



North Carolina Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Resources for Conversation regarding the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and 2009 Churchwide Assembly Decisions

This document has been prepared by the Bishop's office of the North Carolina Synod, ELCA in response to questions recently received. It is not meant to be exhaustive but rather to serve as clarification and a resource for conversation. Bishop Bolick and staff welcome opportunities for continued dialog about mission and ministry in the ELCA and the North Carolina Synod.

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1. What does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America believe?

- + This church confesses the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- + This church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the Gospel as the power of God for the salvation of all who believe.
- + This church believes in the Word of God, and receives God's Word in Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate; in proclamation of God's message to us as both Law and Gospel; and in the canonical Scriptures, the inspired and written Word of God, which provides the authoritative source and norm for proclamation, faith and life.
- + This church accepts the historic creeds (Apostles, Nicene, Athanasian) as true declarations of the faith, and the Lutheran Confessions as faithful witnesses and interpretations of the faith.
- + This church is gathered around God's Word and Sacraments, and its worship flows into witness and service that proclaims God's love to this broken world.
- + This church maintains a deep and abiding commitment to ministry with children and youth.
- + This church engages in global mission with deep respect for the rich gifts of our brothers and sisters in other lands and understands this engagement as focused in accompaniment.
- + This church continues a rich heritage of theological reflection and discernment and is dedicated to strong theological education in preparing leaders.
- + This church believes in the vocation of the baptized to ministry in daily life, translating Sunday's faith into Monday's world.
- + This church is committed to interdependence in its three expressions and as the vision for networks of mission agencies in the United States and throughout the world, including Lutheran Services in America, Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, Lutheran Disaster Response, and the Lutheran World Federation.

2. How does the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America live out its beliefs in daily ministry?

ELCA churchwide ministries support:

- 4,650,000 baptized members, over 10,000 congregations and 8 seminaries – our closest is Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina
- 27 universities – including Lenoir-Rhyne University in Hickory which has about 1,700 students
- 267 elementary schools
- 147 outdoor ministries – such as Lutheridge, Lutherock and Agape-Kure Beach
- A National Youth Gathering that last year brought 37,000 youth to New Orleans, including over 1,000 from North Carolina
- 15,000 rostered leaders with healthcare and pension benefits for clergy, lay leaders and missionaries
- 260 missionaries in 50 countries; 198 military chaplains
- Strong ecumenical partnerships – we are in “full communion” (which means we speak well of each other, look for ways to work together, support and challenge each other, and that pastors are interchangeable) with the following church bodies: United Methodist, United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), The Moravian Church, and The Episcopal Church. We are in conversation with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and the NC Synod has a covenant with the Roman Catholic Diocese in North Carolina.
- Endorsement for chaplaincy and specialized ministry
- Investment opportunities and financial services
- Legal guidance to synods
- 70,000,000 Lutherans represented in the Lutheran World Federation
- Director of Evangelical Mission on the territory of the Synod (Pastor Hinojosa)
- Response to disaster and hunger through the ELCA Disaster Response and World Hunger Funds. Approximately 92% of all gifts go to those in need.
- Social service organizations that serve one of every 50 people in the United States and the Caribbean each year.
- Mobility assistance for rostered leaders in conjunction with the NC Synod
- Fund for Leaders providing financial assistance for seminarians

- Special Needs Fund for rostered leaders
- Health and wellness initiative through the Board of Pensions
- Resources for congregational ministry (ie. Worship, stewardship, education, Book of Faith, Lutheran Magazine)

North Carolina Synod ministries support:

- Recruitment, screening and preparation of candidates for ministry in cooperation with ELCA guidelines – currently more than 80.
- Staff assistance in the call process
- Staff and consultants to walk with and coach congregations and pastors in conflicted situations
- An efficient and effective system to respond to rostered leader misconduct, with ELCA support
- Constitution and compensation guidelines for pastors and rostered lay leaders
- 6 mission congregations under development in North Carolina
- Over 7,000 resources available through the Heilig Resource Center located in the Synod Office building on Lutheran Synod Drive in Salisbury
- Bi-weekly communication through Synod Servant E-News
- Over 2,000 youth and adults engaged in faith-building opportunities across the synod
- Companion Synod relationships with Costa Rica and Papua New Guinea
- 12 Campus Ministries: UNC Chapel Hill, NC State, Appalachian State, Elon, Wake Forest, Duke, NC Central, UNC Charlotte, UNC Greensboro, East Carolina, UNC Pembroke, Lenoir-Rhyne
- Agencies and institutions, including:
 - + Lenoir-Rhyne University
 - + Lutheridge Lutherock
 - + Agape-Kure Beach
 - + Lutheran Family Services
 - + Lutheran Services for the Aging
 - + Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary
 - + Twin Lakes
- Women of the ELCA
- Lutheran Men in Mission

- Lutheran Youth Organization
- Fall gathering for Leaders (Convocation)
- First Call Theological Education (capable pastor mentors new pastors)
- Youth Workers network
- Intentional interim ministry training and support
- Yearly event for rostered leaders new to North Carolina
- Membership in the North Carolina Council of Churches
- Book of Faith Initiative training and support
- Bishop staff available to congregations and leaders
- Planned giving

3. How does the ELCA make decisions?

The highest decision making body is the Churchwide Assembly that meets every two years at various places around the country. The next meeting is in Florida in August of 2011.

In 2009 there were 1045 voting members at the Churchwide Assembly elected by the 65 synods that make up the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The North Carolina Synod Assembly elected 19 voting members based on the number of members in the NC Synod. All Assemblies, Synod and Churchwide, are made up of 50% men and 50% women; 60% lay and 40% clergy; 10% persons of color or primary language other than English.

