



Introduction to the Sixteenth Churchwide Assembly

“Embody the Word” is the theme for the sixteenth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For a number of years now, a phrase that has caught the imagination of this church is “God’s work. Our hands.” In very real ways, we assemble in Columbus, and indeed in all of our individual congregations, to do God’s work as the body of Christ. But also, in a mysterious way, when we assemble and when we go back out into the world, we embody the living Word that brings life and hope to that world. As Martin Luther said, we become “little Christs” who by our love and service for the neighbor become the very presence of Christ in the world.

For these days, we assemble as a part of the body of Christ. We will gather around the word and share in the sacrament as the living, breathing body of Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit to do the work we are called to do. We come representing 65 synods, more than 8,700 congregations, and 3 million ELCA Lutherans. In our role as members of this assembly, we have been given the responsibilities of listening, debating, and deciding important matters that will affect and lead this church into the future.

Responsibilities of the Churchwide Assembly

The nature and role of the Churchwide Assembly are defined in constitutional provision 12.11. of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* in this way:

The Churchwide Assembly shall be the highest legislative authority of the churchwide organization and shall deal with all matters which are necessary in pursuit of the purposes and functions of this church. The powers of the Churchwide Assembly are limited only by the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation, this constitution and bylaws, and the assembly’s own resolutions.

The Churchwide Assembly, according to constitutional provision 12.21., must:

- a. Review the work of the churchwide officers and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- b. Review the work of the churchwide units and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- c. Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies.
- d. Establish churchwide policy.
- e. Adopt a budget for the churchwide organization.
- f. Elect officers, board members, and other persons as provided in the constitution or bylaws.
- g. Establish churchwide units to carry out the functions of the churchwide organization.
- h. Have the sole authority to amend the constitution and bylaws.
- i. Fulfill other functions as required in the constitution and bylaws.
- j. Conduct such other business as necessary to further the purposes and functions of the churchwide organization.

Assembly vocabulary is intentional

It is important to note and remember that no *delegates* will be present for this assembly. Voting members are not delegates, as that term is understood or used in some political contexts. The voting members, elected by synod assemblies to serve in the Churchwide Assembly, come together as representatives not only of their own congregations and synods but also serve on behalf of all the people of the ELCA.

These words both recognize certain legal requirements and also reflect an ecclesial (that is, churchly) understanding, an understanding grounded in Scripture, reflected in the Lutheran confessional writings, and established as part of this church’s polity upon the formation of the ELCA.

Within the ELCA, there are three primary expressions of this church: congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. Each one is fully the church, but none is the whole church. They exist and serve within this one church.

In the case of the Churchwide Assembly, voting members carry out their duties on behalf of all members of the ELCA. Nourished by word and sacrament, they are called in assembly to seek the well-being of this whole church. As stated in ELCA bylaw 19.11.06.: “All persons elected to any position . . . shall strive to represent this church and not just a particular geographic area.”

Voting members carry a heavy responsibility. They must study conscientiously the issues on the agenda of the assembly; listen thoughtfully to the debate throughout plenary sessions; examine carefully possible amendments to proposals; consider with insight resolutions or new business submitted by voting members; elect with care capable people to serve on Church Council, boards and committees; seek prayerfully the guidance of God’s Spirit in all matters; and act in all things for the sake of the unity and well-being of this church and the whole Church.

The vocabulary that we use within the ELCA both *shapes* and *reflects* our understanding of this church. When we recognize and understand that our “congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations” (ELCA constitutional provision 3.03.), then our awareness of the significance of being voting members in a given assembly grows. After all, as we declare in regard to the “Nature of the Church,” the ELCA “derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inherent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful” (also ELCA 3.03.).

We need to understand more clearly and embrace more completely the conviction that the ELCA “shall seek to function as people of God through congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization, all of which shall be interdependent. Each part, while fully the church, recognizes that it is not the whole church and therefore lives in a partnership relationship with the others” (ELCA 8.11.). Our challenge is to appreciate and practice interdependence!

Indeed, we together affirm and declare the primary principle of organization for our church, namely: “The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be one church” (ELCA 5.01.).

Within this one church, we as voting members, advisory members, non-voting members, visitors, and staff will gather to carry out the work of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.

Organization of the Pre-Assembly Report

The *Pre-Assembly Report* is organized by sections, as follows:

- I. General Information
- II. Reports of the Officers
- III. Reports of the Churchwide Organization
- IV. Reports of the Separately Incorporated Ministries
- V. Recommendations of the Church Council
- VI. Other Assembly-Related Documents
- VII. Report of the Memorials Committee
- VIII. Report of the Nominating Committee
- IX. Report of the Reference and Counsel Committee
- X. Report of the Elections Committee
- XI. Report of the Church Council
- XII. Governing Documents
- Other

Content of the Pre-Assembly Report

This *Pre-Assembly Report* contains the reports of the churchwide units and of the separately incorporated ministries as information for the voting members of the ELCA’s sixteenth Churchwide Assembly. Reports of the presiding bishop, vice president, secretary, and treasurer are provided as required in this church’s constitution. It also contains a summary of actions of the Church Council during the triennium, which is formally presented to the assembly by the vice president.

