

# **POLICY ON CRITERIA FOR SYNODICALLY AUTHORIZED WORSHIPING COMMUNITIES**

*Adopted by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
April 6, 2003*

## **1. BASIS**

The possibility of synodically authorized worshiping communities being acknowledged by synods exists on the basis of churchwide bylaws and an optional provision in the Constitution for Synods.

Churchwide bylaw 10.02.03. says: “Within the territory of each geographic synod, the synod, in keeping with criteria and procedures proposed by the Division for Outreach and approved by the Church Council, may acknowledge certain authorized worshiping communities—such as developing ministries, preaching points, or chapels—as related to the synod and part of the synod’s life and mission. Such authorized worshiping communities of the synod shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.”

Further, churchwide bylaw 10.41.04. indicates: “Synods may establish processes that permit representatives of authorized worshiping communities of the synod, under bylaw 10.02.03., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with bylaw 10.41.01.”

In the Constitution for Synods, S7.26., if adopted by the synod, provides: “This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council that permit representatives of authorized worshiping communities of the synod, under ELCA bylaw 10.02.03., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with +S7.21. Such authorized worshiping communities, acknowledged under criteria and procedures of the ELCA Division for Outreach and the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be

served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.”

## **2. CRITERIA**

- a. The primary criteria for acknowledgment of such synodically authorized worshiping communities, under the governing documents of this church, include agreement to:
  - (1) Accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith of this church (Chapter 2 of the churchwide constitution);
  - (2) Accept and adhere to the Statement of Purpose of this church (Chapter 4 of the churchwide constitution);
  - (3) Be served by leadership appointed or called on an annual basis by the synod under the criteria of this church;
  - (4) Be subject to the discipline [pattern of order] of this church;
  - (5) Be evaluated annually by the synod to determine next year’s status; and
  - (6) Function under the corporation established through the guidance of the synod.
- b. Other criteria for such synodically authorized worshiping communities (hereafter known as “chapels,” unless otherwise designated) include:
  - (1) Participatory worship for the chapel, consistent with Lutheran expectations, provided under the leadership of a pastor of this church or a licensed lay person;
  - (2) Ability to be a financially self-supporting ministry, unless other arrangements are made in accord with the Division for Outreach policies on developing ministries;
  - (3) Participation in benevolent (“mission support”) giving to the synod and churchwide organization, with the expectation that 15 percent of the offerings

of such chapels will be provided to the respective synod as a sign of commitment to the overall ministry of this church;

- (4) Commitment to evangelical outreach to unchurched persons within the area of the chapel;
- (5) Authorization by the synod for a specified duration, generally for one year, subject to possible renewal following evaluation jointly by the synod and the Division for Outreach;
- (6) Maintenance by the leadership appointed or called to serve the chapel of a listing of regular participants to be filed annually with the synod<sup>1</sup>;
- (7) Proper recording of such pastoral acts as baptism (see item 4.b.1.); and
- (8) If an authorized worship community is discontinuing, refer remaining participants to a regularly recognized congregation of this church for possible membership.

### 3. EXAMPLES OF CHAPELS AND OTHER AUTHORIZED WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

Generic designation—*Chapels*: Such gatherings of small groups sometimes are known as preaching points and places where the population base is insufficient to establish or maintain a congregation, as defined in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* (9.11., 9.21., 9.23., 9.25., and 9.31.).

- a. *Former congregation*: A small group that has dissolved as a congregation and who can no longer call a pastor, but who may continue worshipping as a chapel.
  - (1) An authorized worshiping community may be a way in which the synod may continue to serve a group of people in an area where a congregation has dissolved or where several congregations have dissolved.
  - (2) Before being identified as an authorized

worshipping community, an existing congregation that may no longer be viable would have to complete the necessary steps for dissolution as a congregation.

- (3) Subsequent to the dissolution, a new corporation would be established with the synod as the corporate member for the purposes of the chapel.
- b. *Small groups*: A small group of Lutherans may request Lutheran worship in an area where the potential for growth is limited and could not be expected to achieve a self-reliant congregation nor to call a full-time pastor. This group, however, could generate enough income to pay for worship costs and the service of a part-time pastor or other synodically authorized leader.
  - c. *Test a Field*: An opportunity may be sought to test the potential of a new development prior to the commitment of churchwide resources for development of a congregation. This may be a vehicle for experimentation to reach a specialized community of people whose population base is not sufficient to guarantee viable development of a congregation.
  - d. *Seasonal and Recreational Ministries*: In situations where recreational and vacation communities exist, seasonal worship needs might be met, even though a year-round worship schedule would not be possible.
  - e. *A Former Ministry Development*: A former ministry under development may not have developed sufficiently for formal organization as a recognized congregation. Yet a long-term commitment was found within a group of loyal “members.” They may be organized into a chapel as participants in such an authorized worshiping community.

### 4. LISTING OF CHAPELS AND OTHER AUTHORIZED WORSHIPPING COMMUNITIES

- a. Upon acknowledgment by the Synod Council in the synod to which the chapel is related, the synod shall report such acknowledgment to the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for recording on

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<sup>1</sup> A temporary roster of participants is to be filed annually with the synod. The synod will use this listing in determining status as to voting rights at the Synod Assembly. Records are also to be maintained of any official pastoral acts [see item 4.b.(1) below].

the list of acknowledged chapels and other authorized worshiping communities.

