



Nov. 18, 2020

To: Bishops of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Vice presidents of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Secretaries of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Members of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Administrative Team of the churchwide organization
Chief executive officers of separately incorporated ministries
Seminary leaders

FROM: Deacon Sue E. Rothmeyer, secretary

SUBJECT: Report Church Council Responses to Synod Council Resolutions (Nov. 12–14, 2020)

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I. RESPONSE TO SYNOD COUNCIL
A. ELCA Disability Offset Policy for Dependents
East-Central Synod of Wisconsin (5I) [2020]

Resolution from the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin Synod Council

WHEREAS, the Synod Council of the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin received a resolution from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Plover, Wisconsin, with this resolve:

Resolved, that we petition the Church to amend the current disability policy with Portico Benefits, so that a disabled member’s Social Security Dependents’ Benefits are not factored into the Social Security offset of Portico’s financial obligation to the disabled member.

WHEREAS, we are a church that has called ourselves “to make fresh commitments in all dimensions of its ministry and mission among people with disabilities.” (“A Message on People Living with Disabilities” ELCA Social Statement, 2011).

WHEREAS, we call our congregations and ministries to “support advocacy by its members for public policies, programs, and adequate funding to benefit the needs of people with disabilities and the common good.” (“A Message on People Living with Disabilities” ELCA Social Message, 2011).

WHEREAS, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church of Plover also provides the following rationale in the WHEREAS portion:

- That the Social Security administration acknowledges and provides extra funds necessary to aid dependents of individuals living with disabilities.
• That these Social Security dependent benefits are paid to the dependent and are not considered income for the disabled individual.
• That the current disability policy with Portico does not offer extra funds because of dependents yet claims a right to offset the dependents’ Social Security funds from Portico’s financial obligation to the disabled member.
• That Portico Benefits ends up paying less money to individuals with dependents than those without.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that we request the ELCA Church Council to consult with Rev. Jeff Thiemann, President and CEO of Portico Benefits, and review the current disability policy of Portico Benefits and address the concern that a disabled member’s Social Security Dependents’ Benefits are factored into the Social Security offset of Portico’s financial obligation to the disabled member.

Executive Committee Action (EC20.04.19)

To receive the resolution from the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin on “ELCA Disability Offset Policy for Dependents;”

To refer the resolution to Portico Benefit Services for a report or a timeline on when this resolution will receive further action; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from Portico Benefit Services (November 2020)

ELCA Philosophy of Benefits

Portico Benefit Services [Portico] applauds the spirit and intent of this resolution and is always open to receiving and considering feedback and sharing information on the benefits offered. As the ELCA’s benefits administrator, Portico is called to support the church’s benefits as its ministry. As set forth in the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits, the guiding principles include:

- Benefits are an investment in God’s ministry as carried out through the lives of rostered ministers and lay employees.
- As church together, pooling our collective purchasing power helps us support the church’s unique needs in a cost-effective manner.
- Benefits are a shared responsibility of the ELCA—through sponsoring employers, plan members, and Portico.
- Benefits reflect a goal of total well-being.

ELCA Disability Benefits Plan

The ELCA Disability Benefits Plan (“Plan”) is self-insured; which means that benefits are funded by the contributions made by congregations and other ELCA sponsoring employers and determined based on an actuarial estimate of the future need. The contributions are held in trust until they are needed to pay for the disabled members’ benefits. On behalf of all who receive ELCA benefits, Portico is grateful for the generosity of congregations and ELCA sponsoring employers.

The Plan provides that the ELCA Disability Benefits Trust shall make the following payments for a disabled member’s benefits:

- Monthly disability benefit payments to replace two-thirds of the member’s prior compensation, less offsets.
- Fully paid premiums for health coverage under the ELCA Medical and Dental Benefits Plan for the disabled member and all family members regardless of family size.
- Contributions to the disabled member’s retirement account under the ELCA Retirement Plan (10% contribution for clergy calculated on income prior to offsets).
- Contributions for basic group life insurance under the ELCA Survivor Benefits Plan.

Offsets include payments from the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and other government offsets, that are paid on account of the same disability for which the Plan is paying benefits. The Plan ensures a disabled member, in the aggregate, receives two-thirds of their prior income to assist with basic needs, in addition to seamless health, retirement, and survivor benefits. It is not the intent for the disabled member to receive duplicate insurance benefits for the same disability or for the member to receive more than two-thirds of the monthly income received prior to the disability. The Plan has included the SSDI offset in the Plan document since at least 2003 and it is clearly stated in the Summary Plan Description.

