

# Report of the “Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA” Task Force



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

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## EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

### MISSION STATEMENT

Marked with the cross of Christ forever,  
we are claimed, gathered and sent for the sake of the world.

### VISION STATEMENT

- CLAIMED:** by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we are a new creation through God’s living work by the power of the Holy Spirit;
- GATHERED:** by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we will live among God’s faithful people, hear God’s Word and share Christ’s supper;
- SENT:** by God’s grace for the sake of the world, we will proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serve all people following the example of our Lord Jesus and strive for justice and peace in all the world.

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### PREFACE

The pursuit of its mission and vision goals by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America led to the study, “Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA” (LIFT). The ELCA Church Council authorized the appointment of a study design group in March 2009 and subsequently formed the LIFT Task Force in November 2009 (hereafter referred to as the task force). The task force met for the first time in January 2010.

The task force studied the ELCA’s identity and mission as it is formed by the relationships among its various parts. The task force found the biological term “ecology” an appropriate metaphor for its task. Since the word literally refers to matters of the “household” (Gr. *oikos*), it takes us back to St. Paul’s thinking of the people of God in Galatians 6 as the “household” of faith.

The purpose of the study is stated in the task force's Charter: ...to recognize the evolving societal and the formation of this church and to evaluate the organization, governance and interrelationships among this church's expressions in the light of those changes. The intended result of the Ecology Study Task Force's work is a report and recommendations that will position this church for the future and explore new possibilities for participating in God's mission.

In the last two decades, the cultural environment in which the ELCA is called to serve has changed significantly and often in ways not imagined when this church was formed. Knowledge has exploded. New developments in technology and electronic communication have changed the culture—immediately with younger people and more gradually with other age groups. New forms of communication and networking have altered the way people understand and relate to one another; they also have altered the way institutions function. Globalization and mobility have increased religious, ethnic, racial and cultural diversity in American society. Fewer Americans belong to congregations and few Americans attend church regularly. Americans seem less loyal to any one religious perspective or any religion; in fact, the fastest growing faith group is those who claim to be “spiritual but not religious.” These changes have affected every member, our partners and every aspect of our life together.

The Church, the body of Christ, is a living entity that must be attentive to its relationships and contexts. For that reason, the task force invited people across this church to join a conversation about the internal and external changes that have impacted the relationships and interdependence within and among the participants and partners of this church. Thousands of people joined the conversation and offered their wisdom. The task force listened and learned from this conversation; the voices of this dialogue are reflected in the task force's report and recommendations. (Appendix B)

Recognizing these significant environmental changes and the opportunities placed before the ELCA by the mission of the triune God, the task force was led by these overarching questions:

*What is God calling this church to be and do in the future?  
What changes are in order to help us respond most faithfully?*

### *Changing Times*

Our American forebears designed a place where different religious view points could coexist peacefully. No one was compelled to profess an official set of beliefs or even to believe anything at all. To be heard in this new world, religious groups were required to make a public case for themselves. Some did so aggressively while others, including Lutherans, largely kept to themselves. Lutherans organized according to language and culture and managed to thrive in America by gathering in new immigrants from European countries where Lutheranism was the official religion (1650–1920). After the Second World War, the high birth rate resulted in the baby-boom generation (1945–1965)

and also swelled the ranks of Lutherans. During the 20th century, others became Lutherans, but neither immigration nor population growth continued to increase membership in Lutheran congregations. Realization of this transition and other factors have led this church to analyze both the culture in which it lives and its own internal ecology.

Lutherans in America have done good things. They planted congregations. They gathered around word and sacrament. They participated through their vocations in the nurturing of church and community life. They used their leadership skills and financial resources to start and sustain colleges and seminaries, hospitals and many other social ministry agencies and institutions.

The mission begun by Lutherans in America is recognized for its remarkable strengths: unparalleled social ministry and advocacy ministries; an ecumenical spirit that ties us to partners around the world; a system of seminaries and candidacy highly regarded among American churches; strong connections to a world-wide communion in the Lutheran World Federation and a faithful confessional commitment that is echoed in our constitution, underscored in seminary training and supported by the continued widespread use of Luther's Small Catechism. (Appendix H)

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

- Gathers together 4.7 million baptized members in over 10,000 congregations.
- Includes congregations that in 2009 gathered 1.3 million people in worship each week, baptized 62,000 children and supported the mission and ministry of the ELCA with \$1.9 billion in contributions.
- Began 62 new mission starts in 2010.
- Includes members and congregations who give generously to the World Hunger Appeal. In December 2010, their gifts of \$3.3 million were the highest ever recorded for that month.
- Has built relationships and brought God's comfort and healing to those who suffer through the ELCA Disaster Response in places like Egypt, Sudan, Haiti, Indonesia and Japan.

This mission and ministry grew out of a theological heritage that has been shaped by the Lutheran capacity for broad reflection, dialogue and conversation. This heritage is truly evangelical—that is, it believes and confesses that the good news of God's grace in Jesus Christ speaks to all people of all times and in all places. However, much of the early activity within the Lutheran church was designed to serve and attract those of northern European descent and did not intentionally reach out in widespread and sustained ways beyond this ethnic and cultural heritage. Lutherans tended to depend upon birth and marriage to grow the church.

It is clear that trends occurring in the ecology of the ELCA today require significant renewal and change. Baptized membership, worship attendance and giving within the ELCA have continued to decline while the U.S. population and the racial and ethnic diversity in our communities has increased. During the life of the ELCA, although the percentage and number of people of color in the church have increased, the ELCA has been unable to achieve its goal of reflecting the diverse demographics

of our American context. In the midst of this opportunity, this church remains committed to being an anti-racist and multicultural church. (Appendix C)

As the ELCA endeavors to carry out its mission and ministry in changing times, it does so with confident hope in the Spirit's work of renewal. The new environment not only poses challenges, but offers new opportunities for ministries not yet imagined.

**Report of the Task Force**  
**Living into the Future Together:**  
**Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT)**  
April 2011

The task force believes God is a missionary God who sends this church to participate in God's mission in new ways precisely in this challenging environment and in these changing times. To be a Lutheran means to be in mission. God has given the ELCA "the present moment as an opportunity, unparalleled in our history, to confess the center of our faith to the world." (Appendix H)

*New Opportunities*

Changing times present new opportunities. God is sending this church to speak the gospel particularly through vital local congregations. The future will require new forms and tools to reach people who may not be drawn to a traditional congregational setting. God will empower us to ensure that the gospel will be good news that translates into every context.

God has expectations for ELCA Lutherans. The way to meet these expectations is to embrace and reflect the spirit of Lutheranism. As heirs of Martin Luther—who was not afraid of change for the sake of the gospel—this church and its members expect that the gospel itself initiates change and growth for the sake of the world.

Change in the church stems from the Spirit's continuing work of renewal and the power of Jesus to make all things new. According to Luke's Gospel, Jesus quoted a passage in Isaiah 61 to characterize his ministry:

The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

This passage describes the implications of the gospel for us and our world as well.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus gives the Church its commission:

...All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age (Matthew 28: 18b-20).

In the midst of great change, these promises are sure:

- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).
- And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5a).

*Abundant Gifts—Claimed Promises*

Living into the future together, we look toward a vibrant and constantly renewing church. That vision of the future imagines Lutherans renewed by the Spirit so that with confidence each ELCA member believes that God:

- Envisions a renewed role for this church in the United States.
- Calls this church to tell the story of new life in Jesus Christ
- Sends us to make a difference in our communities and the world as we do God's work with our hands.

Lutherans do God's work with a unique style and flare that expresses their confidence in the power of God's grace. That confidence arises from their *identity* as believers: firm in the word, grounded in the Lutheran Confessions and enlivened by the sacraments. From that foundation they affirm that God has blessed the members of this church with a distinctive combination of gifts to bring to this environment and to this time of change:

- The power of *God's word and the sacraments* to create faith and foster new life together. Rooted in worship life, ELCA Lutherans will discover new forms of studying and presenting the biblical story of Jesus Christ and his servant life to people who have not heard the good news or who need to hear and experience the power of the gospel anew.
- The power of *God's grace as the foundation of restored relationships* with God, each other and the world. ELCA Lutherans trust in the power of God's promises to generate faith and to produce goodness even in the presence of suffering, distress and unprecedented challenges. God's graciousness spoken and enacted for the sake of others is unexpected and transforms lives even in this cynical, harsh and abusive world.
- The power of being *claimed, gathered and sent by God to serve others*. God operates in every sphere of existence and the callings of God's people encompass every area of life. In Jesus, God became a servant and walked the way of the cross. ELCA Lutherans provide service to others and seek justice and in their own sacrificial life will bear vocal and visible witness to the power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- The power of *mutual relationships and partnerships*. The triune God created us for community. ELCA Lutherans forge strong, lasting and mutually uplifting and accountable relationships of interdependence for the sake of God's mission within their congregations, among and between ELCA congregations, their synods, the wider church and with ecumenical and global partners. These relationships and partnerships:
  - o are foundational to God's work of creating and sustaining faith and calling us to leadership in serving others.

- o reflect bold collaboration through mutual support and accountability .
- o strengthen and expand the reach of God’s message and work in the world.
- o will be inclusive in both the local and the global church.
- o remove the barriers to community created by powers and forces within the world.
- o make known far and wide the power of the ministry of reconciliation for restoring community.
- The power of *spiritual hunger and learning* to foster a mature faith filled with the will and conviction to follow Jesus Christ into new challenges and the opportunities of life. ELCA Lutherans value a faith informed by knowledge that can and will engage and serve those both in and outside of this church, seekers, young and old, those who are like us and those who are not.

As we seek to live out and embrace these significant gifts, the task force offers recommendations that place an emphasis on vital congregational mission and strengthening relationships across this church. This report is the beginning of an ongoing process that also identifies some items that require further study and future action.

#### **What does the LIFT Task Force report mean to you?**

As part of its assignment, the task force examined how the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America does its work. The task force made two assumptions:

- ELCA members love Jesus, are his disciples and want to be in relationship with one another; and
- The Holy Spirit is preparing this church to change for the sake of witness and service.

Given these assumptions, the ELCA will be changed in several ways if the task force recommendations are adopted. The task force:

1. Calls for a priority in this church on the work of evangelical congregations. At this time in the history of the world and of this church, we need a renewed commitment to the ministry of local communities of faith: congregations will deepen the discipleship of their members and members will speak freely about their faith with their friends and their neighbors. As the ELCA receives the Holy Spirit’s gifts of courage and hope, our congregations will flourish.
2. Calls on synods to become centers for mission planning. By calling leaders together, gathering resources and nurturing relationships, synods and bishops coordinate and support the witness of the ELCA in their territories. The task force proposes a process by which this church can assess and strengthen the ministries of synods.
3. Affirms the mission of the ELCA’s churchwide ministry to support the work of congregations and synods and coordinate this church’s mission to the world. As the advocate for mutual accountability, theological reflection and global mission, ELCA churchwide structures will connect ELCA members to the greater church.
4. Supports both increased collaboration among theological education institutions and increased diversity and flexibility

in the way this church prepares its lay and clergy rostered leaders.

5. Requests that no social statements be brought to churchwide assemblies until a study process examines the ELCA’s system of theological conversation and mutual discernment.
6. Calls for ongoing discussion and evaluation regarding the ways that legislative decisions are made.
7. Expresses concern that current agreements that call for a 55/45 percent division of congregational mission support between churchwide ministries and synodical ministries are not sustainable. The task force calls for a study of the current situation and action by the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to change it.
8. Trusts that God will continue to move the ELCA into the future and calls for immediate attention to understanding this church as a grouping of networks. Caring for these networks, some of them virtual networks and social networking relationships, is an immediate necessity.

#### **Congregations**

The task force believes that the priority for this church is to work together to nurture congregations that are *evangelical* (proclaiming God’s reconciling forgiveness, mercy and love) and *missional* (engaged in witness and service in God’s world) through which God makes disciples of Jesus Christ who are sent into God’s mission in the world. A congregation’s vitality can be understood by looking at the relationships of its members with the triune God, with each other and with the community. Strong, reciprocal relationships throughout this church nurture vital congregations and strengthen God’s work in all ministries of this church.

Through these congregations the Holy Spirit brings people to faith in Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior. Through these congregations people are set free to serve their neighbors and the world with joy and compassion. The faithful ministries of the synods and the churchwide organization support these congregations and extend their reach. The mission of God calls us beyond congregationalism and more fully engages congregations in broader relationships and ministries.

#### **The task force recommends that:**

1. Congregations and synods in partnership develop a mission plan that will strengthen the congregation. We recommend that, in concert with their synod bishop and the director for evangelical mission, the congregation develop a plan to achieve as many of the following characteristics of vital congregations as are realistic for their life together. These plans will vary from congregation to congregation as leaders take seriously the context in which God has placed them (e.g., rural, urban, suburban) and as congregations discern the leading of the Spirit at various stages in a congregation’s life. Characteristics of vital congregations include:
  - fostering mature faith and discipleship in members.
  - understanding God’s grace as the foundation of restored relationships with God, one another and the world.
  - worshipping God in word and sacrament.

- strengthening evangelical outreach.
  - supporting lay, lay rostered and clergy leaders.
  - serving others in the way the congregation uses its resources.
  - learning about the congregation's surrounding community, including its racial and ethnic diversity and how this context might inform ministries.
  - building and maintaining relationships and partnerships with other ELCA congregations, the synod and the wider church for the sake of God's mission in the world.
  - building and maintaining relationships and partnerships with other religious and non-religious groups in the congregation's area and globally for the sake of God's mission in the world.
  - supporting people in their daily vocations of work, family life and relationships.
  - discerning what should be celebrated, engaged, tweaked or relinquished for the sake of God's mission.
  - sustaining the congregation's mission plan and determining how it will be carried out.
2. Congregation mission plans be completed by December 31, 2012, and become a regular process within each congregation.

### Synods

In order to be this church's chief catalysts for mission and outreach, synods need to be organized and supported. For the sake of congregations, synods should be centers of encouragement and facilitators of planning and partnership. For the sake of the larger Church, synods should be the constant reminders that our common life is larger than the local congregation.

#### The task force recommends that:

1. The Conference of Bishops, in consultation with synod leaders and the churchwide organization, prepare a report to the Church Council for recommendations to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly that includes:
  - a description of the current pattern or patterns of synodical life in the ELCA that effectively supports vital congregations, mission growth and outreach.
  - a proposal to establish a pattern or a set of patterns that will allow synods to receive and distribute financial resources to support the whole ministry of this church in all its forms and expressions.
  - strategies for increased mission vitality that may include consideration of redrawing synod boundaries.
  - recommendations for revising and reordering the constitutional responsibilities of bishops and synods to emphasize synods as agents of mission in the changing context and culture. Revising functions previously considered responsibilities of the bishop may involve identifying tasks to let go or do differently (e.g., conflict management in congregations or full involvement in

- candidacy and placement processes. See ELCA 8.13. and 10.21. and \*S6.02. and \*S6.03.).<sup>1</sup>
2. Synods, through their bishops, assemblies, councils, staffs and committees prioritize the responsibilities in their constitutions to reflect a focus on equipping congregations and leaders (\*S6.03.).
  3. The synod bishop take steps to ensure that the priority of the synod is building and supporting the ability of congregations to make disciples of Jesus Christ and follow his call to serve others. The steps include:
    - Developing and supporting lay, rostered lay and clergy leadership for serving and witnessing.
    - Advocating for mutual relationships and partnerships with youth and young adults, people of color or language other than English and women.
    - Calling congregations to discern God's leading in their particular context for the sake of the gospel.
  4. Synod leadership, in partnership with the churchwide organization, devote at least one full or part-time staff person, usually the director for evangelical mission, who is dedicated to building and supporting the ability of existing and emerging ministries and congregations within the territory of the synod to do evangelical outreach and serve others.
  5. Mutual accountability and joint planning for mission be emphasized as synods, congregations, the churchwide organization and other ministry partners work together.
  6. The churchwide organization assist synods in their work to build and support the ability of the congregations in their territory to serve others as a witness to the gospel. The priority includes supporting the positions of directors for evangelical mission and ensuring the availability of consultation and expertise to support the directors and synod leadership in the areas of community organizing, leadership development, multicultural ministry, youth ministry, evangelism and stewardship.

### Regions

The task force recognizes the variations in the form, function and effectiveness of regions across this church and found support from the synods for existing regional configurations as they continue to evolve.

#### The task force recommends that:

1. Synods work together in their regional settings, continuing to use regions as laboratories for cooperative mission and ministry. Specific recommendations are included in revisions to constitutional provisions ELCA 10.6.1. and \*S.12.01.

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<sup>1</sup> These and other similar references are found in *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 2009).

## Churchwide Organization

The churchwide organization is an instrument for accomplishing the purposes of this church that are shared with and supported by the members, congregations and synods of this church (ELCA 11.12.). The churchwide organization serves on behalf of and in support of this church's members, congregations and synods in proclaiming the Gospel, reaching out in witness and service both globally and throughout the territory of this church, nurturing members of this church in the daily life of faith and manifesting the unity of this church with the whole Church of Jesus Christ (ELCA 11.11.).

In its review of the structure of the churchwide organization, the task force conducted extensive research with people across this church that provided the churchwide organization design team with current insights about priorities for ministries. In addition, the design team consulted with the task force as the design was being shaped. The perspectives and ideas generated through the task force were foundational to the deliberations and shaping of the proposal developed by the design team. The new design of the churchwide organization focuses particularly on the areas of congregational and synodical mission, global mission and mission advancement. (Appendix E)

### The task force recommends that:

1. A primary role for the churchwide organization is to support and build the capacity of synods, which are best positioned to work directly with congregations in planning and carrying out God's mission.
2. The churchwide organization continues the strategic priorities of
  - Accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission.
  - Building the capacity of this church for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.
3. The churchwide organization maintain its commitment to build and strengthen mutual and interdependent relationships among congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, agencies, institutions, partners and developing networks. These relationships can be seen as gifts of the triune God given to create the community of this church.
4. The churchwide organization continue to deploy directors for evangelical mission (DEMs) in synods. In this way the churchwide organization will continue to assist synods to accompany congregations and will serve as a catalyst for renewing evangelizing congregations as mission centers. The DEMs will encourage missional plans that focus on starting new evangelizing congregations, renewing evangelizing congregations, mission support and stewardship education and missional strategies that are attentive to the presence of the diverse peoples God has sent to each local community.
5. In many places in this nation, the vision of a multicultural, multi-ethnic church which reflects the reality of the whole people of God will require synodical and local leaders to recognize the power and privilege held by a majority culture

and work to dismantle the barriers that continue to divide communities. The ELCA churchwide organization can provide support and resources for this endeavor.

6. The churchwide organization support and strengthen the capacity of this church for global mission. The churchwide organization should provide both for the support of this church's work in other countries and the means through which churches in other countries engage in God's mission to this church and society. Stronger relationships with congregations working through synods are critical to increasing the global capacity of this church. The global partners of the ELCA depend upon the Global Mission unit to coordinate the work of the whole church. Global partners also depend upon congregations and synods to undertake global relationships in consultation with the Global Mission unit and in keeping with commonly recognized methods of accompaniment.
7. The churchwide organization continue its long-term commitment to international development and disaster relief.
8. The responsibility for this church's theological discernment be located in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, which will assist this church in better understanding its identity, recognizing the theological, relational and educational gifts God has given this church and the power of these gifts to provide Christian leadership and partnership in today's rapidly changing world.

### Leadership for Mission and Education in the Faith

Studies and conversations on theological education, both those done previously and those done concurrently with research undertaken by the task force are valuable to this church. The insights inspired by the research have led to a convergence of thought among many partners in theological education and reveal the critical role of congregational leadership: lay, lay rostered, clergy and other members. All congregational leaders need to be faithful and effective and theologically well prepared for their roles.

Research shows that members of the ELCA believe that this church must:

- Rigorously address the need and desire of its laity for greater biblical and catechetical fluency.
- Inspire in the people of this church a more robust sense of their baptismal vocation.
- Invest more deeply in equipping its lay leadership for evangelical mission in this changing world.
- Identify synods, working with seminaries and schools, as the primary catalysts for opening the missional imagination of congregations to differing types of Christian public leaders, new ways of preparation, innovative ways of financing and openness to a variety of ministries in a variety of contexts.
- Prepare the people of this church to represent a more articulate Lutheran witness in this multicultural, contemporary society through better acquaintance with Scripture and Lutheran theology, emphasizing the primacy of the gospel.

- Increase the number of rostered and lay leaders who are young and racially and ethnically diverse.
- Commit to training its leaders effectively and efficiently without subjecting them to inordinate levels of educational debt.

**The task force recommends that:**

1. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America strengthen and integrate its network of leadership development and theological education, including seminaries, colleges and universities, campus and outdoor ministries, lifelong learning programs, schools, congregations, synods and the churchwide organization. Each institution in this network can and should seek new ways to contribute to the network's effectiveness.
2. Congregations recommit to identifying people with the potential to lead in the congregations of this church, both as members and/or as staff, and strongly support these leaders in their theological education.
3. The Conference of Bishops include consultations as part of its review of funding for the mission of this whole church to accomplish increased support from congregations for the necessary funding of theological education for leadership. All ministries providing this education can and should renew creative efforts for efficiency and effectiveness, including possible ELCA and ecumenical collaborations.
4. ELCA colleges, universities and seminaries be encouraged to continue their individual and common efforts to collaboratively, faithfully, effectively and efficiently carry out their mission(s) within this church's commitments to a system-wide network of theological education and leadership development, respecting each institution's integrity while honoring the commitments and needs of the ELCA and the larger church.
5. ELCA colleges, universities and seminaries strongly pursue many of the tasks, outcomes and expectations for colleges, universities and seminaries identified in the documents (see Exhibit 1F) with the support of the larger church. The strong alignment of these tasks and outcomes with the values of the ELCA as discovered in the task force's research supports the emerging recommendations for developing evangelical missional congregations led by lay and rostered people of evangelical, missional imagination.
6. ELCA colleges, universities and seminaries collaborate with the ELCA churchwide organization, synods and other theological education providers in the development of lay mission schools and that programs, courses, workshops and faculty already utilized for equipping missional leaders be drawn upon as synods develop these schools and the teaching and learning developed in the lay mission schools be fed back into the preparation of candidates for ordination. (Appendix F)
7. ELCA colleges and universities continue to promote the Lutheran concept of vocation as the sense of life as "calling" among its faculty, staff and students with the affirmation and support of the whole church.

8. The ELCA churchwide organization convene a group of ELCA colleges and university presidents for the purpose of formulating new models of governance and ways for ELCA colleges and universities to relate to and support congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.
9. Congregations, synods and the churchwide organization, in concert with colleges and universities, develop strategies to share Lutheran youth prospects with Lutheran colleges and universities.
10. Synods, the churchwide organization and the ELCA network of ministry partners stand ready to join the seminaries in the essential equipping of evangelical public leadership for congregations and other faith communities.
11. ELCA seminaries and synods prepare a variety of candidates of missional imagination and become catalysts for opening congregational imaginations to differing types of missional leaders
  - traveling differing pathways of preparation
  - supported by differing types of financing
  - sustaining differing ministries in greatly differing contexts.

**Global and Ecumenical Partnerships**

The task force conducted extensive research with the members of this church and held conversations with global and ecumenical partners.

**The task force recommends that the ELCA:**

1. Build and strengthen relationships with this church's global companions and ecumenical partners, focusing on accompaniment, mutual growth, capacity building and the sustainability of relationships.
2. Celebrate the high regard for the global mission and ecumenical activities of the ELCA within and beyond this church.
3. Affirm the consistent use of plans for ministry in a particular country (i.e., country plans) to help the Global Mission unit and global companion churches prioritize mission activities together.
4. Encourage congregations and synods of this church, in their global mission work, to draw on the resources of the Global Mission unit in keeping with the commonly recognized methods of participation in the style of accompaniment.
5. Continue conversation and reflection about evolving relationships between the expressions of this church and global Christianity.
6. Explore stronger relationships with ecumenical partners in every expression of the church, including the sharing of administrative staff and facilities and shared program work.

**Agencies, Institutions, and Other Ministries**

The ELCA is part of a strong Lutheran tradition of attention to faith formation for children and youth, both education in the faith as it applies to the world and service to people in need. As a result, this church's ecosystem includes social ministry organizations, schools, colleges, universities, outdoor and campus

ministries, seminaries and others. Their work encompasses support for people in the many vocations of their lives. While most of these ministries are independently governed, they are diversely but concretely related to the congregations, synods and churchwide organization of the ELCA. These institutions continue to strengthen their work through network relations among themselves and outside this group of institutions. We affirm the breadth of ministries and their attention to supporting people in their daily vocations.

**The task force recommends that:**

1. The vital agencies, institutions and ministries related to the ELCA:
  - seek to sustain mutually beneficial relationships with this church; and
  - continue to give attention to networking as an organizational principle and practice that can enhance our shared mission of service to the world.
2. Congregations, synods and the churchwide organization be attentive to these ministries, seek in diverse ways to be supportive partners and be aware of the complimentary nature of mission.

**Communal Discernment**

The task force commends the work of the Communal Discernment Task Force formed by action of the Church Council in 2008, which seeks better ways to engage emotional and divisive issues and make difficult decisions in this church by means that increase mutual trust, build respect for each other as the body of Christ and deepen spiritual discernment. The task force commends the spirit of communal discernment to the whole church.

**The task force recommends that the ELCA:**

1. Nurture a culture of faithful discernment in all its expressions, assemblies and councils, the churchwide organization, synods, congregations, institutions and small groups. This culture will contribute to healthier decision-making and stewardship of mission, relationships, trust and respect for one another.
2. Shape churchwide assemblies to include a focus on identity and mission in order that participants gain a deeper understanding of what God is calling this church to be and do.
3. Undertake sustained, ongoing conversations and deliberation regarding this church's identity and its implications for our participation in God's mission. Link mission and identity rather than seeing mission as one more activity of the church.
4. Affirm the responsibility of the presiding bishop to be the prime catalyst in this church's conversations and deliberations on identity and mission. This would include working with:
  - The Conference of Bishops, the presidents of the seminaries and the Convocation of Teaching Theologians to fully address this church's discourse on identity and mission.

