



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

April 9, 2014

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 presidents
 Regional coordinators

FROM: The Rev. Wm Chris Boefger, secretary *WCB*

SUBJECT: Report of Church Council Responses to Synod Resolutions
 and Churchwide Assembly Actions (April 4–6, 2014)

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I. RESPONSES TO SYNOD RESOLUTIONS

A. Confirmation Resources

Southeastern Minnesota (3I)

WHEREAS, members of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod have engaged in ongoing conversation about confirmation ministry and what it means in this time and place;

WHEREAS, the most recent study of confirmation ministry in the ELCA is from 1993;

WHEREAS, 56 percent of youth in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, ages 13–17, make a personal commitment to living life with and for God (*Portraits of Protestant Teens: A Report on Teenagers in Major US Denominations*, Phil Schwadel and Christian Smith, 2005);

WHEREAS, one third of adults under 30 are religiously unaffiliated (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 2012); and

WHEREAS, if confirmation is only centered in youth ministry, we miss opportunities for lifelong faith formation; and

WHEREAS, some in our Lutheran faith community are struggling with biblical literacy, faith articulation, and Christian identity; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod will continue innovative exploration of Confirmation ministry; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod will share with other expressions of this church any resources that are discovered in this exploration; and be it further

RESOLVED, that synods and congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America be invited to re-imagine Confirmation ministry in the 21st century; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America be a network for the adaptations that are already and will take place in the three expressions of this church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod Council requests that the Church Council direct the appropriate unit of the churchwide expression to update the resources available on the churchwide website to reflect the changes in faith formation ministry that are taking place within all expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Church Council Action [CC13.04.26]:

To thank the Southeastern Minnesota Synod for its resolution related to confirmation ministry;

To acknowledge that the churchwide organization is in the process of a complete redesign of the entire ELCA.org website;

To request the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in consultation with the Mission Advancement unit and the Office of the Presiding Bishop, to update the resources on the new ELCA.org website to reflect the changes in faith formation ministry taking place within all expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;

To further request that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, as part of the ongoing work of the Faith Formation Team (which includes unit staff and staff from Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, as well as Christian education teachers in ELCA colleges and seminaries and other partners), take up the conversation about “re-imagining” confirmation ministry and resources, and to report progress to the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council; and

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

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (April 2014)

A review of the Southeastern Minnesota resolution on confirmation, along with information related to confirmation shared by Bishop Michael Girlinghouse with the Conference of Bishops, suggests there are two distinct areas related to confirmation this resolution addresses. The first issue is the request that the ELCA.org website reflect the changes that are taking place in faith formation ministry within each of the three expressions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The second issue can be summarized in the following question, “Does the ELCA need to explore a new vision for confirmation in the 21st century?”

Reflecting Changes in Faith Formation on ELCA.org

In the revised ELCA website “Resources” section, one of several areas listed is Faith Practices. Within that section, there are several resources related to the current Faith Practices Initiative. They are divided into four areas:

1. Baptismal Covenant
2. Program Planners
3. Spiritual Renewal
4. Story Matters

The Faith Practices webpage is still under development and will eventually have a link to the ministry of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA (formerly known as the Lutheran Association of Christian Educators [LACE]). The Christian Education Network of the ELCA has several confirmation resources and other faith formation resources and is extremely helpful in providing assistance to anyone seeking a particular type of resource. Its website has a link to the location of ELCA Resource Centers, and these centers also have many faith formation materials, including confirmation materials.

The Faith Practices webpage will be updated periodically by the program director for faith practices to insure that the most current information is offered for those seeking new insights on how to live out their faith.

Does the ELCA need to explore a new vision for confirmation in the 21st century?

1. The Southeastern Minnesota Synod has a team that crafted this resolution. The group was formed in February 2011 to explore alternative practices that can re-imagine confirmation in the 21st century. We are responding to the confirmation resolution submitted by this team. The primary questions of this group are the following:
 - Do we need confirmation today?
 - Is confirmation working as it was intended to work?
 - Is confirmation necessary?
 - Should parents be involved in confirmation?

Two members of this team are members of the Christian Education Network of the ELCA.

2. The Confirmation Project, a research project being funded by the Lily Endowment, is a collaborative research effort among five denominations to learn more about confirmation and equivalent practices across the United States. The intent of the project is to research how the experience of confirmation serves to intensify and integrate beliefs into daily life.

The five denominations participating are the following: the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., The Episcopal Church, and the United Methodist Church. Members of the team leading this research are ordained ministers, practical theologians, researchers, youth ministers, and Ph.D. and Master of Divinity candidates. The team is currently seeking congregations that would like to be involved in the research. The actual research will begin in fall 2014.

Undoubtedly, the findings from this study can be critical to the efforts of the ELCA as a new vision for confirmation is discussed. The Rev. Brenda Smith, program director for faith practices and missional leadership in the Congregational and Synodical Missions (CSM) unit, will be the liaison with the staff of “The Confirmation Project,” directing them to the individuals and ministries at the churchwide organization that they may need to contact as this research project evolves.

3. February 3–5, 2014, twenty-eight ELCA faith formation leaders representing various networks and organizations gathered for a summit in St. Louis following the Youth Extravaganza. The overall goal of the summit was: “To renew and strengthen partnerships for a common mission of faith formation within the ELCA.” The conversation was extensive and vibrant, with a clear recognition that faith formation education in this missional age must change if it is to catch up with the dynamic societal changes in our culture. For example, “Are our teaching strategies sensitive to the needs of ethnic specific communities?”

One expected outcome of the summit was to “identify opportunities to more fully share and live out a common vision and mission for faith formation together.” As summit participants continue to network, it can only enhance our ability to strive to make faith formation relevant, exciting, transformational, participatory, and theologically grounded. The summit was partially funded by a grant from the CSM unit.

Please note that this was the second gathering of faith formation leaders hosted by the CSM unit. The first summit took place in September 2011, and more than 20 faith formation leaders gathered to spend time sharing their ministries and also discussing future joys and challenges to be faced in faith formation in the 21st century. Following that summit, one of the participants, Terri Elton, associate professor of Children/Youth/Family Ministry wrote a white paper titled, “What is Faith Formation in a Missional Age?” A copy of this white paper is attached to this report as *Appendix A*.

The Rev. Brenda Smith will be meeting with Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton to discuss her vision for faith formation in the ELCA. The resolution and Churchwide Assembly memorial on confirmation will be discussed with her at that meeting. As a churchwide organization, we continue to be in a variety of conversations about confirmation ministry. We are grateful to the Southeastern Minnesota Synod for its ongoing work in re-imagining confirmation ministry in the 21st century.

Church Council Action:

To receive the response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit and to thank the Southeastern Minnesota Synod for its resolution on Confirmation Resources; and

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

B. A Churchwide Policy of Parental Leave for Rostered Persons

Lower Susquehanna Synod (8D) [2013]

WHEREAS, questions arise between rostered persons and congregations concerning the compensation and benefit package for parental leave; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) document, “Definition of Compensation Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor,” item D.6. states, “Where applicable, parental leave up to six weeks with full salary, housing and benefits;” and

WHEREAS, the ELCA document, “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities for Associate in Ministry, Deaconess, or Diaconal Minister Under Call,” item D.6. states, “Where applicable, parental leave up to six weeks with full salary and benefits;” and

WHEREAS, ordained persons and congregations have not been consistent with the application of the parental leave benefit as stated in the “Definition of Compensation Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor;” and

WHEREAS, the church is called to support and uplift parents and families; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Lower Susquehanna Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to direct the Office of Secretary to amend the documents, “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor” and “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities for Associate in Ministry, Deaconess, or Diaconal Minister Under Call,” items D.6. to state “parental leave of at least six weeks with full salary and benefits;” and further be it

RESOLVED, that the Lower Susquehanna Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly to encourage all congregations to adopt a parental leave policy consistent with the above-referenced documents and in which congregations are encouraged to offer all employees the same benefit.

[The Office of the Secretary determined that the Lower Susquehanna Synod Assembly memorial, “Churchwide Policy of Parental Leave for Rostered Persons,” is a resolution that more properly should have been submitted to the Synod Council for referral to a churchwide office through the Church Council’s Executive Committee.]

