

# SOME INFORMATION ABOUT AN ASSEMBLY FOR THOSE NEW TO THIS KIND OF EVENT

## Northern Texas – Northern Louisiana Synod

### Getting the Vocabulary Right

You are a *Voting Member* (not a delegate) for this *Synod Assembly* (not Convention). *Voting members* comprise an *assembly*, a gathering of the Church.

- The terminology related to the legislative process of this church is no accident.
- The words, “Synod Assembly” and “Churchwide Assembly” rather than convention, and “voting members,” rather than delegates, were deliberately chosen for our governing documents.

These words not only fulfill certain legal requirements but also reflect an ecclesiastical (that is, churchly) understanding - an understanding grounded in Scripture, reflected in the Lutheran Confessional writings, and established as part of this church’s polity upon the formation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Within the ELCA, we find three primary expressions of this church - congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization. They exist and serve within this *one* church.

- 1) A congregation of the ELCA does not meet in convention; the members gather in worship, carry out service, and assemble occasionally and properly for governance decisions and elections. When a congregation meets to do its business, it is the Church.
- 2) A Synod meets as an assembly: The voting members are not sent as agents of a particular caucus; they are *not* gathered to act as politicized delegates to a regional party convention. Rather, they *assemble* as duly selected *members* of this church with *voting* responsibilities for governance and elections on behalf of the synod. The Synod Assembly is just that, an assembly of the people of this church, some of whom have been chosen for the responsibility of being *voting members* of the *Synod Assembly*. They assemble together in worship and are nurtured in the faith through Word and Sacrament. Then, in their deliberations, they seek the wisdom and guidance of God’s Spirit in the decisions and elections of the assembly. When a synod meets to do its business, it is the Church.
- 3) The ELCA also meets as an assembly: When a synod meets in assembly they have the responsibility of electing the *voting members* of the *Churchwide Assembly*. Persons so chosen are given the responsibility of doing the work of the Churchwide Assembly on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They are *not* sent to participate as politicized delegates from a regional or agenda-specific caucus at some national party convention. Rather, they assemble as members of this church. When the ELCA meets in assembly, it is the Church.

In the ELCA's predecessor church bodies the word "delegate" was used and meant people chosen to fulfill responsibilities in what then were known as synod or district "conventions." Like those "delegates" in our predecessor churches, ELCA voting members in ELCA synodical assemblies are chosen to represent all of the members of all of the congregations in the synod.

In the case of the Churchwide Assembly, voting members carry out their duties on behalf of all member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Nourished by Word and Sacrament, they are called in assembly to seek the well-being of this whole church.

Voting members carry a heavy responsibility. They must study carefully the issues on the agenda of the assembly, listen thoughtfully to the debate throughout plenary sessions, examine wisely possible amendments to proposals, consider with insight resolutions or new business submitted by voting members, elect with care apt persons to serve on the churchwide council, boards, and committees, seek prayerfully the guidance of God's Spirit in all matters, and act conscientiously for the sake of the unity and well-being of this church and the whole Church.

### **Parliamentary Procedure**

- In order to assist large numbers of people to engage in sustained and orderly debate on issues, elaborate rules of procedure have been adopted to govern the conversation. Roberts Rules of Order is the well-known authority for such rules.
- An assembly will have a designated parliamentarian on hand as an authority on the rules. The parliamentarian is a resource to the presiding officer in the conduct of all business.
- The *Standing Rules of the Assembly* as adopted at the start of the assembly become the additional guiding rules of that particular assembly unless amended by assembly action.
- At registration you will receive a binder for your *Book of Reports* (which is mailed out in advance of the assembly), colored voting cards, and a name tag.

### **Presentation of a Resolution**

- Items that come as printed reports in the *Book of Reports* are received by virtue of having been printed. No motion is needed to accept a printed report. If the report calls for an action, then the author of the report needs to be ready with such a request.
- Some motions are brought before the assembly by the Synod Council and are considered moved and seconded without action by either the assembly or the Committee on Reference and Counsel.

- Some motions are brought before the assembly by voting members at the time of a report (e.g. the budget, a commission report) because they concern that report. The presiding officer may proceed to act on the motion at the time it is presented.
- Most motions of new business are brought before the assembly by being presented by a voting member by the announced pre-assembly date (two weeks prior to the assembly date).
- Only a voting member can present a motion or amendment. Though it is read, it must also be in written form and given to the Secretary of Synod immediately after its presentation. The format for resolutions may be found on the synod web site, including instruction on what content belongs within the “whereas,” the “resolved,” and the supporting information.
- Motions for new business are then referred to the Committee on Reference and Counsel which serves the presiding officer and assembly by being a place where motions are clarified, edited, and prepared for assembly consideration.
- The Committee on Reference and Counsel reintroduces the motion at an appropriate point in the agenda and recommends adoption, defeat, referral, or a substitute motion.
- The recommendation of the Committee is the motion that is before the assembly for debate and vote, not the original motion itself.

