

> Date: 26 March 2025

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To: The 2025 ELCA Churchwide Assembly

6 From: 7

The Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon Schwartz, Co-Chairs

Subject: Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

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The 2022 Churchwide Assembly overwhelmingly passed the following:

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

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

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

40 Attached are the findings and recommendations of the CRLC, following prayerful discernment 41 and diligent striving grounded in our seasons of learning and engaging. We have attempted to 42 provide thoughtful and thorough rationale, alongside additional information to help provide the 43 context and history of the commission's efforts and time together, recognizing that the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, which we were modeled after, was a more than six-44 year effort, and that much work, gathering of voices, assessment of needs and realities, and 45 prayerful discernment remains before us. The CRLC acknowledges that renewal for this church 46 47 mirrors the daily renewal we each have available to us through our baptism. The determination, hope, and love we receive through our Savior, Jesus Christ, guides us and leads us through these 48 49 infinite cycles of reformation.

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

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85 Executive Summary:

86 Report of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC)

87 The Imperative for Renewal and Reformation

- 88 In the life of the Church, renewal is not merely an administrative task but a Spirit-led response to
- 89 God's continuous call for discernment and reformation. As a community rooted in faith, guided
- 90 by Scripture, and committed to living out the gospel, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in
- 91 America (ELCA) understands renewal as an essential, ongoing process. This process is deeply
- 92 embedded in our theological and organizational framework as reflected in the *Constitutions*,
- 93 Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA, which articulates how we organize ourselves
- 94 to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, share the sacraments, reach out to our neighbors with good
- 95 news, and express God's love in the world.
- Each expression of this church—the churchwide organization, synods, and congregations—is
- 97 held together in a relationship of interdependence, encouraging responsiveness to contextual
- 98 needs. This interdependence reflects our dedication to listening anew to the Holy Spirit and
- 99 reevaluating how our structures, practices, and missions align with God's calling in a rapidly
- 100 changing world.

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

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

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

2022 ELCA Churchwide Assembly Action

"...To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all three expressions that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its

125 126 127	findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly." [CA22.01.06]
128 129 130 131 132	We recognize that the work conducted by the CRLC may inspire a number of responses. Some will say that we have gone too far, while others will say not far enough. We offer this work as part of the ongoing efforts of this church to more fully live out the mission of sharing the love of God for all. We encourage this church to continue discernment and taking action related to our purpose, mission, structure and longing for the love and equality of all people.
133	Methodology
134 135 136 137 138 139 140	Over the last two years, the commission has endeavored to ground its work deeply in the understanding of our theology and Lutheran heritage. As we engaged with Scripture, history, and our shared Lutheran culture, the CRLC implemented a broad engagement strategy involving surveys and listening sessions across the ELCA. These sessions included diverse groups such as laity, rostered leaders, youth and young adults, and historically marginalized communities. This inclusive process aimed to gather comprehensive feedback on the existing church structure and assess its alignment with both contemporary and future needs.
141 142 143 144	Throughout the work of this commission, we have maintained regular consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council of the ELCA, ensuring that our efforts resonate with broader church leadership. We extend our gratitude to the multitude of voices that have enriched this process through their input, shared resources, and prayers.
145 146 147 148 149 150	It is crucial to highlight that our commission has sustained a dedicated focus on our fundamental commitment to dismantling racism, a mandate clearly articulated by the Churchwide Assembly. In our pursuit to cultivate an anti-racist church, we have expanded our awareness to address other forms of exclusion within this church. We encourage all ELCA Lutherans to actively embody their faith by advocating for a more equitable and inclusive society. This call to action reaches beyond our formal governance and organizational structures, urging each individual to honor the dignity of every person, particularly those marginalized, akin to the Samaritans among us.
152	Key Findings
153 154 155	The commission's key findings can be found in the Observations section of this report and represent the breadth of issues facing the ELCA today. Most of these issues need further reflection as the church considers structural and governance reform:
156	Governance and Structural Matters
157 158	The commission noted the many ways our current governance models across the ELCA vary in their reflection of and service to the diversity of its membership.
159	Administrative Opportunities
160 161 162	The commission acknowledges the variety in administrative management, coordination of services, and opportunities for effectiveness in the way that each of the expressions carries out its purpose and ministry.

163 Interdependence of this Church

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

169 Commitment to the Dignity of All People

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

175 Recommendations

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

178 Governance and Structural Considerations

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

183 Strategic Initiatives for Long-Term Impact

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

189 Respecting the Dignity of All People

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

Conclusion

- The CRLC's findings and recommendations are framed to guide the ELCA towards a more
- inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused future. These recommendations, rooted in a vision
- of continuous transformation, are offered with the hope that their adoption will empower the
- three expressions of this church to better serve our diverse membership. By embracing these
- ongoing changes, we align ourselves more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This
- 200 process fosters a church that is not only adaptable and accountable but also fully equipped to

meet the challenges of our time while remaining steadfast in our theological convictions. Our enduring commitment to reformation and renewal underscores our role in God's world, reminding us that our efforts are not solely for the church's benefit but are crucial for the broader realization of God's kingdom on earth. This is an everlasting endeavor. While the work of the commission concludes, we encourage the church to continue in its efforts for renewal in all matters.

Process and Work of the Commission

Origin and Formation

- 210 The August 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten synods titled
- 211 "Restructure the Governance of the ELCA." These memorials included common themes related
- 212 to an overall decline in membership and numbers of congregations since the ELCA was created
- in 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA's governing documents to meet new challenges, the desire
- for a "well-governed, connected, and sustainable church," and the need to dismantle racism and
- acknowledge this church's complicity in related trauma and harm. The Commission for a New
- 216 Lutheran Church (CNLC) toiled for several years during the 1980s, eventually leading to the
- 217 creation of the ELCA. The establishment of the CRLC marked the first major review of the
- 218 governance and polity of the denomination since its creation.
- 219 The following resolution, as amended, was adopted by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly by a 738-

"To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed

220 72 vote:

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- 222 Lutheran Church comprised of leaders of diverse representation from all 223 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
- 226 structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive
- 227 to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present its findings
- 228 and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for a
- possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special
- 230 meeting of the Churchwide Assembly." [CA22.01.06]
- The ELCA Church Council was charged with establishing the CRLC. Since there was no
- precedent for such an entity, it was the Church Council's responsibility to determine the size and
- selection of the commission membership. In April 2023, the Church Council appointed 34
- individuals to the commission and appointed two members as co-chairs. The commission
- 235 membership represented broadly diverse perspectives across the ELCA's three expressions; the
- churchwide organization, synods, and congregations, and beyond. The members of the CRLC all
- served in a volunteer role. While supported by resource staff, the CRLC did not have full-time
- 238 dedicated staff support or engage any significant consulting efforts.

The Work Begins

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

- 248 2. Racial and economic disparities impacting the candidacy process and management of rostered leaders.
 - 3. Overwhelming passage of the memorials at the synod level indicating a broad appetite for change in this church and a sense of urgency.
 - 4. The need to commit to being an anti-racist institution and related examination of our governing documents.
 - 5. Concern for accountability and results in the broader church and a desire for the commission to recommend tangible action steps for consideration.
 - 6. Collaboration with our full communion partners for theological education and mission work should be encouraged.
 - 7. Maintain congregational independence to choose their calls.
 - 8. A growing focus on concerns about transparency, accountability, and governance.
- Achieving a common understanding of the commission's task was an early challenge among the members of the commission.
- 262 Individuals worked together to share their interpretation and the ways it might inform the
- 263 commission's collective work. Significant time was spent reviewing and then unpacking the
- 264 charge given to the CRLC by the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. In particular, the development of
- the language of our "shared commitment to dismantle racism" in the memorial was noted. In our
- third meeting, CRLC3, the members thoroughly discussed the memorial, "Restructure the
- Governance of the ELCA" and its mandate. After much discussion, the commission voted to
- approve the mandate focus as follows:

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- 1. "shall reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church" [churchwide organization, synod, congregation]
- 2. [shall reconsider] "the principles of its organizational structure"
- 3. [shall reconsider] "all matters pertaining thereunto" [as it relates to governance]
 - 4. "being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism" [as it relates to governance]
- 275 In addition to seeking a common understanding of the mandate, an early task of the commission
- was to clarify the timeline of activities and associated milestones. There were two such major
- 277 milestones identified. First, any recommendations for constitutional changes to be considered for
- adoption at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly were to be provided to the Church Council prior to
- 279 its November 2024 meeting. Second, the CRLC final report needed to be provided to the Church
- 280 Council in the early spring of 2025 so that it could be included in the packet of materials
- 281 distributed to voting members of the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The CRLC recognized the
- 282 tight timeline and structured its work accordingly. The timeline proved to be a distinct challenge,
- as it required the early prioritization of recommendations for constitutional changes, resulting in
- a limited capacity in early meetings for conversations of a more transformative and generative
- 285 nature. The timeline prescribed by this church's current governing documents proved to be a
- repeated challenge to the commission's work.

Learning, Listening and Consulting

- Early in our time together it became clear that not everyone was starting from the same place of
- 289 understanding of the operation of the denomination, its formation, the constitution, or its history.
- 290 Meetings in 2023 focused heavily on creating a foundation of understanding among members

291 regarding the polity and current governance structures of the ELCA as well as a brief overview 292 of this church's ecclesiology. The commission was blessed with a diverse membership with a 293 variety of skills, gifts, and experiences. Several members of the commission invested in the 294 creation of resources to provide all CRLC members with a better understanding of ELCA 295 governance, polity, and ecclesiology. In addition to CRLC members, resource persons and other 296 churchwide organization subject-matter experts, especially those whose work focuses on racial 297 equity, were essential to building a common understanding and foundation. At every full 298 commission meeting and almost every committee meeting, resource persons were available and 299 in attendance to answer questions, provide feedback, and serve as a conduit to the churchwide 300 organization. The CRLC understood that it was not only necessary to have a strong grounding in 301 the past, but also necessary to have exposure to current on-going efforts within the church and requested a list of such efforts from the churchwide organization. Presentations to the CRLC 302 303 were provided by staff involved in the Vision Team and the God's Love Made Real initiative. It 304 was a challenge to identify and engage with the wide variety of ongoing efforts due to the limited 305 time available and the peripheral nexus of some of the efforts with the work of the CRLC. This 306 multifaceted engagement offered vital insights into the current and future needs of this church.

- To inform its work, the CRLC engaged in an extensive listening process, both formal and
- 308 informal. The formal efforts included online surveys of ELCA members (both laity and rostered
- 309 ministers), with special surveys of youth and historically marginalized communities.
- 310 Additionally, listening sessions were held across the denomination, hosted by CRLC members.
- 311 Informal listening was a constant source of feedback for each CRLC member as they personally,
- and in some cases professionally, engaged with others.
- 313 The memorial creating the CRLC directed the commission to be in consultation with the
- 314 Conference of Bishops and the Church Council. The presiding bishop and the secretary of the
- 315 ELCA, members of both the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, served as resource
- 316 persons. The Conference of Bishops was represented on the CRLC by two bishops. One
- 317 commission member was a member of the Church Council. Additionally, resource persons from
- 318 the Church Council included the chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and
- 319 the treasurer of the ELCA.
- Written materials as well as in-person presentations were provided to the Conference of Bishops
- and Church Council. Verbal and written feedback was received from both bodies. This wide-
- ranging engagement provided invaluable perspectives, fostering a collaborative approach as the
- 323 CRLC prepared its findings and recommendations for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. The
- 324 CRLC also engaged in consultation with a wide variety of stakeholders including rostered
- 325 ministers, ethnic associations, synod vice-presidents, members of the ELCA Larger Church
- 326 Conference, and others.

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Committee Work and Focus

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

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

348 All Ears Committee

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

Communications Committee

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

359 Dismantling Racism Committee

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

How We Are Governed Committee

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

Planning and Report Committee

- The Planning and Report Committee exists to ensure project management, coordinate
- resources and provide for a final report to be presented to the Church Council in April of
- 370 2025 in preparation for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Who Are We Committee

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

376 377 378 379	Why and What Committee The Why and What Committee exists to review the purpose statements for the three expressions of this church as set forth in their constitutions and to make recommendations concerning changes to those statements.
380 381 382 383	3-4 Committee The 3-4 Committee combines the purposes of the Who Are We Committee and the Why and What Committee with a special focus on the interdependence among the three expressions of the church and their purpose statements.
384 385 386	Setting the Table Committee The Setting the Table Committee's purpose is to draft a document listing the presenting issues facing this church that the CRLC identified through its listening efforts.
387	Challenges
388 389 390 391 392 393 394 395 396	The work of the CRLC faced a variety of challenges, including logistical, structural, and environmental. The fact that the ELCA had not created such an entity since its inception nearly two generations ago meant there was no template. The most analogous entity was the original Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC). Yet the tasks were significantly different: creating a new denomination versus examining an existing denomination's governance and structure. The CNLC performed its work over the greater part of a decade. The CRLC was limited to less than two years of actual meeting time. This meant that a process for responding to the mandate was created in tandem with the actual work of responding to the mandate. A lack of precedent in process was a notable challenge.
397 398 399 400	The size and diversity of the CRLC was both a challenge and a strength. There was strength in the wide variety of gifts, experiences, and perspectives of the members. There was also a challenge in engaging and ensuring that all members had an opportunity to fully participate in a group of 34 people.
401 402 403 404	The CRLC was composed entirely of volunteers. Thus, the membership was confined to those who had the time and means to do the work. This reality is indicative of a larger systemic challenge across the structure and leadership of this church, inherently limiting the full participation of the diversity represented in this church.
405 406 407 408	An additional and significant challenge was the wording of the mandate. There were a variety of interpretations of the memorial language, with some arguing for a narrow scope and others seeking a broad interpretation. The CRLC voted on an understanding of the mandate in our third meeting.
409 410 411	However, there still exist varying opinions of the mandate across the spectrum of people and groups within the ELCA. This challenge consumed valuable time and energy of the CRLC members and supporting resource persons.
412 413 414 415 416	The CRLC was intentionally created to consist of members from all three expressions of the ELCA as well as related institutions, organizations, and ministries. Logistically, the CRLC was created by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and established by the ELCA Church Council. It was important that the CRLC not appear to be driven in its work by any particular expression of this church. In some cases, this led to a lack of awareness of or confusion regarding already

existing projects and activities in the broader church. It was a challenge for the CRLC members to be knowledgeable of such efforts and their potential nexus with the CRLC.

