

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SYNODICAL SECRETARIES

by Secretary David D. Swartling
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

(July 14, 2008)

This memorandum provides background information and recommendations to assist you in your responsibilities as synodical secretary. As you carry out your duties, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of the Secretary.

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A. *Responsibilities of Synodical Secretaries:* Under required provision †S8.32. in the *Constitution for Synods* of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The secretary shall:

- a. **Keep the minutes of all meetings of the Synod Assembly and the Synod Council, be responsible for the printing and distribution of such minutes, and perform such other duties as this synod may from time to time direct.**
- b. **Be authorized and empowered, in the name of this synod, to attest all instruments which require the same, and which are signed and sealed by the bishop.**
- c. **In consultation with the bishop, classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of this synod.**
- d. **Submit to the secretary of this church at least nine months before each regular Churchwide Assembly a certified list of the voting members elected by the Synod Assembly.**

B. *Minutes of Synod Assemblies:* One of your strategic and critical responsibilities as synodical secretary is to keep an eye on history. Therefore, prepare the minutes and other synod documents from the perspective that those written chronicles are crucial for the permanent historical record of your synod as well as an immediate record of actions.

1. ***Content of minutes:*** For the sake of archival and historical needs as well as an accurate legal and corporate record, the synod's annual report or directory needs to be comprehensive. Such a report of the Synod Assembly and synodical activity should include:
 - a. Agenda of the Synod Assembly;
 - b. Minutes of the Synod Assembly;
 - c. Adopted budget;
 - d. Financial reports and audit statements for previous year;
 - e. Election report, including terms of elected persons;
 - f. Complete list of members of the Synod Council, boards, and committees, including terms of

- office;
- g. Ordinations and installations, with dates and places;
- h. Commissionings and installations of associates in ministry and consecrations and installations of deaconesses and diaconal ministers, with dates and places;
- i. Complete listing of all rostered persons in the synod;
- j. Other information on rosters of synods, including necrology of pastors and those on the official lay rosters;
- k. Updated synod roster of names and addresses of congregations;
- l. Parochial reports and statistics;
- m. Complete text of resolutions and other actions of the assembly;
- n. Reports of synodical bishop and other officers;
- o. Text of salary guidelines for the year; and
- p. Current edition of synod constitution, unless published separately.

2. **Coding of actions:** Your predecessor may have established a coding system for actions of the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, and Synod Council Executive Committee. If that has not been done already, please consider following this recommended coding system in your synod:

A TWO-LETTER code that identifies the decision-making body; followed by YEAR of action; then MONTH of action; and NUMBER of action in the calendar year.

The two-letter code for the Synod Assembly could be “SA”; for the Synod Council, “SC”; and for the council's Executive Committee, “EC/SC.” “EC” serves as an extension of the “SC” two-letter code because the Executive Committee is a part of the Synod Council.

► Using this pattern, the tenth action of the Synod Assembly in June of 2008 would be: **SA08.06.10**. The **text** of the completed action then would follow the number, **preferably in boldface type**. For example,

VOTED:

SA08.06.10 To adopt the projected 2009 budget of the Great Vision Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the amount of \$2,589,445.

► Under this numbering system, the twenty-fourth action of your Synod Council in November of 2008 would be: **SC08.11.24**.

► The Synod Council's Executive Committee is not a separate entity but is under the council. Therefore, an alternate coding related to the council is suggested. As a result, the sixth action of your Synod Council's Executive Committee in March of 2009 would be: **EC/SC09.03.06**.¹

3. **Copies of Synod Assembly minutes:** When minutes are available after each Synod Assembly, please send two paper copies to the Office of the Secretary:

- a. one copy is kept in the Office of the Secretary in your synod's file,
- b. one copy is kept in this church's archives.

¹ Note that the numbering sequence for actions of the Executive Committee is separate from the numbering sequence for actions of the Synod Council. "SC" action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year. Likewise, "EC/SC" action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year.

In addition to the actual minutes portion of the assembly materials, all materials as outlined in section 1 (above) also should be sent with the minutes, since that information constitutes the complete record of an assembly. If materials are distributed electronically, an electronic version of the minutes and reports also should be sent to this church's archives, in addition to the printed copy.

Regardless of format, however, please ensure that copies of the minutes of Synod Assemblies are submitted promptly upon completion.

4. ***Size and suggestion on binding:*** Follow the established (year-after-year) format on the page size for your synod's minutes. Some synods have established a pattern of a 6" by 9" page size; other synods use a 5 ½" by 8 ½" page size; still others employ an 8 ½" by 11" page size. If the minutes booklet, as the annual report of your synod, is thick enough for "perfect binding," a term that refers to binding with flat space on the spine, type on the spine should read downward and identify the year, name of the document, and name of the synod. This information also should be on the cover, of course. "Saddle stitching" does not offer spine space, but for documents of a limited number of pages, this usually is less expensive than perfect binding.

C. *Synod Council Minutes:* The Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is no longer collecting for this office's files minutes of the *Synod Council* and the council's Executive Committee. Therefore, Synod Council minutes do not need to be sent to this office.² However, any resolution of the Synod Council must be forwarded promptly to the Office of the Secretary, as discussed below.

D. *Remember the synodical archives:* Under †S8.32.c., each synod secretary is assigned the responsibility, in consultation with the bishop, to "classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of the synod." This needs to be an ongoing process so that materials are not lost for the historical record.

