



Introduction to the Tenth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

“Living in God’s amazing grace: Thanks be to God!” is a theme of profound evangelical witness. It is a theme that reflects in significant ways the six-fold “statement of purpose” of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

1. To proclaim God’s saving Gospel;
2. To carry out Christ’s Great Commission;
3. To serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs;
4. To worship God;
5. To nurture members in the Word of God; and
6. To manifest unity.

These six purposes are to guide the work of each congregation, all 65 synods, and all the ministries carried out through the churchwide organization. In fact, exactly the same text of that statement is contained in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, the *Constitution for Synods*, and the churchwide constitution.¹

Together as Baptized Members

For the tenth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we gather as members—baptized members of Christ’s Church. We meet, however, not as a random collection of baptized members. For the sake of the Gospel and the well-being of this church, we serve as representatives on behalf of the nearly 5 million members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in 10,549 congregations. In our role as voting members, we have been assigned specific decision-making responsibility.

Among those of us who assemble in Chicago from August 6-11, 2007, we will find: 1,071 who will be duly elected voting

¹Provision 4.02. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* reads:

To participate in God’s mission, this church shall:

- a. Proclaim God’s saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ’s sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
- b. Carry out Christ’s Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
- c. 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.
- d. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
- e. 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 the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.
- f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.

members; about seven dozen others who will be designated as advisory members, including Church Council members, executive directors of churchwide units, and board and committee chairs. Presidents of the eight ELCA seminaries and 28 colleges and universities serve as non-voting members. About two dozen ecumenical observers and guests, and several hundred other people who will be visitors also will be present.

All together, as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we assemble with the conviction that we are “living in God’s amazing grace.” Under that conviction, we will embark with thanksgiving upon the work of the Churchwide Assembly.

Responsibilities of the Assembly

The nature and role of the Churchwide Assembly are defined by the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* in this way:

The Churchwide Assembly shall be the highest legislative authority of the churchwide organization and shall deal with all matters which are necessary in pursuit of the purposes and functions of this church.

Further, ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 12.11. declares:

The powers of the Churchwide Assembly are limited only by the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation, this constitution and bylaws, and the assembly’s own resolutions.

The Churchwide Assembly, according to ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 12.21., must:

- a. Review the work of the churchwide officers, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- b. Review the work of the churchwide units, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- c. Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies.
- d. Establish churchwide policy.
- e. Adopt a budget for the churchwide organization.
- f. Elect officers, board members, and other persons as provided in the constitution or bylaws.
- g. Establish churchwide units to carry out the functions of the churchwide organization.
- h. Have the sole authority to amend the constitution and bylaws.
- i. Fulfill other functions as required in the constitution and bylaws.
- j. Conduct such other business as necessary to further the purposes and functions of the churchwide organization.

Assembly Vocabulary No Accident

It is important to note and remember that no *delegates* will be present for the assembly. Voting members are not delegates, as that term is understood or used in some political contexts. The voting members, elected by Synod Assemblies to serve in the Churchwide Assembly, come together as representatives not only of their own congregations and synods but also serve on behalf of all the people of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

- The terminology related to the legislative process of this church is no accident.
- The words, “Synod Assembly” and “Churchwide Assembly,” rather than convention, and “voting members,” rather than delegates, were deliberately chosen for our governing documents.

These words not only fulfill certain legal requirements but also reflect an ecclesial (that is, churchly) understanding—an understanding grounded in Scripture, reflected in the Lutheran Confessional writings, and established as part of this church’s polity upon the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Within the ELCA, we find three primary expressions of this church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. They exist and serve within this *one* church.

1. A congregation of the ELCA does not meet in convention; the members gather in worship, carry out service, and assemble occasionally and properly for governance decisions and elections.
2. The people of this church in each of the 65 synods are not sent as agents of a particular caucus; they are *not* gathered to act as politicized delegates to a regional party convention. Rather, they *assemble* as duly selected *members* of this church with *voting* responsibilities for governance and elections on behalf of the synod. The Synod Assembly is just that, an assembly of the people of this church, some of whom have been chosen for the responsibility of being *voting members* of the *Synod Assembly*. They assemble together in worship and are nurtured in the faith through Word and Sacrament. Then, in their deliberations, they seek the wisdom and guidance of God’s Spirit in the decisions and elections of the assembly.
3. The people of this church, when gathered as voting members of the Synod Assembly, have the responsibility of electing the *voting members* of the *Churchwide Assembly*. Persons so chosen are given the responsibility of doing the work of the Churchwide Assembly on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are *not* sent to participate as politicized delegates from a regional or agenda-specific caucus at some national party convention. Rather, they assemble as members of this church.

