

Report of the Communal Discernment Task Force



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Interim Report

At its spring 2008 meeting, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) responded to a request from the Southwestern Minnesota Synod for a task force “to explore and analyze other models and possible adjustments of our model of communal discernment as a church body” in order to aid in “discern[ing] truth together as a large, complex church body serving the Gospel in very different contexts.” The Church Council authorized [CC08.04.09] the appointment of a communal discernment task force “to explore whether there may be better ways for the ELCA in all its expressions to engage emotional and divisive issues, seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and make difficult decisions as a church body in ways that will increase mutual trust, build respect for each other as the Body of Christ, and deepen spiritual discernment.” The task force also was encouraged “to engage in a thorough study of alternative possibilities for communal discernment, to recommend to the Church Council alternative models of communal discernment if it deems helpful, and to offer leadership to this church as it seeks to be led by the Holy Spirit in its communal discernment processes.”

Since its first meeting in July 2008, the task force has explored problems and issues related to communal discernment, including the differences between decision-making and discernment, between individual and communal discernment, between discerning actions to be done and vocations and identity members have. The task force’s own experience of a specific practice of Dwelling in the Word, used multiple times at each task force meeting, has contributed to its understanding of the distinctive nature of *communal* discernment and the ways that the Scriptures inform discernment. The task force has come to the realization that for the goal of fostering or nurturing a culture of discernment in the ELCA, no single practice or method will magically “solve the problems” that emerge when engaging emotional and divisive issues. Rather, developing a culture of discernment in all expressions of this church—in assemblies and councils; in churchwide, synodical, and congregational meetings; in both institutional and small-group relations—will contribute to mutual trust and respect and to deeper spiritual discernment. The task force encourages the use of specific practices as a way of building a culture of discernment in the life of this church in all of its expressions.

A preliminary report was presented to the Planning and Evaluation Committee of the Church Council at its November 2010 meeting. A copy of the report is available through the [ELCA Archives online catalog](#) in Exhibit Q of the agenda for that meeting.

At the spring 2011 meeting of the Church Council, the task force requested and received an extension of its original three-year work plan in order to continue its exploration and analysis of specific discernment practices from a broad range of sources.

Pr. Marcus R. Kunz, *executive for discernment of contextual and theological issues*

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