

Welcome to your new role as the vice president of your synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). Your service is greatly appreciated. This resource has been compiled to help you hit the ground running. Some parts of it will likely be more useful to you than others, depending upon your background. It will give you an overview of what the position of synod vice president entails and will answer many of your questions about the new job. If at times it falls short, we hope it has pointed you in the right direction to find the answers you need. It is comprised of 12 sections, some short and some longer.

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Section 1

Serving on your synod's council

What you can expect and what is expected of you

Election to a Synod Council carries with it the respect and trust of the constituency of your synod. The value of your willingness to make a contribution to the life of your church is significant and appreciated. Your contribution involves your time, expertise, enthusiasm and energy. Saying yes to this responsibility brings some basic duties. They include:

- Attend all meetings of the council.
- Consider the well-being of the synod as a whole when dealing with specific issues and ministries.
- Leave the management and administration of the synod to the bishop, staff and appropriate committees.
- Treat all matters relating to council deliberations as confidential, until such time

as the information is determined a matter of public record.

- Be part of a united body by supporting all decisions of the council even if the decision doesn't agree with your personal opinion.
- Treat members of the council and staff as sisters and brothers in Christ.

Serving as a council member you will gain insight into the life of the whole ELCA. Your tenure will be educational and informative. You will also be inspired by sharing devotions, worship and holding conversation with members of your synod's staff, council, committees and others involved in this church and its ministries. You will experience the diversity of the church and see its opportunities, issues and challenges from a broader perspective. And you will certainly discuss and deliberate some of the major issues facing this church. Finally, you will participate in the governance of your synod through review of the mission and vision that calls each person to serve. You will participate in the long-range planning process of your synod, review goals and affirm the appropriateness and direction of the major programs and ministries throughout your synod.

The bishop and vice president of the synod both are responsible to guide and direct the members of the council to remain faithful to these roles and responsibilities.

Council development

One of the responsibilities of the vice president in partnership with your bishop is training and developing the council. Another section of this resource deals with the training aspects of a board. The ongoing growth and development of the council to function appropriately is a matter that you will want to give attention to throughout your tenure. Look for resources within your synod, such as your bishop and local consultants or contact the Executive for Conference of Bishops in the Office of the Presiding Bishop for assistance and mentoring if you are unfamiliar with board development.

In general the ongoing development of your council will mean attention to each of the following items:

- Provide well-written job descriptions for council members, officers and staff that outline roles, responsibilities and authorities of each.
- If you have standing committees in your synod, establish written descriptions and responsibilities for each of them.
- Define a council and committee recruitment and development process.
- Identify the critical skills appropriate for council members.
- Maintain the diversity and representation of the council.
- Formalize a decision-making process between the bishop, staff, committees and the council.
- Use an agenda developed by the vice president and the bishop or the vice president, your bishop and the executive committee at every council meeting. Distribute this agenda well in advance of your council meeting.
- Evaluate each meeting near its conclusion and incorporate the suggestions for

improvement at future meetings.

Assessing your performance

An often-overlooked function of a council is self-assessment. Perhaps we neglect self-assessment because we are overly focused on getting to the next task. Yet if your Synod Council is to continually improve its service and effectiveness to your synod and its constituents, you will need to invest in assessment activities. Additionally, for individual council members, and for the council as a whole, assessment provides affirmation of the value of their service. Celebrate what you have accomplished and you will invigorate your commitment to the future.

Your assessments should take place at multiple levels across the council and the synod. Some of these levels and methods of assessment your council might consider include:

A synodwide review process: On a rotational basis, review the progress of each of the synodical divisions or program units, committees and major ministries. Agenda time at each meeting can be set aside to accomplish this. Many factors can negatively or positively influence a unit's ability to realize its goals. Some factors include budgets, key staff and volunteers, and reorganization. Council members' satisfaction with their services is linked to their understanding and cognitive processing of goal achievement. In most synods it will require two or more years to accomplish all of these reviews.

Assessment of council processes and relationships: Intelligent, skilled and faithful servants are elected to serve on synod councils and boards. However, it does not necessarily follow that council meetings will always run smoothly. Relationships and dynamics among the members greatly affect their ability to work together. The very nature of board work demands conflicting opinions, ideas, points of view and critical evaluation.

At each meeting, boards should devote time to assessing their own performance as a group. Reasons for this assessment include:

- to grow in the ability to debate and yet remain collegial;
- to develop a forum where all positions are honored; and
- to give the vice president guidance so he or she may continue to develop the council as well as his or her own leadership style.

Member self assessment: Service on a synod-wide level has both its investments and benefits. Investments include time to prepare for and attend meetings and the inconvenience of travel. Benefits include the opportunity to influence the mission and ministry of the synodical expressions of the church and to enjoy close interaction with other leaders in the church. At each meeting councils should devote some time to personal prayer and reflection. This activity deepens the meaning of service and helps members individually and collectively to discern the will of God.

There is no right or wrong way to accomplish meaningful council assessments. The important thing is to do it and then to take actions based on the results of the assessment. Here are a few

good questions to start you on your way:

Goal achievement

- Which goals did we achieve fully? Why? What contributed to our success?
- Which goals did we achieve partially or not at all? Why? What factors limited success?
- What did we learn in the process of trying to implement these goals?
- What might we do differently next time?
- Have council policies been carried out?
- Are there new policies we need to address?

Council relations

- Did everyone participate in this meeting? Why or why not?
- Were all opinions respected?
- Are members clear on the functions of the council (i.e., distinguish between council functions and staff functions)?
- Is creativity and individuality of council members encouraged and respected?
- Is decision making superficial? Is the council a rubber stamp?
- Did we stay focused without going off on tangents?

Personal reflection

- How did I feel about this meeting?
- What did I like best and least about the meeting? Can I do anything to change the things I didn't like?
- Are there issues and opportunities to which I can respond?
- Do I add value by my participation?

Recruiting and training synodical leaders

One of the hallmarks of successful leaders is that they assume responsibility for finding and mentoring future leaders of their organization. This is particularly critical in volunteer organizations that wish to remain faithful to the Lord's work they are called to support and sustain. Intentionally sought leaders, leaders who are effective and appropriate for each of the positions on your board or council, are essential for the continuity of mission and governance a Synod Council is to provide and are a pleasure for returning members of your council to welcome and work together with.

Many councils assign the task of recruiting candidates to their nominating committee. A more appropriate use of a nominating committee would be to screen potential leaders for their willingness to serve, evaluate the appropriateness of candidates' skills and gifts and coordinate the process of nominating qualified candidates to open positions on your council. The actual activity of recruiting a group of valued, potential leaders falls to the members of your council. You should plan well in advance to recruit for vacancies that are to occur. Think about qualified leaders you may know through your congregation, conference or through other ELCA synodical

agencies you encounter. Use your network of colleagues and constituents to publicize openings on the council. Have a formalized recruitment document easily accessible and downloadable on your synod's website.

Remember that another goal in recruiting candidates is to conform as closely as possible with the constitutional requirement in the ELCA of male and female, clergy and laity, people of color or whose primary language is other than English, and the involvement of youth and young adults. It is also important to seek collegiality and to ensure diversity within the council.

Section 2

Background information on the ELCA

What are the chief purposes of the ELCA?

The primary purposes are expressed in the constitutions of congregations, synods and the churchwide organization:

- to proclaim God's saving gospel;
- to carry out Christ's Great Commission;
- to serve in response to God's love to meet human needs and work for peace and reconciliation;
- to worship God through word and sacrament and through lives of prayer, praise, thanksgiving, witness and service;
- to nurture members in the word of God and in their Christian calling; and
- to manifest the unity given to the people of God by living together in the love of Christ and by joining with other Christians in prayer and action.

What is a congregation?

A congregation is a community of baptized people whose existence depends on the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments and whose purpose is to worship God, to nurture its members and to reach out in witness and service to the world. To this end, it assembles regularly for worship and nurture, organizes and carries out ministry to its people and neighborhood, and cooperates with and supports the wider church to strive for the fulfillment of God's mission in the world. As of August 2011 there were 10,000 congregations within the ELCA with a total of 4.2 million members.

What are the key responsibilities of each congregation?

The congregation includes in its mission a life of worship and nurture for its members, and outreach in witness and service to its community.

What criteria apply to all ELCA congregations?

A congregation is recognized as a member of the ELCA if it:

- preaches the word, administer the sacraments, and carry out God's mission;
- accepts this church's Confession of Faith;
- agrees to the Statement of Purpose of this church;
- agrees to call pastoral leadership from the clergy roster in accordance with the call procedures, except in special circumstances and with the approval of the synodical bishop;
- agrees to be responsible for their life as a Christian community; and
- agrees to support the life and work of this church.

What is the churchwide organization?

The churchwide organization works on behalf of the ELCA's members, congregations and synods in proclaiming the gospel, reaching out in witness and service both globally and locally,

nurturing its members in the daily life of faith. It develops churchwide policy, sets standards for leadership, establishes criteria for the ELCA's endeavors and coordinates its work. It is a means for sharing resources and providing programs and services for the members of the ELCA.

Is the ELCA Constitution available online?

Yes. Synod Council members will benefit from a thorough understanding of how the [ELCA Constitution](#) describes the organization of this church, its synods and congregations. A word about the numbering system used in the constitution. The ELCA Constitution is divided into major sections called "chapters." Each deals with a particular topic. Within a chapter, there are three kinds of material:

Constitutional provisions: These are the basic framework of the constitution, the core material. Constitutional provisions require the approval of the Churchwide Assembly. The other information in the chapter serves as an elaboration of this core material. These provisions are designated by a two-number code (for example 14.21.), the first portion of which is the chapter. The provisions are printed in boldface type in the constitution. Chapter 14 of the constitution is the section where you will find the definitions of the council and its key responsibilities, though additional responsibilities do appear in other chapters as well.

Bylaws: These flesh out the core provisions of the constitution and further define the topic at hand, offering a finer level of detail. Changes in bylaws require the approval of the Churchwide Assembly. They are designated by a three-number code according to the constitutional provision to which they relate (e.g., 14.21.03.), and are printed in lightface type.

Continuing resolutions: These are the finest level of detail in the constitution, and frequently serve as the practical means of carrying out the requirements of the constitutional provisions and bylaws. Continuing resolutions may be adopted or amended by a majority vote of the Churchwide Assembly or by a two-thirds vote of the Church Council. They are designated by a three-number code that includes a letter in the last portion (for example 19.21.A98.). The final number represents the year in which the resolution was adopted. Continuing resolutions are printed in italic type.

Section 3

Getting to know the synod

What is a synod?