- The churchwide organization and synods in developing their ability deeply and expansively to engage congregations and their members in ongoing critical conversations.
5. Bring no social statements to churchwide assemblies until a review process is completed. This review of current procedures for the development and adoption of social statements, established by the Church Council in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, should reflect the spirit and culture of communal discernment.
  6. Continue work on current social statements.

**Structure and Governance**

The task force recommends that the structure and governance of this church be constituted in ways that are aligned with its governing documents and strategic priorities, provide broad-based communal discernment and allow legislative work to be accomplished efficiently and effectively. These conclusions affirm the theology, purposes and foundational principles of organization found in Chapters 2 (Confessions of Faith), 3 (Nature of the Church), 4 (Statement of Purpose), 5 (Principles of Organization) and 8 (Relationships) of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. In reaching these conclusions, the task force specifically affirms interdependence as a central principle in the ELCA and reiterates this church's commitment to inclusivity.

At the same time, the task force recognizes the importance of ongoing discussion and evaluation regarding both the ways legislative decisions are made and the underlying principles of organization and relationships reflected in the governing documents. These recommendations also recognize the importance of creating non-legislative gatherings to address missional and theological issues and strengthen leadership development and interdependence as identified in the previous section.

In compliance with the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, specific governance and structure amendments were developed and submitted to the Church Council. These were submitted separately to the Church Council in November 2010 to comply with constitutional notice requirements. The Church Council recommended approval to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly of the amendments summarized below: (See Appendix G for the background of the recommendations and the full text of proposed amendments.)

**The task force recommends that:**

1. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly
  - Move to a triennial cycle for the Churchwide Assembly after 2013.
  - Explore opportunities for synodical, regional and leadership gatherings.
  - Reduce the number of advisory members paid by the churchwide organization to attend the Churchwide Assembly and request that other organizations provide expenses for their leaders who attend.



2. The ELCA Church Council
  - Enlarge the Church Council to a range of 33–45 members (plus officers), with the added members nominated by the Nominating Committee based upon demographics, experience, and expertise in Church Council responsibilities.
  - Reduce the number of advisory members paid by the churchwide organization to attend Church Council meetings.
3. The Conference of Bishops
  - Provide voice and vote on the Church Council to the chair of the Conference of Bishops.
  - Expand the role of the Conference of Bishops in its consultative capacity with the Church Council and strengthen the interdependent relationships in this church.
4. Program committees
  - Eliminate program committees for churchwide units and develop new strategies for obtaining input from constituencies.
5. Interrelationships and Networks
  - Develop intra-synodical and inter-synodical networks that organize for unified and specific purposes, have fluid and flexible structures and serve to strengthen relationships among congregations and synods.

### **Mission Support**

God, who is gracious and kind, showers countless blessings on the whole human race. It is because of God's bounty that people can care for themselves and others. It is because of God's bounty that people can sustain the structures of their common life. To the Church that follows Jesus Christ, God gives overflowing, abundant resources for ministry. It is because God blesses the Church that Christians are able to build up a common life of faithful discipleship. It is because God blesses the Church that Christians are able to care for the poor and those in need of care or comfort.

Members of the ELCA know that they have been richly blessed by God. They have been generous in sharing their resources—especially their money—for the good of the gospel and their neighbors. Throughout the history of this church, however, there have been struggles to find the financial resources to sustain certain kinds of work. In recent years especially, many congregations, most synods, the churchwide organization and many ministry partners have experienced serious financial shortfalls. These shortfalls, caused by economic pressures and by changing patterns of philanthropy, cannot be addressed comprehensively by this task force.

### **The task force recommends that:**

1. The ELCA as a whole celebrate the financial interdependence of all its ministries, calling each to careful stewardship and faithful sharing.
2. In recognition of the interdependence of congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, the ELCA affirms

that all share in the responsibility to develop, implement, and strengthen the financial support ministry of this church.

3. The Conference of Bishops, synod vice presidents, the Church Council and the churchwide organization collaborate to ensure that work on a proposal for renewed, sustainable mission support for this church begin in the fall of 2011 and be brought to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. That work, should acknowledge that:
  - the ELCA as a whole has great capacity and abundant financial resources;
  - the support from congregations has been and is critical to the vitality and interdependence of this church;
  - while the economic health and sustainability of many congregations and synods has changed since the Blue Ribbon Committee recommendations were adopted in 2007, the understanding of mission funding articulated in the report remains foundational for the ELCA;
  - the goal of synods sharing 55 percent of the undesignated receipts for churchwide ministries has been successful in some synods, but not sustainable or workable in others;
  - synods that maintain or increase their sharing at this time are providing a valuable opportunity for this church to review its plans while sustaining its mission.
4. The churchwide organization, in collaboration with the Conference of Bishops, synod vice presidents and Church Council, lead this church in exploring new opportunities for growing in financial faithfulness, including direct appeals, designated giving, planned giving and endowment management.
5. The churchwide organization, synods and congregations prioritize their spending to emphasize congregational outreach, leadership development, global mission and new communication strategies, while discerning how to constructively withdraw from other tasks.
6. Financial self-sufficiency never be the only criterion used to evaluate the work of congregations, synods or ministry partners, but that resources be sought and shared with joy where this is necessary to sustain strategic missional opportunities.

### **Communication, Collaboration and Networks**

Interdependence is a core value of the ELCA. The various organizations, ministries, partners and agencies that comprise our denominational ecosystem depend on each other for vitality and vibrancy. This characteristic of interdependence is a gift that heightens collaboration and connectivity, which are essential as we live into the future together.

The rapid growth of global digital media has caused a cultural shift in the way we connect with one another and with the institutions in our lives. In this new landscape, trust in authority seems to erode and power becomes decentralized. Connectivity has increased. Our ancestors might have encountered only 150

people in their lives. We are able to connect with millions. As the biologist E.O. Wilson says, “We’re in uncharted territory.”<sup>2</sup>

Changes in technology and communication have moved organizations from institutional structures to network structures.<sup>3</sup> These developments provide both challenges and opportunities for this church to shift from institutional to network models. Network systems theory organizes groups of people into loosely defined, simple structures. “Effective networks have five essential features: (a) unifying purpose, (b) independent members, (c) voluntary links, (d) multiple leaders and (e) integrated levels.” Network systems are “not a free-floating super-democratic system, although (they do) promote initiative, fluidity and flexibility.”<sup>4</sup> Some are convinced that networks are not a good thing and will seek to preserve the structure they were raised with or were instrumental in creating. Additional reflection about the structure and function of a denomination will be essential in the days ahead.

#### **The task force recommends that:**

1. The implementation of the recommendations in this report include plans and strategies for all parts of this church to utilize global digital media as new opportunities for the Spirit’s work among us. These communications methodologies will be both digital and relational; neither is successful without the other.
2. The Office of the Presiding Bishop
  - initiate ways to encourage congregations, synods and partners to develop flexible networks for varying purposes, recognizing that these networks can increase collaboration and connections across this church and include emerging leaders from all parts of the ecology.
  - encourage congregations, synods, the churchwide organization and institutions and agencies of this church to work together to explore new communication strategies and techniques and share them throughout this church.
3. The Mission Advancement unit of the churchwide organization continue to develop and update a communications plan that offers nimble strategies and practices for new forms of technology and communication.

#### **Ongoing work for further study and future action**

The task force recognizes the need for ongoing efforts, including further study and future action as we live into the future together.

#### **The task force recommends:**

1. The Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and Church Council, provide for the

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Stengel, “Only Connect,” Time (December 15, 2010) [www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683\\_2037181,00.html](http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,2036683_2037181,00.html).

<sup>3</sup> Networks are a Comin’ - Bacher

<sup>4</sup> Stengel, “Only Connect.”

continuation of the functions assigned to the task force as this church continues to discern what God is calling it to be and to do in order to serve God’s mission most faithfully. The task force identified the following items for immediate attention, further study and future action:

- Review of the constitutional responsibilities of synods.
- Facilitation by the Church Council of a broad-based process addressing legislative decision-making in this church.
- Exploration, including legal implications, of the use of social media and technology options to allow greater participation of ELCA members in the Churchwide Assembly and in meetings of the Church Council.
- Collaborative work by congregations, synods, the churchwide organization and others to facilitate diverse non-legislative forums and events that bring together rostered leaders and lay persons to address missional issues, theological study and reflection and foster leadership development and enhanced interdependence in this church. Guidelines and resources for such forums and events should be collaboratively developed and shared widely.
- Proposals to the Church Council by the units of the churchwide organization to generate and foster broadly participatory conversations and communicate their work. These proposals should include commitments to those engaged in multicultural and ethnic-specific ministries, young adult networks, justice for women, ministry partners, various constituents as well as those outside of this church. They also should include strategies for using emerging forms of communication and social media to obtain grassroots input and to communicate and engage in dialogue about these ministries.
- Expand the consultative role of the Conference of Bishops by developing practices and procedures that allow the Church Council to refer issues to it and for the Conference of Bishops to make recommendations to the Church Council.

#### **Conclusion**

The task force prays that every congregation and partner might enter into the rich and fruitful experience of discovery and discernment that the Spirit graciously provides through the questions that guided this study:

*What is God calling this church to be and do in the future?  
What changes are in order to help us respond most faithfully?*

May we together live into the future as a church that is created and formed, networked, sustained and sent by the Holy Spirit to participate in God’s missionary ways.

## Appendix A: The LIFT Project



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

The purpose of the task force for Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT) is stated in its Charter:

The ELCA Ecology Study task force intends to study the evolving societal and economic changes that have occurred in the twenty years since the formation of this church and to evaluate the organization, governance and interrelationships among this church's expressions in the light of those changes. The result of the Ecology Study task force's work will be a report and recommendations that will position this church for the future and explore new possibilities for participating in God's mission.

That purpose evolved from a process that began at the March 2009 meeting of the ELCA Church Council where Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson, in collaboration with the Executive Committee of the Church Council and the Conference of Bishops, was asked to appoint a study design group. The study design group submitted its report to the ELCA Church Council in November 2009. The ELCA Church Council approved a Charter on the basis of which the LIFT task force began its work in January 2010. The task force's report was submitted to the April 2011 meeting of the ELCA Church Council, which approved the task force's report and conveyed its recommendations to the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

This church initiated the LIFT process as a faithful response to change. In the 20 years since the ELCA was created, the environment has changed dramatically in ways not imagined when the ELCA was formed. There has been an explosion of knowledge. New developments in technology, particularly related to electronic communication, have altered the way people understand and relate to one another. Globalization and mobility have produced new levels of religious, ethnic, racial and cultural diversity within American society. Along with changes in financial giving patterns, these changes call for new ways for this church to be faithful in its mission.

The task force identified seven specific questions to be addressed:

1. What unique gifts does our theological, confessional and liturgical identity bring to this environment and to this time of change?
2. How is God surprising and leading us in the midst of change and uncertainty to new and distinctive opportunities?
3. What are the key changes, internal and external, that have most impacted the relationships and interdependence within and among the congregations, synods, the churchwide organization and related organizations, agencies, entities and partners including, but not limited to, seminaries, campus ministries, outdoor ministries, colleges and universities, social ministry organizations, ecumenical partners, global companions and others?
4. Given the importance of congregations in the ELCA, how has the changing environment affected their mission and relationships? How might this church through its congregations, in partnership with synods and the churchwide organization, engage in ministry with evangelical missional imagination for the sake of the world?
5. How can the ELCA's relationships with its full communion and global mission partners strengthen and extend this church's mission and ministries? How can we learn from and partner with ministries and organizations accomplishing God's work beyond this church?
6. How can this church most effectively and efficiently steward and deploy the funds available for its mission? What are the current patterns and what are their implications for future funding patterns?
7. How can the governing documents in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* provide structures and governance mechanisms that strengthen identity and faithfully and effectively facilitate mission and ministry?

The membership of the task force represents a broad spectrum of the membership of the ELCA. It includes members Robert Bacher, Linda Bobbitt, Deborah Chenoweth, Kathleen Elliott Chillison, Teresa Cintron, Richard Graham, Debra Jacobs Buttaggi, Rollie Martinson, Scott McAnally, Dee Pederson (chair), Richard Torgerson, and Erik Ullestad. Resource staff includes Wyvetta Bullock, Kenneth Inskeep, Stanley Olson, Karl Reko and David Swartling. Two resource observers, Marge Watters Knebel and Ron Schultz, brought insights from similar studies done in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod respectively.

LIFT committed itself to following guidelines inherent in the tradition and identity of this church. In order to strive for integrity and effectiveness in its report, the LIFT task force reflected a Lutheran understanding of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions in its work. It proceeded with sensitivity to interdependence and mutuality by attempting to pursue the paradigm of accompaniment. In demonstrating partnership it conducted extensive interviews with social ministry

organizations, national denominations with which this church is in full communion and international churches in a companion relationship with the ELCA. As much as possible the task force members exhibited transparency in conducting research, setting goals and formulating recommendations. The task force does not intend the report resulting from its work to offer only recommendations calling for change now, but also identified possible ways of doing further work in complex areas in the future.

LIFT found the biological term “ecology” an appropriate metaphor for its task. Since the word literally refers to matters of the “household” (Gr. *Oikos*), it takes us back to St. Paul’s thinking of the people of God in Galatians 6 as the “household” of faith. Mining the concept of ecology for relevant direction for its work produced helpful insights for the task force. The term ecology leads to understanding the role each species plays in a complex system. Their relationship is what maintains an ecological system. Sustainability is central in ecological studies. These implications of the concept of ecology for this church are evident and drawn out in the task force’s report. As a community, this church’s *oikos* is changing, but God’s grace-filled message and mission through it remain the same. The Creator, known in our Redeemer and working through the Sanctifier, both leads and accompanies this church’s migrant people on their way through the transition.

The task force’s website is located at <http://liftELCA.org>.



### Introduction

The primary goal of the research activities undertaken in support of the LIFT task force was to provide opportunities for individuals and groups to engage in a conversation about the future of this church and to make the substance of those conversations available to the task force. Opportunities were provided through the task force's website and through a random sample survey of ELCA clergy and congregational leaders.

About 200 individuals provided responses via e-mail to an open-ended set of questions posted on the LIFT website. These questions focused on what it means to be Lutheran, on issues facing congregations and on the appropriate role of synods and the churchwide organization in the life of this church. The other option for individuals via the website was an online questionnaire covering the same basic topics. Fifteen hundred people completed this open questionnaire. The questionnaire also was sent to a random sample of 1,100 clergy and 1,300 lay leaders. The full report on the questionnaire follows this introduction. Five hundred eighty completed the clergy questionnaire and 530 completed the lay leader questionnaire. Finally, about 80 individuals wrote scenarios that describe their vision of the preferred future for this church.

Many more individuals responded as part of groups. The questions used in synod assemblies in 2010 also focused on what it means to be Lutheran, on issues facing congregations and on the appropriate role of synods and the churchwide organization in the life of this church. Twenty-seven synods provided Research and Evaluation with 885 response forms (1 form per table) from table discussions in their assemblies. Based on a typical table size of five participants, approximately 4,500 people participated in these synod discussions. The full report on the synod assembly responses is a part of this exhibit.

In addition to the synod assemblies, a host of other groups were asked to discuss and report on the most important issues facing this church and the best strategies for addressing these issues. Most of these groups also were asked about the role they see themselves playing in the wider ecology of the ELCA. Because of the number of people sponsoring these discussions, our records of who participated may be incomplete. We know, however, the following were engaged on one or more occasion: the Conference of Bishops, the seminary presidents, the college presidents, those on the lay Word and Service roster of the ELCA, the campus ministry staff advisory group, the Lutheran Men in Mission board, the Women of the ELCA board, the ethnic ministry association boards, the senior pastors of large ELCA congregations, the Lutheran Outdoor Ministry Network, the Youth Ministry Network, the Pennsylvania Lutheran Network and the program committees of churchwide units. Interviews also were conducted with representatives of the global and ecumenical partners of this church.

Finally, the task force sponsored a consultation to discuss the mission capacity and funding of this church. It brought together approximately 70 individuals who represented every part of the ecology of this church. It also included ecumenical ministry partners.

Between individual e-mail responses, responses to the LIFT questionnaires, the synods assemblies and contacts with other groups, a conservative estimate is that LIFT engaged as minimum of 8,000 individuals.

### Findings

1. Many congregations in the ELCA are struggling. Nearly half of the lay leaders who responded to the LIFT questionnaire "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with the statement "My congregation is thriving". This finding is consistent with the rapid increase in the number of congregations reporting financial deficits on their annual report in 2009. Many congregations have seen persistent declines in membership for years, but the rate of decline most recently has increased. There was widespread belief among the survey respondents that economic and cultural changes over the past few years have impacted their congregations negatively and a many individuals believe that the Churchwide Assembly action on the human sexuality social statement and related policy changes also has impacted their congregations negatively. Finally, demographic changes have negatively impacted many ELCA congregations. The strongly committed core of members is aging. Rural communities with large numbers of ELCA congregations have lost population, particularly young adults and in urban areas the population has become more diverse, which has challenged many ELCA congregations.
2. ELCA Lutherans often refer to God's grace and worship when asked about what distinguishes Lutherans from other religious groups, but there is strong evidence that many Lutherans find it difficult to articulate what it means to be Lutheran. For example, when asked "is there anything unique about ELCA Lutherans which distinguishes them from other Christians," a third of lay

leaders said “no” and another third said they were “unsure.” It also is clear from the annual reports of congregations that Christian education, other than in the context of worship, is a low priority for many of the members of this church.

3. Connections between many ELCA congregations are weak, as are connections between many congregations and their synod. Connections between many ELCA congregations and the churchwide organization appear to be even weaker. Those who wrote scenarios typically asked that the ELCA be reimagined as a more flexible, less formal organization. On the whole, the scenarios writers called for this church to be more concerned with the quality and integrity of congregational ministries and with the daily discipleship of its individual members. Some of the scenarios envisioned Christian communities of the future as loose-knit networks of people connected to each other electronically. A fair number of scenario writers expressed confusion about what difference a national institution possibly could make to individuals personally or to their life of faith.
4. There is little sense of shared mission between congregations, within the synod or with the churchwide organization. In the minds of many, congregations exist to meet the needs of their members. Synods exist to meet the needs of congregations. The churchwide organization exists to meet the needs of the whole church and should be responsible for leadership education, global mission and ecumenical relationships. Instead, in the minds of many, the churchwide organization appears primarily responsible for social statements that are counter-productive because they produce division rather than unity within the church.
5. There is a sense on the part of many that ELCA Lutherans need to focus more outwardly, toward engaging their local communities, and to preach, teach and serve for the sake of the Gospel as Lutherans understand it. Many congregations understand this as their mission, but there is evidence that, for many members, looking outward and engaging the local community for the sake of the Gospel is neither the primary way they understand what it means to be a Lutheran Christian nor the primary task they see for their congregation.
6. Many are convinced that the ability of this church to proclaim the Gospel is dependent upon healthy congregations and their ability to strengthen the faith of individuals. And, as one e-mail writer put it: “The most fundamental thing is engaging more and more people in God’s mission for God’s world. Mission should and will calibrate our prioritizing.”
7. Many believe the way forward is to understand synods more clearly as the “key connective tissue for this church.” The primary work of synods should be “building relationships” for the sake of mission on the territory of the synod. In this context many called for thinking about the resources synods have available to them, the different capacities of synods and the “need for more accountability among the parts of this church.” Some also argued that synods need to “reclaim their teaching role” and focus on the “vocation of all, including rostered leaders.” Synods would become centers of experiment and change related directly to their context.

#### **Research Findings and the Recommendations of the Task Force**

The research strongly suggested that this church needs to renew its focus on developing disciples who understand the primary function of the church as engaging the local community for the sake of the Gospel. It may be that many pastors and/or congregational leaders see this as their primary goal, but many members do not. It also was clear that many believe synods are best positioned to build stronger relationships among ministry partners for the sake of mission on the territory of the synod. This relationship or capacity building role, however, would mean changing the way many understand the role and function of the synod. The primary role of the churchwide organization would be to support synods in their local mission efforts, to continue to guide the global mission work of this church and to continue to support a system of lay, lay rostered and clergy leadership development. Many also believe that the churchwide organization, with the Church Council, should take steps to minimize controversy. There also was a call to reexamine the distribution of resources between synods and the churchwide organization. Many see the role of the other agencies and institutions of this church as working with synods and congregations to assist in carrying out local mission and to assist in training leadership. The recommendations of the task force are tied clearly and directly to the context provided by the research conducted in behalf of the task force.

## Template Questions for the LIFT Task force

The following provided the basic template of questions for the task force for discussion purposes. This template often was adapted in many different ways for specific groups.

### *Being Lutheran*

1. There are Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists and Roman Catholics (just to name a few religious groups). Why should there be Lutherans?
2. What, if anything, is most important about being a Lutheran to you personally?
3. In what way(s), if any, does being Lutheran influence how you live your daily life?
4. If someone claims to be a Lutheran, what do you expect to hear or see from that person?

### *Congregations*

5. What changes over the past few years have most impacted your congregation?
6. What are your congregation's greatest strengths and weaknesses?
7. What are your hopes for the future of your congregation? What most needs to happen for these hopes to be realized?
8. Congregations are expected to share their financial resources with the synod and the churchwide organization (through the synod). How has your congregation viewed that expectation in the past and how do you expect to view it in the future?

### *Beyond the Congregation*

This introduction, or something like it, was used to assist members of congregations who are not familiar with the "wider" church.

Congregations in the United States often are affiliated officially with other congregations and together they form a "denomination" such as the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) or the United Methodist Church or the Southern Baptist Convention. Congregations that are not in an official relationship with other congregations are "non-denominational." The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a denomination (ELCA) with over 10,000 congregations. Individuals who are baptized members of those congregations are also members of the denomination. The denomination is governed by a Churchwide Assembly of over 1,000 locally elected voting members. The Assembly meets every two years. The ELCA also includes synods which consist of the congregations in 65 different geographic territories of the United States and the Caribbean. Each synod has a bishop and most bishops have a full or part-time staff that assists the bishop in caring for the congregations and the pastors of the synod. In addition to the synods, the ELCA has a presiding bishop, who is responsible for the care of the 65 synod bishops. The presiding bishop also oversees the "churchwide organization," which facilitates, with synods, both the domestic and global work of the ELCA. The churchwide organization of the ELCA is in Chicago, Illinois. Finally, the ELCA includes many other agencies and institutions including seminaries, colleges and social ministry organizations.

You should feel free to answer any of the following questions based on whatever impressions you may have. If you do not have an impression of the ELCA beyond your congregation, at the very least, please consider answering questions 14 or 15.

9. In the context of God's mission, what do you believe your synod does well? What do you believe the synod needs to do better?
10. What two things should be the primary focus of the synod's work?
11. In the context of God's mission, what do you believe the churchwide organization of the ELCA does well? What do you believe the churchwide organization needs to do better?
12. What two things should be the primary focus of the work of the churchwide organization in the ELCA?
13. In the context of God's mission, what do you believe the ELCA as a whole denomination does well? What do you believe this church needs to do better?
14. What do you want or expect from of the ELCA as a denomination?
15. What do you want or expect from someone who is a member of the ELCA?

**Living into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT)  
Report on the Open, Clergy and Lay Leader Questionnaire**

*Kenneth W. Inskeep*

Research and Evaluation

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

July 2010

In support of the LIFT Task Force, Research and Evaluation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) fielded a questionnaire addressing topics of interest to the Task Force. The questionnaire was posted on the LIFT website and open to anyone. The questionnaire was also fielded to a random sample of 1,167 pastors in the ELCA and a random sample of 1,366 congregational lay leaders (members of congregation councils). As of July 22, 2010, 1,515 had completed the open questionnaire, 581 (50%) had completed the clergy questionnaire and 533 (39%) had completed the lay leader questionnaire.

The majority of respondents to the open questionnaire and the lay leader questionnaire were female (52% and 54% respectively). The majority of respondents to the clergy questionnaire were male (70%).

In each of the respondent groups, the vast majority of respondents were life-long Lutherans. Seventy-three percent of the respondents to the open questionnaire were baptized in a Lutheran church, as were 78 percent of the clergy and 70 percent of the lay leader respondents. At least three-fourths in each of the respondent groups have been members of their congregations for 21 or more years (open, 77%; clergy, 91%; lay, 77%).

Twenty-seven percent of the respondents to the open questionnaire were 44 years of age or younger, as were 16 percent of the respondents to the clergy questionnaire and 12 percent of the respondents to the lay leader questionnaire.

**Factors Impacting Congregations**

The respondents to the questionnaires were asked about factors impacting their congregation over the past few years. Table 1A shows the factors where the impact was more positive than negative according to the respondents. In all three of the respondent groups there is agreement that the impact of a commitment to evangelism or outreach has been more positive than negative over the past few years, as have been changes in the quality of pastoral leadership in the church.

Opinion over the impact of changes in participation among lay leaders is more divided. Those who believe the change has been positive slightly outnumber those who believe it has been negative.

The majority believe that the impact of ethnic/racial changes in their local communities was either of no impact or the impact has been more positive than negative.

<b>Table 1A: More Positive Than Negative Changes Impacting Congregations</b>						
	<b>Open</b>		<b>Clergy</b>		<b>Lay Leaders</b>	
	<b>Positive Impact (4 or 5)</b>	<b>Negative Impact (1 or 2)</b>	<b>Positive Impact (4 or 5)</b>	<b>Negative Impact (1 or 2)</b>	<b>Positive Impact (4 or 5)</b>	<b>Negative Impact (1 or 2)</b>
commitment to evangelism or outreach	56%	8	60	5	48	11
changes in the quality of pastoral leadership in the church	45	24	52	12	44	25
changes in patterns of participation among lay leaders	33	28	36	34	27	22
ethnic/racial changes in the local community	23	9	21	8	15	8

Table 1B presents those factors that were more negative than positive. Two-thirds or more of the respondents in each of the groups believe that economic changes in their local community have negatively impacted their congregations over the past few years. A majority of the respondents in each group also indicated that changes in the culture of American society and changes in the religious climate have had a negative impact on their congregations. Finally, a majority of lay



leaders and clergy believe the Churchwide Assembly action on the human sexuality social statement and related policy changes has negatively impacted their congregations.

