

Sexuality, Restructuring, Hymnal to be Discussed at Churchwide Assembly

Voting members of the 2005 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) Churchwide Assembly will act on several proposals – including plans for restructuring and governance changes for the ELCA churchwide organization, new worship resources, interim Eucharistic sharing with the United Methodist Church, proposals emerging from the ELCA Studies on Sexuality and two ethnic ministry strategies. The assembly will be held Aug. 8-14 at the World Center Marriott Resort and Convention Center, Orlando, Fla.

About 2,000 people – including 1,018 voting members elected by synods – are expected to participate in the ELCA's ninth biennial assembly. The theme is "Marked With the Cross of Christ Forever," taken from the ELCA's mission statement.

The Churchwide Assembly is the ELCA's chief legislative authority and represents the 5 million members of the ELCA across the United States and Caribbean.

Daily worship, Bible study and prayer are planned. Bible study will focus on the assembly theme.

The Rev. Mark S. Hanson, in his fourth year as ELCA presiding bishop, will chair the assembly.

The ELCA constitution requires a churchwide assembly every two years. Significant funding for the assembly is provided by the churchwide organization with some financial support from Thrivent

Financial for Lutherans, a not-for-profit financial services organization based in Minneapolis.

Restructuring, Governance Changes Proposed

Last November, the ELCA Church Council transmitted to the assembly for final consideration a report and recommendations for restructuring the work of the churchwide organization, as well as a report on proposed governance changes.

The council is the ELCA's board of directors and serves as the legislative authority of the church between churchwide assemblies.

If the restructuring plan and corresponding amendments to governing and policy documents are adopted, the churchwide organization will enter the design's implementation phase.

The proposal organizes the work of the churchwide organization into seven program units: Church in Society; Evangelical Outreach and Congregational Mission; Global Mission; Multicultural Ministries; and Vocation and Education. Augsburg Fortress Publishers, the ELCA publishing ministry, and Women of the ELCA, the church's women's organization, remain as separately

incorporated units.

The Office of the Presiding Bishop will retain its present functions and be responsible for ecumenical and interreligious relations, human resources, research and evaluation, synodical relations and worship. The Office of the Treasurer will retain its present functions, including information technology and management services. The Office of the Secretary will retain its present functions.

There are six service units in the proposal: Communication, which includes a new relationship with *The Lutheran*, the magazine of the ELCA; Development Services, including the ELCA Foundation and the separately incorporated

Endowment Fund; and the separately incorporated Mission Investment Fund and Board of Pensions, both of which would retain their current roles.

As for proposed governance changes, the council and ELCA Conference of Bishops will provide a "systematic and standardized" process to enable members in

synods to discuss and respond to significant decisions to be made by the assembly, beginning in 2007. The churchwide organization and council will be committed to consult regularly with synods, particularly in years when

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there is no Churchwide Assembly.

The Church Council will remain at 33 voting members plus the four churchwide officers: the presiding bishop, vice president, secretary and treasurer. Council members would be nominated by synods and elected by the Churchwide Assembly beginning in 2007.



Voters at the 2003 Churchwide Assembly
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Assembly to Vote on Renewing Worship Project

The ELCA Division for Congregational Ministries and Augsburg Fortress Publishers are coordinating the ELCA's Renewing Worship project.

The assembly will act on a proposal that directs the ELCA Office of the Presiding Bishop to complete a liturgical review of proposed content for a new book of worship. It calls on the presiding bishop to work with the church to further the development of worship resources and commit to ecumenical cooperation in the development of these resources.

The "next generation" of resources for Renewing Worship involves the development and availability of a "family" of resources that has at its center a new primary book of worship.

The proposal acknowledges the widespread participation of Lutherans in the worship project,

including development of provisional resources, testing and responding to proposals, participation in worship events and congregational engagement on issues related to worship.

Assembly to Vote on Interim Eucharistic Sharing

The Church Council recommended that the assembly approve a relationship of "Interim Sharing of the Eucharist" between the ELCA and the United Methodist Church.

The United Methodist Church's Council of Bishops approved the interim agreement in May. The two churches have been involved in theological dialogue for nearly 30 years.

With an interim commitment, congregations and judicatories of both churches will be encouraged to study theological documents, participate jointly in Holy Communion and explore new opportunities for shared ministry. Eventually, the two churches may achieve a relationship of full communion, which would allow for clergy of one church body to serve in congregations of the other church and would create opportunities for joint ministry.

Sexuality Proposals Result of a Four-Year Effort

The Church Council developed and forwarded resolutions to the assembly which address whether or not the church will bless same-sex relationships and whether or not the ELCA will allow people in such relationships to serve the church as professional lay and ordained ministers.