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

432 Survey and Listening Sessions Summary

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

Listening Sessions:

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- What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the current constitutional language?
- What does a renewed church look like to you? What are your hopes for the ELCA?
- What elements of the Statement of Purpose do you believe are vital to the ELCA, and what
- do you believe should be modified?
- Are there ways in which the ELCA could be better structured to support the three expressions of the church for the sake of the gospel in the world?
- Describe a time/situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA
- supported the flourishing of the gospel in your context, and/or describe a time/situation where the current structure/power configurations of the ELCA inhibited the flourishing of
- 450 the gospel in your context.

General and Ethnic Associations Surveys:

- Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose are vital to the ELCA's future?
- Which of the following elements of the congregation's purpose need to be modified?
- Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose are vital for the ELCA's future?
- Which of the following elements of the synod's purpose need to be modified?
- Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose are vital to the ELCA's future?
- Which of the following elements of the churchwide organization's purpose need to be modified?
- The ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide organization) help to promote racial diversity.

25 Years and Under and Youth Surveys:

- Does the ELCA's organizational structure (congregations, synods and churchwide organization) help promote racial diversity?
- Identify the most important things about the ELCA that will encourage them to remain in the church in the future.
- Responses for each question in the General Survey are arranged by general results and crosstabulations. For example, the responses to question 1 (congregation purpose, that which is vital

and that which should be modified) contain the most frequent survey responses plus the most frequent survey responses from cross-tabulations for age, race, gender and most frequent responses.

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

CRLC	
Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church	

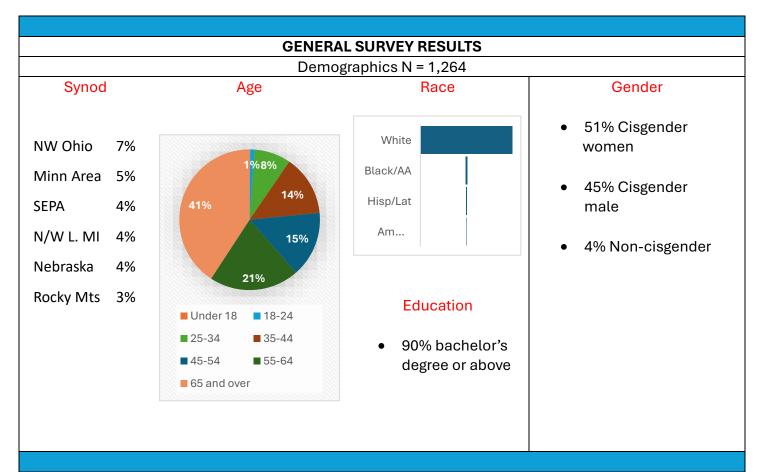
SNAPSHOT OF THE LISTENING SESSIONS AND SURVEY RESULTS

Understanding the Scope of Research Findings

Caveat: It is important for readers to recognize that the research observations and survey responses included in this report reflect the perspectives of those who participated and <u>do not</u> represent the entire Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) community. While this data has been valuable in informing the CLRC's discussions and decision-making processes, we acknowledge that it is not a statistically representative sample. As such, the findings should be interpreted as informative observations rather than predictive of broader trends within the ELCA. We encourage readers to view these responses and data as one part of a larger conversation rather than definitive conclusions about our church as a whole.

	LISTENING SESSIONS RESULTS	
	Demographics N = 1,285+	
# Attendees	Setting: In-person vs. Zoom	Respondents
67 Listening Sessions •1,285+ attendees	1,285+ Attendees 37% 63% Zoom	 Rostered ministers Retired ministers Synod councils Congregations Young adults LGBTQIA+ People with disabilities Deacons Exec. Directors of related institutions, etc.
	Key Themes	
Purpose:	While some respondents saw the congregand that the existing purpose statemen participants expressed dissatisfaction we resonate with diverse communities or refinclusivity and relevance.	its were clear and well-defined, other vith how the current language fails to
rganization Structure: The congregation-centered nature of the ELCA was frequently mentioned as strength, with a focus on local congregations being a vital part of the church		

	identity. However, there was also a call for better alignment and support from the		
	churchwide and synod levels to the congregational level.		
Dismantling Racism:	A recurring theme was the desire for the ELCA to be more inclusive, welcoming diverse communities and ensuring that all voices are heard and represented. Participants also emphasized the need for the church to stay relevant in contemporary society by addressing current social issues and adapting to changing cultural contexts.		



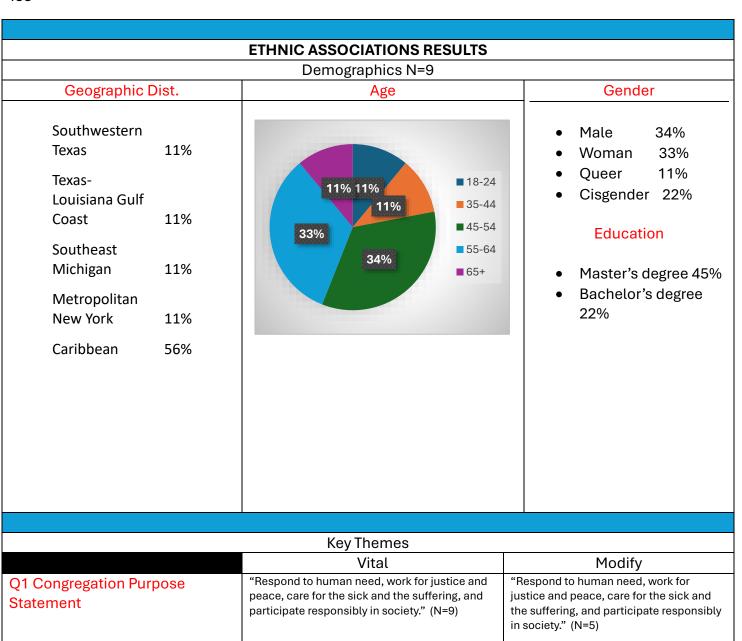
Responses to each question are arranged by General Survey results and cross-tabulations. Key

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

Q1 Purpo	Q1 Purpose Statement — Congregation				
Key	Vital	Modify			
"Provide services of worship at which the Word of is preached, and the sacraments are administered		"Motivate its members to provide financial support for the congregation's ministry and the ministry of the synod and the churchwide organization."			
В	"Provide pastoral care and assist all members to participate in this ministry."	"Provide services of worship at which the Word of God is preached, and the sacraments are administered."			

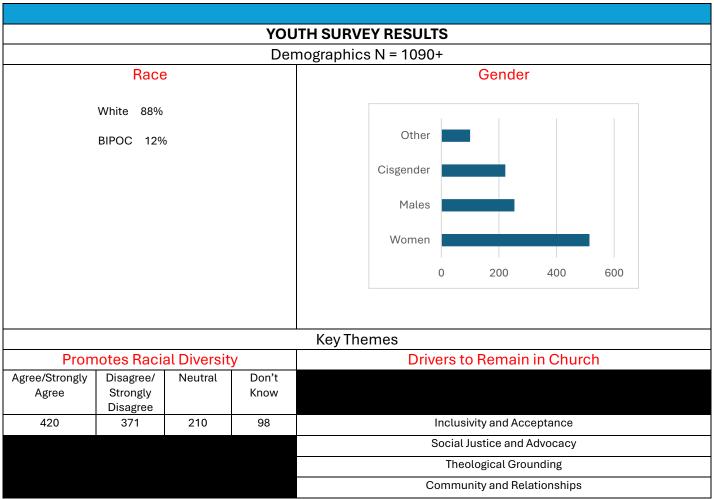
С	"Respond to human need, work for ju care for the sick and the suffering, responsibly in society."		"Provide pastoral c this ministry."	are and assist all members to participate in
D	"Provide services of worship at which is preached, and the sacraments are a			ipate in interdependent relationships with ns, the synod, and the churchwide
E	"Challenge, equip, and support all men out their calling in their daily lif congregation."			of worship at which the Word of God is acraments are administered."
Q2 Purpo	se Statement — Synod			
Key	Vital			Modify
Α	"Provide for pastoral care of congregat rostered ministers in the synod."	ions and	"Provide for pastora ministers in the syn	al care of congregations and rostered od."
В	"Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the church through congregations."	mission of this	synods, and the relationships with	pendent relationships among congregations, churchwide organization, and foster agencies and institutions affiliated with or ch as well as ecumenical partners."
С	"Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the church through congregations."	mission of this		e, and nurture the mission of this church
D	"Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the church through congregations."	mission of this	"Provide for pasto ministers in the syn	oral care of congregations and rostered od."
E	"Strengthen interdependent relation congregations, synods, and the organization, and foster relationships with institutions affiliated with or related the well as ecumenical partners."	e churchwide vith agencies and	"Provide for pasto ministers in the syn	oral care of congregations and rostered od."
Q3 Purpo	se Statement — Churchwide			
Key	Vital			Modify
A	"Provide resources to equip members to worship, learn, serve, and witness in their ministry in daily life."		•	
В	"Undergird the worship life of this church as the Word of God is preached and the sacraments are administered."		relationship to othe	ect this church's ecumenical stance and its r churches and direct this church's policy for ersons of other faiths."
С	"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		"Provide for a composition church's mission resources necess	prehensive financial support system for this and for the administration of financial sary for fulfillment of the particular ne churchwide organization."
D	"Undergird the worship life of this church God is preached and the sacraments a		"Provide for the rost	tered ministers for this church."
Е	"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."		coordinate planning	blish policy for this church's mission and g and evaluation for that mission throughout participation with other churches."
Q4 Promo	otes Racial Diversity			
Key	Strongly Disagree +	Strongly Ag	ree + Agreed	Neutral
,	Disagreed			
-	Disagreed N = 498 or 36.5%	N = 301	or 22.1%	N = 437 or 32%
A B			or 22.1% year olds	N = 437 or 32% NA

D	65.9% Non-cisgender 40.6% Cisgender women 33.9% Cisgender male	NA	NA	
E Oualitative	NA Data Results	Bachelor's degree Professional degree Master's degree	NA	
Orga	anization Structure	Dismantling Racism	Other	
Recognize the distinct needs of metropolitan and rural congregations.		Distribute resources more equably.	Improve diversity and organizational structure.	



Q2 Synod Purpose Statement	"Provide for pastoral care of congrostered ministers in the synod." ("Plan for, facilitate, and nurture the mission of this church through congregations." (N=6)			
Q3 Churchwide Purpose Statement	congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to implement the mission of this whole church." (N=5) church's colleges		church's relati colleges, unive education end	e and establish policy for this relationship to seminaries, , universities, schools, and other on endeavors, and provide as appropriate." (N=4)	
	Agree	Disa	igree	Neutral/DKN	
Q4 Promote Racial Diversity	NA	NA N = 5		N = 3 /1	
Info Accessible in Spanish	N = 1	N	= 5	N = 3	
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 7 (press releases and leadership spaces)				
Type of Info Avail in Spanish needed	N = 6 (information/national assembly et.al.)				
484					

Organizational Structure Changes			Dismantling Racism		
"Flexibility and process streamlining (policy statements), e.g., shifting the focus from institutional policies to people and ministries."			"Create a Latino Synod."		
"Decentralization of por rather than internal ones		ng the church to	o external solutions	"Let the Latir	no community make decisions for themselves."
		25 YE	ARS AND UND	ER RESULT	rs
			Demographics	N=360	
Age)		Race		Gender
Under 18 yea	ars = 28%		■White ■Othe	er	200
Under 18 years = 28% 18–25 years = 72%			13%		150 100 50 0 Nonen Men Cissender Other
			Key Theme	es	
Promotes Racial Diversity (N= 364)				Drivers to Remain in Church	
Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Don't Know		
N = 256	N = 49	N = 37	N = 22		Inclusivity and Acceptance
					Community and Fellowship
					Youth Engagement and Activities
				Social Justice and Advocacy	



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



Observations

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

Identified Areas of Need

1. Structural Concerns and Governance

- Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this church are to be carried out under his rule and authority. [ELCA constitution 3.01]. It is also a non-profit organization, legally registered in the state of Minnesota [Article 2, Article 5]. For the sake of good stewardship, we utilize governance processes across the three expressions that blend non-profit structures with ecclesiastical structures. Through our listening we have found areas in all three expressions of the church where the governance structures are not serving the purpose of this church, nor are we modeling good stewardship of the tasks and resources entrusted to us, the people. Tension also lies in the need to clearly define the purpose of this church, to ensure governance and resources are appropriately aligned.
- 1.2 Challenges in Governance Model: The current governance models in all three expressions have weaknesses. Leadership recruitment, leadership diversity, and intentional and meaningful representation in many synods and congregations are currently highly dependent on passive inbound application, versus a blendof intentional recruitment and open and welcoming invitation. Additionally, there is a wide variance in the implementation of governance practices across congregations and synods which result in unintentional inequities.
 - In both the synod and churchwide expressions, executive power—encompassing the authority to govern and administer—is fully vested in the bishop [13.31, S8.12]. All other elected officials, including the single constitutionally required lay leader, are directed by the bishop. The staff, led by the bishop, have the full responsibility to manage and lead the organization.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For example, one reason presented by some of the synods who sent memorials to the 616 617 Churchwide Assembly in 2022 that called for creation of the CRLC was to address the number of synods. The original number was a compromise between the Lutheran 618 619 Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC). However, the current division of 65 synods no longer provides appropriate representation or good 620 stewardship of resources. 621 622 Congregational Distribution 623 **Top 5 Largest Synods (by congregations):** Synods 3D, 8D, 4A, 3F, and 7E collectively have 1,131 congregations. 624 625 Smallest 16 Synods (by congregations): Synods 7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 8G, 626 5L, 8A, 5G, 2D, 1C, 1D, 4D, 1B, 4F, and 2C together have a total of 1,104 627 congregations. 628 **Comparison:** The largest single synod, 7E, alone hosts 240 congregations, while the combined total for the six smallest synods (7G, 1A, 9F, 4C, 8H, 629 8G) is only 259 congregations. 630 Active Participant Distribution 631 632 **Largest Synod (by active participants):** Synod 3G has 96,792 active 633 participants. Smallest 13 Synods (by active participants): Synods 7G, 9F, 8H, 4C, 1A, 634 8A, 8E, 8C, 5G, 4D, 1D, 1F, and 1C together have a total of 92,983 active 635 636 participants. 637 In some cases, synods may need to merge, in others split. Current governing documents 638 require approval of the Churchwide Assembly to make this happen, which can prove 639 cumbersome. 640 Current governance structures require funding at a level that is no longer available, due 641 to the reduction in size of this church. Ministries at the margins, such as those coming from our ethnic-specific tables, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, and service learning 642 643 ministries are underfunded. Critical evaluation of priorities is necessary to ensure the essential work of this church is funded and following its mission. 644 Governance Adaptations: As previously stated, the CRLC has identified the need for 645 governance updates to enhance adaptability and streamline responsibilities across the 646 647 churchwide organization, synod and congregation expressions. These updates aim to 648 establish a more cohesive, mission-oriented framework. 649 As is often the case with organizations, our current systems tend to default to 650 preserving the status quo. Given this reality, it is essential to evaluate roles and

structures from an organizational perspective, separate from the individuals currently

will be necessary to meet future needs effectively.

occupying those roles or the existing systems. This approach allows us to focus on what

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- **1.10.** Representation: Vital and important areas of our church's engagement in the world, such as social ministry organizations, campus ministries, outdoor ministries, nontraditional worshiping communities, and other ministries—often served by non-rostered professionals—lack formal recognition within the current structures. These ministries, which provide significant diversity and outreach, are asking for greater connection, a strength that is currently underutilized. Formal recognition might include institutional access to voice and vote in formal settings, addressing these gaps in representation in the current three expressions. Recognition of these ministries not represented by the three expressions would move us toward being a more equitable and inclusive church.
 - **1.11 Lay Leadership:** Lay leadership has played a vital role in the ELCA and continues to grow in prominence today. Ensuring a balance of voices requires intentionality in how both lay and rostered leaders are equipped and empowered to contribute to the decision-making processes of this church.