Executive Committee Action [EC13.07.21c]:

To receive the resolution of the Lower Susquehanna Synod regarding A Churchwide Policy of Parental Leave for Rostered Persons;

To refer the resolution to the Office of the Secretary, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit; and

To request that a report with recommendations be brought to the November 2013 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Office of the Secretary (November 2013)

After reviewing the resolution more extensively, we request additional time in order to consult with colleagues to properly address the resolution. This additional time will also be helpful as the newly elected secretary is acclimated to the position and responsibilities.

Church Council Action [CC13.11.69b]:

To receive the response from the Office of the Secretary;

To postpone the report with recommendations to the April 2014 Church Council meeting; and

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

Response from the Office of the Secretary (April 2014)

The forms “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities of the Pastor” and “Definition of Compensation, Benefits, and Responsibilities for Associate in Ministry, Deaconess, or Diaconal Minister Under Call” are used in a number of synods as part of the documentation supporting the letter of call issued by the synod for synod staff and by a congregation supporting the letter of call by a congregational vote. These forms are made available to synods and congregations under Office of the Secretary resources on the ELCA website.

The two forms have provided flexibility through a series of blanks that the calling body completes to describe the compensation and benefits that are part of the call. When a recommendation is made, for example related to continuing education, the recommendation is in parenthesis. The current recommendation (paragraph D.6.) related to parental leave is simple a statement, “where applicable, parental leave up to six weeks with full salary and benefits.” This statement is inconsistent with the method of recommendations in the rest of the form and provides no certain benefit.

The issue of parental leave (or maternity and paternity leave) is further complicated by the Family Medical Leave Act. This legislation applies to organizations with a large number of employees and provides for unpaid parental leave. It does apply to many congregations and agencies in this church.

The churchwide organization cannot impose a personnel policy on the entire church but may provide forms that provide recommendations and flexibility. Each congregation or synod has the authority and responsibility to attend to personnel issues. The churchwide organization’s personnel policies do provide for “Maternity/Paternity and Adoptive Leave” of four consecutive weeks paid leave.

There has been consultation with the Congregation and Synodical Mission unit and the Conference of Bishops regarding this resolution, current practices followed, and the need for flexibility. Given the current request calling for

six weeks paid leave, the existing language in the current forms, and the existing churchwide organization's policy of four weeks paid leave, it is appropriate to change paragraph D.6. to keep the forms flexible and allow discretion in the calling entity. (Recommended 6 weeks; 4 weeks minimum.) The new D.6. would read as follows:

D.6. Maternity/Paternity or Adoptive leave of _____ weeks with full salary, housing, and benefits.
(Recommended 6 weeks; 4 weeks minimum).

Although the forms are not adopted by the Church Council, the Office of the Secretary will make these changes pursuant to the Church Council response to this resolution.

Church Council Action:

**To receive the response from the Office of the Secretary and to thank the Lower Susquehanna Synod for its resolution on Parental Leave for Rostered Persons; and
To request the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.**

**C. Seminarian Debt Incurred Through Inadequate Health Insurance
Delaware-Maryland (8F) [2013]**

RESOLVED, that the 2013 Delaware-Maryland Synod Assembly memorialize the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to direct the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to consult with the eight ELCA seminaries and Portico Benefit Services to offer adequate and affordable health insurance coverage for ELCA seminarians; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit encourage Portico Benefit Services to offer health advocates to students, free of charge, to assist students facing major medical expenses.

West Virginia-Western Maryland (8H) [2013]

RESOLVED, that the 2013 West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod Assembly memorialize the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to direct the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to consult with the eight ELCA seminaries and Portico Benefit Services to offer adequate and affordable health insurance coverage for ELCA seminarians; be it further

RESOLVED, that the ELCA seminaries be encouraged to ensure that no seminarian ever incur medical expenses totaling more than \$1,500 dollars a year; be it further

RESOLVED, that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit encourage Portico Benefit Services to offer health advocates to students, free of charge, to assist students facing major medical expenses.

Allegheny (8C) [2013]

RESOLVED, that the 2013 Allegheny Synod Assembly memorialize the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to direct the eight ELCA seminaries to explore the possibilities of partnering with Portico Benefit Services to extend their healthcare ministry by developing more affordable, adequate insurance coverage for seminary students.

Montana (1F) [2013]

RESOLVED, that the 2013 Montana Synod Assembly memorialize the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to direct the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit to consult with the eight ELCA seminaries and Portico Benefit Services to offer adequate and affordable health insurance coverage for ELCA seminarians; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit encourage Portico Benefit Services to offer health advocates to students, free of charge, to assist students facing major medical expenses.

Executive Committee Action [EC13.07.21a]:

To receive the resolutions of the Delaware-Maryland, West Virginia-Western Maryland, Allegheny, and Montana synods regarding "Seminarian Debt Incurred Through Inadequate Health Insurance;"

To recognize that Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators, Inc. (EIIA) provides a comprehensive seminary student health plan for ELCA seminary students and the EIIA staff provides hands-on services to assist students;

To affirm the work of EIIA as being in accordance with the ELCA Philosophy of Benefits;

To recognize that EIIA is working with ELCA seminaries to identify healthcare insurance options in light of the implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act;

To refer the resolution to the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit in consultation with all ELCA seminaries, EIIA, and Portico Benefit Services; and

To request that a report with possible recommendations be presented to the April 2014 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (April 2014)

Following the action of the Executive Committee of the ELCA Church Council to refer the resolutions of the Delaware-Maryland, West Virginia-Western Maryland, Allegheny, and Montana synods regarding Seminarian Debt Incurred Through Inadequate Health Insurance to the Congregational and Synodical Missions (CSM) unit and to request a report and recommendations to the Church Council's April 2014 meeting, three CSM staff members (Jonathan Strandjord, Greg Villalón, and Mark Wilhelm) were assigned to this task.

These three have worked in preparing this report with Andy Willenborg, the chief financial officer at Wartburg Theological Seminary (and, through him, have consulted with the business officers of the other ELCA seminaries), with Marion Hernandez, vice president for student programs at Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators, Inc. (EIIA), and with Brad Joern, vice president for products and services at Portico Benefit Services (Portico).

The synod resolutions accurately note that full-time seminarians at ELCA seminaries are required to have health insurance and that this insurance may be obtained through either private insurance, parental insurance, spousal insurance, or school-supplied insurance. They also are correct in stating that, for some seminarians, health care costs are a significant contributor to high levels of student debt.

In order to make available the option of school-supplied insurance, the seminaries of the ELCA have worked together for a number of years through EIIA to provide a comprehensive student health plan. Over the years, EIIA has worked with the seminaries to design plans that help control costs that students pay both in premiums and in out-of-pocket expenses. In a time of rising health care costs, a major challenge has been to keep premiums affordable while at the same time limiting out-of-pocket expenses (which can be especially difficult for students with dependents).

In keeping with the requirements of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), the plan design EIIA has secured for the ELCA Seminary Health Plan for the 2014–2015 school year limits student out-of-pocket expenses more than in previous years. The current \$500,000 maximum will increase to unlimited; the \$500 deductible and 20 percent co-pay will apply toward the out-of-pocket maximum of \$5,000 per individual; the pre-existing condition exclusion will be removed; and preventive and wellness services will be covered 100 percent while in-network.

This limitation on out-of-pocket costs will greatly reduce the exposure of a seminarian covered under this plan to catastrophically high medical costs. At the same time, this increased coverage is a significant reason for the 25 percent increase in the cost of insurance premiums in 2014–2015 compared to 2013–2014 (to \$3,556 for a student, \$6,785 for a spouse, \$4,160 for a child). Therefore, while there will be in this next year fewer cases in which medical costs result in very high student debt, the increased cost of insurance could result in an increase in borrowing by seminarians enrolled in the ELCA Seminary Student Insurance Plan.

The cost of insurance in the ELCA Seminary Student Insurance Plan has provided good value for seminarians. (For example, in 2012–2013, the total cost of claims actually exceeded total premiums.)

