

Report for the Church Council on Governance

Executive Committee of the Church Council

October 7, 2004

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

Introduction

The members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its various expressions and institutions share a calling. We proclaim in our mission statement that, “Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we have been claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.” In order to be part of God’s mission in the world, this church periodically returns to its Lutheran heritage of “always reforming” itself. Reflection on this church’s mission in our time and context resulted in the adoption by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly of new mission and vision statements, strategic directions for the churchwide organization, and commitments for implementation of the strategic directions.

As this church seeks to live more fully into its mission and transform its words into deeds, it has been considering how its various expressions and institutions can work better together so their ministries and decision-making are even more effective in accomplishing, with God’s help and guidance, God’s mission through this church.

To achieve the goal of the reformation of this church for mission, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson will present to the Church Council in November 2004 a proposal for reorganizing the work of the churchwide organization. At the same time, the Executive Committee of the Church Council will offer a proposal concerning the way the ELCA is governed. These coordinated proposals are designed to:

- build a stronger relationship and connection among all the members of the ELCA and its various expressions, agencies, and institutions;
- maintain the churchwide organization’s effectiveness and efficiency;
- remain attentive to a wide range of views;
- strengthen the voices of members, congregations, and synods; and

- enable this church to carry out effectively its mission in the world.

The proposals on governance and restructuring rely on and are accountable to the confessional, ecclesiological, theological, and organizational foundations of this church. One succinct articulation of these foundations is in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. Of particular note in the ELCA constitution are Chapter 2, Confession of Faith; Chapter 3, Nature of the Church; Chapter 4, Statement of Purpose; Chapter 5, Principles of Organization; and Chapter 8, Relationships.

Many steps have been taken to engage the members of this church in the discussion about this church’s governance. We are particularly thankful to all those people who responded to questionnaires, including current and former members of the Church Council; synodical bishops and officers; pastors and congregation council presidents; members of boards and committees for the churchwide units of the ELCA; and the presidents of this church’s social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities.

Premises and Commitments

This church’s current system of governance has a number of strengths, including its ability to foster widespread participation, giving many people an opportunity for greater involvement in this church beyond their own congregation. It has worked well for 16 years, addressing such challenging issues as evangelism, world hunger, rural and urban ministry, ecumenical and interfaith relationships, theological education, health care, and global concerns. It has provided support and structure for this church’s ministries in congregations and in communities throughout the world. This system, however, also has some weaknesses, particularly the perception that it is complicated, unresponsive, and confusing.

It has not realized fully its potential for interdependent ministry—congregations, synods, institutions, agencies, and the churchwide organization supporting each other and working together in mission—that was envisioned for it by the framers of this church.

Research conducted at the request of the Executive Committee of the Church Council shows that most members of this church are satisfied with the governance system in spite of its perceived weaknesses. On any given aspect of governance, the majority of respondents to a recent survey support the current system. Moreover, voting members of the 2003 Churchwide Assembly defeated a number of specific proposals for changing this church's governance procedures, including synodical ratification of policy and governing documents and congregational ratification of ecumenical agreements and ministry standards. This would suggest that significant changes are not in order, and that changes, which potentially would satisfy some, would in turn likely make others dissatisfied, in equal or even greater numbers. Acknowledging this dilemma, the Executive Committee nevertheless believes that some changes in governance would strengthen this church for mission and accordingly have incorporated these proposed changes into this document.

Research indicates that some people who are dissatisfied with this church's governance system believe that decisions do not reflect adequately the views of the majority and that the majority's views are diluted by this church's representational principles.¹ On the other hand, at least two-thirds or more of those who responded to questionnaires favor continued use of the representational

¹ The representational principles, defined in constitutional provision 5.01.f., provide that, within assemblies, councils, boards, and committees, "at least 60 percent of the members . . . shall be laypersons; that as nearly as possible, 50 percent of the lay members . . . shall be female and 50 percent shall be male, and that, where possible, the representation of ordained ministers shall be both female and male. At least 10 percent of the members . . . shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English."

principles. The ELCA governing documents specifically state that "it shall be the responsibility of the Church Council to assure that this church maintain its commitment to inclusive representation" (19.11.01.a.).

These principles ensure that a broad cross-section of members of this church participate in deliberations and decisions. Further, these principles reflect, to some degree, the biblical visions for the body of Christ, with all parts being seen as important for the well-being of the whole body.

