

April 19, 2007

TO: Bishops of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Secretaries of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Vice Presidents of synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Members of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Members of the Cabinet of Executives
Regional Coordinators

FROM: The Rev. Lowell G. Almen, secretary

SUBJECT: Report of Responses to Synodical Resolutions by the Church Council
(April 13-16, 2007)

I. RESPONSES TO SYNODICAL RESOLUTIONS

A. RULES FOR THE 2007 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY Metropolitan Chicago Synod (5A)

WHEREAS, the Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the highest legislative authority of this church and will next meet August 6-11, 2007, (ELCA constitutional provision 12.11.); and

WHEREAS, the Church Council of the ELCA is the interim legislative authority of this church and, as such, must act in accordance with the actions and policies of the Churchwide Assembly (ELCA 14.13.); and

WHEREAS, under the ELCA bylaws, the Church Council has authority to amend,¹ by a simple majority, “Definitions and Guidelines,”² “Vision and Expectations,”³ and the policy on reinstatement to the rosters of this church;⁴ and

WHEREAS, under the ELCA bylaws, the Churchwide Assembly does not itself have authority to amend these same policies but does have authority to direct the Church Council to amend them; and

WHEREAS, it does not seem appropriate that a greater majority should be required for the Churchwide Assembly to direct the Church Council to amend these policies when the Church Council can amend them on its own initiative by a

simple majority; and

WHEREAS, the Church Council will recommend rules for the 2007 Churchwide Assembly; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod Council recommends and requests that the ELCA Church Council not recommend any rule for the 2007 Churchwide Assembly that would require anything other than a simple majority for matters relating to the rostered service of persons in a committed same-gender relationship; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this recommendation and request does not apply to those matters that are specified by the ELCA constitution and bylaws themselves as requiring a two-thirds supermajority for adoption by the Churchwide Assembly; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the secretary of this synod transmit a copy of this resolution to the vice president of the ELCA (Mr. Carlos Peña), the secretary of the ELCA (Pr. Lowell Almen), and the chair of the Church Council’s Legal and Constitutional Review Committee (Pr. Kenneth Ruppard).

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the Metropolitan Chicago Synod;

To acknowledge that the recommendation of the Church Council to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America related to the “Rules of Organization and Procedure” will be the response of the Church Council to the resolution of the synod; and

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

¹ For this authority, see the minutes of the April 2005 ELCA Church Council meeting, p. 90, explanation by ELCA Secretary Lowell Almen.

² The legislative basis for “Definitions and Guidelines” is contained in ELCA bylaws 20.71.11. and 20.71.12.

³ The legislative basis for “Vision and Expectations” is contained in ELCA bylaws 7.31.11., 7.31.13., and 7.51.03.b.

⁴ The legislative basis for the policy on reinstatement is contained in ELCA bylaws 7.31.15. and 7.52.13.

**B. INTERPRETATION OF 1993
CONFERENCE OF BISHOPS STATEMENT
Allegheny Synod (8C)**

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at its 2005 Churchwide Assembly adopted the following [CA05.05.18]:

WHEREAS, this church holds that “marriage is a lifelong covenant of faithfulness between a man and a woman” (*Message on Sexuality: Some Common Convictions [1996]*, page 3); and

WHEREAS, the Conference of Bishops in October 1993 stated, “We, as the Conference of Bishops of the ELCA, recognize that there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship. We, therefore, do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of this church’s ministry. Nevertheless, we express trust in and will continue dialogue with those pastors and congregations who are in ministry with gay and lesbian persons, and affirm their desire to explore the best ways to provide pastoral care for all to whom they minister” (CB93.10.25); therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops; and be it further

RESOLVED, that this church welcome gay and lesbian persons into its life (as stated in Churchwide Assembly resolutions from 1991, 1995, and 1999), and trust pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care for all to whom they minister;

and

WHEREAS, the Synod Council of the New England Synod adopted “Guidelines for pastors and congregations of the New England Synod, regarding the blessing of unions of same-sex couples”; and

WHEREAS, ever since the adoption of Recommendation Two at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, there has been a lack of clarity in some quarters as to whether “pastoral care” means the approval of the blessing of same-sex unions; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Allegheny Synod Council request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide an interpretation of the action passed by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.

Background:

The request contained in the Allegheny Synod Council resolution has been raised previously. At its July 2005 meeting, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council approved the following resolution, which requested that the Church Council consider clarification of its Recommendation for Assembly Action related to Recommendation Two of the ELCA Studies on Sexuality:

WHEREAS, there is a wide variety of interpretation and widespread confusion about the intent of the Church Council’s Recommendation Two on the ELCA Studies on Sexuality; and

WHEREAS, memorials to the Churchwide

Assembly in response to Recommendation Two range in understanding all the way from saying that it will establish policy that does not support the blessing of same-sex couples to making the blessing of same-sex couples a matter of discernment entrusted to pastors and congregations; and

WHEREAS, Recommendation Two of the Church Council resolves to continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops and also reminds this church of our actions to welcome gay and lesbian persons into our life and to “trust pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples”; and

WHEREAS, there is no definition provided for what pastoral care means concerning same-gender relationships and if the blessing of same-sex couples is precluded or provided for within this pastoral care; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Synod Council of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America at its pre-assembly meeting in August 2005 provide clarifying information about the intention of Recommendation Two and provide interpretation to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly voting members about what is being considered so that they will have clarity about the recommendation prior to discussion, consideration, and action.

Following discussion, the Church Council at its August 2005 meeting voted [CC05.08.48]:

To receive the resolution of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod Council requesting further clarification about the intention of Recommendation Two related to the ELCA Studies on Sexuality;

To acknowledge with gratitude that the extensive dialogue and discernment within the Church Council has been echoed within the Conference of Bishops and the congregations and synods of this church and to anticipate that the dialogue and discernment will continue through the deliberations of the 2005 Churchwide Assembly;

To express concern that additional information provided by the Church Council in response to the request of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod may further complicate rather than clarify the information prepared by the Church Council, which has been widely distributed and discussed throughout this church; and

To express trust and confidence in the voting members of the 2005 Churchwide Assembly and to anticipate that their ongoing dialogue and discernment will establish the

clarity sought by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly discussed Recommendation Two extensively. A number of attempts to amend the recommendation were made, some of which would have provided the clarity desired. The assembly defeated the following proposed substitution: "It shall be the policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that for the sake of ministry and mission a congregation may choose to authorize its pastor(s) to preside at services of blessing for persons in covenanted same-gender relationships."

It also defeated the following substitute motion:

WHEREAS, the Conference of Bishops issued a statement in 1993 acknowledging "that there is basis neither in Scripture nor tradition for the establishment of an official ceremony by this church for the blessing of a homosexual relationship"; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly urge all congregations to welcome everyone in the life of its congregations regardless of their sexual self-identity; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly believe the solemnizing and blessing of sexual unions is a rite of the church to be reserved for the marriage of a man and a woman.

It defeated as well the following proposed amendment [changes underlined]: "RESOLVED, that this church welcome gay and lesbian persons into its life (as stated in Churchwide Assembly resolutions from 1991, 1995, and 1999) and trust pastors and congregations to discern ways other than the blessing of unions to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples."

It also defeated the following proposed amendment [changes underlined]: "RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops, which is received as a statement of advice to congregations and pastors, and therefore shall not be used as grounds for discipline in this church;" [the rest of the recommendation remains unchanged].

It approved a proposed substitution, which returned Recommendation Two to the original language of the Conference of Bishops' statement: "RESOLVED, that this church welcome gay and lesbian persons into its life (as stated in Churchwide Assembly resolutions from 1991, 1995, and 1999) and trust pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples for all to whom they minister."

It is clear, then, that the 2005 Churchwide Assembly declined to provide through amendment of the recommendation any interpretation or clarification of Recommendation Two. It would be inappropriate for the

Church Council to do what the assembly itself declined to do.

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the Allegheny Synod Council;

To indicate that, in response to previous requests, the Conference of Bishops, the Church Council, and the Churchwide Assembly have declined to interpret further the 1993 statement of the Conference of Bishops or the action of the 2005 Churchwide Assembly; and

To request that the secretary provide the background information (above) as the response of the Church Council to the resolution.

C. SEXUALITY TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION THREE

Southeast Michigan Synod (6A)

RESOLVED, that the Southeast Michigan Synod Council request that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America recommend to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly that the third recommendation of the Task Force for the ELCA Studies on Sexuality, as presented to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, be placed on the agenda of the 2007 Churchwide Assembly and adopted.