Looking ahead, the premium cost of the plan secured through EIIA for 2014–2015 will be less expensive than what is available in the individual insurance market for the same coverage. At the same time, it is possible that due to low household income levels, a significant number of students and their families will qualify for government subsidies (premium tax credits) for health coverage offered through a health insurance exchange. As a result, some of our seminarians will potentially have lower cost options to consider on an insurance exchange.

In the rapidly changing marketplace of health insurance, it is more important than ever that students at our ELCA seminaries have access to good information and counsel concerning their options. EIIA has for several years offered educational webinars providing objective information, but student participation up until now has been low. It will be important to find new ways to ensure that students both have the information they need to find the plan that is best for them and, in the case of the ELCA Seminary Student Insurance Plan, know how to use it most effectively.

A further challenge will be to keep our plan viable as enrollment numbers likely shrink. Enrollment has already significantly contracted over the last five years (from 678 in 2008–2009 to 322 in 2013–2014) as the federal rules for Student Insurance Programs have eliminated low-premium/limited coverage options and as the ACA has enabled students under age 26 to continue health coverage under their parents' insurance (or for subsidized coverage in some states that provided it even before the ACA). With the full implementation of the ACA, enrollment in our plan might decline to

a point where the pool is too small on its own to secure coverage. Therefore, EIIA is working to pool together multiple seminary systems in developing a common plan for those seminarians for whom a student plan will continue to be the best and most affordable option.

Portico would seem to be a natural source of health insurance coverage for ELCA seminarians, but certain challenges exist to doing so. First, Portico's governance process must be considered as it relates to offering benefits to those who do not meet current eligibility definitions. Thought must be given to the definition of an eligible student—the attainment of “endorsed” status, for example—and what implications that might or might not have for benefits beyond health coverage. Second, none of Portico's current health plan options guarantees out-of-pocket expenses at the levels suggested in the resolutions. For example, Portico's most comprehensive plan limits annual out-of-pocket expenses for medical and pharmacy expenses to \$3,000 for individuals and \$6,000 for families. Third, the question of how health coverage through Portico would be paid for needs to be addressed. Would students be expected to pay the contributions as part of their seminary costs (just like now), would it be provided by the ministry sites where they do their internship/residency, or would some other means be necessary?

If students were covered in the Portico plan, Portico could offer health care advocacy to students and their families by virtue of its relationship with both the student and the benefits administrator; whereas, in the current arrangement, health care advocacy is not possible since Portico does not have a relationship with the benefit administrator. Portico is well-positioned to provide seminarians with certain wellness resources through the Mayo Health Clinic health assessment and the financial counseling services it provides at no charge to seminarians through its partnership with Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota. Future considerations for utilizing Portico's experience might include providing information to seminary students and administrative staff regarding how to best evaluate opportunities available through the health insurance exchanges, as well as helping candidacy committees become better equipped to recruit and support healthy leaders.

The following are some possible recommendations:

1. That CSM, in partnership with the ELCA seminaries, work with EIIA and Portico to develop a robust strategy to engage all seminarians at ELCA seminaries in opportunities to understand the advantages and disadvantages of various health insurance options available to them under the Affordable Care Act.
2. That EIIA move ahead with folding the ELCA Seminary Student Insurance Plan together with its other seminary plans.
3. That CSM develop a strategy to ensure that every candidacy committee has basic knowledge of health insurance issues and the options available to their candidates, with at least one member of each committee participating in an annual webinar or other training.
4. That during the 2014–2015 academic year, CSM, the ELCA seminaries, and Portico actively explore the feasibility of bringing at a future date some ELCA seminarians into a Portico plan at some appropriate point of candidacy (e.g., at endorsement).

Church Council Action:

To request the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in partnership with ELCA seminaries, to work with Educational and Institutional Insurance Administrators, Inc. (EIIA) and Portico Benefit Services in order to develop a robust strategy to engage seminarians at this church's seminaries in opportunities to understand the advantages and disadvantages of various health insurance options;

To affirm EIIA's intent to incorporate the ELCA Seminary Student Insurance Plan with its other seminary plans;

To encourage the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to develop a strategy to ensure that every candidacy committee has basic knowledge of health insurance issues and the options available to their candidates, with at least one member of each committee participating in an annual webinar or other training;

To request during the 2014–2015 academic year that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the ELCA seminaries, and Portico Benefit Services continue to explore the feasibility of allowing ELCA seminarians to enroll into health coverage through Portico Benefit Services at an appropriate point of candidacy (e.g. at endorsement);

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

**D. To Commission an Adult Catechism
Metropolitan New York Synod (7C) [2013]**

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to request the Church Council to commission, through the appropriate channels with appropriate funding, the development of an Adult Catechism as a resource for the church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to request that this catechism be prepared as an educational resource to supplement Luther's Catechisms, not as a vehicle for establishing specific policies or norms within this church or for binding the consciences of its members; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan New York Synod memorialize the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to request that the Church Council invite full communion partner churches to participate in this project so that continued inter-church dialogue may be enriched and shared throughout the churches, and so that this church may further live out the promise of its partnerships; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this catechism take into account and reference the extensive bilateral ecumenical dialogues of the past 50 years.

[The Office of the Secretary determined that the Metropolitan New York Synod Assembly memorial, "To Commission an Adult Catechism," is a resolution that more properly should have been submitted to the Synod Council for referral to the Church Council. The resolution will be transmitted, as attached, to the Church Council through its Executive Committee.]

Executive Committee Action [EC13.07.21b]:

To receive the resolution of the Metropolitan New York Synod regarding To Commission an Adult Catechism;

To refer the resolution to the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit in consultation with Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Conference of Bishops; and

To request that a report with possible recommendations be brought to the November 2013 Church Council meeting.

Response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit (November 2013)

In conversations with other churchwide staff, we recommend that this resolution be reassigned to the Office of the Presiding Bishop. The staff in that office is primarily responsible for theological discernment, 500th anniversary work, and has direct contact with our full communion partners. It is in a better position to review the various aspects of the resolution recommended by the Metropolitan New York Synod.

In reassigning this resolution, we further recommend additional time is granted so that the Office of the Presiding Bishop can consult with colleagues in our unit as well as with the Conference of Bishops and Augsburg Fortress.

Church Council Action [CC13.11.69d]:

To receive the response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;

To refer the resolution to the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, Augsburg Fortress, and the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;

To request that a report with possible recommendations be brought by the April 2014 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

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

Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop (April 2014)

Consideration of the proposed project has focused on the purpose, scope, outcomes, feasibility, and partners. Initial conversations about developing resources for the renewal of faith formation have taken place with Beth Lewis and Martin Seltz of Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, and follow-up conversation is needed. The development of new resources for renewal of faith formation is also an initiative under consideration for the ELCA's observance of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, and the possibility of connecting this request with that initiative will be considered in the coming months. Theological conversations based on Luther's Small and Large Catechisms taking place among churchwide staff this spring will contribute to the consideration of the purpose, scope, and outcomes of this proposed project.

In short, consideration of the request has begun and is continuing. However, at this time there are no recommendations for Church Council action.

Church Council Action:

To receive the response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop and to thank the Metropolitan New York Synod for its resolution on Adult Catechism;

To encourage the Office of the Presiding Bishop to continue in its conversations regarding the development of resources for the renewal of faith formation; and

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

II. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY ACTIONS

The Report of the Memorials Committee to the 2013 Churchwide Assembly includes the full text of the synodical memorials to that assembly under the categories given below.