To some, these principles feel quite different from past experience. Actually, principles of representation are not new for Lutherans in North America. The current principles reflect how we in this church at this time have chosen to order our life together. These principles have had an important, positive impact on the life of this church. Their existence has enabled a wider variety of people to step forward and share their gifts who may not have done so in the absence of these principles. The principles also represent a wholesome reminder that this church is not diverse racially and has not reached its goal of at least 10 percent members who are persons of color or language other than English. Adding new voices may prompt some to feel other voices are no longer heard. This tension is recognized, but it should not undermine this church's commitment to inclusive representation.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council is committed to proposing changes in governance that will result in a system that is transparent, readily understood, responsive, flexible, accessible, effective, and efficient. The system will be one in which roles and responsibilities of its various interdependent parts will be clear. It will be one that will enable this church to live out its mission and calling through its strategic directions.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council bases its proposals on the following premises:

- Leadership and decision-making in this church must be shared.
- Leaders and decision-makers must be accountable to one another.
- Decisions are best made by well-informed members of this church.

- One of the most important ways members will become well-informed is through discussing issues and listening to one another in assemblies and councils, which bring together people with different views on, and experiences in, this church.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council is committed to ensuring that:

- the principle of inclusive representation is retained;
- the principle of interdependence is retained;
- there is broad conversation throughout this church before decisions are made;
- every opportunity to become well-informed is made available to the members of this church and its decision-makers;
- communication among members of this church will be improved;
- a wide variety of views are considered seriously in assembly and council deliberations;
- those who serve on councils or in assemblies serve on behalf of this whole church; and
- the rationale behind decisions is widely communicated after decisions are made.

Governance Proposals

A. On the Churchwide Assembly

The recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Church Council about the Churchwide Assembly are based on the conviction that the Churchwide Assembly remains the best forum for making decisions already assigned to it on behalf of this whole church. These recommendations respond to perceived weaknesses in the current system by strengthening communication among members of this church and by providing synodical assemblies with a means of giving input to the Churchwide Assembly on key issues.

Proposals

1. The current size of the Churchwide Assembly would be maintained with some adjustments for changes in the baptized membership of the regions.

2. The Church Council, in collaboration with the Conference of Bishops, would provide a systematic and standardized process to enable synodical assemblies to discuss and respond to upcoming major decisions facing the Churchwide Assembly, beginning with the 2007 Assembly. These opportunities would be available early enough in the process to consider synodical responses carefully and incorporate them into the process.
3. The churchwide organization, including the Church Council, is committed to being in regular and significant consultation with its partners. One of the ways this can happen is through formal consultations with various groups, institutions, and agencies during years when no Churchwide Assembly is scheduled. Another way is through encouragement to members of congregations to avail themselves of the opportunity to attend the Churchwide Assembly as congregational observers. This role would be established in an ongoing way through a new continuing resolution.
4. Voting members would receive a subscription to *The Lutheran* during the biennium in which they are serving.

Rationale

1. The Executive Committee proposes to retain the current size of the Churchwide Assembly (Section A, Proposal 1; A1) because adding voting members is unlikely to change effective representation, but would add considerable cost.
2. Instituting a review process by synods (A2) indicates that the desire for more input into major decisions on the part of synods and congregations has been heard. The review process puts the responsibility for seeking and processing responses to key proposals on the churchwide organization.
3. The Executive Committee's recommendations about consultations (A3) are based on the following: formal consultations in non-Churchwide Assembly years are being recommended—but not mandated—because concerns were raised about costs, both monetary and staff. Formal consultations may

not be the only or best way to achieve the desired improvement in communication and relationship-building.

4. The Executive Committee proposes that voting members receive *The Lutheran* (A4) so that they can become more informed about issues in order to make good decisions about them. Providing *The Lutheran* to voting members is part of an increased effort to communicate with all members of this church and is part of the new integrated communications strategy.

B. On the Church Council

The recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Church Council regarding the Church Council are based on concern for the council's effectiveness as a deliberating body. They also reflect the committee's conviction that council voting members serve this whole church. The Executive Committee does not recommend a larger council, because it believes a larger council would inevitably lead to more decisions being made by a smaller group of people—namely, the Executive Committee. The recommendations respond to perceived weaknesses in the current system by giving synodical assemblies responsibility for nominating council voting members and by expanding the number of advisory voices at the table.