Our English word “synod” comes from two Greek words “syn” and “hodos” that literally mean “a way together.” In and through synods, the churchwide organization, congregations and other ministries walk together. Synods are an expression of this church, just as are congregations and the churchwide organization. Your synod office coordinates the work of congregations within its region. Your synod office plans for the ELCA’s mission (which is one dimension of God’s larger mission) in its area. Your synod is one of the ELCA’s 65 synods. Synods are grouped into nine regions. Each region serves as a point of connection between synods and the churchwide organization and is served by a coordinator for ministry leadership who is called by the Church Council.

The ELCA’s 65 synods vary greatly in size, geography, membership, staffing and program. The smallest synod has 31 congregations — the largest nearly 300. In the Saint Paul Area Synod, most congregations are within a half-hour drive of the synod office. By contrast, the Rocky Mountain Synod includes 20 percent of the contiguous continental U.S. landmass, requiring frequent staff travel by air. From Alaska to the Caribbean, from the tip of Southern California to Maine, the 65 synods of the ELCA carry out their mission of making Christ known!

Each synod in assembly elects a bishop and other officers. As the synod’s pastor, the bishop oversees the ministry of other pastors and congregations. Together with her/his assistant(s) and paid or volunteer staff, the bishop provides support for congregations to carry out their own ministries. Support includes assistance in calling pastors and other staff; resources and support in times of difficulty and congregational conflict; and joining in the celebrations of congregations. Bishops also oversee the administration of the synod, supervising the work of other officers and staff. In addition, they serve as bishops of the whole ELCA, coming together regularly in gatherings of the Conference of Bishops.

The Synod Assembly

The Synod Assembly is the highest legislative authority of the synod. The powers of the Synod Assembly are limited only by the provisions in the Articles of Incorporation, the constitution and bylaws, the assembly’s own resolutions, and the constitutions and bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Constitutionally, the rostered and lay leaders from across the synod are to assemble at least biennially.

The synod’s officers

The officers of the synod include a bishop, a vice president, a secretary and a treasurer. The roles and responsibilities of each office are specified in your synod’s constitution. Generally they will include:

Bishop

The synod’s bishop is an ordained pastor of the ELCA. She or he is elected bishop by the Synod

Assembly. As the synod's pastor, the bishop:

- preaches, teaches and administers the sacraments in accord with the Confession of Faith of the ELCA;
- has primary responsibility for the ministry of word and sacrament in the synod and its congregations;
- provides pastoral care and leadership for the synod, its congregations, its ordained ministers and its other rostered leaders;
- exercises the church's power to ordain approved candidates;
- commissions approved candidates for service as associates in ministry and consecrates approved candidates for service as deaconesses and diaconal ministers;
- attests letters of call for those called to serve in the synod.
- installs (or provides for the installation of):
 - the pastors of all congregations of the synod;
 - ordained ministers called to extra-parish service within the church; and
 - those serving in the other rostered ministries within the synod.
- exercises leadership in the mission of this church and in so doing:
 - interprets and advocates the mission and theology of the whole church;
 - leads in fostering support for and commitment to the mission of the church within the synod;
 - coordinates the use of the resources available to the synod;
 - submits a report to each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly concerning the synod's life and work; and
 - advises and counsels the synod's related institutions and organizations.
- practices leadership in strengthening the unity of the church and in so doing:
 - exercises oversight of the preaching, teaching and administration of the sacraments within the synod;
 - is responsible for administering the constitutionally established processes for the resolution of controversies and for the discipline of ordained ministers, other rostered leaders and congregations of the synod;
 - is the chief ecumenical officer of the synod;
 - consults regularly with other synodical bishops and the Conference of Bishops;
 - fosters awareness of other churches throughout the Lutheran world communion and, where appropriate, engages in contact with leaders of those churches;
 - cultivates communion in faith and mission with appropriate Christian judicatory leaders functioning within the territory of the synod; and
 - is an "ex officio" a member of the Churchwide Assembly.
- Oversees and administers the work of the synod and in so doing:
 - is the president of the synod corporation and chief executive and administrative officer of the synod;
 - presides at all meetings of the Synod Assembly and provides for the preparation of the agenda for the Synod Assembly, Synod Council and the

- council's Executive Committee;
- o ensures that the constitution and bylaws of the synod and of the churchwide organization are duly observed within the synod;
- o exercises supervision over the work of the other officers;
- o coordinates the work of all synodical staff members;
- o appoints all committees for which provision is not otherwise made;
- o is a member of all committees and any other organizational units of the synod, except as otherwise provided in the synod's constitution;
- o provides for preparation and maintenance of synodical rosters;
- o annually brings to the attention of the Synod Council the names of all rostered people on leave from call or engaged in approved graduate study;
- o provides for prompt reporting to the secretary of this church of additions to and subtractions from the rosters of the synod and the register of congregations, the issuance of certificates of transfer for rostered people in good standing and the entrance of the names of those for whom proper certificates of transfer have been received;
- o provides for preparation and maintenance of a register of the congregations of the synod and the names of the lay people who have been elected to represent them; and
- o appoints a statistician of the synod.

Vice president

The vice president is a layperson elected by the Synod Assembly. The vice president is a voting member of a congregation of the synod and does not receive a salary for the performance of the duties of the office. The vice president chairs the Synod Council.

Unless otherwise determined by the synod, the vice president is as a voting member of the Churchwide Assembly.

In the event of the death, resignation or disability of the bishop, the vice president convenes the Synod Council to arrange for carrying out the duties of the bishop until a new bishop is elected or, in the case of temporary disability, until the bishop resumes full performance of the duties of the office.

Secretary

The secretary is also elected by the Synod Assembly and must be a voting member of a congregation of the synod. The secretary can be either a layperson or an ordained minister.

The secretary:

- keeps the minutes of all meetings of the Synod Assembly and Synod Council, is responsible for the printing and distribution of these minutes and performs other duties as the synod may from time to time direct;
- attests all instruments of the synod;
- consults with the bishop to classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposits them in the archives of the synod; and

- submits to the secretary of the ELCA a certified list of the voting members elected by the Synod Assembly.

Treasurer

The treasurer is also elected by the Synod Assembly and must be a voting member of a congregation in the synod. The treasurer may be either a layperson or an ordained minister.

The treasurer provides and is accountable for:

- management of the monies and accounts of the synod, its deeds, mortgages, contracts, evidences of claims and revenues, and trust funds, subject to the order of the synod;
- investment of funds authorized by the Synod Council;
- receipt and acknowledgment of offerings, contributions and bequests made to the synod, collecting interest and income from its invested funds, and paying regular appropriations and orders on the several accounts as approved and directed by the Synod Council;
- transmitting each month to the treasurer of the ELCA the funds received by the synod for the general work of this church;
- maintenance of a regular account with each congregation of the synod and informing the congregation, at least quarterly, of the status of this account;
- rendering at each regular meeting of the Synod Assembly a full, detailed, and duly audited report of receipts and disbursements in the accounts of the synod for the preceding fiscal year, together with the tabulation, for record and publication in the minutes, of the contributions from the congregations; and
- giving of corporate surety in the amount determined by the Synod Council.

The Synod Council

The Synod Council consists of the four officers of the synod, 10 to 24 other members and at least one youth and young adult. All members are elected by the Synod Assembly. Elected Synod Council members are voting members of a congregation of the synod, with the exception of rostered ordained ministers of the synod who may reside outside the territory of the synod.

The Synod Council is the board of directors of a synod and is its interim legislative authority between meetings of the Synod Assembly. It makes decisions not in conflict with actions taken by the Synod Assembly or not precluded by provisions of the synod's constitution and bylaws or the constitution and bylaws of the ELCA.

The Synod Council members:

- act as the trustees of the synod;
- recommend program goals and budgets to the regular meetings of the Synod

Assembly;

- carry out the resolutions of the Synod Assembly;
- provide for an annual review of the roster of ordained ministers (including the bishop) and of other rostered individuals;
- issue letters of call to ordained ministers and associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers;
- fill council vacancies until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly;
- determine the fact of the incapacity of an officer of the synod;
- report its actions to the regular meeting of the Synod Assembly; and
- perform other functions as set forth in the bylaws of the synod or as may be delegated by the Synod Assembly.

How the Synod Council and staff is organized and governs

In most ELCA synods, governance is the function of the council, while administration is the function of the staff. Governance includes the use of a process and leadership to plan, make policy, monitor programs, relate to the bishop, request and monitor resources and assess the council's own performance. Administration includes directing, managing and evaluating day-to-day operations within the parameters set by a governing board. There is a dynamic interplay between governance and administration, as both council and staff participate in planning for the ministry of the synod. Governance and administrative roles are established in your synod's constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions.

Each synod should make a decision about its governance and structure. While the size of the synod will influence this decision, the following questions can inform the conversation:

- Which decisions should the council make and which should they delegate?
- How much involvement should the council have in the day-to-day operations of the synod?
- How will the reporting relationship between the council and the staff be defined?

Working or administrative councils deal with both the results and the methods by which their synod supports the mission of their synod. In addition to their stewarding of the mission and resources on behalf of the congregations and ministries of the synod, they usually have some responsibilities for the operation of the organization. In addition to providing policy and general direction, these board members may help in practical ways such as organizing events and drafting documents.

Policy-based governance councils, on the other hand, primarily focus on the outcomes of the work of the bishop, staff and congregations within their synod. They provide their leadership by defining and measuring the outcomes of the synod's ministries and support programs.

Collaborative councils incorporate some elements of both of the above types of councils.

The following chart is helpful in comparing the primary roles of the Synod Council and how they are exhibited in these three models of governance:

Council Role	Policy-Based Councils	Working/Administrative Councils	Collaborative Councils
Visioning, Planning and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Create the vision and mission. † Set policies and ensure procedures are in place. † Define the outcomes and measurements of results. † Planning: A committee drafts planning to be approved by Synod Council and Synod Assembly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Set policies and provide general direction. † Council and staff create the strategic plan and implement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Share responsibility with staff for policy setting. † Have shared values with the staff on the involvement in providing programs, the ways of providing them, and the manner in which council work is conducted.
Finances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Have a volunteer treasurer. † Have a finance committee. † Set limits on the bishop's financial decisions. † Reviews financial statements. † May or may not be involved in financial decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † The financial decision-making is largely in the council's hands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Council, bishop and staff work on financial matters as a team.
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Bishop reports personnel matters to the chair of the personnel committee. † Council speaks with one voice to the bishop. The bishop is responsible to the council. † Policy is communicated by the bishop and the personnel committee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † May not have a senior staff person. † Council members often act as direct volunteers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Staff, management and chairing functions are often shared by the staff and Synod Council. † There is little or no management hierarchy.
Organizational and Operational	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Extensive committee structure supported by staff. † Council receives reports. † Bishop attends to all "operations." † Council plans direct "council work." † No/limited committee structure – only when needed to support the work of the council. † Council discussions lead to decisions by consensus. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Committees support the work of operations. † Council members' workload is heavier. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Operational functions are shared by the council, bishop, staff and volunteers. † Decisions are made through consensus.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † The outreach committee develops awareness of the church's mission and ministry in congregations, agencies and institutions. † The committee interprets and reflects community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † Bishop, staff and council represent the synod to the community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> † All members represent the synod to the community.

	needs to the organization. † Synod Council defines the results (ends) the synod is trying to achieve in the community and measures them.		
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The active oversight of organizational governance by the Synod Council can also be referred to as stewardship. It is the duty of the Synod Council to oversee the conduct of the synod’s affairs, ensure that an effective team is in place to carry out day-to-day activities, account for its financial and other resources, and ensure that no issue falls by the wayside in steering the organization toward the fulfillment of its mission.