A. 2013 Category C1: Israel and Palestine

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA13.06.25]:

To receive with gratitude the memorials of the Southwestern Texas, Saint Paul Area, Rocky Mountain, Southeast Michigan, Oregon, Sierra Pacific, Northwest Washington, Greater Milwaukee, Southwest California, Southeastern Iowa, New England Northeastern Pennsylvania, Indiana/Kentucky, Lower Susquehanna, Upper Susquehanna and Metropolitan Washington, D.C., synods related to Peacemaking with Justice in Israel and Palestine;

To reaffirm the commitment of this church to:

1. Continue its awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;
2. Learn more about the experiences of both Israelis and Palestinians and their mutual fears, aspirations, and hopes;
3. Work to convey the concerns and perspectives of Palestinians and Israelis that dispel stereotypes and caricatures and promote better understanding;
4. Lift up the voices within both communities, especially those of victims of violence, that seek peace with justice through nonviolent responses to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict;
5. Continue to help alleviate the humanitarian needs of all of those affected by the conflict;
6. Support U.S. funding that promotes peace and cooperation for all parties to the conflict; and
7. Continue to pray for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land;

To reaffirm the 2011 Churchwide Assembly action [CA 11.04.27] “to commend the policy, ‘ELCA Economic Social Criteria Investment Screens,’ to the members, congregations, synods, and agencies of this church; and to decline to undertake a review of the investment of funds managed within the ELCA but to commend these recommendations to the Office of the Treasurer, the Office of the Secretary, the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, and the ELCA Board of Pensions for consideration;”

To refer to the Global Mission unit, the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, the Mission Advancement unit, the Office of the Secretary, the Office of the Treasurer, and Portico Benefit Services the matter of evaluating possibilities for investing in specific Palestinian economic endeavors and other projects that would promote peace and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians; and to provide a report with recommendations to the April 2014 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from Global Mission unit (April 2014)

At this time, our progress report is that conversations are ongoing with the various churchwide units as well as Portico Benefit Services. We would appreciate the opportunity to make a fuller report, including a comprehensive strategy, to a subsequent meeting of the Church Council.

Church Council Action:

To receive the response from Global Mission and to grant an extension for a final report and possible recommendations; and

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

B. 2013 Category A2: Uniting American Families Act

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA13.03.07b]:

To receive with gratitude the memorials of the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana, Eastern Washington-Idaho, South-Central Synod of Wisconsin, Southwestern Texas, Saint Paul Area, Oregon, Florida-Bahamas, Sierra Pacific, Northwest Washington, Southwest California, Minneapolis Area, Central States, Metropolitan New York, Northwestern Minnesota, Upstate New York, Northeastern Pennsylvania, Southwestern Pennsylvania, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., and Indiana-Kentucky synods related to the Uniting American Families Act;

To affirm the Uniting American Families Act or its equivalent in the Congress of the United States;

To request the presiding bishop of this church to communicate to the president and members of Congress the action of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly; and

To encourage rostered leaders and members of congregations in this church, if consistent with their individual bound consciences, to support the Uniting American Families Act, or its equivalent, to their elected representatives and encourage them to co-sponsor and to support a just, comprehensive reform of U. S. immigration law that includes the principles of the Uniting American Families Act.

Church Council Action [CC13.11.69g]:

To request the Office of the Presiding Bishop, in consultation with the Congregational and Synodical Mission Unit, to bring a report on its activities related to Uniting American Families Act by the April 2014 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from Office of the Presiding Bishop (April 2014)

In June, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) made the historic decision to repeal Section 3 of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). Prior to the court ruling, DOMA had required the federal government to deny legal marriage status to same-sex couples and prevented those couples from accessing federal benefits designed to aid married couples, which, before the SCOTUS decision, defined marriage as a union between one man and one woman.

The repeal of Section 3 is a victory for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) families and for equal treatment under the law. Among many policy implications, the repeal permits legally married LGBT U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents to sponsor their foreign-born spouses for green cards.

Prior to the SCOTUS ruling, the Uniting American Families Act (UAFAs) was introduced in the 111th Congress in an attempt to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act so that bi-national LGBT spouses could be united and live in the United States as a family. Because the U.S. Citizen and Immigration Services had incorporated Section 3's marriage definition into its administrative policies and practices, prior to this past June, LGBT individuals were not allowed to sponsor their foreign-born spouses. As a result, some LGBT spouses of U.S. Citizens were deported. Bi-national LGBT families were separated. The UAFAs amendment never made it past markup in the Senate.

With the Court's Section 3 decision, however, a UAFAs amendment is no longer necessary. The SCOTUS decision provides for equal treatment to same-sex bi-national couples under immigration law, which is under the federal government's purview. The repeal of Section 3 accomplishes much of what UAFAs set out to do: LGBT spouses who lived in fear of separation or were separated with no legal avenue to gain unification may finally get relief. Thanks to the Supreme Court's ruling, LGBT individuals can now sponsor their spouses for an immigration visa and their families no longer have to fear being torn apart.

In January 2014, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton sent letters to the members of the Senate who co-sponsored the original UAFAs legislation in the 111th Congress. Presiding Bishop Eaton thanked them for supporting the legislation and shared the action of the 2013 Churchwide Assembly about the principles of the UAFAs. She also shared the Churchwide Assembly action with President Barack Obama and thanked him for his comments on immigration reform in the State of the Union address. A special letter of thanks was communicated to Senator Patrick Leahy, who was the original drafter of the UAFAs legislation and introduced it on the Senate floor.

More work is still needed on the issue of immigration reform, and the letters stated that we encourage members of Congress and the President to continue to support a just, comprehensive reform of U.S. immigration law that includes the principles of the Uniting American Families Act.

Church Council Action:

- To receive the response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop;**
- To express appreciation for this church's ongoing work on the issue of immigration reform that includes the principles of the Uniting American Families Act; and**
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synods of this action.**

C. 2013 Category A3: Community Violence

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA13.06.24]:

To receive with gratitude the memorials of the Sierra Pacific and New Jersey synods concerning gun violence and the memorials of the Pacifica, Southwest California, New England and Metropolitan Washington, D.C., synods concerning confronting the culture of violence;

To reaffirm this church's commitment to addressing issues of violence through worship, education, service, advocacy, ongoing moral deliberation and the work called for in the 1993 Churchwide Assembly resolution, the 1994 social message on Community Violence and the 2013 Conference of Bishops' Pastoral letter on Violence;

To educate members of this church that more people die from suicide than from homicide in the United States and to lift up the ELCA social messages on suicide prevention, community violence, mental health, and to call upon congregations and synods to engage their members on ways to prevent suicide;

To refer the matter of evaluating the feasibility and advisability of developing additional investment screens and related recommendations to the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit with the request that it ask the Corporate Social Responsibility Team to provide a report with possible recommendations to the Church Council at its November 2013 meeting; and

To refer requests for education and resource development on issues of violence in society to the ELCA Church Council for appropriate action in keeping with the recommendations of the Addressing Social Concerns Review Task Force.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (November 2013)

Due to limited staffing capacity, the Congregational and Synodical Mission (CSM) unit was unable to adequately evaluate the feasibility and advisability of developing additional investment screens and related recommendations. CSM is requesting an extension to the April 2014 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

Church Council Action [CC13.11.69q]:

- To receive the response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;
- To postpone the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit response of the fourth resolve including possible recommendations to the April 2014 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (April 2014)

The Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) team is scheduled to review the weapons screen this year. This screen is based on the ELCA social statement, *For Peace in God's World*, and deals with indiscriminate weapons. The specifics around gun control do not, at this point in time, appear to fit the screen, but it will be brought up in the review.

The "Violence in Our World" issue paper was updated in November 2012 and approved at the Church Council. At this point in time, it deals with a variety of issues including policies and reports around gun violence (point 8). This past year CSR, in partnership with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Social Responsibility, addressed Starbucks and Amazon around gun issues and the Newtown situation. The CSR team will continue to follow this work in order to see if there are any places where the ELCA voice could join. This particular resolution and piece of work does not deal with limiting sales but does address issues like corporate policies around having weapons.

Based upon current ELCA social statements, ELCA teaching does not compel a gun screen. At this point in time, and in accordance with current ELCA teachings, there is insufficient basis for such a screen. Again, a handgun screen is not feasible on the basis of the ELCA's existing teaching and policy. There is no textual passage or specific set of signals that could be summarized to support such a screen. *For Peace in God's World* is the basis of the weapons screen, but it never mentions handguns, suicide, or community violence.

The message on community violence puts the ELCA on record favoring gun control as a matter of advocacy, but it also places the questions on a more deliberative note under “ongoing deliberation.”