The *Pre-Assembly Report* also contains recommendations to the assembly for actions to be taken by the Church Council. Proposed revisions to the governing documents of this church are presented by the council. This is done consistent with the Church Council’s duties, as defined in this church’s bylaws. Recommendations for assembly action by the Memorials Committee and the report of the assembly’s Nominating Committee also are provided.

Policies regarding mailing lists and materials distribution

The policy on providing materials to voting and other members before the Churchwide Assembly, other than materials provided by the churchwide organization, is as follows:

That any organization composed entirely of members of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, registering an official request to mail materials to the voting members of a forthcoming ELCA Churchwide Assembly, shall be permitted to do so if the materials are pertinent to the business of the assembly as determined by the Office of the Secretary (CC88.07.80).

Lists of voting members will not otherwise be provided to those who are not voting members.

The list of voting members also is available for review by voting members upon publication of the official notice of the Churchwide Assembly, as specified in ELCA bylaw 12.31.02. According to the nonprofit law under which the ELCA is incorporated, the list of voting members must be provided for inspection by voting members either in the registered office of the ELCA in Minnesota or at a place in the city where the assembly is to be held. Voting members may use the list solely for the purpose of communicating with other voting members concerning the meeting of the Churchwide Assembly and for no other purpose.

At the April 2001 meeting of the Church Council, the secretary expressed concern that the pattern of the list's being available only at the registered office or the assembly site made inspection of the list conveniently accessible only to those voting members near the place where the list is deposited. In response to this concern, the Church Council voted (CC01.04.44):

To affirm that the secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America will continue to offer the service of distribution of material for the assembly, including materials pertinent to the assembly submitted by any organization composed entirely of members of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, registering an official request to mail materials to the voting members of a forthcoming ELCA Churchwide Assembly, according to the policy established by the Church Council in 1988 (CC88.07.80); and

To authorize the secretary—for the sake of fairness to voting members for the forthcoming Churchwide Assembly in view of geographic distance from the site of the official location of the list of voting members—to provide, at the time of the publication of the official notice of the assembly and subsequent to that date, a paper copy of the names and addresses of the list to any voting member of the next assembly who submits a written request to the secretary for the list, agrees in writing to use the list solely for the purpose of communicating with other voting members of the Churchwide Assembly concerning the meeting, and provides payment of the cost of the list, as determined by the secretary.

The secretary has determined that this list does not include email addresses for voting members.

Distribution of materials and operation at the Churchwide Assembly

According to the ELCA policy adopted by the Church Council (CC88.07.81), the following procedures apply to distribution of materials and allocation of space at the Churchwide Assembly:

- Only materials authorized by this church's secretary, with approval of the Reference and Counsel Committee, will be distributed to voting members of the assembly during the assembly.
- Inclusion of material from related institutions, agencies and organizations (such as church colleges related through the Christian Community and Leadership home area) will be decided by the unit, subject to approval of the secretary.
- Space for meetings or meal functions, as requested by churchwide units or synods, will be provided whenever possible.
- Office space will be available only to assist the work of the assembly.
- Secretarial services are supplied only in relation to the official work of the assembly, its officers, and its committees.
- Individuals or groups wishing to appear in relation to or at the assembly must secure permission from the secretary of this church. Priority for any such appearances will be given to persons or groups from within the constituency of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, particularly to groups or persons of the host synod. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America assumes no responsibility for expenses—including travel, food, and lodging—nor does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offer honoraria of any amount.

Assembly procedures

The Rules of Organization and Procedure cite the applicable constitutional provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions that relate to the work of the assembly. In addition, various rules intended to facilitate the work of the voting members in assembly are provided. The rules provide a primer for the tasks ahead, as well as specific guidance on how voting members together shall proceed. One of the first actions the assembly will take in plenary session is adoption of its Rules of Organization and Procedure.

Except where ELCA churchwide governing documents or the adopted rules specify otherwise, *Robert's Rules of Order* (latest edition) will govern assembly procedures, as indicated in ELCA bylaw 12.31.09.

Voting and debate procedures

The sixteenth Churchwide Assembly will utilize electronic balloting. An introduction to the electronic voting procedures will be presented during the first plenary session.

Separate floor microphones will be available for those who wish to speak in favor of a proposal and those who oppose a proposal. This arrangement contributes to balanced debate.

Voting en bloc

As explained in the Rules of Organization and Procedure, in order to save the time of the assembly in plenary sessions, some routine or non-controversial business may be grouped together into a block of items. Such a block of items will be approved or disapproved by action on a single motion. Some constitutional amendments to governing documents and parts of the report of the Memorials Committee are scheduled to be acted upon in this way. Assembly members, however, are given the opportunity to request that individual items be removed from the “block” and be considered separately. Such requests must be made before the applicable deadlines, which are listed in the Rules of Organization and Procedure. The chair will outline the process for *en bloc* consideration of matters during the first plenary session.

Amendments to the Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions

Various amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* have been recommended to the assembly by the Church Council. Amendments have to do primarily with language clarification, organization of constitutional provisions, inclusive language, and administrative processes.

