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Report for the Church Council on Governance  
Executive Committee of the Church Council  
*DRAFT*  
August 25, 2004

*“Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.”*

### **Introduction**

The members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its various expressions and institutions share a calling. We proclaim in our mission statement that “Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we have been claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.” In order to be part of God’s mission in the world, this church periodically returns to its Lutheran heritage of “always reforming” itself. Reflection on this church’s mission in our time and context resulted in the adoption by the 2003 Churchwide Assembly of new mission and vision statements, strategic directions for the churchwide organization, and commitments for implementation of the strategic directions.

As this church seeks to live *more fully* into its mission and transform its words into deeds, it has been considering how its various expressions and institutions can better work together so their ministries and decision-making are even more effective in accomplishing, with God’s help and guidance, God’s mission through this church.

To achieve the goal of the reformation of this church for mission, Presiding Bishop Mark S. Hanson will present to the Church Council in November 2004 a proposal for reorganizing the work of the churchwide organization. At the same time, the Executive Committee of the Church Council will offer a proposal concerning the way the ELCA is governed. These coordinated proposals are designed

- to build a stronger relationship and connection among all the members of the ELCA and its various expressions, agencies, and institutions,
- to maintain the churchwide organization’s effectiveness and efficiency,
- to remain attentive to a wide range of views,
- to strengthen the voices of members, congregations, and synods,
- to enable this church to carry out effectively its mission in the world.

Many steps have been taken to engage the members of this church in the discussion about this church’s governance. We are particularly thankful to all those persons who responded to questionnaires, including current and former members of the Church Council, synodical bishops and officers, pastors and congregation council presidents, members of boards and committees for the churchwide units of the ELCA, and the presidents of this church’s social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities.

## Premises and Commitments

This church's current system of governance has a number of strengths, including its ability to foster widespread participation, giving many people an opportunity for greater involvement in this church beyond their own congregation. It has worked well for sixteen years, addressing challenging issues, such as evangelism, world hunger, rural and urban ministry, ecumenical and inter-faith relationships, theological education, health care, and global concerns. It has provided support and structure for this church's ministries in congregations and in communities throughout the world. This system, however, also has some weaknesses, particularly the perception that it is complicated, unresponsive, and confusing. It has not realized fully its potential for interdependent ministry--congregations, synods, institutions, agencies, and the churchwide organization supporting one another and working together in mission—that was envisioned for it by the framers of this church.

Research conducted at the request of the Executive Committee of the Church Council shows that most members of this church are satisfied with the governance system in spite of its perceived weaknesses. On any given aspect of governance, the majority of respondents to a recent survey support the current system. Moreover, voting members of the 2003 Churchwide Assembly defeated a number of specific proposals for changing this church's governance procedures, including synodical ratification of policy and governing documents and congregational ratification of ecumenical agreements and ministry standards. This would suggest that significant changes are not in order, and that changes, which would potentially satisfy some, would in turn likely make others dissatisfied, in equal or even greater numbers. Acknowledging this dilemma, the Executive Committee nevertheless believes that some changes in governance would strengthen this church for mission and accordingly have incorporated these proposed changes into this document.

The research shows that many of those who are dissatisfied with this church's governance system believe that decisions do not adequately reflect the views of the majority and that the majority is kept out of the decision-making process through the use of inclusive principles. On the other hand, at least two-thirds or more of those who responded to questionnaires favor the use of inclusive principles. The ELCA governing documents specifically state "it shall be the responsibility of the Church Council to assure that this church maintain its commitment to inclusive representation" (19.11.01.a.). These representational principles—50 percent women and 50 percent men, 60 percent lay and 40 percent clergy, and 10 percent people of color or language other than English—are foundational to this church's commitment to inclusiveness in its mission and ministry. Because this church is not diverse racially and because it has not reached its goal of 10 percent people of color or language other than English, and because this church remains committed to the full participation of women and lay people, there are times when the representational principles seem quite different from the past experience of some in this church. This tension must be managed as well as possible, but it should not be allowed to undermine this church's commitment to inclusive representation.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council is committed to proposing changes in governance that will result in a system that is transparent, readily understood, responsive, flexible, accessible, effective, and efficient. The system will be one in which roles and responsibilities of its various interdependent parts will be clear. It will be one that will enable this church to live out its mission and calling through its strategic directions.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council bases its proposals on the following premises:

- Leadership and decision-making in this church must be shared.
- Leaders and decision-makers must be accountable to one another.
- Decisions are best made by well-informed members of this church.
- One of the most important ways members will become well informed is through discussing issues and listening to one another in assemblies and councils, which bring together people with different views on, and experiences in, this church.

The Executive Committee of the Church Council is committed to ensuring that:

- the principle of inclusive representation is retained,
- the principle of interdependence is retained,
- there is broad conversation throughout this church before decisions are made,
- every opportunity to become well-informed is made available to the members of this church and its decision-makers,
- communication among members of this church will be improved,
- a wide variety of views are considered seriously in assembly and council deliberations,
- those who serve on councils or in assemblies serve on behalf of this whole church,
- the rationale behind decisions is widely communicated after decisions are made.

### ***What is your view of these premises and commitments?***

#### **Proposed Directions on Governance**

*(Below, for the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, and Boards and Steering Committees of Churchwide Units, we present proposals followed by statements of rationale.)*

#### **A. On the Churchwide Assembly**

The recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Church Council about the Churchwide Assembly are based on the conviction that the Churchwide Assembly remains the best forum for making decisions already assigned to it in behalf of this whole church. These recommendations respond to perceived weaknesses in the current system by strengthening communication among members of this church and by providing synodical assemblies with a means of giving input to the Churchwide Assembly on key issues.

#### *Proposals*

1. The current size of the Churchwide Assembly would be maintained with some adjustments for changes in the baptized membership of the regions.
2. Voting members would receive a subscription to *The Lutheran* during the biennium in which they are serving.

3. *The Church Council, in collaboration with the Conference of Bishops, would provide a systematic and standardized process to enable synodical assemblies to discuss and respond to upcoming major decisions facing the Churchwide Assembly, beginning with the 2007 Assembly.* These opportunities would be available early enough in the process to consider synodical responses carefully and incorporate them into the process.
4. The churchwide organization, including the Church Council, is committed to being in regular and significant consultation with its partners. One of the ways this can happen is through formal consultations with various groups, institutions, and agencies during years when no Churchwide Assembly is scheduled. Another way is through expansion of the use of congregational observers at the Churchwide Assembly. This role would be provided for in a continuing way through a new bylaw.

### *Rationale*

1. The Executive Committee proposes to retain the current size of the Churchwide Assembly (A1) because adding voting members is unlikely to change effective representation but would add considerable cost.
2. It proposes that voting members receive *The Lutheran* (A2) so that they can become more informed about issues in order to make good decisions about them. Providing *The Lutheran* to voting members is part of an increased effort to communicate with all members of this church and is part of the new integrated communications strategy.
3. Instituting a review process by synods (A3) indicates that the desire for more input into major decisions on the part of synods and congregations has been heard. It addresses concerns that memorials are not “heard”—especially because of the *en bloc* process for handling many of them—by providing another means for input to decisions. The review process puts the responsibility for seeking and processing responses to key proposals on the churchwide organization.
4. The Executive Committee’s recommendations about consultations (A4) are based on the following: Formal consultations in non-Churchwide Assembly years are being recommended but not mandated because concerns were raised about costs, both monetary and staff, and formal consultations may not be the only or best way to achieve the desired *improvement in* communication and relationship-building.

### **What is your view of these proposals on the Churchwide Assembly?**

#### **B. On the Church Council**

The recommendations of the Executive Committee of the Church Council regarding the Church Council are based on concern for the council’s effectiveness as a deliberating body. They also reflect the committee’s conviction that council members serve this whole church. The Executive Committee does not recommend a larger council because we believe it would inevitably lead to more decisions being made by a smaller group of people, namely, the Executive Committee. The recommendations respond to perceived weaknesses in the current system by giving synodical assemblies responsibility for nominating council members and by expanding the number of advisory voices at the table.