ELCA Social Message on People Living with Disabilities

Portico supports and acts in line with the recommendations of the ELCA social message on “[People Living with Disabilities](#)” (2011), stating, in part:

The Churchwide Organization and Ministries

In the ELCA, people with disabilities and those who accompany them look to the churchwide organization for leadership, resource coordination and collaboration. For this reason, *it is important for promises regarding financial resources and staff capacities to be realistic and clearly communicated* as the churchwide organization seeks to fulfill its roles. (pg. 11, *emphasis added*)

“People Living with Disabilities” social message also encourages the ELCA to:

- work together with ELCA members, congregations, synods and affiliated organizations to advocate for public policies, programs and adequate funding to benefit the needs of people with disabilities and the common good; and

- make its policies and practices regarding ministry with and advocacy for people with disabilities substantially consistent with, whenever possible, those of its full communion partners and other ecumenical partners, both here and internationally. (pg. 12)

In line with this social message, the Plan policy to partner with Social Security Disability Insurance to fund two-thirds of prior income is consistent with the majority of the ELCA’s full communion partners.

Administration of Benefits

In administering benefits, Portico practices stewardship to responsibly manage all resources entrusted to it, while providing robust and generous benefits consistent with the teaching and the compassion of the ELCA. This is a balance, a balance between the benefits paid out and the contributions collected, with the goal striking the right balance for both plan members and congregations. Portico receives no gain from the offset of social security, as its role is to administer the Trust. If benefits are increased, Portico must provide the same increase for all members, then pass along the additional expense to the ELCA ministries that contribute their resources to fund the Plan’s benefits.

Portico Benefit Services Recommendation

The ELCA ministries that contribute to the ELCA Disability Benefits Plan also pay payroll tax that funds Social Security Disability Insurance. With the ELCA ministries making payments to the federal government and to the ELCA Disability Benefits Trust, a fitting partnership is established in allocating resources for monthly disability benefits to be paid to disabled members to fund two-thirds of prior income. Funding health coverage, retirement contributions, and survivor benefits are generous benefits provided by this church through the ELCA Disability Benefits Plan that are generally not included in disability benefits in the United States. Portico respectfully recommends the Plan continue these generous benefits along with the SSDI offset.

Church Council action:

To thank the East-Central Synod of Wisconsin for its resolution regarding “ELCA Disability Offset for Dependents;”

To receive the report and recommendation from Portico Benefit Services on this resolution;

To refer the resolution to Portico Benefit Services for a recommendation, pursuant to 17.20.02.c. of the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolution of the ELCA, on a proposed change to the “ELCA Disability Offset Policy for Dependents” which excludes Social Security Disability Insurance paid to dependent children of disabled members from the offsets to the disability benefits paid to the disabled member; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

II. RATIFICATION OF SYNOD CONSTITUTIONS

Provision †S18.13. of the *Constitution for Synods* describes the processes for synods to amend non-required provisions in their constitutions. It stipulates, “All such amendments shall become effective upon ratification by the Churchwide Assembly or by the Church Council.”

A. Saint Paul Area Synod

Church Council action:

To ratify the following amendment to the constitution of the Saint Paul Area Synod:

S7.22. All retired rostered ministers in this synod shall elect ~~40~~ **5** percent of their number to be voting members; all others shall be advisory members, with voice, but not vote.

B. Northeastern Minnesota Synod

Church Council action:

To ratify the following amendment to the constitution of the Northeastern Minnesota Synod:

S11.11. This synod shall in its bylaws or by continuing resolution establish a process to ensure that the members of its committees and other organizational units will be persons possessing the necessary knowledge and competence to be effective members of such units, and to meet the requirements of †S6.04.. With the exception of ~~ordained ministers on roster of this synod~~ **ministers of Word and Sacrament and ministers of Word and Service** who reside outside the territory of this synod, each member of a committee of this synod, or any other organization unit created by this synod, shall be a voting member of a congregation of this synod.

III. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

A. Carbon Fee and Dividend

Churchwide Assembly action [CA19.02.06d]

To receive with gratitude the memorial from the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin concerning Carbon Fee and Dividend;
To reaffirm the commitment of this church to engage in advocacy that seeks sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all; and

To refer to the Domestic Mission unit for the development of a plan that promotes educational resources on Carbon Fee and Dividend to assist in forming the basis for any potential advocacy strategy.