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

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

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

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

with ecumenical and interfaith dialogues. This all needs to be kept in mind as the purposes and structures of this church are considered.

2. Commitment to the Dignity of All People

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

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

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

- The impetus for DEIA initiatives is deeply biblical, belongs to the best of the Lutheran heritage, and to the essence of the Church, that is, of the body of Christ (Gal. 3:28). The implementation of DEIA principles within this church's governance and educational practices addresses current challenges in both Church and society and leverages them as opportunities to witness and live out both God's law toward justice and the gospel's embrace of all people.
- **2.3 DEIA Policies and Training**: The DEIA audit process was not initiated by the CRLC; however, we have received its findings and they have informed our work. This audit has recommended updated governance and personnel policies, DEIA training for leaders, and the inclusion of DEIA principles in theological education. These changes are seen as foundational to aligning church practices with the ELCA's commitment to justice and inclusivity. Many of the challenges listed in the structural and governance section of identified challenges are disproportionately affecting the ethnic-specific ministries and historically marginalized groups of this church. All needed evolutions of the governance practices should consider both the theology and methodology necessary to truly bring everyone to the table.
 - **2.4 Youth and Inclusivity**: Youth respondents from the 2024 National Youth Gathering, expressed strong support for the ELCA's inclusivity regarding ethnicity, gender identity, and LGBTQIA+ rights. Many respondents reported social justice and advocacy as being essential to this church's mission, and there was widespread support for DEIA as a core value important to young members.

3. Identity and Purpose Statements

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

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

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

4. Theological and Ecclesiological Foundations

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

5. Congregational Health and Vitality

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

6. Vocational Leadership:

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

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

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

7. Community and Relationship Building Across Expressions

- 7.1 Enhanced Communication and Resource Sharing: Listening sessions have identified the need for more effective communication and collaboration among congregations, synods, and churchwide leaders. The world has moved to an expectation of faster and more transparent communication. Historical models of slow response allow gaps which are filled by others and leave space for conflict, when clear timely responses could reduce the opportunity for conflict. This strategic shift in communication strategy is essential to support the ELCA's commitment to being an anti-racist church, ensuring that gaps do not lead to misunderstandings or conflicts that undermine this mission.
 - Suggested improvements arising from our listening include better resource-sharing platforms and consistent engagement channels to support unified and localized mission work. This is notably dependent on participants engaging in whatever channels and platforms are available.
- **7.2** Community Integration and Inclusivity: The importance of community, belonging, and relationships is a consistent theme among laity and youth. Youth respondents particularly value intergenerational bonds and a sense of family within congregations, suggesting that these connections are crucial to this church's long-term vitality.

8. Perspectives in the Pew and Pulpit

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

9. Practical Concerns

Timing and Structural Constraints of the CRLC: The notable speed of decline of the traditional membership model places an urgency on this work. The very structures

853 854	we are considering themselves are a hindrance to timing. From its inception, the CRLC was challenged by time available to do the work we have been called to.
855 856 857 858	Further, the structure and timeline of the CRLC, fully dependent on volunteers who have the time and means to do the work, is indicative of the larger systemic challenges across the structure and leadership of the church, inherently limiting the full participation of the diversity represented in this church.
859 860 861 862 863	The continuation of this work and implementation of recommendations will be impacted by the elections of a presiding bishop and secretary by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Future work on these matters will require comprehensive coordination with other efforts of this church.

Recommendations

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

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- Recommendations 1-6 are addressed to the Churchwide Assembly or the Church Council as
- appropriate, based on the determination of the CRLC as to which body is the appropriate
- authority to implement the recommendation.
- Recommendations 1 and 2 call for action on changes to governing documents, policies, and
- procedures to improve accountability within the church, with particular intentionality around
- 873 dismantling racism.
- 1. Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism
- 2. Accountability within the ELCA
- 876 Recommendations 3-5 call for the creation of task forces to continue the work on issues of
- importance identified by the CRLC that the commission did not have time to complete between
- convening in July 2023 and preparing this final report in April 2025.
- 3. Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose
- 4. Financial Coordinating Task Force
- Task Force to Develop Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance
 Toolkit and Orientation Program
- Recommendation 6 calls for various policies and resources to clarify and uplift the ministry of ministers of Word and Service in the future life of this church.
- 885 6. Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and Service
- Recommendations 7-12 call for specific changes to the ELCA's governing documents, and they are listed here in the order in which they appear in our governing documents:
 - 7. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Changes to Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically Underrepresented Groups
 - 8. Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's Relationship with other Organizations
- 9. Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents
- 892 10. Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of Misconduct
- 11. Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing Documents
- 12. Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution Mandatory
- Because the normal course for amendments to the ELCA's constitution and bylaws to be adopted
- by the Churchwide Assembly involves the Church Council recommending those changes at its
- November meeting preceding the assembly, recommendations 7-12 were all presented to the
- 898 Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The council has already adopted the
- recommended continuing resolutions relating to the DEIA Audit (Recommendation 7), as
- 900 continuing resolutions may be adopted by the Church Council without a vote of the Churchwide
- 901 Assembly. Other recommended changes await further work before they can be implemented

902 903 904 905	(e.g., the change to the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings in Recommendation 10 would not be adopted unless the corresponding bylaw is adopted by the Churchwide Assembly). Specific details of the status of each of these governing document changes appear after the text of the Recommendation below.
906 907 908 909	Finally, the Church Council referred a question concerning the name of the ELCA to the CRLC in its action CC22.11.34.cc. This is the only item specifically referred to the CRLC outside of its original mandate. Recommendation 13 contains the CRLC's response to this Church Council action.
910	13. ELCA Name Change
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913 Recommendation 1: Immediate Action on Dismantling Racism

- 914 (Related to Observations 1.4, 1.6, 1.7, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3)
- 915 The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends that the ELCA Church
- 916 Council immediately begin identifying and acting upon mutual accountability measures
- and compliance incentives across all expressions of the ELCA to ensure the proactive
- 918 centering of dismantling racism within the denomination. These measures and incentives
- shall be guided by the recommendations outlined in the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and
- 920 Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the Strategy Toward Authentic Diversity.
- 921 To ensure timely action, all constitution and bylaw amendments needed for the
- 922 development and implementation of these accountability measures and compliance
- 923 incentives must be developed and advanced in time for consideration by the 2028
- 924 Churchwide Assembly. If by that time such measures and incentives have not been
- 925 adequately identified or enacted, we recommend the ELCA Church Council call for a
- 926 special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to evaluate and enact necessary constitutional
- 927 revisions that will enable and advance the ELCA's commitment to anti-racism work.

929 Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-

- 930 *6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*
- 932 Rationale:

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- 933 The Commission was charged with being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to
- 934 dismantle racism. As a commission we took this directive to include this church's commitment to
- 935 the dignity of all people; a commitment which is strongly rooted in Lutheran theology. (See
- 936 *Observation* 2.2.)
- 937 The CRLC recognizes that there is racism within this church, and we further recognize that there
- 938 exists within this church various forms of discrimination against other historically
- 939 underrepresented groups as well. While the CRLC's mandate was specific to the charge of
- 940 dismantling racism, we encourage the Church Council's to expand the work beyond dismantling
- 941 racism to include dismantling discrimination against all historically underrepresented groups.
- This church at its inception committed to goals around diversity [ELCA 5.01.A24. and
- 943 following], and there has been significant frustration at the slow progress toward becoming a
- 944 truly welcoming church and realizing authentic diversity that recognizes the dignity of all human
- 945 beings.
- In recent years significant effort has been undertaken in the completion of a Diversity, Equity,
- 947 Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Audit and the creation of a Strategy Toward Authentic
- 948 Diversity, but action to implement the outcomes of this work has not permeated the church.
- The commission believes this work can wait no longer. This work is sufficiently important that it
- 950 could necessitate a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly to fundamentally address the
- 951 way our governing documents impede this work. However, the commission believes a concerted
- effort should be made to advance this issue before and to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.
- 953 Specific measures should be presented to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly to center this work,

954 and if sufficient actions cannot be identified and developed for that assembly, then it is the 955 recommendation of the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church that a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly should be called for revision to the Constitution, Bylaws, and 956 957 Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA. 958 While much that needs to be done to accomplish this work may be centered in our constitution 959 and bylaws, which can only be amended by the Churchwide Assembly, the commission encourages the Church Council to act on continuing resolutions and policies that can advance 960 961 this work before the 2028 Churchwide Assembly. 962

Recommendation 2: Accountability within the ELCA

964 (Related to Observation 1.7)

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

- 1. That the Church Council adopt a resolution instructing the Office of the Secretary to explore collaboration with our full-communion partners to develop processes for conflict resolution within the church that are endorsed by, but independent of, the churchwide organization, and ensuring that they are responsive to the needs of historically underrepresented groups.
- 2. That the Church Council adopt a resolution directing the Committee on Appeals to develop resources to help synods both (a) identify candidates to serve on Consultation Committees with the appropriate spiritual gifts and demonstrated competencies in working with varied ethnic backgrounds and (b) train them in conflict resolution.
- 976 Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-977 6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

978 Rationale:

- 979 In other actions, the CRLC has recommended changes to improve synod bishops' access to 980 professional investigatory services under supervision of the ELCA's general counsel through 981 cost sharing between the synod and the churchwide organization. The CRLC has also brought 982 forward recommendations concerning standardized training for congregation council members. Other questions persist about accountability and how it is achieved in our church's governance 983 984 system. There is the recurring challenge of achieving clear, consistent authority across church expressions while upholding accountability. Noting the timeless tension between autonomy and 985 986 accountability, the CRLC sees that current accountability structures must be reviewed to 987 consider their practicality, speed, and equitable application." (Observation 1.7)
- 988 A fundamental issue related to accountability systems in the Church, as well as the rest of society, is that people want others to be accountable more than they want to be held accountable 989 990 themselves. Systems of accountability normally require parties to cede a portion of their 991 authority to a system that may determine that some action they took crossed a boundary, norm, 992 or rule and that there needs to be a "consequence" to that. Such consequences, broadly speaking, 993 could include an apology, a repentance, or a change in behavior, not just some form of 994 punishment. When an existing system is told that a new system of accountability should be 995 considered for the good of the whole, the existing system often resists.
- Accountability systems in our church primarily are governed by Chapter 20 of the *Constitution*, *Bylaws*, *and Continuing Resolutions* and related documents, including Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline and the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings. These documents spell out a formal disciplinary process that has robust due process rights for the accused and can culminate in serious sanctions against the accused. That full disciplinary process is used in an exceptionally small number of cases. Prior to the disciplinary process, these matters must be

referred to Consultation. The Consultation system does not have the ability to take formal action against a person in our church, and it "endeavors to resolve the controversy through recommendations that are pastoral and therapeutic and which, if accepted by the parties and others concerned would eliminate the necessity for [disciplinary] proceedings" [Rule D12 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings]. This Consultation process is intended to help achieve one of the Grounding Values articulated in Definitions and Guidelines, namely "the understanding that, following misconduct, the desired outcome is restoration of right relationships with God and with one another. This church embraces disciplinary processes which may include elements of counseling, admonition, and correction with the objective of healing and reconciliation."

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

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

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

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

2. Current processes are too binary.

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

3. Relationships can be confused.

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

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

1. The role of an ombudsperson.

How might a neutral third party be able to participate in systems of accountability that are not disciplinary? How would the neutrality of this person be assured? The CRLC recognizes both the merits of this possibility and the need for strongly articulated expectations and understanding of the role's independence and bounds of influence/authority. A role like this might function either (a) similarly to the first level of complaints to the local Bar Association about attorney misconduct, with an "intake" process to determine which complaints appear to have sufficient merit to warrant further investigation; or (b) a person who can hear the concern and serve as an advocate to help guide the person making the complaint on options and appropriate next steps to take to navigate ELCA systems to bring a resolution to the concern.

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

2. An independent adjudicatory body.

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

individuals trained in conflict resolution accessible earlier in the process could lead to reconciliation before the situation is too far gone.

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

3. Preventive Training.

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

4. Change in Terms.

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

1108	Recommendation 3: Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose		
1109	(Related to Observations 3, 3.1, 3.1.1., 5, 6,8.1)		
1110	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:		
1111 1112 1113	The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) establish the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose to operate with the scope of work outlined below.		
1114 1115 1116	Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.		
1117	Rationale:		
1118 1119 1120 1121 1122	In 2022, the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) was tasked with reevaluating the purpose statements of the three expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—with a focus on our commitment to dismantling racism. The complexity of this task has revealed that additional expertise and time are necessary to thoroughly address these critical issues.		
1123	Scope of Work:		
1124	The primary charge of the TFIP will be to:		
1125	1. Clarify Purpose Statements.		
1126 1127 1128	 Assess the adequacy and clarity of the purpose statements in the ELCA Constitution, the Constitution for Synods, and the Model Constitution for Congregations, building on the foundational work of the CRLC. 		
1129 1130 1131	 Address the role and function of synods in relation to congregations and the churchwide organization, clarifying governance structures to ensure they support this church's mission. 		
1132	2. Analyze Structural Interdependence:		
1133 1134	 Assess how current governance structures support or hinder the fulfillment of this church's mission. 		
1135 1136	 Explore opportunities to improve engagement, transparency, and effectiveness in governance. 		
1137	3. Promote Justice and Equity:		
1138 1139	 Investigate how governance structures might perpetuate systemic inequalities and recommend changes to promote inclusion and equity. 		
1140 1141	 Define and codify the core values of this church in its governance documents to ensure they are upheld across all expressions of this church. 		