The social policy resolution, Community Violence—Gun Control [CA93.06.10], lists passage of strict enforcement of current legislation but is absolutely silent on investments or many other aspects of the “gun” debate in society. While the ELCA’s approach may be summarized as a strong gun legislative/management approach, at no point does it reject ownership as inherently wrong, or even call for the reduction of the production, sale, or distribution of guns.

On the broader topic of community violence and educational resources available to ELCA members on the topics of suicide and violence prevention, the ELCA has the following:

- Lutheran Suicide Prevention Ministry: www.elcaspm.org
- The Congregational Study Leader’s Guide for Disability Ministry/Mental Health: <http://www.elca.org/resources/disability%20ministry>
- “The Body Of Christ and Mental Illness”: <http://www.elca.org/resources/~link.aspx?id=12187B025F3E4CBD90AD6CD1A1AF477C&z=z>

Other educational resources produced by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, on the topic of Community Violence include:

- Walking Jesus’ Path of Peace-Living Faithfully in a Violent World (10/23/2001)
- Intersections, Peace: Christians Living in a Violent World (4/1/1995)
- Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way by Walter Wink (4/1/2003)
- The Way of Peace: Christian Life in the Face of Discord by Jim Childs (2008)

Church Council Action:

To receive the response of the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;

To commend the development of educational resources on issues of violence in society in order that this church may continue to foster moral deliberation on the issue of reducing gun violence and creating a culture of peace;

To decline to develop additional investment screens on the topic of handgun control; and

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

D. 2011 Category D2: Sacramental Obedience in Holy Communion

Upper Susquehanna Synod (8E) [2010]

WHEREAS, our Lord said, “You are my friends if you do what I command you” (John 15:14); and

WHEREAS, St. Paul indicated an enduring tradition when he repeated the Lord’s command: “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, [gave] thanks...broke it and said ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-24); and

WHEREAS, Christ established a covenantal relationship in this sacrament when he said, “. . . for this is the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many . . .” (Matthew 26:28), and as children of God we have a duty and delight to obey his will: “Take, eat; this is my body. . . . Drink from it, all of you” (Matthew 26:26-27); and

WHEREAS, our Lord warned us, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53); and

WHEREAS, the Augsburg Confession claimed, “Our churches are falsely accused of abolishing the Mass. In fact, the Mass is retained among us and is celebrated with the greatest reverence” (CA XXIV, 1); and “. . . one common Mass is held on every holy day, and it is administered on other days if there are those who desire it. . . . Chrysostom says that the priest stands daily at the altar, inviting some to Communion and keeping others away” (CA XXIV, 34, 36); and

WHEREAS, Martin Luther in the Large Catechism observed, “. . . we go to the sacrament because there we receive a great treasure . . . as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened” (LC V, 22, 24), “. . . those who want to be Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed sacrament frequently” (LC V, 39), “. . . no one under any circumstances should be forced or coerced. . . . Nevertheless, it must be understood that such people who abstain and absent themselves from the sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians” (LC V, 42), “As in other matters . . . there must also be daily exhortation, so that on this subject we must be persistent in preaching” (LC V, 44), “What should move and induce you is that he [Christ] desires it, and it pleases him” (LC V, 52), “For if you wait until you are rid of your burden in order to come to the sacrament purely and worthily, you will have to stay away from it forever” (LC V, 73); and

WHEREAS, our congregational constitutions call the Augsburg Confession “a true witness to the Gospel” (*C2.05.), accept the other confessional writings including the Large Catechism as “further valid interpretations of the faith of the Church” (*C2.06.), and

state that the congregation “accepts the canonical Scriptures of Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God and the authoritative source and norm of its proclamation, faith, and life” (*C2.03.); and

WHEREAS, the Apology of the Augsburg Confession professed, “Among us the Mass is celebrated every Lord’s day and on other festivals” (Ap XXIV, 1), and all Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) congregations by ratifying the ELCA model constitution for congregations have already accepted their responsibility to defend and implement the practice of celebrating the Eucharist weekly; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that, in obedience to the unquestionable command of Christ and in concord with this church’s Confessions and constitutions, the Upper Susquehanna Synod in annual assembly memorialize the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) in its next biennial assembly to embrace this Gospel treasure with joy; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod in annual assembly memorialize the ELCA in its next biennial assembly to recognize that this is a divine mandate and not a human agenda, and is already firmly established in Scripture, confessional documents, and constitutions of this church; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod in annual assembly memorialize the ELCA in its next biennial assembly to devise and implement a plan to encourage all of the congregations of the ELCA to exhort one another to obedience to Christ’s command to the desirable end that all congregations share in the Holy Communion weekly by Reformation Sunday in 2012.

Background and response from the Office of the Presiding Bishop Theological Discernment Team

The Use of the Means of Grace: A Statement on the Practice of Word and Sacrament, adopted by the 1997 Churchwide Assembly, affirms the Scriptures and Lutheran confessional writings, which teach that Holy Communion is a great treasure, a gift of grace from God to be received by Christians joyfully, thankfully, and frequently. “At the table of our Lord Jesus Christ, God nourishes faith, forgives sin, and calls us to be witnesses to the Gospel” (Principle 31; p. 36). “According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival. This confession remains the norm for our practice” (Principle 35; p. 39). The encouragement to celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly (Principle 35B) is rooted in “Christ’s command, his promise, and our deep need” (Principle 35A, quoting *A Statement on Communion Practices*, adopted by the 1989 ELCA Churchwide Assembly).

Nonetheless, weekly observance of the Lord’s Table as the primary worship service of the congregation or local assembly has not been a uniform practice throughout the ELCA. In some remote locations or in places where there is no resident ordained minister, a Sunday service of Holy Communion every week is not yet or no longer feasible. Moreover, while circumstances have changed for other Lutheran worshipping communities, the community’s practice of less frequent observance was established already and has become the tradition in that community. Some congregations have a living memory of changing from *quarterly* celebration of Holy Communion to their current practice of monthly celebration.

For these reasons and others, weekly observance of Holy Communion, including both Word and Sacrament, as the central worship service in all congregations remains a goal that calls for renewed attention throughout the ELCA. Gracious invitation and encouragement to individuals and congregations to make full use of means of grace is one part of the needed attention. Policies and procedures that promote the availability of ordained ministers and lay presiders in all locations are another factor that may affect the feasibility of weekly observance in some congregations. Toward this end, an arbitrary deadline is less likely to be helpful than clear authorization and support for the actions needed to make weekly observance both feasible and graciously inviting for all in every place.

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA11.03.06f]:

To receive with gratitude the memorial of the Upper Susquehanna Synod concerning Holy Communion and to affirm its commendation of faithful and joyful reception of this sacrament; and

To refer the memorial to the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit in consultation with the Conference of Bishops for consideration of actions that will promote more frequent reception of Holy Communion by ELCA members and weekly observance of Holy Communion as the primary worship service of each ELCA congregation.

Church Council Action [CC.11.11.83h]:

To request that the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops, present to the spring 2013 Church Council meeting a report and possible recommendations concerning its activities related to Memorial Category D2: Holy Communion.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (April 2013)

The Congregational and Synodical Mission unit is requesting an extension to our response to this Church Council motion until November 2013. This extension would offer time to facilitate discussion about the proposal in the memorial with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Conference of Bishops.

Church Council Action [CC13.04.27i]:

- To receive the response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;
- To authorize a delay in the response of the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to the memorial on Sacramental Obedience in Holy Communion;
- To request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the November 2013 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (November 2013)

Due to unforeseen circumstances and limited staffing capacity, the Congregational and Synodical Mission (CSM) unit was unable to facilitate a discussion by the requested deadline. In addition, at the 2013 Churchwide Assembly another memorial was received referencing the Sacrament of Holy Communion. This memorial was also directed to CSM for a response and possible recommendations.

Therefore, CSM needs additional time to consult with the Conference of Bishops and the Office of the Presiding Bishop and requests an extension to the April 2014 Church Council meeting to appropriately address the memorial.

Church Council Action [CC13.11.69p]:

- To receive the response from the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit;
- To postpone the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit report with possible recommendations to the April 2014 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission (April 2014)

The blessings and benefits of weekly celebration of Holy Communion are clear in our theology and practice. As noted in the resolution and various responses above, it is the position of this church that weekly Holy Communion be practiced in this church. It is also noted that this is not always possible for a variety of reasons.