When a Synod Council exercises its appropriate governance, relationships between and among congregations, the synod support staff, the churchwide organization and the ministries of the church are strengthened. An inevitable outcome is that those served (the congregations and ministries of the synod and wider church) become more effective and responsible stewards of the church.

In summary, Synod Councils that are the most effective in supporting the mission of their synods have adopted some or all of the following as their understanding of the council’s role:

- They provide much of the vision and direction for the synod.
- They provide for strategic planning for the future.
- They know and believe in the mission of the synod.
- They support their bishop and officers.
- They establish, view and monitor the policies of their synod.
- They monitor the fulfillment of the major goals of the synod.
- They serve as stewards of the resources the synod has been entrusted with.
- They advocate for and assist with the development of financial resources for the synod and the ELCA’s churchwide ministries.
- They care for the spiritual health of the Synod Council.

Using committees and task forces

The time a Synod Council is together is limited. It is controlled by the frequency and duration of your council meetings. A council meeting should not be primarily a “working” session. The administration and work to fulfill the mission of your synod should take place at the staff level and by designated committees and task forces established by the staff or by council. The work of both committees and task forces may be appropriate at both council and staff levels.

Committees and task forces differ in their role and duration. A committee is defined as a group of qualified people responsible for any ongoing work supporting the mission of your synod. Examples of typical committees are: a personnel committee, the executive committee, a finance committee and a nominating committee. A task force is defined as a group of qualified people responsible for any short-term, clearly defined body of work. Task forces are chartered with a

clearly defined scope of work and termination point of their work, and hence the life of the task force. Both committees and task forces should be vehicles utilized to match the work required with the appropriately skilled resources of people, time and other support and help to inhibit the tendency for boards to micromanage the affairs of the synod.

Section 4

Planning and evaluating a council meeting

This training session is intended to be used when a Synod Council gathers for the first time. At this gathering, members will become informed about the goals and objectives of the synod and agree on how the council will function as the board of directors for the synod. This initial look at its purpose should occur after an orientation session for the newly elected Synod Council members.

An agenda for such a training session might look something like this:

- Welcome to all by bishop and vice president
- Devotion led by bishop or vice president
- Time to get acquainted
- A review of your synod
- Review of council governance, functioning and relationship to the synod's Office of the Bishop
- Agree to a set of Synod Council covenants
- Review of the synod's mission plan and priorities
- Schedule future council meetings
- Adjourn with prayer

Suggestions for each agenda item are discussed below.

Welcome by synod bishop and vice president

If this is the first meeting for a vice president, it might be best for the bishop to provide this welcome. A vice president who has already served as chair of the council might do the welcome. Part of the welcome might remind members of why they are present and that all are expected to participate fully in the planned agenda.

Devotion

Use a devotion that is appropriate to the ministry of your synod.

Getting acquainted

Getting to know those who have come together to serve on the Synod Council and what their strengths and gifts are will be time well spent. Very likely those gathered will be a richly diverse group, representing a variety of congregations and cultures. Go around the room and ask each person to share their name, the name of their congregation, their occupation, some things about themselves which might be of interest to others and why they feel called to serve on the council.

When all have spoken, you might discuss the variety and diversity of gifts that are assembled on your council and how this diversity exemplifies God at work in your midst. Ask yourselves what

you are called to do as a body of leaders. This discussion can lead naturally into the next agenda item.

Review of your synod and the ELCA

The review of your synod can usually be presented by the bishop of your synod, members of the staff, the vice president or any combination of qualified individuals. (Most synods will have a presentation handy which is being shared within the synod already.)

Suggestions for topics to be covered in the review of your synod include:

- who the members of the ELCA and your synod are: congregations, people, cultures, organizations and institutions;
- the mission, vision and values, which might already be defined describing your synod's purpose and common ground;
- an outline of the churchwide and synodical staff organizations, roles and responsibilities;
- an outline of the committees and ministry teams functioning in your synod;
- a financial overview of the synod's financial plans, including contributions to churchwide and other organizations and agencies receiving synodical support;
- directories listing the officers, congregations and rostered personnel across the synod;
- an annual Synod Council planning calendar; and
- any other information that might be noteworthy.

Council governance, functioning and relationship to the synod's Office of the Bishop

The work of the Synod Council will be somewhat different from a congregation council or other board experiences members may have had. The council's responsibilities are spelled out in the synod's constitution. Generally these responsibilities include acting as the legislative body of the synod between Synod Assemblies and acting as stewards for the member congregations in seeing that the synod office runs smoothly, appropriately and efficiently. Some constitutions may even give the council members responsibilities to support and participate in the ministry of the synod as committee chairs or on ministry teams aligned with the council.

Effective synods are careful to separate the monitoring and planning roles of their Synod Council from the operations and programmatic roles of the Office of the Bishop and key paid and volunteer leaders and workers in that office. These staff people ordinarily report to the bishop or are supervised by other staff. Councils that attempt to do day-to-day managing of staff don't allow themselves the time or energy to do really important work of encouraging the synod as a whole to move forward in ministry growth and evaluating progress by assessing outcomes or results.

Using a policy-based governance model is one way to improve the effectiveness of the council. In this model, policies are set forth that define the relationships between the synod's council, the bishop, the staff and the volunteers responsible for achieving the ministry goals that have been established.

Agree to a set of Synod Council covenants

A covenant that sets out values, relationships and responsibilities might be discussed and ultimately agreed upon by the council. Discuss this covenant and seek commitment from the council members to maintain their values and carry through on their responsibilities. Refer to your covenant as necessary throughout the year for continuing guidance, evaluation of the job you are doing, and direction for the future. There are sample covenants in section 13 of this resource.

The synod's mission plan, priorities and objectives

Many synods have mapped a strategic course for themselves by adopting a mission plan. Such plans usually include a list of priorities and desired outcomes. This first council session provides an ideal opportunity to introduce the synod plan and the priorities that have been set. This will allow members to understand and commit to the list and the objectives or outcomes. The Synod Council might agree to allow time at future meetings to focus on evaluating progress toward achieving the vision described in each of the areas of the synod's mission plan. Individual meetings might be devoted to items such as financial planning, mission planting of new congregations, leadership development and support, stewardship, synod staff organization and structure, relationships with churchwide, agencies and institutions, and the like.

Future council meetings and agendas

The final piece of business at this training session might be the planning of the future dates and locations of your meetings for at least the next six to nine months. Specific agenda items for each of the meetings might also be set.

Adjourn with prayer

A prayer is offered before the council adjourns.

Shaping a meeting agenda

A meeting agenda is a plan for conducting the business in a meeting. According to a 2004 survey of ELCA vice presidents, over 60 percent of the agendas for Synod Council meetings are developed by the bishop and vice president. It is helpful to have a basic agenda with which to begin the planning of a specific meeting. Here is one model:

1. Preliminaries
 - Introductions
 - Spiritual growth/faith exploration
 - Council member comments
 - Approval of minutes
 - Review and approval of the agenda
2. Council education
 - Progress review on one to two planned strategies of the synod
 - Conduct a “dialogue” – “How are we accounting to the stewards of our synod?”
3. Council business
 - Monitoring
 - Committee reports
 - Management reports

- Policy review or revision
- Visioning
- Old business
- New business
- A look into the future
- Self evaluation
- Adjournment

Recognize that not all Synod Councils will meet with the same frequency or duration when they gather. Therefore structure your agendas to meet your local setting. But do remember to keep the big picture before your council. Don't get too means focused, but evaluate ends. If you are unable to address all of these model topics at one meeting be sure they are not neglected but rather addressed throughout the year. You might develop an additional, expanded annual agenda as a council to help you achieve this.

Good meetings don't happen by accident. As chair of your Synod Council you can control the effectiveness of meetings. To do so takes planning, leading and facilitation for the involvement of all participants. Consider these guidelines as you lead your Synod Council and executive meetings:

A week or more in advance you should define the objectives and desired outcomes from the meeting. This is best done with the help of your bishop and executive council.

Determine the topics that need to be covered and the amount of time you should allow for adequate coverage. This will culminate in your preparation of the formal agenda of the meeting. The agenda should be distributed to all participants well in advance of your meeting. This allows participants and presenters to prepare themselves for the meeting, gather the information they need and plan their role for each agenda item.

Reserve a meeting location and space that will comfortably accommodate everyone and provide for refreshments and meals as necessary. Many Synod Councils meet either at their synod's office or at congregations or agencies within their synod. The latter locations afford the opportunity for council members to experience some of the ministries happening within the synod. Ensure that required projection space, equipment, handouts and learning aids are on hand.

Start and end your meetings on time. Delaying the start of a meeting may come back to haunt you when you do not have enough time to complete all of the business or have to rush through some important topics.

Call the meeting to order and open the meeting with spiritual reflection. Introductions may be in order, especially when new members and guests are present. For councils that don't meet frequently a brief time of introduction will help build a sense of community within the group.

It is usually helpful to review the agenda and adopt it as a council. For large meetings lasting days, such as Synod Assemblies, it is beneficial to the flow of getting the work done and eliminating confusion to adopt an agenda and stick to it. Then, however, to make a change, you

will need to undergo the parliamentary process which can be time consuming. For meetings with fewer attendees and lasting a few hours, having the flexibility as chair of the group to make minor changes will keep things moving. In these instances you can take the initiative to assist the group by asking the participants if they will agree by consensus to things like moving an item of business or delaying lunch so a presenter can complete a presentation. This can be done by simply saying something like, “If there are no objections, I suggest that we ...” If there is an objection then it will need to be dealt with by asking the participants to vote to amend the agenda.

It is usually appropriate to have the synod officers report on a regular basis. The secretary’s report should include approval of the minutes of the prior meeting, items brought by the executive committee for approval by the council, reports of other committees, correspondence received from the churchwide organization or other business. The minutes of the prior Synod Council or executive council meetings need not be read but should be distributed to all participants well in advance of the meeting for their reading and reflections.