Proposals

1. The Church Council would remain at its current size of 33 members plus the four officers (presiding bishop, vice president, secretary, and treasurer).
2. Beginning with the 2005–2006 biennium, Church Council voting members would be nominated through synodical assemblies and elected by the 2007 Churchwide Assembly. Thereafter, 11 would be elected at each Churchwide Assembly. Synods would conduct the nomination process by whatever means they desired, so that the result would be two nominees going forward to the Churchwide Assembly, where one would be elected. There would be no nominations from the floor of the Churchwide Assembly for these positions. The

representational principles would be upheld via a rotational system throughout all the synods. Likewise, a rotational system will provide that a synod will have one voting member on the Church Council for one six-year term followed by a six-year term without a voting member on the Church Council. Information about the nominees, more extensive than is currently the case and including answers to selected questions, would be printed in the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

3. In addition to the current advisory members (one synodical bishop from each of the nine regions and two youth members), the following also would become advisory members to the Church Council:
 - the presidents of the five ethnic associations or their representatives;
 - the chairs of the program committees of the five churchwide program units (see Section C), of Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, and of the Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
 - the chair of the consulting committee on work on behalf of women; and
 - one representative from this church's seminaries, one from the colleges and universities, and one from the social ministry organizations, chosen through those institutions' umbrella organizations.

Advisory members would participate in the committees of the council, where they would have the most opportunity to help shape the work and decisions of the council. The purposes of advisory members are to interpret to this church the policies, goals, and outcomes established by the council; to shape the work of their committees, synods, and organizations around those policies, goals, and outcomes; and to bring ideas, issues, and expertise to the council and its work. The list of those included as advisors is undergirded by constitutional provisions 8.30. and following and by provision 16.22.A00.

- 4a. Church Council voting members would be encouraged to interact with synods in their

region in various ways, including attending at least one synodical council meeting per year, visiting congregations, and participating in synodical assemblies, especially in years when a synod is nominating people to the Church Council. These suggestions would be incorporated into the position description of the duties of a Church Council voting member, which is being developed by the council's task force on board development, and would be articulated during orientation of new board members. The Church Council is developing a plan for members to interact with synods that do not currently have a voting member on the council.

- 4b. Synods would be encouraged to interact more regularly with the Church Council. Among the ways this interaction could occur are the following:
- invite Church Council voting members to synodical council meetings where they could both listen to synodical concerns and present council perspectives on upcoming or previous actions;
 - share regularly synodical council agendas, minutes, and newsletters with Church Council voting members;
 - invite Church Council voting members to write a column in the synodical newsletter; and
 - invite Church Council voting members to synodical assemblies, where they could both listen to synodical concerns and present council perspectives on upcoming or previous actions. In years when the synodical assembly is nominating people for the Church Council, the current member could talk to the assembly about the duties of a council voting member. The position description for council voting members would be distributed to the synodical assembly members.
- 4c. Synods will continue to interact with the Church Council through the significant role played by the nine advisory bishops.

Rationale

1. These proposals try to bridge the expressed disconnect between the Church Council and synods. Church Council voting members, both voting and advisory, are trying to build relationships between the churchwide organization and synods, congregations, and institutions and agencies. Church Council voting members want to be in conversation and relationship with these mission partners, opening lines of communication that extend in both directions—from synods and congregations to the churchwide organization, as well as from the churchwide organization to synods and congregations. Council voting members want to have a role in interpreting the mission of this church to synods and congregations, while also listening to their concerns. Part of this communication is the need for everyone to become better informed—on one hand about the work of the churchwide organization, and on the other about the needs, desires, and attitudes of synods and congregations. The hope is that increased and improved communication, shared information, and intentional dialogue would lead to decisions that will serve more people. The goal is that the members of this church would become contributors to the decision-making process rather than reactors to it.
2. The proposals also address the Church Council's strong support for the representational principles. The council believes that achieving those principles is a matter for this entire church, including synods, which would nominate Church Council voting members in rotation according to representational categories.
3. The proposals address the synods' desire for voting membership, even though not every synod would have a voting member on the Church Council at the same time. A rotational system will provide that a synod will have one voting member on the Church council for one six-year term followed by a six-year term without a voting member on the Church Council. The desire for voting membership is

also addressed through synod nomination of two candidates for Church Council, one of whom would be elected. This proposed change allows synods and voting members to the Churchwide Assembly to know the candidates better. Better knowledge of candidates also would be served by having fuller biographical information available in the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

4. The Church Council continues to affirm that a council voting member serves on behalf of this whole church.
5. The expansion of the council through advisory members allows more voices to be heard.
6. The proposals continue this church's commitments to multicultural ministry and work on behalf of women while integrating them more thoroughly into this church.

