

Introduction to the Twelfth Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

“Freed in Christ to Serve.” We are not only freed *from* the enslaving power of sin, but we are freed *for* bringing Christ’s love to others.¹ This liberating theme unites and inspires us as we gather to worship and work at the twelfth Churchwide Assembly of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). This theme also reminds us that we gather not to carry out our own work or our personal agendas—rather, we assemble to do God’s own work, offering our hands, our resources, our whole selves for God’s purposes in service to others. We come, in the words of the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, to participate in God’s mission, to reach out to all people, and to bring them to faith in Christ. We come to commit ourselves and this church anew to serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, to care for the sick and the aged, to advocate dignity and justice for all people, to work for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and to stand with the poor and powerless.² We come from many places and diverse backgrounds to lift our hands and voices in

¹ *Lutheran Study Bible*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2009), p. 1,918.

² Provision 4.02. in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America* reads:

To participate in God’s mission, this church shall:

- a. Proclaim God’s saving Gospel of justification by grace for Christ’s sake through faith alone, according to the apostolic witness in the Holy Scripture, preserving and transmitting the Gospel faithfully to future generations.
- b. Carry out Christ’s Great Commission by reaching out to all people to bring them to faith in Christ and by doing all ministry with a global awareness consistent with the understanding of God as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier of all.
- c. Serve in response to God’s love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs.
- d. Worship God in proclamation of the Word and administration of the sacraments and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness, and service.
- e. Nurture its members in the Word of God so as to grow in faith and hope and love, to see daily life as the primary setting for the exercise of their Christian calling, and to use the gifts of the Spirit for their life together and for their calling in the world.
- f. Manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action to express and preserve the unity which the Spirit gives.

worship and praise of the Triune God, to seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and to pray together for the sake of the world. We come to seek God’s wisdom as we make decisions to guide this church.

Together as Baptized Members

For the twelfth Churchwide Assembly we gather as members, baptized members of Christ’s Church. We meet, however, not as a random collection of individuals. For the sake of the gospel and the well-being of this church, we serve as representatives of more than 4 million members of the ELCA in approximately 10,000 congregations. In our role as voting members, we have been assigned specific decision-making responsibility.

Among those of us who assemble in Orlando from August 15–19, 2011, we will find: 1,025 who are duly elected voting members; approximately 50 others designated as advisory members, including Church Council members, executive directors of churchwide units, and board and committee chairs; presidents of the ELCA seminaries, colleges, and universities who serve as non-voting members; about two dozen invited ecumenical observers and guests; and several hundred visitors.

All together, as members of the ELCA, we assemble with the conviction that we are here to seek to do God’s work with our hands. With that conviction, we will embark with thanksgiving upon the work of the Churchwide Assembly.

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 ELCA churchwide 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 the 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.

- The terminology related to the legislative process of this church is intentional; it is not accidental.
- The words “Synod Assembly” and “Churchwide Assembly,” rather than “convention,” and “voting members” rather than “delegates,” were deliberately chosen for our governing documents.

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, we find 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.

1. A congregation of the ELCA does not meet in convention; the members gather in worship, carry out service, and assemble occasionally and properly for governance decisions and elections.
2. The people of this church in each of the 65 synods are *not* sent as agents of a particular caucus; they are not gathered to act as politicized delegates to a regional party convention. Rather, they *assemble* as duly selected *members* of this church with *voting* responsibilities for governance and elections on behalf of the synod. The Synod Assembly is just that, an assembly of the people of this church, some of

whom have been chosen for the responsibility of being *voting members* of the *Synod Assembly*. They assemble together in worship and are nurtured in the faith through Word and Sacrament. Then, in their deliberations, they seek the wisdom and guidance of God’s Spirit in the decisions and elections of the assembly.

3. The people of this church, when gathered as voting members of Synod Assemblies, have the responsibility of electing the *voting members* of the *Churchwide Assembly*. These voting members are given the responsibility of doing the work of the Churchwide Assembly on behalf of the ELCA. They are *not* sent to participate as politicized delegates from a regional or agenda-specific caucus at some national party convention. Rather, they assemble as members of this 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 19.21.05.: “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 persons 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.

Words Shape and Reflect Understanding

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 provision 3.02.), 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 3.02.).

We do need to (a) understand more clearly and (b) 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 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

Official Assembly Documents

Key documents related to the assembly are provided in the *Pre-Assembly Report*. Various parts of the *Pre-Assembly Report* are distributed to voting members electronically and in mailings. This material is prepared to fulfill the constitutional directive cited above.

Organization of the Pre-Assembly Report

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

- Program and Order of Business
- I: General Information
- II: Reports of Officers
- III: Reports of Churchwide Units
- IV: Recommendations for Action
- V: Background Information for Proposed Actions
- VI: Report of the Memorials Committee
- VII: Report of the Nominating Committee
- VIII: Report of the Reference and Counsel Committee
- IX: Report of the Church Council
- X: Governing Documents

Within each section, pages are numbered sequentially.