The recommendation reads as follows:

WHEREAS, within this church we continue to share a profound commitment to the authority of Scripture as the norm for faith and life;

WHEREAS, we recognize there are deeply held yet different interpretations of Scripture to which consciences are bound;

WHEREAS, within this church we confess that all people are sinful beings, including those who serve in rostered ministry;

WHEREAS, within this church there are both those who believe that same-sex sexual conduct is inherently sinful, and those who believe that same-sex sexual conduct in a committed relationship is morally defensible for those who are of homosexual orientation;

WHEREAS, there are those in this church who believe that the ELCA should affirm and uphold current policy and practice regarding people in same-sex committed relationships;

WHEREAS, there are those in this church who believe that the Holy Spirit is calling into public ministry persons who are in committed, same-sex relationships, and congregations are indicating a willingness to call such persons to service; and

WHEREAS, within this church there is a desire to maintain the continuity of the church's traditional teaching and practice while also providing opportunity for ongoing discernment of new ways in which the Spirit might be speaking to this church in our time, and both may be honored by taking the step to create a process for consideration of exceptions;

therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall:

1. Affirm and uphold the standards for rostered leaders as set forth in “Vision and Expectations”;
2. Create a process for the sake of outreach, ministry, and the commitment to continuing dialogue, which may permit exceptions to the expectations regarding sexual conduct for gay or lesbian candidates and rostered leaders in life-long, committed, and faithful same-sex relationships who otherwise are determined to be in compliance with “Vision and Expectations”;
3. Adopt the following bylaws to permit implementation of this limited process for exceptions to the normative policies of this church:

7.31.18. Ordination for Particular Service. For pastoral reasons and for the sake of mission in the synod, under policy and procedures approved by the Church Council, upon recommendation by a synodical bishop to the Synod Council and upon endorsement by the Synod Council, a synodical bishop shall seek an exception from the Conference of Bishops to permit the assignment of a candidate who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed and faithful same-sex relationship, and has been approved through the synodical candidacy process. When such an exception is granted, the synodical bishop may ordain—as authorized in the governing documents of this church and policy adopted by the Church Council—a candidate who has received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for service in the ministry of Word and Sacrament by a congregation that has indicated its openness to call a candidate who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed and faithful same-sex relationship. Likewise, upon recommendation by a synodical bishop to the Synod Council and upon endorsement by the Synod Council, a synodical bishop shall seek through the Conference of Bishops—under policy and procedures approved by the Church Council—to maintain on the roster of ordained ministers an individual, under call for

service in an ELCA ministry setting, who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed, and faithful same-gender relationship. All requirements of policies of this church related to ordained ministers apply to such an individual, except those that preclude living in such relationships.

7.52.16. Approval for Particular Service. For pastoral reasons and for the sake of mission in the synod, under policy and procedures approved by the Church Council, upon recommendation by a synodical bishop to the Synod Council and upon endorsement by the Synod Council, a synodical bishop shall seek an exception from the Conference of Bishops to permit the assignment of a candidate who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed and faithful same-sex relationship, and has been approved through the synodical candidacy process. When such an exception is granted, the synodical bishop may—as authorized in the governing documents of this church and policy adopted by the Church Council—commission as an associate in ministry or consecrate as a diaconal minister or deaconess a candidate who has received and accepted a properly issued, duly attested letter of call for such service by a congregation that has indicated its openness to call a candidate who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed and faithful same-sex relationship. Likewise, upon recommendation by a synodical bishop to the Synod Council and upon endorsement by the Synod Council, a synodical bishop shall seek through the Conference of Bishops—under policy and procedures approved by the Church Council—to maintain on the roster of associates in ministry, diaconal ministers, or deaconesses an individual, under call for service in an ELCA ministry setting, who provides evidence of intent to live in a life-long, committed, and faithful same-gender relationship. All requirements of policies of this church related to the official lay rosters apply to such an individual, except those that preclude living in such relationships.

4. Amend bylaw 20.71.11. to allow for the implementation of new bylaw 7.31.18. and bylaw 7.52.16:
20.71.11. The Committee on Appeals shall establish definitions and guidelines, subject to approval by the Church Council, to enable clear and uniform application of the grounds for discipline in each of the above categories, provided, however, that nothing therein shall require the application of discipline where bylaws 7.31.18. and 7.52.16. have been applied.
5. Direct that the Church Council, in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the appropriate churchwide units, adopt policy and procedures for the implementation of bylaws 7.31.18. and 7.52.16.; and
6. Direct that this process be evaluated periodically by the Division for Ministry [or the appropriate churchwide unit] and reviewed by the Conference of Bishops and by the Church Council.

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the Southeast Michigan Synod;

To acknowledge that the third recommendation of the Task Force for the ELCA Studies in Sexuality, as presented to the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, was defeated;

To acknowledge that work toward a social statement on human sexuality continues, including the current study, “Free in Christ to Serve the Neighbor: Lutherans Talk about Human Sexuality,” and that this social statement will be considered by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly; and

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

D. HUMAN SEXUALITY STUDY

North Carolina Synod (9B)

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has been in a study process (*Journey Together Faithfully*) since 2001; and

WHEREAS, the decisions of the 2005 Churchwide Assembly were the result of that study process; and

WHEREAS, the 2005 Churchwide Assembly resolved that the “members, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, and agencies and institutions [of this church] be urged to concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion that we have as members of the body of Christ” [CA05.05.17]; and

WHEREAS, the study process adopted by the Churchwide

Assembly in 2001 is ongoing, leading to a social statement on human sexuality to be presented at the 2009 Churchwide Assembly; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Synod ask the Church Council to continue the current study process and consider no changes to “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline” pending completion of the study process and adoption of a human sexuality social statement.

Church Council Action:

To receive with gratitude the resolution of the North Carolina Synod related to the ELCA Studies on Sexuality;

To acknowledge that the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America provide a process for the development and possible revision of “Vision and Expectations” and “Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline”;

To affirm the importance of consultation with the Conference of Bishops, the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Office of the Secretary, and the Vocation and Education unit before consideration of any revisions; and

To request that the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America inform the synod of this action.

E. PENSION EQUALIZATION

Northwestern Minnesota Synod (3D)

WHEREAS, pastors’ salary recommendations forwarded each year to the parishes of the ELCA are not mandatory and are not uniformly applied, particularly in rural parishes; and

WHEREAS, pastors serving in rural parishes most often must live in a parsonage and are not given a housing allowance. The rural pastor consequently cannot realize the advantage of equity growth from owning and reselling a home that is realized by those in urban settings who have this advantage; and

WHEREAS, rural parishes do not equally provide extra benefits, such as social security and FICA payments and other bonuses; and

WHEREAS, work opportunities for a pastor’s spouse are very limited and very often non-existent in rural communities; and

WHEREAS, living on low salaries that are provided to rural pastors does not allow much, if any, opportunity for personal investment in IRAs, real estate, or other insurance or investment products to enhance retirement living, as their urban counterparts are privileged to experience; and

WHEREAS, pension benefits are tied to the salary provisions that they have experienced during their years of active ministry; and

WHEREAS, there is a consequent disparity between the resulting pensions paid to those pastors who have worked in rural ministries in contrast to those who have worked in urban ministries, often resulting in actual poverty or near poverty situations for those on the lower end of the pension benefit scale; and

WHEREAS, lay members of congregations, with the exception of the few who serve in leadership positions, are almost totally uninformed as to how the pension plan works or how unfairly that plan plays out for some retired pastors; and

WHEREAS, the present pension plan plays right into the ever present temptation to ignore the servant model demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ: "Whoever would be first among you let him be your servant. Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:27-28), seeking and holding onto those pastoral positions that are highly remunerated and with the consequent higher pension payouts; and

WHEREAS, this seemingly necessary game of always seeking to flee to the urban, well-paid pastoral positions and abandon the rural, low-paid pastoral positions leads to an intensifying of the rural ministry crisis that is facing our church today; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod, in assembly, direct the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Council to request the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to prepare a proposal to restructure the ELCA pension plan, working toward equalization or, at the very least, setting a base minimum of pension payments for all pastors; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Church Council bring this restructured plan to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly for full consideration and implementation; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Northwestern Minnesota Synod Council establish a task force to consider possible synod response to pension inequity.

Response from the Church Council

At its November 2006 meeting, the Church Council voted [CC06.11.60a]:

To receive the resolution of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod related to pension equalization; and

To refer the resolution to the Board of Pensions with a request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the ELCA Church Council; and

To anticipate that the report and possible recommendations be included in the summary of Church Council actions prepared for the 2007 ELCA Churchwide Assembly.

Response from the Board of Pensions

This report is the ELCA Board of Pensions' response to the resolution of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod related to pension equalization. It draws heavily from the more comprehensive report on this subject prepared by the Board of Pensions in 2003.

Since the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, there has been much concern and discussion about the issue of low compensation and pensions for rostered leaders in this church. Although

most, if not all, ELCA synods maintain minimum guidelines for cash compensation, actual compensation varies widely—with many rostered leaders paid below guideline.

