



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Mar. 10, 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 of Actions of the Church Council (Mar. 6–8, 2020)

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) met at the Eaglewood Resort in Itasca, Illinois, Mar. 6–8, 2020. Here is a summary of particular actions along with background information.

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1. HEALTHCARE BENEFITS

Church Council action:

To receive with gratitude the report and recommendation of Portico Benefit Services' board of trustees, directing Portico staff to take actions necessary to provide this church with at least two health plans that have 78–82 percent actuarial value for sponsoring organizations to offer and for members to enroll in, and, consistent with the principles underlying the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits, to endorse as a benchmark beginning with the 2021 plan year those proposed plan options that have an actuarial value of at least 78–82 percent; and

To encourage congregations, synods, the churchwide organization, and other ELCA-related organizations to select such options.

2. REPEAL OF *VISION AND EXPECTATIONS*

The Rev. Philip C. Hirsch, executive director of the Domestic Mission unit, reported the review process for *Vision and Expectations* and engaged the Church Council and Conference of Bishops in discussion. The following recommendation was approved by the Church Council.

Church Council action:

To repeal the document, *Vision and Expectations*, effective immediately, and which should no longer be used in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for any purpose;

To affirm that *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* remains the document which describes the grounds for which officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations may be subject to discipline according to the practice of this church;

To request the appropriate churchwide organization offices and units update all relevant documents and manuals, including candidacy and mobility documents, by June 1, 2020, to reflect the role of *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* as defining the grounds for discipline;

To encourage members, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization to reflect on the aspirations this church has established for its members and rostered ministers, including the promises made at baptism, confirmation, and ordination;

To request the Domestic Mission unit engage in conversation with the Conference of Bishops at its October 2020 meeting and the Church Council at its November 2020 meeting to consider the goals and purpose behind a new aspirational document;

To request that the Domestic Mission unit and the Committee on Appeals engage in conversation with the Conference of Bishops to seek further information and guidance regarding the needs of bishops to apply discipline as described in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*, reporting that information to the Executive Committee of the Church Council at its October 2020 meeting.

To request the Domestic Mission unit provide updates to the Executive Committee of the Church Council on these matters; and

To acknowledge that the action of the Church Council regarding *Vision and Expectations* will be the response to Motion D [CC19.11.47dd].

3. UPDATES TO THE ELCA CANDIDACY MANUAL

After the action on *Vision and Expectations*, updates were needed to the ELCA Candidacy Manual.

Church Council action:

To direct the Domestic Mission unit to revise the ELCA Candidacy Manual to remove this language:

“Are you familiar with the document *Vision and Expectations*? Do you intend to live in accord with its standards of conduct as a candidate and as a rostered minister in the ELCA?”;

and, effective immediately, to replace with this language:

“As a candidate for rostered ministry in this church, I understand I will be held accountable to the synod’s candidacy committee regarding this church’s expectations for my speech and conduct as set forward in *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline of Rostered Ministers*. I understand that my candidacy for rostered ministry brings increased attention to my life. I am responsible for informing my bishop regarding any circumstance that might subject me to discipline according to *Definitions and Guidelines* were I a rostered minister. I understand that the candidacy committee may modify my candidacy status in response to my speech and conduct.”

4. CHURCH COUNCIL DESIGNATED FUNDS

Church Council action:

To approve a Church Council Designated Fund in the range of \$1,800,000 to \$2,100,000 representing the remaining excess revenue over expenses from fiscal year 2019 to be released to fund budget shortfall in future years.

Church Council action:

To re-designate the unused portion of the fiscal year 2018 Church Council Designated Fund (\$1,945,079), which was originally approved to be spent in fiscal year 2019, to be released to fund budget shortfall in future years.

5. FUNDING FOR BENEFITS CONTRIBUTION TRUST

In April 2018, the ELCA Church Council made the following changes to post-retirement medical benefits:

- To approve the change from self-insured medical and pharmacy plans for the retirees to fully insured medical and pharmacy plans.
- To acknowledge Portico's collection of the 0.7% surcharge from participating employers through 2019 to help fund the Trust.
- To acknowledge Portico's collection of \$7,000,000 in surcharges from participating employers from 2020–22 to help fund the Trust, with Portico to determine the rate and duration best suited to collect those surcharges.
- To authorize the ELCA to expend \$11,000,000 between 2018 and 2022 to fund the Trust, with the expectation that these amounts, together with amounts contributed from participating employers via Portico, would fully fund the Trust, but recognizing that this is a funding estimate.
- To terminate the Aide-mémoire and replace it with this understanding.