The proposals were developed during the first part of a six-year study process known as the "ELCA

Studies on Sexuality." A study director and a task force developed a report and recommendations, and made them public Jan. 13. Church members were encouraged to respond to the recommendations; responses were provided to the council as it considered resolutions for assembly action. The council offered three resolutions:

✦ In keeping with a task force recommendation, the council drafted an assembly resolution "that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America – its members, congregations, synods, churchwide organization, and agencies and institutions – be urged to concentrate on finding ways to live together faithfully in the midst of disagreements, recognizing the God-given mission and communion that we share as members of the body of Christ." This proposal requires a majority vote for adoption.

✦ A second assembly resolution proposes "that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America continue to respect the guidance of the 1993 advisory statement of the Conference of Bishops" and "that this church welcome gay and lesbian persons into its life and trust pastors and congregations to discern ways to provide faithful pastoral care to same-sex couples." This proposal also requires a majority vote for adoption.

The 1993 advisory statement said the Conference of Bishops finds no basis in Scripture for blessing homosexual relationships, and that conference members do not approve such a ceremony as an official action of the ELCA's ministry.

✦ The third resolution would "create a process for the sake of outreach, ministry and the

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Features

commitment to continuing dialogue, which may permit exceptions to the expectations regarding sexual conduct for gay or lesbian candidates and rostered leaders in life-long, committed and faithful same-sex relationships who otherwise are determined to be in compliance” with the conduct the church expects of its ministers. This proposal requires a two-thirds vote of the assembly for adoption because constitutional bylaws must be amended.

“Rostered” leaders of the ELCA are lay and ordained ministers of the church. Lay ministers are associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

The council drafted specific bylaws that the assembly will consider, defining the process for exceptions.

The council’s recommendations serve as a starting point for the deliberation and decisions of the Churchwide Assembly in August. The assembly also will have resolutions from synods and from its own voting members, and the report and recommendations of the task force for the ELCA Studies of Sexuality to consider.

Two Ethnic Ministry Strategies to be Considered

The assembly will consider the “Arab and Middle Eastern Ministry Strategy: Bridges Across History, Lands and Cultures” and the African Descent ministry strategy – “Many Voices Tell the Story, Create the Vision: Build the Future” – in an effort to intensify outreach and recommit the ELCA to partnership with existing Arab and Middle Eastern and African Descent congregations.

The Arab and Middle Eastern

ministry strategy outlines a plan to start five new congregations in the next 10 years and seeks a deeper partnership with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land.

Assembly to Consider Middle East Action Steps and More

Several other reports and actions are expected at the 2005 Churchwide Assembly:

✦ The assembly will consider adoption of action steps related to the “Churchwide Strategy for ELCA Engagement in Israel and Palestine,”

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adopted by the Church Council in April 2005. The proposal calls for the ELCA and related agencies and institutions to participate in the churchwide campaign for peace, “Peace Not Walls: Stand for Justice in the Holy Land,” through awareness-building, accompaniment and advocacy activities.

✦ The ELCA churchwide organization’s budgets for 2006 and 2007 will be presented for adoption.

✦ The assembly will elect some members to the Church Council, and to various boards and committees that work in partnership with the churchwide organization.

✦ Several constitutional amendments will be presented for consideration, along with resolutions from voting members and synods.

Stay Connected

When the 2005 ELCA Churchwide Assembly convenes in Orlando, August 8-14, you will have almost immediate access to news about assembly issues and actions.

✦ Assembly news will be available on a special telephone

hotline at (773) 380-2477. The recorded message will be updated every evening during the assembly. Daily reports will be available through the end of August.

✦ To learn about the Churchwide Assembly via the Internet, visit the web site at www.elca.org/assembly/05. This will be the place to check for daily updates, news releases, photos, and more during the assembly.

✦ The schedule posted on the Web site includes information about when live webcasts of plenary sessions will be available.

✦ On LutherLink, you can sign up for the meeting “2005 CWA IN ORLANDO” to see frequent information updates, so you’ll get almost-live online reporting, plus a chance to ask questions and make comments. Visit www.lutherlink.org for more information.

✦ If you will be in the Orlando area during the assembly and would like a visitor’s registration form and assembly information faxed to you, call (800) 638-3522 ext 2807 or go to www.elca.org/assembly/05 to find the form online.

✦ A report containing all actions recommended by the Church Council to the assembly will be sent to all congregations by August 1. Within a week following the assembly, a brief summary of assembly actions will be mailed to congregations and voting members. It will also be available on the ELCA web site.

✦ The October issue of *The Lutheran* will offer complete coverage of assembly business. You’ll find some stories on the Web at www.thelutheran.org by mid-September.

✦ Voting members from our synod will be available to speak to congregations. Contact the synod office for details.

To learn more about the Churchwide Assembly, visit www.elca.org/assembly/05
