

Recommendations for Synod Secretaries

Secretary Sue Rothmeyer
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Thank you for your willingness to serve your synod and this church as synod secretary! This document provides background information and recommendations to assist you in your responsibilities. As you carry out your duties, please do not hesitate to contact the staff of the Office of the Secretary (OS). We are committed to supporting and assisting you as you fulfill your strategic responsibilities as synod secretary.

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- A. Responsibilities of synod secretaries:** The *Constitution for Synods* (§8.32.) spells out the required duties of the synod secretary:

The secretary shall:

- a. Keep the minutes of all meetings of the Synod Assembly and Synod Council, be responsible for distribution of such minutes, and perform such other duties as this synod may from time to time direct.
- b. Be authorized and empowered, in the name of this synod, to attest all instruments which require the same, and which are signed and sealed by the bishop.
- c. In consultation with the bishop, classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of this synod.
- d. Submit to the secretary of this church at least nine months before each regular Churchwide Assembly a certified list of the voting members elected by the Synod Assembly.

- B. Minutes of synod assemblies:** One of your critical responsibilities as synod secretary is to keep an eye on history. You should prepare the minutes and other synod documents from the perspective that those written chronicles are crucial for the permanent historical record of your synod as well as being an immediate record of actions.

1. **Content of annual reports:** For archival and historical purposes, as well as for an accurate legal and corporate record, the synod's annual report needs to be comprehensive. Such a report of the Synod Assembly and synod activity should include:

- a. agenda of the Synod Assembly;
- b. minutes of the Synod Assembly;
- c. adopted budget;
- d. financial reports and audit statements for the previous year;
- e. election report, including the terms of office of those elected;
- f. complete list of members of the Synod Council, boards and committees, including terms of office;
- g. ordinations and installations of ministers of Word and Sacrament, with dates and places;
- h. ordinations and installations of ministers of Word and Service, with dates and places;
- i. complete listing of all rostered ministers in the synod;
- j. other information on official rosters of synods, including a necrology of individuals on the rosters;
- k. updated synod roster of names and addresses of congregations;
- l. congregation reports and statistics;
- m. complete text of resolutions and other actions of the assembly;
- n. reports of the synod bishop and other officers;
- o. text of salary guidelines for the year; and
- p. current edition of synod constitution.

2. **Coding of actions:** Your predecessors may have established a coding system for actions of the Synod Assembly, Synod Council, and Synod Council Executive Committee. If that has not been done, we recommend using this coding system:

A TWO-LETTER code that identifies the decision-making body; followed by the YEAR of action; then MONTH of action; and NUMBER of action in the calendar year.

The two-letter code could be “SA” for the Synod Assembly; “SC” for the Synod Council; and “EC/SC” for the council’s Executive Committee.

- Using this system, the tenth action of the Synod Assembly in June 2021 would be: **SA21.06.10**. The text of the completed action follows the number, preferably in boldface type. For example,

VOTED

SA21.06.10

To adopt the 2022 budget of the Great Vision Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the amount of \$2,589,445.

- Under this numbering system, the fourth action of the Synod Council meeting in November 2021 would be: **SC21.11.04**.
- The Synod Council’s Executive Committee is not a separate entity but is a committee of the council. Therefore, an alternate coding related to the council is suggested. As a result, the sixth action of your Synod Council’s Executive Committee in March 2021 would be **EC/SC21.03.06**.¹

- 3. Copies of Synod Assembly minutes:** When minutes become available after each Synod Assembly, please upload an electronic copy to the Synod Online Digital Archive (SODA) and notify the Office of the Secretary with an email to Archives@elca.org or SEC@elca.org. After logging in to the ELCA Community site (<https://community.ELCA.org/>), click on the “Synod Portal” tab, where a link to SODA appears under the heading “Synod Documents.” Send a paper copy of the minutes to the synod’s archives. (See *Remember the synod archives* below.) **The Office of the Secretary does not collect paper copies of Synod Assembly minutes for its files.**

All the materials listed in Section 1 above also should be uploaded to SODA along with the minutes, since that information constitutes the complete record of an assembly.

Regardless of format, please ensure that copies of the minutes of synod assemblies are submitted promptly upon completion.