The treasurer’s report will deal with the financial matters of the synod. It may require council action, such as approving a budget. Written treasurer reports are essential for the conduct of synod business and should also be sent out well in advance of the meeting.

The vice president’s report may include items from the executive committee, if they are not reported by the secretary; activities of the synod; reports from the region (if the vice president serves on that board) or reports of upcoming events or business that the council will be addressing.

The bishop’s report may include reports from the professional staff, synod and churchwide activities. It is wise for the vice president to discuss with each of the other officers in advance of a meeting the amount of time they each need for their oral reports and balance it with the time constraints of your agenda.

Every Synod Council has committees charged with specialized areas of ministry. Committees should submit progress reports at each council meeting. Because of the limits of meeting time, you will need to control which committees can submit only a written progress report and which ones should appropriately give an oral report during a council meeting. Usually oral reports should be made when the council has planned for a scheduled ministry review of a particular strategic area of ministry.

The bishop, secretary, and vice president or the entire executive committee should confer before a council meeting to agree upon which items of new business and old business need to be discussed and handled by the entire Synod Council. These items may be brought forward for discussion and action by the entire council or referred to a committee as appropriate. New business time on the agenda is the time when something not previously dealt with can be brought to the council’s attention. Both new and old business can be matters that might be dealt with quickly: things for which constructive analysis, debate and votes are appropriate; things that need committee or task force handling; or things that council participants may choose not to deal with. It is entirely appropriate for you and the council to screen new business items for appropriateness

of your handling when they may be more “operational” in nature and should be handled by someone within the organization.

You will need to decide whether regular reports from the professional staff need to be heard at each Synod Council meeting. Written reports may be sufficient, or the bishop may relinquish a portion of her or his agenda time to a staff report at his/her initiative. Many synods hear from each professional staff member only once or twice a year in the review of a particular area of ministry emphasis.

When a guest is present they may be afforded an opportunity to speak. An invited speaker should be afforded a specific time on your agenda to speak or make his or her presentation. If a presenter is invited to come at a specific time, it is appropriate to temporarily suspend council discussions and allow the speaker to share the message in the allotted time. After the presentation the previous discussion may resume.

Whenever a sensitive matter is being discussed, such as a personnel matter, it is advisable to go into executive session. The necessity to do so may be planned, requested by the bishop or the executive committee or the council at large. If an executive session is placed on the agenda in advance of the meeting by a two-thirds vote, then it can be considered as an agenda item. If there is reason to call for an unscheduled executive session in the course of a council meeting then a two-thirds favorable majority vote by those present needs to be obtained before the executive session can occur.

Since an executive session rarely occurs, it is the vice president’s responsibility as chair of the council to remind the council of what an executive session is and what is expected of those present. Anyone who is not an elected member of the council is asked to leave the room. All access to the room is closed and no non-council member is allowed in the room during discussions. Information from the executive session is not to be discussed with anyone outside of the meeting. At the request of the council you might have a staff member or other person present who is involved in the matter in order to share their understanding of the situation with the group.

Minutes of executive sessions are taken but kept separate from the council minutes. They are not submitted for approval by the council but are available for review at a future executive session. It is appropriate for you as chair to caution executive session participants that, if they do not feel comfortable with the topic of discussion or feel that they cannot maintain the information in confidence, they should excuse themselves from the executive session.

Synod councils are free to create their own procedures or ways of doing things for the conduct of their meetings. If specific procedures have not been established by the council, then by ELCA constitutions “Robert’s Rules of Order” will apply (see the next section for a review of “Robert’s Rules of Order”). Members of your Synod Council may have had experience in other groups where meeting procedures were different. This does not mean that either set of procedures is necessarily right or wrong. To avoid and dispel many procedural disputes it may be wise to appoint a parliamentarian for your council. A parliamentarian should be someone who is well versed in meeting procedures, can remain impartial, and yet is pragmatic. It is also good to

remember to deal with only one subject at a time and avoid distractions from items not pertinent to the business at hand.

One of your primary roles as chair of the council meeting is to keep the meeting focused and moving. This is a responsibility you cannot delegate or ignore. Maintain your objectivity as much as possible. If you must express opinions, it may be best to “pass the gavel,” that is, ask the bishop to assume chair of the meeting so you can express your opinion while not at the same time controlling the discussion. Ensure that everyone is heard from. Let the council members carry the content of the meeting while you guide the process. Use the agenda to stay on track. Many chairs have their own copies of the agenda time lined to help them do this. Vary the pace of a long meeting — speed some things up, slow some things down, take breaks after “heavy” discussions. Periodically summarize key points and ask for agreement so you can move conversation along to conclusions. Keep the council aware of where they are in the agenda and its time line.

One of the best words of advice a vice president can receive about conducting Synod Council meetings is to remember to be practical. If it makes sense to move an agenda item when you have unexpected time to fill, take the initiative and suggest to the council that an item be moved up from the agenda. For example, move short, routine items such as On Leave from Call, calendar items or short old or new business items into this time slot. If a scheduled speaker is not present when their presentation time comes, move other agenda items into its place until the presenter arrives. If something unexpected comes up, such as the lights going out, a speaker’s equipment malfunctions, or other disruptions, adjust the agenda quickly and move on. If everything just stops, people will mentally and physically drift away. It is like herding cats to get them back into a meeting room and to refocus on the meeting.

When closing the meeting, review upcoming meeting dates and decide on locations. Review any assigned items that you and the council members may have. Conclude by summarizing the group’s accomplishments and ask the group to evaluate its performance.

After the meeting evaluate your own performance: What worked well? What could you have improved on? Plan any post-meeting sessions. Monitor the progress of the items decided on in this meeting and begin to make plans for your next Synod Council meeting.

Evaluating your meetings

Intelligent, skilled and faithful servants are elected to serve on Synod Councils and boards. However, it does not necessarily follow that council meetings will always run smoothly. Relationships and dynamics among the members greatly affect their ability to work together. The very nature of board work demands conflicting opinions, ideas, points of view and critical evaluation.

At each meeting, boards should devote time to assessing their own performance as a group. Reasons for this assessment include:

- to grow in the ability to debate and yet remain collegial;
- to develop a forum where all positions are honored; and
- to give the vice president guidance so he or she may continue to develop the

council as well as her or his own leadership style.

Service on a synodical level has both its investments and benefits. Investments include time to prepare for and attend meetings and the inconvenience of travel. Benefits include the opportunity to influence the mission and ministry of the synodical expressions of the church and to enjoy close interaction with other leaders in the church. At each meeting councils should devote some time to personal prayer and reflection. This activity deepens the meaning of service and helps members individually and collectively discern the will of God.

There is no right or wrong way to accomplish meaningful council assessments. The important thing is to do it and then to take actions based on the results of the assessment. Here are a few good questions to start you on your way:

Goal achievement

- Which goals did we achieve fully? Why? What contributed to our success?
- Which goals did we achieve partially or not at all? Why? What factors limited success?
- What did we learn in the process of trying to implement these goals?
- What might we do differently the next time?
- Have council policies been carried out?
- Are there new policies we need to address?

Council relations

- Did everyone participate in this meeting?
- Were all opinions respected?
- Are members clear on the functions of the council (i.e., distinguish between council functions and staff functions)?
- Is creativity and individuality of council members encouraged and respected?
- Is decision making superficial? Is the council a rubber stamp?
- Did we stay focused without going off on tangents?

Personal reflection

- How did I feel about this meeting?
- What did I like best and least about the meeting? Can I do anything to change the things I didn't like?
- Are there issues and opportunities to which I can respond?
- Do I add value by my participation?

Personal and spiritual growth of council members

Your leadership of the Synod Council meeting is very important. We know that leadership in the synod is a critical factor in how the synod accomplishes its mission. Certainly efforts to train leaders by teaching leadership skills are more than worthwhile. But that's not the end of it. As God's people we affirm that leadership in the church is different from leadership in politics or

business. Leaders in the public sector are put into jobs because they have certain skills. Leaders in the church are invited to do certain tasks because they are chosen. Jesus said and continues to say, “You did not choose me but I chose you” (John 15:16).

God’s leaders have always been chosen -- chosen by God to do the great things by the power of the Spirit. In the church it is not enough to learn a skill or get training. In the church we celebrate the opportunity to lead because God has put us in a place of leadership, consecrated us in the service, equipped us with the spiritual resources we need to do what is set before us, and sent us on our way, guided by the Spirit’s presence. Because we know we are chosen and equipped, we can respond with Isaiah, “Here am I; send me!” (Isaiah 6:8).

Use devotions, individually or in a group in your Synod Council meetings, to reflect on what God is doing through you as chosen leaders in God’s church. Devotions probe Old and New Testament sources to help us celebrate one of the leadership gifts God provides. As we think about and talk about these gifts we can begin to see again how we are God’s leaders because we have been chosen, equipped and empowered by the God who loves, redeems and sends us in mission.

It is the practice of many council’s to commit a portion of time when they are gathered for study, sharing and reflection on the work they do and the Lord that they are called to serve. Every member of a Synod Council should be provided an opportunity to develop and deepen their faith.

One spiritual model for councils developed and tested by the Rev. Charles M. Olson in his book, “Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders”¹ is designed to address concerns voiced by councils and board members serving spirit-led organizations that they were missing spiritual fulfillment while serving on these boards. Pastor Olson’s model recommends four spiritual practices for councils to adopt:

1. History giving and story telling
2. Biblical and theological reflection
3. Prayerful discernment
4. Visioning the future

A study of this model concluded that “The individual board member is no longer seen as a political representative but as a spiritual leader. The board or council is no longer seen as a group of corporate managers, but as the people of God in community. The meeting is no longer seen as a litany of reports and decisions held together by ‘book-end’ prayers, but as a worshipful work.”

Section 5

Legal responsibilities of Synod Council members

In addition to the responsibilities and roles of serving on your Synod Council, as defined by the ELCA and your synod's constitution and bylaws and local organization and traditions, there are also professional and public roles and responsibilities, which are commensurate when serving on the board of directors of a nonprofit corporation.

A Synod Council is the board of directors for the synod and bears substantial responsibility to the public for the actions of the synod. A question most new council members ask is, "Can I be sued?" The answer is yes, but whether the claim would be upheld by a court is another matter. This question approaches the problem of the Synod Council member and the law from the point of view of risk management.

A more important accountability question is "What is my responsibility?" If board members carry out their responsibility properly, the chance of a court upholding a claim is much reduced.

Questions of accountability and liability necessary for a well-functioning Synod Council are:

1. What is the proper thing to do?
2. What are the consequences to be avoided?

This section will review a narrow topic: how the law affects the actions and responsibilities of those on Synod Councils. A large body of federal, state and local law also affects the actions and responsibilities of a synod. The issues that might be covered are too involved to cover in this short section. Local legal counsel should always be available for consultation. In addition, the ELCA attorney in the Office of the Secretary of the ELCA is always willing to aid synods.