Executive Committee action [EC19.09.28.a3]

To refer the 2019 Churchwide Assembly action on “Carbon Fee (and Dividend)” to the Domestic Mission unit for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from the Domestic Mission unit (November 2019)

Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere requires multiple approaches which include carbon pricing, setting emissions performance standards, or GHG mitigation technologies.

Carbon pricing is generally believed by economists to be the best tool for having the greatest impact in the near-term to spur GHG emission reduction mitigation efforts. Carbon pricing can take many forms, with the most familiar being an emissions trading system (ETS) or a carbon fee or tax. This memorial’s focus is on a carbon fee with dividends.

The Domestic Mission unit through ELCA Advocacy will implement this action with deliverables along the following timeline:

11/14/2019 Develop a primer on this memorial entitled “Carbon Pricing Basics” with principles as a basis for ELCA endorsement of potential legislation.

Develop a Frequently Asked Questions Resource document for use by constituents in advocating for or against a carbon tax.

11/19/2019 Publish a blog post to introduce the carbon fee resources available for carbon fee and dividend.

12/1/2019 Develop criteria for comparison of the federal bills that address carbon pricing and post a comparison of the bills.

2/15/2020 Host a webinar on carbon pricing.

Church Council action [CC19.11.47n]

To receive the response on “Carbon Fee and Dividend” from the Domestic Mission unit;

To affirm the proposed timeline on the deliverables and to receive a final report on the implementation of the action at the Church Council’s Fall 2020 meeting; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from the Domestic Mission unit (November 2020)

Reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions into the atmosphere requires multiple approaches which include carbon pricing, setting emissions performance standards, and/or GHG mitigation technologies. Carbon pricing is generally believed by economists to be the best tool for having the greatest impact in the near term to spur GHG emission reduction mitigation efforts. Carbon pricing can take many forms, with the most familiar being an emissions trading system (ETS) or a carbon fee or tax. This memorial’s focus is on a carbon fee with dividends.

The Domestic Mission unit, through ELCA Advocacy, developed a primer on the focus of this memorial entitled “Carbon Pricing Basics” with principles that serve as a basis for ELCA advocacy positions pertaining to potential legislation. ELCA Advocacy also developed questions to ask legislators to help synods better analyze any carbon fee legislation that may be put forth.

While carbon tax legislation remains a favorite among economists, it has not found a place in key legislation launched by either the Democratic or the Republican Party. The Domestic Mission unit reaffirms this church’s commitment to work through ELCA Advocacy with interreligious partners and other faith leaders and will continue to engage in efforts that seek sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all in addressing climate change. The developed carbon pricing primer and a forthcoming frequently-asked-questions document serve as carbon fee with dividend educational resources that will assist in forming the basis for any potential advocacy strategy. It is the Domestic Mission unit’s opinion that this proposed resolution’s request has been met, and this report will serve as the final report.

Church Council action:

To receive the final report from the Domestic Mission unit on the implementation of a plan that promotes educational resources on Carbon Fee and Dividend to assist in forming the basis for any potential advocacy strategy; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

B. Earth Charter

Churchwide Assembly action [CA19.02.06c]

To receive with gratitude the memorials from the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast, New England, Upstate New York, and Southeastern Pennsylvania synods concerning endorsement of the “The Earth Charter”;

To endorse the Earth Charter;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to engage in creation care through principles of sufficiency, sustainability, solidarity, and participation; and

To refer to the Domestic Mission unit for implementation consistent with this memorial.

Executive Committee action [EC19.09.28.a2]

To refer the 2019 Churchwide Assembly action on the “Earth Charter” to the Domestic Mission unit for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from the Domestic Mission unit (November 2019)

The ELCA endorsed the Earth Charter on Oct. 4, 2019. Endorsement of the Earth Charter means that the ELCA will support the charter’s implementation, values, and principles and will work with others toward the same goal.

Endorsers are expected to contribute to the charter initiative and to charter-inspired action projects, implement the charter in its professional work, and agree with this endorsement statement: “We, the undersigned, endorse the Earth Charter. We embrace the spirit and aims of the document. We pledge to join the global partnership for a just, sustainable, and peaceful world and to work for the realization of the values and principles of the Earth Charter.”

To raise awareness of this endorsement, the Earth Charter logo and a link will be added to the elca.org/environment webpage. In early 2020, ELCA Advocacy will convene a staff team to develop a high-level formalized plan promoting the transition to sustainable ways of living into forthcoming resource development and projects. These will center on the Earth Charter action guidelines:

1. Respect and care for the community of life
2. Ecological integrity
3. Social and economic justice
4. Democracy, nonviolence, and peace

A progress report will be brought to the Fall 2020 Church Council meeting.