Pursuant to this action, the ELCA contributed \$2,000,000 in 2018 and \$2,000,000 in 2019, leaving \$7,000,000 to be contributed from 2020–22. Portico collected \$4,500,000 in surcharges in 2018 and \$4,500,000 in surcharges in 2019. The pro rata split between the organizations has been 68.6% to Portico Benefit Services and 31.4% to the churchwide organization.

Church Council action:

To receive with gratitude the report from Portico Benefit Services on the status of the Benefits Contribution Trust;

To approve Portico's discontinuation of the collection of the 0.7 percent surcharge from participating employers, effective July 1, 2020;

To reduce the ELCA's planned contribution to the Trust for 2020–22 from \$7,000,000 to \$1,150,000, with that contribution to be made in 2020; and

To provide that, in the event that any excess remains after satisfaction of all trust liabilities and termination of the Benefits Contribution Trust, such excess be distributed back to Portico and the churchwide organization pro rata, with Portico Benefit Services receiving 68.6 percent and the churchwide organization receiving 31.4 percent.

6. UPDATES TO MANUAL OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE ROSTERS OF THE EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA

The Office of the Secretary proposed changes for the *Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. The last revision was approved by the Church Council at its November 2018 meeting.

Church Council actions:

To approve the updated *Manual of Policies and Procedures for the Management of the Rosters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* for use by synod bishops, synod staff members, and others who hold responsibilities for such matters in this church; and

To authorize the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to provide periodic updates reflecting new or revised policies subsequently adopted by the Church Council.

7. REVISIONS TO DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLINE

In accordance with ELCA constitutional provision 20.21., the Committee on Appeals establishes definitions and guidelines, subject to approval by the Church Council, to enable clear and uniform application of the grounds for discipline of officers, rostered ministers, congregations, and members of congregations. Non-substantive edits were made to reflect recent changes in the rosters of this church as well as the changes in law regarding marriage.

Church Council action:

To approve the amended *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*.

8. RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION

At its November 2019 meeting, the Church Council referred a recommendation on climate change from the Conference of Bishops [CB19.09.26] to the Domestic Mission unit requesting a timeline for when the resolution would receive further attention [CC19.11.41].

Church Council action:

To receive the response on climate change from the Domestic Mission unit;

To affirm the coordinated approach and proposed timeline for this church's response to climate change; and

To anticipate progress reports at future Church Council meetings with a final report by the April 2022 Church Council meeting.

9. TRUSTEES OF THE ENDOWMENT FUND OF THE ELCA

A trustee of the Endowment Fund resigned effective February 4, 2020. No candidate has been identified to fill this vacancy. As the Endowment Fund would like to fill this vacancy prior to its Fall 2020 board meeting, the Endowment Fund asked the Church Council to consider authorizing the Executive Committee to appoint a trustee to fill the remainder of the term.

Church Council action:

To authorize the Executive Committee to elect trustees to fill, until the November 2020 meeting of the Church Council, vacancies in the board of trustees of the Endowment Fund of the ELCA.

10. ELECTIONS, NOMINATIONS AND VACANCIES

The Church Council is responsible for electing people to fill terms on boards of separately incorporated ministries, social ministry organizations, and seminaries. Bylaw 8.21.03. outlines basic parameters for the election of members to the boards of ELCA seminaries. Pursuant to 14.22. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, the Church Council is also to elect nominees to fill vacancies on churchwide boards or committees.

Church Council actions:

To re-elect to the board of directors of Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to a four-year term expiring in 2024: Ms. Karen M. McClain and Mr. Harry C. Mueller.

Church Council actions:

To elect to the board of directors of Wartburg Theological Seminary to a four-year term expiring in 2024: Ms. Debra Ann Hibbard.

Church Council actions:

To elect to the board of directors of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir-Rhyne University to a two-year term expiring in 2022: The Rev. Donald Rhodes Woolly; and

To re-elect to the board of directors of Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary of Lenoir Rhyne University to a four-year term expiring in 2024: Ms. Miriam Lang David.

Church Council actions:

To elect to the board of directors of Luther Seminary to a four-year term expiring in 2024: Ms. Ruth Kimmelshue and Sr. Cynthia Dianne Williams.