Duties of council members

Care of resources

The Synod Council is responsible for the assets of the synod. It must ensure that those assets are guarded from waste and deterioration and see to it that sufficient resources are available to carry out the programs of the synod.

Accountable to the public

The Synod Council is responsible both to the synod and to the public for the resources and activities of the organization. It must account for the use of the resources in its care according to the charter of the organization and under the prevailing laws for nonprofit organizations.

Implications of new legislation

Recent legislation and case law suggests four things that synods should consider to comply with the spirit, if not the letter, of an evolving legal structure:

- have a functioning audit committee;
- have the bishop and treasurer publicly attest to the accuracy, completeness and fairness of the synod's financial statements and to the adequacy of your internal accounting controls;
- adopt and follow a code of ethics for the Synod Council and senior synod staff, including the bishop; and
- consider very carefully all transactions between the synod and any "insider," including executive compensation, fringe benefits and perks. Insiders include: organization officers, Synod Council members, management in decision-making positions, major donors, and members of the immediate families of any of these; controlled and affiliated organizations and trusts; and businesses in which any of the preceding are in significant positions of authority (owner or manager). A personnel policy should particularly specify the circumstances when two people of the same family may be employed by the synod.

Synod Council members are not, individually, responsible for the actions of the Synod Council, but they are individually obliged to three things, the first of which is called duty of care. Council members must exercise their duties:

- in good faith;
- with the care an ordinary prudent person would exercise under similar circumstances;
- in a manner that the member reasonably believes to be in the best interest of the synod;
- with the knowledge that they are not expected to be experts in all matters before the Synod Council;
- by relying on the advice of experts, such as those in finance and law;
- by relying on the facts and advice provided by the management of the synod that is more familiar with the operations (this does not permit council members to defer all judgment to management); and
- by relying on reasonable recommendations of committees with particular expertise.

Further, the duty of care does not require that every Synod Council member guarantee the results of any action approved by the council. It is only necessary that the approval process used appropriate methods in reaching the decision. In practice, a Synod Council member can fulfill the duty of care with respect to council meetings by:

- reading the materials in advance of each meeting;
- fully discussing matters before the council; and
- having dissenting votes recorded in the minutes of each meeting.

Synod Council members must also remember that, as members of the board of directors, their statements, even in casual conversation, may be interpreted as authoritative for the synod. They must be circumspect and thoughtful communicating information, so they do not inadvertently imply that council decisions, particularly controversial ones, were flawed. When struggling with any difficult decision, there is never an obvious and universally agreed no-lose choice. Once the decision is made, after due investigation and deliberation, it is in the best interest of the synod to accept and implement that decision and avoid secondary debate on the rumor circuit.

The second is duty of loyalty. A Synod Council member must evaluate all proposed actions of the council by considering only the best interest of the synod. Another way of saying this is to avoid all conflicts of interest when participating in any considerations of the Synod Council.

A transaction that could involve a conflict of interest is not forbidden, provided that:

- there is full disclosure of the nature of the conflict by the affected council member(s);
- those council members with a potential conflict do not participate in the consideration of the transaction (often it is best for those affected to leave the meeting as the question is considered); and
- the council determines that it is in the best interest of the synod. Legal advice is often appropriate before this conclusion is reached.

It is important that every synod have a written conflict of interest policy. Many nonprofit boards have every board member sign a statement upon election, certifying that they have received a copy of the policy, understand it and will abide by it.

The third is fidelity to purpose. A Synod Council member must act in a way that will advocate and ensure that the actions of the Synod Council are in furtherance of the purpose for which the synod exists. The statement of purpose for a synod is in Section S6 of the synod's constitution.

To fulfill this duty, a Synod Council member should:

- become familiar with the purposes of the synod;
- consider whether each proposed action is designed to meet the purposes of the synod; and
- periodically review the activities of the synod to make sure they still conform to the objectives and purposes of the synod.

To support the obligation for members to attend to fidelity of purpose, the Synod Council minutes should provide enough information so that absent members would be able to recognize important decisions that may require their additional review. This review is important because, in legal terms, absence from a meeting or pleading ignorance does not relieve a council member of responsibility for actions of the council.

Synod Council members must see to it that, in addition to ethical and moral obligation to the public and synodical members, the synod's activities are faithful to its purpose. The federal law that charters nonprofits also requires that the synod act only within the purpose stated in its charter. Other activities, even though they may be appropriate for other nonprofits, can potentially cause the loss of tax-exempt status for the synod if they are not consistent with the synod's charter.

Claims that may be made

Other parties may make claims against the synod or its officers or members of Synod Council in a court of law. Such action cannot be prevented. Claims that might be lodged against executives or members of the Synod Council include:

- a person who claims damage by the synod and also claims that one or more officials of the synod failed to discharge their duties (this is often called a third-party claim and is usually based on an assertion of negligence);
- a person may believe the synod's interests were damaged because of the act or omission to act by an executive or board member and claim damage on behalf of the organization (this is called a derivative action); and
- claims based on specific statutes that may impose liability for an organization's actions upon individuals representing that organization.

Federal law in the Volunteer Protection Act of 1977 provided some protection from third-party claims made against volunteers. The act provides that volunteers are not liable for harm caused by their act or omission if:

- the volunteer was acting within the scope of the volunteer's responsibilities;
- the volunteer was appropriately licensed, certified or authorized for the activity where appropriate or required;
- the harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct or other flagrant behavior; and
- the harm was not caused by operation of a motor vehicle for which the state requires a license.

The act has other terms, conditions and qualifications that should be explained by an attorney when there is need.

Liability protection

Sections S16.02 and 16.03 of your synod's constitution provide typical indemnification for past or present Synod Council members, officers, employees and committee members. The synod would be expected to provide legal counsel for any covered individual and reimbursement of any judgment against the person. These sections also cover volunteers who, at the request of the synod, serve in other organizations. "Other organizations" might include ELCA regions or local Lutheran Social Service organizations.

The standard synodical insurance also provides errors and omissions coverage for officers, executives and members of the Synod Council.

Section 6

Fiduciary and budget responsibilities of the Synod Council

Synod Council members often have mixed feelings about their responsibility for the fiduciary condition and financial management of their synod. Some see it as core to the synod's mission. Others would rather avoid it. A good system of financial management might not equate to mission, but it is important.

A sound financial records and reporting system provides these important benefits:

- it supports effective planning for short- and long-term mission and ministry planning;
- it allows effective monitoring of financial trends and can reveal risks to the financial health of the organization before that risk becomes a crisis;
- it provides for ongoing fiscal management and offers a clear view of where resources are being used, how much and how wisely so that the organization can make short-term adjustments in activities; and
- it carries out the responsibility for careful accounting, allowing the council to report accurately to the synod and to the churchwide organization the responsible use of funds entrusted to the synod.

Budgets are used for many purposes. Each should be developed in a way that is suitable to its intended purpose. Budgets should have no more categories than necessary. For example, a mission development budget intended for managing the next year might have 10 subcategories, but the same task in a long-range budget would have one category.

Planning budgets

Budgets meant for long-range planning would have a few categories, but there would be a complete annual estimate for each of the next 10 years. Clearly the precision of each year's estimate in each category is not as important as the relative numbers between years and categories. These budgets are never used to manage in future years, but rather to plan strategies. Long-range budget categories should match well with the annual budget high-level categories. In this way successive annual financial information can permit the synod to compare their long-range plans against recent experience; this is invaluable for identifying trends.

Annual budgets

Budgets meant for annual use also need sufficient categories for their intended purpose. In a large corporation, these budgets become very sophisticated and are used to control spending. In other words, if there is no money in the budget category, there will be no purchases. Most people think this is the reason for a budget. But for this to work well the business must have elaborate and refined management practices and a business that permits refined and reliable estimates.

Neither is true of a synod or congregation. Rather, a synodical or congregational budget is not best used for control but rather for monitoring the intent of the organization as it is revealed in the expenditure of people and financial resources. This monitoring becomes a way to manage in the short term, not a means to control the detailed behavior of people. Therefore, for a synodical or congregational budget, categories are designed to reflect what things need to be monitored. Then subcategories or accounts should provide about five to 10 subcategories for each monitored category. This strategy means that detailed estimates are not so critical for the five to 10 subcategories, as each of them only contributes a rather small amount to the larger managed category. Thus despite the uncertainty and change in the detailed categories, the larger ones are more stable and easier to monitor and manage.

Developing a budget

There are a great many ways to develop and approve a budget. This does not mean that just any process is acceptable, but it does mean that it is difficult to define a “right” budget process. Whatever the processes, a budget planning process must include both long-range and annual or biennial plans.

Long-range plans are typically for at least five years into the future but not more than 10. Long-range plans are for estimating trends and their implication, not for planning programs. It is easier to plan and to understand a long-range plan if the plan uses constant dollars in which inflation is excluded from both the revenue and the expense estimates. In this way the process compels a focus on what is changing, aside from the basic performance of the economy. We should ask whether congregational giving is changing as a fraction of people’s income, whether benevolence forwarding to the synod is changing as a fraction of congregational budgets, and so on. These types of shifts typically require five to 10 years to change significantly. For example, average personal financial giving to the church tends to change significantly on time scales of five to 10 years. Certainly any individual may double their financial commitments in one year, but a significant group of people will not. The rate of change for a group, either positive or negative, is more like five to 10 years and this is part of the reasons for longer range planning.

Annual or biennial budgets develop near-term estimates in other ways, but there is an overall pattern. First the organization must decide a best way to do the estimating. One approach is resource based. This approach divides the essential units of the synod into resources like people, space, equipment, etc. Then the next year’s costs or revenues are estimated for each of these units. Another approach is task-based and uses the tasks of the synod as the essential unit, such as candidacy, office of the bishop, mission development, etc. For each task, resource needs for the next year are estimated.

With either approach, one can estimate the new level of resources needed for future years in several ways. One common method is called incremental. It is based on past experience and makes small changes to the past to accommodate the future requirements. This approach is easier to do because it begins from experience. On the other hand, if present practice is not very efficient or well aligned with mission goals, then this approach will not likely discover that.

A second approach is called zero-based. This approach requires each estimating unit (like a task) to justify the total cost requirements for the next year without assuming that the costs for the

present or past years were justified. Each task estimate begins from zero and justifies all estimated costs anew. This is a more intensive method for developing budget estimates, but it makes it easier to identify and remove obsolete or unnecessary tasks or resources.