As for pensions (i.e., retirement income), the ELCA Retirement Plan is similar to other employer-sponsored retirement plans that provide benefits related to the level of compensation earned during an employee's years of active service. Thus, rostered leaders who receive low compensation during their years of active service tend to have lower retirement income when compared with those who received higher compensation. (Rostered leaders have the option to annuitize, partially annuitize, or not annuitize their ELCA retirement account as a source of their retirement income.)

Several Churchwide Assemblies and many Synod Assemblies have considered the issue of low compensation and low pensions. The response of this church has been to establish the Special Needs Retirement Fund in order to provide additional income for those retired rostered leaders and surviving spouses in need and supplement retirement income for those currently serving at low salaries.

Most recently, the 2001 Churchwide Assembly addressed low compensation and pension benefits and passed a resolution that called upon the ELCA to

- (1) acknowledge the serious concern about inadequate compensation and pensions expressed in the memorials of the Northwest Washington Synod, the Western North Dakota Synod, and the Northern Great Lakes Synod;
- (2) encourage continued efforts within this church to seek adequate levels of compensation for clergy and other rostered leaders;
- (3) encourage synods to adopt adequate compensation guidelines and to urge congregations to meet or exceed them when possible;
- (4) acknowledge the action of the 1993 Churchwide Assembly that created the Special Needs Retirement Fund for retired rostered leaders and surviving spouses who live in poverty;
- (5) call upon congregations and members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to give generously to the Special Needs Retirement Fund, noting that \$5 million in additional funding will enable the ELCA to supplement pensions for the approximately 170 retired pastors and spouses living below the poverty level;
- (6) encourage giving beyond \$5 million so the Special Needs Retirement Fund will have sufficient funds to address the need for pension supplementation for pastors currently serving in low-salaried positions; and
- (7) direct the Board of Pensions to prepare methods to bring into equity pensions of professional leaders and to report its findings to the Church Council for

further consideration and possible implementation [CA01.06.39].

Summary of 2003 study:

In response to the directive from the 2001 Churchwide Assembly, the Board of Pensions examined possible methods of achieving pension equity for the professional leaders of the ELCA. The key observations from that study were:

- (1) Low compensation is a widespread issue within the ELCA. Our analysis of clergy compensation in six ELCA synods revealed that more than half of the parish pastors in those synods are paid below the minimum guideline.
- (2) If compensation is low, then pensions, which are proportional to compensation and years of service, also will be low. The preferred solution, and the only way to achieve true equity, is to raise compensation levels and thereby pensions as well. This would not be easy. While pension policy is managed on a churchwide basis, compensation decisions are made locally.
- (3) A far less effective solution would be to provide disproportionate pensions to narrow the inequities. However, this would not address the primary issue of low compensation. Instead, it could produce a pension program where low-salaried rostered leaders receive more income in retirement than they received while they were in active service.
- (4) Our ecumenical partners have dealt with this issue in different ways. The Episcopal Church and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) have defined benefit pension plans with minimum pension provisions that provide proportionately greater benefits to low-salaried members. The United Church of Christ (UCC) has an individual account plan similar to the ELCA Retirement Plan. The UCC receives a special offering each year—as much as \$1 million—to provide relief to retired ministers and surviving spouses with very low incomes.
- (5) The defined benefit approach is not practical for the ELCA because of this church's long history of individual account pension plans with member-directed investments and distributions. The only practical approach to improving pensions for the low-salaried rostered leaders would be through a minimum pension contribution year-by-year. A minimum equal to 10 percent of the "guideline defined compensation" would mean rostered leaders who are paid below their synod's minimum guideline would receive a pension contribution as if they were paid the guideline amount.
- (6) There are two key drawbacks to the minimum contribution concept. First, it would apply only to future years of service. As a result, the improvement for low-salaried rostered leaders would be realized

only gradually over a period of many years. Second, the cost to provide a minimum contribution equal to 10 percent of the applicable synod guideline for all rostered leaders in congregations is very high: an estimated \$4.4 million per year or 0.7 percent of total defined compensation for all sponsored members.

- (7) Funding supplemental contributions could be achieved by requiring additional contributions of 0.7 percent of defined compensation. But this would be a substantial increase and would be on top of the 0.9 percent of defined compensation being collected to help fund retiree medical subsidies. The combined amount would represent a six percent surcharge on the cost of ELCA benefits. This could discourage plan participation and be especially burdensome for smaller congregations.
- (8) With the Special Needs Retirement Fund, the ELCA has a program that was created, in part, for the very purpose of supplementing retirement contributions for low-salaried rostered leaders. However, this fund has grown very slowly and, as of December 31, 2006, amounted to only \$5.6 million. The main challenge is to strengthen fundraising efforts so the Special Needs Retirement Fund can fulfill the objectives for which it was established.

Church Council Action:

To acknowledge with thanks the background information and recommendations provided by the Board of Pensions in response to the resolution from the Northwestern Minnesota Synod on pension equalization;

To acknowledge that the issue of pension equity (i.e., retirement income) can best be addressed by providing compensation for rostered leaders that is at or above synodical minimum compensation guidelines;

To acknowledge that additional efforts to grow the Special Needs Retirement Fund are critical, to meet the needs both of those who served at low compensation in the past and now have low retirement income and those currently serving at low salaries;

To decline to initiate a proposal to restructure the ELCA Retirement Plan as a means to address disparities in retirement income; and

To request the secretary of this church to convey the background information and this response to the resolution to the Northwestern Minnesota Synod.

F. COMMERCIALISM

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (8B)

WHEREAS, voluntary giving by church members remains the primary method of financing ministry; and

WHEREAS, our stewardship represents our faith-filled response to God's amazing grace; and

WHEREAS, commercialism, the selling of goods or services in the name of the church with the purpose of securing funds for the operation and mission of the church, its auxiliaries, and

church-related institutions, continues to increase steadily in this church; and

WHEREAS, the influence that the secular world, which relies on the selling of goods and services, which encourages the selling of goods and services to support its various benevolent activities and programs, is affecting our decision-making as a church; and

WHEREAS, commercialism is a concern that needs to be addressed in the context of faithful stewardship within our congregations and within our church; and

WHEREAS, two of the predecessor church bodies to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America developed statements on commercialism with the church, statements to which many congregations looked for guidance in making decisions regarding the relationship between stewardship and the selling of goods and services; and

WHEREAS, this church lacks a clear and current policy statement regarding commercialism to guide its synods, congregations, agencies, institutions, *The Lutheran* magazine, Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, and other related entities, such as Thrivent Financial for Lutherans; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America be asked to consider and study the issue of commercialism in the church so that it can provide this church with a clear policy statement similar to the statements of our predecessor church bodies for guidance to the churchwide, synodical, and local expressions of this church for implementation in our stewardship understanding and practices.

Response from the Church in Society unit

The Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod has asked the Church Council “to consider and study the issue of commercialism in the church so that it can provide this church with a clear policy statement” for guidance in the area of stewardship. It says that commercialism in the church is increasing and references the guidance provided by predecessor church bodies.

In 1964, The American Lutheran Church offered a statement on “Commercialism in the Church” as a guide to pastors and congregations, boards, agencies, institutions, and auxiliaries for their policies and actions. Also in 1964, the second biennial convention of the Lutheran Church in America adopted a social statement on commercialism. Both statements explain the dangers of commercialism in the church to a Christian understanding of stewardship; the consciences of both members and non-members; distinctions from private business; and the church’s tax status with the state. Both statements also have in view the need to address this issue in a pastoral, practical manner “in the spirit of Christian love and evangelical freedom” (ALC, page 4) that educates so as to “replace poor practices with better ones” (LCA, n.p.). In the absence of ELCA policy, these predecessor church body statements continue to serve as guidance to this church, though their relevance is tempered by the passage of time.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America adopted *Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All: A Social Statement on Economic Life* in 1999. The purpose of this statement is to address economic injustice in the broader society and world as opposed to commercialism in the church: “Out of deep concern for those affected adversely [by the market-based economy], we of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America here assess economic life today. . .” (p. 1). At the same time, this statement recognizes that:

- “Economic life pervades our lives . . .” (p. 1);
- “Market-based thought and practices dominate our world today in ways that seem to eclipse other economic, social, political, and religious perspectives” (p. 1);
- “If the economic arena becomes a reigning power for us, the question arises: in what or whom shall we place our trust and hope?” (p. 2); and
- “Economic assumptions can conflict with what we as a church confess. Who we are in Christ places us in tension with priorities given to money, consumption, competition, and profit in our economic system” (p. 3).