In the ELCA’s predecessor church bodies, the word “delegate” was used and meant people chosen to fulfill responsibilities in what then were known as synod or district “conventions.” Like those “delegates” in our predecessor churches, ELCA voting members in ELCA synodical assemblies are chosen to represent all of the members of all of the congregations in the synod.

In the case of the Churchwide Assembly, voting members carry out their duties on behalf of all members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Nourished by Word and

Sacrament, they are called in assembly to seek the well-being of this whole church.

Voting members carry a heavy responsibility. They must study carefully the issues on the agenda of the assembly, listen thoughtfully to the debate throughout plenary sessions, examine wisely possible amendments to proposals, consider with insight resolutions or new business submitted by voting members, elect with care apt persons to serve on the churchwide council, boards, and committees, seek prayerfully the guidance of God’s Spirit in all matters, and act conscientiously for the sake of the unity and well-being of this church and the whole Church.

Words Shape and Reflect Understanding

The vocabulary that we use within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America both *shapes* and *reflects* our understanding of this church. When we recognize and understand that our “congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations” (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 3.02.), then our awareness of the significance of being voting members in a given assembly may grow. After all, as we declare in regard to the “Nature of the Church,” the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America “derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inherent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful” (also ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 3.02.).

We do need to (a) understand more clearly and (b) embrace more completely the conviction that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America “shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others” (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 8.11.).

Indeed, we together affirm and declare the primary principle of organization for our church, namely: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be one church” (ELCA churchwide constitutional provision 5.01.).

Within this one church, we as voting members, advisory members, non-voting members, visitors, and staff will gather to carry out the work of the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

Official Assembly Documents

Key documents related to the assembly are provided in the *Pre-Assembly Report*. Various parts of the *Pre-Assembly Report* are distributed to voting members in several mailings. This material is prepared to fulfill the constitutional directive cited above.

Organized by sections

The content of the *Pre-Assembly Report* is organized by sections. Sequential numbering of pages is provided in each section.

Content of sections

Presented are the reports of the churchwide units as information for the voting members of the ELCA’s tenth Churchwide Assembly. Reports of the presiding bishop, secretary, and treasurer—along with reports of the work of their

offices—are provided as required in this church’s constitution. A summary of actions of the Church Council during the biennium also is prepared and formally presented to the assembly by the vice president.

Proposals for action

Recommendations by the Church Council for assembly action are submitted to the assembly. Proposed revisions in the governing documents of this church also are presented by the council. This is done in keeping with the Church Council’s duties, as defined in this church’s bylaws.

Pages of the *Pre-Assembly Report* that include other items of business are mailed about 30 days prior to the assembly to fulfill official notice requirements for the assembly. Recommendations for assembly action by the Memorials Committee and the report of the assembly’s Nominating Committee also are provided.

A three-ring binder will be given to assembly voting members upon on-site registration in Chicago. The pages of this *Pre-Assembly Report* may be inserted into the notebook for convenience in use throughout the assembly.

From time to time during the assembly, additional pages and replacement pages with revisions are distributed.

Policies for the Churchwide Assembly

In keeping with the practices of the ELCA’s predecessor church bodies, the Church Council adopted a policy in 1988 related to the mailing addresses of voting members of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. In addition, based on the pattern of those predecessor church bodies, a policy was adopted on any distribution of materials, displays, and the operation of the assembly. These policies help ensure that the purposes of the assembly are fulfilled in clear and orderly ways.

List of voting members

Specifically, the policy on the list of voting members provides:

That any organization composed entirely of members of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, registering an official request to mail materials to the voting members of a forthcoming ELCA Churchwide Assembly, shall be permitted to do so if the materials are pertinent to the business of the assembly as determined by the Office of the Secretary. Such materials shall be sent to the secretary of this church for mailing to voting members of the assembly at the expense of the organization making the request and with the use of the specific organization’s stationery and envelopes (CC88.07.80).