Church Council action [CC19.11.47m]

To receive the response on “Earth Charter” from the Domestic Mission unit;

To receive a progress report at Church Council’s Fall 2020 meeting; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2020)

The Earth Charter’s (“Charter”) pillars and 16 principles address equitable sustainability and sufficiency for all communities; and it aligns with ELCA social teachings. ELCA’s Sustainability Table (“Table”) conducts the implementation work to fulfill the Charter endorsement. The Table includes ELCA churchwide staff (Advocacy, Stewardship, World Hunger, Global Mission, Lutheran Disaster Response, Office of the Presiding Bishop, Lutheran Office for World Community, Campus Ministry, Outdoor Ministry, colleges and universities, Ethnic Specific and Multicultural Ministries, Mission Advancement, Faith Formation, and Young Adult ministries), Lutherans Restoring Creation, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, rostered ministers, and lay leaders. Listed below is ongoing implementation work.

Pillar 1—Respect and Care for the Community of Life: Equip congregations and members for advocating in their communities’ interest; support #ELCAvotes initiative; advocate for child nutrition programs and housing reform; support federal disaster aid resources and equitable access programs that assist communities impacted by natural disasters; advocate for support for international antipoverty, humanitarian and global health funding; advocate for migrant rights and immigration reform both domestically and globally through Accompanying Migrant

Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (“AMMPARO”) and our international companions; advance immigration reform; train Creation Care Ambassadors (to date over 50 trained).

Pillar 2—Ecological Integrity: Implement through pillar-focused leadership of the Delaware-Maryland Synod energy conservation and waste reduction (<https://youtu.be/Lo5qIVjTIVs>); explore funding options for projects with the Mission Investment Fund through the Table; lead a global interfaith “Good Trouble for a Healthy Planet” webinar with follow-ups; promote policies to protect all from the impacts of environmental degradation; received Stewardship of Life Institute grant with which synod leaders in four synods will be trained, accompanied and encouraged with skills identified by the ELCA Organized for Mission Network on local and state level stewardship of creation. (The Young Adult Ministry led efforts to give up plastics for Lent in the first quarter of 2020.)

Pillar 3—Social and Economic Justice: Produce resource series on intersectionality of racism and sexism for a just society supporting global health, racial equity, hunger eradication, environment, and housing; advance intra-ELCA and social efforts for equitable compensation; foster ongoing dialogical and theological engagement across this church towards gender and racial justice; address the disproportionate impact environmental injustice and climate change have on people of color and poor communities globally; utilize a racial justice lens to end the impacts of racism and develop models of equitable sustainability for all communities; assist migrants not covered by stimulus packages as well as support state and local advocacy through the AMMPARO network, congregations and synods.

Pillar 4—Democracy, Nonviolence, and Peace: Advocate for support of international funding for conflict prevention and peace-building programs; support and encourage global cooperation, such as the Paris Agreement, to protect the environment; protect human rights to defend democratic values, reject all forms of discrimination, encourage nonviolence and work for peace with the aim of creating a rich and varied space to enable sustainable development (SD); promote election integrity and voter protection; and participate in LWF’s Waking the Giant initiative focused on SD goals related to health, justice, education, reduced inequalities, and peace.

The Earth Charter implementation work is ongoing. The final report will be issued to the Fall 2021 Church Council meeting.

Church Council action:

- To receive the progress report on “Earth Charter” from the Domestic Mission unit;**
- To request that a final report be provided at the fall 2021 Church Council meeting; and**
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.**

C. Motion A: “Emanuel 9”

Churchwide Assembly action [CA19.04.17]

To adopt Motion A as amended.

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America reaffirm its commitment to repentance from racism by:

1. Commemorating June 17th as a day of repentance in the ELCA for the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9; and
2. Having the names of the Emanuel 9 (Clementa C. Pinckney, Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel L. Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, and Myra Thompson) added to future ELCA publications to venerate their martyrdom and lead us to repentance because of the white supremacy and racism in our church; and
3. Calling for this commemoration be grounded in prayer as the Emanuel 9 were murdered while in prayer at the end of the bible study; and
4. Directing the Office of the Presiding Bishop to help develop future worship prayers and litanies around repentance from racism; and
5. To encourage giving both prayer and financial support the memorial to be built in remembrance of the Emanuel 9 (<https://www.emanuelnine.org/>); and
6. Be in deeper conversations with the AME church on ways of reconciliation and repentance on the matters of white supremacy and racism.