Church Council Action:

To thank the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod for its concern for stewardship in the church and the ways stewardship affects the church’s position in society as a whole;

To acknowledge the existence of predecessor church body statements on commercialism in the church;

To decline, at this time, to develop a policy statement on commercialism in the church; and

To request that the secretary of this church notify the synod of this action and the background information provided.

G. CONGREGATIONAL VOTING MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod (8B)

RESOLVED, to transmit to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America a request that the *Model Constitution for Congregations* be amended to exempt military personnel from the voting member requirement (*C8.02.c.) of having communed in and made a contribution of record to the congregation of membership during the current or preceding calendar year.

Response from the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee voted [EC06.09.32a]:

To receive the resolution of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod related to congregational voting membership requirements for military personnel; and

To refer the resolution to the Office of the

Secretary with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from the Office of the Secretary

The matter has been studied. Clearly, no simple solution exists and possible constitutional solutions may be more complicated than the application of reasonable exception under the circumstances.

The issue of absent military personnel has especially presented itself during the past four years in view of the largest call-up of National Guard units since World War II. Many hope that this circumstance and practice will not be of long-term duration.

Church Council Action:

To acknowledge with gratitude the expression of concern of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod for military personnel absent because of duty for extended duration from their respective congregations;

To encourage all congregations to continue to demonstrate ongoing pastoral care for military personnel and their families throughout the period of their service;

To note that persons who cease to be voting members under the requirements of *C8.02. in the Model Constitution for Congregations are not terminated automatically from the role of the baptized (*C8.02.a.) and confirmed (*C8.02.b.) members of a congregation;

To note further that provision *C8.05. specifies that the bylaws of a congregation define the meaning of “inactivity” in regard to membership in a congregation;

To advise the synod that a congregation, by means of council resolution, continuing resolution, or approved bylaw, may provide reasonable exemption to the membership requirement of *C8.02.c. for deployed military personnel;

To observe that C10.05 precludes absentee ballot or proxy voting, and further that the requirements in *C8.02.c for voting members to have communed and contributed could be satisfied as recently as the day of a congregational meeting or as far in the past as two full calendar years, perhaps resulting in few if any exclusions for inactivity on the participating members; and

To ask the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to convey this response to the resolution of the Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod.

H. PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS AND PROSELYTES IN ISLAMIC STATES

West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod (8H)

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America maintains relations with the Islamic community through, among other means, the National Council of the Churches in Christ in the U.S.A. (NCC); and

WHEREAS, the NCC subscribes to the fifth mark of faithfulness in inter-religious dialogue, which states, “True relationship is rooted in accountability and respect. We approach others in humility, not arrogance. In our relationships, we will call ourselves and our partners to a mutual accountability. We will invite each other to join in building a world of love and justice, but we will also challenge each other’s unjust behavior. We can do both only from an attitude of mutual respect”; and

WHEREAS, the state-sponsored or sanctioned persecution of Christians for the faith in Islamic states demonstrates both basic injustice and a lack of respect for the Christian faith and those who subscribe to it; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod Council memorialize the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to condemn the state-sponsored or sanctioned persecution of Christians and proselytes for the faith in Islamic states, demanding of Islamic leaders in the U.S.A. that they join in this condemnation and exercise all salutary influence upon their coreligionists; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod Council communicate to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America that it is the opinion of this synod that fruitful Christian–Islamic dialogue is not possible so long as Christians are executed, tortured, imprisoned, and otherwise persecuted for the faith in Islamic states.

Response from the Church Council

At its November 2006 meeting, the Church Council voted [CC06.11.60d]:

To receive the resolution of the West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod related to the persecution of Christians and proselytes in Islamic states; and

To refer the resolution to the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop with the request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section

The resolution from the West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod seeks to address the conditions of persecuted Christians and proselytes in predominantly Islamic states and concludes that such conditions should have a bearing on the ELCA’s participation in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

Similar topics were addressed at the 2003 Churchwide Assembly [CA03.06.40] and the 1997 Churchwide Assembly [CA97.06.48]. Both actions call upon members of the ELCA “to pray for all victims of religious persecution, both Christians and non-Christians, and for their oppressors.” Likewise, this church was encouraged to “foster respect, tolerance, and understanding of other faiths, including an examination of the causes and manifestations of religious extremism in a variety of religious contexts.”

The “whereas” clauses of the current West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod resolution rely heavily on the conception of inter-religious dialogue adopted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., a conciliar body of which the ELCA is an active participant. It is affirmed in the “fifth mark of faithfulness in inter-religious dialogue” that dialogue should exhibit “accountability and respect” where representatives of different traditions approach one another “in humility.”

Religious persecution perpetrated by any group trespasses all children of God, is a violation of basic human rights, and is an affront to the spirit of possibility in inter-religious cooperation, dialogue, and relationships. However, as the 2003 and 1997 actions make clear, the existence of religious persecution does not create a condition in which “fruitful Christian-Islamic dialogue is not possible.” In fact, the history of inter-religious work and relationships in the ELCA, including local congregations, Churchwide Assembly actions, and international efforts through the global alliance of Action by Churches Together (ACT) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), all reveal that conditions of conflict are precisely when dialogue and relationships toward reconciliation are most necessary, constructive, and vital to peaceful co-existence.

The West Virginia–Western Maryland Synod resolution is concerned with “state-sponsored or sanctioned persecution of Christians for the faith in Islamic states.” Insofar as the ELCA is committed to a model of accompaniment in mission with global partner churches, ACT, and the LWF, the ELCA recommendations and policies regarding Christian involvement in the world are deeply informed by partner perspectives in their respective contexts. For instance, partner churches in Tanzania, Madagascar, and Ethiopia express appreciation to the ELCA for pursuing dialogue and relationships about issues of conflict on their behalf. The ELCA needs to be conscientious about recommendations from these global partners rather than calling for an end to Christian-Islamic dialogue.

Concern expressed in the resolution for Christian minorities around the world is deeply felt. It is important to remember, however, that not all points of conflict involving Christians within largely Islamic societies can be attributed to Islam itself. For instance, Christian minorities in Muslim-majority Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and

Lebanon have differing experiences given their varied political and historical contexts. Furthermore, through the auspices of the LWF and ACT, the ELCA works throughout the world with Muslim partners against the pandemic of HIV and AIDS; provides assistance, such as that to the thousands of Muslims and Christians at the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya; welcomes Muslim students to study at ELCA colleges, universities, and seminaries; and encourages the use of church facilities for Christian-Muslim dialogue and relationships that encourage understanding, reconciliation, and peaceful co-existence.

In addition, North American Christians and Muslims struggle with many of the same social and cultural concerns. Dialogue and relationships in North America take place in a highly politicized context, which includes fear of the other. In this shared context, inter-religious cooperation between Christians and Muslims is and will be increasingly important.

In his own historical context, Martin Luther lived through a period of politicized fear related to Islam, yet he steadfastly resisted calls for a renewed crusade against Muslims. Although he had no opportunities for dialogue like the ones provided by churches today, Luther sought to promote knowledge of Islam from the best possible sources. Similar commitments are reflected in inter-religious dialogue and relationships today.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed that living as a human meant having both “responsibility towards the past” and a “desire to shape the future.” Through inter-religious dialogue and relationships, Christians and Muslims deepen their relationships with others outside of their faith tradition, seeking to find common ground to shape a common future with other people of faith and conscience.

One important step toward deepening the ELCA’s awareness and dialogue with Muslim communities in North America is a forthcoming Lutheran-Muslim Consultative Panel, through the auspices of the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section of the Office of the Presiding Bishop. The Lutheran-Muslim Consultative Panel will reflect on Christian and Islamic traditions of religious toleration, including reflection on the Qur’anic pronouncement, “There is no compulsion in religion” (2:256). The Lutheran-Muslim Consultative Panel will consult with the Global Mission unit, the Church in Society unit, and the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section to assess the role of religious minorities in Christian and Muslim contexts, paying express attention to the 2003 and 1997 actions to examine “the causes and manifestations of religious extremism.”

It is recommended that the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section, the Global Mission unit, and the Church in Society unit work together in keeping with the ELCA’s commitment to the accompaniment model of mission with global church partners by communicating with global companions in regions with Christian

minorities and larger Muslim population centers. In the spirit of the 2003 and 1997 Churchwide Assembly actions, it is recommended that the churchwide office continue to produce literature, programs, presentations, and public opportunities that counter fear and conflict with a commitment to inter-religious dialogue and relationships filled with accountability and respect, humility, faithfulness, and forthrightness.

Church Council Action:

To thank the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod for its resolution of concern related to the persecution of Christians and proselytes in Islamic states;

To receive the report from the Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations section; and

To request that the secretary of this church transmit the report as the response of the Church Council to the resolution of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod.