Solely for communication on assembly matters

The list of voting members also is available for review by voting members upon publication of the official notice of the Churchwide Assembly, as specified in churchwide bylaw 12.31.02. According to the nonprofit law under which the ELCA is incorporated, the list of voting members must be provided for inspection by voting members either in the registered office of the ELCA in Minnesota or at a place in the city where the assembly is to be held. Voting members may use the list solely for the purpose of communicating with other members concerning the meeting of the Churchwide Assembly and for no other purpose.

At the April 2001 meeting of the Church Council, the secretary expressed concern that the pattern of the list being available only at the registered office or the assembly site made inspection of the list conveniently accessible only to those voting members near the place where the list is deposited. The Church Council voted (CC01.04.44):

To affirm that the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will continue to offer the service of distribution of material for the assembly, including materials pertinent to the assembly submitted by any organization composed entirely of members of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, registering an official request to mail materials to the voting members of a forthcoming ELCA Churchwide Assembly, according to the policy established by the Church Council in 1988 (CC88.07.80); and

To authorize the secretary—for the sake of fairness to voting members for the forthcoming Churchwide Assembly in view of geographic distance from the site of the official location of the list of voting members—to provide, at the time of the publication of the official notice of the assembly and subsequent to that date, a paper copy of the names and addresses of the list to any voting member of the next assembly who submits a written request to the secretary for the list, agrees in writing to use the list solely for the purpose of communicating with other voting members of the Churchwide Assembly concerning the meeting, and provides payment of the cost of the list, as determined by the secretary.

Distribution of Materials and Operation

According to the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Churchwide Assemblies adopted by the Church Council:

1. Only materials authorized by this church’s secretary, with approval of the Reference and Counsel Committee, will be distributed to voting members of the assembly during the assembly.
2. Display space exists only for churchwide units.
3. Inclusion of material from related institutions, agencies, and organizations (such as church colleges related through the [Vocation and Education unit]) will be decided by the unit, subject to approval of the secretary. The entire assembly display of churchwide units is coordinated by the... Communication [Services unit].
4. No display space or meeting facilities are provided to organizations that have no official relationship to this church.
5. Only this church’s publishing house (Augsburg Fortress, Publishers) may offer items for sale. No commercial displays or sales booths are permitted.
6. Space for meetings or meal functions, as requested by churchwide units or synods, will be provided whenever possible.
7. Office space will be available only to assist the work of the assembly. No space will be provided to individual units for assembly offices.
8. Secretarial services are supplied only in relation to the official work of the assembly, its officers, and its committees.

9. Individuals and/or groups wishing to appear in relation to or at the assembly must secure permission from the secretary of this church. Priority for any such appearances will be given to persons or groups from within the constituency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, particularly to groups or persons of the host synod. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America assumes no responsibility for expenses—including travel, food, and lodging—nor does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offer honoraria of any amount [for the appearance of such groups] (CC88.07.81).

Purpose of policies

These policies were adopted for the effective working of the voting members in conducting the official business of this church and for the practice of fairness in response to various requests.

Assembly Procedures

The Rules of Organization and Procedure cite the constitutional and bylaw provisions that relate to the work of the assembly. In addition, various rules intended to facilitate the work of the voting members in assembly are provided. The rules supply a primer for the tasks ahead, as well as specific guidance on how we together shall proceed. The first action the assembly will take is adoption of its Rules of Organization and Procedure.

Except where ELCA churchwide governing documents or the adopted rules specify otherwise, *Robert's Rules of Order* (latest edition) will govern assembly procedures, as indicated in churchwide bylaw 12.31.09.

Assembly Committees

Under the governing documents of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, certain committees are charged with responsibilities in relation to the Churchwide Assembly.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee must bring slates of paired nominees for each position, other than for officers to be elected by the assembly.

Memorials Committee

The Memorials Committee reviews all memorials received from synodical assemblies, provides background information for voting members on the topics of the memorials, and offers a recommended action in response to the memorials.