1142 **Deliverables:**

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- In the course of its work, the task force will present a report to the Church Council with its findings, including but not limited to:
- Recommendations, if appropriate, for constitutional revisions related to purpose statements.
 - A comprehensive analysis of the current governance structures, highlighting strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for improvement.
 - A framework of guiding principles for governance that aligns with this church's mission and values.
 - Recommendations based on their findings, related to structural adjustments, or alternative governance structures.
 - A framework for a strategic implementation plan related to any proposed changes, possibly across multiple Churchwide Assembly cycles.

Membership and Composition:

- 1156 The TFIP should consist of no more than twelve members, including at least five from the CRLC
- to maintain continuity. The task force should also incorporate new members, especially from
- historically underrepresented groups within the ELCA, to bring diverse perspectives to the table.
- Additionally, membership should include representation from related institutions and other
- ministries and individuals with expertise in church governance, history, and constitutional law.

1161 Resources:

- The TFIP will have access to all research, work product and findings of the CRLC. Specifically,
- 1163 we call the task force's attention to Appendix Three: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod
- 1164 *Purpose and Structure* for consideration when undertaking its work.

1166 Recommendation 4: Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTC)

- 1167 (Related to Observations 1.3, 1.4)
- 1168 The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the ELCA
- 1169 Church Council take action, or recommend that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly take
- 1170 action, to create a Financial Coordinating Task Force (FCTF) as described below.
- 1171 Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-
- 1172 *6*, 2025.
- 1173 *Rationale*:
- In an effort to most effectively and efficiently access, utilize, and manage financial resources
- across all entities within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a holistic
- 1176 perspective is needed. The current financial management and funding models for the ELCA
- denomination are disparate at best and have not evolved with societal shifts in financial
- management and funding. The current system is built in silos at different organizational levels
- and lacks coherence. There are four areas of focus that need to be addressed: revenues,
- expenditures, asset management, and overall financial management.
- The flow of revenues involves any method of accessing funds to support both ongoing mission
- needs as well as one-time fundraising activities. These needs occur within every single ELCA
- entity, from the local congregation, through the synod, to the churchwide organization, and in the
- related institutions, organizations, and ministries (RIOMs). Much of the denominational funding
- still occurs through the collection plate. Stewardship materials and fundraising tools and
- techniques should continue to be provided, and a repository of best practices made available to
- support such revenues. However, methods of donation and donor reasoning have significantly
- evolved since the creation of the ELCA. The trend over the last few decades has been towards
- donors desiring more visibility of, if not control of, the use of donations. There are certainly
- stewardship resources available, but how well is this coordinated? There is some lament that the
- ELCA has an older demographic profile, but the silver lining is there are per capita more funds
- potentially available for donation. For the synods and churchwide organization, significant
- amounts of their revenues emanate from the congregations. The model for how these funds flow
- is outdated. A holistic view of all potential revenues should be taken to both maximize revenues
- and stabilize funding streams for predictability and sustainability.
- 1196 Expenditures across all entities within the ELCA should always be tied to the purpose of the
- entity as budgeted within the context of a strategic plan. It is a core function of every governing
- body to ensure the development and implementation of a strategic plan. This plan is needed to
- ensure expenditures are allocated according to the organization's priorities. The tie between
- expenditures and strategic plans needs to be visible and shared. For example, the priority may be
- to address underfunded pastoral leadership, which especially affects non-white, non-male
- rostered ministers. Pastoral compensation is likely the major expenditure for most congregations.
- 1203 Just as with revenues, there need to be modern resources and best practices information made
- available to all entities related to expenditures. In addition, due to the multi-entity nature of the
- 1205 ELCA, priorities are wide-ranging and sometimes competing between entities. There needs to be

- a forum where discussion can occur to surface such issues and allow the various entities to better
- understand the actions of others and to identify potential areas of synergy.
- 1208 Asset management across congregations, synods, other entities, separately incorporated
- ministries (SIMs), and the churchwide organization are not well coordinated. At the local level
- there are many asset pools that could benefit from being included in a larger asset pool.
- 1211 Decreased expenses, better risk management, and access to professional investment services are
- some of the benefits. At the national level, there are silos of assets managed by disparate entities
- and governed by typically non-communicating boards. The same types of benefits that exist at
- the local level can also be found at the national level with better coordination.
- 1215 Financial management within the ELCA takes many forms. For members, the ELCA Federal
- 1216 Credit Union may be a vehicle of financial management. For most smaller congregations,
- financial management is an ongoing challenge. It is incumbent on the ELCA to provide financial
- management tools and best practices that offer support to such entities. The landscape of options
- has dramatically increased in the past two decades. For example, the ELCA could identify or
- even offer an outsourced financial management service for such entities. In the synod and
- 1221 churchwide organization expressions, financial management is fractured. Opportunities should
- be examined for how the sharing or pooling of systems and expertise or even commonality of
- 1223 charts of accounts might occur. Another aspect of financial management is financial reporting. It
- would also be valuable to see a summary level of financial reporting at the denominational level.
- 1225 It is always important to offer transparency into the finances of every entity. The need for
- 1226 financial audits exists for every entity. Again, sharing experiences and audit practices would be
- 1227 valuable.
- 1228 To meet these coordination needs and opportunities, an ELCA Financial Coordinating Task
- Force (FCTF) should be created under the auspices of the Churchwide Assembly. Membership
- of the FCTF should reflect the variety of entities in the ELCA. Therefore, each of the following
- entities would appoint one member: Portico Benefit Services, the Mission Investment Fund, and
- the ELCA Foundation. The ELCA treasurer would be an ex officio member. In addition, the
- 1233 ELCA Church Council would appoint one of its own members and two members of the ELCA
- who are financial experts or investment professionals. The Conference of Bishops would appoint
- a synod treasurer, the ELCA Larger Church Conference would appoint one member, and a small
- 1236 congregation treasurer would be appointed. Notwithstanding any other provision of the ELCA
- 1237 Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions, financial expertise shall be the determining
- factor in all of these appointments. Financially-related separately incorporated ministries of the
- 1239 ELCA and the Office of the Treasurer shall provide staff support and funding for the FCTF.
- The purpose of the FCTF is to provide a forum for all entities within the ELCA to communicate
- and share best practices, resources, and tools related to financial management. In addition, the
- 1242 FCTF should develop a comprehensive financial strategic plan for the denomination. This plan
- would acknowledge the wide range of entities that form the ELCA and their roles in financial
- management. The plan should provide recommendations that clarify and improve revenue
- streams, target expenditures, coordinate asset management and in general, improve financial
- management across the ELCA.
- Specifically, the FCTF shall develop the denominational plan by October 2026. In addition, the
- 1248 FCTF shall provide a recommendation by March 2027 of how to coordinate the governance
- 1249 and/or operations of the financially-related separately incorporated ministries and any other

1250 1251 1252 1253	increase their value to the members and entities of the ELCA, while still ensuring appropriate liability protections. The FCTF shall report its activities to the ELCA Church Council and provide a report with findings and recommendations to the 2028 Churchwide Assembly.
1254 1255	No changes are recommended to the <i>ELCA Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions</i> at this time.
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1257 1258	Recommendation 5: Creation of a Task Force to Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit and Orientation Program		
1259	(Related to Observations 1.6, 1.7, 1.11, 5, 6)		
1260	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that:		
1261 1262 1263 1264 1265 1266	The Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA to establish a task force dedicated to developing a comprehensive congregational management and governance toolkit. This toolkit will integrate and enhance existing resources while tailoring additional tools to meet the diverse needs of all ELCA congregations. Additionally, the task force will design an orientation program framework for new congregation council members that synods can voluntarily implement to ensure these leaders are well-prepared for their roles.		
1267 1268 1269	Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Rationale:		
1270 1271 1272 1273 1274 1275	In the ELCA, our congregations face varied challenges and opportunities necessitating a unified yet adaptable resource for effective management and governance. Recognizing that there are some existing resources that align with the goal of this proposal, this toolkit and orientation program should standardize and consolidate those resources, identify existing best practices and result in the development of new resources while accommodating the unique contexts of our congregations, ranging from small, rural parishes to large, urban communities.		
1276	Task Force Composition:		
1277	The task force will consist of representatives from:		
1278 1279 1280 1281 1282 1283	 Small congregations Large congregations Synods Churchwide organization Conference of Bishops Synod vice presidents 		
1284 1285 1286	This diverse group will ensure that the toolkit and orientation program incorporate a broad range of perspectives and meet the varied needs of our congregations. This group should be comprised in alignment with the stated representational goals of this church.		
1287	Objectives:		
1288 1289	1. Develop a Comprehensive Congregational Management and Governance Toolkit that includes:		

Guidelines on congregation council roles and responsibilities.

Financial management and reporting best practices.

Strategic planning and mission alignment resources.

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1293	 Conflict resolution and community engagement tools. 	
1294	 Compliance guidelines for legal and ethical standards. 	
1295	 Property management and utilization guidelines. 	
1296	 Customizable templates and checklists for church operations. 	
1297 1298	• Integration of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) initiatives to ensure they permeate all aspects of congregation life.	
1299 1300	The task force should make an effort to review existing resources and incorporate current or revised versions of those resources in this toolkit.	
1301 1302	2. Create an Orientation Program Framework for New Congregation Council Members that:	
1303	 Provides an overview of ELCA structures and governance. 	
1304	 Offers training on the legal and fiduciary duties of council members. 	
1305	 Includes leadership and spiritual development modules. 	
1306	 Teaches skills for effective communication and conflict resolution. 	
1307	 Uses case studies for practical learning and application. 	
1308 1309	 Educates congregational leaders about existing resources for continuous support and development. 	
1310 1311 1312	 Provides guidance to participants on local congregation lay leadership succession planning for congregation council and other leadership roles, with an aspiration toward our representational goals as a denomination. 	
1313 1314	 Promotes collaboration across ELCA churchwide expressions to foster a unified approach to church management. 	
1315 1316	The framework is designed by the task force, with the adaptation and execution owned by each synod, allowing for tailoring to meet local needs and contexts.	
1317	Implementation Timeline:	
1318	• Quarter 1: Formation of the task force and initial scope and objective meetings	
1319 1320	 Quarter 2-4: Research existing resources and development phase for the toolkit and orientation program 	
1321	• Quarter 4-6: Pilot testing in selected synods	
1322	 Quarter 7-8: Evaluation and revisions based on feedback 	
1323	 Quarter 9: Official rollout and distribution to all synods 	
1324	Budget:	
1325 1326	A comprehensive budget will be allocated for task force meetings, resource development, pilot testing, and dissemination of the toolkit and orientation program.	

1327 Conclusion:

This initiative aims to significantly enhance governance effectiveness across our denomination.

By equipping new council members with essential tools and knowledge, and ensuring DEIA

principles are embedded in all church activities, we can strengthen congregational leadership and
foster healthier, more inclusive church communities.

- 1333 Recommendation 6: Strengthening the Framework for Ministers of Word and
- 1334 Service

- 1335 (*Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 5*)
- 1336 The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) recommends that the
- 1337 Churchwide Assembly direct the Church Council of the ELCA, in consultation with the
- 1338 Conference of Bishops, to complete the following:
- 1. Establish Standards and Processes for Congregation Calls for Deacons, with Annual Reporting and Oversight: Establish a policy to require synods to report regularly to the churchwide organization on their call processes for deacons. Creating a "repository" for this information would hopefully encourage consistency and help identify best practices.

2. Define Baseline Compensation Guidelines

- *Minimum Compensation and Benefits*: Establish a policy to require synods to set compensation guidelines for deacons serving congregations. Deacons serving in non-congregational roles are varied and compensation guidelines are not easy to discern, but guidelines for deacons serving congregations should be easier to develop. These guidelines may be different from the guidelines for ministers of Word and Sacrament; however, careful attention should be given in their development, especially where the roster of deacons is primarily made up of people from marginalized groups.
- *Housing Allowance Equivalence*: Church Council should direct the Office of the Secretary, or the appropriate churchwide unit, to undertake a review of tax law changes and determine whether changes to the description of the ministry of deacons are appropriate to enable them to take advantage of housing allowances allowed by the tax code. Churchwide organization legal staff should develop a "frequently asked questions" resource to explain the ELCA's current legal understanding of this issue.

3. Clarify Role and Sacramental Authority

• *Uniform Guidelines for Bishops and Synods*: Ask the Conference of Bishops to convene a table to develop guidelines to be followed across this church when interpreting deacons' roles in worship leadership, including the ability of deacons to administer sacraments. Such guidelines would reduce interpretive disparities.

4. Implementation Through Education and Training

- *Education for Congregation and Synod Leaders*: The Church Council should direct the appropriate churchwide unit or office to develop educational materials and resources for bishops, synod staff, and congregations about the theology and practice of Word and Service ministry.
- *Transparency and Communication*: Encourage congregations and synods to educate congregations and their members about the role of deacons, emphasizing their contributions to this church's mission and ministry.

1370 Status: This recommendation is being transmitted to the ELCA Church Council meeting April 3-

1371 *6, 2025, and to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.*

1372 *Rationale*:

- 1373 **Introduction:** The Commission for a New Lutheran Church did not resolve all the issues
- surrounding the role of deacons in the new denomination. In recent years, the ELCA has taken
- significant steps to unify and clarify the roles of its rostered leaders. In 2016, a major structural
- transition consolidated several lay rosters into a single roster of ministers of Word and Service,
- 1377 commonly known as deacons. While this move was intended to streamline leadership structures
- and provide a clearer understanding of ministry roles, practical challenges remain. Deacons often
- experience inconsistencies in how they are called, compensated, and empowered for ministry.
- 1380 These discrepancies can arise from synodical autonomy, varying local interpretations, and the
- relative newness of the unified roster. The CRLC sees three key issues facing deacons—uneven
- treatment across synods, compensation inequities, and ambiguity regarding sacramental
- authority—and proposes possible ways to address them.
- 1384 **Background:** The ELCA's governance structure is threefold: churchwide organization, synods,
- and congregations. The ELCA Constitution, alongside bylaws and continuing resolutions,
- establishes broad frameworks for rostered ministries. Synods, however, maintain significant
- 1387 latitude in implementing these frameworks, leading to variation in practice. The role of deacons,
- as detailed in the ELCA Constitution (notably in Chapter 7 and its related bylaws), is to equip the
- baptized for ministry in daily life, serve this church's mission in the world, and support
- 1390 congregations through teaching, advocacy, and service. Yet, the practical realization of this
- vision differs widely from one place to another, depending in large measure upon the theological
- understanding and interpretation of a synod bishop.