I. NATURAL CHURCH DEVELOPMENT

New Jersey Synod (7A)

WHEREAS, the kingdom of God can be compared to a man scattering seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come (Mark 4:26-29); and

WHEREAS, the creation of vital and healthy congregations does not consist of pushing or pulling congregations in human strengths and efforts but in releasing and developing their “all by itself” potential God has given to build the Church; and

WHEREAS, Natural Church Development is an approach to church growth that strives to release the “all by itself” growth potential that God has put into every congregation; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, through its Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit, has adopted Natural Church Development as an assessment tool and now is using it with mid-sized and larger congregations, with new mission starts, with plateaued or declining congregations, and with congregations that are in need of more significant transformation to assess the health of their ministry and gauge its capacity for growth; and

WHEREAS, within a clear biblical, theological, and missional framework, the Natural Church Development tool provides congregations with guidance to build healthy ministries that can grow both in the quality of ministry and in the numbers of faithful and engaged participants, increases congregational capacity for ministry and evangelical outreach, and thereby provides a promising base for healthy ministry development and renewal for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

WHEREAS, promoting a healthy culture is something every congregation struggles with at various times in its life-cycle; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit work in cooperation with Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, both to create new and to

repurpose existing resources that could be used by congregations using the Natural Church Development tool; and be it further

RESOLVED, that consideration be given that such resources be organized and marketed in such a way as to correspond with the eight quality characteristics of Natural Church Development in order to facilitate congregational efforts to address their “minimum factor” (weakest characteristic) as they strive to grow naturally as God has given them the ability to grow as vital centers for mission and ministry; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the New Jersey Synod Assembly direct the New Jersey Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Executive Committee of the Church Council for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Response from the Executive Committee

At its July 2006 meeting, the Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC06.07.24a]:

To receive and refer the resolution of the New Jersey Synod related to Natural Church Development to the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit in consultation with Augsburg Fortress, Publishers;

To request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

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

Response from Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers

Staff members of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission (EOCM) unit are pleased that Natural Church Development is being explored and received with enthusiasm. The unit is working diligently to increase the number of coaches available to assist congregations in its use. In addition, new updates to Natural Church Development materials are being received and incorporated into training and materials that the unit is using or developing.

As part of this ongoing work and in response to the memorial from the New Jersey Synod:

1. EOCM staff will work with Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, through an existing resource management team to assess current Augsburg Fortress resources and their relevance to Natural Church Development characteristics and the Natural Church Development process. A bibliography will be compiled that includes these resources and their appropriateness for various Natural Church Development quality characteristics and steps. This will be available online and as a download at the EOCM Web site during 2007. The bibliography will include active

links to the listed resources available at the Augsburg Fortress Web site.

2. EOCM staff will write a series of shorter resources relating specifically to each of the eight quality characteristics, the organic growth (formerly biotic) principles, and the Natural Church Development process. These will be available for congregational use as they are completed. Conversation at the resource management team will determine whether these resources are best produced in print or for downloading from the Internet. Each resource will offer both insights to clarify Lutheran connections and concerns within each specific characteristic and information related to appropriate portion of the bibliography and resource list mentioned above.

Church Council Action:

To offer gratitude to the New Jersey Synod for its resolution related to Natural Church Development;

To acknowledge the information provided by the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit as the response of the Church Council to the resolution; and

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

J. MISSION TO THE ANTI-TRINITARIANS

West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod (8H)

WHEREAS, promulgation and propagation of right doctrine is an essential of the Great Commission; and

WHEREAS, failure to do so among our anti-trinitarian brothers and sisters is a failure in Christian love; and

WHEREAS, failure to equip the members of this church to defend the faith from the assaults of anti-trinitarianism is also a failure in Christian love; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Synod Council of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod memorialize the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to take appropriate measures to develop and provide for this church the resources needed to mount a vigorous missionary campaign for outreach to our brothers and sisters who refer to our Lord Jesus as Messiah or Christ without the blessing of the knowledge of the Christ's divinity or his consubstantiality with the Father and the Holy Spirit without confusion of the persons; and be it further

RESOLVED, that such resources be particularly mindful of the impoverished condition of our psilanthropist, tritheist, and modalist brothers and sisters who claim Jesus as Messiah or Christ and withal be well suited for use in apologetics and proselytization.

Executive Committee Response

At its June 2006 meeting, the Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC06.06.20a]:

To receive the resolution of the Western Virginia-Western Maryland Synod regarding

mission and outreach to anti-trinitarianists;

To refer the resolution to the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit with a request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council; and

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

Response from the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit

Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit staff researched issues raised in the resolution within the broader scope of witnessing to all people. Many of the issues concerning engagement with nontrinitarian groups are comparable to those encountered among the unchurched and among those who hold decision, fundamentalist, or conservative evangelical theologies. In response, the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit will continue to:

1. Encourage the development and use of resources that:
 - a. witness confidently to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ; and
 - b. uphold the commitment not only to treat people of other faiths with respect, but also as people to be loved rather than enemies to be defeated.
2. Define this issue in the context of the desire for this church to reclaim the word "evangelical." As evangelizing people, the priority is preparation for encounters with people in general, including those with whom there may be disagreement. These encounters are opportunities to manifest the presence of Christ in our lives.
3. Work for long-term change within this church to create a biblically literate and theologically confident membership as part of the unit's existing goal to promote a culture of discipleship within the ELCA and its congregations. The institutional change necessary will require extensive time and attention. EOCM also will continue to partner and contribute to other units within this church to ensure that emphases such as "Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible" build confidence and competence among ELCA members.
4. Work with the evangelism and outreach staff within EOCM to increase awareness of existing resources for witnessing, especially those available online. In addition, EOCM will:
 - a. develop and incorporate simple and practical resources and practices into the implementation of the current evangelism strategy;
 - b. review evangelism and witnessing resources in consultation with campus ministry staff to ensure that resources and practices are accessible and appropriate for campus applications;
 - c. review evangelism and witnessing resources to

ensure accessibility and applicability for a wider Lutheran audience, seeking to broaden the ability of all members of the ELCA to witness in their daily lives and to engage people of other faiths in lively and respectful conversations.

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the West Virginia-Western Maryland Synod related to mission to anti-trinitarians;

To acknowledge the report of the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit, including the unit's commitments to:

1. Encourage the development and use of resources that:
 - a. witness confidently to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ; and
 - b. uphold the commitment not only to treat people of other faiths with respect, but also as people to be loved rather than enemies to be defeated;
2. Define this issue in the context of the desire for this church to reclaim the word "evangelical." As evangelizing people, the priority is preparation for encounters with people in general, including those with whom there may be disagreement. These encounters are opportunities to manifest the presence of Christ in our lives;
3. Work for long-term change within this church to create a biblically literate and theologically confident membership as part of the unit's existing goal to promote a culture of discipleship within the ELCA and its congregations. The institutional change necessary will require extensive time and attention. EOCM also will continue to partner and contribute to other units within the church to ensure that emphases such as "Book of Faith: Lutherans Read the Bible" build confidence and competence among ELCA members;
4. Work with the evangelism and outreach staff within EOCM to increase awareness of existing resources for witnessing, especially those available online. In addition, EOCM will:
 - a. develop and incorporate simple and practical resources and practices into the implementation of the current evangelism strategy;
 - b. review evangelism and witnessing resources in consultation with campus ministry staff to ensure that resources and practices are accessible and appropriate for campus applications; and
 - c. review evangelism and witnessing resources to ensure accessibility and applicability for a wider Lutheran audience, seeking to broaden

the ability of all members of the ELCA to witness in their daily lives and to engage people of other faiths in lively and respectful conversations; and

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

**K. LOCAL CHAPTERS OF ELCA ETHNIC ASSOCIATIONS
Northeastern Ohio Synod (6E)**

RESOLVED, that the Northeastern Ohio Synod Executive Committee request clarification from the Executive Committee of the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America regarding the status, mutual accountability, and constitutional standing of local chapters of ELCA ethnic associations.

Executive Committee Response

At its June 2006 meeting, the Executive Committee of the Church Council voted [EC06.06.20b]:

To receive the resolution of the Northeastern Ohio Synod Executive Committee requesting clarification concerning local chapters of ELCA ethnic associations;

To refer the resolution to the Multicultural Ministries unit with a request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council; and

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

Response from the Multicultural Ministries unit

Chapter 16 of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* treats ELCA ethnic associations [16.12.E05.]:

The Multicultural Ministries unit shall guide the churchwide organization in the multicultural dimensions of its work. To fulfill these responsibilities, this program unit shall: . . .

- f. relate to and assist the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA, the American Indian and Alaska Native Lutheran Association in the ELCA, the Association of Lutherans of Arab and Middle Eastern Heritage, the Association of Asians and Pacific Islanders in the ELCA, and the Association of Latino Ministries in the ELCA, and encourage and support associations in their relationship with other churchwide units.