The Executive Committee is not recommending that the language of †S10.01.a. be changed to require Church Council participation in meetings of synodical councils. The reasons for this recommendation include recognition that council voting members' participation may be limited due to cost, time involved, and distance (in some regions). This recommendation also encourages synods to take responsibility for this aspect of relationship-building. This recommendation should be seen as an opportunity for synods to use Church Council voting members as resources and partners.

C. On the Boards and Committees of Churchwide Units (not separately incorporated)

The Executive Committee recommends that existing boards and steering committees be changed to program committees. The Executive Committee's recommendations on the program committees of churchwide units reflect the desire for greater clarity concerning the responsibilities of every aspect of this church's governance system. They also strengthen the interdependent relationship between these aspects. The recommendations address concerns about the current system by sharing responsibility for nominations between synodical assemblies and the churchwide Nominating

Committee and by providing more information about program committee nominees to the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly.

Proposals

1. Program committees for churchwide program units would consist of 15 members serving one nonrenewable six-year term. A process will be devised that ensures continuity where possible of current board and steering committee members, whose terms are not expiring, on the program committees representing their present field of service.
2. With the exception noted below, two-thirds of the members of program committees would be nominated by synodical assemblies and one-third by the churchwide Nominating Committee. All would be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. The Nominating Committee would attend to matters of balance and expertise on the committee after considering the nominees from synods. Representatives from social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities would be included in the five members emerging from the Nominating Committee process.
3. The Multicultural Ministry Program Committee would consist of at least two people each from the following communities: African American, Black; Arab and Middle Eastern; Asian and Pacific Islander; Latino; American Indian and Alaska Native; multiracial or biracial; and Caucasian. One person will be elected to a two-year term on the committee by the Multicultural Advisory Committee of the Lutheran Youth Organization. The Nominating Committee would develop nominees through its usual processes. Election would be by the Churchwide Assembly.
4. A Church Council voting member would serve on each committee as liaison with voice but not vote. Church Council voting members would be available to serve on any advisory committees established by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, *The Lutheran* magazine, or by the

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

5. An advisory bishop will be assigned by the Conference of Bishops to each program committee. Additional advisors may be named by program committees from time to time as needed and within budgetary limits.
 6. Additional representatives from social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities would serve on committees as needed for special initiatives.
 7. Program committees will meet at least two times a year. Each committee, in collaboration with the executive director of the program unit, may organize itself in ways that meet the specific needs of the unit.
 8. Program committees would be consulted concerning the appointment of the program unit's executive, who is nominated by the presiding bishop and confirmed by the Church Council. An executive may be terminated by the presiding bishop with the consent of the Executive Committee of the Church Council in accordance with the churchwide organization's personnel policies.
2. The proposals address the desire of synods for representation by placing responsibility for two-thirds of the nominations in the hands of synods.
 3. The proposals respond to desires for expertise and experience on committees and uphold the representational principles by making one-third of the nominations the responsibility of the Nominating Committee. In addition, voting members to the Churchwide Assembly may nominate other people, within the categories of the one-third of the program committee positions nominated by the Nominating Committee, for service on program committees.
 4. By coordinating these election cycles with those for Church Council, the process ensures that synods are always involved in some way with churchwide governance.

Upon completion of the Church Council's recommendations in November 2004 related to governance for action by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the council will determine a transition plan for the revised form of governance. The council's decisions will guide the Nominating Committee in the preparation of the committee's report to the assembly. Further, the proposed governance transition plan, if confirmed by the Churchwide Assembly, will guide the election process at the assembly, including the number to be elected to the various committees and boards.

Rationale

1. This proposed system clarifies the distinct roles of and relationships between the program committees, which are advisory to the program units, and the Church Council, which is the board of directors of this church. The Church Council has responsibility for policy. Through its executive director, a program unit will bring to the council policy proposals that reflect not only the best work of staff, but also the best advice and counsel of its program committee. The expert advice and variety of viewpoints in the program committee also will be engaged as the unit's vision, strategies, and priorities are shaped and evaluated. As the churchwide organization has gained so much from the contributions by board and steering committee members, so it seeks to sustain the avenues for such contributions through program committees. The new constitutional language would make this clear.