	Open		Clergy		Lay Leaders	
	Positive Impact (4 or 5)	Negative Impact (1 or 2)	Positive Impact (4 or 5)	Negative Impact (1 or 2)	Positive Impact (4 or 5)	Negative (1 or 2)
economic changes in the local community	11%	67	11	71	12	66
changes in the culture of American society	12	61	10	71	9	61
changes in the religious climate or culture of American society	12	62	10	69	11	57
conflict in the congregation	6	48	13	40	8	51
Churchwide Assembly action on the human sexuality social statement and policy changes	26	45	16	53	9	61
other demographic changes in the local community (people moving in or out of the community, young people coming or going)	24	42	23	43	21	50
competition from other local congregations	7	33	5	35	10	35

The respondents to the open questionnaire who were 44 or younger had a somewhat different view of the impact of the Churchwide Assembly. A majority believe there either was no impact (34%) or that the impact was positive (31%). For the respondents who were 45 or older, 49 percent believe the impact was negative.

### **Attending an ELCA Congregation**

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents to both the open and clergy questionnaires indicated that ELCA theology and teaching was “very important” in explaining why they attend an ELCA congregation. However, theology and teaching was much less important to the lay leader respondents. For the lay leader respondents, a majority said their appreciation of the people who attend their congregation was “very important.” This was the only item that a majority of lay leader respondents said was “very important.”

There also was considerable difference between response groups on the importance of the relationship of an ELCA congregation to the wider church. The appreciation of the relationship of their congregation to the wider church was “very important” for 37 percent of the open questionnaire respondents and 35 percent of the clergy respondents compared to 16 percent of the lay leader respondents.

No matter which group, the least important reasons for attending an ELCA congregation, according to these respondents, were because the congregation was most convenient when they became active in church, or because their closest friends were Lutheran, or because they wished to associate with people who are important contacts in the local community.

Fifty-eight percent of the respondents who were 45 or older indicated their appreciation of Lutheran forms of worship was “very important” in their decision to attend an ELCA congregation compared to 49 percent of those who were 44 or younger.

**Table 2: Reason for Attending an ELCA Congregation**

	Open		Clergy		Lay	
	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important
my agreement with the theology and teaching of the ELCA	57%	32	58	31	33	50
my appreciation of Lutheran forms of worship	55	36	51	39	41	51
my appreciation of the people who attend my congregation	47	47	39	54	55	41
my appreciation of the relationship an ELCA congregation has with the wider church	37	39	35	42	16	47
the fact that my parents are/were Lutheran	24	35	24	40	30	29
the fact that my spouse is/was a Lutheran	18	30	21	36	23	30
an ELCA congregation was most convenient when I first became active in church	10	21	8	20	12	33
the fact that my closest friends attend my congregation	7	19	2	19	9	20
my association with people in my congregation who are also important contacts in the local community	6	20	4	21	8	26

### ELCA Lutheran Identity

Considerable attention has been given to the strength of a denomination’s religious identity among its members as compared to its strength in American society.<sup>5</sup> Religious groups are more likely to grow, for example, if their members clearly understand and value their distinctiveness. In the case of ELCA Lutherans, there is evidence that the majority of lay leaders do not believe Lutherans are distinctive. In response to the question “Is there anything unique about ELCA Lutherans which distinguishes them from other Christians?” 31 percent of the lay leader said “no” and 37 percent said they were “unsure.”

This lack of conviction about the distinctiveness of a Lutheran identity among lay members is not new. In 1982, a sample of lay members of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) was asked “Is there anything unique about Lutherans which distinguishes them from other Christians?” Forty-five percent of the lay respondents said “no” and 25 percent said they were “undecided.”

As one would expect, clergy were much more likely to believe there is something unique about Lutherans. Eight-three percent of the respondents to the current clergy questionnaire and 85 percent of the clergy respondents to the LCA questionnaire responded “yes” to this question.

### Connections with ELCA Lutheranism

Nearly two-thirds of respondents to the open questionnaire and the clergy questionnaire “strongly agreed” that it is important for them to be members of a Lutheran church. (See Table 3.) Perhaps reflecting the findings noted above that lay leaders are less convinced ELCA Lutherans are distinctive, fewer lay leaders (49%) “strongly agreed.” When asked how important it is for them to be a member of a congregation that is part of the ELCA, the percentage of the respondents who “strongly agreed” falls in each of the three respondent groups, with the largest drop of 18 percent among lay leaders.

<sup>5</sup> See for example, *The Churching of America, 1776-2005: Winners and Loser in Our Religious Economy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, Rutgers, 2005.

Nearly a third (31%) of the lay leaders “disagreed” (23%) or “strongly disagreed” (8%) that it is important for them to be a member of a congregation that is part of the ELCA.

These questions about the importance of being a member of a Lutheran church and a congregation that is part of the ELCA were also included on the ELCA’s *U.S. Congregational Life Survey* in 2008. The *U.S. Congregational Life Survey* was distributed to worship attendees in 369 randomly selected ELCA congregations.<sup>6</sup> On the *U.S. Congregational Life Survey*, 52 percent of the worship attendees “strongly agreed” that it was important for them to be a member of a Lutheran church and 33 percent “strongly agreed” that it was important for them to be a member of a congregation that is part of the ELCA. A total of 16 percent either “disagreed” (14%) or “strongly disagreed” (2%). This suggests that those who responded to the lay leader questionnaire are less connected to the ELCA than were the lay worship attendees in 2008.

	Open		Clergy		Lay Leaders	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
It is important for me to be a member of a Lutheran church.	63%	26	64	32	49	40
The world needs the message that ELCA Lutheran’s bring.	56	31	56	31	26	59
I’m proud to be part of the ELCA.	56	27	48	33	33	50
It is important for me to be a member of a congregation that is part of the ELCA.	55	24	57	25	31	38
If I had to change my membership to another congregation, I would feel a great sense of loss.	48	35	36	42	52	36
The congregation I am a member of has helped me grow as a Christian.	49	42	41	52	49	46
I am hopeful about the future of the ELCA.	45	33	34	41	26	53
My congregation has strong ties to the synod.	27	45	20	48	16	53
My congregation is stronger because it is part of a wider church.	30	44	25	45	12	36
My congregation has strong ties to the wider church.	19	42	13	43	12	44

When asked about the strength of ties to the synod and to the wider church, the respondents were much more likely to “agree” with the statements than to “strongly agree.” This is particularly true of lay leader respondents. Among the lay leaders, 16 percent “strongly agreed” that their congregation has strong ties to the synod and 53 percent “agreed.” Twelve percent of the lay leader respondents “agreed” that their congregation has strong ties to the wider church and 44 percent “agreed.”

Both the respondents to the open questionnaire and the clergy respondents were more likely than lay leaders to “strongly agree” with the statement “My congregation is stronger because it is part of the wider church.” Thirty percent of the respondents to the open questionnaire and 25 percent of the respondents to the clergy questionnaire “strongly agreed,” compared to 12 percent of the lay respondents.

Finally, we asked respondents directly how connected they feel to the wider church. Once again, the lay leader respondents were least likely to feel strongly connected with 38 percent choosing a “4” or “5” on the five-point scale compared to 58 percent of the respondents on the open questionnaire and 62 percent of the clergy. (See Table 4.) On the open questionnaire, there were differences by age. Sixty-two percent of those 44 or younger chose “4” or “5” on the scale compared to 55 percent of those who were 45 or older.

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<sup>6</sup> ELCA *U.S. Congregational Life Survey* (N=29,976), 2008. Frequencies are available from Research and Evaluation, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

	<b>Not Connected at All (1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>(4)</b>	<b>Very Strongly Connected (5)</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
open	8%	12	20	31	27	2
clergy	6	12	19	33	29	1
lay leaders	6	14	34	29	9	8

Of the lay leaders who indicated they felt strongly connected to the wider church, 28 percent “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed” that their congregations had strong ties to the wider church.

### **Factors Contributing to a Sense of Connectedness**

The respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale (1 - “not at all” to 5 - “quite a bit”) the extent to which a series of items have contributed to their sense of connectedness to the ELCA. The items presented in Table 5 are in rank order based on the open questionnaire respondent scores.

Five items had an average score of 3.5 or above for the respondents in each of the respondent groups. (See Table 5.) These five items included common forms of worship and music, having pastors trained in ELCA seminaries, participation in synod or churchwide ministries, a shared ELCA theology and participation with other ELCA Lutherans in shared local ministry. The clergy respondents added two additional items with average scores of 3.5 or above including attending a synod or churchwide assembly and a relationship or experience with the synod or churchwide bishop.

	<b>Average Score</b>		
	<b>Open</b>	<b>Clergy</b>	<b>Lay</b>
common forms of worship and music	<b>4.0</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.9</b>
having pastors trained in ELCA seminaries	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>3.8</b>
participation with other ELCA Lutherans in synod or churchwide ministries (outdoor or campus ministry, advocacy, Lutheran social ministries, ELCA World Hunger, disaster response, companion synods, etc.)	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>
a shared ELCA theology	<b>3.8</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>3.6</b>
participation with other ELCA Lutherans in shared local ministry (food pantries, Habitat for Humanity, youth programs, etc.)	<b>3.6</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>3.6</b>
attending a synod or churchwide assembly	3.4	<b>3.5</b>	2.8
the congregation’s financial support shared with the synod and churchwide organization	3.4	3.4	3.2
our congregation’s use of “ELCA” in its name, documents, website, etc.	3.4	3.1	3.1
a relationship or experience with the synod bishop or churchwide presiding bishop	3.4	<b>3.6</b>	3.1
reading <i>The Lutheran</i> or other ELCA publications	3.3	3.1	3.0
a shared common purpose within the synod	3.3	3.2	3.1
a shared ELCA stand on social issues (social statements)	3.3	3.0	2.8
engaging in social networking with other ELCA Lutherans	3.0	2.8	2.6
participation on ELCA agency or church boards, committees, task forces, etc. outside of your congregation	3.0	3.1	2.5
financial support received from the wider church (loans, grants, etc.)	2.8	2.7	2.4
a shared Northern European Lutheran ethnic heritage	2.7	2.5	2.9

## Factors Contributing to a Lack of Connectedness

### Churchwide Assembly Action on the Human Sexuality Social Statement and Related Policy Changes

The questionnaire included the open-ended question “What, if anything, makes you feel less part of the wider church?” Responses to this question, which were made by about 50 percent of the respondents, were coded and analyzed.<sup>7</sup> For the three respondent groups as a whole, the primary factor cited as contributing to a lack of connectedness with the wider church was conflict, most notably conflict around the recent Churchwide Assembly action. For lay leaders in particular, conflict around this action was the most commonly named factor contributing to a lack of connectedness. Many of those who opposed the changes said they felt less connected to the wider church because the church had abandoned “traditional” teachings on sexuality and, as a result, had abandoned them. They objected to what they perceived as a significant concession to a “liberal” cultural and political agenda which is precisely the agenda they believe this church should be opposing.

The Churchwide Assembly action appears to have also negatively impacted those without strong feelings about the social statement or related policy changes and those who may have more quietly favored them. From the perspective of these groups, too many in the church have behaved in ways inconsistent with the most basic teachings of the church which they believe are to love, care for and respect one another. This behavior has produced a church with which these individuals are not sure they wish to be associated.

### A Culture of Skepticism and Institutional Disengagement

The second most frequent response to this question described a gap between congregations, other congregations, the synod and the churchwide organization which may well reflect the broader cultural trend of disengagement from institutions.

Finally, some respondents made a direct critique of the churchwide organization. It is their perception that the churchwide organization does not listen to congregations; that it is not focused enough on mission; that it does not communicate well; and it does not care about congregations while it continues to expect their financial support.

## Expectations of ELCA Lutheranism

The respondents were asked how important the items presented in Table 6 were to them personally in terms of what they expect from being part of the ELCA.<sup>8</sup> Ninety-two percent of the clergy respondents and 85 percent of the respondents to the open questionnaire said the theology of justification by grace through faith was “very important” to them as an expectation of ELCA Lutheranism. The theology of justification by grace through faith was also the most important item to the lay leader respondents with 63 percent indicating it was “very important.”

Only one item on this list—“traditional” teaching of the Bible—was more important to the lay leader respondents than to the clergy respondents or to the respondents to the open questionnaire.<sup>9</sup> Fifty-three percent of the lay leader respondents said it was very important to them compared to 46 percent of the clergy and 38 percent of the respondents to the open questionnaire.

A majority of respondents in each of the response groups indicated that three items were “very important” to them including the theology of justification by grace, a strong system of theological education for new pastors and being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people.

The majority of respondents to the open questionnaire and the clergy also agreed that significant involvement of laity in ministry, being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry and strong public advocacy in behalf of the poor were “very important.”

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<sup>7</sup> I want to thank Linda Bobbit and Scott McAnally from the LIFT Task Force for their assistance in coding the responses to this question. The conclusions drawn in this section, however, are my responsibility alone..

<sup>8</sup> This question was designed to reflect a similar question asked in 1982 on the Lutheran Church in America’s *Lutheran Listening Post* (LLP).

<sup>9</sup> There was no attempt to define “traditional” in the wording of the response category. The use of the word was an attempt to draw a parallel to its use in defining “family values” which is a phrase frequently used by conservative evangelical Christians. Certainly respondents may have interpreted the word in another context.

**Table 6: Expectations of ELCA Lutheranism**

	Open		Clergy		Lay Leaders	
	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important	Very Important	Important
the theology of justification by grace through faith	85%	13	92	8	63	33
a strong system of theological education for new pastors	67	29	71	27	50	45
being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people	64	32	74	24	53	43
significant involvement of laity in ministry	60	34	70	28	36	52
being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry	60	36	63	35	41	54
strong public advocacy on behalf of the poor	59	33	57	35	38	52
reaching out to other racial/ethnic groups	51	40	48	45	32	55
liturgical worship	48	37	42	43	37	47
the Lutheran Confessions	45	41	52	41	33	46
strong national coordination and involvement in global mission	46	42	45	45	28	56
providing worship and educational resources for congregations	41	52	34	52	33	61
traditional teaching of the Bible	38	38	46	36	53	38
strong positive relationships among ELCA congregation in the synods	40	51	39	53	25	60
strong ecumenical contacts and agreements	36	44	34	44	23	49
a strong system of higher education through ELCA colleges	33	47	35	47	19	53
starting new congregations	31	52	41	47	16	57

Finally, while a majority of the respondents on all the questionnaires indicated starting new congregations as either “important” or “very important,” it was “very important” to fewer respondents than any other item on the list.

### **Priorities for the Expressions of the Church**

The respondents were asked how involved each expression of the church (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization) should be in accomplishing 15 tasks. They were also asked to prioritize tasks for each expression. An average score was calculated using a three-point scale (2 - “very involved;” 1 - “involved;” 0 - “not involved”) for the level of the involvement for each expression on each item. (See Table 7.)

The respondents from all three groups agree congregations should be responsible primarily for:

1. Ensuring that worship provides a meaningful experience of God.
2. Ensuring that children and youth receive Christian education.
3. Ensuring that adults continue to grow in knowledge and faith.
4. Sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people.
5. Providing direction by setting priorities for the mission of the church.

<b>Table 7: Priorities for Expressions of the Church</b>									
	<b>Open</b>			<b>Clergy</b>			<b>Lay Leaders</b>		
	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>
ensure that worship provides a meaningful experience of God	<b>1.93</b>	1.12	1.09	<b>1.95</b>	1.05	1.01	<b>1.84</b>	1.24	1.13
ensure that children and youth receive Christian education	<b>1.92</b>	1.25	1.20	<b>1.95</b>	1.13	1.14	<b>1.85</b>	1.30	1.22
ensure that adults continue to grow in knowledge and faith	<b>1.88</b>	1.29	1.23	<b>1.94</b>	1.22	1.18	<b>1.78</b>	1.30	1.19
share the good news of the gospel with unchurched people	<b>1.72</b>	1.43	1.47	<b>1.83</b>	1.43	1.45	<b>1.61</b>	1.45	1.46
provide charity and service to people in need	<b>1.85</b>	1.43	<b>1.54</b>	<b>1.89</b>	1.31	1.48	<b>1.74</b>	1.48	<b>1.52</b>
encourage members to act on the relationship of Christian faith to social, political and economic issues	<b>1.52</b>	1.36	1.44	<b>1.52</b>	1.30	1.37	1.29	1.25	1.25
provide direction by setting priorities for the mission of the church	1.48	1.43	<b>1.51</b>	<b>1.60</b>	1.46	1.47	1.37	1.40	1.41
start new congregations	0.90	<b>1.58</b>	1.39	1.08	<b>1.61</b>	1.49	0.69	1.42	1.39
assist congregations in finding a new pastor	1.41	<b>1.70</b>	0.92	1.37	<b>1.80</b>	0.85	1.44	<b>1.61</b>	0.99
assist congregations in times of conflict	1.36	<b>1.71</b>	0.84	1.36	<b>1.77</b>	0.66	1.43	<b>1.61</b>	0.99
plan for and conduct the global mission of the church	1.21	1.37	<b>1.78</b>	1.16	1.33	<b>1.80</b>	1.05	1.35	<b>1.62</b>
provide for the education of new pastors	1.07	1.51	<b>1.73</b>	1.13	<b>1.50</b>	<b>1.76</b>	0.93	1.56	<b>1.62</b>

<b>Table 7: Priorities for Expressions of the Church</b>									
	<b>Open</b>			<b>Clergy</b>			<b>Lay Leaders</b>		
	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>	<b>Congre- gations</b>	<b>Synods</b>	<b>Church- wide</b>
be responsible for the ecumenical relationships of the church	1.30	1.37	<b>1.62</b>	1.27	1.35	<b>1.66</b>	1.38	1.36	1.33
advocate with government agencies on behalf of the poor	1.20	1.36	<b>1.56</b>	1.21	1.36	<b>1.62</b>	0.99	1.28	1.38

There is also agreement from all the groups that synods should be responsible for:

1. Assisting congregations in finding a new pastor.
2. Assisting congregations in times of conflict.

There is agreement from all the groups that the churchwide organization should be responsible for:

1. Planning for and conducting the global mission of the church.
2. Providing for the education of new pastors.



## Discussion

One of the goals of LIFT was to encourage broad participation in a discussion on the future of this church. To this end, discussion resources and feedback opportunities were created for many groups in the ELCA including the participants at synod assemblies.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the Task Force supported fielding a questionnaire designed for the members of this church which is the focus of this report. The design of the questionnaire was challenging. The ecology of the ELCA is complex and most ELCA members have experience with only one or two aspects of that ecology. As a result, the questionnaire focused primarily on congregations because it is the one aspect of the ecology most know best. The questionnaire also covered the connections individuals feel to the wider church and more broadly, their views of the appropriate functions of congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.

Because there is no national membership list for the ELCA, it is impossible to draw a random sample of members and, as a result, it is impossible to know how a “typical” member of the ELCA would have responded to these questions. Clearly the respondents to the open questionnaire are not typical because the responses of those who completed the open questionnaire are much closer to those of the clergy respondents than to those of the lay leaders. Of these groups, it is reasonable to assume that the questionnaires completed by the lay leaders would be most representative of typical members of this church.

### Factors Influencing Congregations

Fifty-one percent of the lay leader respondents either “strongly agreed” (12%) or “agreed” (39%) with the statement “My congregation is thriving.” On the other hand, 49 percent “disagreed” (37%) or “strongly disagreed” (12%) with the statement. The clergy respondents were more positive with 19 percent “strongly agreeing” with the statement and 54 percent “agreeing.” The respondents to the open questionnaire were in the middle with 20 percent “strongly agreeing” that their congregation is thriving and 45 percent “agreeing.”

A majority of the respondents in each of the respondent groups believe economic and cultural changes over the past few years have negatively impacted their congregations. A majority of the respondents in each of the groups also believe the Churchwide Assembly action on the sexuality social statement and the related policy changes have negatively impacted their congregations. The combination of these two factors has significantly disrupted whatever homeostasis existed in the ecology of the ELCA. There appears to be more conflict in congregations and there is evidence, particularly among lay leaders, that because of this conflict, their connection to the wider church has weakened. There is also little evidence that a strong ELCA Lutheran religious identity exists to counterbalance these trends.

### Identity

If the strength of a religious group in American society is related to the strength of its religious identity, then the responses of the lay leaders pose a significant challenge for the future. When asked “is there anything unique about ELCA Lutherans which distinguishes them from other Christians,” 31 percent of the lay leaders said “no” and 37 percent said they were “unsure.” It may well be that many of these lay leaders believe that ELCA Lutheranism is a kind of “generic” Christianity or that whatever may have been distinct in the heritage of the ELCA is now lost or no longer relevant.

### Connections

Lay leaders as members of their local congregation councils are critically positioned to determine the level of support, financial and otherwise, for the wider ecology of the ELCA. This makes assessing the commitment of ELCA lay leaders to the wider ecology of the church critical.

### *Congregational Connections*

As a reason for attending an ELCA congregation, 16 percent of the lay leaders indicated their appreciation of their congregation’s relationship with the wider church was “very important.” This ranks this relationship behind the importance of the appreciation of other people who attend their congregations (55%, “very important”), the appreciation of Lutheran forms of worship (41%, “very important”), the theology and teaching of the ELCA (33%, “very important”),

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<sup>10</sup> A report analyzing responses from the various groups in the ELCA including synod assemblies is not yet complete.

the fact that their parents are/were Lutherans (30%, “very important”) and the fact that their spouse is/was a Lutheran (23%, “very important”).

### *Connections to the Wider Church*

When asked how connected they feel to the wider church, 38 percent of the lay leader respondents indicated they were strongly connected, choosing 4 or 5 on the 5 point scale (1 - “not connected at all,” 5 - “very strongly connected”). Twenty percent indicated they were not connected at all, choosing 1 or 2 on the scale. Eight percent said they were “not sure” and 34 percent chose 3 on the scale. These findings suggest a significant number of lay leaders in the ELCA have modest to weak ties to the wider church.

The relative contribution or impact of these items on the level of connectedness can be measured.<sup>11</sup> For each of the following groups the items are presented in order of their **impact** on connection.

For respondents to the open questionnaire the items are:

1. a relationship or experience with the synod bishop or the presiding bishop.
2. a shared theology.
3. a shared stand on social issues.
4. attending a synod or churchwide assembly.
5. participation with other ELCA Lutherans in synod or churchwide ministries.

For clergy respondents the items are:

1. a shared stand on social issues.
2. a relationship or experience with the synod bishop or the presiding bishop.
3. a shared theology.
4. financial support received from the wider church.
5. attending a synod or a churchwide assembly.
6. reading *The Lutheran* or other ELCA publications.

For lay leader respondents the items are:

1. a shared theology.
2. a shared stand on social issues.
3. common forms of worship and music.

Two items, a shared stand on social issues and a shared theology, are common to all the groups. It is not known if this would have been the case before the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, but it is the case now.

For the respondents to the open questionnaire and the clergy engaging with the wider church (e.g., attending a synod or churchwide assembly, a relationship with the synod bishop or the presiding bishop) also has a significant impact on how connected people feel to the wider church. It may be that these items reinforce each other—those who feel most connected are most likely to engage and/or those who engage are most likely to feel connected.

For lay leader respondents engaging with the wider church was not important at least in terms of having a relationship or experience with the synod bishop or the presiding bishop or in attending a synod or churchwide assembly. This may be the case simply because too few have had these experiences. Instead, shared forms of worship and music was behind shared theology and a shared stand on social issues.

### Expectations of ELCA Lutheranism

A majority of respondents in each of the response groups indicated that three items were “very important” to them as expectations of ELCA Lutheranism. These items included the theology of justification by grace, a strong system of theological education for new pastors and being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people.

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<sup>11</sup> Step-wise regression with the level of connectedness as the dependent variable.

Among the lay leaders, different expectations of ELCA Lutheranism emerged, based on how connected the respondent said they were to the wider church. A majority of those who indicated they were “very strongly connected” (4 or 5 on the five-point scale) indicated the following items were “very important.” Comparative percentages are given for those who said they are “not connected at all” (1 or 2 on the five-point scale).

1. a theology of justification by grace through faith (79%, “very strongly connected” to 55%, “not connected”).
2. being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people (63% to 45%).
3. a strong system of theological education for pastors (63% to 38%).
4. being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry (55% to 21%).
5. strong public advocacy on behalf of the poor (55% to 21%).
6. significant involvement of laity in ministry (53% to 25%).
7. liturgical worship (52% to 21%).
8. traditional teaching of the Bible (51% to 67%).

It is clear that there are very different expectations of ELCA Lutheranism depending on how connected the lay leader respondent is to the wider church. First, those lay leaders who are very connected to the wider church have many more expectations of ELCA Lutheranism and among those expectations a majority of the respondents included being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry and strong public advocacy on behalf of the poor. The expectations of those who are not connected to the wider church are more limited. They include a theology of justification by grace and traditional teaching of the Bible.

The clergy respondents who are very connected also have more expectations of ELCA Lutheranism than those who are not and the expectations of these two groups of clergy are different. These two groups share the following expectations:

1. a theology of justification by grace through faith (92%, “very strongly connected” to 91%, “not connected”).
2. being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people (76% to 77%).
3. a strong system of theological education for pastors (78% to 60%).
4. significant involvement of laity in ministry (74% to 59%).

In addition, those who are very connected add the following:

1. being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry (70% to 46%).
2. strong public advocacy on behalf of the poor (68% to 27%).
3. strong national coordination and involvement in global mission (57% to 25%).
4. reaching out to other ethnic/racial groups (55% to 32%).

Those who are not connected add these two expectations:

1. traditional teaching of the Bible (43% to 75%).
2. the Lutheran Confessions (48% to 66%).