Each ethnic association in the ELCA has a constitution, and each has its own organizational structure. The only ELCA association that has local chapters is the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA. The constitution of the African American Lutheran

Association in the ELCA addresses local chapters in Article III:

- III.01. Association with this organization shall be by chapter and individual membership.
- III.03. Chapters shall be made up of individual members as defined in Section III.02 of this Article and in B. Chapter IV, section 1 of the bylaws.

The bylaws of the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA address local chapters in Chapter IV:

- B.IV.1.01. The philosophy of this organization is to encourage chapter formation along the geographical boundaries set forth in Subsection B.IV.2.01. of these bylaws. As indicated in Subsection B.IV.1.02 below, a minimum number of members are necessary to form a chapter. There maybe more than one chapter formed in close geographical proximity, although the latter is not desirable or encouraged. Chapters are encouraged to foster a cooperative spirit and to coordinate mutual goals and plan and implement programs and projects jointly to further the goals and purposes of this organization.
- B.IV.1.02. A chapter shall consist of at least ten (10) members who agree to be bound by this organization's constitution and bylaws.
- B.IV.1.03. No single congregation shall form more than one (1) chapter.
- B.IV.1.04. Chapters shall meet regularly and conduct business consistent with the vision, goals and purposes of this organization as provided in the constitution and bylaws.

Article II of the constitution of the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA provides additional information related to the vision and purpose of local chapters of the association:

- II.01. We, the African American Lutheran Association, are people of God rooted in the gospel and redeemed by Jesus Christ. We are committed to living out our faith by expressing our love for one another and affirming ourselves and our cultural heritage as gifts to the church (ELCA).
- II.02. God, our Creator, has richly endowed each individual with gifts. Humanity, however, has fallen into bondage to sin and stands separated from God. This sin expresses itself in many ways, including exclusivism and separation among people manifested in racism. We believe that Jesus Christ is our True Liberator, having come into the world proclaiming a Gospel, which gives sight to the blind and released the captives. We believe that we have been called to a ministry of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5),

serving as ambassadors for Christ. The church is to be a fully inclusive fellowship, which celebrates the contributions of all members. In recognition and adherence to these principles, this organization exists to:

- II.02.a. Help assure that each individual will be respected as a unique gift of God (*imago Dei*, Genesis 1:31);
- II.02.b. Help exorcise personal and institutional racism in church and society;
- II.02.c. Work towards a full realization of the unity that is to be found in Jesus Christ;
- II.02.d. Celebrate, not worship, diversity in the human family;
- II.02.e. Proclaim Christ's message of material and spiritual liberation to all peoples;
- II.02.f. Exercise a ministry of reconciliation among diverse peoples in the church and society; and
- II.02.g. Encourage members to become fully involved with the affairs of church assemblies, synods, regions and congregations.

The above portions from the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA's constitution and bylaws define local chapters. The Statement of Vision and Purpose speaks to the goals and purposes of the association, which the local chapters are encouraged to support and implement. In that capacity, local chapters do not speak for the association or for the entire ethnic or cultural group of which it is a part. Local chapters do, however, "foster a cooperative spirit and coordinate and implement mutual goals and purposes of the association." A natural example of the latter would be the Cleveland chapter of the African American Lutheran Association in the ELCA, which assisted in the development and implementation of "A Strategy for Outreach with African American/African Persons in Northeastern Ohio, ELCA."

If the Executive Committee of the Northeastern Ohio Synod has concerns about the local chapter on its territory, the Multicultural Ministries unit would be pleased to convene a meeting to discuss such concerns so that the ministry of outreach and reconciliation can move forward in the name of Christ.

Church Council Action:

To receive the resolution of the Northeastern Ohio Synod related to local chapters of ELCA ethnic associations;

To acknowledge the report of the Multicultural Ministries unit, including the unit's openness to convene a meeting for further discussion of the synod's concerns; and

To request that the secretary of this church provide the report of the Multicultural Ministries unit (above) as the response of the Church Council to the synod's resolution.

II. RESPONSES TO CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY REFERRALS DIRECTED TO THE CHURCH COUNCIL

A. FUND APPEAL FOR NEW MINISTRIES

Grand Canyon Synod (2D) [2005 Memorial]

WHEREAS, it is the commission of the Lord of the Church to “Go and make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . and teaching them . . .” (Matthew 28:19–20); and

WHEREAS, the challenge of the great commission would coincide with the present Evangelical Lutheran Church in America emphasis on evangelism; and

WHEREAS, the resources of this church, the people, are relatively untapped for this kind of witness; and

WHEREAS, new mission development has never, since 1988, reached the level of new starts that existed in the predecessor synods; and

WHEREAS, the basic ministries of the Gospel take place in and through congregations; and

WHEREAS, there is estimated to be over 90,000,000 unchurched people in this country; and

WHEREAS, membership in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is diminishing, some 200,000 in recent years, now numbering under 5,000,000 people at the same time the population of the nation is increasing; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Grand Canyon Synod in assembly memorialize the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to authorize a three-year professionally guided fund appeal to be used for the establishing of new congregations.

Response from the 2005 Churchwide Assembly

The Churchwide Assembly voted [CA05.07.39q]:

To express gratitude to the Grand Canyon Synod for its commitment to the evangelism strategy, “Sharing Faith in a New Century: A Vision for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,” adopted by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly, the great need to increase this church’s establishment of new congregations, and the significant funding required for this endeavor; and

To direct, in accordance with churchwide bylaw 11.41.06., that the Division for Outreach (or the appropriate churchwide unit), the Division for Congregational Ministries (or the appropriate churchwide unit), the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Office of the Treasurer, and the Conference of Bishops bring a report related to funding for new and renewing congregations to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council, with a report to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Churchwide Assembly Background [2005]

The Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing

Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America includes bylaw 11.41.06., which reads:

No churchwide appeal to congregations or individuals of this church for the raising of funds shall be conducted by this church or churchwide units without the consent of the Churchwide Assembly, following consultation with the Conference of Bishops. No appeal to selected congregations and individuals of this church for the raising of funds shall be conducted by this church or churchwide units without the consent of the Church Council, following consultation with either the Conference of Bishops or specific synods as appropriate. Proposals for such special appeals shall be presented to the Church Council through the appropriate council committee with recommendations by the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

The topic of a churchwide campaign or funding appeal was discussed in two churchwide settings during the 2003–2004 biennium. First, a churchwide staff working group developed a report with recommendations to the Office of the Presiding Bishop in 2003 on the subject of mission funding. One topic addressed in the report was a major churchwide campaign. The commentary indicated that “a major churchwide campaign to support specific churchwide mission priorities (e.g., planting new congregations) could provide significant additional income. Such a campaign could enhance a sense of unity and, possibly, new energy and excitement to advance a common purpose. It could also build major donor capacity and provide an opportunity to ‘tell the story.’ It would, however, require a significant, multi-million dollar up-front outlay to defray fund-raising expenses (commensurate with the goals set). It would have a long window for return. In the current fund-raising and economic environment, the outcome of such a campaign is not certain.”

The recommendation accompanying the report advised “do not launch a major churchwide campaign at this time.” The report was presented to the Budget and Finance Committee of the Church Council in April 2003. A significant portion of that committee meeting was devoted to discussion of the report and recommendations. There were no suggested changes to the recommendations.

Second, as part of the churchwide strategic planning process, a roundtable on mission funding was held October 7–8, 2003. There were twenty participants from congregations, synods, and institutions of this church and ten participants from churchwide staff. In the course of the meeting, a major churchwide funding appeal was discussed, but without definitive conclusion. The final report of the roundtable includes eight far-reaching outcomes related to mission funding with many additional

short-term outcomes. No reference was made in the report to a churchwide fund appeal.

Cost Analysis

It is generally estimated that an organization needs to have in hand the equivalent of 20 percent of the fund appeal goal to underwrite the appeal expenses. Thus, for example, if the goal is \$25 million, \$5 million would be required up front to study, plan, and implement the appeal. The source for such funding is unknown at this time.

Church Council Background [2007]:

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America considered a memorial from the Grand Canyon Synod “to authorize a three-year professionally guided fund appeal to be used for the establishing of new congregations.” The 2005 Churchwide Assembly directed the memorial to certain churchwide units and the Conference of Bishops and requested that a report related to funding for new and renewing congregations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council for transmission to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly.

Subsequently, following the constituting of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding, the 2005 memorial and the request for a report was referred to the Blue Ribbon Committee for consideration.

The Blue Ribbon Committee consulted with the Conference of Bishops at its March 2007 meeting. The committee reported to the conference its conviction that the role of the synodical bishop is pivotal to a successful appeal. This implies a significant time commitment and personal gift to the fund appeal. There is also the expectation that synods would not be conducting their own formal appeals to their congregations during the period of a joint churchwide and synodical campaign. Consultation with the conference concluded with a “straw poll” indicating 80 percent support among the bishops to proceed with a feasibility study for the appeal.