Assembly committees

Under the governing documents of the ELCA, certain committees are charged with responsibilities in relation to the Churchwide Assembly.

Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee must nominate at least one person for each position, other than for officers, to be elected by the assembly. Nominations from the floor can be made for some positions.

Memorials Committee

The Memorials Committee reviews all memorials received from synod assemblies, provides background information for voting members on the topics of the memorials, and offers recommended actions in response to the memorials.

Reference and Counsel Committee

The Reference and Counsel Committee is charged with reviewing and evaluating resolutions submitted by voting members. The committee then brings recommendations and advice to the assembly for possible action.

In addition to the committees mandated by the governing documents, a number of other committees facilitate the work of the Churchwide Assembly. Among them are the following:

Elections Committee

The Elections Committee oversees the conduct of all elections in accordance with the governing documents and procedures adopted by the Churchwide Assembly.

Credentials Committee

The Credentials Committee oversees registration of voting members and reports periodically regarding the composition of the assembly.

Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee

The Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee assists the officers of this church in planning the assembly's agenda, program, worship, and arrangements.

Ad Hoc committees

The Rules of Organization and Procedure authorize the presiding bishop to appoint other committees as needed.

Abbreviations and citations

Where possible, abbreviations and acronyms have been avoided. Where they occur, the full name or title has been identified at its first occurrence within a chapter or section, for example, "Lutheran World Federation (LWF)."

Designation of decisions of the governing bodies

Reference to the actions of the ELCA's various governing bodies are noted by a code, such as CC22.04.17. The initial letters followed by a number indicate the body and the year during which the action was taken—in this case an action taken by the Church Council during 2022 (CC indicates Church Council; EC, the Executive Committee of the Church Council; CB, the Conference of Bishops; and so on). The second number designates the month during which the body convened and the action was taken—in this example, April 2022. The third number is the sequence number of the action taken during the calendar year—in this instance, the 17th action taken by the Church Council during 2022.

Action numbers assigned to the 1989 and succeeding churchwide assemblies follow a similar pattern, with the exception that the letters preceding the year of the assembly read "CA." Thus, in the minutes of the 2019 assembly, CA19.04.10. would signify that the 10th action of the 2019 Churchwide Assembly occurred on the fourth day.

References to the governing documents

Care should be used to distinguish between the action numbers, explained above, and citations of sections of the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*. For example, ELCA 9.21. denotes a churchwide constitution provision; †S18.11. denotes a provision in the *Constitution for Synods*, with † indicating that it is a required provision; and *C9.03. denotes a provision of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, in which asterisks [*] indicate required provisions.

There are three categories of governing document provisions: constitutional provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions. Three-digit or four-digit numbers with a period preceding the last two digits refer to constitutional provisions, such as ELCA 8.11. Bylaws are identified by triple sets of numbers, such as ELCA 8.31.01. Continuing resolutions in ELCA constitutional material also are codified with three sets of numbers. In each type of provision, the numbers before the initial period indicate the applicable chapter. The final set of numbers in the case of continuing resolutions is preceded by a letter. The number indicates the year during which the resolution was adopted, and the letter indicates the sequence of resolutions adopted during that year with respect to that matter. Thus, ELCA 18.01.C91. signifies a continuing resolution adopted during 1991 with respect to chapter 18, section 1, of the ELCA's constitution.

College corporation meetings

Two of the ELCA's colleges and universities have bylaws requiring that the Churchwide Assembly ratify election by the boards of regents of these institutions of candidates to fill vacancies on their boards (Luther College, Decorah, Iowa and Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa). Information on these college corporation meetings will be distributed to assembly members under the Other section of the *Pre-Assembly Report*.

Live streaming of churchwide assembly

Plenary sessions will be streamed live on the ELCA website. At this assembly, a live stream of worship also will be provided. Members of the assembly are encouraged to invite members of congregations and others to view the worship and work of the sixteenth Churchwide Assembly.

Care of creation

Substantial efforts have been undertaken to “green” this sixteenth Churchwide Assembly. Thousands of pages of paper and countless envelopes have been saved by utilizing electronic communications whenever possible. In addition, the Churchwide Assembly Planning Committee has worked closely with the hotels and convention center and the local arrangements committee to implement the three “Rs” of environmental stewardship: reduce, reuse and recycle. It is preliminarily estimated that more than 500,000 pages of paper will be saved at this Churchwide Assembly by use of the ELCA Events application and electronic communications. As voting members, visitors, observers, and guests, please help us to care for God’s creation.

Gathering as members

As we look toward the sixteenth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we see before us major decisions that need to be made and significant issues that await the deliberation of the voting members. We must always remember that when we gather to do the work to which we have been called, we are centered in worship, where we pray for God’s guidance, hear God’s word proclaimed and receive the gift of Holy Communion.

Nourished and strengthened for ministry, individual members of this church will gather together in assembly to discuss and implement ways of embodying the living Word in all the expressions of this church in the many and varied contexts in which we live. Thanks be to God.

Deacon Sue E. Rothmeyer, *secretary*