As noted at the beginning of this section, the vast majority of the respondents believe the church should be about three things—a theology of justification by grace through faith, being a church focused on sharing the good news of the gospel with unchurched people and providing a strong system of theological education for pastors. In addition to these expectations, however, those who see themselves as strongly connected to the wider church believe it also should be about feeding the hungry and advocating for the poor. On the other hand, the majority of those who are not well connected to the wider church do not share these expectations. Instead, their expectations of the wider church are more limited to the traditional teaching of the Bible and, for the clergy respondents, care for the Lutheran Confessions. It may be the case that a significant number of lay and clergy respondents feel disconnected from the wider church because they believe it is too involved in issues they would address differently or not at all.

For whatever reason, no matter which respondent group, the vast majority of those who say they are not connected to the wider church also believe their congregation is not stronger because it is part of the wider church. The differences

between those clergy and lay respondents who say they are connected and those who say they are not are very significant. Among the clergy who said they are not connected, 26 percent agreed with the statement “My congregation is strong because it is part of a wider church,” compared to 88 percent of those who are very connected. Among lay leaders who said they are not connected, 20 percent agreed with the statement “My congregation is strong because it is part of a wider church,” compared to 73 percent of those who are very connected.

Again, this discrepancy is reflected in views of the Churchwide Assembly. On the clergy questionnaire, 80 percent of the respondents who said they were not connected to the wider church also indicated that the Churchwide Assembly action had a negative impact on their congregation, compared to 45 percent of those who said they were very connected. Eighty-four percent of the respondents to the lay leader questionnaire who said they were not connected to the wider church indicated the Churchwide Assembly action had a negative impact on their congregation, compared to 47 percent of those who said they were very connected.

#### Differences Between Clergy and Lay Leader Respondents

Clergy have higher hopes and expectations than lay leaders for the wider church. Perhaps this is to be expected. People become pastors because they believe the work of the wider church is very important. At the same time, the size of these differences is striking and the differences may well be an indication of a different understanding of the role of the wider church. A majority of both the clergy and the lay leaders “strongly agreed” that the church should be expected to proclaim a theology of justification by grace through faith, to share the good news of the gospel with unchurched people and that it should provide a strong system of theological education for new pastors. But, the clergy are much more likely to expect that the wider church should also work to feed the hungry and advocate for the poor. For example, 63 percent of the clergy believe being a church dedicated to feeding the hungry is “very important” compared to 41 percent of the lay leaders. Fifty-seven percent of the clergy believe strong advocacy on behalf of the poor is “very important” compared to 38 percent of the lay leaders.

Lay leaders are less convinced in general that congregations are stronger because they are part of the wider church. Seventy percent of the clergy “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with this statement compared to 48 percent of the lay leaders. Twenty-five percent of the clergy “strongly agreed” compared to 12 percent of the lay leaders. Lay leaders are also less convinced that the world needs the message that ELCA Lutherans bring. This is a matter of degree, but when it comes to the wider church, it is a very significant matter of degree. Eighty-five percent of the lay leaders and 87 percent of the clergy agreed with the statement, but 56 percent of the clergy “strongly agreed” compared to 26 percent of the lay leaders.

Finally, a majority of both lay leader (61%) and clergy (53%) respondents believe the Churchwide Assembly action had a negative impact (1 or 2 of the five-point scale) on their congregations, but 37 percent of lay leaders chose the most negative point on the scale (1), compared to 26 percent of the clergy.

Why these views of the wider church differ between clergy and lay leaders is an important and significant question. It is not that lay leaders have completely different views but their understanding of the importance, role and utility of the wider church is considerably more limited. If this gap exists between clergy and lay leaders at the congregational level, it should be no surprise that an even wider gap would exist between lay leaders, the leadership of synods and the leadership of the churchwide organization.

## Synod Assembly Responses to LIFT Surveys

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### Overview

As part of the Living into the Future Together (LIFT) process, participants at synod assemblies were invited to discuss several questions during small group sessions. The questions were divided into three sections: Being Lutheran, Congregations and Beyond the Congregation. These responses were then compiled and coded by Research and Evaluation staff. A total of 885 surveys were completed from 27 synods (42% of synods): Alaska, Southwestern Washington, Oregon, Montana, Sierra Pacific, Pacifica, Grand Canyon, Rocky Mountain, South Dakota, Northeastern Minnesota, Southwestern Minnesota, Minneapolis Area, Central States, Arkansas-Oklahoma, Southwestern Texas, Metropolitan Chicago, Northern Illinois, Northeastern Iowa, Northwest Synod of Wisconsin, East-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Greater Milwaukee, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Indiana-Kentucky, Northwestern Ohio, New Jersey, New England and North Carolina.

### Being Lutheran

The first two questions discussed by synod assembly participants related to the importance of being Lutheran. The first question was, “Given that there are Presbyterians, Methodists, Episcopalians, Baptists and Roman Catholics (just to name a few religious groups), why should there be Lutherans?” There were a total of 865 responses to this question. (See Table 1.) The most common response was the concept of grace (29%), followed by word and sacrament, liturgy and worship and the confessional nature of Lutheranism and tradition (both 10%). Several respondents felt Lutheranism was important because questioning and challenging are encouraged and because it is Christ-centered, Scripture-based and they liked the Lutheran interpretation of the Bible (both 9%). Others listed the diversity of opinions and inclusivity of Lutherans (9%), as well as the missional, action and service-oriented aspects of Lutheranism (8%). Some respondents liked the ecumenical aspects of Lutheranism (5%), the concepts of the priesthood of believers and vocation and the fellowship of Lutherans (both 4%). A few respondents said they were born Lutheran and that Lutherans take their faith more seriously than other denominations (both 1%).

grace	29.1%
word and sacrament/liturgy/worship	10.3%
confessional/tradition	9.6%
questioning/willing to be challenged	9.4%
Christ-centered/Scripture-based/interpretation	9.1%
diversity of opinions/inclusivity	8.7%
missional/action/service	8.4%
ecumenical	5.4%
church of the people/priesthood of believers/vocation	4.3%
fellowship	3.6%
born Lutheran	1.4%
take faith more seriously	0.7%

The second question was similar to the first, asking respondents what, if anything, was most important about being a Lutheran to them personally. There were a total of 1,009 responses to this question. (See Table 2.) Again, the most common response was the concept of grace (29%), followed by Bible study, the accessibility of Scripture, Lutheran

interpretation of the Bible and theology of the cross (13%). Other respondents felt social issues, service and the missional and global nature of Lutheranism were most important to them personally (11%). Several respondents listed tradition, Luther and the confessions, as well as liturgy, worship and word and sacrament as important aspects (both 9%). Some respondents felt the welcoming and inclusive nature of Lutherans was important, while others listed the questioning and reforming aspects of Lutheranism (both 8%). Several respondents said they were born Lutheran (4%) and others liked the lay leadership, priesthood of believers and vocation concepts (3%). Some felt Lutheranism was less extreme and less rigid than other denominations and they liked the ecumenical aspects (both 2%). A few respondents mentioned the church structure and larger church leadership as important (2%), while others felt the emphasis on baptism was important (1%). A couple of respondents listed the Lutheran traditions of coffee and food as important to them personally (1%).

grace	28.8%
Bible study/accessibility of Scripture/interpretation/theology of the cross	13.4%
social issues/service/missional/global	10.5%
tradition/Luther/confessions	9.0%
liturgy/worship/word and sacrament	8.5%
welcoming/inclusive	8.1%
questioning/reforming	7.5%
born Lutheran	3.8%
lay leadership/priesthood of believers/vocation	2.9%
less extreme/less rigid	2.4%
ecumenical	2.0%
structure/larger church leadership	1.6%
baptism	0.9%
coffee/food	0.6%

We were also interested in potential differences in responses by synod. We examined the top three responses for each question. There were significant differences<sup>12</sup> found by synod for this question. Respondents from the North Carolina Synod were most likely to list grace compared to other synods. On the other hand, respondents from the Minneapolis Area Synod were most likely to list Bible study, the accessibility of Scripture, Lutheran interpretation of the Bible and theology of the cross. Respondents from the New Jersey Synod were most likely to list social issues, service and global mission as important to them personally.

### **Congregations**

The next three questions asked synod assembly participants about their congregations. First, respondents were asked what internal and external changes over the past few years have most impacted their congregation. There were a total of 524 responses to this question. (See Table 3.) The most common response was loss of employment and the economy (19%), followed by major contributors dying and the aging of the congregation (17%). Many respondents also listed the sexuality decision and related issues (16%), as well as new pastoral leadership (13%) as having an impact on their congregation. Several respondents mentioned the lower priority families place on church and the competition for time (10%), while others felt they could not keep youth involved in the congregation (6%). Some respondents listed technology and the lack of a permanent pastor as important issues (both 4%). Others had new building or remodeling projects and a renewed focus on mission (both 3%). A few respondents said people were moving more (2%) or they were dealing with the issue of divorced parents (1%). Some felt they were dealing with a generation that is biblically illiterate, while other respondents mentioned a renewed focus on the Bible in their congregation (both 1%). Other issues listed were not evangelizing (1%) and health care (0.4%), while a couple respondents felt their congregation was more spiritual, less uptight and open to God and others (0.4%). A couple respondents listed divisive rhetoric, withholding giving to synod

<sup>12</sup> All reported differences are significant at the .05 level.

and churchwide expressions, not being able to rely on the pastor and interfaith marriages as issues affecting the congregation (all 0.2%).

There were also significant differences found by synod for this question. Respondents from the Metropolitan Chicago and Montana Synods were most likely to list loss of employment and the economy. On the other hand, respondents from the Minneapolis Area Synod were most likely to list major contributors dying and the aging of the congregation compared to other synods. Respondents from the Rocky Mountain Synod were most likely to cite the sexuality decision and related issues as changes that have impacted their congregation.

loss of employment/economy	19.3%
major contributors dying/aging	16.8%
sexuality issues	15.8%
new pastoral leadership	13.2%
lower priority family places on church/competition for time	9.5%
can't keep youth involved	5.9%
technology	3.6%
lack of permanent pastor	3.6%
new building/remodeling	2.9%
mission	2.7%
people moving more	2.1%
divorced parents	1.0%
generation that is biblically illiterate	1.0%
renewed focus on the Bible	0.6%
not evangelizing	0.6%
health care	0.4%
more spiritual/less uptight/open to God and others	0.4%
divisive rhetoric	0.2%
withholding giving to synod/churchwide expressions	0.2%
can't rely on the pastor	0.2%
interfaith marriages	0.2%

The next question about congregations asked participants to describe their hopes for the future of their congregation and what most needs to happen for those hopes to be realized. There were a total of 1,011 responses to this question. (See Table 4.) The most common response was their congregation needs to be more outwardly focused on the community, with increased discipleship, outreach and evangelism (43%). Many respondents felt their congregation needs more young families, young adults and intergenerational programs (14%), as well as strong youth programs (12%). Some respondents felt there needs to be more emphasis on social ministry and a willingness to change (both 6%). Others would like their congregation to be more Christ-centered and focused on Bible study, as well as more emphasis on worship and in some cases adding Spanish services (both 4%). A few respondents listed increased giving, tithing and stewardship, while others would like their pastor to stay a lengthy time or find a new pastor (both 3%). Some respondents hope for more stability or unity in their congregation (2%) and others would like to relate the gospel to everyday life (1%). A couple of respondents felt their congregation should be more motivated to get information and read materials from the synod and the churchwide staff and others would like more small groups (both 1%). A couple of respondents would like congregants to speak up more and be more assertive about their faith (0.4%) and others would like a bigger kitchen to serve more people (0.2%).

More outwardly focused/community/discipleship/outreach/evangelism	42.8%
More young families/young adults/intergenerational	13.8%
Strong youth programs	11.6%
More emphasis on social ministry	6.3%
Willingness to change	5.9%
Christ-centered/Bible study	4.2%
More emphasis on worship/Spanish services	3.7%
Increase giving/tithing/stewardship	3.3%
Have our pastor stay a lengthy time/new pastor	2.6%
Stability/unity	2.2%
Relate the gospel to everyday life	1.4%
More motivation to get information/read materials from synod/churchwide staff	0.9%
More small groups	0.8%
Speak up more/more assertive about faith	0.4%
Bigger kitchen	0.2%

Significant differences by synod were found for this question as well. Respondents from the New England, Rocky Mountain, South Dakota and Sierra Pacific Synods were more likely to hope their congregation would be more outwardly focused, with increased discipleship, outreach and evangelism. On the other hand, respondents from the Oregon Synod were most likely to hope for more young families, young adults and intergenerational programs compared to other synods. Respondents from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod were most likely to list strong youth programs as a hope for the future of their congregation.

The last question about congregations explained that they are expected to share their financial resources with the synod and the churchwide organization (through the synod). Respondents were asked how their congregation has viewed that expectation in the past and how they expect to view it in the future. There were 291 responses to this question. (See Table 5.) The most common response was a strong, continued support of the synod (43%), followed by the need for more visible connections to ministries and how the money is being used (18%). Many respondents felt the trend is to focus on local ministries and designated giving (15%), while many struggle to meet their budget and they cut benevolence first (13%). Some respondents said a few congregations have stopped giving to the synod and churchwide organization because of the human sexuality decision (10%). A couple respondents felt the churchwide organization should provide more help to struggling congregations (1%).

strong, continued support of synod	43.3%
need more visible connections to ministries/how money is being used	17.5%
trend is focus on local ministries/designated giving	14.8%
some struggle to meet budget/cut benevolence first	13.1%
a few congregations have stopped giving/sexuality decision	10.0%
provide more help to struggling congregations from churchwide organization	1.4%

Significant differences by synod also emerged for this question. Respondents from the Indiana-Kentucky and Minneapolis Area Synods and the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin were more likely to say their congregation has a strong, continued support of the synod. On the other hand, respondents from the Oregon and Rocky Mountain Synods were more likely to say they need more visible connections to ministries and how the money is being used compared to other synods. Respondents from the Alaska Synod were most likely to say that the trend is to focus on local ministries and designated giving instead of mission support to the synod and churchwide organization.



The final section of questions focused beyond the congregation. First, participants were asked to think about their congregation's relationships with other ELCA Lutheran congregations, their synod and the churchwide organization in Chicago. They were also encouraged to think about their congregation's relationships with other groups in their community, the nation, or around the world. These other relationships could be ecumenical relationships, connections to for-profit or nonprofit organizations, other ministries, etc.

Next, respondents were asked of all these relationships, which are most important to their congregation and why. There were 1,007 responses to this question. (See Table 6.) The most common response was community involvement and civic organizations (34%), followed by relationships with other ELCA congregations (19%). Many respondents listed ecumenical partners (14%), as well as the ELCA World Hunger Appeal, hunger organizations, LWR and ELCA Disaster Relief (11%). Others felt missions in other countries were most important (11%), as well as support from the synod, especially in the call process (6%). A few respondents felt it was most important to be part of the ELCA (3%) and some listed Interfaith Caregivers and Hospitality Network as important relationships (1%). A couple respondents listed Women of the ELCA and Lutheran Men in Mission (1%), as well as Thrivent (0.4%) as relationships most important to their congregation.

community involvement/civic organizations	34.4%
other local ELCA congregations	18.6%
ecumenical partners	14.1%
ELCA World Hunger Appeal/hunger organizations/LWR/ELCA Disaster Relief	10.8%
missions in other countries	10.7%
support from synod/call process	6.2%
important to be part of the ELCA	2.8%
interfaith caregivers/hospitality network	1.3%
Women of the ELCA/LMM	0.8%
Thrivent	0.4%

There were also significant differences by synod for this question. Respondents from the Arkansas-Oklahoma Synod were most likely to list community involvement and civic organizations as most important to their congregation. In contrast, respondents from the Greater Milwaukee Synod were most likely to list relationships with other local ELCA congregations as most important. Respondents from the Montana Synod and the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin were more likely to list ecumenical partners as most important to their congregation.

The next question was related to the previous question and asked respondents what, if anything, they would like to change about the nature of these outside relationships. There were a total of 134 responses to this question. (See Table 7.) The most common response was more cooperation and less competition between churches (28%), followed by a better connection with others that would enable partnership (25%). Many respondents would like to expand their ecumenical relationships (13%) and others would like their congregation to be more open to the community (10%). Several respondents would like more people to help with the ministries (9%) and more youth fellowship (5%). A couple respondents felt their congregation should be more connected to their benevolences (3%), while others felt a dependency could be created if mission was not done right (2%). A couple respondents would like congregational representatives at the churchwide organization, as well as doing more with companion synods (both 2%). One respondent felt Thrivent should be more equitable and another would like to develop stronger second, third and fourth responders to disasters (both 1%). One respondent felt there should be less power and control centered in the churchwide organization and another felt the cluster could share with congregations outside the cluster (both 1%). One respondent would like the ministry to become self-sustaining (1%).

<b>Table 7: What Would You Like to Change about the Nature of These Relationships? (N = 134)</b>	
end competition between churches/more cooperation	27.6%
better connection would enable partnership	24.6%
expand ecumenical relationships	12.7%
congregation more open to the community	9.7%
more people to help with ministries	9.0%
more youth fellowship	5.2%
congregation more connected to benevolences	3.0%
dependency created if mission is not done right	1.5%
congregational representatives at churchwide organization	1.5%
more with companion synods	1.5%
Thrivent—more equitable	0.7%
develop stronger second, third and fourth responders to disasters	0.7%
less power and control centered in churchwide organization	0.7%
cluster could share with congregations outside cluster	0.7%
self-sustaining ministry	0.7%

Significant differences by synod were also found for this question. Respondents from the North Carolina Synod were most likely to say they would like to see more cooperation and less competition between churches. On the other hand, respondents from the Arkansas-Oklahoma and New England Synods and the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin were more likely to feel a better connection would enable partnership. Respondents from the Northern Illinois Synod were most likely to say they would like to expand ecumenical relationships.

The last three questions asked specifically about the ELCA as a whole. First, respondents were asked, “In the context of God’s mission, what do you believe the ELCA as a whole does well?” There were a total of 1,022 responses to this question. (See Table 8.) The most common response was LWR, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Response (28%), followed by social services and social justice issues (18%). Many respondents felt the ELCA was doing well in the areas of global mission (15%) and education, colleges and seminaries (10%). Others listed ecumenical relationships (8%) and being inclusive, thoughtful and deliberative (5%) as strengths of the ELCA. Some respondents liked the variety in worship and the Book of Faith Initiative and focus on Scripture (both 3%). Others praised the ELCA’s ability to address

<b>Table 8: What Do You Believe the ELCA as a Whole Does Well? (N = 1,022)</b>	
LWR/ELCA World Hunger/Disaster Response	28.4%
social services/social justice	18.3%
global mission	15.3%
education/colleges/seminaries	9.7%
ecumenical relationships	7.5%
inclusive/thoughtful/deliberative	5.0%
variety in worship	3.1%
Book of Faith Initiative/Scripture	3.0%
ability to address issues without being divisive	2.7%
ELCA Youth Gathering/Youth Ministry	2.4%
Bible camps/outdoor ministry	1.4%
Christ-centered leadership	1.1%
campus ministry	0.7%
opening new congregations	0.5%
fellowship/friendship	0.4%
military chaplains	0.3%
prayer league	0.2%

difficult issues without being divisive (3%), as well as the ELCA Youth Gathering and youth ministry (2%). A few respondents felt the ELCA’s Bible camps and outdoor ministry were strong, as well as its Christ-centered leadership (both 1%). A few respondents listed campus ministry and opening new congregations as strengths of the ELCA (both 1%). A couple respondents like the fellowship and friendship (0.4%), military chaplains (0.3%) and the prayer league (0.2%) provided by the ELCA.

Synods also differed in their responses to this question. Respondents from the Metropolitan Chicago Synod and the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin were more likely to list LWR, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Response. On the other hand, respondents from the New Jersey Synod were most likely to feel the ELCA does social service and social justice well. Respondents from the South Dakota Synod were most likely to feel global mission is a strength of the ELCA.

In contrast, respondents were also asked what they believe the ELCA needs to do better. There were a total of 635 responses to this question. (See Table 9.) The most common response was evangelism (29%), followed by better communication and branding of the ELCA (28%). Many respondents felt the ELCA could improve outreach to youth and young adults, as well as being more inclusive and more diverse (both 10%). Some respondents felt the ELCA was too liberal and needs to return to Scripture (5%). Others would like to see less competition among churches and a more public voice in society (both 3%). A few respondents would like more up-to-date education resources and others feel the ELCA should stop fighting change and embrace technology (both 2%). A few respondents would like to see more lay training (2%), as well as more support for missionaries (1%). A couple of respondents felt the ELCA could improve the call process and provide more pastoral care for pastors (both 1%). A couple of respondents would like to see better health care, pensions and debt relief for pastors, as well as better use and promotion of ELCA policy statements (both 1%). A couple of respondents felt the ELCA does not relate well to the underclasses (1%) and one respondent would like to see more wellness advocacy (0.2%).

<b>Table 9: What Do You Believe the ELCA Needs to Do Better? (N = 635)</b>	
evangelism	29.0%
better communication/branding	28.3%
better youth outreach/young adults	10.1%
more inclusive/diversity	9.6%
too liberal/return to Scripture	5.2%
less competition among churches	3.3%
more public voice in society	3.0%
more up-to-date education resources	2.0%
fight change/technology	1.9%
lay training	1.9%
more support to missionaries	1.3%
call process	1.3%
pastoral care for pastors	0.9%
health care for pastors/pension/debt relief	0.9%
use and promotion of policy statements	0.6%
don't relate well to underclasses	0.5%
wellness advocacy	0.2%

Again, significant differences by synod were found for this question. Respondents from the North Carolina and Rocky Mountain Synods were more likely to list evangelism as an area for the ELCA to improve. On the other hand, respondents from the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin and the Montana Synod were more likely to feel the ELCA needs to improve its communication and branding. Respondents from the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin were most likely to list better youth and young adult outreach as areas needing improvement for the ELCA.

The final question on the survey asked respondents what God is calling the ELCA to do and be over the next ten years. There were a total of 478 responses to this question. (See Table 10.) The most common response was evangelism, discipleship and witness (22%), followed by meeting the needs of diverse populations, inclusivity, diversity and being welcoming (13%). Many respondents felt the ELCA should be a voice for justice and service (11%), while others would

like to see youth, families and young adults valued (8%). Several respondents felt the ELCA should think creatively, restructure ministry teams and the constitution and continue worldwide outreach and mission work (both 6%). Others felt it is important for the ELCA to change with the times and adapt, as well as sticking to Scripture and not conforming to society (both 5%). A few respondents would like the ELCA to demonstrate what it is to disagree and still be the body of Christ and they would like better communication from the churchwide organization (both 4%). A few respondents felt the ELCA should preach grace, be united and focus on ecumenical ministries (all 3%). Other respondents would like to see an increase in stewardship and better use of money and people resources by the ELCA, as well as new congregations and new pastors (both 2%). A couple respondents listed lay leadership training and partnership with other congregations (both 1%). One respondent would like to see the ELCA build on its strengths, while another respondent would like seminary instructors to go out into the congregations (both 0.2%). Finally, one respondent would like the ELCA to have a better balance between its local and global focus (0.2%)

evangelism/disciples/witness	22.0%
meet the needs of diverse populations/inclusivity/diversity/welcoming	13.4%
voice for justice/service	11.3%
youth and families valued/young adults	7.5%
think creatively/restructure ministry teams/constitution	6.3%
worldwide outreach/mission work	5.6%
change with the times/adapt	5.2%
stick to Scripture/don't conform to society	4.6%
demonstrate what it is to disagree and still be the body of Christ	4.2%
better communication	4.0%
preach grace	3.3%
united	2.9%
ecumenical ministries	2.5%
increase stewardship/better stewards of money and people resources	2.1%
new congregations/new pastors	1.9%
lay leadership training	1.3%
partner with other congregations	1.3%
build on strengths	0.2%
seminary instructors out into congregations	0.2%
balance between global/local focus	0.2%

Synods also differed in their responses to this question. Respondents from the Alaska Synod were most likely to say the ELCA needs to work on evangelism, discipleship and witness in the next ten years. In contrast, respondents from the Central States Synod were most likely to feel meeting the needs of diverse populations, inclusivity, diversity and being welcoming are most important. Respondents from the Rocky Mountain Synod were most likely to say the ELCA should be a voice for justice and service in the future.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The responses were very similar for the first two questions: Why there should be Lutherans and what is most important personally about being Lutheran. The concept of grace was the top response in both cases. Respondents also felt Lutherans were important due to the focus on word and sacrament, liturgy and worship, as well as the confessional nature and tradition of Lutheranism. As for personal reasons, other top responses were Bible study, the accessibility of Scripture, Lutheran interpretation and theology of the cross, as well as the focus on social issues, service and global mission.

The top three changes that have had the most impact on congregations were loss of employment and the economy, major contributors dying and the aging of the congregation and the human sexuality decision and sexuality issues. Almost

half of the respondents hoped their congregation would be more outwardly focused in the future, with increased discipleship, outreach and evangelism. Other top responses were more young families, young adults and intergenerational programs, as well as strong youth programs.

When asked about mission support, almost half of the respondents felt their congregation had a strong, continued support of the synod. Other top responses were the need for more visible connections to ministry and how the money is being used and the trend of focusing on local ministries and designated giving.

Respondents reported that the most important relationships outside of the congregation were community involvement and civic organizations, other ELCA congregations and ecumenical partners. When asked what they would like to change about these relationships, the top response was more cooperation and less competition between churches. Other common responses were that a better connection would enable partnership and the desire to expand ecumenical relationships.

When asked what the ELCA as a whole does well, the top responses were LWR, ELCA World Hunger and Disaster Response, social services and social justice and global mission. In contrast, respondents felt the ELCA needs to improve in the areas of evangelism, communication and branding and outreach to youth and young adults. Similarly, respondents felt the ELCA should work on evangelism, discipleship and witness over the next ten years. Other areas of concern for the future are meeting the needs of diverse populations, inclusivity, diversity and being welcoming, as well as being a voice for justice and service.

Overall, the synod assembly responses to the LIFT survey revealed the need to focus on evangelism in the future. Other areas that surfaced many times were the need for increased diversity and attracting youth and young adults. Improving communication among all the partners and better branding of the ELCA were also suggested. As the ELCA moves into the future, the changing ecology will need to address these important areas.