## Proposals

1. The Church Council would remain at its current size of 33 members and the four officers (presiding bishop, vice president, secretary, and treasurer).
2. Beginning with the **2005-2006** biennium, Church Council members would be nominated through synodical assemblies and elected by the Churchwide Assembly, eleven at each Churchwide Assembly. Synods would conduct the nomination process by whatever means they desired so that the result would be two nominees going forward to the Churchwide Assembly, where one would be elected. There would be no nominations from the floor of the churchwide assembly. The representational principles would be upheld through a rotational system throughout all the synods. Information about the nominees, more extensive than is currently the case and including answers to selected questions, would be printed in the *Pre-Assembly Report*.
3. In addition to the current advisory members (one synodical bishop from each of the nine regions and two youth members), the following also would become advisory members to the Church Council:
  - o the president of each of the five ethnic associations;
  - o the chair of the program committee of each of the five churchwide program units (*See Section C*) and Augsburg Fortress, Publishers, and Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;
  - o the chair of the consulting committee on work on behalf of women;
  - o one representative from this church's seminaries, one from the colleges and universities, and one from the social ministry organizations, chosen through those institutions' umbrella organizations.

Advisory members would participate in the committees of the council, where they would have the most opportunity to help shape the work and decisions of the council. The purposes of advisory members are to interpret to this church the policies, goals, and outcomes established by the council, to shape the work of their committees, synods, and organizations around those policies, goals, and outcomes, and to bring ideas, issues, and expertise to the council and its work. The list of those included as advisors is undergirded by constitutional provisions 8.30. and following and 16.22.A00.

- 4a. Church Council members would be encouraged to interact with synods in their region in various ways, including attending at least one synodical council meeting per year, visitation of congregations, and participation in synodical assemblies, especially in years when a synod is nominating persons to the Church Council. These suggestions would be incorporated into the position description of the duties of a Church Council member, which is being developed by the council's task force on board development, and would be articulated during orientation of new board members. The Church Council is developing a plan for members to interact with synods that do not currently have a member on the council.

4b. Synods would be encouraged to interact more regularly with the Church Council.

Among the ways this interaction could occur are the following:

- invite Church Council members to synodical council meetings where they could both listen to synodical concerns and present council perspectives on upcoming or previous actions;
- share regularly synodical council agendas, minutes, and newsletters with Church Council members;
- invite Church Council members to write a column in the synodical newsletter;
- invite Church Council members to synodical assemblies where they could both listen to synodical concerns and present council perspectives on upcoming or previous actions. In years when the synodical assembly is nominating persons for the Church Council, the current member could talk to the whole assembly about the duties of a council member. The position description for council members would be distributed to the synodical assembly members.

### *Rationale*

1. These proposals are trying to bridge the expressed disconnect between the Church Council and synods. Church Council members, both voting and advisory, are trying to build relationships between the churchwide organization and synods, congregations, and institutions and agencies. Church Council members want to be in conversation and relationship with these mission partners, opening lines of communication that extend in both directions—from synods and congregations to the churchwide organization as well as from churchwide organization to synods and congregations. Council members want to have a role in interpreting the mission of this church to synods and congregations while also listening to their concerns. Part of this communication is the need for everyone to become better informed—on the one hand about the work of the churchwide organization, and on the other about the needs, desires, and attitudes of synods and congregations. The hope is that increased and improved communication, shared information, and intentional dialogue would lead to decisions that will serve more people. The goal is that the members of this church would become contributors to the decision-making process rather than reactors to it.
2. The proposals also address the Church Council’s strong support for the representational principles. We believe that achieving those principles is a matter for this entire church, including synods, which would nominate Church Council members in rotation according to representational categories.
3. The proposals address the synods’ desire for representatives, even though not every synod would be represented at the same time. Synods would be represented on a rotational basis by having one six-year term on council and one six-year term off. The desire for representation is also addressed through synod nomination of two candidates for Church Council, one of whom would be elected. This proposed change allows synods and voting members to the Churchwide Assembly to know the candidates better. Better knowledge of candidates also would be served by having fuller biographical information available in the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