Committee of Reference and Counsel

The Committee of Reference and Counsel is charged with studying resolutions submitted by voting members. The committee, then, brings recommendations and advice to the assembly for possible action.

Constitutional Amendments

Various constitutional and bylaw changes have been proposed by the Church Council. Most of those amendments relate to clarification of constitutional language, churchwide processes, or administrative procedures.

Voting Procedures

The tenth Churchwide Assembly again will utilize electronic balloting to register voting on issues. An introduction to the electronic voting procedures will be presented during the first plenary session.

Separate floor microphones will be available for those who wish to speak in favor of a proposal and those who oppose a proposal. This procedure contributes to balanced debate.

Voting *En Bloc*

Although described elsewhere in assembly materials (e.g., the Rules of Organization and Procedure), the following explanation is offered here. In order to save the valuable and limited time of the assembly in plenary sessions, some routine or non-controversial business before the assembly may be grouped together into a block of items. Such a block of items will be approved or disapproved by action on a single motion. This is sometimes termed an *omnibus* resolution. Some constitutional amendments and parts of the report of the Memorials Committee are scheduled to be acted upon in this way. Assembly members, however, are given the opportunity to request that individual items be removed from the “block,” and be considered separately. The chair will outline that procedure during the first plenary session.

Abbreviations and Citations

Where possible, special abbreviations and acronyms peculiar to this church have been avoided. Where they occur, the referent has been identified in full at its first occurrence within a chapter or section, for example, “Global Mission unit (GM).”

Decisions of the Church Council

Reference to the actions of the ELCA’s various governing bodies are noted by a code, for example, CC06.04.20. The initial letters followed by a number indicate the body and the year during which the action was taken—in this case an action taken by the Church Council during 2006 (CC indicates Church Council; EC, the Executive Committee of the Church Council; CB, the Conference of Bishops; and so on). The second number designates the month during which the body convened and the action was taken—in this example, April 2006. The third number is the sequence number of the action taken during the calendar year—in this instance, the twentieth action taken by the Church Council during 2006.

Decisions of the Churchwide Assembly

Action numbers assigned to the 1989 and succeeding churchwide assemblies follow a similar pattern, with the exception that the letters preceding the year of the assembly read, “CA.” Thus, in the minutes distributed in regard to decisions of the 2007 assembly, CA07.04.11 would signify that the eleventh action of the 2007 Churchwide Assembly occurred on the fourth day of meeting.

References to the Governing Documents

Care should be used to distinguish between the action numbers, explained above, and citations assigned to sections of the

Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, codified variously as ELCA 9.21. (denoting a churchwide constitution provision), †S18.11. (denoting a provision in the *Constitution for Synods*, with † indicating that it is a required provision), and *C9.03. (denoting a provision of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, in which asterisks [*] indicate required provisions).

Bylaws are identified by triple sets of numbers, such as ELCA 8.31.01. Continuing resolutions in ELCA constitutional material also are codified with three sets of numbers. The first two numbers indicate the constitutional chapter and section to which the continuing resolution applies. The final set, preceded by a letter, indicates the year during which the resolution was adopted and, by the letter, the sequence of resolutions adopted during that year with respect to that matter. Thus, ELCA 9.52.A93. signifies a continuing resolution adopted during 1993 with respect to chapter 9, section 52, of the ELCA's constitution.

College Corporation Meetings

Four of the ELCA's 28 colleges and universities have bylaws requiring that the Churchwide Assembly ratify election

by the boards of regents of these institutions of candidates to fill vacancies on their boards (Dana College, Blair, Neb.; Luther College, Decorah, Iowa; St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.; and Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa). A separate booklet on these college corporations will be distributed to assembly members with details on the procedures for college corporation meetings.

Gathering as Members

As we look toward the tenth biennial Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we see before us major decisions that need to be made, and significant issues that await the deliberation of the 1,071 voting members. We also anticipate an inspiring time as all participants in the assembly gather to hear the Word preached and to receive the sacramental meal of the faithful in Holy Communion.

We will assemble in Chicago as members, specific members of this church, who will explore anew the ways in which we are living in God's amazing grace. Thanks be to God!

The Rev. Lowell G. Almen, *Secretary*

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