

Assembly Vocabulary No Accident

It is important to note and remember that we don't send *delegates* to the assembly. *Voting members* are not delegates, as that term is understood or used in some political contexts.

- 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 ecclesial (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: The people of this church, when gathered as voting members of the Synod Assembly, 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.