- C. Synod Council minutes:** The minutes of Synod Council meetings and the council’s Executive Committee meetings are to be filed promptly with your synod office, with a copy sent to your synod’s archives. Upload electronic copies of Synod Council minutes to SODA. **The Office of the Secretary does not collect paper copies of Synod Council minutes for its files.**

Any resolution passed by the Synod Council must be forwarded promptly to the Office of the Secretary by filling out an electronic form ([Synod Council Updates](#)).

- D. Remember the synod archives:** Under †S8.32.c., each synod secretary is assigned the responsibility, in consultation with the bishop, to “classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of the synod.” This needs to be an ongoing process so that materials for the historical record are not lost. Official records are required at times for legal purposes and therefore must be accurate and complete. Although distribution of documents in electronic form

¹Note that the numbering sequence for actions of the Executive Committee is separate from the numbering sequence for actions of the Synod Council. “SC” action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year. Likewise, “EC/SC” action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year.

allows materials to get to people more quickly and at less cost, paper copies should be maintained in the synod's archive. Electronic mail concerning matters of significance should be printed out monthly and retained with other correspondence. You may consult the "Records Retention Schedule" document on the [Office of the Secretary page](#) on ELCA.org for advice.

- E. Prompt reporting:** As secretary of the synod, you are responsible for ensuring prompt reporting to the Office of the Secretary—immediately following the Synod Assembly—of the full adopted text of any memorials addressed to the churchwide organization, the results of any election or re-election of officers, and the adoption of any amendments to the synod's constitution, bylaws, or continuing resolutions. Names and addresses of people elected to serve as voting members of the Churchwide Assembly are to be reported through the Churchwide Assembly registration system. (Instructions for that reporting will be provided in the year before an assembly.)

As provided in †S18.13., constitutional amendments, apart from those provided by the Churchwide Assembly for the *Constitution for Synods* under †S18.11. and †S18.12., are subject to ratification by the ELCA Church Council or by the Churchwide Assembly. As soon as the synod's constitution is updated, please upload an electronic copy to SODA and send a copy to the Office of the Secretary by email to Daniel.Eppley@elca.org or SEC@elca.org.

- F. Memorials and resolutions:** For recording and proper handling, all resolutions and memorials are to be submitted by synods only to the Office of the Secretary and not directly to churchwide units. Although both memorials and resolutions are requests by a synod for action, they are intended to address different issues and are processed differently.

Memorials address broad policy issues that the Synod Assembly would like the Churchwide Assembly to consider.

Resolutions are requests from synods to the Church Council.

As a practical matter, resolutions have a narrower focus than memorials because they are requests for consideration by the Church Council or requests to have the Church Council direct a unit or office of the churchwide organization to respond in some way. Resolutions may be more time-sensitive, as they can be addressed more quickly.

It also is important to point out that resolutions and memorials cannot *direct* the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council, or churchwide organization to take action. They are proposals that *request* the specified action.

Any resolutions pertaining to proposed amendments to the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA* should be acted on as resolutions from your Synod Council to the ELCA Church Council, rather than as memorials to the Churchwide Assembly. Your Synod Assembly can still act on such a resolution, but the action should be addressed to your Synod Council to direct it to forward the assembly's resolution to the ELCA Church Council for consideration by the Churchwide Assembly.

So, for example, a request for the Church Council to recommend a constitutional amendment or to recommend a particular action by a churchwide unit or office would be the subject of a resolution, while a request to change an ELCA policy should be a memorial.

There is often confusion about what may be addressed more appropriately in resolutions to the Church Council rather than in memorials to the Churchwide Assembly. Whatever you can do as synod secretary to educate your synod about this distinction will be appreciated. Many helpful resources,

including a flowchart, guidelines for writing memorials and resolutions, and a webinar recording from Feb. 2021, can be found on the [Memorials and Resolutions](#) page of the OS webpage on ELCA.org.

There are three avenues for a synod to address the churchwide organization:

- The **Synod Assembly** may address the **Churchwide Assembly** through **memorials**.

The “resolved” clause of a memorial must include “*memorialize*” and could begin:

RESOLVED, that the ____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to . . .

The Synod Council may not adopt memorials for submission to the Churchwide Assembly—only the Synod Assembly may do that. Once received by the Office of the Secretary, memorials are referred to the Memorials Committee of the Churchwide Assembly, which is appointed by the Church Council to review and make recommendations to the Churchwide Assembly (12.51.02.). The Memorials Committee meets following the last of the synod assemblies before the Churchwide Assembly. The Memorials Committee then forwards memorials to the Churchwide Assembly with its recommendation for action.