Executive Committee action [EC19.09.28.a12]

To refer the 2019 Churchwide Assembly action on Motion A to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with appropriate churchwide organization units, for a report or for a timeline on when this resolution will receive further attention.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2019)

As the resolves of this motion cover a variety of areas, a team including the executive for worship, the executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations and theological discernment, the program director for racial justice ministries, and the director for ethnic specific and multicultural ministries is coordinating action and implementation.

In early 2020, the presiding bishop will convene a consultation via video conference to include representation from churchwide staff, authors of this resolution, the African Descent Lutheran Association, the Conference of International Black Lutherans, and the European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice. The purpose of this consultation will be to review and coordinate efforts in the churchwide organization and other grassroots work related to worship resource development as called for in the resolution. This work comes alongside strengthening ecumenical relations (both grassroots and church-to-church) with the African Methodist Episcopal church.

Church Council Action [CC19.11.47bb]

To receive the response on “Motion A: Establish June 17 as Emanuel 9 Day of Repentance” from the Office of the Presiding Bishop; and

To request that a report on the implementation of this resolution be provided at the Fall 2020 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop (November 2020)

A churchwide staff implementation team, including the executive for worship, the executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations and theological discernment, the program director for racial justice ministries, and the director for ethnic specific and multicultural ministries, has coordinated the implementation of this action over the last twelve months. In late January 2020, the presiding bishop convened a consultation including churchwide staff, authors of this resolution, the African Descent Lutheran Association, the Conference of International Black Lutherans, and the European Descent Lutheran Association for Racial Justice. This consultation looked to review and coordinate efforts in the churchwide organization and other grassroots work related to worship resource development as called for in the resolution.

The consultation highlighted the need for worship resources that both commemorate the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9 and respond to the sins of racism and white supremacy. In addition, the consultation encouraged this church to find ways to lift up our ongoing ecumenical relationship with the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the early months of 2020, the resource of Prayers, Litanies, and Laments for the Commemoration of the Emanuel Nine was developed to include newly commissioned and crafted worship resources for use in congregations and synods on or near the June 17 commemoration. In cooperation with the Mission Advancement unit, a resource page was launched at www.ELCA.org/EmanuelNine as a central hub for worship resources. In cooperation with Augsburg Fortress, the Emanuel Nine commemoration has been added to the *Sundays and Seasons* family of worship planning resources.

In late spring, the consultation team was reconvened to review the implementation work to date and to consider plans going forward given the reality of the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. Out of this group grew the idea of a national virtual service to complement numerous activities in congregations and synods. This service was shared with the whole church on June 17, the fifth anniversary of the martyrdom of the Emanuel Nine, with a sermon by Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton and including leaders from around the ELCA and ecumenical partners, including senior episcopal leadership from the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and executive leadership from the National Council of Churches and the Conference of National Black Churches. Over 1,500 people viewed the service together at noon Eastern Time on June 17, 2020, and over 7,000 viewed in the hours and days to follow. The service continues to be available for viewing at www.ELCA.org/EmanuelNine.

At the conclusion of the service, the ELCA Anti-Racism Pledge was launched. It outlines eight anti-racist actions individuals and congregations can take to reinforce our shared commitments in their churches and communities. Over 3,000 individuals and congregations signed the pledge within a month of the June 17 commemoration.

As this church continues to repent the sin of racism and white supremacy, ongoing worship resource development and raising awareness of this commemoration will continue to be a priority. The staff implementation team plans to convene the consultation group in late 2020 to continue this work and look to specific goals leading to the 2021 commemoration date. In addition, conversations with AME Church leaders about how we can deepen our partnership, including in future commemoration services and events, will be resumed in late October 2020.

Church Council action:

To receive the report on “Motion A: Establish June 17 as Emanuel 9 Day of Repentance” from the Office of the Presiding Bishop;

To thank the churchwide staff implementation team and the consultation team for its comprehensive efforts to commemorate June 17 as a day of repentance in the ELCA for the martyrdom of the Emanuel 9 (Clementa C.

Pinckney, Cynthia Marie Graham Hurd, Susie Jackson, Ethel Lee Lance, Depayne Middleton-Doctor, Tywanza Sanders, Daniel L. Simmons, Sharonda Coleman-Singleton, and Myra Thompson);

To encourage the ongoing conversations with the African Methodist Episcopal Church to deepen our partnership in future commemoration services and events, including on the matters of white supremacy and racism; and

To urge this church to continue its efforts to repent the sin of racism and white supremacy and to raise awareness of the June 17 commemoration.