Kev Issues:

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- 1. Inconsistent Treatment Across Synods: Deacons encounter varying levels of recognition, authority, and support, depending on the synod in which they serve. Call processes lack uniformity, with some synods offering well-structured and transparent procedures while others rely on *ad hoc* practices. While this may also be true of call processes of ministers of Word and Sacrament, the impact on deacons (who are a minority in number and whose role is more widely misunderstood by congregations) is significant. As a result, deacons in certain synods may struggle to find opportunities for service or encounter a lack of clarity about their roles and responsibilities.
- 2. Compensation and Benefits Inequities: While ministers of Word and Sacrament often benefit from long-standing compensation guidelines and more standardized financial packages, deacons serving congregations frequently operate within less-established frameworks. This can lead to significant disparities in salary, housing allowances, and benefits. In some settings, deacons are undervalued financially despite their theological training and leadership responsibilities. Although some synods produce compensation guidelines for deacons, the absence of those guidelines for deacons serving in congregations results in a patchwork of standards.
- **3. Ambiguity in Sacramental Authority and Role Definition:** The constitution delineates the distinct ministries of Word and Service and Word and Sacrament, but the parameters

for when and how deacons may administer sacraments are unclear in practice. Determining whether deacons may administer Holy Communion or Baptism in special circumstances often falls to the discretion of individual bishops. The inconsistency in the ability of deacons across the church to administer sacraments is said to be a theological issue on which bishops hold differing views. The resulting inconsistent interpretations can cause confusion and hinder the full integration of deacons' gifts into the life of this church. One practical outcome can be that some deacons find they are granted authority by a synod bishop to administer sacraments; but upon a change in bishop, find that they no longer can.

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

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

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

1446 1447 1448	Changes to 0	dation 7: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Related Governing Documents and Recognition of Historically sented Groups
1449	(Related to Obs	servations 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 5)
1450 1451	The Commissi Church Counc	ion for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 cil meeting:
1452 1453	*	tinuing resolutions 5.01.G24., 5.01.H24., 5.01.I24., and 5.01.J24., adopt new bylaw †S6.04.02., and modify bylaw 12.41.11. as follows:
1454 1455 1456 1457 1458 1459 1460 1461 1462 1463 1464 1465 1466 1467 1468 1469 1470 1471 1472 1473 1474 1475 1476 1477		This church is dedicated to fostering a diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible environment that honors the diversity of God's creation so that as many people as possible have the opportunity to participate fully in the life and work of this church. None of the definitions in Chapter 5 shall be construed as limiting this church's commitment to inclusive participation in its life and work. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility shall have the following meaning: a. Diversity is a reality rooted in the variety found in the body of Christ: the wide range of communities and identities related to race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexuality, age, background, ability, socio-economic status, culture, and perspective. b. Equity means fair treatment of people according to their needs. The principle of equity takes into account that due to poverty, sexism, racism, and other factors individuals or groups may require different resources and support to ensure that they have the same rights and abilities to make choices as others do. c. Inclusion means the proactive and meaningful engagement of diverse individuals in all aspects of church life, especially indecision-making processes and leadership roles, creating a church culture of welcome, respect, and value for unique perspectives and abilities. d. Accessibility means aspiring to develop and maintain this church's physical infrastructure, information, communication technology, programs, and services to maximize participation in the life of this church.
1479	·	This church commits to working to intentionally lift up voices from
1480		historically underrepresented groups in its assemblies, councils,
1481		committees, boards, and other organizational units. While specific
1482		identities are listed below, this church recognizes that humans have
1483	-	multiple aspects of their identities that are tied to systemic privilege and
1484		oppression that shape the lives of individuals and communities in distinct
1485		ways. For all purposes in this church's governing documents, historically
1486	<u> </u>	underrepresented groups shall be understood to include the following:

1487		a. <u>Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than</u>
1488		English;
1489		b. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual
1490		<u>orientations;</u>
1491		c. Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income;
1492		d. <u>Persons living with disabilities;</u>
1493		e. <u>Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens.</u>
1494	<u>5.01.J24.</u>	For all purposes in this church's governing documents, the terms above
1495		shall have the following meanings:
1496		a. Persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other
1497		than English means African American, African Caribbean, African
1498		Descent, African National, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian,
1499		Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, South Asian, Latin(-o, -a, -é, -x),
1500		Hispanic, American Indian, Indigenous, and Alaska Native people, as
1501		well as multi- and bi-racial people.
1502		b. Persons of diverse gender identities and persons of diverse sexual
1503		orientations means individuals who identify beyond the sex and
1504		gender binary, individuals whose gender identity may be fluid, and
1505		individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,
1506		intersex, asexual, or other sex, gender, and sexual identities that are
1507		more complex than sex, gender, and
1508		c. Persons experiencing poverty or persons of lower income means
1509		individuals whose economic circumstances inhibit their ability to meet
1510		basic living needs according to their societal context and standards.
1511		d. Persons living with disabilities means individuals who have physical,
1512		mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that may hinder their full
1513		participation in church life.
1514		e. Persons who are not natural-born United States citizens needs no
1515		additional clarifying definition.
1516	5.01.K24.	It is the goal of this church that at least 10 percent of the voting members
1517		of the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, and churchwide boards
1518		and committees be members of historically underrepresented groups in
1519		addition to the required 10 percent representation of persons of color
1520		and/or persons whose primary language is other than English in 5.01.e.
1521		The Church Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal.
1522	12.41.11.	In addition, each synod shall elect one additional voting member who is a
1523	12, 11,11,	youth or young adult at the time of the election and, one additional voting
1524		member who is a person of color or a person whose primary language is
1525		other than English, and one additional voting member who is a member of
1526		a historically underrepresented group. The Church Council may allocate
1527		up to 10 additional voting members []
1528	†S6.04.02.	It is the goal of this synod that at least 10 percent of the voting members of
1529	_ DU.UT.U#.	the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, committees, and organizational units
1530		of this synod be members of historically underrepresented groups, in
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addition to the 10% representation of persons of color in †S6.04. The 1531 1532 Synod Council shall establish a plan for implementing this goal. 1533 Status: Continuing resolutions 5.01.G24, 5.01.H24, 5.01.I24, and 5.01.J24 (as amended) were adopted by the Church Council and are now part of the ELCA's governing documents. The 1534 1535 proposed amendments to bylaw 12.41.11 and to required synod bylaw †S6.04.02 have been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly, though the 1536 1537 change to bylaw 12.41.11 has been included along with other recommended changes to that 1538 bylaw from the Office of the Secretary. 1539 Rationale: This set of changes is designed to implement many of the recommendations of the Diversity, 1540 1541 Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility audit of our church's governing documents that was completed as a result of a memorial that came before the 2022 Churchwide Assembly. The audit 1542 1543 recommended various changes to the governing documents, and members of the CRLC worked in conjunction with members of the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review 1544 1545 Committee, which oversaw the work of the audit, to approve language to be recommended to the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly to implement the concepts of some of the audit's 1546 recommendations, while using language more consistent with the ELCA's theology and social 1547 1548 teachings. 1549 The proposed changes to the governing documents have the effect of including definitions of 1550 diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in the governing documents that can be used throughout the work of this church. In addition, they introduce the concept of "historically 1551 underrepresented groups," which are identified in 5.01.I24. and defined in 5.01.J24. The 1552 definition of "persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English" is 1553 1554 largely the definition that previously existed as 5.01.C21., with some updates. 1555 The definition of historically underrepresented groups is used in 5.01.K24, and †\$6.04.02, to state a goal, but not a requirement, that in addition to the requirement that 10% of the 1556 1557 composition of assemblies, Church Council, synod councils, and boards and committees be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, there is a goal that 1558 another 10% of such bodies will be from historically underrepresented groups. This language is 1559 1560 modeled on the 10% goal for youth and young adult members. Further, the proposed change to 12.41.11. allows each synod that otherwise complies with the representational principles of 1561 12.41.11. to bring one additional voting member from a historically underrepresented group to 1562 1563 the Churchwide Assembly, in addition to the already permitted additional voting members who are persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English and youth and 1564 young adults. 1565

1567 1568	Recommendation 8: Clarifying Language Concerning this Church's Relationship with Other Organizations		
1569	(Related to Observation 1.10)		
1570 1571	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:		
1572	Amend constitutional provisions 8.20. and 8.23. and bylaw 8.23.01. as follows:		
1573 1574	8.20.	RELATIONSHIP WITH INSTITUTIONS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND AGENCIES MINISTRIES	
1575 1576 1577	8.23.	Institutions, <u>Organizations</u> , and <u>Agencies Ministries</u> . This church shall seek to meet human needs through encouragement of its people to individual and corporate action, and through establishing, developing,	
1578 1579 1580		recognizing, and supporting institutions, <u>organizations</u> , and <u>agencies ministries</u> that minister to people in their spiritual and temporal needs.	
1581 1582 1583 1584	8.23.01.	Social ministryRelated institutions, organizations, and ministries may affiliate with this church through criteria and policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit and through membership in Lutheran Services in America.	
1585 1586	Status: This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.		
1587	Rationale:		
1588 1589 1590 1591 1592 1593	The changes to this provision are designed to emphasize the importance of the many and varied entities that work alongside this church in meeting human need, as well as to broaden the understanding of the many ways in which this work may be carried out. Only the revisions to provisions 8.20. and 8.23. originally came from the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, and the recommended changes to bylaw 8.23.01. were added by the Office of the Secretary as the natural consequence to the proposed changes in 8.23.		

1596 1597	Recommendation 9: Empower Lay Leadership: Association of Synod Vice Presidents
1598	(Related to Observation 1.11)
1599	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommends to the Church Council:
1600	Adopt the following continuing resolution:
1601 1602 1603 1604 1605 1606 1607 1608 1609 1610 1611 1612 1613 1614 1615 1616 1617 1618 1619 1620 1621 1622 1623 1624 1625 1626 1627 1628 1629 1630	 10.31.B25. Association of Synod Vice Presidents The Association of Synod Vice Presidents shall be composed of the vice presidents of the synods. The churchwide vice president shall be a member of the association with voice but not vote. The Church Council may appoint a member to serve as a liaison to the association with voice but not vote. The Conference of Bishops may appoint a synod bishop as a liaison to the Association with voice but not vote. a. The association shall provide for orientation, continuing education, collaboration, and leadership development for synod vice presidents. b. The association shall meet at least annually. In years in which churchwide assemblies are held, the association meeting may occur in conjunction with the assembly. c. The association shall provide opportunities for worship, spiritual renewal, and leadership development for those elected to the office of vice president of a synod. To fulfill these responsibilities, the association shall: 1. Be a forum in which goals, objectives, and strategies may be developed and shared concerning lay leadership for the synods; 2. Offer programs for orientation and continuing education for vice presidents; 3. Assist the vice presidents in their role as synod council chairs by being a resource for training and guidance in the governance of this church; 4. Assist the vice presidents in their role as collaborative leaders with bishops in fostering the work of the synods; and 5. Provide advice and counsel when requested by the Church Council or other church leaders. d. The association may establish committees as its members may determine to assist in fulfillment of the Association's responsibilities. The Association shall elect a chair and vice chair, each of whom shall serve a term of three years. e. Staff services for meetings of the association shall coordinate and support the operation of the association.
1631 1632 1633 1634	Status: An earlier version of this recommendation was presented to the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting. The Church Council declined to adopt it as presented, and members of the CRLC and the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee worked through potential revisions to the proposal. This revised proposal has been recommended to the Church Council for action at its April 3-6, 2025, meeting

1637	Rationale:
1638 1639 1640 1641 1642	In an effort to recognize, lift up and further develop the highest elected lay leaders in this church, a proposal to create an Association of Synod Vice Presidents is offered. The Association would allow for a more intentionally organized orientation, education and training of these leaders. The Association would elect its own chair and vice-chair to lead its efforts. The Association would meet at least annually.
1643 1644 1645	There is no such formal gathering of the highest elected lay leaders in the church presently recognized in the governing documents. To the extent synod vice presidents gather (currently by Zoom meetings scheduled monthly), it is at their own initiative.
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1647 1648	Recommer Misconduct	ndation 10: Cost-Sharing for Professional Investigations of t
1649	(Related to Ob	oservations 1.7, 6)
1650 1651	The Commiss Church Coun	sion for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 acil meeting:
1652 1653	Amend bylaw follows:	20.22.04. and amend Rule D2 of the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings as
1654 1655 1656 1657 1658 1659 1660 1661 1662 1663 1664 1665 1666 1667	20.22.04.	When there are indications that a cause for discipline may exist, the bishop of the synod may request, and the general counsel of this church shall make available, resources for investigation into the facts surrounding the alleged misconduct that gives rise to the potential cause for discipline. Such resources may include, but are not limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized professional services. The cost of such investigation shall generally be borne one-half by the churchwide organization and one-half by the synod of the bishop requesting such investigation. Procedural details relating to such investigations shall be set forth in the Rules Governing Disciplinary Proceedings. and bBefore charges are made, efforts shall be made by the bishop of the synod to resolve the situation by consultation; for assistance in these efforts, the bishop may utilize either a consultation panel or an advisory panel as herein provided:
1669 1670 1671 1672 1673 1674 1675 1676 1677 1678 1679 1680	Rule D2	In addition to, or in lieu of, a consultation panel or an advisory panel, a synod bishop may utilize the assistance of one of the synod bishop's assistants or other staff persons or any other individual appointed by the synod bishop for this purpose. In addition, a bishop may request investigatory assistance under 20.22.04., which may include, but is not limited to, contracting for investigatory expertise in matters of alleged sexual abuse, forensic accounting in matters of alleged fiscal misconduct, or other specialized professional services. a. Any contractors providing services in such investigations will work under the supervision of the general counsel. b. The result of such investigation shall be the preparation of a written report delivered to the general counsel and to the bishop requesting the investigation.
1682 1683 1684 1685	adoption by the the Committee	commended change to 20.22.04 has been recommended by the Church Council for the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. If the recommended change to 20.22.04, is adopted, and an Appeals will be asked to recommend a change to Rule D2 in accordance with addition to present to the Church Council for approval.