In some denominations one person, or bishops, make “big” decisions, in some denominations congregations must ratify decisions made by churchwide assemblies, in other denominations it is the congregations that decide – the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is somewhere in between. The ELCA makes “big decisions” by entrusting them to voting members chosen at synod assemblies. Some prefer one method over others and yet most would say the Holy Spirit can and does work in all methods of decision making.

4. What “big decisions” were made during the 2009 Churchwide Assembly in Minneapolis?

- Full communion with the United Methodist Church was approved
- HIV and AIDS Funding Proposal approved to raise \$10 million over three years to support this church’s HIV and AIDS strategy
- Development of Lutheran Malaria Initiative approved to fight malaria, particularly in Africa. The LMI is a shared effort with Lutheran World Relief, The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod and the United Nations Foundation.
- Social Statement “Human Sexuality; Gift and Trust” adopted by exactly the necessary 2/3 majority.
- Changes to ministry policies based on the approved social statement

5. What is a social statement, and what did this one say?

Social statements are teaching documents of our church, but they are not doctrinal statements with which all members are expected to agree. "Human Sexuality, Gift and Trust" builds on the Lutheran principles of justification by grace and Christian freedom. It emphasizes that central to our vocation, in relation to human sexuality, is the building and protection of trust in relationships. The social statement addresses marriage, same-gender relationships, families, protecting children, friendships, commitment, social responsibility and moral discernment. Regarding same-gender committed relationships, the social statement says that this church is not in agreement and recognizes different perspectives which are present among us.

6. What were the new ministry policies adopted at the Churchwide Assembly

The assembly adopted the resolutions in the following order, beginning with a strong statement about how we will live together in the face of our disagreements:

1. "RESOLVED, that in the implementation of any resolutions on ministry policies, the ELCA commit itself to bear one another's burdens, love the neighbor, and respect the bound consciences of all." (Adopted 771 – 230 as amended)
2. "RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding ways to allow congregations that choose to do so to recognize, support and hold publically accountable life-long monogamous, same-gender relationships." (Adopted 619 - 402)
3. "RESOLVED, that the ELCA commit itself to finding a way for people in such publicly accountable lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship to serve as rostered leader of this church." (Adopted 559 - 451)
4. RESOLVED, that members respect the bound consciences of those with whom they disagree; declared intent to allow structured flexibility in decision-making about candidacy and the call process; eliminated the prohibition of rostered service by members in publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships; recognized and committed to respect the conviction of members who believe that this church should not call or roster people in a publicly accountable, lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationship (Adopted 667-307)

7. How have congregations and individuals responded to the decisions regarding the social statement and ministry policies?

1. Some congregations have supported the decisions made at the Assembly.
2. Some congregations have adopted a declaration by the council and/or congregation stating that same-sex relationships will not be recognized in the church facility or by the pastor and that their congregation would not call a person who is in or intends to be in a same-gender relationship.

3. Some congregations have disaffiliated and joined one of 3 other Lutheran bodies.
4. Some congregations have voted and will not be leaving.
5. Many congregations have not made these decisions a significant focus of their ministry.
6. Many congregations have lost members in a response to the Assembly decisions, and a few have gained members.

8. How do these responses relate to our understanding of scripture?

No one at the assembly suggested that scripture be ignored. Members of ELCA congregations - people who believe in the death and Resurrection of Jesus, who believe that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and who worship the triune God - have differing opinions on how scripture speaks to life-long monogamous, same-gender relationship and other ethical issues.

9. Is it possible to be at the table together if we do not agree?

Historically, the ELCA has said and continues to say that all who believe that Jesus is Lord and who are baptized are welcome to come to the table. Those in the church (all denominations) have disagreed over the necessity of circumcision, civil rights, divorce of church members and clergy, inter-faith and inter-denomination marriage and ordination of women. Even Paul and Peter didn't always agree.

10. Will congregations calling a pastor be able to ask questions regarding sexuality?

As in the past, congregations are free to ask questions of those they consider calling. Questions about the pastor's sexuality, as well as questions about beliefs, what he or she will preach and teach on these and other issues are valid. Congregations will continue to call those they believe will serve them best. Congregations will decide for themselves whether or not they will recognize, in some way, same-gender unions.

11. If a congregation wishes to consider leaving the ELCA, what should they do?

A congregation should consider the implications of membership in all Lutheran bodies, including asking such questions as – in a particular church body:

1. How will disaffiliation from the ELCA change the life and ministry of the congregation and its members?
2. How will we care for those who do not agree with the decision – either to disaffiliate or remain?
3. How will future pastors be found and prepared?
4. What is the availability of pastors for interim and call? How will missionaries be called and how are they supported?
5. What is the status of interpretation of scripture, role of women, and ministries etc.?
6. With what do I agree and with what do I disagree?
7. What would be the reasons for and against membership in a particular church body?

12. How might the Bishop and staff be helpful to congregations wrestling with churchwide assembly decisions?

The Bishop and staff may be called upon to:

- Visit with council or congregation
- Provide questions for discussion
- Provide alternatives for congregations who want to remain in the ELCA.
- Provide guidance for straw votes
- Clarify the process of considering disaffiliation
- Provide information about the ELCA

13. Dr. Mark Allen Powell visited North Carolina and discussed the different views of homosexuality - could you summarize his presentation?

A separate summary is available discussing the extreme conservative, extreme liberal, moderately conservative, and moderately liberal positions.