Based on its own assessment of the memorial of the Grand Canyon Synod and its discussion with the Conference of Bishops, the committee affirms a feasibility study on a churchwide fund appeal to benefit both synodical and churchwide ministries.

The committee believes that fund appeals work best when several ministry areas are supported and therefore initially commends the ministry areas of new congregations, theological education, and global mission as the ministry areas to benefit from the appeal. The feasibility study not only will assist in ascertaining if these are the appropriate areas around which to organize a funding campaign, but will also provide a projection of an appropriate campaign goal.

The 25th anniversary of the ELCA in 2012 is an opportunity to strengthen relationships in this church, tell

the story of God’s mission through this church, and raise capital for the mission to which God calls this church. This date coincides well with the time required for a feasibility study in 2008, consideration of the appeal by the 2009 Churchwide Assembly, and, if approved by the assembly, organization of the campaign.

If this church proceeds with a fund appeal of this nature, the committee believes that a joint committee of synodical and churchwide representatives must be constituted immediately after the 2007 Churchwide Assembly to oversee the feasibility study and develop the formulas needed for distribution of the appeal receipts.

The committee believes that this appeal will give this church a burst of focused energy and thus is worth the expenses related to organizing and implementing the appeal. The appeal will be a tangible reminder that this is one church and that the responsibility to assist key areas of our ministry in taking on new life is shared.

Response from the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit [2007]

The response of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Funding serves as the response from the Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission unit.

Church Council Action:

To approve implementation of a feasibility study related to an ELCA fund appeal benefitting both synodical and churchwide ministries;

To request the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Office of the Treasurer, Development Services, Communication Services, and Conference of Bishops to proceed with the steps required for a professionally conducted feasibility study; and

To request a report to the April 2009 meeting of the Church Council on the results of the feasibility study and recommendations pursuant to a fund appeal benefitting both synodical and churchwide ministries of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

B. NEW MISSION STARTS Southeastern Minnesota Synod (3I) [2005 Memorial]

WHEREAS, the Church has been called to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ; and

WHEREAS, there are over 70 million people without churches in the United States today; and

WHEREAS, the starting of new congregations is a good way to spread the Good News; and

WHEREAS, there are many methods for starting new congregations; and

WHEREAS, local expressions of this church (for example, synods and conferences) need to try some of these processes as well as the current Evangelical Lutheran Church in America model for outreach if the growing population of the unchurched is to be reached; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has identified specific sites for development of mission starts

and redevelopments, yet does not have sufficient numbers of leaders identified as mission developers and redevelopers to do the ministry in those places; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod memorialize the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to call upon each synod and synodical subdivisions (for example, conferences), where they exist, to work in collaboration with the Division for Outreach (or the appropriate churchwide unit) in outreach and mutual support in a variety of methods to develop and redevelop congregations for people who have no church home; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Southeastern Minnesota Synod memorialize the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to call upon each synod and synodical subdivisions (for example, conferences), where they exist, to work in collaboration with the Division for Outreach (or the appropriate churchwide unit) to identify and raise up missional leaders whom God calls to mission development and redevelopment.

Response from the 2005 Churchwide Assembly

The Churchwide Assembly voted [CA05.07.39a]:

To thank the Southeastern Minnesota Synod and to affirm in principle the synod's memorial for its support of the goals of the evangelism strategy, "Sharing Faith in a New Century: A Vision for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America," and the second strategic direction of "Faithful Yet Changing," the Plan for Mission in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: "to assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach";

To reaffirm the call of the ELCA evangelism strategy "to underscore the importance of strengthening partnerships throughout this church for starting new congregations and renewing existing congregations as centers of evangelical outreach";

To direct that the Division for Outreach (or the appropriate churchwide unit), the Division for Congregational Ministries (or the appropriate churchwide unit), the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Office of the Treasurer, and the Conference of Bishops bring a report related to starting and renewing congregations to the April 2007 meeting of the ELCA Church Council, with a report to the 2007 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Churchwide Assembly Background [2005]

The Division for Outreach is grateful for the

memorial of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod that encourages synods and their structures to work in partnership to start new and renew existing congregations. An adequate response to this memorial will require both partnership and increased resolve to identify, recruit, support, train, and deploy lay and clergy people with gifts for starting new congregations and renewing existing congregations.

Since the early 1990s, the ELCA has called on this church to increase the number of new starts. The 2003 Churchwide Assembly approved "Sharing Faith in a New Century: A Vision for Evangelism in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America" and asked this church not only to "nurture evangelical leaders so that this church will be faithful in its response to God's call to mission and evangelism" but also "to support the development of new ELCA congregations and ministry sites in communities that invite all to faith in Jesus Christ."

The Churchwide Assembly action underscored the importance of strengthening partnerships throughout this church for starting new congregations and renewing existing congregations as centers of evangelical outreach. It expressed gratitude for the possibilities for expanded collaboration in witness and service with ecumenical partners and companion churches around the globe. Finally, the action commended the proposed actions in the strategy to the Office of the Presiding Bishop for inclusion into the overall strategic planning process, which was approved by the Church Council in April 2004. One strategic direction of the Plan for Mission is "to assist members, congregations, synods, and institutions and agencies of this church to grow in evangelical outreach."

The Plan for Mission supports the objectives of the evangelism strategy, including the objective to "Start and Renew Congregations," which calls for "members, congregations, synods, churchwide ministries, and related institutions and agencies to seek opportunities to strengthen partnerships throughout this church for starting new congregations and renewing existing congregations as centers of service and witness, inviting all to faith in Jesus Christ." The objective calls for the development of a plan that by 2010 would include a pattern of starting 100 new congregations annually. At least half of these new ministries will be among people of color or people whose language is other than English. At least 20 percent of these new ministries will be among people living in poverty, requiring additional long-term funding or less capital-intensive leadership models. The action also calls for the annual redevelopment of at least 200 existing congregations by 2010. At least 25 percent of these congregations would be in rural areas and 25 percent in urban areas.

The Division for Outreach has been working with synods through its mission directors to plan for a diverse and growing number of new ministry profiles to consider annually. Over the last two years, approximately sixty

profiles for new starts were considered by a review table including nine synodical bishops along with Division for Outreach executive staff and mission directors. Each of the past two years, 50–55 sites have been approved for entry, but only 30–35 have been started due to the lack of leaders. The profiles included a wide variety of types of starts and partnerships for funding. There are an increasing number of congregations starting congregations, second-site new starts, and clusters of congregations starting congregations.

Plans for starting and renewing congregations also call for a comprehensive plan to revitalize congregations. The plan is to include: identification of assessment tools based on the standards of excellence that can be used to evaluate present ministry and identify assets; development and training of teams of consultants in every synod, available to congregations to support their work with the assessment tools and set in motion specific actions toward increased vitality and effectiveness; and encouragement of congregational plans for outreach. Staff of the churchwide organization have identified Natural Church Development as a tool to assess health in congregations. Coaches trained in use of the tool work with congregations to identify eight quality characteristics of healthy congregations, assess strengths in each area, and develop a plan for increasing strengths. Transformational Ministry training also addresses the redevelopment of congregations. The training is provided nationally and in many regions with a goal of working with 300 congregations annually. A series of training events throughout this church for “coaches” seeks to address the call for people in each synod to assist congregations in renewal and to support and encourage mission developers in their work.

The second objective of the evangelism strategy is to “Prepare and Renew Evangelical Leaders,” calling on “. . . members, congregations, synods, churchwide ministries, and related institutions and agencies to nurture evangelical leaders under the renewing power of God’s Spirit so that this church can be faithful in its response to God’s call to mission and evangelism.” A goal under this objective is “prepare and renew evangelical leaders, lay and clergy, by reaffirming evangelism as a key priority.” A footnote to the goal states: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America affirms its evangelical identity and mission, and calls for further development and renewal of evangelical leaders. Our mission seeks the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to prepare and renew evangelical leaders so that the ELCA can be faithful to God’s will for our church and its ministry. Effective evangelical leaders:

1. hold Jesus at the heart of their ministry and set about to make disciples in his name;
2. center ministry in effective proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments, and equip the people of God for witness and service;
3. are courageous, passionate, and contextual leaders

who see themselves as witnesses to Jesus Christ and the in-breaking reign of God;

4. see change as an opportunity for renewed spiritual vitality;
5. understand the gift of the diverse cultural reality in their contexts and develop a plan for their congregations to reflect that diversity;
6. have a clear vision of God’s mission and the commitment to following that vision;
7. work in partnership teams, lay and clergy, for the sake of God’s mission;
8. engage the needs of neighbor, community, and world, shaping their witness and service to fit those needs; and
9. invite all into God’s baptismal and Eucharistic community.”