Once the estimates for both revenue and expense are developed, the budget is prepared for approval. If the budget is a long-range one, it is normally not approved, but presented to the Synod Council and received as information. If the budget is an annual or biennial one, the Synod Council would receive the detailed budget and approve it for forwarding to the Synod Assembly. When it is presented to the assembly for approval, it is best to present figures for monitored categories only. The detailed categories are presented for information to justify how the monitored category figures were derived. This strategy prevents misunderstandings that the detailed category estimates were “promises” rather than estimates.

Monitoring budgets

A budget, long-term or annual, is not much use unless it serves as a monitoring and management tool. A long-range budget should be updated annually as actual experience can replace projections. The finance committee should re-examine the trends to evaluate whether the long range projections need revision.

Annual budgets are best monitored by including the budget information within the monthly financial reports. The finance committee will take the annual expenditure estimates for each category and use historical information to estimate the probable revenue or expense rate per month.

Remember that this budget data is not a “limit on the authorization to spend.” Rather it is the best estimate of the probable expenditures to meet the agreed work of the synod.

This comparison then permits a way to check, month by month, whether the budget estimates are being borne out by experience. Some financial reports will provide “estimate at completion” columns. These are an attempt to forecast the end-of-year values of revenue and expenses by taking the experience so far through the year plus the budget estimates for the remaining months to deduce the probable values at the end of the year. This is a common and useful short-term forecasting technique, but like all forecasting it is subject to unknown error as the future always seems to refuse to behave as we would like.

Section 7

Long-range mission planning

Why plan?

Why do Synod Councils need to be involved in mission planning? God calls the church into this mission of telling mankind the plan of God through Christ. Therefore every synod should be in discernment about where our Lord calls it. Synods should discern to discover and to utilize the gifts God has already given them to do God's will in the world and to bring others into a relationship with Christ.

In his book, "Robust Church Development, A Vision for Mobilizing Regional Bodies in Support of Missional Congregations," Mike Regele, author and president of Percept Group Inc., shares 10 best practices that his organization's research discovered enable regional agencies to successfully support mission-minded congregations and ministry partners. The research was carried out across a number of denominations. Those success factors were:

- a growing commitment to congregational development at the regional level;
- a strategic plan for congregational development providing vision and direction;
- specific targets or goals for new congregation development, redevelopment and racial/ethnic development;
- focused action toward meeting goals;
- annual plan evaluation, goal-setting and budgeting integrated into the rhythm of the regional agency;
- experienced leadership capable of guiding congregational development efforts;
- vision for congregational development and ongoing planning, informed by regional demographic analysis;
- a minimum allocation of 10 percent of the program budget for congregational development with a propensity to increase the percentage;
- at least one professional staff member for whom congregational development represents 50 percent or more of his/her portfolio; and
- an intentional process to prepare congregational development committees.

Throughout this research the presence of intentional strategic mission planning is seen as an underlying characteristic of successful middle regional church bodies.

Planning options

In reality there are three options a synod may consider about its mission. The first is that it might decide to maintain the ministry it is living out today. However, by living in "maintenance of ministry," the ministry may be different from one it might live if it truly understood its mission. Maintaining the status quo is usually the path of least resistance and is living in a comfort zone.

The second option a synod might choose about its mission is to analyze itself and its context and ask the Lord for guidance to determine how it should be about bringing Christ to the world. The result of this decision is the discernment of a "future story" or a vision. This vision, when set

against the current reality of the synod, will show what transformation and change need to be made to fulfill God's mission for this time and place.

The last choice a synod might choose is to do nothing. When a synod does nothing, it has made a decision. This decision, albeit sometimes an unconscious one, ultimately results in the internalization of mission, a separation of the church from the world and Christ's call. The decision not to plan ultimately will lead toward the demise of that synod.

In Ephesians 3:8-12, St. Paul outlines what is a bold mission for himself and for the church of Christ. How do we each achieve this mission as individuals, as congregations, as synods and throughout the larger church? What are the steps we are called to take? What are the realms of ministry that are appropriate for us. Which ones are inappropriate for us to attempt today? How do we live out this mission? How can we live each day by following what God is calling for us to be?

The implications for the church are that, even with the help of the Holy Spirit and with the assurance of Christ's promise to be with us always (Matthew 28:18-20), we still will have options and choices to make. How do we sort through the complex calls of the world to define just what it is we are called by God to be as a community of believers? And then, how do we live out this call in mission?

Vision-based mission planning

Vision-based mission planning (information used with permission of Monson, Krejci and Associates) can be one of the most helpful ways to accomplish this discernment and to set a mission plan into motion that calls the synod into a future that is different from its present or its past. Appropriate mission planning asks the questions:

- When we are on the road to fulfilling the mission God calls us to, what will we be doing and what will that look and feel like?
- What is the current reality of our ministry?
- How do we get from whom and where we are now to become whom and where God is leading us?

Vision-based mission planning uses the vision of this future as the stepping stone, as the point of departure for a synod, its council, its bishop, its staff and its member congregations and ministry partners to journey on a pathway of faith, in ministry together.

Formalizing the process of mission planning results in a number of positive outcomes for a synod. Among those desirable results the synod and its leaders should be seeking is a strategic mission plan that:

- is based on the Holy Spirit and explains where God is calling the synod;
- is a coherent, unifying and integrating blueprint for making future decisions;
- reveals the synod's purpose in terms of long-term objectives, action plans and resource allocation;
- selects the appropriate ministries the synod is in now or aspires to be in;

- points to the interdependence of congregations, synod support staff and volunteers, and the national church working together to achieve your vision of the future;
- attempts to achieve sustainable ministries by responding to the gifts God has given us;
- engages all levels of the synod — Synod Council, bishop and synod staff, congregations, ministry partners and the wider church — to move into the future while remaining faithful to the mission; and
- affirms that there is value in involvement in the ministry of the synod.


Beginning to plan

The planning process begins by determining a vision of the future, or future story, which the leaders and members describe for your synod. This vision creates the directional compass with which the mission plan will navigate itself over time. The mission plan then draws the road map for what actions and activities can be undertaken to reach the vision.

DEVELOPING YOUR VISION

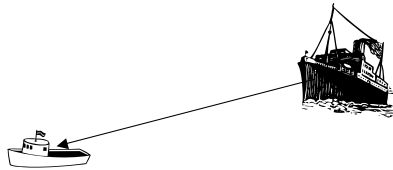
VISION-BASED planning involves creating a *VISION* of where we want to be at some point in the future.

- The *VISION* has our *Mission* as its basis.
- The *VISION SCENARIO* should be a narrative describing as many specific key elements of the *VISION* as possible.
- The *VISION* represents a future that we care about through the discernment of God's calling.



After establishing our *VISION*, **then** *Strategic Mission Planning* takes place. *Strategic Mission Planning* involves determining how we are going to get to that *VISION* from where we currently are.

- This planning emphasizes longer time lines.
- This planning is imaginative and creative.
- This planning is distinct from fiscal planning.



The *VISION* is the force that pulls us forward!

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The mission plan then becomes the flywheel that generates the energy for the daily tactical living you do as a synod. It determines what you do in the daily tactical living in ministry. It helps you discern what ministry you are both called and equipped to deliver to the world in the name of Christ. Important tactical outcomes that are reliant upon the mission planning process include: setting ministry goals and priorities, understanding the spiritual gifts present in the synod, laying out a financial plan to support the ministry vision of the future, establishing and enabling real-life

ministry that members and associates can respond to, and then linking ministry with witness to unbelievers.

Organize for planning

Before your Synod Council begins its mission planning process you will need to determine who should participate with you. At a minimum, you should consider including the synod staff, key synodical ordained and lay leaders, representatives from the ELCA's churchwide staff, representatives of your ministry partners and your constituents. Synods often find it useful to bring in an objective third-party consultant from outside of the synod. A good consultant will help lead you through the process, guide you in the use of some of the most appropriate and best practices for your consideration and be an invaluable time saver through providing much of the administrative work that you will have difficulty in doing yourself in a relatively short period of time. Be sure to include the consultant's fees in your budget planning. Contact the executive for the Conference of Bishops in the Office of the Presiding Bishop for referrals to available churchwide staff assistance and appropriate consultants.

Appoint a planning task force who will keep the process on track and on time. Provide prospective candidates for this role with a brief description of the skills they should have and the time commitment they will need to make (number of meetings, planning timetable from beginning to completion, what resources and people will be available to assist them, etc.).

Section 8

A mission-planning process example

Begin to plan

The bishop, synod staff, synod vice president, and Synod Council begin to work together to gain a clearer understanding of the synod's mission, vision and goals. This should be done through prayer, study of scripture and open and frank discussion. In describing the vision of the future, you should paint a word picture of what the synod looks like in the future when it is more fully living out the mission. The vision is often referred to as the future story of the synod. Your planning process should focus on helping the synod create a stronger relationship with the pastors and congregations; agencies, organizations and institutions operating with the synod; and the churchwide organization through the understanding of your mission and this vision of the future. Your mission and vision will focus on:

- partnership with pastors;
- collaboration with congregations;
- relationships with related agencies and institutions;
- shared decision-making;
- enhancing a meaningful collaborative relationship with churchwide ministries; and
- support of congregational-based ministries.

Listening, learning and identifying critical factors

Listening, learning and identifying critical factors will help you develop a strategy that will serve as a unifying and integrating blueprint for your synod. In developing this strategy you should conduct listening sessions across the synod with a cross-section of synodical leaders to collect indicators of how the synod sees itself, assesses its strengths and opportunities, responds to the mission and vision of the future, or future story, which synodical leadership has developed through their discernment. You should also reflect on how decisions have been made historically and differences handled. Determine if these historical patterns need to change or be reinforced.

You should also evaluate and prioritize the naturally occurring themes of the synod's vision by recognizing and listing the critical success factors essential to achieve the synod's vision. Determine which critical success factors are already in place and how they can be supported and sustained. Determine which critical success factors are not in place or not supported and how they can be in place and supported. Examples of critical success factors are:

- percent of healthy congregations within the synod;
- number of new mission starts;
- redevelopment of declining congregations;
- development of transformational leaders;
- growth of mission-centered and focused congregations;
- presence of vibrant and spiritual worship throughout the synod;
- the effectiveness of stewardship within the synod;
- the type of governance employed by the Synod Council; and

- the number of ministry specialists/consultants serving the congregations and clergy in the synod.

Planning workshops

The next step focuses on workshops, seminars, and case study review to develop the vision-based mission plan, including the expectations and function of the staff and the Synod Council, and the required stewardship resources to achieve the synod's future vision. This step should result in:

- establishing short-term and long-term attainable goals and objectives with accompanying action plans, ministry milestones, and strategies for resource allocation;
- creating an extensive planning document suitable for presentation at synodical gatherings and assemblies;
- casting a vision of a synodical governance and organization that utilizes appropriate and anticipated resources for the next five years;
- Evaluating synod governance models and choosing one appropriate for the future governance needs of the synod; and
- evaluating quarterly the mission, vision, critical success factors, ministry outcomes, and resource projections.