Content of the Pre-Assembly Report

The *Pre-Assembly Report* contains the reports of the churchwide units as information for the voting members of the ELCA’s twelfth Churchwide Assembly. Reports of the presiding bishop, secretary, and treasurer—along with reports of the work of their offices—are provided as required in this church’s constitution. It also contains a summary of actions of the Church Council during the biennium, which is formally presented to the assembly by the vice president.

The *Pre-Assembly Report* also contains recommendations for action by the Church Council to the assembly. 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.

Portions of the *Pre-Assembly Report* are posted on the ELCA website at www.elca.org/assembly as they become available. Voting members and others are encouraged to review periodically all the postings to know and understand the work of the Churchwide Assembly and to be prepared for the legislative, or plenary, sessions. A full *Pre-Assembly Report* will be mailed to voting members about 30 days prior to the assembly to fulfill official notice requirements. Recommendations for assembly action by the Memorials Committee and the report of the assembly’s Nominating Committee also are provided.

A three-ring binder will be given to assembly voting members at on-site registration. The *Pre-Assembly Report* may

be inserted into the notebook for convenience in use throughout the assembly. In keeping with this church’s commitment to care for creation, the notebooks this year are biodegradable. There will be an opportunity to recycle them at the close of the assembly.

From time to time during the assembly, additional pages and replacement pages with revisions will be distributed.

For the first time at this Churchwide Assembly, a pilot project will take place in which voting members from a number of synods will receive their *Pre-Assembly Report* and other materials *only* in an electronic format.

Orientation Video

In order to facilitate voting members’ preparation for this Churchwide Assembly, an orientation video has been prepared. It is available for review on the assembly website at www.elca.org/assembly. An instructional video on parliamentary procedure at the Churchwide Assembly also will be posted on the website.

Policies Regarding Mailing Lists and Materials Distribution

In keeping with the practices of the ELCA’s predecessor church bodies, the Church Council adopted a policy in 1988 related to the mailing addresses of voting members of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly. In addition, based on the pattern of those predecessor church bodies, a policy was adopted on distribution of materials, displays, and the operation of the assembly. These policies help ensure that the purposes of the assembly are fulfilled in clear and orderly ways and the privacy of voting members is protected appropriately.

Distribution of Materials to Voting Members Before the Churchwide Assembly

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. Such materials shall be sent to the secretary of this church for mailing to voting members of the assembly at the expense of the organization making the request and with the use of the specific organization’s stationery and envelopes (CC88.07.80).

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

Lists of Voting Members Are Available to Voting Members for Use Only for the Churchwide Assembly

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 (CC87.07.81), 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 Congregational and Synodical Mission unit) will be decided by the unit, subject to approval of the secretary.
- No display space or meeting facilities are provided to organizations that have no official relationship to this church.
- Only this church's publishing house (Augsburg Fortress, Publishers) may offer items for sale. No commercial displays or sales booths are permitted.
- 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. No space will be provided to individual units for assembly offices.
- 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 for the appearance of such groups.

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 twelfth Churchwide Assembly again 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. This is sometimes termed an *omnibus* resolution or consent agenda or an *en bloc* resolution. 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. These proposals relate both to issues of structure and governance and the restructuring of the churchwide organization well as matters of procedure, language clarification, 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 bring slates of paired nominees for each position, other than for officers to be elected by the assembly.

Memorials Committee

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

Reference and Counsel Committee

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

Other Committees

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.

Minutes Committee

The Minutes Committee takes and reviews the assembly minutes, under the supervision of the secretary of this church.

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, “Global Mission unit (GM).”

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 CC10.04.20. 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 2010 (*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 2010. The third number is the sequence number of the action taken during the calendar year—in this instance, the twentieth action taken by the Church Council during 2010.

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 2009 assembly, CA09.04.11 would signify that the eleventh action of the 2009 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- 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 9.52.A93. signifies a continuing resolution adopted during 1993 with respect to chapter 9, section 52, of the ELCA's constitution.

College Corporation Meetings

Four 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 (Dana College, Blair, Neb.; Luther College, Decorah, Iowa; St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minn.; and Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa). A separate booklet on these college corporations will be distributed to assembly members with details on the procedures for college corporation meetings.

Live Streaming of Churchwide Assembly

As has been the case in the last two Churchwide Assemblies, 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 twelfth Churchwide Assembly.

Care of Creation

Substantial efforts have been undertaken to “green” this twelfth 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 hotel and convention center and the local arrangements committee to implement the three “Rs” of environmental stewardship: reduce, reuse, and recycle. As voting members, visitors, observers, and guests, please help us to care for God's creation.

Gathering as Members

As we look toward the twelfth biennial 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 1,025 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 one church will gather together in assembly to discuss and implement ways of carrying out God's work in this world with our hands. Truly we have been freed in Christ to serve!

Mr. David D. Swartling, *secretary*