- The **Synod Council** may address the **Church Council** through **resolutions**.

Typically, the Synod Council passes resolutions and forwards them directly to the Church Council for consideration.

The Synod Council may also forward resolutions adopted by the Synod Assembly. Because it is the Synod Council that communicates with the Church Council, the final “resolved” clause of such an assembly action should indicate that the Synod Assembly is “directing” or “requesting” that the Synod Council forward the resolution to the Church Council. For example:

RESOLVED, that the ____ Synod Assembly direct the ____ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council for consideration and possible action.

- The **Synod Council** may address **churchwide units or offices** through resolutions addressed to the **Church Council’s Executive Committee**.

If the desired action involves referral to a unit or office of the churchwide organization for a response or action, resolutions may also be sent by the Synod Council to the Church Council’s Executive Committee.

The Synod Council may also forward such resolutions adopted by synod assemblies. The final “resolved” clause of such an assembly action should indicate that the Synod Assembly is “directing” or “requesting” that the Synod Council forward the resolution to the Executive Committee of the Church Council.

RESOLVED, that the ____ Synod Assembly direct the ____ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council’s Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

A resolution and a memorial are *not* to be combined in one action. In addition, a synod should not address both the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly on the same subject. The Office of the Secretary, with the concurrence of the Executive Committee of the Church Council, may reclassify a proposal characterized as a memorial as a resolution. In these circumstances, the synod will be notified promptly of the reclassification.

Where appropriate, please encourage your assembly's Reference and Counsel Committee (sometimes called the Resolutions Committee) to use resolutions in preference to memorials. Resolutions follow a more direct route and receive a faster response than memorials, which must go to the next triennial Churchwide Assembly and await the assembly's response.

Interdependence, as well as stewardship of resources, requires care to avoid resolutions and memorials that impose unreasonable financial demands on synods and the churchwide organization. If a proposed resolution or memorial will impose an unfunded mandate if adopted, the Synod Council is asked to review the proposed action before submission to the Synod Assembly and help the drafters of the proposed resolution or memorial to understand the financial implications of the proposal. Synods also are asked to advise their councils and synod assemblies that the churchwide organization may not be able to support requested resolutions or memorials for budgetary reasons and that, if adopted, such proposed actions may have adverse consequences on existing programs or ministries. As interdependent partners, it is important for synods and the churchwide organization to work collaboratively. If questions exist regarding the potential resource implications of a proposed resolution or memorial, inquiries to the Office of the Secretary are encouraged.

Writing resolutions and memorials: To prepare or edit the texts of resolutions and memorials, your assembly's Reference and Counsel Committee/Resolutions Committee will find information on proper language in *Robert's Rules of Order*. Here are a few basics:

Normally, the "whereas" clauses concisely describe the issue, concern, problem and the basis or need for the resolution. They state the case but technically are not part of the resolution. They should be accurate and factual and should not misrepresent the issue being addressed or offer a false foundation for the proposed action. They should not be argumentative.

"Resolved" clauses point to proposed solutions and define requested action. "Resolved" clauses should define clearly the following: To whom is the request for action addressed? What should be done? What may the action cost and how is it to be funded? When should the action be done? To whom should the results be reported?

Clarity in the text of any resolution or memorial is important. A good test is, "Is this statement clear? Will the resolution make sense to someone who was not present at the assembly?"

Under *Robert's Rules of Order*, the Reference and Counsel Committee/Resolutions Committee is empowered to screen all resolutions and memorials. At a minimum, this means ensuring clarity and accurate information. If authorized by the assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure or Standing Rules, the committee also may edit substantively such resolutions and memorials. For all cases, if issues exist with respect to the clarity or accuracy of resolutions and memorials, the committee should attempt to confer with the authors to address the issues.

Filing resolutions and memorials with the Office of the Secretary: Immediately after Synod Assembly or Synod Council meetings, complete the electronic reporting forms online and also send electronic copies of resolutions and memorials by email to Daniel.Eppley@elca.org or SEC@elca.org. While the text of memorials with "whereas" clauses may be sent, the resolved clauses are all that is needed.

- Synod Assembly actions reporting: [Synod Assembly Updates](#)
- Synod Council actions reporting: [Synod Council Updates](#)

The forms are also online at ELCA.org/resources/Office-of-the-Secretary under the "Governance" tab. Your bishop will be sent an acknowledgment that they have been received and that will indicate when they will be considered.