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# Appendix C: Multicultural Ministries in the ELCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), in its constituting convention in 1987, adopted the following goal: "It shall be a goal of this church that within 10 years of its establishment the membership shall include at least 10 percent people of color and/or primary language other than English" (ELCA 5.01.A87.).

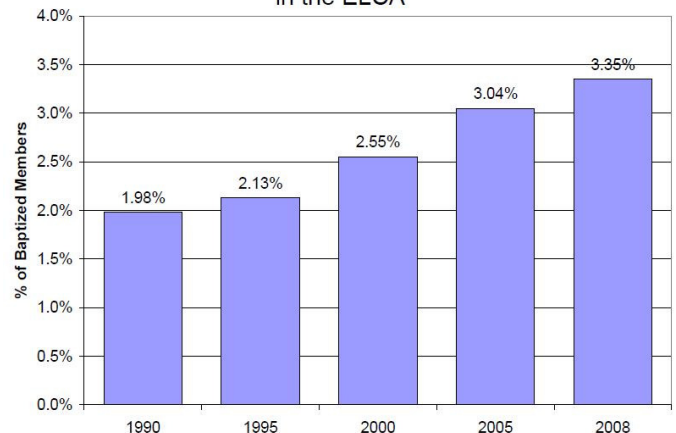
As of December 2008, 22 years after the 10 percent goal was established, people of color make up 3 percent of the baptized members of the ELCA (see Table 1). In December 2009, when ELCA counts changed from baptized members to active participants, the percent of people of color in the ELCA increased to 4.84 percent.

During the life of the ELCA the percentage and number of people of color in the ELCA have increased. Table 2 shows that the percentage has increased from 1.98 percent in 1990 to 3.35 percent in 2008. The number of baptized members that are people of color has increased from 103,715 in 1990 to 155,141 in 2008 (see Table 3). The largest number of growth is found among Latinos and multiracial members (see Table 4).

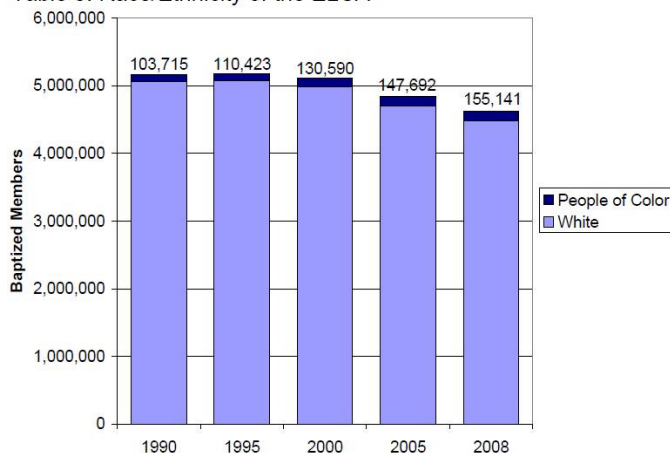
**Table 1. Number and Percent Persons of Color or Primary Language Other Than English in the ELCA, December 2008.**

Group	Number	Percent
African American/Black	52,661	1.14%
American Indian/Alaska Native	6,818	0.15%
Arab/Middle Eastern	2,154	0.05%
Asian/Pacific Islander	22,067	0.48%
Latino/Spanish	42,621	0.92%
Multiethnic	18,098	0.39%
Other	10,722	0.23%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>155,141</b>	<b>3.35%</b>
White	4,470,272	96.47%
Not reported	8,474	0.18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,633,887</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

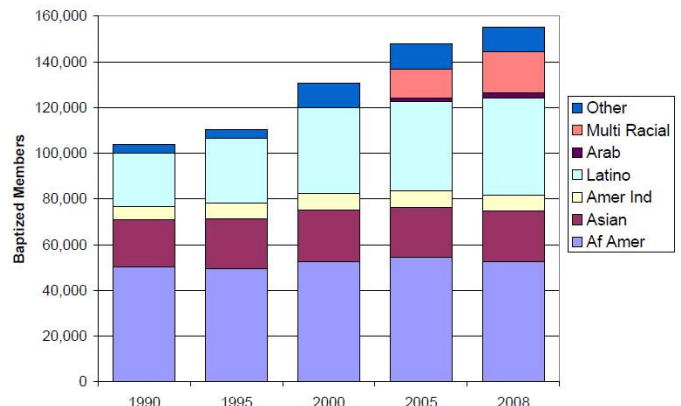
**Table 2: Percent People of Color in the ELCA**



**Table 3. Race/Ethnicity of the ELCA**



**Table 4. Number of People of Color in the ELCA**



The number of rostered leaders of color also is growing. Ordained ministers grew from 270 pastors of color (1.6 percent) in 1988 to 665 (3.8 percent) in 2010 (see Table 5). One new deaconess of color was consecrated during that time period, bringing the number to 4 (6.6 percent). Associates in Ministry have remained around one percent; there are no diaconal ministers of color.

Master of Divinity (M.Div.) enrollment in ELCA seminaries experienced a large jump in the 2009–2010 academic year with 57 (5 percent) M.Div. candidates (see Table 6). If TEEM (Theological Education for Emerging Ministries) candidates are added to M.Div. candidates, people of color are 9.8 percent of candidates for ordained ministry. TEEM candidates have jumped from nine in 2000 to 21 in 2009.

ELCA congregations have become more diverse. Between 1990 and 2008, the number of congregations with 20 percent or more members of color has grown by 200 (52 percent) from 385 congregations in 1990 to 585 in 2008. The number of congregations with 5 percent or more people of color also is increasing from 1,101 in 2000 to 1,515 in 2008 (see Table 7).

### Mission Opportunities

Changes in the U.S. population show many opportunities for the ELCA to grow multiculturally. Table 8 shows projections by the U.S. Census Bureau for race and ethnicity. It shows the fastest growth for Latinos followed by Asian Americans. The percentage of the population that is White continues to become smaller. Diversity is growing particularly in Region 2, Region 4 and Region 9. These are areas where the ELCA has many opportunities for outreach and mission among a very diverse population. Region 2 includes 156 ZIP Codes that are growing, have 20 percent or more people of color in the population and have no ELCA congregations currently serving the ZIP Code; Region 4 has 103 ZIP Codes; Region 9 has 142 ZIP Codes. The ELCA is actively starting congregations and synodically authorized worshiping communities in these areas (see the map below). In 2010 54 percent of congregations under development and synodically authorized worshiping communities were among people of color.

Existing ELCA congregations also have opportunities for growing in diversity. Table 9 shows that there are 1,763 ELCA congregations located in ZIP Codes where the population is 11 to 20 percent more diverse than their membership’s diversity—an opportunity for evangelism and growth in diversity. There are 933 congregations with communities that are 21 to 30 percent more diverse than their membership. Overall, more than 4,000 ELCA congregations are located in communities with an opportunity for growth in diversity.

Table 5. Percent Clergy of Color in the ELCA

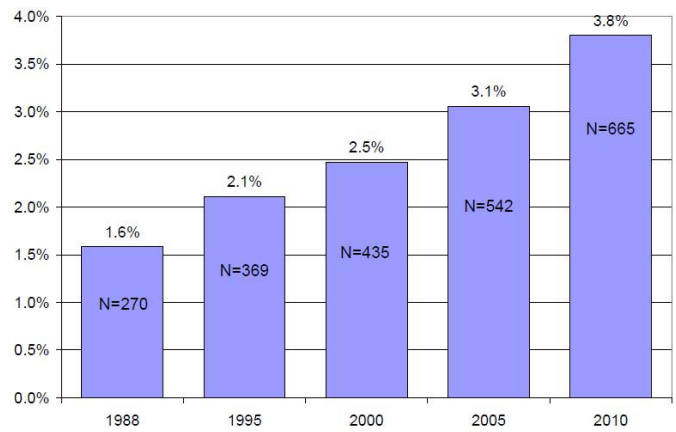


Table 6. ELCA M.Div. Persons of Color Enrollment in ELCA Seminaries

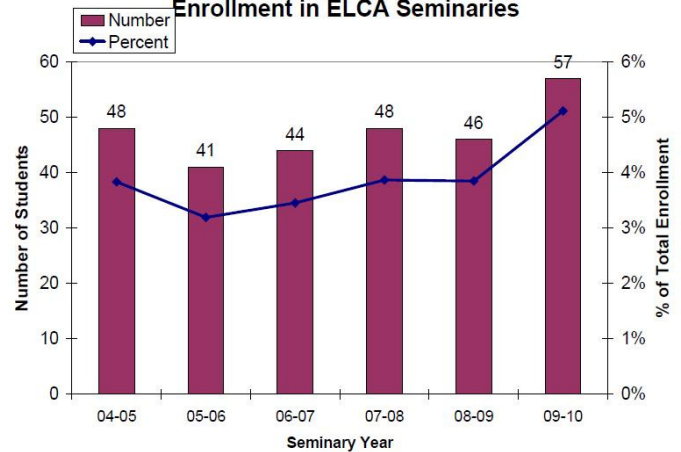
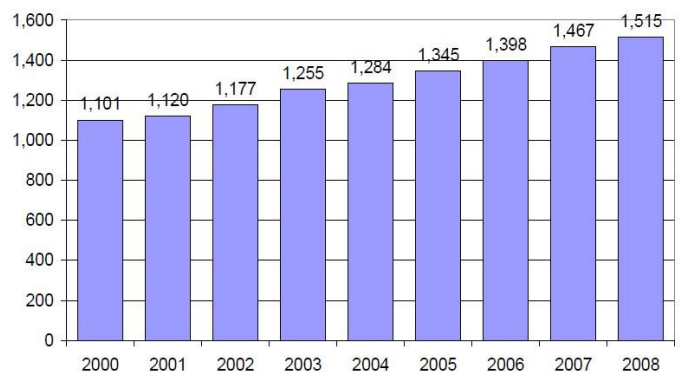
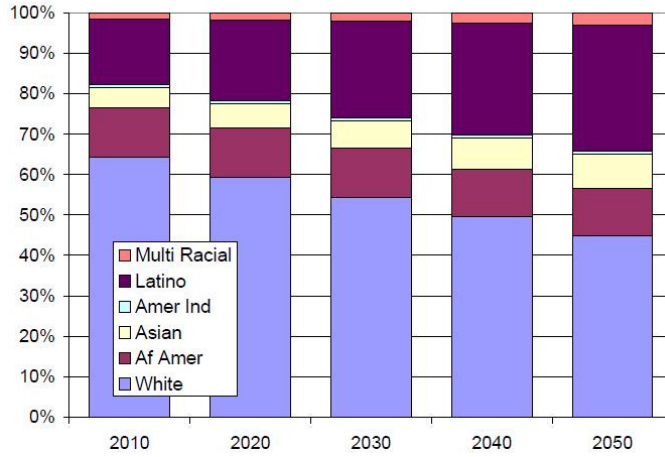


Table 7. Number of ELCA Congregations with 5% or More Baptized Members of Color and Language Other Than English

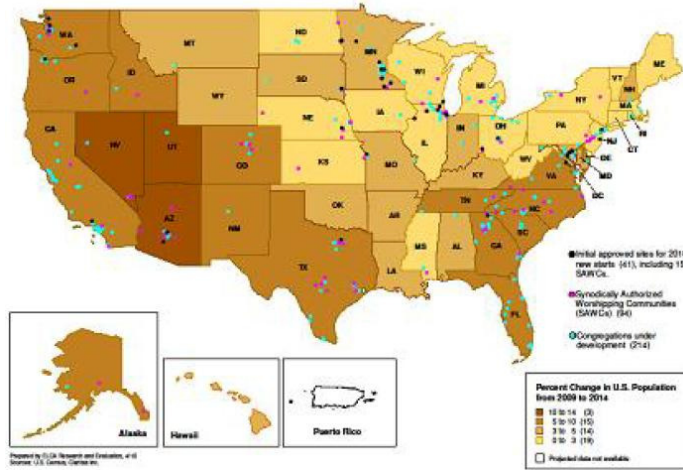




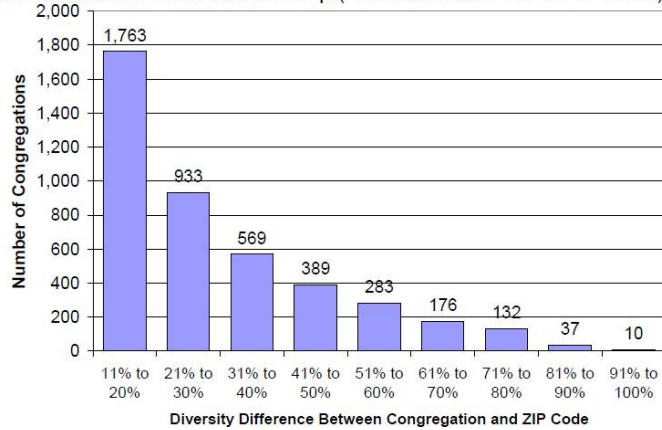
**Table 8. Projected U.S. Population by Race & Hispanic Origin**



**ELCA - New Congregational Development - 2010**  
4/14/10



**Table 9. ELCA Congregations with More Diversity in Their ZIP Codes Than in Their Membership (At Least 10% POC in ZIP Code)**



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## Appendix D: Sample Congregational Mission Covenant



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### **Evangelizing Congregations Mission Covenant** between **Name of Congregation, City, State** and the **Name of Synod** **Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

*“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ ” (Matthew 28:18–20)*

#### **A VISION OF PARTNERSHIP**

Shaped by the presence of the Risen Lord through communal and individual faith practices of the disciple, CONGREGATION NAME, CITY, STATE and the NAME Synod will partner interdependently with other agencies, institutions and organizations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to preach the Word, administer the sacraments and carry out God’s mission. The interdependent partners of the ELCA accompany new and renewed evangelizing congregations as centers for evangelical mission, inspiring missional leaders, re-rooting in their communities at the grassroots and joined together as partners in mission support. The congregations, synods and churchwide organization of the ELCA with other interdependent ministry partners will engage mission for the formation of evangelizing congregations that make disciples for Jesus Christ who use their gifts for God’s reign in the church and in the world. Grounded with the leadership of the *missionary bishop*, all congregations are called to evangelical mission for the vision:

*Every person is a missionary, every pastor is a mission director,  
and every congregation is a mission station for the sake of the world.*

#### **PURPOSE**

In faithful participation in the mission of God in and through this church, its congregations, synods and the churchwide organization—as interdependent expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—are guided by the biblical and confessional commitments of this church (ELCA Constitution, 8.16). The purpose of this Covenant is to foster *interdependent partnership* of all ELCA expressions for *congregations as centers for evangelical mission* to be shaped by both local needs and global awareness, by both individual witness and corporate endeavor and by both distinctly Lutheran emphases and growing ecumenical cooperation, consistent with the following commitments:

+**Constitution for Congregations** (4.01): The Church is a people of 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.

+**Synod Constitution** (6.03e): Each synod, in partnership with the churchwide organization, shall bear primary responsibility for the oversight of the life and mission of this church in its territory. In fulfillment of this role, the synod shall: Plan for the mission of this church in the synod, initiating and developing...new ministries, redevelopment of existing ministries...leadership and encouragement of congregations in their evangelism efforts...encouragement of financial support for the work of this church by individuals and congregations...provision for resources for congregational life...and assistance to the members of its congregations in carrying out their ministries in the world.

+**Strategic Directions for the ELCA Churchwide Organization**: *Claimed, gathered and sent by God’s grace for the sake of the world, the ELCA will...*support congregations; grow in evangelical outreach; step forward as a public church; deepen and extend global, ecumenical and interfaith relationships; and bring forth and support faithful, wise and courageous leaders.

+**Churchwide Priorities**: Working collaboratively with congregations, synods, agencies and institutions and other partners, the churchwide organization will give priority to: *accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and build capacity for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.*

**COVENANT EXPRESSIONS**

The congregation is engaged in God’s mission through this church in its community and the world through the discernment, development and implementation of *missional plans* as an evangelizing congregation that makes disciples for Jesus Christ who use their gifts for God’s reign in the church and in the world. To participate in God’s mission, this congregation as a *center for evangelical mission*, shall implement missional plans (consistent with the Statement of Purpose of ELCA congregations in chapter 4, Model Constitution for Congregations), including to:

- +Carry out Christ’s Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier of all.
- +Serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
- +Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling and to use these gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.

The synod is engaged in God’s mission through this church for missional ministry in this synod through the discernment, development and implementation of synodical missional plans focused on intentional engagement for *new evangelizing congregations, renewed evangelizing congregations, mission support* and *stewardship education* and *missional strategies* (e.g. attentiveness to ethnic and multi-cultural strategies; ELCA Evangelism Strategy; missional leadership).

To fulfill these purposes “the congregation shall...motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation’s ministry and the ministry of other parts of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America....Foster and participate in interdependent relationships with other congregations, the synod and the churchwide organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” (Chapter 4, Model Constitution for Congregations)

The congregation and the synod will be “walking partners” with one another and pray for each other regularly.

The congregation and the synod will continue to embrace and practice transparency and mutual accountability in our ongoing relationship as partners.

The congregation and the synod will be alert to the needs of each other as we communicate regularly.

There will be periodic review of the missional plans of the congregation and the synod as an expression of our relationship.

Initiated in consultation, \_\_\_\_\_ (date) \_\_\_\_\_:

NAME: CONGREGATION

NAME: SYNOD

City, State

*Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*    *Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

President of the Congregation

Vice President

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

Pastor

Bishop

*Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37–40)*

## Appendix E: Design Proposal for the Churchwide Organization



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*NOTE: This exhibit outlines one of the ways in which LIFT research has been used to date. In October 2010 the ELCA implemented a rationale for an extensive redesign of the churchwide organization. LIFT had been conducting extensive research for its report while the redesign was in the planning stages. The Design Team reflected themes found in the LIFT research in its work. The document that follows originally was prepared for the October 2010 meeting of the Church Council.*

### Rationale and Narrative

The churchwide organization is an instrument for accomplishing the purposes of this church that are shared with and supported by the members, congregations and synods of this church (ELCA constitution 11.12.). The churchwide organization serves on behalf of and in support of this church's members, congregations and synods in proclaiming the Gospel, reaching out in witness and service both globally and throughout the territory of this church, nurturing members of this church in the daily life of faith, and manifesting the unity of this church with the whole Church of Jesus Christ (ELCA 11.11.).

In 2010, the Presiding Bishop appointed the Churchwide Design Team<sup>13</sup> to evaluate and propose changes in the churchwide organization in light of the changing mission and ministry needs of this church and the resources available to the churchwide organization. This action was precipitated by a significant drop in mission support. In 2008, after adjusting for inflation, the value of mission support income had declined by half since the founding of this church in 1988. From 2008 to 2011, estimated churchwide mission support dropped from \$65.3 million to \$48 million. The work of the design team is based on an estimate of \$48 million with a contingency plan of \$45 million.

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<sup>13</sup> The members of the design team were the Rev. M. Wyvetta Bullock, executive for administration, Office of the Presiding Bishop; Mr. Jonathon Beyer, executive for information technology; the Rev. Mark S. Hanson, presiding bishop; the Rev. Sherman G. Hicks, executive director, Multicultural Ministries; Mr. Kenneth W. Inskip, executive for research and evaluation; Ms. Christina Jackson-Skelton, treasurer of the ELCA; Ms. Else Thompson, executive for human resources.

### Information Available to the Design Team

The design team took full advantage of the work of the LIFT/Ecology (Living in to the Future Together) task force.<sup>14</sup> In 2009, the LIFT task force was authorized by the Church Council in collaboration with the Conference of Bishops to study the "ecology" of the ELCA and make recommendations that "will position this church for the future and explore new possibilities for participating in God's mission." These recommendations will be presented to the 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly. In support of the work of the task force, extensive studies were conducted with congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. These studies, including surveys of lay and clergy leaders in addition to the participants at a majority of 2010 synod assemblies, were foundational to the deliberations of the design team. The design team also consulted with the LIFT planning team by conference call and one face-to-face meeting.

The design team also encouraged synod bishops to meet regionally and to share their thoughts and ideas. Seven of the nine regions responded.

The design team consulted three times by conference call with the Executive Committee of the Church Council and twice with representatives of the Planning and Evaluation Committee of the Church Council.

The design team provided opportunities for the executive directors, churchwide staff and units to share their thoughts and ideas. Responses were received from each of the executive directors of program units and from 75 individual staff members.

The design team conducted a detailed analysis of the churchwide organization's job positions and its grants to partners in ministry.

Two organizational consultants advised the design team: Michael Hansen of Hansen and Associates, Potomac, Maryland; and John Andrews, Executive Vice President, D. Hilton

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<sup>14</sup> Full reports of the research conducted in support of LIFT are available from the Research and Evaluation unit of the ELCA. The reports include: *The 2008 Faith Communities Today: Survey of ELCA Congregations* (2009); *The 2006 ELCA Congregational Survey* (2007); *Lutherans Say 6: The Religious Beliefs and Practices of Lay Leaders in the ELCA* (2009); *The Number and Size of Synods in the ELCA* (2009); *The Synod Assembly Responses to LIFT Surveys* (2010); and *The Living into the Future Together Report on the Open, Clergy, and Lay Leader Questionnaire* (2010). Notes are available from the LIFT Consultation on Mission Capacity and Funding.

Associates, The Woodlands, Texas. Consultants in communications and development also provided input.

Based on this work, the design team concluded that this church has the potential to strengthen its capacity for mission in response to the good news of the Gospel. In this context, the design team also concluded that the two existing priorities of the churchwide organization are widely shared by the members, congregations and synods of this church. These priorities are:

- 1. Accompanying congregations as growing centers for evangelical mission; and**
- 2. Building the capacity of this church for evangelical witness and service in the world to alleviate poverty and to work for justice and peace.**

To this end, the churchwide organization can continue to play a significant and pivotal role in the life of this church by working with its local and global mission partners to build, support and extend the mission of this church.

### **The Goals of the Design Team**

The design team embraced the following goals:

1. To design a churchwide organization that effectively and efficiently works with its ministry partners to respond nimbly with and on behalf of this church to the needs of the world in both its local and global context.
2. To design a churchwide organization that effectively and efficiently works with its ministry partners to build the capacity of this church for local and global mission.
3. To maximize the stewardship of this church's resources by creating for the churchwide organization the most efficient operational infrastructure possible.
4. To create new resources by better communicating and interpreting the effectiveness and efficiency of this church's response to the needs of the world.
5. To strengthen the response of this church to the needs of the world by increasing the collaboration and accountability within the churchwide organization and between the churchwide organization and its mission partners.
6. To reflect our core values as presented in the ELCA Constitution and the "Commitments for Implementation" of the ELCA Plan for Mission.

### **The Design Proposal**

Achieving the priorities of this church is dependent upon strong interdependent relationships between congregations, synods, the churchwide organization and the agencies and institutions of this church. These interdependent relationships will extend the mission capacity of this church, promote accountability and provide for the best stewardship of the resources of this church. It will be a priority of the churchwide organization to help build these interdependent relationships with and among its mission partners.

### *Congregational and Synodical Mission*

Because strong and vibrant congregations are central to the capacity of this church to fully participate in God's mission, the churchwide organization will work with synods toward vital congregational mission.

- Synods are best positioned to work directly with congregations in planning and carrying out mission, while the primary role of the churchwide organization is to provide support and build capacity.
- The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit will provide support and build capacity in the following areas:
  1. Centers for Mission (new congregations and renewed congregations, worship, congregation-based organizing, youth and young adults, stewardship).
  2. Directors for Evangelical Mission.
  3. Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Mission.
  4. Leadership for Mission (candidacy/assignment, mission schools and lifelong learning, outreach leadership, TEEM, seminary relationships; colleges and universities).
  5. Hunger and Justice (poverty, advocacy, disaster and social ministry-related issues, including relationships with World Hunger, Lutheran Disaster Relief, Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service).

### *Global Mission*

The churchwide organization will continue to support and build the capacity of this church for global mission. The churchwide organization will provide integrated support of this church's work in other countries and the means through which churches in other countries engage in mission to this church and society.

- The Global Mission unit will build capacity and provide support in the following areas:
  1. Global Community (kerygma, martyria) (with companion churches, including placement of missionaries, grants, scholarships/leadership development).
  2. Mission Formation and Relationships (koinonia) (mutual learning with companions and growth in the accompaniment model for mission, companion synod relationships, young adults in global mission, relationships with independent Lutheran organizations).
  3. International Development and Disaster Relief (diakonia).

### *Mission Advancement*

The full participation of this church in the mission of God depends upon how clearly members understand that mission and their level of commitment to it. To this end, the churchwide organization will create a Mission Advancement unit. The Mission Advancement unit will strengthen the identity and mission of this church through focused, strategic and integrated communication with the members of this church and the wider

society and the development of financial resources, including mission support, major gifts, appeals, and planned giving.

- The Mission Advancement unit will be responsible for:
  1. Marketing and public relations.
  2. Creative services.
  3. The ELCA Foundation.
  4. The Lutheran Magazine.
  5. Mission Funding (mission support, the World Hunger and Disaster Appeal, Global Mission appeals, new congregational ministry and Vision for Mission, Fund for Leaders).
  6. Major gifts and planned giving.
  7. Constituent data management.

#### *The Office of the Presiding Bishop*

The Office of the Presiding Bishop will provide leadership for the life and witness of this church.

- The Office of the Presiding Bishop will provide:
  1. Oversight of the work of the churchwide organization, including the supervision of the work of the other officers.
  2. Leadership and care for synodical bishops and the relationship with the Conference of Bishops.
  3. Theological discernment (justice for women; studies).
  4. Oversight of the ecumenical and inter-religious relations of this church.
  5. Relationships with separately incorporated ministries.
  6. Oversight of the military chaplaincies of this church.
- The Office of the Presiding Bishop will include:
  1. Human Resources.
  2. Research and Evaluation.

#### *The Office of the Secretary*

The Office of the Secretary will fulfill the normal functions of the secretary of a corporation.

