



## Report of the Secretary

**TO:** Voting Members of the Synod Assembly  
**FROM:** Anthony Ormsbee-Hale, Synod Secretary  
**DATE:** April 24-25, 2026

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This memorandum provides an update on the work of the Synod's Office of the Secretary and Legal and Constitutional Review Committee. The committee continues to serve our congregations by reviewing submitted constitutions, developing resources to support constitutional compliance, and planning educational opportunities for congregational leaders.

### **Constitution Review Activity**

The committee is actively reviewing congregation constitutions submitted to the synod office. In accordance with ELCA bylaw 9.53.03, all proposed changes to congregation constitutions must be referred to the synod for review. The committee examines each submission to ensure alignment with the Model Constitution for Congregations and provides feedback to help congregations complete the revision process successfully. We encourage congregations to submit draft constitutions for review **before** taking their first congregational vote, allowing time to address any recommendations.

### **Resources for 2025 Churchwide Assembly Updates**

The 2025 Churchwide Assembly adopted amendments to the Model Constitution for Congregations affecting 12 provisions across 8 chapters. Several of these amendments are to required provisions (marked with an asterisk) and must be adopted by congregations exactly as written when they next amend their governing documents.

The committee is developing resources to assist congregations in understanding and implementing these changes, including:

- A Frequently Asked Questions guide addressing common questions about constitution revisions
- Summary materials explaining the 2025 amendments and their practical implications
- Guidance on the two amendment paths available to congregations
- Reference materials from the ELCA Office of the Secretary

These resources are available through the synod office and will be distributed to congregations as they are finalized.

### **Upcoming Workshops for Congregational Leaders**

To provide hands-on guidance for congregational leaders undertaking constitution revisions, the committee is planning a series of workshops to be offered in both online and in-person formats. These workshops will cover:

- Overview of the 2025 Model Constitution amendments
- Step-by-step guidance on the revision and adoption process
- Understanding required vs. recommended provisions
- Common questions and best practices
- Opportunities for Q&A with committee members

Workshop dates and registration information will be communicated to congregations as scheduling is confirmed. We anticipate offering multiple sessions to accommodate schedules across our synod's geography.

### **Questions and Assistance**

Congregations with questions about the constitution revision process or the 2025 amendments are encouraged to contact the Office of the Synod Secretary at [secretary@ntnl.org](mailto:secretary@ntnl.org). We are committed to supporting our congregations through this important work of aligning our governing documents with the broader church.

We give thanks for the faithful service of our congregational leaders and look forward to partnering with you in this work.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Revising Your Congregation's Constitution

### Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

## Introduction

This guide answers common questions about revising congregation constitutions in alignment with the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations. For additional guidance, contact the Office of the Synod Secretary.

### 1. Where do I find the latest version of the ELCA Model Constitution?

The Model Constitution is available at [elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions](https://elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions). You can also go to [elca.org](https://elca.org) and search for "Model Constitution for Congregations." The current edition (August 2025) contains changes adopted by all churchwide assemblies of the ELCA.

### 2. What is the process for revising our congregation's constitution?

- a) Congregation Council or congregation identifies need to revise constitution.
- b) Congregation identifies a team of its members to work on revision.
- c) Once your congregation's constitution committee has a draft ready, and **before you take your first vote**, please forward a copy to the synod office at [secretary@ntnl.org](mailto:secretary@ntnl.org) where it will be reviewed. Any recommendations will be shared with your committee.
- d) Synod returns constitution to congregation with recommendations for change (in which case congregation makes changes and resubmits), OR
- e) Synod returns constitution with provisional approval contingent upon the congregation taking necessary votes to approve.
- f) Notify your congregation of the date for your vote(s) and provide members with copies of the revised constitution at least 30 days prior to the meeting. Constitutions typically require 2 votes by the congregation—one for approval and a second for ratification. Check your current constitution for guidelines.
- g) Upon completion of congregation vote(s), provide a final copy of the constitution to the synod office along with documentation of the date of congregational votes, number of members attending the meeting, and the number of votes cast.

