

**2025 CHURCHWIDE ASSEMBLY AMENDMENTS TO THE
MODEL CONSTITUTION FOR CONGREGATIONS OF THE
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN AMERICA®**

[WITH RATIONALES]

Prepared by the Office of the Secretary
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
August 2025

Following are amendments to the *Model Constitution for Congregations* that were approved by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly. Additions are underlined; deletions are ~~struck through~~; all changes are highlighted.

Provisions within the *Model Constitution for Congregations* are of two types:

- **Those provisions marked with an asterisk (*) are required when a congregation amends its governing documents.** They must be used without alteration or amendment of the text in any manner (i.e., neither additions nor deletions are permissible). Such provisions go into effect immediately upon approval by a majority vote of those voting members present and voting at any legally called meeting of the congregation, provided that they have been presented to the congregation at least 30 days prior to the meeting.
- **Provisions not marked with an asterisk are non-required provisions.** These provisions represent wording recommended by the Churchwide Assembly. If the congregation chooses to incorporate them into the congregation's constitution exactly as presented here, these provisions require a majority vote of those voting members present and voting at any legally called meeting of the congregation, provided that they have been presented to the congregation at least 30 days prior to the meeting.

If the wording of non-required provisions is altered or amended in any way from the text presented here, the provisions must be approved at one congregation meeting by a majority vote and then must be ratified *unchanged* by a two-thirds vote at the next regular meeting of the congregation. (See *Model Constitution for Congregations*, *C16.04. for more detail.)

For convenience, the rationale that was presented to the Churchwide Assembly for each amendment is provided in italics following the amendment. These rationales are *not* part of the amendments with which they are associated, they are *not* part of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, and they are *not* intended to be incorporated into the constitutions of congregations. They are here only to give context for the amendments.

The Office of the Secretary would like to express gratitude for your faithful attention to your congregation's constitution!

Chapter 1. NAME AND INCORPORATION

- C1.02. For the purpose of this constitution and the accompanying bylaws [and continuing resolutions], the congregation of (insert full legal name) is hereinafter designated as “this congregation.”

Rationale: Insertion for comprehensiveness.

Chapter 5. POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION

- *C5.04. This congregation or the Congregation Council shall elect from among its ~~the~~ voting members of the congregation laypersons to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly as well as persons to represent it at meetings of any conference, cluster, coalition, or other area subdivision of which it is a member. The number of persons to be elected by this congregation and other qualifications shall be as prescribed in guidelines established by the (insert name of synod) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Rationale: This change allows for lay voting members of the Synod Assembly to be elected either by the congregation or by the Congregation Council. Current language requires election by the congregation.

Chapter 7. PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

- *C7.03. If the voting members of this congregation present at a legally called and conducted special meeting of this congregation vote to relate transfer to another Lutheran church body, title to property shall continue to reside in this congregation, provided the process for termination of relationship in *C6.05. has been followed. Before this congregation takes action to relate transfer to another Lutheran church body, it shall consult with representatives of the (insert name of synod).

Rationale: Consistency with 9.71.d. of the ELCA Constitution.

Chapter 9. ROSTERED MINISTER

- *C9.02. Only This congregation may call as a pastor only:
a. a member of the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or
b. a candidate for the roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament who has been recommended for this congregation by the synod bishop.
may be called as a pastor of this congregation.

Rationale: Formatting for clarity.

- *C9.03. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America,
a. Every minister of Word and Sacrament shall:
.....
8) speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, proclaiming God's love for the world, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations.

Rationale: A number of amendments were made by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to this bylaw and to its parallels throughout the constitutions. In the process, the phrase “proclaiming God’s love for the world” was omitted from the list of responsibilities of rostered ministers. This amendment restores the phrase.

- *C9.06. At a time of pastoral vacancy, an interim pastor ~~shall~~ may be appointed by the bishop of the synod with the consent of this congregation or the Congregation Council.

Rationale: It is not always possible for a synod bishop to appoint an interim pastor for every congregation.

- *C9.15. Under special circumstances, subject to the approval of the synod bishop and the concurrence of this congregation, a minister of Word and Sacrament of a church body with which the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America officially has established a relationship of full communion may serve temporarily as pastor of this congregation under a contract between this congregation and the pastor in a form proposed by the synod bishop and approved by this congregation.

Rationale: Provision is being changed to “required.” With the increasing use of exchangeability of rostered ministers with full communion partners, it is advisable that all congregations make allowance for that possibility.