- (1) A number will be assigned to the authorized worshiping community by the Office of the Secretary.
- (2) Upon filing of the required authorization, the community will be listed in the ELCA churchwide organization's next annual report to the Internal Revenue Service, to be covered by the ELCA Group Exemption Number for nonprofit status.
- (3) Each synodically authorized worshiping community is to obtain an Employer Identification Number to be used for payment of the salary and benefits of the pastor or other leader serving the authorized worshiping community.
- (4) A corporation is to be established for each worshiping community by the synod designating such a ministry, under the laws of a state selected by the Office of the Secretary and using standard corporate governing documents developed by the Office of the Secretary.
- (5) This corporation is to be qualified, if necessary, as a foreign corporation in the state in which the chapel or other authorized worshiping community will be functioning.

b. Records shall be maintained on an annual basis of the regular participants of each acknowledged chapel and of all pastoral acts conducted within each chapel, the latter retained on a permanent basis.

- (1) For retention on a permanent basis, the synod shall designate an existing congregation as a congregation of record for the recording of all pastoral acts conducted within a synod's authorized worshiping communities.
- (2) Those participants in an authorized worshiping community who are received by affirmation of faith or adult baptism shall be recorded as members in the congregation of record (cited immediately above) for the duration of participation in the authorized worshiping community.
- (3) Those participants in an authorized worshiping community who already are members of an existing congregation shall

continue to be listed as members of such an existing congregation during the period of their participation in the authorized worshiping community.

## **5. PROVISIONS FOR PROPERTY, FINANCES, AND INSURANCE**

- a. Care must be taken to assure appropriate maintenance, insurance, management, liability protection, exemption from state and local taxes, and other matters.
- b. If title to any real property is held in the name of the synod, but leased to the community, arrangements may be developed through the Division for Outreach to provide insurance coverage.
- c. Each authorized worshiping community is to make provision for bond coverage for the handling of finances in the authorized worshiping community.

## **6. PROCEDURES**

The authorized worshiping community:

- a. May select a steering committee from the list of participants to work with the synodically designated leader.
- b. Should develop and approve an annual spending plan, including the commitment to 15 percent of all offerings to benevolence ("mission support").
- c. Should function under a governing document that includes: fully and without alteration or amendment the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; a statement of the community's relationship to the synod; agreement to be served by leadership appointed or called by the synod; agreement to be subject to the discipline of this church; agreement to be reviewed by the synod and the Division for Outreach annually to determine the next year's status; and any definition of internal organization and decision-making.

- d. May elect representation to the Synod Assembly, if such a provision is made in the synod's constitution.

## **7. CHANGING STATUS**

Status may be shifted from a synodically authorized worshiping community to a congregation under development or a recognized congregation:

- a. When the population of the community has sufficient potential to warrant full-time mission development, this ministry may be declared a congregation under development by the synod and the Division for Outreach.
- b. When the participants of this ministry are of a sufficient number and leadership ability and when they have fulfilled the organizing steps leading to recognition and reception as a congregation, then the synod and the Division for Outreach may complete the process for the recognition and reception of a congregation of this church, in accord with the churchwide constitutional provision 9.25.

## **8. IN EVENT OF DISCONTINUANCE OF AUTHORIZATION**

- a. A plan, effective upon discontinuance of authorization, should be established for the transfer of any remaining participants to regular membership in congregations of this church.
- b. Arrangements, in consultation with the synod, should be made for the orderly disposition of any interests in real estate, other than capital items, supplies and other material, and the payment of all debts.
- c. Arrangements and historical materials of the chapel should be gathered and transferred to the synod for archival filing.
- d. The corporation of the formerly authorized community must be legally dissolved.

*Revised policy adopted by the Church Council  
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
April 6, 2003*

**ELCA AUTHORIZATION FORM**

April 2012

*[To establish Exemption from Federal Income Tax  
under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code]*

The annual filing for our exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) will be made by ELCA for its **Congregations Under Development and its Synodically Authorized Worshiping Communities**.

A **Congregation Under Development (CUD)** and a **Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community/Chapel (SAWC)** is eligible for inclusion in the group exemption status provided it has: (1) authorized ELCA to include it; and (2) provided the necessary federal employer identification number (EIN).

The EIN is the nine-digit number assigned to you by the IRS. It usually consists of two digits followed by a dash and seven more digits, e.g., 41-1234567. This number is used for payment of the salary and benefits of the pastor serving the congregation under development.

While a congregation under development can have exempt status from federal income tax without being included under the ELCA Group Exemption Determination, the ELCA would not be able to provide them with the necessary certification letter unless the congregation under development has provided its authorization and has been included in one of ELCA's filings. Accordingly, if you wish to be included under ELCA's group exemption determination, please complete the form below, and return the original by mail immediately upon receiving your EIN# from IRS to the following address. You may also fax a copy but we will eventually need the original.

*ELCA / CSM*  
Attn: New Evangelizing Congregations  
8765 West Higgins Road  
Chicago IL 60631  
(773)380-2632 (Fax)

Please check one of the following: CUD  SAWC  SYNOD

Development Name \_\_\_\_\_

Location Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Federal Employer Identification Number: \_\_\_\_ -- \_\_\_\_ -- \_\_\_\_ -- \_\_\_\_ --

Person Completing Form: **(Please Print)**

\_\_\_\_\_ Position \_\_\_\_\_

The congregation under development identified above is affiliated with and, for IRS purposes, subject to the general supervision or control of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and authorizes the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to request that the organization be included in the Internal Revenue Service group exemption status whereby the organization will be determined to be exempt from federal income taxation pursuant to Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_