The resolution calls for the development of a plan. There are already plans in the works for the encouragement of weekly celebrations of Holy Communion. The Worship Jubilee 2015 will encourage this practice. The planning for the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation will also raise this issue. *The Use of the Means of Grace* statement of this church states, "According to the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Lutheran congregations celebrate the Holy Communion every Sunday and festival. This confession remains the norm of our practice."

Church Council Action:

- To receive with gratitude the memorial of the Upper Susquehanna Synod concerning Holy Communion and to affirm its commendation of faithful and joyful reception of this sacrament;**
- To affirm the projects underway that will lift up this normative practice;**
- To decline to develop additional plans beyond those in process; and**
- To request that the secretary of this church inform the synod of this action.**

E. 2013 Category D1: Communion Practices

Northern Illinois Synod (5B) [2012 Memorial]

WHEREAS, *The Use of the Means of Grace* (1997), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's (ELCA) guiding document on the "Practice of Word and Sacrament," clearly states that "The Holy Communion is given to the baptized" (Principle 37, pp. 41-42); and

WHEREAS, since the publication of that document the ELCA has entered into full-communion partnerships with church bodies that do not share that same understanding; and

WHEREAS, the implementing resolutions of our full-communion agreements encourage us to extend sacramental hospitality to one another's members; and

WHEREAS, some congregations of the ELCA currently have Communion policy statements which would effectively bar members of church bodies with which we are in full communion from participation in the Sacrament; and

WHEREAS, some ELCA congregations welcome everyone present to partake of the Eucharist without stipulating the need for Baptism; and

WHEREAS, clarification concerning Lutheran Sacramental theology and practice would be helpful in the life of this church at this time; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Northern Illinois Synod memorialize the 2013 Churchwide Assembly to institute a process necessary to review and possibly revise the ELCA's guiding documents concerning admission to the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Churchwide Assembly Action [CA13.03.10]:

To receive with gratitude the memorial of the Northern Illinois Synod requesting a process to review the ELCA's guiding documents on communion practices;

To invite members, congregations, synods and the churchwide organization into conversation and study regarding the Use of the Means of Grace;

To request the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit, in consultation with the Office of the Presiding Bishop and the Conference of Bishops, to establish a process to review current documents concerning administration of the Sacrament of Holy Communion; and

To request the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to bring a report and possible recommendations to the April 2014 meeting of the ELCA Church Council.

Response from Congregational and Synodical Mission unit (April 2014)

It is important to note that this entire church has been invited to encourage and invite one another into conversation and study regarding *The Use of the Means of Grace*. The invitation is both important and timely. A review of sacramental practices related to Holy Communion depends on a broad and deep understanding of this church's teaching, in order to address the question of whether changing sacramental practices that are emerging in local settings merit reconsideration of ELCA policy/guidance documents.

A renewed conversation about who is or should be welcome at the Lord's Table has been underway for several years, with scholars and local practitioners from various Christian traditions weighing in. Whether bishop or local pastor, teaching theologian or lay leader, the arguments for more latitude in welcoming the unbaptized to the sacrament of the altar are grounded in a deep desire for broader inclusion that seeks to serve the mission of Christ's church. Some describe it as an exercise in "Eucharistic Hospitality."

Consultations with synod bishops, teaching theologians, and other leaders throughout this church affirm that changing contexts are influencing changes in practice. Further research is required to confirm the anecdotal assessment that more often than not, invitations to the meal of Holy Communion include an indication that this sacrament is for the baptized. Still, it is evident that the link between Holy Baptism and the Eucharist is frequently unstated and that the invitation to the table is increasingly more "open."

To be sure, circumstances are changing and local practices are often removed from the guidance that this church has adopted and provides. But the question is more complex than whether or not all people who are welcome in the assembly are welcome to participate in all of what the assembly does. *The Use of the Means of Grace* itself makes the argument that sacramental practices as described therein are of and for the sake God's mission.

Just as changing contexts influence changes in practice, they also reveal a growing need for catechesis. Most broadly, there is the need to explore the renewing aspects and essence of worship, together with what it means to confess and teach that the church is "the assembly of believers gathered" around the means of grace. There is a particular and pronounced need to rediscover and articulate the relationship between Baptism, Eucharist, and how they are bound up in the ways we teach, learn, and experience our individual and communal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

It is also important to attend to what is happening within and among our ecumenical counterparts, especially our full communion partners. The insights and practices of others related to the sacrament of the altar, while not determinative, are important to our consideration of open questions about our own practices.

Church Council Action:

To take seriously the invitation to engage one another in conversation and study of *The Use of the Means of Grace*;

To request the Congregational and Synodical Mission unit to provide resources that will help facilitate that conversation;

To encourage others to develop and share resources more locally, while guiding people to *The Use of the Means of Grace* with the invitation to read and share it;

To let the conversation regarding *The Use of the Means of Grace* serve as the initial step in a process of review, but to delay any further development or implementation of a process until research is done to assess the nature and extent of changing practices, and until a director for worship formation and liturgical resources at the ELCA churchwide organization is in place and prepared to oversee the design of such a process, both in scope and hoped-for outcomes; and

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

What is Faith Formation in a Missional Age? a conversation starter

By Terri Elton
Luther Seminary

Faith is a gift from God, a gift which informs, forms and transforms. Faith is a given and an unfolding mystery, a foundation and something to be nurtured, about salvation and life in this world, is personal and communal. As 1 Corinthians 13:13¹ reminds us, faith is a dynamic, multi-faceted reality which is not fully understood this side of heaven yet guides a Christian's life on earth.

Christians live in the world, a world where God's kingdom is unfolding, but not fully realized. In this now and not yet reality, God's people are offered an eternal relationship with the Creator and promised salvation, while remaining within a sinful world. God is present in this world and freely offers faith to all people. In this way, Christians are passive in faith. Yet faith is more than passive reception. Faith is stirred within as it also summons response. In this way, Christians are active in faith. Through faith God's people join God's work in the world as they participate in God's ongoing creative and redemptive mission. This work includes fostering faith or equipping "people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature." (Ephesians 4:12-13)

But what does this mean?

Several things can be said about the Christian faith. For our purposes, three key ideas will be lifted up.

- 1. Christianity is an embodied faith**, a lived faith. Faith inhabits human beings who live in the world God created. This reality is most evident in the incarnation – in God coming to earth in the person of Jesus. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection, God's love and promises broke into the world *in the flesh*. Jesus' life centered on sharing God's love, inviting people into a relationship with God and announcing the kingdom of God was near. Today the church, the body of Christ post-resurrection, is commanded to continue proclaiming and embodying God's love and promises, making God's people God's hands and feet. The church is the sign, foretaste and instrument of God's love in the world.
- 2. Our life and identity as Christians is rooted in faith in God.** Faith summons people to see themselves as subjects of God's love; faith invites people into a two-way relationship with God; and faith informs the way Christian's live. Faith, at its core, is a relationship, born out of love and offered as a gift to all. This relationship gives Christians their identity as children of God and orients their life by placing it in God's hands, not the world's. Yet faith does more than inform Christian identity, it also forms and transforms life. Faith calls people to not only love themselves, but also to love and serve their neighbor. A life of faith draws people outside themselves and into the world. Hence, faith is a communal venture, as it is also personal. This

¹ "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I share know fully, even as I am fully know."

reality comforts as well as challenges. Faith matters for Christians as it's a given, providing identity, and a dynamic relationship, guiding and sending people into the world.

- 3. Christian's embodied faith exists in the midst of a broken world.** Pain and suffering are present realities, yet people of faith see beyond the present, informed by a different story. As God's people rest in their identity in God, not the promises of the world, they provide hope. As signs and instruments of God's love, God's people witness in a broken world as they proclaim the gospel and serve others. The church, as a living community, is called to translate the good news of God's love to every generation in every era. Being God's people in a broken world means telling God's story, again and again in new and different ways. Being the church requires connecting *current* experiences to the larger story of God's people across time and place. Being the church involves God's people gathered in Christian practices holding their identity in Christ. And being the church includes God's people scattered in the world, putting God's creative and redemptive love into action.