### 3. What information is required to be in the congregation constitution?

Sections marked with an asterisk [\*] are **required provisions** that must be used without alteration or amendment of the text in any manner (neither additions nor deletions). This requirement is based on provision 9.52. in the Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the ELCA.

The required provisions cover: Preamble, Confession of Faith (Chapter 2), Nature of the Church (Chapter 3), Statement of Purpose (Chapter 4), Powers of the Congregation (Chapter 5), Church Affiliation (Chapter 6), Property Ownership (Chapter 7), Membership (Chapter 8), Rostered Minister (Chapter 9), Discipline of Members and Adjudication (Chapter 15), Amendments (Chapter 16), Bylaws (Chapter 17), Continuing Resolutions (Chapter 18), Indemnification (Chapter 19), and Parish Authorization (Chapter 20, if applicable).

#### 4. What is the difference between provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions?

**Constitutional Provisions** establish the most basic and vital organizational structures. They are the broadest, most fundamental, and most difficult to adopt or amend.

**Bylaws** provide more detailed rules that relate to and flesh out provisions. They generally cover meetings, elections, officer duties, committees, and other operational conduct. They are somewhat easier to adopt or amend than provisions.

**Continuing Resolutions** are the most specific and most likely to change as circumstances change. They spell out responsibilities of persons and groups and clarify organizational structure. Because the Congregation Council can adopt them, they are the easiest to change and keep current.

#### 5. How are provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions numbered?

The codification system indicates the type and relationship of each section:

- **Constitutional provisions** use two sets of numbers preceded by "C": chapter number and a two-digit sequence number (e.g., \*C8.02 is a required provision in Chapter 8 on Membership).
- **Bylaws** use three sets of numbers: chapter, related provision, and bylaw number (e.g., C8.02.01 is the first bylaw related to C8.02).
- **Continuing resolutions** also use three sets, but the third is preceded by a letter indicating sequence and a two-digit year (e.g., C13.07.A25 is the first continuing resolution on that subject adopted in 2025).

#### 6. When is it necessary to revise our congregation's constitution?

- **After each Churchwide Assembly:** The Assembly meets every three years and typically amends the Model Constitution. Review the amendments document to identify required changes.
- **When local circumstances change:** If membership has declined, can the congregation still meet its quorum requirements? If leadership structure has evolved, does the constitution reflect current practice?
- **Periodic review:** It is recommended that congregations review their constitution at least every three years.

**Note:** If a Congregation Council chooses to pass or change only a continuing resolution (e.g., adding a committee), a full constitutional revision process is not triggered. However, per ELCA bylaw 9.53.03.b, proposed bylaws and continuing resolutions must still be submitted to the synod for review. The synod has no authority to approve or disapprove bylaws or continuing resolutions, but may recommend changes if they appear to conflict with required provisions.

#### 7. What are the two paths for amending a constitution?

### **Path 1: Revisions in conformity with the Model Constitution**

For adopting required (\*) provisions or recommended provisions exactly as written in the Model Constitution:

1. Congregation Council provides notice to congregation at least 30 days prior to meeting
2. Majority vote at a legally called congregation meeting
3. Provisions become effective immediately
4. Secretary submits copy to synod for the record (no approval needed)

### **Path 2: Other revisions (local provisions, modified recommended provisions)**

5. Proposed amendments filed with Congregation Council at least 60 days before first vote
6. Council provides notice to congregation at least 30 days before meeting
7. Majority vote at first congregation meeting to approve
8. Two-thirds vote at next regular congregation meeting to ratify (without change)
9. **Amendments sent to synod for approval**—changes become effective when synod notifies congregation of approval

## **8. Why must the synod review our constitution?**

ELCA Churchwide bylaw 9.53.03 requires that each congregation provide a copy of its governing documents to the synod. The synod's role is to:

- Ensure alignment with the ELCA Model Constitution and churchwide guidelines
- Advise congregations on best practices and potential issues
- Approve or disapprove proposed changes to non-required provisions
- Recognize that congregations may organize themselves as they deem appropriate, consistent with required provisions

## **9. Does our constitution need a table of contents?**

A table of contents is not required, but it is highly recommended. It facilitates navigation when referencing particular sections during meetings and discussions.

