

A Memorial to Restructure the Governance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) was formed in 1988 from three Lutheran church bodies, i.e., the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), the American Lutheran Church (ALC), and the Association Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC), with 5.3 million members and 11,133 congregations¹; and

WHEREAS, the Commission for a New Lutheran Church, envisioning stability and anticipating growth, developed a structure and polity with three interdependent entities, i.e., the churchwide organization, 65 synods, and 11,133 congregations, organized for the realities of the time;² and

WHEREAS, the leadership of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church (CNLC) expressed an eagerness to form “a new Lutheran church truly committed to the Gospel and organized for effective mission in today's world;”³ and

WHEREAS, over the last 34 years, the ELCA has decreased in size to 3.1 million members and 8,894 congregations;⁴ and

WHEREAS, the governing documents, constitutions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions of the ELCA do not allow these interdependent entities to reorganize quickly to meet the changing realities for effective mission in today's world; and

WHEREAS, the churchwide organization as well as many synods and many congregations, having decreased significantly in size and resources, struggle to meet the expected work as assigned by the governing documents; and

WHEREAS, the Church Council of the ELCA, through its adoption of Strategic Directions 2025, has called for a “well-governed, connected, and sustainable church;”⁵

WHEREAS, it is critical that the stated mission of the ELCA be not only consistent with Lutheran expectations for the institutional church but also realistic with respect to human and fiscal resources; and

WHEREAS, the social statements of the ELCA call us to be a better version of ourselves

¹ [Churchwide Assembly Minutes 1989](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1989.pdf) (p.70);

<https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/CWA1989.pdf>

² The CNLC was a representative body of the three predecessor institutions who worked from 1982-1986 to plan the ELCA and keep the merger on track. For more information see Edgar R. Trexler, *Anatomy of a Merger*, Augsburg Fortress, 1991.

³ [3 LUTHERAN BODIES TOTALING 5 MILLION DECIDE ON MERGER - The New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/09/world/3-lutheran-bodies-totaling-5-million-decide-on-merger.html),

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/09/world/3-lutheran-bodies-totaling-5-million-decide-on-merger.html>

⁴ <https://directory.elca.org/Pages/reports/Summary-of-Congregational-Reports.pdf>

⁵ https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Future_Directions_Paper_Called_Forward_Together_in_Christ.pdf (p.8)

including a commitment to actively dismantle racism in our systems; and

WHEREAS, the church has been complicit in trauma and harm through our current structures; and

WHEREAS, it is critical that the structure of the ELCA meet the needs of effective mission in today's changing world; and

WHEREAS, a reconstituting convention for the ELCA, in the form of a special meeting of the Churchwide Assembly, would provide an opportunity for deliberation and action on these pressing matters of mission, ministry, and structure;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Metropolitan Chicago Synod of the ELCA memorialize the 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to direct the Church Council to establish a Commission for a Renewed Lutheran Church consisting of leaders from across the three expressions, including persons representing historically marginalized groups that, working in consultation with the Conference of Bishops and the Church Council, shall reconsider the Statements of Purpose for each of the expressions of this church, the Principles of Organization, and all matters pertaining thereunto, in light of the stated goals, ideals and purposes of this church to dismantle racism and engage the pressing matters of mission, structure and ministry for these days, presenting its findings to the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Submitted on June 1, 2022 by Metro Chicago Synod Assembly Voting Members:

The Rev. Erin Coleman Branchaud	St. Luke's of Logan Square, Chicago
The Rev. David C. Elliott	Lutheran Church of the Master, Carol Stream
The Rev. Josh Evans	St. Philip, Glenview
The Rev. Laura Harris-Ferree	Grace, Evanston
The Rev. Anders Nelson	St. Paul, Wheaton
The Rev. Dr. Thomas R. Gaulke	Gethsemane, Cicero
The Rev. Jenna Pulkowski	St. Andrew Lutheran Church, Mundelein
The Rev. Heidi L Torgerson	Grace Lutheran Church of LaGrange
The Rev. Eric Worringer	Holy Family, Chicago
The Rev. Anna Ernst	Epiphany Lutheran Church, Elmhurst
The Rev. Nathaniel P. Klein	St. Stephen, Midlothian
Deacon Pat Gerber	Lutheran Church of the Master, Carol Stream
Mrs. Karen Mason	Lutheran Church of the Master, Carol Stream
Ms. Judy Briggs	Lutheran Church of the Master, Carol Stream
Mr. Iván A. Perez	St. Luke's of Logan Square, Chicago

With support of Metro Chicago Synod rostered and lay leaders (not attending assembly):

The Rev. Elle Dowd

South Loop Campus Ministry, Chicago

The Rev. Emily Heitzman
Chicago

Ebenezer and Immanuel Lutheran Churches,

The Rev. Allison Bengfort

St. John's Lutheran Church, Wilmette

The Rev. Matthew Zemanick
(Member)

On Leave from Call, Iglesia de la Trinidad