's work. Accordingly, it would be appropriate to preserve significant freedom for the commission to pursue pertinent matters while also trying to avoid having the commission duplicate work already delegated to other parts of the churchwide organization by the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed timeline from the Executive Committee called for discussion of the parameters of creating the commission at the November 2022 Church Council meeting, with a nomination process early in 2023 and the Church Council formally appointing members to the commission around March or April 2023.

The Church Council's initial discussion of the creation of the commission was led by Mr. Kevin Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, on Saturday, November 12, 2022. The conversation focused on three questions:

1. What are council members' hopes for the commission?
2. What should be the size of the commission? and
3. What is the most appropriate way to select the members of the commission?

The Executive Committee took the feedback it received in that discussion to its 7:30 a.m. meeting on Sunday, November 13, to formulate the general sense of the council into a more specific recommendation for the size of the commission and the process for appointing members to it. The Executive Committee's recommendation, with minor stylistic amendments made by the Church Council, was adopted in the council's final plenary session of the meeting as follows:

***To establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consisting of no more than 35 voting members, directing the Executive Committee of the Church Council to initiate the process of forming the commission, fulfilling the responsibilities of the Church Council related to nominations in accordance with 14.41.01.c., and receiving nominations to fill positions allocated in the following manner:***

- *Three voting members from each region for a total of 27, two of whom will be selected from nominations received by each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee and one of whom will be received through an open nomination process;*
- *Each Synod Council or Synod Council Executive Committee will be invited to submit two potential nominees;*
- *Up to eight at-large voting members will be selected from either the synod nominations or the open nomination process;*

***To populate the commission according to the representational principles of this church, requiring that at least 25% of the commission be persons of color/primary language other than English; and striving for at least 20% of members to be youth/young adults;***

***To request the nomination process be completed prior to the April 2023 Church Council meeting, presenting a slate of nominees to the Church Council for action; and***

***To invite this church to join us in prayer as this church embarks on this process of renewal.***

In addition to the original scope of the Commission's mandate as provided in CA22.01.06, the Church Council at its November 2022 meeting also referred one specific item of business to the commission: a resolution from Southwest California Synod Council calling to discontinue the use of the word "evangelical" in the name of our denomination. The council adopted the following:

***To request the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consider the question of whether the denomination name, "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," should be changed; [and]***

***To anticipate a recommendation when the commission presents its findings for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly;***

The Office of the Secretary would take the responsibility for communicating information about the size and proposed composition of the commission and the nominating process to the synods. The Office of the Secretary also developed nomination forms and a nomination website to be available by early January 2023. The nominations were to be open until early March, with the Executive Committee of the Church Council operating as the nominating committee to review the nominees. The Church Council was scheduled for an in-person retreat, not a formal business meeting, in March 2023 in Bloomington, Minnesota. At the retreat, the Church Council would hear an update on the Executive Committee's work on reviewing nominations to the commission, and the council would vote to appoint members to the commission at its April 2023 business meeting to be held online.

As of the March 2023 Church Council retreat, the synod councils or synod executive committees had identified 108 nominees to the commission. Additionally, more than 380 nominees had been received through the open nomination process for a total of more than 400 unique nominations. Of the commission members, 18 (two from each region) were to be selected from the synod nominee pool, and an additional 9-17 could be selected from either the open nominee process or the synod nominee pool.

At the Church Council retreat, it was also reported that The Rev. Susan Johnson, national bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, would serve as a process facilitator/consultant for the commission and that the first, mandatory, in-person meeting of the commission would be held July 13-15, 2023, at the churchwide offices.

The Church Council's Executive Committee worked extensively on reviewing the nomination forms and interviewing potential nominees throughout March and April to develop a slate of candidates that matched the representational principles of this church[, the specific demographic parameters of CC22.11.37, and considering other items such as economic, theological, and political diversity of potential commission members.

