

Recommendations for Congregation Secretaries

by Secretary Wm Chris Boerger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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This memorandum provides background information and recommendations to assist you in your responsibilities as the congregation's secretary. As you carry out your duties, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of the Secretary.

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Responsibilities of a Congregation Secretary: The *Model Constitution for Congregations*, in C11.01.a., says that the duties of the officers, including the secretary shall be specified in the bylaws. The secretary is a required officer of the congregation. The actual duties may vary from congregation to congregation. There are, however, certain tasks which the secretary should see that are accomplished.

1. Keep the minutes of all meetings of the congregation, the congregation council and the congregation executive committee, be responsible for the distribution and publication of such minutes.
2. Be authorized and empowered, in the name of the congregation, to attest instruments which require the same and may also be signed by the congregation president or pastor.
3. Work with the pastor and congregation staff, if any, to ensure the storage and protection of all important documents and papers.
4. Make sure that annual reports of the congregation's corporate status are filed with the appropriate office in your state (if required).
5. Work with the treasurer and pastor to ensure timely filing of the congregation's annual parochial report.
6. Sign the letter of call for rostered staff at the time of a call meeting.
7. Attest to the synod office that the congregation's records are up to date and under your control at the time of pastoral transition.
8. Submit copies of constitution and bylaw amendments to the synod.

Minutes: The congregation secretary is also the corporate secretary of the congregation. That means that state nonprofit or not-for-profit corporate law will also govern how the records of the congregation are to be kept and maintained. This would require that the minutes of the congregation meetings and congregation council meetings are accurate and kept in a way that allows members of the congregation appropriate access to these minutes. That usually means that they are stored in the congregation's office, not in the secretary's home. Once approved by the council or the congregation meeting, these are the official record of decisions of the congregation.

Certain elements should be part of congregation or council minutes:

1. Date, time and location of the meeting. A record of the required notifications calling the meeting should be noted.
2. The presiding officer's call to order.
3. For a council or committee meeting, the names of the members present and absence. Those whose absence is excused should also be noted.
4. Affirmation that a quorum exists, including the number required for a quorum and the total number of members present.
5. Approval of previous meetings minutes.
6. The exact language of motions or resolutions and any amendments. Even if an amendment is not adopted the language of an amendment and its disposition should be recorded.
7. The motion should be recorded, and the fact that a second is provided should be noted.
8. When a ballot is used or when voting other than by voice vote, the number of votes for or against are recorded. When voting by voice, the ruling of the chair is recorded.
9. When there are nominations and elections, the names of all nominees are recorded. When announced, the number of votes for each person is recorded and the declaration of election.
10. A copy of all written reports is attached to the minutes.
11. A summary of any oral report should be included, when there is not a written report.
12. Adjournment, including the time of adjournment, is recorded.

Minutes do not need to include:

1. Record of discussion between members regarding the issues being considered.
2. Discussions that take place in executive session. Minutes should reflect the times when members went into and out of executive session. No decisions or actions should be taken in executive session. Any action needed as the result of an executive session should take place in open session.
3. Formal discussions with attorneys, certified public accountants and other legal advisors should be in executive session.

Filing State Forms: Some states require an annual filing with the state to insure that the corporate status of the congregation is maintained. Congregation secretaries should work with congregation staff to ensure timely filing of this information.

Annual Parochial Reports: In the same way the parochial report should be filed annually with the Office of the Secretary of the ELCA. Pastors and congregation staff play an important role in the filing of this information. Congregation treasurers and secretaries contribute information to the preparing of these forms. These forms can be filed online at www.ELCA.org.

Pastoral Transition:

- *C9.14. The parochial records of this congregation shall be maintained by the pastor and shall remain the property of the congregation. The secretary of this congregation shall attest in writing to the bishop of this synod that such records have been placed in his or her hands in good order by a departing pastor before the installation of that pastor in another field of labor or the granting by the synod of retired status to the pastor.