The governance and organizational structures of the synod could be revised as directed by the evaluation.

Updating your plan

Measure the outcomes toward achieving your vision of the future on a continual basis. You might select one major portion of the plan at each council meeting and make it the subject of intensive review, evaluation, change and support with the leadership gifts of your council.

The Synod Council should continually re-evaluate the mission, vision, critical success factors and resource projections required to support the vision-based mission plan. At times it will be appropriate to revise the governance and organizational structures of the synod or even the plan itself.

Section 9

Parliamentary basics

The following information is used by permission of The National Association of Parliamentarians (www.parliamentarians.org).

In conducting your Synod Council meetings you will need to have some familiarity with parliamentary basics. While a thorough treatment of parliamentary procedure cannot be condensed onto a few pages, there are some basic components of effective meeting procedure that can help to improve participation in and facilitation of business meetings. In general, “Roberts Rules of Order” provides the structure under which this church governs its meetings. You can access an overview of “Roberts Rules of Order” on the ELCA website under "[Miscellaneous Resources](#)" available to synods from the Office of the Secretary.

Presiding over a meeting

An essential component of effectively presiding over a meeting is handling motions fairly and consistently. Here are some guidelines for handling motions.

There are several classes of motions you may encounter in meetings. The main motion is the basis of all parliamentary procedure. All business to be considered by an assembly is introduced by a main motion. This type of motion may only be considered if no other business is pending.

Subsidiary motions are those that may be applied to another motion for the purpose of modifying it, delaying action on it, or disposing of it.

Privileged motions are motions that are unrelated to the current motion but are of such urgency or importance that they are considered immediately. These motions are related to members, the organization and meeting procedure rather than the item of business being considered.

Incidental motions are motions that are related to, or incidental to, the business being considered, but do not directly modify the pending motion.

Motions that bring a question again before the council, or bring-back motions, are a special type of main motion that permit the council to consider business that was previously disposed of.

Procedure for handling a main motion

Obtaining and assigning the floor

1. A member raises his/her hand or rises when no one else has the floor and addresses the chair: "Mr./Madam President," "Mr./Madam Chairman," or by other proper title. (In a larger assembly, the member gives his name and identification.)
2. The chair recognizes the member by announcing his name or title, or, in a small assembly, by nodding to him.

How the motion is brought before the assembly

1. The member makes the motion: "I move that (or 'to')..." and resumes his seat.
2. Another member seconds the motion: "I second the motion," or "I second it" or even just "second."
3. The chair states the motion: "It is moved and seconded that Is there any discussion?"

Consideration of the motion

1. Members debate the motion.
2. The chair puts the motion to a vote.

The chair asks: "Are you ready for the question?" If no one claims the floor, the chair proceeds to take the vote.

The chair says: "The question is on the adoption of the motion that.... As many as are in favor, say 'Aye'. (Pause for response.) Those opposed, say 'No'. (Pause for response.)

3. The chair announces the result of the vote.

"The ayes have it, the motion is adopted, and (indicating the effect of the vote)," or

"The noes have it, and the motion is lost."

Discussion and debate

Discussion, or debate in parliamentary terms, is how a deliberating body decides whether a proposed course of action should be followed. Disagreement is healthy and helps the organization make the best decision, if discussion is approached fairly and consistently:

- Before speaking in debate, members obtain the floor as described above.
- The person who makes a motion may speak on it first, if he or she expresses desire to do so.
- All remarks are addressed to the chair, not to other members.
- Debate is confined to the merits of the motion currently under consideration.
- Debate can only be closed by order of those assembled (by a two-thirds vote) or by the chair if no one seeks the floor for further debate.

Tips on parliamentary procedure

To do this:	You say this:	May you interrupt?	Is your motion debatable?	Is your motion amendable?	Vote required to pass?
Make a motion (called a main motion)	"I move that..." (not, "I would like to move that...")	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Amend a motion	"I move to amend by..." (adding, inserting, striking)	No	Yes	Yes	Majority, unless otherwise indicated
Postpone further debate, consideration or vote	"I move that this matter be tabled."	No	No	No	Majority
End debate and bring a vote	"I move the previous question."	No	No	No	2/3
Refer a matter to another person or group	"I move that this matter be referred to..."	No	Yes	Yes	Majority
Reconsider a previous action	"I move to reconsider the vote on..." (only if you voted on the winning side)	No	Yes, if original motion was debatable	No	Majority
Object to procedures	"Point of order"	Yes	No	No	Chair decides
Challenge ruling of the chair	"I appeal the chair's decision."	No	Yes	No	Majority
Find out when a motion you wish to make can be made	"When would it be in order for me to move that..."	No	-	-	-
Request information	"I wish to request information, clarification, etc."	No	-	-	-
Get an exact count after a close voice vote	"I call for a division."	Yes	No	No	-

Section 10

A new bishop

The election of a synod's bishop occurs every six years. From the moment a synodical bishop is elected or a bishop in office announces his or her intention not to run for re-election, to leave office in order to retire, to accept another call or for personal or family reasons, the synod will experience a period of significant anxiety and transition. Along with a new bishop may come changes in staffing, procedures, vision and planning. Many people are affected by one person's decision. This significant changing of the guard will influence the synod as a whole.

As the synodical vice president, you should have a significant leadership role in guiding the council, staff and the rest of the synod through these waters of transition. As in any time of change, leaders who have an action plan can help make the transition a time of growth, rather than of instability and stimulate positive forward movement of the synod's mission, rather than experience mission stagnation.

The following checklist is provided to assist synodical officers, staff, council members and other leaders, working with the outgoing bishop, to prepare for this significant time of change in the synod's life. Synod leaders are encouraged to contact partners in the churchwide office who may be able to provide support and assistance. Particularly helpful may be the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Office of the Secretary and Synodical Relations.

Here's the usual scenario when there is a transition from the current bishop:

The vice president, Synod Council and the executive committee work with the bishop to communicate the bishop's decision to the synod and key partners in the synod and beyond, including ELCA institutions and companion synod leaders.

The bishop formally notifies the synod of his or her decision not to seek another term, or, if resigning before the end of a term, prepares a letter of resignation to Synod Council and Office of the Presiding Bishop with a copy to the executive for the Conference of Bishops of the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

If there will be an interim time before a new bishop assumes office, the vice president and Synod Council explore with the Office of the Presiding Bishop possible candidates who can serve as interim bishop.

The vice president and Synod Council work with the Office of the Presiding Bishop to establish a date for a specially called Synod Assembly, if needed, and announce that date throughout the synod.

The status of the synod's professional staff (bishop's assistants or associates) is reviewed by the Synod Council. The synod's severance policy is reviewed and plans are made for any necessary implementation. (After clarifying the continuing status of all support staff, communicate with them clearly and regularly.)

The vice president and Synod Council make plans for an "exit interview" with the outgoing bishop and any staff who will also be leaving. The executive for the Conference of Bishops also makes plans for an exit interview with the bishop.

The vice president and Synod Council prepare the synod for the transition process by distributing handouts of the election process at the Synod Assembly or distributing them by mail or email to all rostered personnel and congregational presidents.

If there is a Synod Assembly, review the process with the voting members and allow time for questions and answers. If there is not an assembly, arrange for electronic or public questions and answers. Identify the point people in the synod who can answer questions and address concerns.

Be sure to provide process updates to the synod in all regular publications during the interim. If anything, over communicate!

The Synod Council should also decide who will be responsible for planning the bishop's farewell and any appreciation events.

If an interim bishop will be needed, the Synod Council should discuss the expectations for the interim bishop in general terms. Later, the expectations should be discussed with the person chosen to serve. Some things to consider include:

- Will the position be full-time or part-time?
- At which events should the interim bishop be present?
- Who and how will the coordination of the interim bishop's work with the vice president and the Synod Council take place? Will there be more involvement than under normal circumstances?
- What are the administrative implications? Are there any types of decisions that would need approval by the Synod Council?

The Synod Council also needs to agree on a compensation package for the interim bishop and any authorized and anticipated expenses for this person.

To prepare for the election of the new bishop, the vice president, the Synod Council and the Synod Assembly planning committee should review the synod's constitution and bylaws for the synod's process for electing a bishop. The Synod Council should make provisions for fulfillment of constitutional requirements.

The Synod Council also needs to set a tentative date for the new bishop's installation in consultation with Office of the Presiding Bishop. If the office of synod bishop is vacant at the time of election, the Synod Council should prepare a resolution for assembly action, authorizing the bishop-elect to function immediately with the full authority of the bishop's office.

The Synod Council should also discuss the budget implications of a special Synod Assembly and any moving expenses for the new bishop. The Synod Council should make arrangements to assure that the newly elected bishop can fully participate in orientation and any personal

development opportunities arranged through the Conference of Bishops and the Office of the Presiding Bishop.

Some other details that should be taken care of to ensure a smooth transition:

- The secretary of the synod should work with the outgoing bishop and staff to plan for the transfer of files and documents of historical value to the synod's archives and see that the bishop prepares confidential files for transmission to her or his successor.
- Files for the bishop's on-going work should be reviewed and supplemented to provide clarity to the successor and a smooth transition on each project.
- The outgoing bishop and staff should compile an informational manual that includes lists of contact people and resources that will be needed by her or his successor.
- The vice president and other officers need to make arrangements for the transfer of signature authorization on bank accounts and other official documents.

It is important during this time of transition to provide strong leadership in all areas concerning the life and mission of the synod. The synod staff, Synod Council and other leaders will play a crucial role in monitoring the financial health of the synod and encouraging strong support for all the synod's commitments during this time of transition.

Section 11

Language and diversity

Today Christians are continually reminded of our responsibility as transmitters of values through language. In particular, we are reminded to avoid the transmission, either in writing or orally, of stereotypes that limit the opportunities for members of any group in our society to grow as people and to live freely and creatively. We accept this responsibility as one important act of obedience to God and one aspect of proclaiming the salvation which Jesus Christ came to bring to all people.

Liberation for the Christian, for example, consists of choosing language that will support this principle and of accepting responsibility for a choice that enhances the dignity of all people. Language does affect values. Nowhere is this more evident than when we are speaking of people who belong to groups other than “our own.”