- *C9.22. ~~Only This congregation may call as a deacon only:~~
a. a member of the roster of Ministers of Word and Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; or
b. a candidate for the roster of Ministers of Word and Service who has been recommended for this congregation by the synod bishop;
~~may be called as a deacon of this congregation.~~

Rationale: Editorial reformatting for clarity.

- *C9.23. Consistent with the faith and practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, every minister of Word and Service shall:
-
- c. Speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, proclaiming God’s love for the world, advocating dignity, justice, and equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations;

Rationale: A number of amendments were made by the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to this bylaw and to its parallels throughout the constitutions. In the process, the phrase “proclaiming God’s love for the world” was omitted from the list of responsibilities of rostered ministers. This amendment restores the phrase.

Chapter 10.

CONGREGATION MEETING

- C10.02. A special Congregation Meeting may be called by the [senior] pastor, the Congregation Council, or the president¹ of this congregation, and shall be called by the president of this congregation upon the written request of [number] ~~[percent]~~ of the voting members. The president of the Congregation Council shall call a special meeting upon request of the synod bishop. The call for each special meeting shall specify the purpose for which it is to be held, and no other business shall be transacted.

Rationale: The recommendation is to use a fixed percentage of voting members to request a Congregation Meeting, rather than the option of a given number of voting members.

Chapter 15.

DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS AND ADJUDICATION

- *C15.01. Persistent and public denial of the Christian faith, willful or criminal conduct grossly unbecoming a member of the Church of Christ, continual and intentional interference with the ministry of this congregation, or willful and repeated harassment or defamation of member(s) of this congregation is sufficient cause for discipline of a

¹ If the pastor is the president of the congregation, the congregation may consider giving the vice president the authority to call a special meeting.

member. Prior to disciplinary action, reconciliation and repentance will be attempted following Matthew 18:15–17, proceeding through these successive steps, as necessary:

- a) private counsel and admonition by the pastor,
- b) censure and admonition by the pastor in the presence of two or three witnesses,
- c) written referral of the matter by the Congregation Council to the vice president of the synod, who will refer it to a consultation panel drawn from the Consultation Committee of the synod, and
- d) written referral of the matter by the consultation panel to the Committee on Discipline of the synod.

If, for any reason, the pastor is unable to administer the admonitions required by paragraphs a. and b. hereof, those steps may be performed by another pastor chosen by the Executive Committee of the Congregation Council.

Rationale: Formatting correction and consistency of constitutional language.

- *C15.11.** When there is disagreement between or among factions within this congregation on a substantive issue which cannot be resolved by the parties, members of this congregation may petition the synod bishop for consultation after informing the president [vice president] of this congregation of their intent to do so. The synod bishop shall seek a timely resolution of the dispute. If the issue relates directly to the pastor, the bishop may begin the process in ~~§14.18~~ ***C9.05**.d. In all other matters, if the bishop's consultation fails to resolve the issue, the bishop shall refer the matter to the Consultation Committee of the synod, which shall undertake efforts to find an appropriate solution. If the Consultation Committee's efforts fail to resolve the dispute, the entire matter shall be referred to the Synod Council for adjudication by whatever process the Council deems necessary. The Synod Council's decision shall be final.

Rationale: It is more logical to cross-reference within the Model Constitution, rather than to make reference to the synod constitution.

Chapter 16.

AMENDMENTS

- *C16.02.** An amendment to this constitution, proposed under *C16.01., shall:
- a. be approved at any legally called meeting of this congregation by a majority vote of those voting members present and voting; and
 - b. be ratified ~~without change unchanged~~ at the next regular meeting of this congregation by a two-thirds vote of those voting members present and voting.

Rationale: Consistency of constitutional language.

Chapter 20.

PARISH AUTHORIZATION

[Required provisions when congregation is part of a parish]*

- *C20.04.** Any one of the congregations of the parish may terminate their relationship with the pastor as provided in ~~§14.18~~ ***C9.05**.d. ~~of the synod constitution of the synod named in *C6.01.~~ In such case, the other congregation(s) of the same parish shall have the right to terminate the parish agreement.

Rationale: It is more logical to cross-reference within the Model Constitution, rather than to make reference to the synod constitution.

- *C20.05.** Any one of the congregations of the parish may terminate their relationship with a minister of Word and Service as provided in ~~§14.43~~ ***C9.25**.d. ~~of the synod constitution of the synod named in *C6.01.~~ In such case, the other congregation(s) of the same parish shall have the right to terminate the parish agreement.

Rationale: It is more logical to cross-reference within the Model Constitution, rather than to make reference to the synod constitution.