The World we Find Ourselves in

The church has always had a **call to the world** – to love one's neighbor and make disciples of all nations. Being a church sent into the world means cultivating Christian community along with engaging culture. This multi-faceted posture requires *both* knowing the Christian story and participating in Christian practices, *as well as* being in, for, with and against the world. The early church did this work primarily outside the host culture and the mainstream of religion or politics. But in the fourth century, when Constantine the Great was converted to Christianity, the Christian church began experiencing a shift, moving from being a sect (or minority) religion to being a state/national (or majority) religion. In the centuries that followed,² religious and political leaders often worked together, intertwining spiritual and civic matters. While there were benefits to this relationship, there were also many liabilities. One liability was blurring the lines between the work of government and religion. As the church operated from a majority position, it became accustom to engaging the world with certain "privileges." These "privileges" included support, resources and power. Within the Western church, this reality of Christianity being aligned with the host culture is referred to as Christendom. In Christendom, the church's call to the world relied heavily on institutional structure, organizational mechanisms and specialized leadership.

While the United States was founded on the separation of church and state it has operated in a *de facto* Christendom environment, with Christian ideals occupying a majority view. This reality resulted in the church being accustom to the host culture being ripe for fostering a Christian way of life, at least until the past 50 years. As the United States has continued welcoming diverse groups of people, it has had the opportunity to exercise its commitments to religious freedom. As a result, the United States has experienced a growing religious pluralism. In this environment the Christian church has been forced to reexamine its relationship with the host culture. Accustom to working *with* the host culture, overlapping language, life patterns and values, the Christian church is now discovering it is no longer in the center,

² It is noted this story is not descriptive of all areas of the world. This story describes the orientation of Western Christianity.

aligned with the dominant power and supported by civil society. This shift, subtle in some areas and abrupt in others, has created an opportunity within the church to rediscovering its identity and mission practices.³ The call of the church to love God and one's neighbor plays out differently outside the center, without the resources of the host culture. Today society does not necessarily aspire to biblical values. Life patterns which reinforce a Christian lifestyle can no longer be assumed within school systems or the business world. And the language of faith, once understood in congregations and civil society, is now foreign to many. This is the missional era in which Christians live. Being a church sent into the world without the infrastructure of the host culture and with diminishing institutional support requires rethinking the church's posture toward the world, revisiting the role of faith communities and being open to learning new skills which help people discover a Christian way of life.⁴ So, **while the work of the church today is the same, the relationship with the host culture has changed, causing the church to reimagine its work.**

What is faith formation in a missional era?

In its history, the church has had to rediscover its sent nature and mission practices many times. Today is one such time. The activities associated with the sent character of the church, once charged to a specialized group of people, have reemerged as a call for all of God's people and this call is being lived out within an environment where the Christian faith is less prominent. Yet the deep questions humans have about life have not gone away. At work, in school and in neighborhoods people struggle to find meaning and identity in a broken world; pain and despair are wide spread and people long for hope and healing. Such moments not only highlight the missional reality in our midst, but also the opportunity for people of faith to witness to God's love. God's people are present in such moments every day. Yet how is faith informing and transforming these times? And, on a larger scale, how might Christians witness to God's love and promise in this missional era?

³ John Roberto, in *Faith Formation 2020*, identifies eight driving forces which are impacting the church and faith formation. These forces are: declining number of Christians and a growing number of people who identify with "no religious affiliation," increasing number people who identify as of "spiritual" but not "religious," decreasing number of people participating in Christian churches, increasing diversity and pluralism in the United States, increasing impact of individualism of Christian identity and community participation, changing marriage and family life patterns, declining socialization of family religiosity, and increasing impact of technology and digital media. For more, see *Faith Formation 2020*, Appendix, 26-39.

⁴ Anthony Robinson sums up the effects of Christendom with six shifts: "1. *Conversion* and *formation* declined because a person was Christian by virtue of citizenship, birth, and residence. This meant that the Christian faith was a social given rather than a choice or conscious commitment. 2. Christianity no longer found its primary embodiment in *congregations*, but in *territories* and *nations*. 3. *Mission* was not an inherent characteristic of every congregation that belonged to all its members; rather, mission was something done by specially designated 'missionaries' in territories or nations that were not Christian. 4. The *purpose* of a church was to provide religious services to a particular local population. 5. The ministry of the church increasingly was performed by and belonged to *religious professionals*, whose roles was in many ways comparable to that of civil servants or government officials. 6. *Society* (or culture) and *faith* (Christianity) overlapped to such an extent that being a good Christian and being a good citizen were equivalent, and each defined the other." Anthony Robinson, *Changing the Conversation: a third way for congregations*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008, 21. For more on this topic I comment this book and his ten conversations.

Today the work of translating the good news of God's love *is* located in the hands of all Christians. This is part of what it means to be church today. And this is an asset in a missional era. But what does it mean for the church to be the body of Christ not only when it is gathered, but also when it is scattered? As the church lives into its minority position, the practices which help Christians hold their unique Christian identity need to be revisited and refreshed, as do the skills and aptitudes needed to live a Christian life.

Faith formation in a missional age will be both similar and different to faith formation in other eras. Discovering what stays the same and what needs to be reinvented requires the whole body of Christ to return to the basics *and* engage in experiments; it will require risk and discernment. As the church lives into this time, two basics will be critical: *revisiting our view of faith* and *exploring what it means to be a gathered and sent people*.

1. Revisiting our view of Faith.

Faith is a gift, a relationship with God, which informs, forms and transforms. Faith is about salvation, or life after death, as it is also about life on earth. Hence, faith formation in a missional age begins by revisiting our view of faith. Faith, for Lutherans, is robust and dynamic and has at least four dimensions.⁵

- Faith as **a gift**. As has already been established, faith is a gift from God, a gift which saves and provides identity. Martin Luther wrestled with this issue, reminding himself and generations to come that Christians are justified by faith alone. There is nothing humans can do to earn this gift! Salvation is ours. This dimension of faith secures the future, while it also informs and forms the present. For Christians, faith creates a hybrid identity. In Lutheran terms this hybrid identity is known as being paradoxically saint and sinner. Christians humbly accept this gift of faith from God, while continuing to live as sinners. Receiving this gift names each human person child of God, and sets them on a journey of discovering a Christian way of life. Faith as a gift is simple and mysterious, unfolding over a lifetime.
- Faith **as compass**. Faith informs the Christian way of life. As faith is embodied, particular human experiences become the occasion for God's creative and redemptive love to be revealed in the world. In other words, faith is not just about salvation – or life after death, in heaven (eternal), but also about every day matters – or life on earth (temporal). Because faith is a relationship, not a set a rules, people of faith are constantly discerning what a Christian would say or do in any given situation. God's Word and Christian communities come alongside individual Christians, as current situations are put into conversation with particular understandings of God. Faith as compass is an internal *and* external activity; it's at work implicitly, as well as explicitly.
- Faith **as witness**. The Christian faith is a relational affair, always and only within community, with a public dimension. And Christian witness is part of a larger story, drawing from the past and extending into the future, while rooted in the present

⁵⁵ For more on this see, Mark Edwards, Jr. "Characteristically Lutheran Leanings?," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, Vol 41, No 1, Spring 2002.

moment. People of faith are the body of Christ in the world as they come together to be light in the darkness or share their faith one-on-one in the world. Christians witness to their relationship with God in many ways. This witness may include proclaiming God's Word, giving testimony to one's faith or putting faith into action through serving one's neighbor.

- Faith **as agent**. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, God's people are not only subjects of God's love, but agents as well. As faith informs, forms and transforms individuals and communities it evokes agency. Faith calls forth active engagement with the world, the world which God created. This world seeks rich, abundant life within its broken, sinful reality. God loves the world and people of faith in a relationship with God cannot help but get caught up in this love, turning their agency to the world. As people of faith, Christians are invited to join God in God's most precious mission – caring for the world. This mission is about fostering and sustaining life, as well as righting wrongs and reconciling brokenness.