- The Office of the Secretary will provide for:
  1. The minutes and records of official church meetings, including the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council and Conference of Bishops.
  2. The rosters of this church, annual congregational reports, archives and records management.
  3. The publication of official documents.
  4. Changes to the Constitution of the ELCA and interpretation of the Constitution.
  5. Legal services.
  6. Risk management.
  7. Central meeting planning and management and arrangements for Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, Conference of Bishops, and all other churchwide meetings.

#### *The Office of the Treasurer*

The Office of the Treasurer will fulfill the normal functions of the treasurer of a corporation.

- The Office of the Treasurer will provide for:
  1. Financial, accounting, insurance, property management, investment and money management systems and related services for churchwide units.
  2. Relationships with the Board of Pensions, Endowment Fund of the ELCA, Mission Investment Fund.
  3. The information technology infrastructure.

#### *Separately Incorporated Ministries*

- Related to the Office of the Bishop
  1. Augsburg Fortress
  2. Lutheran Deaconess Association
  3. Lutheran Men in Mission
  4. National Lutheran Campus Ministry
  5. Women of the ELCA
- Related to the Office of the Treasurer
  1. Board of Pensions
  2. Endowment Fund of the ELCA
  3. Mission Investment Fund
- Related to the Office of the Secretary
  1. ELCA Risk Management

### **Impact**

The churchwide organization will contain three units (down from the current 16 unincorporated units and sections) and three offices. There still will be nine separately incorporated ministries. The staffing will decrease by approximately 65 employees (approximately 60 full-time equivalent positions). More specific detail will be provided.

### **Administrative Team**

The Presiding Bishop will convene and oversee a management and planning team that will include the full-time officers of the ELCA, the executive for administration in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, and the executives of the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Global Mission unit, and the Mission Advancement unit.

### **Time Line**

#### *October 2010*

- Conversation with ELCA Conference of Bishops
- Consideration of proposal direction by ELCA Church Council (October 8, 2010)
- Announce decisions (beginning October 11, 2010)

*November 2010:* Action by ELCA Church Council

*August 2011:* Action by ELCA Churchwide Assembly

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# Appendix F: Seminary and Theological Education



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## ELCA Colleges and Universities, Theological Education, and Leadership Development

Over the last 15 years in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, much has been spoken and written regarding theological education and Christian public leadership. Much is occurring within and among the ELCA seminaries even as LIFT does its work. What follows is a compilation of documents representing what has been said and written; also included is a brief allusion to what is underway presently within and among our seminaries.

This information provides a backdrop and information for recommendations set before the LIFT task force for its discussion.

What follows are two parts, one from the perspective of ELCA seminaries and the other from the perspective of ELCA-related colleges and universities. The final versions of the recommendations are included in the report of the LIFT task force.

### PART ONE: Seminaries

#### Related Documents

1. "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA" (ELCA Study of Theological Education; Report to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly)
2. *Our Calling in Education* (2007 ELCA social statement)
3. "What Does the ELCA Need from its Seminaries?" (Faithful Leaders for a Changing World; 2009-2010 Vocation and Education Review)
4. "Conversation Papers" from the fall 2010 meeting of seminary presidents and Conference of Bishops by Rick Bliese, James Echols and Robin Steinke
5. "Renewing the Seedbed" (Governance Task Force Report, Fall 2010)
6. "Stewardship of Abundance" (2009 Lilly grant project on seminarian student debt; ongoing)
7. ELCA dean's meeting notes regarding mission schools (Fall 2010)

#### Faithful Leaders for a Changing World

"Faithful Leaders for a Changing World" was the report of the ELCA Study of Theological Education to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly. It includes this vision statement: "The preparation of a wide variety of leaders, grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran confessional tradition and equipped for the

church's mission in a rapidly changing environment...through ...an *interdependent network of theological education providers...*"<sup>15</sup>

Approved by the 1993 Churchwide Assembly, the report includes eight recommendations regarding theological education in the ELCA:

1. Be a foundational priority
2. Eleven imperatives to be reflected in theological education
  - Depth in the faith
  - Mission outreach
  - Practical congregational needs
  - Cultures and contexts
  - African American, Latino and Native American candidates
  - Indigenous lay leaders
  - Life-long learning
  - Ministry in daily life
  - Scholarly discourse and reflection
  - Life circumstance of candidates
  - Ecumenical interdependence
3. Seminary clusters
4. Academic readiness standards
5. Ecclesial readiness standards
6. First-Call Theological Education
7. Theological Education by Extension (TEE)
8. Funding

#### Our Calling in Education

*Our Calling in Education* was approved as an ELCA social statement by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly. The social statement

1. Underscores the importance of ELCA seminaries: "...provide important support for those involved in the faith formation of all ages. The Lutheran Tradition has long valued the teaching role in the congregation of those trained in theological education and we look to pastors, deaconesses, diaconal ministers, associates in ministry and lay leaders to work with congregations and parents in the crucial task of forming the faith of all generations."
2. Speaks of the integral place of seminaries and colleges in the network of educational institutions: "...this church affirms

<sup>15</sup> The Rev. Phyllis B. Anderson, "Theological Education as Hope for a New Ecclesiology" (presentation to the Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary TEEM Conference, Berkeley, Calif., October 5, 2010).

the role of these institutions and encourages them to sustain and strengthen those elements that distinguish the Lutheran tradition in higher education and theological education.”

### **What Does the ELCA Need from its Seminaries?**

“Faithful Leaders for a Changing World” is the report of the review by the former Vocation and Education program unit in 2009-2010. The excerpts that follow include the summary statement, specific tasks and outcomes.

Summary statement: “The fundamental task the ELCA needs its seminaries to pursue is their joint leadership of a theological education network that is coextensive with the life and mission of the ELCA, a teaching-and-learning network that mobilizes the resources of a wide variety of educational partners to equip and join together everyone who exercises any sort of leadership in all of the ELCA’s expressions, institutions and ministries. In our time, it is particularly important to renew in this church a culture of engagement with scripture, catechesis and theological reflection that increases general biblical fluency and the capacity of all the baptized to understand their lives, the world and the mission of the church through shared exploration of faith’s wisdom.”

The report specified 12 tasks for ELCA seminaries:

1. Seminaries are to create a theological education network structured as a collaborative partnership between the seminary system and other theological education providers;
2. Seminaries are to prepare and support rostered leaders as front-line theological educators;
3. Seminaries are work together with each other, synods, colleges, campus ministries, outdoor ministries, congregations, etc. to renew a culture of call;
4. Seminaries are to lead in developing a vibrantly multicultural church;
5. Seminaries are to lead in developing a vibrantly multigenerational church;
6. Seminaries need to prepare to graduate at 4,000 candidates for ordained ministry in the next ten years;
7. Seminaries need to prepare other rostered leaders in the next ten years; situation is fluid, while exact numbers are not known, many will be needed and are emerging;
8. Seminaries need to provide appropriate in-service theological training;
9. Seminaries need to deepen and extend their relationships with companion churches;
10. Seminaries need to assist the church in fulfilling its ecumenical vocation;
11. Seminaries need to work with each other in building a renewed, sustainable gift-economy of theological education;
12. Seminaries need to collaborate with each other and church leaders in adjusting governance structures, policies and practices so as to improve the reach, quality and sustainability of the ELCA’s theological education network.

Finally, the report included a series of outcomes in response to the question, “What does the ELCA need from its seminaries?” Nine outcomes were identified:

1. A reduction in the “gap” between lay and rostered leaders (on average) in their basic biblical fluency and theological understanding.
2. A growing capacity among ELCA members to live out of a robust sense of baptismal vocation.
3. A church more broadly and thoroughly knit together by relations of teaching-and-learning.
4. A Lutheran theological witness that is more audible in the North American marketplace of religious ideas.
5. A church that has the mission developers it needs to serve in the variety of models necessary for it to start new congregations and new ministries every year. (see ongoing reports for up-to-date numbers)
6. A church with significantly more multicultural rostered leaders and broad cross-cultural capacity.
7. A church with a significantly younger average age on the ordained roster
8. A church which relies less and less on seminarian student debt to support theological education.
9. A more broadly shared consensus on how theological education can best be supported.

### **“Conversation Papers”**

In the fall of 2010, the Conference of Bishops and seminary presidents met to discuss three “conversation papers.” The papers were written and presented by James Echols, president of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC); Robin Steinke, dean of the Lutheran School of Theology at Gettysburg (LSTG); and Richard Bliese, president of Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. Excerpts from the three papers follow:

James Echols:

What advice and counsel do the bishops have regarding these four strategies:

1. Streamline current operations;
2. Commitment to programmatic innovation;
3. Diversify and expand revenue streams; and
4. Pursue alliances, partnerships, joint ventures and/or mergers?

Robin Steinke:

1. What seem to be the most promising new forms of theological education?
2. What kinds of delivery methods would meet the high expectations of this church for leadership formation and respond to needs in your area?
3. What kinds of innovative staffing partnerships would you like to see tested?

Richard Bliese:

1. One of the keys to a future governance model is the relationship between synods and seminaries. This relationship needs to be strengthened. How do we do this?
2. Clusters have stabilized our present theological system. However, they have not proven flexible and/or adaptive enough to expand theological education fast enough or broadly enough across the system. How can seminaries

become more flexible and adaptive in expanding their mission?

3. What kind of ongoing dialogue with the Conference of Bishops will support the quality and faithfulness of our system of theological education as it strives to not only meet our present leadership needs, but looks to the future?

### **Renewing the Seedbed**

In the spring of 2010, the seminary presidents requested the former Vocation and Education unit to “appoint and convene a task force to examine current seminary governance patterns and explore new models/options (including patterns emerging in clusters) that would serve the sustainability and enhance the capacities of individual seminaries and the theological system as a whole.” The task force’s report was presented to the seminary presidents in the fall of 2010.

Governance recommendations:

1. Bring the seminary board chairs and presidents together as the Council of Presidents and Board Chairs (CPBC) to attend to the seminaries’ relationships to one another and their role(s) in the larger network of theological education;
2. Strengthen individual seminary board functioning;
3. Strengthen fundraising;
4. Strengthen board membership;
5. Develop a successor to the theological education coordinating committee (TECC) to tend to systemic matters in the larger network of theological education;
6. Convene a churchwide seminary consultation that gathers a wide range of stakeholders.

Collaborative resource utilization:

1. Shared administration where possible;
2. Strengthen existing revenue models; attend to the unevenness within synods and strengthen the ELCA financial commitments to seminaries and theological education.

Educational models:

1. College and seminary programmatic collaborations: could include B.Th. and articulation agreements that shorten time to M.Div. and MA;
  - a) College and seminary to develop closer relationships, up to and including merger;
  - b) Seminary with seminaries of other denominations: relationships up to and including merger.

Preparation of leaders for the church:

1. Financial counseling for prospective rostered ministers/seminarians;
2. Maintain and creatively utilize strong faculty.

Recovery Planning: written policies and pre-existing arrangements to govern “wind-down” processes if seminaries fail.

### **The Stewardship of Abundance Lilly Grant on Funding Theological Education:**

### **Table Three**

Who should fund theological education?

1. Collaboration and sharing of resources are essential;
2. Costs must be shared by congregations, donors, individual students, endowments and efficient institutions;
3. “It is crucial for the ELCA to assess current consultation processes concerning seminary support and to consider how they can be strengthened in order to better express this church’s priorities and its understanding of mission support.”

What does it mean for Lutheran theological education to be the responsibility of the whole church?

1. Recognized the great array of places, methods, teachers and global contexts;
2. Called to be ecumenical and recognize the multiple mission contexts in need of educated leadership;
3. Be open to non-traditional places and non-traditional means.

What creative new models might address both the cost dimensions and the adaptive leadership needs?

1. Imaginative and connective *delivery methods*; we need more rather than fewer locations for lay leaders and rostered ministry students;
2. Recognition of *alternate credentials* for ministry;
3. *Fewer moves* for seminary students with *longer mentoring in contexts*.

### **ELCA Academic Deans’ Meeting Excerpts from November 2010 Minutes**

*Mission schools*

From minutes of the academic deans’ deliberations and decisions:

Mark Wilhelm updated the deans on the emerging vision and programmatic emphasis on lay schools of mission. Much discussion ensued, which led to a decision to send a letter to Stephen Bouman expressing the deans’: 1) gratitude for Mark Wilhelm’s consultation; 2) support for this programmatic emphasis; 3) readiness to support the project, including already existing capacities and 4) the notion that the theological education networks might well provide a constructive “vehicle” or structure for these lay schools of mission.

*Short summary of ongoing seminary efforts*

- Conversations between and among ELCA seminaries and colleges with each other and other seminaries; these conversations are in many stages of development with varying results: some of these discussions have yielded concrete, collaborative arrangements; some are stalled; some are ongoing; some have ended; some are just beginning.
- Individual seminaries are working on their mission, programs and governance focusing on their particular settings, often in collaboration with institutions in these local contexts;

- Each seminary is under financial stress and undergoing financial streamlining;
  - Recognition that there is increasing competition for a currently smaller pool of degree students.
5. Why not solve the debt issue by reducing the cost of theological education by finding new efficiencies (like merging seminaries)?  
Here we can point to how our already comparatively low-cost system is finding new efficiencies while at the same time maintaining (and even expanding) *broad* access through new forms of partnerships (both intra-ELCA and ecumenical) that reduce costs of administration and infrastructure, allowing spending to be more focused on teaching and learning.

*Questions emerging from the “Stewardship of Abundance” project regarding student debt*

(From an internal working document reflecting an ongoing conversation and a work in progress):

1. Are the levels of debt that many ELCA seminarians carry into ministry *really* a problem?  
Research and Evaluation’s (RE) rationale for why anything above \$30K per borrower is a problem gives us the key measuring point for saying how many students have a significant debt issue (and how big their issues are). We’ve probably got enough material already in our Lilly grant proposal—and Fund for Leaders in Mission (FLM) materials—to say what sorts of consequences we’re hearing about.
  2. Why is this excessive debt something the church needs to address and not simply the responsibility of those who borrow the money for their education?  
It seems that there are three pieces of the answer to this question: the church requires this sort of educational program; the church needs healthy leaders; theological education is not a private possession but a public good (since it serves the free flow of the gospel into the world).
  3. Couldn’t we solve the problem by focusing our resources on fewer candidates? Do we really need to be preparing more pastors and other rostered leaders? Isn’t the ELCA shrinking in membership?  
The material in “What the ELCA Needs from its Seminaries” that deals with supply-demand projections can be updated and summarized.
  4. Why not solve the debt issue by reducing (or even eliminating) the church’s requirements for theological education?  
From Phyllis Anderson’s ideas (or even language) in her recent essay, “Theological Education as Hope for New Ecclesiology” (page 3): “In times of vast social change, education becomes very important. When old paradigms start shifting under your feet, you either get paralyzed by fear or you learn how to make adaptive changes. Education then becomes the hope for people to move into a new way of being and doing....Theological education is the most efficient way to shape and influence the called leaders of the church, who in turn have broad and disproportionate influence among the people of God.” Her contemporary point could be underscored by showing how it fits tightly with what Luther and the other reformers did when they initiated a major educational program to reform and renew the church. In other words—when times are challenging, Lutherans ramp up theological education.
6. Since seminarians’ living costs are a major factor in the accumulation of excessive student debt, why not solve the problem through better financial education and more frugal living?  
Here we can point to financial education and coaching programs that are already underway—and to their expansion in this project. We can also point to how even on a very modest student budget, it is not possible to finish seminary in good financial condition without very significant financial aid. We should also acknowledge that there are cases (currently perhaps around X% of ELCA seminarians) in which, due to the student’s family circumstances, living costs are necessarily going to be so high that even a combination of strong financial aid and frugal living will not be sufficient to enable completion of the ELCA’s standard four-year M.Div. without excessive debt. Our seminaries are experimenting with degree program designs (both distributed models and compacted calendar designs) that meet the distinctive challenges of this group of students.
  7. Why doesn’t the national church (and/or the synod) simply pay for theological education like it used to?  
We’ve got new data to show what we already know—the churchwide organization and synods have been good supporters—and are considering how their commitment can best be lived out now—but congregations have been sending a smaller percentage along to them. Also, if we can show that the churchwide organization and synods are acting to rededicate themselves to this support, that should help strengthen our case to individual donors.
  8. Are the challenges posed by seminarian student debt just too big for the ELCA (members, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, seminaries, etc.) to handle?  
The challenges are significant—but the capacities of this church are much greater.
  9. What does this Stewardship of Abundance project aim to achieve?  
There’s language we can steal right out of the grant proposal for this.
  10. How can I/we help meet the challenge?

*Emerging Observations and Analysis of the Documents and Seminary Actions: Questions for discussion*

1. There is much ongoing work within the ELCA’s churchwide organization, seminaries, synods and ministry partners regarding theological education. Is this work coordinated, inter-communicated and aligned? If it isn’t, should it be?

Coordination, inter-communication and alignment are most certainly occurring in many places. How might this coordination, inter-communication and alignment be expanded?

2. Themes seem to emerge from these efforts and from the documents resulting from those efforts. Example: The need of and call for a rapidly expanding cadre of leaders with evangelical missional imagination who can effectively serve congregations, who are able to pass on faith and who can effectively bear witness to and serve in their communities. What other themes emerge and align with LIFT's findings?
3. What of these themes aligns with LIFT's discoveries and recommendations? Which themes don't align? What does LIFT want to do about those?
4. What is missing in these documents and efforts that is needed to develop the lay and rostered leadership the church needs?
5. What of all of this rises to the level of constructive recommendations from LIFT's work?

#### *Recommendations:*

- ELCA seminaries must continue their efforts to collaboratively, faithfully, effectively and efficiently carry out their mission(s) within the ELCA's commitments to a system-wide network of theological education and leadership development in a manner that respects the seminaries' integrity while at the same time honors the commitments and needs of the ELCA and the larger church. Synods, the churchwide organization and the ELCA network of ministry partners must stand ready to join seminaries in this essential equipping of evangelical public leadership for congregations and other faith communities.
- That the tasks and outcomes for seminaries identified in "What does the ELCA need from its seminaries?" be pursued intensely by our ELCA seminaries and supported by the larger church. These tasks and outcomes are strongly aligned with the values of the ELCA as discovered in LIFT's research and LIFT's emerging recommendations for developing evangelical missional congregations led by lay and rostered individuals of evangelical missional imagination.
- That synods become primary catalysts in opening congregational missional imagination to differing types of Christian public leaders, who are traveling differing pathways of preparation and who supported by differing types of financing that sustain differing kinds of ministries in greatly differing contexts and circumstances.
- That ELCA seminaries, in collaboration with other theological education providers, partner with the ELCA churchwide organization and synods in the development of lay mission schools. That programs, courses, workshops and faculty already utilized for equipping missional leaders be drawn upon as synods develop these schools. That the teaching and learning developed

in the lay mission schools be fed back into the preparation of candidates for ordination.

- That the ELCA as a church commit to giving 1 percent (approximately \$18M) of its unrestricted congregational giving as mission support directly to theological education. That the ELCA Church Council appoint a blue-ribbon panel to propose the most strategic, connective and direct manner in which to receive and allocate these monies. Such a commitment aligns with the critical role of faithful and effective evangelical missional lay and rostered leadership in this church's future.

## **PART TWO: Colleges and Universities**

### **Related Documents**

1. "Faithful Leaders for a Changing World: Theological Education for Mission in the ELCA" (ELCA Study of Theological Education; Report to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly) – see excerpts above.
2. *Our Calling in Education* (2007 ELCA social statement) – see excerpts above.
3. "What Does the ELCA Need from its Colleges and Universities?" (Faithful Leaders for a Changing World; 2009–2010 Vocation and Education Review)
4. "Renewing the Seedbed" (Governance Task Force Report, Fall 2010)
5. "Stewardship of Abundance" (2009 Lilly grant project on seminarian student debt; ongoing)
6. ELCA deans' meeting notes regarding mission schools (Fall 2010)

### **What Does the ELCA Need and Expect from its Colleges and Universities?**

"Faithful Leaders for a Changing World" was the report of the ELCA Study of Theological Education to the 1995 Churchwide Assembly. It includes this vision statement: "The preparation of a wide variety of leaders, grounded in Scripture and the Lutheran confessional tradition and equipped for the church's mission in a rapidly changing environment...through...an *interdependent network of theological education providers...*"

Approved by the 1993 Churchwide Assembly, the report includes 13 recommendations regarding undergraduate education in the ELCA:

1. Reaffirm their commitment to maintain a living connection and authenticity with the Christian faith in the Lutheran tradition.
2. Offer excellent, broad education in service to church and society in a setting of academic freedom.
3. Educate in the faith with courses in Bible, Lutheran theology, church history and ethics.
4. Serve as incubators for the discovery of knowledge, preserve it in scholarly collections and communicate it through scholarly publications.

5. Nurture an ongoing dialogue between the claims of the Christian faith and the claims of the many academic disciplines as well as explore issues at the crossroads of life.
6. Feature prominently the Lutheran teaching on vocation.
7. Bring a Lutheran voice to bear in an increasingly global, ecumenical, diverse and competitive educational landscape.
8. Foster openness and interfaith dialog with students who come out of diverse faith traditions.
9. Embody important elements—worship, music and the arts, service, personal moral standards, international education—as part of the ongoing Lutheran ethos.
10. Maintain programs that serve as a liaison between the college or university and the various expressions of this church.
11. Sustain strong programs of service to the neighbor in both local and global settings.
12. Make adequate provision to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
13. Continue to attempt to make it financially possible for qualified students—especially Lutheran students—who desire to attend a Lutheran college or university to do so.

#### **What can ELCA Colleges and Universities Expect from the Church?**

1. The presiding bishop, synodical bishops and pastors who voice persistently and persuasively their commitment to ELCA colleges and universities and the value of these institutions.
2. A churchwide organization which demonstrates persistently and persuasively its commitment to this church's colleges and universities by making available names of Lutheran youth in ways that enable colleges and universities to engage Lutheran youth.
3. A churchwide organization which continues its consultative and gathering role with ELCA colleges and universities and fosters contact, networking and collaboration among them.
4. Congregations and synods which support colleges and universities on their territory in intentional and visible ways.
5. New governance models for ways in which colleges and universities relate to the larger church, synods and congregations.
6. Colleges and universities, seminaries, synods and other ELCA institutions and ministries which initiate and welcome partnerships with one another.
7. Congregations that affirm and support colleges and universities, encourage students to consider an ELCA college or universities, help recruit students and aid students financially who attend ELCA colleges and universities.

#### **“Renewing the Seedbed”**

In addition to the excerpts provided in Part One, the report also notes the inclusion of possible collaborations between colleges and universities and seminaries. Cited specifically are two education models:

- College and seminary programmatic collaborations, which could include bachelor's degrees in theology (B.Th.) and

articulation agreements that shorten the time to M.Div. and MA degrees.

- College and seminary: closer relationships, up to and including merger.

#### **The Stewardship of Abundance Lilly Grant on Funding Theological Education: Table Three**

In addition to the excerpts provided in Part One, there also are implications in these conversations for participation by colleges and universities in the development of theological leadership, including:

1. Who should fund theological education?
  - Collaboration and sharing of resources are essential;
  - Costs must be shared by congregations, donors, individual students, endowments and efficient institutions.
2. What does it mean for Lutheran theological education to be the responsibility of the whole church?
  - Recognize the great array of places, methods, teachers and global contexts;
  - Called to be ecumenical and recognize the multiple mission contexts in need of educated leadership;
  - Be open to non-traditional places and non-traditional means.
3. What creative new models might address both the cost dimensions and the adaptive leadership needs?
  - Imaginative and connective delivery methods; we need more rather than fewer locations for lay leaders and rostered ministry students;
  - Recognition of alternate credentials for ministry.

#### **ELCA Academic Deans' Meeting Excerpts from November 2010 Minutes**

##### *Mission Schools*

There are implications in this recommendation for networks of ministry partners (including colleges and universities) within the “theological education clusters.” From minutes of the academic deans' deliberations and decisions:

Mark Wilhelm updated the deans on the emerging vision and programmatic emphasis on lay schools of mission. Much discussion ensued, which led to a decision to send a letter to Stephen Bouman expressing the deans': 1) gratitude for Mark Wilhelm's consultation; 2) support for this programmatic emphasis; 3) readiness to support the project, including already existing capacities and 4) the notion that the theological education networks might well provide a constructive “vehicle” or structure for these lay schools of mission.

##### *Recommendations*

1. That ELCA colleges, universities and seminaries be encouraged to continue their individual and common efforts to collaboratively, faithfully, effectively and efficiently carry out their mission(s) within the ELCA's commitments to a system-wide network of theological education and leadership development respecting each institution's integrity while at

the same time honoring the commitments and needs of the ELCA and the larger church.

2. That the colleges and universities work of promoting the Lutheran notion of vocation be affirmed and supported by the whole church as a way to develop the sense of life as “calling” among its faculty, staff and students.
3. That many of the tasks, outcomes and expectations for seminaries, colleges and universities identified in the documents cited be strongly pursued by our ELCA colleges and universities and supported by the larger church. These tasks and outcomes are strongly aligned with the values of the ELCA as discovered in LIFT’s research and LIFT’s emerging recommendations for developing evangelical missional congregations led by lay and rostered individuals of evangelical missional imagination.
4. That ELCA colleges and universities collaborate with the ELCA churchwide organization, seminaries and synods in these regions in the development of lay mission schools. That programs, courses, workshops and faculty already utilized for equipping missional leaders be drawn upon as synods develop these schools.
5. That the ELCA as a church commit to giving 1 percent (approximately \$18M) of its unrestricted congregational giving as mission support directly to theological education. That the church appoint a blue-ribbon panel to propose the most strategic, connective and direct manner in which to receive and allocate these monies. Such a commitment aligns with the critical role of faithful and effective evangelical missional lay and rostered leadership in this church’s future.
6. That the ELCA churchwide organization convene a group of ELCA colleges and university presidents for the purpose of formulating new models of governance and ways for ELCA colleges and universities to relate to and support congregations, synods and the churchwide organization.
7. That congregations, synods and the churchwide organization develop, in concert with colleges and universities, strategies to share Lutheran youth prospects with Lutheran colleges and universities.