	<i>Exclusive</i>	<i>Inclusive</i>
Use inclusive language.	The average American citizen is proud of her heritage.	For the most part, American citizens are proud of their heritage.
Use women's and men's names.	Robert Smith and his wife	Robert and Alice Smith
Use no titles when they refer exclusively to the marital status of one of the individuals.	Jim Clark and Mrs. Brown The Rev. Joan Johnson and husband	Jim Clark and Sara Brown The Rev. Joan Johnson and Mr. Paul or Joan and Paul Johnson
Use inclusive terminology for all generic groupings.	Clergyman Laymen Clergy and wives Chairman	Clergy or Ministers Lay men and women or Laity Clergy and spouses Chairperson or Chair
Avoid sexual personal pronouns when talking about a person's activities.	When a voting member votes yes, he votes for...	A voting member's yes vote means...
Find functional substitutes for problem words.	Forefathers Brotherhood Fraternity Mankind	Ancestors, forbears Companionship, kinship, unity Comradeship Humankind

Section 12

Recognizing the role of conflict

(The following information has been adapted from “Dealing with Conflict,” by Robin McCullough-Bade, 2004, ©Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.)

One does not have to look far to find examples of conflict in this church today:

- The synod’s benevolence from congregations has fallen, some congregations have even elected to withhold their financial support to the synod and the wider church as a reaction to this church’s social studies, full communion agreements, sexuality and ordination decisions.
- New ministries emerge and need resources and support from the synod but it is likely at the expense of the historical support of existing ministries.
- Leadership’s vision of the future can clash with the ways of tradition that are held firmly by many of the pastors and stewards in the synod.
- Cries to be mission- and outreach-minded seemingly compete with the demands of the congregations to primarily minister to those we already have with us.

Welcome to the world of the church, a body of Christ made up of sinners. Finding conflict in the church should not surprise us. The church is not a perfect place with perfect people. Instead, the church is made up of people in need of God’s grace and guidance who come and gather in the name of Christ.

In the early church, Peter faced tough criticism for eating with unclean people. The bigger issue was Peter’s scandalous baptism of non-Jews. Yet, Peter believed it was God who gave them the gift of the Holy Spirit and faith in Christ Jesus. Who was he to hinder God? (Acts 11:1-18)

The issue did not end there. In Acts 15, Peter appeared before the Council at Jerusalem. The debate was over salvation. Could those who were uncircumcised be saved? Peter stood and proclaimed, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will. Paul also appeared at the Council in support of extending the gospel of Jesus Christ to gentiles. He witnessed to God’s actions in regions beyond Israel. (Acts 15:1-22)

Thanks be to God for tenacious leaders like Peter and Paul who remained in the conflict long enough to convince others to extend the gospel to non-Jews.

What can we learn about conflict in the church?

- Some conflicts appear to be about minor concerns, but in reality involve deeper issues.
- Conflict helps us gain clarity.
- Certain conflicts are worth investing energy in because they remind the church about its mission.
- Don’t use all your creative energy on a minor scrape disguised as a crisis.

- The church is called to speak a prophetic word to the world, stirring up conflict on issues such as injustice, prejudice and hatred.

God calls us into some conflicts well worth using every ounce of our energy. That was true of Peter and Paul as they struggled with the message of Jesus Christ and it is true for us today. We follow Jesus, one who dealt with conflict throughout his ministry.

Conflict within an organization that is treated with avoidance and not directly addressed can have a debilitating effect on the effectiveness of that organization. Should conflict even begin to overwhelm your energies and overtake your ministries in the name of Christ, you should consult with a conflict intervention specialist. Your synod bishop and staff should be aware of who those resource people are and recommend them to you and the Synod Council.

Section 13

Miscellaneous resources

Synod Council covenants

These covenant ideas can be changed, edited or combined to be used as needed by your Synod Council.

Example 1

I, _____, vice president of _____ Synod, as presider of the _____ Synod Council, commit myself to support the bishop, the synod staff and the clergy and lay members of the council in their duties and responsibilities.

We, as members of the Synod Council of the _____ Synod pledge to build a stronger synod family by empowering the synod, discerning the gifts and needs of our synod and by responding to the synod so that the people of the _____ Synod may contribute to and take ownership of the life of our synod.

Motivated by the message of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, we will work to be a people of prayer, reflection and action to serve the needs of our synod community. This is the pledge we make in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Covenant: A mutual agreement between God and God's people, based on mutual accountability, faithfulness and love.

But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love (Ephesians 4:15-16).

As members of the Synod Council and leaders of the church, we agree to:

- remember that we are doing God's work;
- be present at each meeting;
- be forthcoming with ideas and questions;
- encourage one another and listen to each other;
- raise any disagreements with tact and care; and
- faithfully support the _____ Synod with prayers, presence, gifts and service.

Example 2

These are the principles that will govern our actions:

- Cradle the vision: encourage people to think the unthinkable and to dream.
- Focus on our fundamental values: our mission and our call to ministry.
- Force an external focus: foster a market-like response to ministry needs.
- Enable an outcome-driven organization: measure all decisions against the standards of the purposes of the mission.
- Be results minded, not means minded: allow the Office of the Bishop to be responsible for the means.
- Separate large issues from small: focus on the large ones.
- Force forward thinking: strategic leadership demands not dwelling on the past or present.
- Enable pro-activity: spend more time creating, not approving.
- Facilitate diversity and unity: optimize the richness of diversity.
- Describe ministries and relationships to relevant constituencies: bring identity and accountability to the synod.
- Be disciplined: stick to job descriptions, keep discussions to the point.
- Balance over-control and under-control: be neither a rubber-stamp nor a meddler.
- Speak as a united body: not as individuals.
- Use council time efficiently.

Example 3

A covenant of responsibilities

Our purpose: To be the board of directors of our synod, to serve as its interim legislative authority between meetings of the Synod Assembly and to stir up Christ's church to bear witness to the crucified and risen Jesus.

Our duties:

- attend all called meetings of the Synod Council;
- work “hands-on” through at least one of the working teams of the synod;
- set policy and provide oversight for the synod's finance, assets and personnel;
- recommend long-range and intermediate program goals and budgets to the synod;
- ensure that resolutions of the Synod Assembly are carried out;
- annually review the roster of ordained and lay ministers;
- provide for the issuance of letters of call to ordained and lay ministers;
- fill council vacancies until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly; and
- report our work to the regular meetings of the Synod Assembly.

Example 4

As members of the Synod Council of the _____ Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we are entrusted with the responsibility of the leadership of our synod. We seek to honor our responsibility through covenants to God; the synod; its congregations, agencies, organizations and institutions; our churchwide ministries; and to each other. These covenants express the call to each of us to “equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12-13).

Our promise to God:

We promise to pray, alone and together, to thank God and to ask for God’s help in our lives and in our work for our synod and this church. And we promise to listen to God’s answers to us.

Our promises to our synod:

- demonstrate our leadership and commitment to our synod by our example;
- support our synod, its congregations, pastors and staff so that their efforts can be most productive;
- support the leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran church worldwide in our shared goal of building up the body of Christ;
- try to discover, through prayer and discernment, what is best for our synod as a whole, not just what is best for us or some group of congregations;
- foster healthy communication by seeking to understand and defining the authority and responsibility of the staff, the Synod Council and the committees of the synod; and
- create clear avenues for policy and decision-making and conflict resolution.

Our promises to each other:

- respect and care for each other. Matthew 19:19 (“Love your neighbor as yourself”);
- treat our time on the Synod Council as an opportunity to make an important gift to our synod;
- listen and be open, with a nonjudgmental mind, to the words and ideas of others in our synod and on our council;
- discuss, debate and disagree openly in council meetings, expressing ourselves as clearly, honestly and directly as possible; and
- support the final decisions of the Synod Council, whether they reflect our view or not.

Sample recruitment letter

This is provided as a sample recruitment letter. Be sure to edit it for appropriateness to your synod and for each board or council position you are recruiting for.

You are asked to consider nomination for a _____ -year term as a member of the Synod Council of the _____ Synod of the Evangelical Church in America (ELCA). The position we ask you to consider is _____. As you consider this opportunity for service, we want you to understand some of the expectations and responsibilities of this office so you may make an informed and faithful decision.

In accordance with our synod's constitution and bylaws, members of the Synod Council are elected by the Synod Assembly. The term of office of a member is for ____ years, with the term beginning _____. Most positions are eligible for re-election for a second consecutive term. A member of the Synod Council must be a voting member of a congregation of this synod, with the exception of any ordained ministers on the roster of the synod who reside outside the territory of the synod.

Our Synod Council usually meets _____ times per year. Council meetings are scheduled on (add day(s) of the week) from (add times of your meetings). All council members serve either on the Executive Committee (the officers of the council) or another committee or ministry team of the synod or as a liaison to a synod division. One of their responsibilities is to report the activities of this organization to the Synod Council.

The responsibilities of our Synod Council include:

- acting as the trustees of the synod;
- recommending program goals and budgets to the annual Synod Assembly;
- carrying out the resolutions of the Synod Assembly;
- providing for the annual review of the roster of ordained ministers (including the bishop) and of other rostered ministers;
- issuing letters of call to ordained ministers and associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers;
- filling council vacancies until the next regular meeting of the Synod Assembly;
- determining the incapacity of an officer of the synod;
- reporting our actions to the annual meeting of the Synod Assembly; and
- performing other functions as set forth in the bylaws of the synod, or as delegated by the Synod Assembly.

Our Synod Council provides leadership by:

- providing much of the vision and direction of the synod;
- providing for strategic planning for the synod's future;
- knowing and believing in the mission or purpose of the synod;
- supporting our bishop, staff and officers;
- establishing, viewing and monitoring the policies of the synod;

- monitoring the fulfillment of the major goals of the synod;
- serving as stewards of the resources the synod has been entrusted with by its constituents;
- advocating and assisting with the development of financial resources for the synod and for the ELCA's churchwide ministries; and
- caring for the spiritual health of the council.

The general expectations of a member of our Synod Council are to:

- attend all meetings of the council or board;
- consider the well-being of the synod as a whole when dealing with specific issues and ministries;
- leave the management and administration of the synod to the bishop, staff and appropriate committees;
- treat all matters relating to council or board deliberations as confidential, until such time as the information is determined a matter of public record.
- be a united body by supporting all decisions of the council or board after deliberation and as positions have been agreed to; and
- treat members of council or board and staff as sisters and brothers in Christ and as part of the synod.

We are seeking people who are faithful Christians, highly participative, ask questions, generate ideas, make decisions, accept responsibility and are collegial. If you meet these qualifications, please consider serving Christ's wider church as a member of the _____ Synod Council. Please contact _____ at _____ if you have questions and to advise of your prayerful decision.

(Note: If you are seeking specific qualifications and gifts for a "specialized" council position, be sure to list them as well)

Links to synod and ELCA constitutions

The general constitution for synods and the ELCA constitution are available at ELCA.org: <https://elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions>.

Besides the constitutions, ELCA.org has a wealth of other information that may be helpful for you.