The Church Council met in a business session online April 20, 2023. Significant actions of the April 2023 Church Council meeting to the work of the commission included the appointment of the members of the commission:

***To appoint the following members to the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church: Mr. Roberto Lara Aranda, the Rev. Sean Avery, Ms. Felecia Boone, Mr. Michael J. Chan, the Rev. Tiffany Chaney, Mr. Don Corson, Mr. Antoine Cummins, the Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, the Rev. Charlene Guiliani, the Rev. Gail Hagerty, Bishop Regina Hassanally (at-large), the Rev. Douglas A. Hill, Mx. Ruth Ellen Howard, Ms. Thelma Pruitt Jacks, Mr. Ryan Johnson (at-large), Ms. Stacy D. Kitahata, the Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Mr. David M. Lenz (at-large), Ms. Alexandra Mack, Mr. Thomas Madden (at-large), Ms. Susan Wilds McArver, Ms. Candy McCorkle, Mr. Evan Moilan (at-large), Ms. Sarah E. Morris, Ms. Laurel Muhly-Alexander, Mr. Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, Bishop Matthew Riegel (at-large), Mr. Leon Schwartz, Deacon Dallas Shealy (at-large), the Rev. Adam Sornchai, Ms. Melody Stachour, Ms. Cheryl Stuart, Ms. Loni Taylor (at-large), Ms. Linda M. Timmons, and the Rev. Carla Christopher Wilson; and***

***To authorize the Executive Committee to appoint members as necessary if a vacancy occurs.***

The council also established a budget for the commission's work:

***To approve the establishment of a Church Council designated fund, entitled Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, in the amount of \$300,000, to be used to cover the costs of meetings and other resources.]***

A few days after the announcement of the appointment of members to the CRLC, it was learned that the Rev. Douglas A. Hill would not be able to attend the first in-person meeting of the commission. He was accordingly unable to serve. The Executive Committee appointed Mr. Ralston Deffenbaugh in his place to fill the vacancy created.

At its May 2023 meeting, the Executive Committee voted to (a) invite members of the commission to indicate interest in serving as a co-chair of the commission through completion of a form that would allow members to describe their interest in serving as co-chair and to describe the gifts, skills, and abilities they felt they would bring to the position of co-chair and (b) authorize the Executive Committee to review the forms and appoint co-chairs for the commission. As of the June 2023 Executive Committee meeting, there were seven individuals who had completed the form indicating interest in serving as a co-chair. After review of those applications, the Executive Committee appointed the Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon Schwartz to serve as co-chairs.

While not formally members of the commission, the commission has benefitted greatly from the perspectives and insights of the following resource persons:

- The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop
- The Rev. Michael Burk, presiding bishop *pro tempore*
- Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, secretary
- Lori Fedyk, treasurer
- Judith Roberts, senior director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Jackie Baumhover, director for strategy in the Office of the Presiding Bishop
- Vance Blackfox, director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations
- Jennifer DeLeon, director for Racial Justice
- The Rev. Nicollette Peñaranda, program director for African Descent Ministries
- Desta Goehner, president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
- Shari Seifert, past president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
- Kevin Anderson, chair of the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee
- Thomas Cunniff, general counsel for the ELCA
- Paul Irwin, associate general counsel for the ELCA

One of the first tasks the commission undertook was to speak with key leaders from each of the synods that sent the memorials that led to the creation of the commission to see what had motivated their synods to bring the memorials forward. Major themes of these conversations included:

1. Structural concerns and the need to right-size the church;
2. Racial and economic disparities impacting the candidacy process and management of rostered leaders;
3. Overwhelming passage of the memorials at the synod level indicating a broad appetite for change in the church and a sense of urgency;
4. The need to commit to being an anti-racist institution and related examination of our governing documents.
5. Concern for accountability and results in the broader church and a desire for the Commission to recommend tangible action steps for consideration;
6. Collaboration with our full communion partners for theological education and mission work should be encouraged;

7. Maintain congregational independence to choose their calls;
8. A growing focus on concerns about transparency, accountability, and governance.

In October 2023, Loni Taylor resigned from the commission. She was one of two current members of the Church Council, and was the only American Indian/Indigenous member of the commission. At its December 2023 meeting, the commission approved two resolutions concerning membership of the commission. First, it requested that the Executive Committee of the Church Council appoint a member to the commission to replace her to maintain representation from an Indigenous perspective. In a separate resolution, the commission petitioned the Church Council to appoint two additional members, including one who would be Arab/Middle Eastern and one who would be of African National descent. Mr. David Lenz, the only remaining member of the commission who was also a member of the Church Council was invited to appear at the Executive Committee meeting on December 12, 2023, to discuss these two resolutions. The Executive Committee considered its response to these resolutions, including the need for additional Church Council representation on the commission due to the mandate to represent all expressions of the church, the need for diverse representation, and whether the commission's work was too far along to introduce new members.