1. ***Legal Records:*** Official records are required at times for legal purposes and, therefore, must be accurate and complete.
2. ***For the Sake of History:*** Records must be complete for the sake of history and the work of those who follow us. For advice, you may consult the synodical records-retention document (www.elca.org/secretary/records/synods) under "Guidelines for Synods."

E. *Electronic Versions of Documents:* Although distribution of documents in electronic form allows materials to get to people more quickly and at less cost, paper copies for the official records still should be maintained in the synod's archives. Electronic mail concerning matters of significance should be printed out monthly and retained with other correspondence.

F. *Prompt Reporting:* As the secretary of the synod, you are responsible for ensuring prompt reporting to the Office of the Secretary—immediately following the Synod Assembly—of the full adopted text of any resolutions or memorials addressed to the churchwide organization, the results of any election or reelection of officers, the adoption of any amendments to the synod's constitution, bylaws, or continuing resolutions, and, on a biennial basis, the names and addresses of persons elected to serve as voting

² Obviously, care must be taken by you to make certain that the minutes of all Synod Council meetings and of the council's Executive Committee are filed properly in the synod office and in the synod's archives.

members of the Churchwide Assembly. As provided in †S18.13., constitutional amendments, apart from those provided by the Churchwide Assembly for the *Constitution for Synods* under †S18.11. and †S18.12., are subject to ratification by the Church Council.

G. *Memorials and Resolutions:* For recording and proper disposition, all resolutions and memorials are to be submitted by synods only to the secretary of this church and not directly to churchwide units.

As a preliminary matter, confusion exists in places about what may be addressed more appropriately in resolutions to the Church Council rather than memorials to the Churchwide Assembly. Whatever you can do to educate your synod about this distinction will be appreciated.

Here is the basic background information regarding resolutions and memorials. The Church Council voted in November 1988 “that future communications from synods will be dealt with according to ELCA constitutional and bylaw provisions 12.21.c., 12.51.21., 14.21.11., and 14.41.11.” The following principles are based on those constitutional provisions:

Synod Assemblies address the Churchwide Assembly through memorials. A memorial adopted by a Synod Assembly is submitted to the Churchwide Assembly with a recommendation for action from the Memorials Committee of the Churchwide Assembly. Memorials should be reserved for broad policy issues that belong in the Churchwide Assembly.

Synod Councils may address the Church Council through resolutions, including forwarding actions of the Synod Assembly. The final “resolved” clause of such an assembly action should include this provision:

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly direct the _____ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council for consideration and possible action.

Synod Councils also may address churchwide units through resolutions directed to the Church Council’s Executive Committee, including forwarding actions of the Synod Assembly. The final “resolved” clause of such an assembly action should include this provision:

RESOLVED, that the _____ Synod Assembly direct the _____ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council’s Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Please encourage your assembly’s Committee of Reference and Counsel or Resolutions Committee to use resolutions in preference to memorials. Resolutions follow a more direct route than memorials, which must go to the Churchwide Assembly and await the assembly’s response.

Please also remind them that a resolution and a memorial may not be combined in one action. That is, the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly may not be addressed in the same resolution. A synod should not address both the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly on the same subject.

1. *Writing Resolutions and Memorials:* To prepare or edit the texts of resolutions and memorials, your assembly’s Committee of Reference and Counsel or Resolutions Committee will find information on proper language in *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Here are a few basics.

Normally, the “whereas” clauses concisely describe the issue, concern, problem, and basis for or need of the resolution. They state the case but technically are not part of the resolution. They

should be accurate and factual and should not misrepresent the issue being addressed or offer a false foundation for the proposed action. They should not be argumentative.

“Resolved” clauses point to proposed solutions and define requested action. “Resolved” clauses should define clearly the following: To whom is the request for action addressed? What should be done? What may the action cost and how is it to be funded? When should the action be done? To whom should the results be reported?

Clarity in the text of any resolution or memorial is important. A good test is, “Is this statement clear? Will the resolution make sense to someone who was not present at your assembly?”

Obviously, a resolution of a Synod Council cannot direct the Church Council to take a specific action. Likewise, a memorial from a Synod Assembly cannot order that the Churchwide Assembly vote in a particular way. A memorial, by definition, is a proposal appealing for action.

Under *Robert’s Rules of Order*, the Committee of Reference and Counsel or Resolutions Committee is empowered to screen all resolutions and memorials. At a minimum, this means ensuring clarity and accurate information. If authorized by the assembly’s Rules of Organization and Procedure or Standing Rules, the committee also may edit substantively such resolutions and memorials. For all cases, if issues exist with respect to the clarity or accuracy of resolutions and memorials, the committee should attempt to confer with the authors to address the issues.

2. ***Filing Resolutions and Memorials with the Office of the Secretary:*** Immediately after Synod Assemblies or Synod Council meetings, please send electronic copies of resolutions and memorials to Ruth.Hamilton@elca.org in the Office of the Secretary. She will send an acknowledgment that they have been received and indicate when they will be considered.

Thanks for your Partnership: Thank you for your conscientious service on behalf of this church as secretary of your synod. The staff of the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to supporting and assisting you as you fulfill your strategic responsibilities as synodical secretary.

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