Rationale:

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

1690 1691	Recommendation 11: Streamline Process to Amend the ELCA's Governing Documents		
1692	(Related to	Observations 1.8, 1.9, 7.1)	
1693 1694	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 20 Church Council meeting:		
1695 1696		vision 22.11., concerning amendments to the ELCA Constitution, and 22.21. amendments to the ELCA bylaws as follows:	
1697 1698 1699 1700 1701 1702 1703 1704 1705 1706 1707 1708 1709 1710 1711 1712 1713 1714	22.11.	 This constitution may be amended only through either of the following procedures: a. The Church Council may propose an amendment, with an official notice to be sent to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. The adoption of such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the members of the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly present and voting. b. An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more members of the Churchwide Assembly. The proposed amendment shall be referred to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation, following which it shall come before the assembly. If such an amendment is approved by a two-thirds vote of members present and voting, such an amendment shall become effective only if adopted-ratified unchanged by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at the next regular Churchwide Assembly or a subsequent two-thirds vote of the members of the Church Council taken within 12 months of adoption by the Churchwide Assembly. 	
1716 1717 1718 1719 1720 1721 1722 1723 1724 1725 1726 1727	22.21.	Bylaws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or amended at any regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly when presented in writing by the Church Council or by at least 15 members of the assembly. An amendment proposed by at least 15 members of the assembly shall immediately be submitted to the Committee of Reference and Counsel for its recommendation. An amendment may not be placed before the assembly for action sooner than the day following its presentation to the assembly unless it has been presented in writing by the Church Council and sent with an official notice to the synods at least six months prior to the next regular meeting of the Churchwide Assembly. A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting shall be necessary for adoption.	

1728 Status: This recommendation has been recommended by the Church Council for adoption by the 1729 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

1730	Rationale:
1731 1732 1733 1734 1735 1736	Currently, constitutional provisions and bylaws may only be changed by the Church Council providing notice of proposed changes at least six months before the Churchwide Assembly and adoption by the assembly or by action on the floor of the assembly that is ratified by the next regular Churchwide Assembly. The change to 22.11.a. would allow for the possibility of a special assembly amending the Constitution in a single step, following recommendation of amendments proposed by the Church Council.
1737 1738 1739	The changes to 22.11.b. would allow amendments introduced on the floor of the Churchwide Assembly to be ratified unchanged by a 2/3 vote of the Church Council within 12 months of the assembly, instead of waiting three years for the next Churchwide Assembly.
1740 1741 1742	The change to 22.21. would allow for bylaw amendments by a special assembly, not only by a regular assembly.

1743 1744	Recommendation 12: Make Fewer Provisions in the Synod Constitution Mandatory
1745	(Related to Observations 1.2, 1.3, 1.5, 1.8, 1.9)
1746 1747	The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church recommended to the November 2024 Church Council meeting:
1748 1749	To make the following provisions that are currently required in the <i>Constitution for Synods</i> now non-required:
1750 1751 1752 1753 1754 1755	 †S9.02. concerning requirement of majority vote in Synod Assembly elections other than for bishop †S10.01. concerning composition of the Synod Council †S11.04. concerning the synod's Mutual Ministry Committee †S15.01. concerning the synod's fiscal year †S15.12. concerning the synod's budget
1756 1757 1758	Status: The Church Council has recommended that the 2025 Churchwide Assembly make †S9.02 and †S11.04. non-required provisions. The Church Council has declined to recommend the remainder of this recommendation.
1759	Rationale:
1760 1761 1762 1763 1764 1765 1766	Certain provisions in the <i>Constitution for Synods</i> are marked with a "dagger" symbol indicating that they are required provisions that automatically are to be incorporated into each synod's constitution without change by the synod secretary when they are adopted by the Churchwide Assembly. Such provisions leave no room for a synod to organize its business in any varied way. A subcommittee of members of the CRLC involved in synod leadership reviewed the required provisions and the CRLC adopted their recommendations that certain provisions be left in the <i>Constitution for Synods</i> but no longer be marked as required provisions.

1768 Recommendation 13: ELCA Name Change

- 1769 (Specifically referred to the CRLC by the Church Council in CC22.11.34.cc)
- 1770 The Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) declined to make a
- 1771 recommendation about whether the name of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- 1772 (ELCA) should be changed.
- 1773 Status: This decision was transmitted to the November 2024 meeting of the ELCA Church
- 1774 Council.
- 1775 *Rationale*:
- 1776 In 2022, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a resolution leading to the creation of the
- 1777 Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church (CRLC) and giving the CRLC its mandate. The
- 1778 ELCA Church Council later asked the CRLC to consider an additional question, whether the
- 1779 name "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" should continue to be utilized for this church
- 1780 body.
- 1781 The CRLC engaged in significant discussion of a possible change of name. As the members of
- the CRLC considered this issue, the conversations highlighted a range of opinions about the
- significance of the term "evangelical" and the larger implications that any new name might
- 1784 create.
- 1785 In the end, no consensus emerged among members of the CRLC as to whether the name
- 1786 "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" should be changed.
- 1787 Some participants maintain that the term "evangelical" has shifted significantly in meaning in the
- present day and may hinder the proclamation of the gospel, due to its associations with more
- 1789 conservative forms of Christianity and even, in some quarters, with Christian nationalism.
- 1790 Eliminating the term "evangelical," they believe, would avoid these initial negative perceptions
- and indicate a more welcoming stance.
- Others, however, support maintaining the term "evangelical" because of its deep scriptural and
- theological roots (the term comes from the Greek word for "gospel" and literally means, "good
- news"), and argue that to eliminate the term "evangelical" would actually diminish this church's
- 1795 core identity and mission. The term also connects the ELCA with the global Lutheran
- 1796 communion: The majority of Lutheran World Federation member churches have "Evangelical"
- in their names.
- 1798 While the CRLC did not come to consensus on this matter, it makes the following observations:
- The CRLC believes that this question reflects larger issues of identity. Changing the name alone will not address deeper issues within the denomination and may in fact lead to unintended consequences for various groups.
- If a change of name is to be considered, the commission recommends engaging a
 broader range of voices in deeper conversation about this church's core identity
 before making final recommendations.

1805 1806 1807	 If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA is kept, the CRLC would recommend an effort to lean more intentionally into our understanding and definition of what it means to be "evangelical," and that new branding might assist with this emphasis.
1808 1809 1810	 If after thoughtful discussion the name ELCA were to be changed, a possible approach might be to consider retaining the legal name of the ELCA, while creating new name under which it would be known ("Doing Business As" (DBA).
1811	Overall, the CRLC acknowledges the complexities surrounding the term "evangelical" and its

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implications for this church's identity, emphasizing that thoughtful dialogue and understanding are essential before any decisions are made on this significant matter.

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1815 Issues for Continued Reflection

1816 The section entitled "Issues for Continued Reflection" identifies a wide array of matters that the CRLC heard or became aware of in the course of its work. At a macro level, it is important to 1817 1818 remember that the CRLC was *not* tasked with addressing every problem or issue raised, no 1819 matter the asserted merit. Its mandate, as the commission defined it, was significant, but not 1820 boundless. The committee structure it established enabled robust discussions and ideas to surface 1821 in smaller groups. Defining the presenting issues was a key part of each committee's work. Committees lifted up various proposals to the full CRLC, not all of which were deemed ready for 1822 recommendation. Still, the CRLC wishes to preserve some of these concepts in an effort to 1823 provide possibilities for future reflection in the unending work of meaningful reformation, as 1824 1825 prompted by the Holy Spirit. Dismantling Racism 1826 1827 As we have completed our work, the commission has taken a variety of actions, as outlined in 1828 this report, in an effort to respond to God's call for radical inclusion. Even with these recommendations, the commission recognizes that the work of full inclusion of all of God's 1829 1830 beloved children in the life and leadership in the church is never truly finished. This work is not just personal; it is also institutional and systemic. One example of this is the misuse of the 1831 1832 categories of law and gospel, whereby the gospel message of grace and forgiveness is twisted to 1833 perpetuate systems of oppression and bondage. 1834 As a church rooted in diverse origins, we call ourselves to remember the story of Pentecost. In 1835 Acts, people speaking many languages were gathered. The Holy Spirit appears and enables them 1836 to hear each other in their own languages about the great deeds God has done. Filled with the Spirit (and not wine!), and eventually listening to Peter, they were baptized and began the 1837 fellowship that we today would call "church." The miracle of Pentecost calls us forth and 1838 1839 inspires our diverse selves to live in community. Today, we continue to remind each other that 1840 God intends our diversity to be a celebrated part of our lives together as children of God. 1841 The commission knows that the work of dismantling racism continues in various ways in the 1842 church. The ELCA's ethnic associations, its Ministries of Diverse Cultures and Communities, Racial Justice unit, and other task forces and committees strive to identify, name, and correct 1843 1844 racist elements of this church, but they alone are not responsible for the act of justice, equity and 1845 reconciliation. It is valuable and often life-saving work. But that work is often under-resourced, 1846 siloed, and is invisible to the wider church. Synods vary widely in their resourcing and efforts to 1847 make progress in meeting the diversity goals this church has established for itself. 1848 The work to dismantle racism is ongoing work. Overt and subtle forms of racism must be 1849 identified, named and challenged in our congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization 1850 expression. 1851 While there are institutional and systemic realities within this church that allow for and 1852 perpetuate racism, this commission also recognizes the need for transformation within and 1853 among the people in our pews. To continue to become an anti-racist church, this church must pay 1854 attention to both systemic racism and the necessary Spirit-empowered and inspired

- transformation of individual hearts and minds. It will take a commitment of all members of the
- 1856 ELCA to learn, repent, and grow in living into the fullness of God's wildly diverse community.
- Like the persons gathered at Pentecost, may the Holy Spirit inspire our efforts to really see, hear
- and value each other as God's beloved children.

Governance Matters

- 1860 The Governance Committee discussed an array of structural and governance related challenges
- and possible options for change.
- 1862 Governing Boards/Administration
- 1863 The Governance Committee noted that governing boards are generally weak in all three
- 1864 expressions, due in part to the lack of experience, training, and understanding of some lay
- people, and the inherent imbalance of power between laypersons and rostered ministers.
- 1866 Governing boards in this church mix their roles as "boards of directors" vs. "interim legislative
- authority," sometimes resulting in confusion and inconsistency. The infrequency of meetings,
- particularly in the synod and churchwide organization expressions, often caused by financial and
- logistical concerns, limits a council's ability to govern as effectively as other non-profit boards
- do. These councils are very dependent on staff, which makes it hard to hold staff accountable.
- The idea of separating the "board of directors" function from the legislative/policy authority was
- explored. Such a separation allows for a more nimble governance structure. In the churchwide
- organization expression, a very large Church Council which only meets twice a year makes it
- very dependent on staff and often blurs the line between interim legislative and business
- functions. While an Executive Committee meets at least monthly, communication gaps were
- identified as a particular shortcoming in allowing the Church Council to be most effective.
- 1877 A proposal to revise the Church Council was discussed by the committee, and the CRLC sent
- this concept to the Conference of Bishops (COB) and the Church Council as part of the
- 1879 consultation process. In summary, it would have streamlined the council so it could focus on its
- "interim legislative authority" and would have established a more robust Executive Committee.
- 1881 The Executive Committee would function more like the "board of directors" of a non-profit.
- 1882 Council members would serve 6-year terms, with eligibility to serve two terms. A lay "Church
- 1883 Council chair" would be elected by the Churchwide Assembly (akin to the current vice
- president). The proposal did not draw discussion at either the COB or the Church Council,
- largely, it seems, due to at least one other proposal forwarded to them. Still, because it would
- take time to transition any change to the council structure, further reflection on clarifying its
- scope of responsibilities and optimizing its ability to fulfill them effectively is worthy of further
- 1888 reflection.
- 1889 At the same time, the CRLC forwarded a proposed change to the executive structure of the
- 1890 churchwide office. At the executive level, the Governance Committee/CRLC suggested
- clarifying the scope of the role of the presiding bishop. In brief summary, it would center the
- 1892 ecclesiastical, ecumenical, and theological leadership of the denomination in the role of the
- presiding bishop. The presiding bishop would still be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. A
- 1894 chief executive officer (CEO) position would be created and hired by and be accountable to the
- 1895 Church Council. This would be in lieu of and different from the current executive for

- administration position, which reports to the presiding bishop. Persons to fill the offices of
- secretary and treasurer would be recommended by the CEO to the Church Council, which would
- select those offices. Duties and committee assignments would be allocated between the Office of
- 1899 the Presiding Bishop and the CEO. (The treasurer is already selected by the council; the
- 1900 secretary presently is elected by the Churchwide Assembly).
- 1901 The proposal to revise the executive structure received questions and much criticism from
- 1902 current officers, the Conference of Bishops, and the Church Council. Without responding to the
- 1903 questions or making revisions to the proposal, the Governance Committee acknowledged that
- this restructuring (which would not have altered the process for election of officers by the 2025
- 1905 Assembly) would be a significant change and a very heavy lift. And while the goal of finding a
- 1906 more streamlined, responsive, and effective governance structure remains, the Governance
- 1907 Committee recommended to the CRLC that it take up other governance matters, and not pursue
- 1908 the matter further at this juncture. The CRLC considers it a matter for further reflection.
- 1909 Rostered Ministries Matters, including Pay Inequity
- 1910 Broadly speaking, how this church employs and compensates rostered ministers surfaced during
- 1911 listening sessions and affects the governance structure of the denomination. The CRLC is aware
- of pay inequity in and between worshipping communities, especially as it affects persons of
- 1913 color, differing abilities, different genders and sexual orientations, and mission developers.
- 1914 Paying rostered ministers by congregations may also foster a concern that a rostered leader is
- beholden to the largest checkbook (e.g., "preaching the Beatitudes or lifting up systemic racism
- 1916 may cost me my job.")
- 1917 All solutions are not structural. Some may require policy changes. In addition, there is work
- being done elsewhere in the church on parts of this issue (e.g., the Quality of Call Initiative and
- 1919 the work around matters relating to First Call). We did not seek to influence or impede that work
- and commend efforts to tackle these matters in meaningful ways while engaging the persons
- 1921 most affected.
- 1922 In a "big-picture" sense, the Governance Committee discussed a new model of having rostered
- leaders employed by a third-party entity that would handle all payroll, benefits, and HR matters
- for persons called to a congregation. It also discussed setting up a fund, modeled after the Fund
- 1925 for Leaders, that would help deal with inequities. Settings such as rural congregations, those in
- 1926 economically-challenged areas, as well as strategic outreach ministries and non-congregational
- faith formation communities that are vibrant but may never be "self-sustaining," could benefit
- 1928 from this fund. These and other ideas all have pros and cons, and the legal questions that arise
- 1929 would need to be thought through. This issue is also tied to the funding and financial issues
- 1930 identified by the CRLC. While we believe this to be a governance structure issue in part, further
- 1931 comprehensive work on these matters seems called for at this point. The work of the
- 1932 recommended Financial Coordinating Task Force, as well as that of the Ongoing Work to
- 1933 Understand Synod Purpose and Structure may lay some of the necessary groundwork. Continued
- reflection on the impact of pay disparity on the health and vibrancy of leaders and congregations
- 1935 is suggested.