### **Addressing the Assembly from the Floor**

- A voting member or a person recognized as having voice (see the Standing Rules of the Assembly) may speak to a motion by moving to a microphone on the floor.
- Each speaker should show the green “yes” card or the red “no” card depending on whether they plan to speak in favor of the motion or against.
- The presiding officer will normally call on speakers, alternating between a “yes” and a “no.”
- Speeches must address the current motion before the assembly, or the amendment to the motion currently being considered, or the substitute motion currently being considered. Speeches about anything but the current item before the assembly are out of order.
- Speeches are limited to three minutes, or the amount of time designated by the *Standing Rules*. An assembly can vote to extend a speaker’s time or to extend the total time allotted for debate.
- Begin your comments by stating your name, the congregation of your membership, and words such as, “I rise to speak [against/in favor] of the motion.” Your remarks are address to the chair rather than to others in the assembly.
- Speeches should not be inflammatory or deceptive, but should add helpful information, perspective, or logic to the debate.
- No applause or other outbursts should follow speeches since this polarizes the assembly and detracts from rational, respectful debate.

- Someone who has already spoken to an issue will not be recognized to speak again on the same issue until all others who wish to speak have had their opportunity.
- Debate will end when all have spoken or when a call for the “Question” results in a vote to end debate and proceed to vote.
- If you have a question about what is happening in the business of the Assembly or about a vote that is about to happen, go to the microphone and indicate that you have a “point of order”.

### **Seating Arrangement**

- The assembly floor **can have** as many as three seating areas – a visitors’ section, a voting members’ section, and an area for those who assist the presiding officer in the management of the assembly (media, facilitators, and support personnel). There may also be a small area for honored guests or observers.
- Visitors and others who anticipate coming and going during a business session are urged to stay within the visitors’ section (chairs) so as not to disrupt the considerations of the assembly.
- Voting members are urged to find a seat in that section of the floor area that is marked for that Conference (if Conferences are designated). You do not have to be seated with others of your congregation to vote, but sitting together will facilitate your interaction.
- Voting members must be within the voting members’ section in order to vote; tellers will not count the votes of voting members who are in the visitor’s section (chairs), display area, or public areas of the hall. You must be wearing the appropriate colored “voting member” name tag to vote.
- Up to two youth members from a congregation may be seated with the voting members of the congregation even though the youth member may be a visitor. Likewise, a spouse of a voting member may be seated with the voting member. However, visitors seated in the voting section are expected to refrain from voting and may be asked to leave this section if they fail to do so.

### **The Book of Reports**

The Book of Reports (BoR) is mailed to all who register for the assembly. Upon arrival and check in at the assembly you will receive a special binder for your BoR. Please add to your binder as items are passed out during the assembly.

After the assembly the minutes of the assembly and an updated version of the synod constitution is sent to all congregations as well as electronically sent to all participants. It is requested that one of the congregation’s voting members give their BoR binder to the parish office for record and archives. It is also requested that the parish add the minutes

and constitution to that binder.

## **Official Information About an Assembly** **From the Synod Constitution**

### **Voting Members to the Annual Synod Assembly**

- +S7.21. The membership of the Synod Assembly, of which at least 60% of the voting membership shall be composed of lay persons, shall be constituted as follows: ...
- c. A minimum of one lay member elected by each congregation with fewer than 175 baptized members and a minimum of two lay members elected by each congregation with more than 175 baptized members related to this synod, normally one of whom shall be male and one of whom shall be female, shall be voting members. The Synod Council shall establish a formula to provide additional lay representation from congregations on the basis of the number of baptized members in the congregation. The Synod Council shall seek to ensure that, as nearly as possible, 50 percent of the lay members of the assembly shall be female and 50 percent shall be male. Additional members from each congregation normally shall be equally divided between male and female.
- S7.21.C.A91 Congregations shall be allotted additional voting members as follows: up to 500 baptized members, two voting members; 501 - 750 baptized members, 3 voting members; 751 – 1000 baptized members, 4 voting members; 1001 or more baptized members, 5 voting members. Selection of the voting members by the congregation shall be on the basis of the most recently submitted annual parochial report and shall adhere to male - female formula outlined in +S7.21.c. Any congregation allotted an additional youth voting member under S7.21.01 need not consider such additional youth voting member as one of their additional voting members under this resolution.*
- S7.26.0 The participants of synodically authorized worshiping communities may elect voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with the requirements for congregations as expressed in +S7.21.

### **Purpose of the Annual Assembly**

- +S7.01. This synod shall have a Synod Assembly, which shall be its highest legislative authority. The powers of the Synod Assembly are limited only by the provisions in the Articles of Incorporation, this constitution and bylaws, the assembly's own resolutions, and the constitutions and bylaws of this church.
- +S7.11. A regular meeting of the Synod Assembly shall be held at least biennially.
- S7.11.01. The regular meeting of the Synod Assembly shall be held annually at a time and place determined by the Synod Council. The proposed agenda of business of the Assembly shall be determined by the Synod Council. The program of the Assembly shall be determined by the bishop and a host conference.

### **Responsibilities of the Voting Members**

- +S13.02. It shall be the responsibility of each congregation of this synod annually to choose from among its voting members lay persons to serve as members of the Synod Assembly as well as persons to represent it at meetings of any conference, cluster, or coalition of which it is a member. The

number of persons to be elected by each congregation and other qualifications shall be as prescribed in guidelines established by this synod.