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# Appendix G: Structure and Governance



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

*NOTE: The document that follows originally was prepared for the November 2010 meeting of the Church Council.*

**CBCR = Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

	<u>Subject</u>	<u>Other proposed amendments</u>
8.32.02.	Churchwide Assembly	
10.61.	Relationships	
11.35.	Program Committees	
		<i>Churchwide Assembly redesign</i>
12.31.	Churchwide Assembly	
12.31.A11.	Churchwide Assembly	
12.41.31.	Program Committees	
		<i>Churchwide Assembly redesign</i>
13.52.A05.	Program Committees	<b>[proposed 15.14.A10.]</b>
		<i>Church Council redesign</i>
14.31.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
14.32.01.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
		<i>General CBCR amendments</i>
14.32.02.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
14.32.03.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
14.32.04.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
14.32.A10.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
14.41.C05.	Churchwide Assembly	
16.12.10.	Program Committees	
16.12.11.	Program Committees	
		<i>General CBCR amendments</i>
16.12.12.	Program Committees	
16.12.13.	Program Committees	
16.12.14.	Program Committees	
16.12.15.	Program Committees	
19.02.	Church Council/Conference of Bishops	
19.04.	Program Committees	
19.05.01.	Program Committees	
		<i>General CBCR amendments</i>
19.05.02.	Program Committees	
19.11.01.	Program Committees	
19.21.B05.	Churchwide Assembly	
		<i>General CBCR amendments</i>
19.51.01.	Program Committees	
19.61.02.	Program Committees	
		<i>General CBCR amendments</i>
†S12.01.	Relationships	

## Amendments Related to the Living into the Future (LIFT) Task Force November 8, 2010

The charter for “Living into the Future Together (LIFT): Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA” task force was approved by the Church Council at its November 2009 meeting. The charter identified seven major areas for the scope of the work of the task force: identity, opportunities for the future, the changing context of this church, interrelationships of church expressions, partnerships, financial resources, and structure and governance. The task force was organized into seven work groups that each focus on one of the areas identified in the scope of the task force charter; each work group has developed a plan to guide its work. As the task force engaged these areas, it was guided by the following overarching questions: What is God calling this church to be and to do in the future? What changes are in order to help us respond most faithfully?

The LIFT task force is proposing recommendations in several areas of structure and governance.

### **1. LIFT Recommendations: Churchwide Assembly**

The work group on structure and governance concluded that the legislative and oversight functions of the Churchwide Assembly described in the governing documents should not be altered at this time. In addition, it concluded that the size of the Churchwide Assembly and the method of allocation of voting members, which provides for elected voting members from synods, are appropriate. The work group on structure and governance believes, however, that current economic realities in the churchwide organization and throughout the ELCA militate for changing the cycle of the Churchwide Assembly, with non-legislative functions of the assembly addressed in other ways. In addition, the category of advisory members should be eliminated or amended; whether categorized as advisory members or guests, such persons should attend at the expense of their organizations or alternative funding sources obtained. Guests should be encouraged to attend at their own expense. Technological options also should be explored and expanded to broadcast the assembly to a wider audience and to disseminate more broadly its activities.

The specific recommended amendments to the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* are as follows:

**8.32.02.** Colleges and universities of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America may relate to this church in various ways, including relationship with the Churchwide Assembly, a synodical assembly, or a corporation whose voting members are, or have been elected by, synodical assemblies, other organizational units (conferences, clusters, etc.), or congregations. Subject to approval by the appropriate synods, a college or university may be owned by a not-for-profit corporation (1) that has voting members, at least 90 percent of whom shall consist of members of the **biennial** Churchwide Assembly, and (2) that shall hold the **biennial** meeting of such a corporation in conjunction with the Churchwide Assembly for the purpose of electing or ratifying members of the governing board and approving amendments to the governing documents. At least 60 percent of the members of the governing boards of the corporations that meet in conjunction with the Churchwide Assembly shall be members of this church.

**12.31.** **The assembly shall meet biennially in regular session through 2013, and triennially thereafter. Special meetings may be called by a two-thirds vote of the Church Council. The purpose for a special meeting shall be stated in the notice.**

**12.31.A11.** *To implement the transition to a triennial cycle, the Church Council shall make recommendations to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly regarding elections to the Church Council, boards, and committees. This continuing resolution shall expire upon adjournment of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly.*

**14.41.C0511.** **Planning and Evaluation Committee**  
*A Planning and Evaluation Committee shall be composed of members of the Church Council elected by the council and shall have staff services provided by the Office of the Presiding Bishop. This committee shall assist the presiding bishop in coordinated, strategic planning for the work of the churchwide organization. This committee also shall be responsible for the ongoing evaluation of churchwide units and the structure of the churchwide organization, making recommendations to the Churchwide Assembly through the Church Council. This committee shall establish a process for a periodic review of all churchwide units. Further, in consultation with the executive for administration, this committee shall evaluate and report annually to the Church Council and **biennially** to the Churchwide Assembly on how the churchwide organization complies with and implements commitments and*

*policies adopted by the Churchwide Assembly and the Church Council.*

**19.21.B0511.** *On behalf of the Nominating Committee, the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America—in the **first half of the biennium-year** preceding each regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly—shall solicit from eligible synods on a rotating basis the names of two persons in specified categories, in keeping with the representation principles of this church, for possible election to the Church Council. Upon their selection by the assemblies of the respective synods, the names of the two persons shall be presented to the Nominating Committee for submission to the Churchwide Assembly. In the event that any nominee withdraws or is disqualified from possible service, the Nominating Committee shall submit a replacement name from the same synod as the original nominee. In the event that the vacancy occurs subsequent to the preparation of the report of the Nominating Committee to the Churchwide Assembly, a floor nomination shall be provided from the same synod as the original nominee. Except as provided herein, no floor nominations for positions on the Church Council shall be permitted at the Churchwide Assembly.*

## **2. LIFT Recommendations: ELCA Church Council and the Conference of Bishops**

The work group on structure and governance and the LIFT task force planning team believe that the current size of the Church Council is in a reasonable range from a governance perspective. Given the current number of synods, it would not be desirable, either from a cost standpoint or a governance perspective, to increase the size of the Church Council to 69 members. Further, increasing the size to 69 by election of a voting member from each synod would not address the issue of ensuring the requisite skills and expertise of the Council. It also necessarily would increase the role of the Executive Committee.

Foundational principles of the ELCA call for equitable representation of the people of God in this church. Lutheran tradition also emphasizes that life in the church be maintained decently and in order. The work group on structure and governance and the LIFT task force planning team believe that the size of the Church Council is reasonable, although a range in size would be desirable. However, changes in the method that some members are elected for the sake of suitable representation from the membership of the ELCA and for the sake of good order in ELCA governance are recommended. Specifically, it is

desirable to elect some members to the Church Council who have the skills and expertise crucial to the governance of the churchwide organization. These people with specialized skills can be elected with specific and current issues in mind rather than assigning a “slot” or “category” for a theologian, lawyer, accountant or the like. Efforts should be undertaken to draw people with the necessary experience and expertise from as wide a pool of this church as possible.

In an era of reduced mission support, the current number of advisory members, whose expenses are borne by the churchwide organization, is not financially justifiable. Input from constituencies can be provided in other ways.

The work group on governance and structure and the LIFT task force planning team also believe that the Conference of Bishops is underutilized as a resource in this church. However, options to expand the role legislatively would be inconsistent with the history and polity of this church, and amending the governing documents to specify a role in particular circumstances is complex and raises the possibility of unintended consequences. Therefore, the work group recommends as follows:

Expand the role of the Conference of Bishops in its consultative capacity by developing practices and procedures for the Church Council to refer issues to it and for the Conference of Bishops to make recommendations to the Church Council. However, no change in the governing documents regarding the legislative role of the Conference of Bishops is recommended.

Within the existing framework, the Church Council should work proactively to elicit input and recommendations from the Conference of Bishops as part of the legislative decision-making process, and the Conference of Bishops should work proactively to provide specific input and recommendations on important policy issues. This process for cross-referral could include requests for theological papers or input on important issues, as well as convening other tables across synodical lines to address issues of importance to this church.

A recommended change is to provide for the chair of the Conference of Bishops to be an *ex officio* member of the Church Council and the Executive Committee (i.e., a voting member by virtue of the bishop’s position). Liaison bishops provide an important input to the Church Council, but having the chair of the Conference of Bishops serving as a full voting member of the Church Council and the Executive Committee strengthens the governance connection between the groups and will facilitate the opportunity for cross-referral of matters from one group to the other.

The specific recommended amendments to the ELCA *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* in this area are as follows:

**14.31. The voting members of the Church Council shall consist of the four churchwide officers, the chair of the Conference of Bishops, and at least 33 and not more than 45 other persons, elected by the Churchwide Assembly.**

**14.32.01.** The Church Council shall have as liaison members nine synodical bishops, each elected by the Conference of Bishops to one four-year term. One bishop shall be elected from each region. ~~In addition, the chair of the Conference of Bishops shall be present for meetings.~~

*[Alternative amendment proposed in general CBCR amendments.]*

~~**14.32.02.** The Church Council shall have two youth advisory members, each elected by the board of the youth organization of this church to a three-year term.~~

~~**14.32.03.** The Church Council shall have as advisory members each president, or the designated representative of the president, of the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA, the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage, the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the ELCA, the Association of Latino Ministries in the ELCA, the American Indian and Alaska Native Association in the ELCA, and the European-American Association in the ELCA.~~

~~**14.32.04.** One individual representing this church’s seminaries, one individual representing the ELCA-related colleges and universities, and one individual representing the social ministry organizations, chosen by the respective associations of these institutions and agencies, shall serve as advisory members of the Church Council.~~

~~**14.32.A10.** The chairs of the program committees for the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit and the Global Mission unit shall serve as advisory members of the Church Council with voice but not vote. In addition, the chairs of the respective boards of trustees of the Publishing House of the ELCA and Women of the ELCA shall serve as advisory members of the Church Council with voice but not vote.~~

**19.02.** The members of the Church Council shall be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. ~~Each biennium~~ **In preparation for the Churchwide Assembly, the Church Council shall determine how this church’s commitment to inclusive representation will affect the next election to the Church Council. For thirty-three of the council members, the** ~~The~~ **Nominating Committee shall invite each eligible synod to submit suggested nominees and shall then nominate persons who fulfill the categories assigned by the Church Council. With respect to the other nominees, the Church Council shall review its size and**

**composition and take into consideration the experience and expertise of existing members and synodical nominees as well as the needs of the council in seeking to fulfill its duties and responsibilities. Based upon this analysis, the Church Council shall instruct the Nominating Committee to provide nominations in specific categories for the remaining positions.**

Excluding the churchwide officers, there shall not be more than **one-two** members of the Church Council from a synod, nor shall more than two-thirds of the synods in a region have members on the Church Council at the same time. The Church Council shall have at least one member from each region. The terms of office of persons elected to regular terms on the Church Council by the Churchwide Assembly shall begin at the conclusion of the Churchwide Assembly at which such persons were elected.

### 3. *LIFT Recommendations: Program Committees*

The work group on governance and structure and the LIFT task force planning team recommend amending the governing documents to eliminate program committees and to reallocate their responsibilities to a committee of the Church Council.

1. A single Church Council committee—the Planning and Evaluation Committee or a newly configured committee—would receive reports on policies and strategies from all program units on a regular basis, probably at least yearly. Such a committee would have the advantage of receiving reports from all units and would be able to synthesize them and make coordinated recommendations to the Church Council. While this approach would expand the work of members of the Church Council, it would facilitate the coordination of oversight responsibilities and substantially reduce costs associated with the meetings of individual program committees.
2. If additional reporting and/or oversight are needed or desirable, meetings by teleconference or webinars can be arranged. If special expertise is needed, guests can be invited to participate in the meetings.
3. Methods need to be explored and developed to obtain input from congregations, synods and individual members and to disseminate information regarding the work of program units more effectively.

The specific recommended amendments to the ELCA Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions in this area are as follows:

**11.35. Each program unit shall relate to a program committee and each separately incorporated unit shall be governed by a board.**

**[Alternative amendment proposed in redesign amendments.]**

**12.41.31. Members of the Church Council, unless otherwise elected as voting members, shall serve as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly. Likewise, program committee chairpersons and board chairpersons or their designees, and the president of the Lutheran Youth Organization or a designee, unless elected as voting members, shall serve as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly. In addition, executive directors of units of the churchwide organization, churchwide program units, executive directors of churchwide service units, executives for sections related to the officers, presidents of separately incorporated churchwide units, the executive for administration, and executive assistants to the presiding bishop other persons from the churchwide organization designated by the presiding bishop shall serve as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly. The Church Council also may designate other persons as advisory members of the Churchwide Assembly.**

**[Alternative amendment proposed in redesign amendments.]**

### **13.52.A05. Responsibilities of the Office of the Treasurer**

- a. *This office shall be related to the treasurer, who shall be its full-time executive officer.*
- b. *This office shall have the sole authority and responsibility to establish and maintain banking relationships.*
- c. *This office shall have the authority to borrow; issue bonds, notes, certificates, or other evidence of obligation; or increase contingent liabilities within the overall limits determined by the Churchwide Assembly and the more restrictive limits established by the Church Council. No churchwide board or program committee shall make a commitment that binds the churchwide organization to an outside lending or other similar institution or which creates a liability of this church to such an institution without prior approval of the Office of the Treasurer.*

**[Amendment proposed to November Church Council meeting; to be amended and renumbered as 15.14.A10]**

### **16.12.10. Program Committees**

**16.12.11. Each program committee, which normally shall meet two times each year, shall function as specified in this church's constitution, bylaws, and continuing resolutions regarding its responsibilities in relation to a particular unit of the churchwide organization.**

**[Alternative amendment proposed in general CBCR amendments.]**

**16.12.12.** Each program committee shall be composed of 15 persons elected to one six-year term, with no consecutive reelection, and with one-third of the members being elected every biennium, as provided in Chapter 19. The presiding bishop of this church, or the presiding bishop's designee, shall serve as an advisory member of each program committee. The Conference of Bishops shall select one bishop to serve as an advisory member of each program committee. A member of the Church Council shall be appointed by the Church Council to serve as a liaison member of each program committee with voice but not vote.

**16.12.13.** Each program committee shall review proposed policies and strategies for its areas of responsibility in the preparation of such policies and strategies for submission by the executive director of the unit to the appropriate committee of the Church Council, for presentation to the Church Council.

**16.12.14.** Proxy and absentee voting shall not be permitted.

**16.12.15.** Each program committee shall seek to ensure that the unit operates within the expenditure authorization established by the Church Council.

**19.04.** Other than elections of officers and executive directors of units, elections shall be for one six-year term, without consecutive reelection, and with one-third of the members of the Church Council and of each board, **program committee**, or advisory committee elected each biennium.

**19.05.01.** Each voting member of the Church Council, board, **program committee**, or advisory committee of this church shall cease to be a member of the Church Council, board, **program committee**, or advisory committee if no longer a voting member of a congregation of this church. Upon two successive absences that have not been excused by the Church Council, board, **program committee**, or advisory committee, a member's position shall be declared vacant by the secretary of this church, who shall arrange for election by the Church Council to fill the unexpired term.

**[Alternative amendment proposed in general CBCR amendments.]**

**19.05.02.** For purposes of nomination to and service on the Church Council, **a program committee**, or a board

of a churchwide unit, "synodical membership" shall be defined as follows:

...

**19.11.01.** In the nomination and election process the following general considerations shall be observed:

...

f. The Conference of Bishops shall select one bishop from each region to serve a four-year term as a liaison member of the Church Council. Each biennium the Conference of Bishops shall select a bishop to serve as an advisory member of each board, **program committee**, and advisory committee of the churchwide organization. No synodical bishop, **with the exception of the chair of the Conference of Bishops**, shall serve as a voting member of the Church Council **or of a board or committee of any churchwide unit.**

**[Alternative amendment proposed in general CBCR amendments.]**

**19.51.01.** The Churchwide Assembly shall elect all members of **each program committee** and the board of trustees of the Publishing House of the ELCA, the board of trustees of the Mission Investment Fund, and the board of trustees of the Board of Pensions. The Nominating Committee shall seek to ensure that these **committees and** boards have within their membership persons with the expertise and experience essential to the fulfillment of the work of the unit.

**19.61.02.** No member of the Church Council, a committee of the Church Council, a board, **a program committee**, or other committee of the churchwide organization shall receive emolument for such service, nor shall any member be simultaneously an officer of this church, an elected member of the Church Council, or a voting member of a committee or board of the churchwide organization.

...

**[Alternative amendment proposed in general CBCR amendments.]**

**4. LIFT Recommendations: Interrelationships**

The LIFT Task Force is proposing recommendations that focus on strengthening the vitality of congregations in ways that also strengthen connections within and across the expressions and partners of this church.

The specific recommended amendments to the ELCA *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions* in this area are as follows:

10.61. ~~Opportunities for groupings of congregations and institutions in specified geographic areas of the synod shall be provided by the synod to foster interdependent relationships among congregations, institutions, the synod, and churchwide units for mission purposes. These groupings may be formed as conferences, clusters, coalitions, or other area subdivisions. This synod may establish conferences, clusters, coalitions, area subdivisions, and networks as appropriate within its territory and in collaboration with other synods and partners as specified in the bylaws and continuing resolutions. The purpose of such groupings shall be to foster interdependent relationships among congregations, institutions, and synodical and churchwide units.~~

†S12.01. This synod shall ~~may~~ establish conferences, clusters, coalitions, ~~or other~~ area subdivisions, ~~and networks as appropriate~~ within its territory ~~and in collaboration with other synods and partners~~ as specified in the bylaws ~~and continuing resolutions~~. The purpose of such groupings shall be to foster interdependent relationships among congregations, institutions, and synodical and churchwide units for mission purposes.

## Appendix H: Serving the Gospel for Tomorrow



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

### **The ELCA: Serving the Gospel for Tomorrow** Written and presented by Dr. Timothy Wengert

It is my great honor to have been asked to address you on such an important topic for the continued life and health of our church. For all of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune that have buffeted our church since its founding, perhaps before we focus on where we may go we can give thanks to God for where we have been. The American Lutheran Church (ALC) and the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) came into existence in the early 1960s, with the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC) being much younger. They all went out of existence in 1987, thus lasting no more than 27 years. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is already 23 years old, and—despite the current changes—will doubtless be in existence at least five years from now, outlasting all of its predecessors. There were naysayers who thought we would not last a decade. They will also be surprised to discover that we will survive the present unrest.

Moreover, we always need to remember our remarkable strengths: social ministry and advocacy unparalleled among our predecessors; an ecumenical spirit equal to no other church in the United States (and probably the world); a system of seminaries and candidacy that is the envy of American churches; strong connections to a worldwide communion in the Lutheran World Federation. Perhaps the greatest strength is our faithful confessional commitment—echoed in our constitution, underscored in seminary training, and supported by the continued widespread use of Luther's Small Catechism. Whatever changes we may embark upon, they will doubtless not undermine our heritage but rather strengthen it. We are *the* Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, perhaps the only one. Indeed, the present interest by some to form an alternative to the ELCA is deeply flawed by comparison—given that it's only unifying impetus is disagreement with the ELCA on matters of sexuality, so that there is very little if any talk of mission, training of pastoral leaders or anything else that marks healthy Lutheranism in this land. What the present moment gives us in the ELCA is an opportunity, unparalleled in our history, to confess the center of our faith to the world.

As I look at the ELCA and its heritage for possible support in our life together, it occurs to me that there are at least three areas which must shape our future: the commitment to the Bible, the centrality of worship and the witness to the gospel as shaped by our Lutheran confessions. I will argue that our commitment to the Bible must be measured and shaped by the second chapter

of the ELCA constitution. Our worship life may best be nurtured by *The Use of the Means of Grace and Evangelical Lutheran Worship (ELW)*. And our witness to the gospel gains new focus by using especially the remarkable, radical evangelical witness of the Augsburg Confession. Let me take each subject in order, spending most of my time on the third point.

#### ***I. The Biblical Source and Norm of Our Life Together***

In the twentieth century, between the 1920s and 1960s, all three of our predecessor bodies developed and came to welcome critical historical and literary methods of interpretation of the Bible. And yet, especially in the midst of the recent debate over sexuality, it is clear that not only many among the laity have not made such approaches a part of their own piety and theologies but also some pastors have failed to use these insights fully in their own teaching and preaching. Much of this failure may indeed stem from weaknesses within these methods themselves. Some has arisen because of a radical disconnect between such methods of biblical interpretation and parish life—this despite popular studies in the ALC and LCA (*Word and Witness and Search Bible Study*).

However, if this were only a failure in telling the laity about and getting clergy to use the latest exegetical methods, the problem would scarcely deserve mention. As a historian of biblical interpretation, I can assure you that such disconnects are typical throughout the history of the church and do not necessarily lead to disruptions in the lives of the churches. Indeed, as I see it, the far greater loss has come from our failure to communicate the profound Lutheran approach to biblical hermeneutics—a Greek term that now designates not the interpretation of individual texts but the approach to the Bible itself. Even some of the material generated for the Book of Faith Initiative has not always helped in this regard.

Specifically, I believe that we have in the ELCA constitution itself a short and succinct summary of the heart of that hermeneutic. It deserves to be used and quoted and used again in all of our deliberations. Here's what it says:

This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.

- a. Jesus Christ is the Word of God incarnate, through whom everything was made and through whose life, death, and resurrection God fashions a new creation.
- b. The proclamation of God's message to us as both ~~Lord and Savior~~ ~~and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe~~

Word in creation, continuing in the history of Israel, and centering in all its fullness in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

- c. The canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the written Word of God. Inspired by God's Spirit speaking through their authors, they record and announce God's revelation centering in Jesus Christ. Through them God's Spirit speaks to us to create and sustain Christian faith and fellowship for service in the world.<sup>16</sup>

This says exactly what was crucial for the Reformers, what is crucial for the ELCA's existence now and for what the Holy Spirit is calling the ELCA to become. First, *Christus solus*: Christ alone. Our crucified and risen Savior is the Word. What John wrote at the end of the first century must continue to shape our reading of the Bible. We are not on a lark to find Bible verses to hurl at our enemies; we encounter the Word of God first as the Incarnate One. Second, *viva vox evangelii*: the living voice of the gospel. The word is proclaimed as law and gospel—where law and gospel refer not to different kinds of words (commands and promises) but rather to what those words do: kill and make alive; terrify and comfort; show sin and show the Savior. The church, Luther once said, is not a quill house but a mouth house. We live and come to life each Sunday that someone proclaims the truth about the human condition (law) and the truth about God (gospel)—truths the Spirit takes to make believers out of unbelievers. Finally, we come to the Bible—understood not as a book of doctrines or a book of rules or even a book of future events but as the good news, the best news, of God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is this simple, direct and non-Fundamentalistic approach to Scripture that needs to be front and center in all we do: our training of new rostered leaders, our generation of educational materials at all levels, and our continued shaping of our social statements and churchwide policy. Here we will discover a new sense of identity and strength.

## II. The Center of Worship in the ELCA: *God's Word Heard and Seen*

We all need reminding about how important our Lutheran approach to worship is. The *ELW* is a remarkable testimony to the flexible, forward-looking approach to worship already championed by Martin Luther and other reformers and always grounded in the basic *ordo* of gathering, Word, Meal and Sending. The document, *The Use of the Means of Grace*, is one of the most important documents this church has ever produced. Not only did it shape the *ELW* itself but it also has the potential to refocus our church's commitment to word *and* sacrament at the center of the Christian life.

The American religiosity that developed in the 19th century and continues to distort our culture's view of Christianity today has hurled two destructive fireballs at true Christian worship. On the one side, our reduction of faith to decision has turned the sermon into an opportunity to manipulate people into committing

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<sup>16</sup> The Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, chapter 2 (Confession of Faith), 19.

to Jesus. On the other, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper have become ancillary at best and simply one more sign of our commitment at worst.

God gives the Word and the sacraments to the Church and by the power of the Spirit thereby creates and sustains the Church among us. God establishes the sacraments "to awaken and confirm faith." God calls the Church to exercise care and fidelity in its use of the means of grace, so that all people may hear and believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ and be gathered into God's own mission for the life of the world.<sup>17</sup>

God works through word and sacrament! This implies that every time the Christian assembly gathers for worship, God is there at work, using these very means to create faith, comfort the terrified, strengthen the fainthearted, and support the weak. This also means that everything else that happens at the congregational, synodical, and churchwide expression of our church must draw people into that assembly, where God encounters us in the bath, at the table, in the word and in prayer and praise. To turn our common life toward this center is our only task in the world today; to open that center to the weak ones of the world is our only mission.

## III. The Augsburg Confession: *Informing Our Evangelical Witness*

By asking the fellow, whose name (as editor) is on the back of *The Book of Concord*<sup>18</sup> and who translated the Small Catechism, to reflect on these serious matters meant, as I am sure you knew, that sooner or later I would get to that book. Although, as I have been saying and writing for 21 years as a teacher of the church, there are resources aplenty in the entire *Book of Concord*, I would like to focus our attention on the central witness of our faith, the Augsburg Confession [=CA]. I believe that in these simple articles of faith there lurks the best and most powerful antidote to our present uncertainties and the clearest path for the future of the ELCA. And I believe that the history of Lutheranism in the United States bears me out. In the 18th century, Henry Melchior Mühlenberg himself insisted on keeping Lutherans Lutheran by means of this book. In the 19th century, his successors in the Pennsylvania Ministerium—including such names as Charles Porterfield Krauth and Henry Eyster Jacobs—built on the very latest historical scholarship from Germany to revive their church through a renewed commitment to these confessions. In the 20th century, our teachers did the same: one has only to mention the likes of Gerhard Forde, Theodore Tappert, Robert Jenson, Eric Gritsch, Robert Bertram, Robert Goesser, Ralph Quere, James Schaaf, Fred Meuser—the list goes on and on—to realize just how Lutheran we remain as a result of their testimony to the remarkable practicality of the *Book of Concord*. And our

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<sup>17</sup> *Use of the Means of Grace* (Chicago: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1997), 7.

<sup>18</sup> *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) [= BC].



ecumenical agreements themselves read as much like a commentary on the CA as any classroom lecture at seminary.