1936 Related Institutions, Organizations, and Ministries (RIOMs):

- The commission sought to lift up the role of institutions, organizations, and ministries that are, or seek to be, related to the ELCA. Work related to this is included in recommendations that were
- recommended by the Church Council at its November 2024 meeting for adoption at the 2025
- 1940 Churchwide Assembly.

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1951 1952

- 1941 In addition, the commission believes that there is work to be done along these lines:
 - Institutions, organizations, and ministries may relate to this church through criteria and policies developed by the appropriate churchwide unit. Depending on the circumstances, such relationships may with the congregations, synods, or churchwide organization expression.
 - The appropriate churchwide unit should maintain a directory of the related institutions, organizations, and ministries.
 - This church recognizes the importance of "faith formation ministries," such as campus and outdoor ministries, for the vitality, resilience, and future of this church. This church should be strategic in supporting the staffing and budget of such ministries, as well as in providing for accountability for those rostered ministers and others who are called for leadership in such ministries.

1954 Conclusion

1984

1955 Empowered by the hopeful message of the resurrection, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is called to recognize its imperfections and actively engage in both individual 1956 1957 and collective renewal. 1958 This report, while highlighting areas for potential renewal, also honors the vital, life-affirming work undertaken by communities across the ELCA. These communities exemplify the Spirit's 1959 1960 transformative power through worship, service, advocacy, and discipleship, illustrating that 1961 renewal encompasses more than structural change—it is about continuous transformation that embraces inclusivity and collaboration. 1962 1963 The CRLC's recommendations are designed to steer the ELCA toward a future that is more 1964 inclusive, collaborative, and mission-focused. By adopting these changes, we enable all three 1965 expressions of our church—congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization—to better 1966 serve our diverse membership and align more closely with God's perpetual call to renewal. This 1967 ongoing process not only makes our church more adaptable and accountable but also equips us to meet contemporary challenges while remaining firm in our theological convictions. 1968 1969 As we consider these recommendations, we recognize the range of responses they may elicit. 1970 Some in our community will see these recommendations as a pathway to a stronger, more faithful church, while others might view them as unsettling or insufficient. We embrace this 1971 1972 diversity of perspectives and commit to a process of faithful deliberation, rooted in prayer, 1973 humility, and open dialogue. 1974 Inspired by Psalm 51:10-12, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit 1975 within me," we seek a renewal of heart and spirit, ensuring that our actions reflect our commitment to God's mission. We urge this church to integrate proactive reflection and renewal 1976 1977 into the fabric of our daily lives, understanding that the work of renewal is not a once-in-ageneration task but an ideal we strive for each day. This work is not finished and should not end 1978 1979 with this commission. This ongoing commitment to reformation and renewal is a testament to our role in God's world, emphasizing that our efforts extend beyond the church to touch the 1980 broader expanse of God's kingdom on earth. 1981 1982 In all we do, we trust in God's continual guidance and inspiration, leading us toward ever more 1983 faithful and effective expressions of our shared mission.

Acknowledgments 1985 1986

- The CRLC wishes to acknowledge the many people and entities that supported, contributed to,
- 1987 and prayed for us during our sojourn. We are thankful for the ten synods that submitted
- 1988 memorials, catalyzed by the work of Bishop Jim Dunlop, to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly and
- 1989 to that body for their understanding and action in creating the CRLC. We thank the ELCA
- 1990 Church Council, especially the Executive Committee, for establishing the CRLC, a difficult task
- 1991 since there was no template. We thank the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council for
- 1992 their counsel as they provided guidance and feedback.
- 1993 The CRLC was privileged to have Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and Secretary Sue
- 1994 Rothmeyer accompany us as resource persons on our journey. Other resource persons included:
- Lori Fedyk, ELCA treasurer; Kevin Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review 1995
- Committee of the ELCA Church Council; Judith Roberts, ELCA senior director for Diversity, 1996
- 1997 Equity, & Inclusion; Jennifer DeLeon, ELCA director for Racial Justice; the Rev. Nicolette
- 1998 Peñaranda, program director for ELCA African Descent Ministries; Tom Cunniff, ELCA general
- 1999 counsel; and Presiding Bishop pro tempore Michael Burk. The Rev. Alejandro Mejía provided a
- 2000 valuable link as the representative of the ELCA ethnic associations. National Bishop Susan
- 2001 Johnson, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, provided spiritual grounding and facilitation
- 2002 for the early meetings of the commission.
- 2003 We also extend gratitude to our Office of the Secretary staff support, including the Rev. Keith
- 2004 Fry, executive for Office of the Secretary administration; Dan Eppley, manager for official
- 2005 documentation; our technical support, Joseph Schmidt, administrative services coordinator; and
- our hospitality team for CRLC meetings, Dana Adams, director, meeting management; Christina 2006
- Ptack, meetings and events manager; and Rosa Pérez, meeting planner. 2007
- 2008 A special thank you goes to Jodi Slattery, ELCA executive for governance and the primary
- support person for the CRLC, for her gentle guidance and tireless support. 2009
- 2010 The CRLC is indebted to every member of the commission for their volunteer time and effort.
- 2011 Each one of them loves the ELCA. Finally, we acknowledge the gift of the Holy Spirit who
- 2012 moved through and among the commission, thanks be to God!

2014 A Prayer for the Church's Renewal

2015	God of resurrection and renewal,
2016 2017 2018 2019	You have called Your Church into being, not for its own sake, but to bear witness to Your creative, redeeming, and sanctifying work in the world. We give thanks for the faithfulness of those who have carried this mission before us, and we pray for the wisdom and courage to carry it forward with integrity and boldness.
2020	Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a right spirit within us.
2021 2022 2023	Where we have clung to structures that no longer serve Your mission, give us the courage to reimagine. Where we have been slow to act, stir us to faithful urgency. Where voices have been silenced, open our ears to hear the full breadth of Your people's wisdom.
2024 2025 2026 2027 2028	As we reflect on the findings and recommendations of this report, we acknowledge that there will be differing responses: affirmation, concern, hope, hesitation, and even opposition. In the midst of these varied perspectives, bind us together in the unity of Christ. Give us patience to listen deeply, humility to learn from one another, and faith to trust that You are working in and through this process.
2029	Do not cast us away from Your presence, but guide us with Your Holy Spirit.
2030 2031 2032 2033	May Your Spirit lead us into the hard work of transformation, binding us together as one Church in the midst of change, disagreement, and discernment. Restore to us the joy of Your salvation, that we may embrace this renewal not as a burden but as a gift—an opportunity to more fully reflect Your justice, mercy, and love.
2034 2035 2036 2037 2038	We give thanks for the congregations, synods, and churchwide ministries that are already engaged in life-giving and sustaining work to renew this church. Through their faithfulness in worship, service, and mission, we see the Spirit's movement and the power of Your grace at work. Strengthen them in their calling and inspire us to walk alongside them, that together we may be a church continually renewed by Your love.
2039	Send us forth with willing hearts, strengthened by Your grace and emboldened by Your call.
2040 2041	We entrust the future of this church to You, knowing that You are already at work making all things new.
2042	In the name of Jesus Christ, our hope and our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.

Signature Page

2045	
2046 2047 2048 2049 2050 2051 2052	Below is the Signature Page, which includes the names of the chairs followed by members who have given their full consent, listed alphabetically for clarity. For those providing partial consent, their names are listed alphabetically along with specific sections from which they have expressed dissent, as exemplified by "[Name] provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Section [X] of the report." It is important to note that commission members who have dissented entirely from the report are not listed below.
2053 2054 2055	THE REV. CARLA CHRISTOPHER (Co-Chair) Lower Susquehanna Synod [8D] — St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church
2056 2057 2058	LEON SCHWARTZ (Co-Chair) Southeastern Iowa Synod [5D] — St. Paul Lutheran Church
2059 2060 2061	Alexandra Mack New Jersey Synod [7A] — Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
2062 2063 2064	Antoine Cummins Pacifica Synod [2C] — Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church
2065 2066 2067	Anthony Ormsbee-Hale Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod [4D] — Messiah Lutheran Church
2068 2069 2070	Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D. North/West Lower Michigan Synod [6B] — Immanuel Lutheran Church
2071 2072 2073	The Rev. Charlene Giuliani Greater Milwaukee Synod [5J] — Incarnation Lutheran Church
2074 2075 2076	Cheryl Stuart Florida-Bahamas Synod [9E] — St. Stephen Lutheran Church
2077 2078 2079	Deacon Dallas Shealy South Carolina Synod [9C] — Summer Memorial Lutheran
2080 2081 2082	David Lenz Northeastern Ohio Synod [6E] — Messiah Lutheran Church
2083 2084 2085	Deacon Don Corson, Ph.D. Southwestern Washington Synod [1C] — Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
2086 2087 2088	The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman Southeast Michigan Synod [6A] — Lord of Light Lutheran Church

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2090
        Evan Moilan Jr.
2091
        Southwestern Texas Synod [4E] — Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
2092
2093
        Felecia Boone
2094
        Minneapolis Area Synod [3G] — Calvary Evangelical Lutheran Church
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2096
        The Rev. Gail Hagerty
        Western North Dakota Synod [3A] — Heart River Lutheran Church
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2098
        The Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Ph.D.
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2100
        Northeastern Iowa Synod [5F] — St. John's Lutheran Church
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        Linda Timmons
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        Nebraska Synod [4A] — St. Thomas Lutheran Church
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2105
        Melody Stachour
2106
        Metropolitan Washington, D.C. Synod [8G] — St. Matthew's
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2108
        Michael Chan, Ph.D.
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        Northwestern Minnesota Synod [3D] — Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
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2111
        Ralston Deffenbaugh
2112
        Rocky Mountain Synod [2E] — Shepherd of the Mountains Lutheran Church
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2114
        Bishop Regina Hassanally (will review on March 30, 2025)
        Southeastern Minnesota Synod [3I] — St. John's Lutheran
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2117
        Roberto Lara-Aranda
2118
        Metropolitan New York Synod [7C] — Saint Peter's Church, Manhattan
2119
2120
        Rvan Johnson
        Western Iowa Synod [5E] — Our Saviors Lutheran Church
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2122
        Ruth Ellen Howard
2123
2124
        Central States Synod [4B] — St. Mark Hope and Peace Lutheran Church
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2126
        Sarah Morris
2127
        Grand Canyon Synod [2D] — Our Savior's Lutheran Church
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2129
        The Rev. Sean Avery
        Alaska Synod [1A] — Joy Lutheran Church
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2132
        Stacy Kitahata
        Northwest Washington Synod [1B] — Immanuel Lutheran Church
2133
2134
2135
        Susan McArver, Ph.D.
        South Carolina Synod [9C] — Incarnation Lutheran Church
2136
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2139	Thelma Jacks
2140	Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod [7F] — Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church
2141	
2142	Thomas Madden
2143	Upstate New York Synod [7D] — Lutheran Church of the Incarnate Word
2144	
2145	The Rev. Tiffany Chaney
2146	Southeastern Synod [9D] — Gathered by Grace
2147	
2148	The Rev. Adam Sornchai
2149	Northwestern Ohio Synod [9D] — St. John Lutheran Church (Windfall)
2150	Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Recommendation 4 and Recommendation
2151	11b of the report.
2152	
2153	Laurel Muhly-Alexander
2154	West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod [8H] — St. Mark's Lutheran Church
2155	Provided partial consent and expressed dissent from Recommendations 1, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13;
2156	Governing Boards/Administration

2158	Appendix		
2159	CRLC Committees		
2160	Origin and Formation of the CRLC		
2161	Reference Material for Synod Evaluation		
2162			
2163	Appendix 1: CRLC Committees		
2164 2165 2166 2167 2168 2169 2170 2171 2172	In late 2023, during the third meeting of the CRLC, seven committees were established. Four of these were tasked with addressing specific aspects of the Commission's mandate, while three served operational functions. Initially, all committees focused on the urgent goal of proposing any necessary constitutional amendments to the Church Council by November 2024, to ensure consideration by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. After achieving this milestone, the CRLC's attention turned to preparing a final report, outlining key findings and recommendations for presentation to the 2025 assembly. This phase involved deep dives into critical issues such as the interdependence of this church's three expressions, the principle of subsidiarity, and the denomination's financial flow.		
2173 2174 2175 2176 2177	Following consultations with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council—and aligning with the revised focus—late 2024 saw the formation of the Setting the Table Committee. Additionally, the Who Are We and Why and What Committees were merged to form the "3-4 Committee," addressing overlapping areas concerning interdependence and purpose. This restructuring enabled more streamlined and focused discussions on these fundamental topics.		
2178 2179 2180 2181	The committees operated autonomously, setting their schedules and contributing to full CRLC meetings by presenting updates, soliciting feedback, and submitting recommendations. Following are descriptions of each committee's purpose (taken from their charters) and a listing of the members of each committee.		
2182	All Ears Committee		
2183 2184 2185 2186 2187	The All Ears Committee exists to collect data from a wide range of constituents, through both live listening sessions and electronic surveys, in order to inform the work of the CRLC. Additionally, this committee will serve as a liaison to other data collections groups in the ELCA, particularly Future Church. Finally, this committee will oversee data analysis and present a report of its findings to the CRLC.		
2188	CRLC Membership:		
	The Rev. Dr. Kristin Johnson Largen, <i>chair</i> Susan McArver, Ph.D. Ryan Johnson	Michael Chan, Ph.D. Sarah Morris Roberto Lara Aranda	

Thelma Jacks

The Rev. Carla Christopher, CRLC co-chair,

ex officio

Resource person:

Sean Zimny, contract researcher

Communications Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

Alexandra Mack, *chair* The Rev. Carla Christopher, *CRLC co-chair*,

The Rev. Gail Hagerty *ex-officio*

Laurel Muhly-Alexander

Ryan Johnson Resource person:

The Rev. Tiffany Chaney Candice Buchbinder, *ELCA public relations*

manager

Dismantling Racism Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

Melody Stachour, *chair* Linda Timmons

Antoine Cummins The Rev. Carla Christopherson, *CRLC co-*

Stacy Kitahata chair, ex-officio

Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.

