

Resources for Your Consideration in Remaining with the ELCA or Voting to Separate from the ELCA

A Process Rooted in Christian Love and Faithful Decisions

1. **Actions/Decisions of Churchwide Assembly** can be found at www.elca.org; click on the “Churchwide Assembly” icon
2. Some may be interested in **seeking help** from a personal counselor, spiritual director, or congregational consultant in the processing of how churchwide decisions may impact you. For a list of such resources, please contact the synod office.
3. **Guidance for congregational meetings/retreats in discernment**
 - a. Wrap everything in prayer
 - b. Use a Behavioral Covenant for the entire discernment process
 - c. Use transparent processes (no secret meetings)
 - d. Follow a process that is fair, just, and spirit-filled
 - e. Provide safe space so that the variety of voices are heard and honored
 - f. Respect the bound conscience of all who speak
 - g. Provide regular, ongoing, accurate information-sharing
 - h. Eliminate intimidation in the discernment process
 - i. Remember the 8th Commandment – put the best construction on people and their comments
 - j. The process is as important as the end result; consider ways of compromise instead of a win-lose situation
4. **Questions for congregations if considering terminating the relationship with the ELCA**
 - a. How will withdrawal from the ELCA change the life and ministry of the congregation and its members?
 - b. With what new church body will the congregation affiliate?
 - c. What will be the process for hearing and caring for those in the congregation who want to remain in the ELCA?
 - d. How will members who wish to remain in the ELCA be able to do so?

- e. How will future pastors in the new church body be formed? Through what seminary process?
- f. What process is in place in the new church body for the proper certification and verification of pastoral credentials?
- g. What is the availability of clergy in the new church body? How are they screened for past misconduct? How long is the average vacancy in the new church body and what interim pastoral assistance is provided to congregations?
- h. What are the missional goals of the new church body? What missionaries do they have? Where do they serve? How does the new church body start and support new missions?
- i. What processes are in place to support disaster needs in the new church body? How is disaster assistance funded?
- j. What is the new church body's stance on the interpretation of Scriptures? What is the role of women, minorities, and others who are marginalized in the new church body?
- k. Where are the pastors in your new church body trained? What seminary education do they have? Who pays for seminary training? What processes are in place for approving candidates for ordination in the new church body? How does the body ensure that candidates to be pastors are emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually ready for pastoral leadership?
- l. How will the congregation compare the mission and ministry opportunities within the ELCA to those available in the new church body?
- m. Currently the congregation's tax exempt status is through the ELCA's group exemption. How will the congregation retain its tax exempt status?

5. If the **decision of the congregation is to terminate the relationship with the ELCA/Synod**, the following are important for congregational consideration:

- a. Carefully follow the constitutional process (see constitutional document on our website, www.ntnl.org under Tool Kit)
- b. Help find new church homes for those who will not continue with the congregation
- c. Re-establish tax-exempt status (currently under ELCA group exemption)
- d. Determine pastoral leadership if the pastor does not remain with the congregation
- e. Determine medical/pension coverage for the pastoral leader(s)
- f. Address any land/property ownership and legal concerns

- g. Adopt a new constitution
- h. Determine future church body affiliation
- i. Address emotions and the grieving process for those who leave and those who stay

Various Scenarios

1. If the **decision of the congregation and pastor is to remain in the ELCA**, consider the following:

- a. Counsel with those in the congregation who may not be in favor of churchwide decisions and determine how to best minister to them

2. For **rostered leaders under call who personally choose to terminate his/her relationship with the ELCA**:

- a. The congregation is not “yours” to take out of the ELCA with you. You should submit a letter of resignation to the bishop and to the congregation and depart the congregation and community.
- b. Provide for a healthy leave-taking from the congregation
- c. Make inquiry to Board of Pensions for continued coverage or termination of coverage and ramifications

3. For **rostered leaders under call who choose to terminate his/her relationship with the ELCA with a congregation that leaves**:

- a. Submit a letter of resignation to the bishop
- b. Make inquiry to Board of Pensions for continued coverage or termination of coverage and ramifications; congregations/pastors may remain in the ELCA/BOP plan under most circumstances or develop a separate pension and medical plan
- c. ELCA pension accounts belong to the individual and are part of the personal assets of that individual

4. For **rostered leaders under call who do not choose to terminate his/her relationship with the ELCA but the congregation does**:

- a. Submit a letter of resignation to the congregation
- b. Provide for a healthy leave-taking from the congregation
- c. Fill out the Rostered Leader Profile for a new call, or if applicable, consider options like retirement, specialized ministry, etc.
- d. Apply for On Leave from Call status (up to three years, annually renewable)
- e. Make inquiry to Board of Pensions for continued coverage; pension cannot be contributed by the individual; medical coverage can continue up to 18 months but becomes the responsibility of the rostered leader

5. Creating a **Synodically Authorized Worshipping Community** in areas with that need:

- a. Information on establishing a Synodically Authorized Worshiping Community is available through the synod office
- b. The Rev. Stephen Kanouse, Director for Evangelical Mission, has resources that establish the criteria for a new start, a model constitution, and a checklist for its formation

Note: A rostered leader cannot continue to serve a congregation which leaves the ELCA. A decision must be made by that rostered leader to remain with the congregation and resign from the ELCA or remain with the ELCA and resign from the call.

Retired Rostered Leaders

For retired rostered leaders:

- a. “A retired pastor must be a member of an ELCA congregation in order to remain on the roster of ordained ministers and remains subject to the standards for ordained ministers of this church.” (Manual of Policies and Procedures for Management of the Rosters, Part One, page 33)
- b. If a retired rostered leader personally chooses to terminate his/her relationship with the ELCA, he/she submits a letter of resignation from the retired roster to the bishop.
- c. If the congregation the retired rostered leader attends terminates its relationship with the ELCA and he/she does not wish to continue with them, transfer membership to another ELCA congregation.
- d. “If a (rostered leader) who has been granted retired status resides at too great a distance from any congregation of this church to be able to sustain an active relationship with that congregation, the bishop of the synod in which the (rostered leader) is listed on the roster may grant permission for the (rostered leader) to hold membership in a congregation or parish of a church body with which a relationship of full communion has been declared and established by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.” (ELCA Constitution 7.41.17.b)
- e. If the congregation a retired rostered leader attends terminates its relationship with the ELCA and he/she wishes to remain with the congregation, submit a letter of resignation from the retired roster to the bishop.