Mission developer training, transformational ministry training, and coach training for Natural Church Development all seek, with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to renew and strengthen evangelical leaders.

Cost Analysis

The memorial calls for each synod either to start a congregation or to redevelop an existing congregation every year. The current process calls for and budgets for approximately 50 new starts each year. The funding for those new starts, increasingly, is through the churchwide organization and other funding partners.

The approximate cost for a mission developer for a year is \$68,000–70,000. The formula assumes half the cost of mission developers will be generated in the synod, conference, cluster, or local congregation through dollars over and above regular mission support. The formula also expects that the leadership from some starts will be provided by existing congregations at no additional cost, bi-vocational developers that earn most of their salary in secular work, and other varieties of less-than-full-time paid leadership. Under the current approach to funding new starts, if every synod supported a new start (approximately 15 more than are approved now), the churchwide cost beyond currently available funds would be \$500,000 each year to start those ministries with decreasing amounts required for two to three additional years as the new starts grow and mature financially.

The Church Council in April 2005 approved a designated fund that provides \$2,587,000 for support of the leadership development dimensions of the evangelism strategy and a one-time additional amount of \$500,000 for new congregation development and renewal. Additional resources would be required to meet the goals described in this memorial and the evangelism strategy. The action of the Church Council is a significant step toward identifying needed resources. Continued work on partnership funding of new starts through a wide variety of sources will be critical to reaching the goals.

*Response from Evangelical Outreach and
Congregational Mission [2007]*

Significant work was done during the 2005-2007 biennium that responds to the 2005 Southeastern Minnesota Synod memorial on new mission starts. The Office of the Presiding Bishop brought together staff of the Vocation and Education, Multicultural Ministries, and Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission units as well as the Office of the Secretary, the Mission Investment Fund, and Research and Evaluation to study the congregational new start process. That process resulted in increased knowledge and partnerships within the churchwide organization to strengthen the work of new starts. The Conference of Bishops also discussed new starts at their meetings in October 2006 and March 2007. Material was developed that informs and guides the process. The first paper, "Biblical Principles for Starting New Congregations: A Paper to Ground Lutheran Mission in the Twenty-first Century," sets out the learning of a group that included seminary professors, mission developers, churchwide staff, and bishops to outline biblical principles for starting new congregations.

The second paper, "New Starts Process," was developed by staff of the Vocation and Education and Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission units to describe the work of new starts and to invite stronger partnership in the work, as was requested in the memorial of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod.

Church Council Action:

To acknowledge the memorial of the Southeastern Minnesota Synod related to new mission starts;

To acknowledge with gratitude the ministry and partnerships of individuals, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization in the process of starting new congregations and renewing existing congregations;

To receive the paper "New Mission Starts" as a resource for deepening understanding of this work throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and

To request that the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America convey this paper and this action to the Southeastern Minnesota Synod as the response of the Church Council.

C. STUDENT LOAN INDEBTEDNESS

Indiana-Kentucky Synod (6C) [2005 Memorial]

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America requires four years of graduate education beyond a bachelor's degree for ordained ministry and at least two years of graduate education for most other rostered leaders; and

WHEREAS, tuition rates at both the undergraduate and seminary level have increased at well beyond the rate of inflation for more than a decade, leading to increased student loan indebtedness for those pursuing degrees leading to rostered ministry; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America through its churchwide and synodical budgets and special appeals subsidizes about 23 percent of the costs of seminary education, so that the average debt load for seminary graduates accepting their first call was approximately \$24,600 in 1999, an increase of 137 percent over the average debt of about \$10,400 in 1991 (a trend which has continued since 1999); and

WHEREAS, average salaries for rostered leaders have at best kept pace with inflation, so that many who have entered rostered ministry recently are faced with serious financial challenges due to student loan indebtedness; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Indiana-Kentucky Synod Council be encouraged to develop programs (perhaps similar to the Eastern North Dakota Synod's endowment fund) that help relieve student loan indebtedness for rostered leaders; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Indiana-Kentucky Synod memorialize the 2005 Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to consider plans for relieving student loan indebtedness for current rostered leaders.

Response from the Churchwide Assembly

The 2005 Churchwide Assembly voted [CA05.07.39y]:

To thank the Indiana-Kentucky Synod for the memorial on student loan indebtedness;

To request that the Division for Ministry (or the appropriate churchwide unit), in consultation with ELCA seminaries, continue to monitor the level of indebtedness among ELCA candidates and first-call rostered leaders, to investigate existing programs to address this issue, and to report biennially to the Church Council concerning this topic including possible strategies to address this issue; and

To encourage members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to support generously the Fund for Leaders in Mission.

Churchwide Assembly Background

The Indiana-Kentucky Synod memorial identifies a significant reality facing rostered leaders in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: that of increasing educational and consumer indebtedness for many seminary students and first-call rostered leaders. Many of these students enter seminary with significant educational and consumer debt. While there is still a significant percentage of ELCA candidates who graduate without indebtedness, the number of those with debt and the size of indebtedness is increasing. While tuition rates are a factor in this indebtedness, the net tuition increases have been modest, due to increased financial aid. The ELCA Fund for Leaders in Mission, established in 1999, is a long-term churchwide strategy to provide tuition scholarships for all ELCA candidates at ELCA seminaries. The fund presently has an endowment of over

\$10 million and to date has provided more than \$1.2 million in scholarships. The ELCA Foundation and the Division for Ministry continue to urge the members of the ELCA to support this fund.

In 2004–2005 the Division for Ministry participated in an inter-Lutheran study of indebtedness of seminarians and rostered leaders funded by Thrivent Financial for Lutherans, which indicated that both student loans and consumer indebtedness are an increasing reality. There is a commitment from all three Lutheran church bodies to continue to monitor this situation and consider possible strategies to address this issue.

Response from the Church Council [2005]

At its November 2005 meeting, the Church Council voted [CC05.11.77i]:

To refer the action of the Churchwide Assembly on student loan indebtedness to the Vocation and Education unit in consultation with seminaries; and

To request that a report and possible recommendations be brought to the April 2007 meeting of the Church Council.

Response from the Vocation and Education unit [2007]

The level of indebtedness continues to be a concern for those working with candidates and rostered leaders. ELCA seminaries attend to the total debt level and projected need of each student who applies for financial aid and offers counsel in a variety of ways. Synod candidacy committees increasingly raise these questions with candidates during the years of preparation and discernment. Committees are required to ask the candidate about debt at the entrance interview and at the approval interview. Committees occasionally must challenge a candidate to make specific plans for addressing debt, including the possibility of taking a period off from study. A number of synods have developed specific plans to help address education costs for their candidates, and some are attempting to facilitate debt reduction for rostered leaders in their first years of service. The Vocation and Education unit gathers and monitors anecdotal and systematic data from these various sources. At the initiation of the seminaries and as part of the work of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Mission Support, there is growing attention to stewardship education and formation of candidates, including personal financial management.

In response to the Churchwide Assembly memorial, Vocation and Education staff members have consulted with ELCA seminary presidents and other leaders about how best to proceed in assessing current levels and trends of ELCA seminarian indebtedness and in determining what actions would be most helpful. On January 30, 2007, a telephone meeting of seminary presidents and leadership of the Conference of Bishops, the Fund for

Leaders in Mission, and the Board of Pensions reviewed historical data on seminarian student debt, both in the ELCA and in other denominations; made plans for a full survey of debt levels of the most recent graduating class; and agreed to meet face-to-face with an expanded table in the spring to consider possible courses of coordinated action. A survey instrument has been designed in consultation with the financial aid offices of the seminaries, and the data gathered will be discussed at a May 23, 2007, meeting convened by Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson at the Lutheran Center.

The ELCA Fund for Leaders in Mission, established in 1999, is a long-term churchwide strategy to provide tuition scholarships for all ELCA candidates at ELCA seminaries. The fund presently has an endowment of over \$15 million with commitments of an additional \$15 million. To date, the Fund for Leaders in Mission has provided more than \$2.2 million in scholarships. For the 2006–2007 school year, grants totaling \$640,000 were awarded to 122 students. This figure includes grants from fund programs established by individual synods. The ELCA Foundation and the Vocation and Education unit continue to work systematically to urge the members of the ELCA to support this fund.

Church Council Action:

To express thanks to the Indiana-Kentucky Synod for its attention to indebtedness among candidates and rostered leaders within its synod and throughout this church;

To express sincere thanks and support for congregations, synods, seminaries, and churchwide units that monitor this debt and seek to address it in a variety of ways, including through collaborative efforts;

To urge the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to give strong and consistent financial support for scholarship aid to candidates through congregations and seminaries and through the Fund for Leaders in Mission; and

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