D. Sanctuary

Churchwide Assembly action [CA19.03.07]

To receive with gratitude the memorial from the Metropolitan New York Synod concerning sanctuary;

To reaffirm the long-term and growing commitment of this church to migrants and refugees and to the policy questions involved, as exemplified most recently in the comprehensive strategy “Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities” (AMMPARO);

To recognize that the ELCA in congregations, synods and the churchwide organization are already taking the actions requested by this memorial; and

To request that appropriate staff on the AMMPARO team, LIRS, and the Domestic Mission, Global Mission, and Mission Advancement units review the existing strategies and practices by the five current sanctuary synods and develop a plan for additional tools that provide for education and discernment around sanctuary;

To declare the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America a sanctuary church body; and

To request the ELCA Church Council, in consultation with the appropriate churchwide units and offices, provide guidance for the three expressions of this church about what it means to be a sanctuary church body and provide a report to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

Executive Committee Action [EC19.09.28.a6]

To refer the 2019 Churchwide Assembly action on Sanctuary to the Global Mission and Domestic Mission units, in consultation with the AMMPARO (“Accompany Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) team, LIRS and other appropriate churchwide organization units, for a report or for a timeline on when this will receive further attention; and

To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from the AMMPARO Team (November 2019)

There are essentially three requests from the 2019 Churchwide Assembly for further action:

1. educational materials for congregations and synods;
2. guidance for the three expressions of this church on what it means to be a sanctuary church body from the Church Council in consultation with the churchwide organization; and
3. a report to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

In terms of educational materials, the churchwide office has already produced talking points, an overview of sanctuary, and a video answering frequently asked questions. A new congregational study titled “Transformed Communities: Freed for Radical Welcome,” originally produced by Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, has been edited by Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS) with significant input by AMMPARO (Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities) staff as a Bible study for congregations to begin to discern their work with migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers. More materials will continue to be produced.

In order to provide the requested guidance for the three expressions on what sanctuary means, AMMPARO staff, as well as others at the churchwide office, have reached out to other denominations who have supported sanctuary congregations to receive any materials and resolutions that they have produced. A small group of churchwide staff has been assembled as an advisory team to the AMMPARO Sanctuary team to oversee this process and recommends the following five-step process:

1. Convene the five sanctuary synods and selected sanctuary hosting congregations to receive their guidance and suggestions in January 2020. Representatives from LIRS and churchwide staff will be included.
2. Get feedback, if possible, on preliminary conclusions at the March 2020 joint meeting of the Church Council and Conference of Bishops.
2. Present a draft of the final report to the Fall 2020 Conference of Bishops meeting for feedback.
3. Present the definitions and final report to the Church Council at its fall 2020 meeting.
4. Release the definitions, together with tools for synods and congregations, to use following the Church Council’s action. These tools will be guides for those who wish to engage around sanctuary. Resources will be available shortly after the approval of the definitions by the Church Council.

A report will be presented at the Spring 2022 Church Council meeting with a final report presented to the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

Church Council action [CC11.19.47t]

To receive the response on “Sanctuary” from the AMMPARO (“Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) team;

To affirm the timeline proposed in the response;

To request that the definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body for the three expressions of this church be provided to the Church Council’s Fall 2020 meeting;

To request a final report be provided to the Church Council’s Spring 2022 meeting in anticipation of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly; and

To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.

Response from the AMMPARO Sanctuary Team (November 2020)

The ELCA AMMPARO Team received significant input at the March 2020 joint Conference of Bishops and Church Council meeting as well as through the online feedback form for congregational members. A variety of opportunities were contemplated but were not possible to carry out as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. To respond to these changed conditions, the online feedback survey was heavily promoted and kept open for additional time in order to receive more input. The analysis of the input timeline was modified, which has delayed the drafting of definitions and guidelines.

The current uncertainty around future policy makes the drafting of effective guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body most difficult at this time. The ELCA constituency would best be served by guidelines that respond to the post-election context.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertain policy future around immigration issues as a result of the fall elections, the ELCA AMMPARO Team respectfully requests the Church Council postpone its receipt of the definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body until the Spring 2021 meeting of the Church Council.

Church Council action:

To receive the update from the AMMPARO (“Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities”) Team on definitions and guidelines about what it means to be a sanctuary church body;

To extend the deadline for these definitions and guidelines to the Spring 2021 Church Council meeting; and

To request that the secretary inform the synod of this action.