Ultimately, in its January 17, 2024, meeting, the Executive Committee encouraged the commission "to seek, identify, and hear all of the voices and perspectives that are necessary and helpful for its work, but decline[d] to appoint a replacement member to the commission or to petition the Church Council to expand the membership.

## Appendix 3: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod Purpose and Structure

During the work of the commission, we had extensive discussions regarding the number, purpose, and structure of synods. We recognize the complexity of this issue and ongoing discussions regarding their purpose. This commission, acting on feedback from the Conference of Bishops, believes that work should be completed to determine any possible revisions to the purpose statements pertaining to synods and other expressions of this church. Based upon the work of the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose, when the Church Council initiates action relating to the synods, carefully considering the impact of its recommendations on minority and marginalized communities, ensuring intentional inclusion of diverse perspectives throughout its work, we commend the following for consideration:

### Objectives

1. **Optimize the Number of Synods:** Assess whether the current number of synods optimally supports efficient governance, effective ministry delivery, and resource utilization.
2. **Establish Routine Evaluation Protocols for Synods:** Create a standardized process to routinely assess the performance and effectiveness of synods that synods would adapt into a strategic plan.
3. **Improve Regional Cooperation:** Make recommendations to enhance collaboration among synods within regions to optimize resource sharing and ministry efforts.

### Evaluation Criteria

The expanded evaluation criteria will include an assessment of the number and structure of synods and regions, alongside other key areas including, but not limited to, the following:

1. **Optimize the Number of Synods**
  - **Membership Density:** Measure the number of congregations and members per synod to assess whether the synod is too large or small for effective governance.
  - **Geographic Efficiency:** Evaluate the geographic size of each synod to determine logistical efficiency in terms of travel times for synod events and bishop visitations.
  - **Cost Efficiency:** Analyze the cost implications of maintaining each synod, including administrative costs, to determine financial sustainability.
2. **Establish Routine Evaluation Protocols for Synods**
  - **Synod Engagement Metrics:** Develop metrics such as participation rates in synod assemblies, training sessions, and regional activities to gauge active engagement.
  - **Synod Health Metrics:** Create metrics that track financial health, leadership stability, mission outreach effectiveness, congregation vitality, commitment to anti-racism and social justice work.
  - **Feedback and Satisfaction Scores:** Regularly collect feedback from congregations on synod support, using standardized surveys to measure satisfaction and areas for improvement.
3. **Improve Regional Cooperation**
  - **Resource Sharing Effectiveness:** Track the number and quality of shared resources among synods (e.g., training programs, administrative tools, ministry materials) and the perceived effectiveness of these shared resources.
  - **Joint Initiatives and Programs:** Monitor the development and outcomes of regional initiatives to enhance cooperative ministry efforts, such as joint mission trips, shared clergy training, and combined outreach programs.

- **Communication Frequency and Quality:** Evaluate the frequency and quality of communications between synods, including regular updates, collaborative meetings, and shared strategic planning sessions.

#### 4. General Criteria for All Objectives

- **Change Readiness and Adaptability:** Measure how ready and able synods are to adapt to proposed changes or new structures, including staff and leadership training in change management.
- **Leadership Development:** Track the development programs for synod leadership to ensure there is a focus on growing skilled leaders who can manage change and foster collaboration.

### Evaluation Process

1. **Evaluation Cycle:** Implement a comprehensive evaluation framework with specific emphasis on structural efficiency alongside other performance metrics.
2. **Alignment with ELCA Values:** The evaluation process for the ELCA synods should be conducted in a manner that is deeply aligned with the church's core values. These include forgiveness and reconciliation, dignity, compassion and justice, inclusion and diversity, courage and openness to change, and faithful stewardship of God's creation and gifts.
3. **Structured Feedback and Adjustment Mechanism:** Establish continuous feedback mechanisms to allow for real-time adjustments and strategic alignments, with a special focus on the structural aspects of synods and regions.

### Implementation Phases

*The outline below may be adjusted by the council as deemed necessary and the information listed below is meant to serve as an initial framework.*

**Phase 1:** Develop and implement the expanded evaluation framework, initiate detailed structural assessments, and begin collecting data.

**Phase 2:** Continue assessments with a mid-cycle review focusing on structural efficiency and its impact on mission effectiveness.

**Phase 3:** Complete final assessments and prepare comprehensive evaluation reports, including recommendations for potential structural, policy and/or constitutional changes.