Alexandra Mack Resource persons:

The Rev. Tiffany Chaney

Judith Roberts, *ELCA senior director*,

The Rev. Char Guiliani *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

Felecia Boone Jennifer De Leon, ELCA director, Racial

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman Justice

Ruth Ellen Howard

How We Are Governed Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

Cheryl Stuart, *chair*Sarah Morris
The Rev. Sean Avery
Bishop Regina Hassanally

Anthony Ormsbee-Hale

Deacon Dallas Shealy

David Lenz Thomas Madden

Melody Stachour

Evan Moilan

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Resource persons:

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, *ELCA secretary* Tom Cunniff, *ELCA general counsel*

Paul Irwin, ELCA associate general counsel

Kevin Anderson, chair, Legal and

Constitutional Review Committee, Church

Council

Planning and Report Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, chair

Evan Moilan David Lenz

Antoine Cummins

Antonie Cummin

Cheryl Stuart Thelma Jacks

Bishop Regina Hassanally

Ralston Deffenbaugh

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Resource person:

Jodi Slattery, ELCA executive for

governance

Who Are We Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Adam Sornchai *chair* Michael Chan, Ph.D. Laurel Muhly-Alexander Ralston Deffenbaugh

Susan McArver, Ph.D. Don Corson

The Rev. Char Guiliani

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Thomas Madden

Deacon Dallas Shealy Resource person:

Bishop Matthew Riegel The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, *ELCA presiding*

Linda Timmons bishop

Why and What Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, chair

Felecia Boone

Stacy Kitahata

The Rev. Sean Avery

The Rev. Gail Hagerty Ruth Ellen Howard

Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.

Bishop Matthew Riegel The Rev. Adam Sornchai Resource persons:

Deacon Don Corson

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, ELCA secretary

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Kevin Anderson, chair, Legal and

Constitutional Review Committee, Church

Council

3-4 Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

The Rev. Adam Sornchai, chair

Laurel Muhly-Alexander Susan McArver, Ph.D. The Rev. Char Guiliani

Thomas Madden

Deacon Dallas Shealy Bishop Matthew Riegel

Linda Timmons

Michael Chan, Ph.D.

Ralston Deffenbaugh

Deacon Don Corson

Roberto Lara Aranda

The Rev. Elizabeth Friedman

Felecia Boone

Stacy Kitahata

The Rev. Sean Avery The Rev. Gail Hagerty Ruth Ellen Howard

Candy McCorkle-Broughton, Ph.D.

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Resource persons:

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, ELCA presiding

bishop

Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, ELCA secretary

Kevin Anderson, chair, Legal and

Constitutional Review Committee, Church

Council

Setting the Table Committee

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

CRLC Membership:

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

Don Corson Alexandra Mack

Carla Christopherson, CRLC co-chair, ex-

officio

Leon Schwartz, CRLC co-chair, ex-officio

Appendix 2: Origin and Formation of the Commission

2189 The August 8-12, 2022, Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA received memorials from ten synods concerning the topic "Restructure the Governance of the ELCA." 2190 The recitals to the memorials included common themes regarding an overall decline in 2191 2192 membership and numbers of congregations since 1988, the inflexibility of the ELCA's governing documents to meet new challenges, the desire for a "well-governed, connected, and sustainable 2193 2194 church" and the need to dismantle racism and acknowledge the church's complicity in related 2195 trauma and harm. In its pre-assembly report, the Memorials Committee recommended to the assembly the 2196 following action in response to these memorials: 2197 To refer the memorials to the Church Council for further deliberation and definition, 2198 2199 specifically to determine the goals and boundaries of any proposed changes to the constitution, especially those related to Chapters 4 and 5; the need for a Commission 2200 for a Renewed Lutheran Church; and the need and scope of any proposed 2201 2202 reconstituting convention, with recommendations to be presented to the 2025 2203 Churchwide Assembly. 2204 In its supplemental report of Tuesday August 9, 2022, the Memorials Committee proposed to amend the above resolution by substituting: 2205 2206 To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran 2207 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 2208 reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the 2209 2210 principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present 2211 2212 its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for 2213 a reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting of the 2214 Churchwide Assembly. 2215 This recommendation was placed on the floor of the assembly on Tuesday afternoon. There was one amendment offered on the floor, to insert the word "possible" in front of "reconstituting 2216 convention" in the second-to-last line above, which was adopted by a 748-36 vote. The following 2217 resolution, as amended, was adopted by the assembly by a 738-72 vote: 2218 2219 To direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran 2220 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 2221 reconsider the statements of purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the 2222 principles of its organizational structure, and all matters pertaining thereunto, being 2223 2224 particularly attentive to our shared commitment to dismantle racism, and will present 2225 its findings and recommendations to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly in preparation for 2226 a possible reconstituting convention to be called under the rules for a special meeting

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of the Churchwide Assembly.

2228 With the adoption of this resolution by the assembly, it was the Church Council's responsibility

2229 to determine the size and selection of the commission. The Church Council's first meeting after

- 2230 the 2022 Churchwide Assembly was its regularly scheduled fall meeting, which was held in-
- person at the churchwide offices on November 10-13, 2022. Prior to that meeting, the Church
- 2232 Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee and Executive Committee had considered
- 2233 possible timelines for the Council's work in establishing the commission and the work of the
- 2234 commission itself. It was noted by the Executive Committee that the assembly action calling for
- the creation of the commission placed relatively few constraints on the commission's work.
- 2236 Accordingly, it would be appropriate to preserve significant freedom for the commission to
- 2237 pursue pertinent matters while also trying to avoid having the commission duplicate work
- 2238 already delegated to other parts of the churchwide organization by the Churchwide Assembly.
- 2239 The proposed timeline from the Executive Committee called for discussion of the parameters of
- creating the commission at the November 2022 Church Council meeting, with a nomination
- process early in 2023 and the Church Council formally appointing members to the commission
- around March or April 2023.

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- The Church Council's initial discussion of the creation of the commission was led by Mr. Kevin
- 2244 Anderson, chair of the Legal and Constitutional Review Committee, on Saturday, November 12,
- 2245 2022. The conversation focused on three questions:
 - 1. What are council members' hopes for the commission?
 - 2. What should be the size of the commission? and
 - 3. What is the most appropriate way to select the members of the commission?
- The Executive Committee took the feedback it received in that discussion to its 7:30 a.m.
- meeting on Sunday, November 13, to formulate the general sense of the council into a more
- specific recommendation for the size of the commission and the process for appointing members
- 2252 to it. The Executive Committee's recommendation, with minor stylistic amendments made by the
- 2253 Church Council, was adopted in the council's final plenary session of the meeting as follows:

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

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

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

2271 To request the nomination process be completed prior to the April 2023 Church 2272 Council meeting, presenting a slate of nominees to the Church Council for action; and 2273 To invite this church to join us in prayer as this church embarks on this process of 2274 renewal. 2275 In addition to the original scope of the Commission's mandate as provided in CA22.01.06, the Church Council at its November 2022 meeting also referred one specific item of business to the 2276 commission: a resolution from Southwest California Synod Council calling to discontinue the 2277 use of the word "evangelical" in the name of our denomination. The council adopted the 2278 2279 following: To request the Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consider the question 2280 2281 of whether the denomination name, "Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," 2282 should be changed; [and] To anticipate a recommendation when the commission presents its findings for the 2283 2284 2025 Churchwide Assembly; 2285 The Office of the Secretary would take the responsibility for communicating information about the size and proposed composition of the commission and the nominating process to the synods. 2286 2287 The Office of the Secretary also developed nomination forms and a nomination website to be available by early January 2023. The nominations were to be open until early March, with the 2288 Executive Committee of the Church Council operating as the nominating committee to review 2289 2290 the nominees. The Church Council was scheduled for an in-person retreat, not a formal business 2291 meeting, in March 2023 in Bloomington, Minnesota. At the retreat, the Church Council would hear an update on the Executive Committee's work on reviewing nominations to the 2292 2293 commission, and the council would vote to appoint members to the commission at its April 2023 2294 business meeting to be held online. 2295 As of the March 2023 Church Council retreat, the synod councils or synod executive committees 2296 had identified 108 nominees to the commission. Additionally, more than 380 nominees had been received through the open nomination process for a total of more than 400 unique nominations. 2297 2298 Of the commission members, 18 (two from each region) were to be selected from the synod 2299 nominee pool, and an additional 9-17 could be selected from either the open nominee process or 2300 the synod nominee pool. 2301 At the Church Council retreat, it was also reported that The Rev. Susan Johnson, national bishop 2302 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, would serve as a process facilitator/consultant for 2303 the commission and that the first, mandatory, in-person meeting of the commission would be 2304 held July 13-15, 2023, at the churchwide offices. 2305 The Church Council's Executive Committee worked extensively on reviewing the nomination 2306 forms and interviewing potential nominees throughout March and April to develop a slate of candidates that matched the representational principles of this church^{[,} the specific demographic 2307 2308 parameters of CC22.11.37, and considering other items such as economic, theological, and political diversity of potential commission members. 2309 The Church Council met in a business session online April 20, 2023. Significant actions of the 2310 2311 April 2023 Church Council meeting to the work of the commission included the appointment of the members of the commission: 2312

2313	to appoint the following members to the Commission for a Renewea Lutheran	
2314	Church: Mr. Roberto Lara Aranda, the Rev. Sean Avery, Ms. Felecia Boone, Mr.	
2315	Michael J. Chan, the Rev. Tiffany Chaney, Mr. Don Corson, Mr. Antoine Cummins,	
2316	the Rev. Elizabeth Friedman, the Rev. Charlene Guiliani, the Rev. Gail Hagerty,	
2317	Bishop Regina Hassanally (at-large), the Rev. Douglas A. Hill, Mx. Ruth Ellen	
2318	Howard, Ms. Thelma Pruitt Jacks, Mr. Ryan Johnson (at-large), Ms. Stacy D.	
2319	Kitahata, the Rev. Kristin Johnston Largen, Mr. David M. Lenz (at-large), Ms.	
2320	Alexandra Mack, Mr. Thomas Madden (at-large), Ms. Susan Wilds McArver, Ms.	
2321	Candy McCorkle, Mr. Evan Moilan (at-large), Ms. Sarah E. Morris, Ms. Laurel	
2322	Muhly-Alexander, Mr. Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, Bishop Matthew Riegel (at-large), Mr.	
2323	Leon Schwartz, Deacon Dallas Shealy (at-large), the Rev. Adam Sornchai, Ms. Melody	
2324	Stachour, Ms. Cheryl Stuart, Ms. Loni Taylor (at-large), Ms. Linda M. Timmons, and	
2325	the Rev. Carla Christopher Wilson; and	
2326	To authorize the Executive Committee to appoint members as necessary if a	
2327	vacancy occurs.	

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

To approve the establishment of a Church Council designated fund, entitled Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church, in the amount of \$300,000, to be used to cover the costs of meetings and other resources.¹

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

At its May 2023 meeting, the Executive Committee voted to (a) invite members of the commission to indicate interest in serving as a coco-chair of the commission through completion of a form that would allow members to describe their interest in serving as co-chair and to

2339 describe the gifts, skills, and abilities they felt they would bring to the position of co-chair and

2340 (b) authorize the Executive Committee to review the forms and appoint co-chairs for the

commission. As of the June 2023 Executive Committee meeting, there were seven individuals

2342 who had completed the form indicating interest in serving as a co-chair. After review of those

applications, the Executive Committee appointed the Rev. Carla Christopher and Mr. Leon

2344 Schwartz to serve as co-chairs.

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

- The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop
- The Rev. Michael Burk, presiding bishop *pro tempore*
- Deacon Sue Rothmeyer, secretary
- Lori Fedyk, treasurer
 - Judith Roberts, senior director for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Jackie Baumhover, director for strategy in the Office of the Presiding Bishop
- Vance Blackfox, director for Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations
- Jennifer DeLeon, director for Racial Justice

- The Rev. Nicollette Peñaranda, program director for African Descent Ministries
- Desta Goehner, president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
- Shari Seifert, past president, Association of White Lutherans for Racial Justice
 - Kevin Anderson, chair of the Church Council's Legal and Constitutional Review Committee
 - Thomas Cunniff, general counsel for the ELCA
 - Paul Irwin, associate general counsel for the ELCA

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

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

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

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

2399 Appendix 3: Ongoing Work to Understand Synod Purpose and Structure

- 2400 During the work of the commission, we had extensive discussions regarding the number,
- 2401 purpose, and structure of synods. We recognize the complexity of this issue and ongoing
- 2402 discussions regarding their purpose. This commission, acting on feedback from the Conference
- of Bishops, believes that work should be completed to determine any possible revisions to the
- 2404 purpose statements pertaining to synods and other expressions of this church. Based upon the
- 2405 work of the Task Force on Interdependence and Purpose, when the Church Council initiates
- 2406 action relating to the synods, carefully considering the impact of its recommendations on
- 2407 minority and marginalized communities, ensuring intentional inclusion of diverse perspectives
- 2408 throughout its work, we commend the following for consideration:

Objectives

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

2418 Evaluation Criteria

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

1. Optimize the Number of Synods

- *Membership Density*: Measure the number of congregations and members per synod to assess whether the synod is too large or small for effective governance.
- *Geographic Efficiency:* Evaluate the geographic size of each synod to determine logistical efficiency in terms of travel times for synod events and bishop visitations.
- *Cost Efficiency:* Analyze the cost implications of maintaining each synod, including administrative costs, to determine financial sustainability.

2. Establish Routine Evaluation Protocols for Synods

- **Synod Engagement Metrics:** Develop metrics such as participation rates in synod assemblies, training sessions, and regional activities to gauge active engagement.
- **Synod Health Metrics:** Create metrics that track financial health, leadership stability, mission outreach effectiveness, congregation vitality, commitment to anti-racism and social justice work.

• *Feedback and Satisfaction Scores:* Regularly collect feedback from congregations on synod support, using standardized surveys to measure satisfaction and areas for improvement.

3. Improve Regional Cooperation

- **Resource Sharing Effectiveness:** Track the number and quality of shared resources among synods (e.g., training programs, administrative tools, ministry materials) and the perceived effectiveness of these shared resources.
- *Joint Initiatives and Programs:* Monitor the development and outcomes of regional initiatives to enhance cooperative ministry efforts, such as joint mission trips, shared clergy training, and combined outreach programs.
- Communication Frequency and Quality: Evaluate the frequency and quality of communications between synods, including regular updates, collaborative meetings, and shared strategic planning sessions.

4. General Criteria for All Objectives

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

2454 Evaluation Process

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

Implementation Phases

- The outline below may be adjusted by the council as deemed necessary and the information listed below is meant to serve as an initial framework.
- **Phase 1**: Develop and implement the expanded evaluation framework, initiate detailed structural assessments, and begin collecting data.
- **Phase 2**: Continue assessments with a mid-cycle review focusing on structural efficiency and its impact on mission effectiveness.

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