Sometimes, the Lutheran Confessions become reduced to shibboleths or, worse yet, in the case of the Small Catechism simply strong medicine for the hormonally challenged young teens. That is, they are either seen as a simple hoop through which pastors and congregations jump or viewed as a doctrinal straightjacket (a.k.a. justification by right answer alone). They are not. Instead, they and the CA in particular bear witness to the Triune God and God's work in the world through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let me show you how the CA could transform (or, better, *continue* to transform) our life in the ELCA.

A. Original Sin as Lack of Faith (CA II)

{II} [1]Furthermore, it is taught among us that since the fall of Adam, all human beings who are born in the natural way are conceived and born in sin. This means that from birth they are full of evil lust and inclination and cannot by nature possess true fear of God and true faith in God....

[3]Rejected, then, are the Pelagians and others who do not regard original sin as sin in order to make human nature righteous through natural powers, thus insulting the suffering and merit of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

There are many ways to read the CA. When we consider it as strong medicine for recalcitrant pastors-in-training, justification by faith alone becomes justification by right answer alone. Or, we can consider the CA as *passé*—good for what ailed the 16th century but irrelevant to our own day. Or, we can read it out of a sense of commitment but rather flatly, as if every word and phrase had equal weight and equally applies to us. I suggest instead that we read the CA in its context but for our life today and not simply as a straightjacket for theological discussion but as witnesses to the truth of the gospel, much as Philip Melancthon, the chief drafter of the document, read the church fathers. In CA XX (Latin), he wrote of the “*testimonia Patrum*,” the testimonies of the Fathers to the gospel.<sup>20</sup>

The advantage of a historical reading of these texts is that we can more easily discern what mattered to the reformers themselves and set their confessions of faith apart from the regnant theologies of their day. In the case of CA II, it is their surprising definition of original sin (a.k.a. the mess we are in) as “lack of fear of God and faith in God.” This truly also reflects the world in which we live. From the threat of atomic warfare in the 1950s through the 1980s to the threat of terrorism and global warming today—to say nothing of the collapse of the church—what we fear and where we put our trust very quickly become our gods and idols. As Luther said in the Large Catechism (Ten Commandments, par. 1-3), “As I have often said, it is the trust and faith of the heart alone that make both God and

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<sup>19</sup> The Augsburg Confession, II.1, 3 [=CA II.1, 3], trans. Eric Gritsch, in BC, 36, 38.

<sup>20</sup> CA XX.12, in BC, 55.

an idol.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly naming our culture's idols—our idols—is a crucial part of what God is calling us to today.

Note, too, that the definition rejects one of the most popular approaches to religiosity in Luther's day and in ours: the desire “to make human nature righteous through natural powers, thus insulting the suffering and merit of Christ.” From the appeals of liberal Christians to all kinds of social action as the heart of our relation to God to the altar calls and revivals of the evangelistic crowd, who believe that we can decide for Christ, Lutherans are surrounded with false sirens calling us to establish our relation to God by what we do. For Lutherans, such calls only obscure Christ and his grace and force the hearers to trust themselves—which is the heart of the human sickness we call sin. The addiction to self cannot be cured by appeals to the self. The more clearly we can proclaim this, the more central becomes our Lord Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for our people and our society.

B. Justification through Word and Sacrament (CA IV-V)

{IV} [1]Furthermore, it is taught that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God through our merit, work, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God out of grace for Christ's sake through faith [2]when we believe that Christ has suffered for us and that for his sake our sin is forgiven and righteousness and eternal life are given to us. [3]For God will regard and reckon this faith as righteousness in his sight, as St. Paul says in Rom. 3 and 4.

{V} [1]To obtain such faith God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. [2]Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. [3]It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ's merit, when we so believe. [4]Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.<sup>22</sup>

Lutherans used to boast that the doctrine of justification by faith alone was the “doctrine on which the church stands or falls.” Yet, even among those who professed this, it very quickly became simply a doctrine to which we give lip service but which has little direct effect on what we do or say in the church. The vitality of our church, however, actually does depend upon two things in articles IV and V, which must be read together as two sides to the same coin. The first thing is the move from “obtain” to “receive.” We live in a society of “go-getters,” as we often call ourselves. Thus, it is not surprising that most Christian churches

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<sup>21</sup> Large Catechism [=LC], Ten Commandments, 2, trans. James Schaaf, in BC, 386.

<sup>22</sup> CA IV.1-3 and V.1-4 in BC, 38, 40.

and their preachers emphasize what we do—for God, for the neighbor, for the world. At some level, it is up to us. This “getting” has, in the case of the church, turned us into what Parker Palmer once called “functional atheists,” where we are quick to trumpet our belief in God while assuming that the survival of the church is up to us. (More on that in a moment!) What needs to be at the heart of every ELCA sermon, teaching, social statement, document, and breath is simply this: “We receive.” Luther’s final written words, found on his desk after his death, are appropriate here: “*Wir sind bettler; hoc est verum*” (We are beggars; this is true). And Paul asks, “What do you have that you have not received?” This receiving is an end to works, an end to boasting, and the beginning of faith.

The second surprise here is that this faith in receiving Christ’s forgiveness, life and salvation is itself not a work. CA V begins: “To obtain such faith God instituted the office of ministry...” Here there is an “obtain” but the subject is not the human being but God and the means of obtaining faith are not our will or decisions but the unconditional word of God’s promise and the sacraments. Not only does this article make rostered leaders transparent, but it also puts the Holy Spirit firmly in charge. Indeed, for these two articles there could be no better commentary than Luther’s explanations of the Creed in the Small Catechism, but especially his famous, “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe, but the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel...”<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, the condemnation at the end of CA V, while it unfairly mentions the Anabaptists (no self-respecting Mennonite would reject the means of grace), nevertheless also helps us to see what is at stake here: the claim that our relation to God finally depends upon us. The claim that “we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works” is at the very heart of *our* culture’s rejection of the unconditional grace and mercy of God in Christ. We have the spiritual gymnastics of the New Age, which is addicted to its own thoughts and works, the claims to free choice by certain evangelicals, and the reduction of all things to our own interpretation by a host of self-proclaimed post-modernists. Lutherans, by contrast, have bread and wine, water, and this weak, foolish word, that proclaims: “Here is your God,” coming to you as to Jerusalem lowly and mounted on a donkey, in bread and wine, with the water, in the very weak word we proclaim using weak, transparent messengers.

#### C. Defining Church As Event (CA VII-VIII, XV)

{VII} [1]It is also taught that at all times there must be and remain one holy, Christian church. It is the assembly of all believers among whom the gospel is purely preached and the holy sacraments are administered according to the gospel.

[2]For this is enough for the true unity of the Christian church that there the gospel is preached harmoniously according to a pure understanding

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<sup>23</sup> Small Catechism [=SC], Creed, 6, trans. Timothy J. Wengert, in BC, 355.

and the sacraments are administered in conformity with the divine Word. [3]It is not necessary for the true unity of the Christian church that uniform ceremonies, instituted by human beings, be observed everywhere. [4]As Paul says in Eph. 4 [4:5]: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism.”

{VIII} [1]Likewise, although the Christian church is, properly speaking, nothing else than the assembly of all believers and saints, yet because in this life many false Christians, hypocrites, and even public sinners remain among the righteous, [2]the sacraments—even though administered by unrighteous priests—are efficacious all the same. For as Christ himself indicates [Matt. 23:2-3]: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat...”

[3]Condemned, therefore, are the Donatists and all others who hold a different view.

{XV} [1]Concerning church regulations made by human beings, it is taught to keep those that may be kept without sin and that serve to maintain peace and good order in the church, such as specific celebrations, festivals, etc. [2]However, people are also instructed not to burden consciences with them as if such things were necessary for salvation.

[3]Moreover, it is taught that all rules and traditions made by human beings for the purpose of appeasing God and of earning grace are contrary to the gospel and the teaching concerning faith in Christ. [4]That is why monastic vows and other traditions concerning distinctions of foods, days and the like, through which people imagine they can earn grace and make satisfaction for sin, are good for nothing and contrary to the gospel.<sup>24</sup>

The church is not a building; it is not an institution; it is not bishops or presbyters or the laity meeting in solemn assembly; the church is an event brought to life by the Holy Spirit working through word and sacrament. Its unity consists not in human agreements or constitutions but in faith and our confession of that faith. To be a part of the church is to be joined with believers of every time and place—with Abraham and Sarah, with Mary Magdalene and Paul, with Hildegard of Bingen and Martin Luther and Martin Luther King Jr. and all the rest, and with all who will come after us. Its unity does not consist in human traditions and regulations—as important as they may be for good order—but in faith, that is, in the work of the Holy Spirit through the word (aural and visible).

Note that the quote from the Augsburg Confession includes not only CA VII and VIII but also XV. This is a tribute to Walter Boumann, who taught me the importance of this connection. Human traditions are first mentioned in CA VII but only defined in CA XV, where we learn their limitations. Human traditions can be different, but they can never be used to burden

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<sup>24</sup> CA VII.1-4, VIII.1-3, XV.1-4, in BC, 42, 48.

consciences or as a means for earning God’s favor. Thus, when it comes to the church we learn several things to help shape our future witness to the gospel in our life together.

First, church is not simply a human institution, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who, as Luther says in the Small Catechism, “calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.”<sup>25</sup> This means that the ELCA as an institution must never be confused with the true church—although we often do that. For example, Christian unity is a given, a gift, not something we do through our agreements. Instead, those agreements are simply signs of the Spirit’s work among us—proving to us what the Spirit has already done: made us one in Christ.

Second, sin cannot destroy the *true* church, understood as this event of word and sacrament. This means that CA XV puts an end to the frenzy over having a pure clergy as a guarantee of God’s word and the sacraments. God is bigger than our sin. Suppose, for example, that the recent decisions on sexuality were completely misguided in God’s eyes and that folks in same-gendered relations are, to use an archaic name for it, “living in sin.” Even such an egregious error (assuming, of course, that it is wrong) simply will not overturn the efficacy of God’s word and the sacraments. Indeed, as Melancthon states in the Apology and as Luther had already argued as early as 1520, you can tell you are in the true church, which consists of all believing sinners, only because (like birds with different feathers or calls) the church has peculiar, visible characteristic markings: the word and the sacraments. We live in a society where Christianity has been so twisted by a kind of Donatism (that is, a demand for pure clergy to guarantee the church’s existence)—we call it Puritanism—that this Lutheran definition of church apart from institution or holiness is completely counter-cultural. We should relish it and proclaim it from the rooftops.

#### D. Doing Law and Gospel: CA XII

{XII} [1]Concerning repentance it is taught that those who have sinned after baptism obtain forgiveness of sins whenever they come to repentance [2]and that absolution should not be denied them by the church. [3]Now properly speaking, true repentance is nothing else than [4]to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin [5]and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace. [6]Then improvement should also follow, and a person should refrain from sins. For these should be the fruits of repentance, as John says in Matt. 3 [:8]: “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.” ...

[10]Also rejected are those who do not teach that a person obtains forgiveness of sin through faith but through our own satisfactions.

*Also rejected are those who teach that “canonical satisfactions” are necessary to pay for eternal torment or purgatory.*<sup>26</sup>

For years I used to apologize for the CA’s lack of interest in the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel. In fact, however, I simply had missed the crucial importance of CA XII, which defines true repentance as “to have contrition and sorrow, or terror about sin and yet at the same time to believe in the gospel and absolution that sin is forgiven and grace is obtained through Christ. Such faith, in turn, comforts the heart and puts it at peace.” The distinction between law and gospel is not simply about the difference between commands and promises or imperatives and indicatives, and it certainly is not about some false distinction between the Old Testament and the New. The distinction has specifically to do with the confession that, unlike human words, God’s word works on us to put to death and bring to life; to terrify and comfort; to reveal our sin and forgive it; to destroy unbelief and create faith.

The word of God that declares us righteous is precisely that very word that as law destroys all of our false idols that we fear and trust—including our works and decisions—and as gospel makes us believers. Again, this is completely counter-cultural. It does not correspond to our pious attempts to decide for Jesus or to our liberal claims that religion is what we make of it. In a world of control freaks, it seizes control from us and causes us to trust not ourselves but God and God’s work in Jesus Christ. As Philip Melancthon noted in his commentaries on Romans, it is no accident that St. Paul moves from the definition of justification by faith alone in chapters three and four to its effect, the first fruit of that faith, namely (Romans 5:1) “having been justified, we have peace with God.”

Using the metaphor of terror and comfort for a moment, there is no doubt that we live in a world filled with terrifying things. When preaching the law, the preacher does not have to make people terrified (they already are for a host of reasons) but simply name the elephant in the room—death, sin, guilt, shame, lack of control, etc.—or as I like to put it: preaching the law is mentioning the unmentionable. Then, the law comes to its appropriate end, and the gnawing accusation and terror are stopped dead in their tracks. More importantly, then room is made for the gospel, now not as something that fixes the problem but rather as something that announces what God has already done, does and will do in Christ. The heart of ministry in the ELCA then is law and gospel: telling the truth about the human condition and at the same time telling the truth about God. To those afraid of death and often in denial about it: “You are dying; Jesus is the resurrection and the life.” To those whose personal lives are in shambles: “You are captive to sin; God in Christ makes you free indeed.” To those worried that the ELCA may collapse: “All human things come to an end, but Jesus Christ is with us always, even to the end of the age.”

<sup>25</sup> SC, Creed, 6, in BC, 355-356.

<sup>26</sup> CA XII.1-6, 10, in BC, 44, 46.

E. The Fruits of Faith: Our Work in the World (CA VI & XX)

There are many other topics that I could cover with you, all of which help to ground us in our confession of the gospel for this age: baptism, absolution, the Lord's Supper, the public office of ministry, relations with government, prayer, bishops—the list is endless.<sup>27</sup> I want to conclude, however, with the one thing about which we so often get confused in the ELCA: the relation of faith and works. Here, we have CA VI and XX to guide us. First, consider CA VI.

{VI} [1]It is also taught that such faith should yield good fruit and good works and that a person must do such good works as God has commanded for God's sake but not place trust in them as if thereby to earn grace before God. [2]For we receive forgiveness of sin and righteousness through faith in Christ, as Christ himself says [Luke 17:10]: "When you have done all [things]..., say, 'We are worthless slaves.'" [3]The Fathers also teach the same thing. For Ambrose says: "It is determined by God that whoever believes in Christ shall be saved and have forgiveness of sins, not through works but through faith alone, without merit."<sup>28</sup>

In this church, we are still confused about faith and works. A survey some years ago asked Lutherans to talk about salvation and most replied that it was a combination of faith (itself understood as a work) and human efforts. This is not just a case of people falling asleep during Confirmation instruction. It reflects two things: the power of the Old Creature in all of our lives and the power of bad preaching and teaching. Karl Barth once said that the Old Creature drowns in baptism but is a good underwater swimmer. Thus, our addiction to works is not something that ends at the baptismal font or at the church door. If anything, baptism, good preaching, forgiveness and the Supper increase the desperation of the Old Adam and Eve to invent new works and new ways to God. What this means is that (law and gospel!), as a church and in everything we do as church, we must be about the business of dragging the Old back to the waters of baptism—daily, Luther says in the Small Catechism.<sup>29</sup> We will not fix or somehow grow out of the problem that one way or another we want to stay in charge of our religious life.

But the other source for people's ignorance of God's unconditional mercy in Christ stems from bad preaching and teaching. From our Sunday church school curricula to social statements to sermons to newsletter articles to stewardship and evangelism campaigns—whatever is produced at the congregational, synodical, and churchwide level—all of it does not clearly witness (with John the Baptist) to "the Lamb of God

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<sup>27</sup> On questions about the church and ministry, I have written two small books: (with Gordon Lathrop), *Christian Assembly: The Marks of the Church in a Pluralistic World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) and *Priesthood, Pastors, Bishops* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008).

<sup>28</sup> CA VI.1-3, in BC, 40.

<sup>29</sup> SC, Baptism, 12, in BC, 360.

who takes away the sin of the world." Instead, we are forever sending mixed signals. Here we have an opportunity to state in no uncertain terms the truth of the gospel: God saves sinners, which means, Luther once wrote, that you should think of yourself as a sinner and be one. Do not confuse faith—itself a gift of God—with what we do, our works.

CA VI is very helpful in that it makes clear at the outset that good works are not the cause of faith or justification or salvation or holiness or sanctification or anything else. Good works are the fruit of faith. Fruit! The spontaneous, sure result of being a good tree is to produce good fruit. Thus, if there is a lack of works in the church, the answer is *not* to command works (as if commanding something actually makes it happen!) but to plant good trees, that is, announce the free, unmerited forgiveness of sins in Christ. The Holy Spirit will do all the rest. When CA VI says that such works are done for God's sake, Melancthon is echoing a metaphor for salvation that we do not often use, that of falling in love. Good works, truly *good* works, are done in a relationship of love and come pouring spontaneously out of the beloved for the lover's sake: flowers, chocolate, love poems and all the rest. All this is not to earn something (forgiveness or anything else) but rather as the response of ones who serve their Lord and Savior. You *must* do these things, but now not under the coercion of the law ("Kiss me!" "Aw, do I *have* to?") but in the joy of the inviting gospel ("Kiss me!" "Whoopie!").

This is why both here and in CA XX, when Melancthon comes to talk about works, he immediately goes back to talking about faith. We often do it the other way around. So often my students hear about faith and immediately worry that people will do no works! Similarly, preachers today often *assume* that people know about grace and faith and (somehow) automatically fear, love and trust in God. Melancthon, however, does just the opposite: begins a discussion of works but worries that people will get confused again and be torn away from God's promise and faith in that promise. The surveys do not lie: the one thing that marks the Lutheran confession of faith off from others (namely, the centrality of faith, grace and God's word of mercy) is the one thing that folks are often not hearing (or believing). We cannot and dare not take the grace and mercy of God in Christ for granted in preaching or anywhere else in the church.

When Melancthon begins CA XX with clearly defensive words ("Our people are falsely accused of forbidding good works"),<sup>30</sup> we should make sure that the ELCA's witness to the gospel causes people to make the same (false) charge. When it comes to good works, it would be good to begin by asking people, "What are you going to do now that you don't *have* to do anything." It is precisely this freedom that marks St. Paul's language in Galatians ("For freedom Christ has set you free!") and Luther's in *Freedom of a Christian*. Paul also contrasts *works* of the flesh to fruits of the Spirit. Indeed, when we talk about good works, we do well to begin where Melancthon does in CA XX: with Christ who is "The way, the truth and the life." We and our works are not that way, truth or life. Or, using

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<sup>30</sup> CA XX.1, in BC, 52.

another line from John, CA XX concludes, “Apart from me, you can do nothing.”<sup>31</sup>

How do we measure our teaching about works? CA XX suggests that we ask—in line with that famous Wendy’s commercial of the 1980s—“Where’s the comfort?” True good works only arise from that conscience that truly receives the comfort of the unconditional promise of God. Here is how Melancthon puts it:

[15]Moreover, although this teaching [about justification] is despised by those without experience, nevertheless devout and anxious consciences find by experience that it offers the greatest consolation. For consciences cannot be calmed by any work but only by faith when they are certain that they have a God who has been reconciled on account of Christ. [16]As Paul teaches in Rom. 5 [1]: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith we have peace with God.” [17]This whole teaching must be referred to that struggle of the terrified conscience, and it cannot be understood apart from that struggle. [18]That is why those who are wicked and without experience judge it badly. For they imagine that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.<sup>32</sup>

That is to say, true good works arise precisely and only when we are no longer worried about our relation to God. Thus, Melancthon defines faith in CA XX as the “trust that consoles and encourages terrified minds.”<sup>33</sup> The reason, for example, that Lutherans have developed the largest set of nonprofit social service agencies in the United States arises, among other things, from the fact that they have so much time on their hands (now that works do not matter in our relation to God) and that they are therefore no longer frantically working off terror but are consoled by God’s mercy alone. Christ said there are two commandments: Love God; love the neighbor. Since the first commandment (indeed, the first table of the law) is fulfilled by faith alone and not works, this leaves us all kinds of free time and useful energy to serve our neighbor, which pleases God no end.

When Melancthon finally gets around to talking about works in CA XX, he immediately returns to faith. “Beyond this, our people teach that it is necessary to do good works, not that we should count on meriting grace through them but because it is the will of God. [28]It is only by faith that forgiveness of sins and grace are apprehended.”<sup>34</sup> How can we do less than Melancthon does? Of course, some hyper religious despisers will grumble about cheap grace, but to them I would say with my teacher Gerhard Forde that the scandal of grace is that it is neither cheap nor expensive. It is free! And that very freedom simply kills the Old Creature.

Next, Melancthon speaks about the Holy Spirit—the neglected person of the Trinity.

[29]Moreover, because the Holy Spirit is received through faith, consequently hearts are renewed and endowed with new affections so as to be able to do good works. [30]For Ambrose says: “Faith is the mother of the good will and the righteous action.” [31]For without the Holy Spirit human powers are full of ungodly affections and are too weak to do good works before God. [32]Besides, they are under the power of the devil, who impels human beings to various sins, ungodly opinions and manifest crimes.... [34]Such is the weakness of human beings when they govern themselves by human powers alone without faith or the Holy Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Remember that CA V makes it clear that the Holy Spirit works through means (gospel and sacraments) to create faith and thus can only be received (not earned!) through faith. Here Melancthon uses some of his favorite words for the work of the Holy Spirit: “hearts are ... endowed with new affections.” Even more passionate is the quote from Prosper of Aquitaine (Melancthon thought it was Ambrose), “Faith is the mother of the good will and the righteous action.”<sup>36</sup> Again, we hear that good works themselves do not arise out of the coercion of the law but out of faith, where faith (in the words of Gerhard Forde) is “falling in love.” It is all about affection and mothers! Thus, rather than try to yell at people to do good works or shame them, as many preachers do, we have to learn again, if you will pardon the expressions, to seduce them into it or to nurse them into it.

Finally, we need a word about what kinds of works constitute good works. Melancthon touches on this at the very beginning of CA XX, when he describes the content of the reformers’ books on the Ten Commandments. “[2]For their writings on the Decalog and others on similar subjects bear witness that they have given useful instruction concerning all kinds and walks of life: what manner of life and which activities in every calling please God.”<sup>37</sup> My former student, Michael Bennethum, has written a simply brilliant book about this titled, *Listen! God Is Calling*<sup>38</sup>. The truly radical words in CA XX’s description of good works are these: “all kinds and walks of life” and “in every calling.” What we have lost in our fervor to turn Christian good works into religious works is one of the most revolutionary insights of the Reformation: Daily life is the Christian life. One does not need to become a rostered member of the ELCA to be *really* Christian—salvation by professionalism. One does not have to spend at least 20 hours per week and 10 percent of one’s salary at the local Lutheran congregation to be *really* Christian—salvation by congregational monasticism. No! Daily life is the Christian life. Stop all this talk about baptismal vocation—an invitation to religious legalism if ever there was one—and invite people to look at their entire lives (24/7 as we

<sup>31</sup> See CA XX.10 [Latin] and 39, in BC, 55, 56.

<sup>32</sup> CA XX.15-18 [Latin], in BC, 55.

<sup>33</sup> CA XX.26 [Latin], in BC, 57.

<sup>34</sup> CA XX. 27-28 [Latin], in BC, 57.

<sup>35</sup> CA XX.29-32, 34, in BC, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Prosper of Aquitaine, *De vocatione omnium gentium* I, 25.

<sup>37</sup> CA XX.2 [Latin], in BC, 53.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Bennethum, *Listen! God Is Calling: Luther Speaks of Vocation, Faith, and Work* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).

now say) from God's perspective: as remarkable venues to serve the neighbors God loves (service that we are already unwittingly doing).

This means that when we preach good works, we should not simply (or ever! ) talk about all the things people are not doing but need to do, but far more (if not exclusively) we need to describe what they already are doing in this world. Martin Luther's world was filled with people who thought that a person could only really be Christian if they lived the lives of super-Christians, doing special works, living in special communities and thinking religious thoughts all day long. In his day, it was called monasticism, and in the Large Catechism he contrasted that hyper religious way of life to the simple life of a household servant.

[145] If this could be impressed on the poor people, a servant girl would dance for joy and praise and thank God; and with her careful work, for which she receives sustenance and wages, she would obtain a treasure such as those who are regarded as the greatest saints do not have. Is it not a tremendous honor to know this and to say, "If you do your daily household chores, that is better than the holiness and austere life of all the monks"? [146] Moreover, you have the promise that whatever you do will prosper and fare well. How could you be more blessed or lead a holier life, as far as works are concerned? [147] In God's sight it is actually faith that makes a person holy; it alone serves God, while our works serve people. [148] Here you have every blessing, protection, and shelter under the Lord, and, what is more, a joyful conscience and a gracious God who will reward you a hundredfold. You are a true nobleman if you are simply upright and obedient.<sup>39</sup>

#### ***IV. Concluding Comments***

Well, there you have it. What will renew the ELCA is what always and only renews us each day: the word of God working as law and gospel; the worship centered in word and sacrament (the visible word) and our unique confession of faith, the Augsburg Confession. In that Confession, we discover not simply time-bound words about problems in the late-medieval church but a witness to faith designed to lead us to the gospel. It is a witness that begins by telling the truth about the human situation (CA II): we fear, love and trust all kinds of idols as ways to obtain relation with God. It then moves to the truth about God (CA III-V): that all of our *obtaining* ends in Christ, from whom we receive all of God's mercy, and that the Holy Spirit works faith in us through word and sacrament. Then we discover that church (CA VII, VIII, XV), far from being an institution, is an event where word and sacrament make believers—an event that does not depend upon our holiness or that of our leaders but only on God's work. That work (CA XII) happens through the word that terrifies the comfortable as law and comforts the terrified. Having been declared righteous and thus made good trees by faith alone, we then bear fruit, that is, we can see our daily lives in a completely

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<sup>39</sup> LC, Ten Commandments, 145-148, in BC, 406-407.

new light, as conduits for God's mercy, as we are continually seduced and nurtured by God the Holy Spirit through the aural and visible word. Now all of this is the rock upon which we may build our church. Thank you for your attention.

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