2. Exploring what it means to be a gathered and sent people

Faith formation in a missional age also means exploring what it means to be a people gathered and sent. Living into and out of this *gathered and sent* rhythm is central for discovering a Christian way of life. Gathered God's people come to know God's story, engage in Christian practices, live in relationship with other people of faith and discover their identity as children of God. Yet God's people live most of their lives scattered in the world. And in the world God's people encounter others, with diverse stories, values and beliefs; in the world God's people see and experience injustice and pain, as they also have opportunities to nurture life and exercise agency. Attending to the rhythm of gathering and scattering is central for the church as it reimagines faith formation in a missional age. This pattern, more than any program or educational endeavor, provides the "curriculum" for faith formation. As the church attends to helping people discover a Christian way of life, gathered and sent, it will be faced with rethinking its posture toward the world, reimagining the role of faith communities and discovering new skills and aptitudes.

- **Posture toward the world** – While people of faith have always lived with a hybrid identity, living in a missional age means embracing our call *to be and live* as strangers and aliens, similar to our Old Testament ancestors. Christians live in this world, but are not defined by it. Richard Bliese suggests the missional posture of Christianity is being *in, with, for and against* the world.⁶ This posture requires Christians to live in the midst of multiple cultures, fostering their own way of life as they also learn to navigate and speak into other ways of life. Minimally, Christians must learn what it means to live Christian, as they are present in and engaged with the host (or dominate) culture. In reality, most people live within multiple, complex cultures. A missional posture sees the world as God's, but also see its sin and injustice. Being people of faith witnessing to God's creative and redemptive love in the

⁶ For more on this, see Richard Bliese, "The Mission Matrix," *Word & World*, Vol. 26, Summer 2006, 237-249.

- world means accompanying, as well as condemning; fostering, as well as reconciling. Living out this call from a minority position requires courage, humility and improvisation. Use the language of faith as an example. “Walter Brueggemann argues that the cultural conditions of postmodernity require the church to function as a bilingual community, conversant in both the traditions of the church and the narratives of the dominant culture.”⁷ Translating the gospel across languages is more than finding the right words; good translation requires a broad understanding of many cultural dynamics. Cultural intelligence, therefore, is critical for Christians as they navigate the dominant culture, as well as various subcultures, inviting conversations among and between cultures.⁸ As faith is lived, embodied in humans and established as a way of life, doctrine and rituals take on flesh and become a public witness.
- **Reimagining the role of faith communities** – As Christianity recognizes its minority status, the importance of dynamic faith communities, which collectively embody a Christian way of life, is heightened. Christian communities, places where people can learn the language and practices of faith, are vital for Christian identity to be discovered and fostered. Kenda Creasy Dean notes that Christians have a peculiar God-Story to claim,⁹ and without vibrant communities faith this story does not become generative and bear witness in the world. Lesslie Newbigin says the congregation is a *hermeneutic of the gospel* – the place where everyday people live into and out of the radical promises of the gospel in a broken world.¹⁰ This public communal witness is critical for the on-going sustaining life of the church. Seeing and participating in living communities make the gospel promises possible. Vibrant communities of faith exercise their agency by being in, with, for and against the world. People, not programs, are central in these communities, for they are the best translators of the gospel. And congregations which invoke their missional imagination are best suited for bearing witness to God’s radical love.¹¹
 - **Discovering new skills and aptitudes** - As Christians live as aliens and strangers, navigating multiple cultures and translating the gospel in word and deed, they discover new skills and aptitudes are needed. Living Christian, when the host culture and the lived faith community are not aligned, is complicated and can be difficult. Once Christians discussed current issues within an environment where Christian values were shared. Now not only are Christian values not shared in much of society, but many do not even know, or care about, the

⁷ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, 112.

⁸ “Brueggemann maintains that taking part in both conversations is crucial for people of faith, and Christian formation must result in a bilingual consciousness.” Ibid., 113.

⁹ Ibid., part 2.

¹⁰ “I confess that I have come to feel that the primary reality of which we have to take account in seeking for a Christian impact on public life is the Christian congregation. How is it possible that the gospel should be credible, that people should come to believe that the power which has the last word in human affairs is represented by a man hanging on a cross? I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it.” Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989, 227. He goes on to name 6 characteristics of such communities: community of praise, community of truth, community concerned for its neighborhood, community that prepares and exercises the priesthood in the world, community of mutual responsibility, and community of hope. (227-233)

¹¹ For more see Dean, *Almost Christian*.

Christian story. Hence engaging in conversation about faith requires the ability for all Christians to be able to share the Christian story in the language of the people, as they also stand up for their beliefs. These circumstances require not only knowing the story, but also the ability to tell the story in one's own words. In the past, faith formation was primarily as an intellectual endeavor, providing education for the practices and relationships already in existence. Today faith formation includes creating and tending relationships, inviting and accompanying people in learning the Christian story and being able to share this story with others, especially those of other religions and religious traditions. Faith formation is teaching Christian faith traditions, but it also entails helping people explore other faith traditions. It is messy and mysterious, as it is wonderful and surprising.

Where do we go from here? And what does this mean for ministry with children, youth, young adults and their families?

Faith formation has not looked the same throughout the history of the Christian church. In the church's recent history within the United States, congregations have relied heavily on shared methods or models, i.e. Sunday School or confirmation. While these methods and models have morphed over time, responding to and adapting to cultural needs, this approach to faith formation is no longer sufficient. Radical shifts need to take place. Faith formation in a missional age will require much more contextualization and creativity. It may draw from the past, but the church must be willing to reimagine. As people of faith seek to discover God's activity in their midst and discern their place within it, risk and innovation will be critical. Such work will seek to extend old practices, as it also introduces new ones. Yes, some practices do transcend particular contextual experiences, but how they are embodied will vary. And, as in any time of major transition, there is a danger of too quickly transferring new discoveries into universal practices. This missional time needs experimenting, remembering, inviting and awakening. Drawing from the past, with an eye toward the future, faith formation in a missional age must be planted in the present circumstances. And current circumstances call for creativity and collaboration.

In the months and years ahead, congregational leaders attending to faith formation are invited into this holy and inventive time; a time to risk, experiment and learn. The church, at its best, will explore this work together, in various locations and with its best resources, and will share its learnings along the way.

As the ELCA seeks to faithfully attend to this question and this situation, the coming year has been dedicated to igniting a conversation. Will you join in the conversation? Will you be part of helping the church rediscover its identity and core work? Many leaders within the ELCA think this work is important and believe the future of the church depends on it. Not only that, but some of us believe the faith formation of children, youth, young adults and their families depend on it.¹² Trusting God is not only ahead of us, but also inviting us into a deeper conversation regarding faith formation for the sake of God's mission in the world, we move forward.

¹² If you are interested in the latest report on religious affiliation, especially among young adults, see the Pew Research Center Study, "'Nones' on the Rise: One-in-Five Adults Have No Religious Affiliation," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012. Available online at: www.pewforum.org accessed October 21, 2012.

As various networks within the ELCA explore faith formation in a missional age, a group has been formed to listen, collect and curate learnings. Over the next several months, three questions are of the most interest to this group. They are:

1. What **questions are most pressing** for you and the ministry you are leading as you attend to faith formation in this missional era?
2. What **faith formation experiments** have your faith community found to be the most fruitful? and what key discoveries have emerged from this experiment?
3. What **skills and abilities** are helping people discover a Christian way of life in this missional age?

And the leadership group is particularly interested in mining the works of various networks. So networks are invited to reflect and respond to the following questions:

1. As you experience the shifts taking place, what **challenges** are you experiencing regarding faith formation? And what **opportunities** or **invitations** do these challenges present?
2. What are some **innovative ways** your network is practicing faith formation? And how is the network supporting innovation in this time?
3. What **resources** do you or your network need to continue creating, expanding and learning from innovative opportunities for faith formation? And what might this mean for the church at-large?

As you have ideas around these questions, please share them via any of the communication channels listed below. Together, let us embrace our call as Christians, gathered and scattered, to bear witness to God's love in the world. And now may the God of abundant life empower and sustain us on this journey.