

## Listening Session: Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church

### 2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action [CA22.01.06]

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

#### **ELCA Constitution: The Three Expressions of the Church** (Chapter 1.01.01)

The name, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, as used herein, refers, in general, to this whole church, including its **three expressions: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization.**

#### **Relationship of the Three Expressions** (Chapter 8:10 – 8:14)

This church 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 an interdependent relationship with the others.

#### **ELCA Statement of Purpose** (Chapter 4)

The Church is a people created by God in Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called and sent to bear witness to God's creative, redeeming, and sanctifying activity in the world. 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, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations, and standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed 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.

#### **Purposes of the Churchwide Organization** (Chapter 11.21)

In fulfillment of the purposes of this church, the churchwide organization shall:

- a. **Undergird the worship life** of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
- b. **Provide resources** to equip members to **worship, learn, serve, and witness** in their ministry in daily life.
- c. **Support and establish policy** for this church's mission and coordinate planning and evaluation for that mission throughout the world, including participation with other churches.
- d. **Witness to the Word of God** in Christ by united efforts in proclaiming the Gospel, responding to human need, caring for the sick and suffering, working for justice and peace, and providing guidance to members on social matters.
- e. **Foster interdependent relationships** among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to implement the mission of this whole church.
- f. **Provide for the rostered ministries** for this church.
- g. **Oversee and establish policy** for this church's relationship to **seminaries, colleges, universities, schools**, and other education endeavors, and provide support as appropriate.
- h. **Establish and reflect this church's ecumenical stance** and its relationship to other churches, and direct this church's policy for relationship with persons of other faiths.
- i. **Develop and administer policies for this church's relationship to social ministry organizations** and cooperate with public and private agencies that enhance human dignity and justice

- j. **Determine and implement policy for this church's relationship to governments.**
- k. **Provide for a comprehensive financial support system** for this church's mission and for the administration of financial resources necessary for fulfillment of the particular responsibilities of the churchwide organization.
- l. **Provide planned giving opportunities for the financial support** of this church, its congregations, synods, agencies, and institutions through the establishment of a foundation.
- m. **Provide pension and other benefits** plans for this church.
- n. **Provide a church publishing house.**
- o. **Provide archives for the retention of its valuable records**, and coordinate archival activity in the synods, regions, institutions, and agencies of this church.
- p. **Provide and monitor a system of discipline**, appeals, and adjudication.
- q. **Establish and operate other programs and activities**, as determined by this church, on behalf of and in support of the congregations and synods of this church.

**Synod: Statement of Purpose** (Chapter 10.21)

Each synod, in cooperation 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 and consistent with policies and procedures of this church, the synod shall:

- a. Provide for **pastoral care of congregations and rostered ministers** in the synod;
- b. **Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission** of this church through congregations;
- c. **Strengthen interdependent relationships** among congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, and foster relationships with agencies and institutions affiliated with or related to this church as well as ecumenical partners; and
- d. **Interpret the work of this church to congregations and to the public** on the territory of the synod.

**Congregations: Function** (Chapter 9.41).

The congregation shall:

- a. **Provide services of worship** at which the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered.
- b. **Provide pastoral care** and assist all members to participate in this ministry.
- c. **Challenge, equip, and support all members** in carrying out their calling in their daily life and in their congregation.
- d. **Teach the Word of God.**
- e. **Witness to the reconciling Word of God in Christ**, reaching out to all people.
- f. **Respond to human need**, work for justice and peace, care for the sick and the suffering, and participate responsibly in society.
- g. **Motivate its members to provide financial support** for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of the synod and the churchwide organization.
- h. **Foster and participate in interdependent relationships** with other congregations, the synod, and the churchwide organization.
- i. **Foster and participate in ecumenical relationships** consistent with churchwide policy.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current constitutional language?
2. What does a renewed Church look like to you? What are your hopes for the ELCA?
3. Based on our discussion, which elements of the Statement of Purpose do you believe are vital to the ELCA and which do you believe should be modified?
4. Are there ways in which the ELCA could be better structured to support the three expressions of the Church for the sake of the gospel in the world?
5. Describe a time or situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA supported the flourishing of the gospel in your context and then another time or situation when it was inhibited.

**Contact Information:**

<https://elca.org/crlc>