4. The Church Council continues to affirm that a council member serves on behalf of this whole church.
5. The expansion of the council through advisory members allows more voices to be heard.
6. The proposals continue this church's commitments to multicultural ministry and work on behalf of women while integrating them more thoroughly into this church.

The Executive Committee is not recommending that the language of †S10.01.a. be changed to require Church Council participation in meetings of synodical councils. The reasons for this recommendation include recognition that council members' participation may be limited due to cost, time involved, and distance (in some regions). This recommendation also encourages synods to take responsibility for this aspect of relationship-building. This recommendation should be seen as an opportunity for synods to use Church Council members as resources and partners.

### ***What is your view of these proposals on the Church Council?***

#### **C. On the Boards and Committees of Churchwide Units (not separately incorporated)**

The Executive Committee recommends that existing boards and steering committees be changed to program committees. The Executive Committee's recommendations on the program committees of churchwide units reflect the desire for greater clarity concerning the responsibilities of every aspect of this church's governance system. They also strengthen the interdependent relationship between these aspects. The recommendations address concerns about the current system by sharing responsibility for nominations between synodical assemblies and the churchwide Nominating Committee and by providing more information about program committee nominees to the voting members of the Churchwide Assembly.

#### *Proposals*

1. Program committees for churchwide program units would consist of 15 members serving one non-renewable six-year term.
2. With the exception noted below, two-thirds of the members of program committees would be nominated by synodical assemblies and one-third by the churchwide Nominating Committee. All would be elected by the Churchwide Assembly. The Nominating Committee would attend to matters of balance and expertise on the committee after considering the nominees from synods. Representatives from social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities would be included in the five members emerging from the Nominating Committee process.
3. The Multicultural Ministry Program Committee would consist of at least two people each from the following communities: African American, Black; Arab and Middle Eastern; Asian and Pacific Islander; Latino; American Indian and Alaska Native. The Nominating Committee would develop nominees through its usual processes. Election would be by the Churchwide Assembly.

4. A Church Council member would serve on each committee as liaison with voice but not vote. Church Council members would be available to serve on any advisory committees established by Augsburg Fortress, Publishers or Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
5. Additional representatives from social ministry organizations, seminaries, and colleges and universities would serve on committees as needed for special initiatives.
6. Program committees would be consulted concerning the appointment of the program unit's executive, who is nominated by the presiding bishop and confirmed by the Church Council. An executive may be terminated by the presiding bishop with the consent of the Executive Committee of the Church Council in accordance with the churchwide organization's personnel policies.

### *Rationale*

1. This proposed system clarifies the distinct roles of and relationships between the program committees, which are advisory to the program units, and the Church Council, which is the board of directors of this church. The Church Council has responsibility for policy, and the program committees help program units carry out that policy by providing expert advice and a variety of viewpoints. *The new constitutional language would make this clear.*
2. It addresses the desire of synods for representation by placing responsibility for two-thirds of the nominations in the hands of synods.
3. It responds to desires for expertise and experience on committees as well as upholds the representational principles by making one-third of the nominations the responsibility of the Nominating Committee.
4. By coordinating these election cycles with those for Church Council, the process ensures that synods are always involved in some way with churchwide governance.

### ***What is your view of these proposals on boards and steering committees of churchwide units?***

Upon completion of the Church Council's recommendations in November 2004 related to governance for action by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly, the council will determine a transition plan for the revised form of governance. The council's decisions will guide the Nominating Committee in the preparation of the committee's report to the assembly. Further, the proposed governance transition plan, if confirmed by the Churchwide Assembly, will guide the election process at the assembly, including the number to be elected to the various committees and boards.

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