## **10. What should we include when submitting our revised constitution?**

When submitting your revised constitution to the synod, please include:

- Complete draft of the revised constitution (before the first vote for pre-review)
- Date(s) of congregational vote(s)
- Number of voting members attending the meeting
- Number of votes in favor and against
- Any correspondence or notes from the review process

## 11. What happens if our constitution doesn't conform to the Model Constitution?

If a congregation's constitution does not conform to required provisions, the congregation's constitution generally controls—except for specific circumstances where the ELCA Constitution takes precedence. These include:

- Requirements for calling pastoral leadership from ELCA rosters
- Process for terminating calls of rostered ministers
- Process for congregational withdrawal from the ELCA
- Provisions for property ownership and disposition
- Pattern for discipline of members
- Requirement for synod review of constitutional changes

## 12. What is the difference between C12.05.c. and C12.05.d. regarding Congregation Council spending authority?

The ELCA Office of the Secretary has received numerous inquiries about the distinction between these two recommended provisions regarding Congregation Council financial authority:

**C12.05.c. (Unbudgeted item limit):** This limits how much the Congregation Council can spend on a *specific item* not included in the budget without obtaining congregation approval. For example, if this limit is set at \$20,000, the council could spend \$15,000 on an unbudgeted HVAC repair but would need congregation approval to spend \$25,000 on an unbudgeted HVAC repair.

**C12.05.d. (Aggregate excess spending limit):** This limits how much the Congregation Council may spend *in aggregate* in excess of anticipated receipts without obtaining congregation approval. For example, if this limit is set at \$25,000 and the budget is \$250,000, then the council can spend up to \$275,000 in aggregate (\$250,000 plus \$25,000) without obtaining congregation approval.

**Note:** These provisions are recommended, not required, so a congregation is free to modify the wording for clarification or to better suit local needs.

## Questions or Need Assistance?

The Office of the Synod Secretary is available to assist your congregation throughout the constitution revision process. We recommend contacting us early in your process for guidance and to submit your draft for review before your first congregational vote.

### Office of the Synod Secretary

Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Email: [secretary@ntnl.org](mailto:secretary@ntnl.org)

## Additional Resources

- **2025 Model Constitution for Congregations** — The complete model constitution with all required and recommended provisions
- **2025 Amendments to the Model Constitution** — Summary of changes adopted by the 2025 Churchwide Assembly with rationales
- **Guide for Use of the Model Constitution for Congregations** — Detailed guidance from the ELCA Office of the Secretary
- **Archived Amendments by Year** — If your constitution has not been updated recently, review amendments from prior assemblies

All resources are available at: [elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions](https://elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions)

# 2025 Model Constitution Updates

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What Congregations Need to Know

Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod

# Why Update Your Constitution?

## **1 Churchwide Assembly Action**

The 2025 Churchwide Assembly approved amendments to the Model Constitution that affect all ELCA congregations.

## **2 Required Changes**

Provisions marked with an asterisk (\*) must be adopted exactly as written and go into effect immediately upon congregation approval.

## **3 Best Practice**

Review your constitution after each Churchwide Assembly to ensure alignment with current ELCA governance standards.

# Three Types of Provisions

## Required (\*)

- Marked with asterisk
- Must be verbatim
- No alterations
- Immediate effect

## Recommended

- No asterisk
- May use as written
- Can be modified
- Extra steps if changed

## Local

- Created locally
- Address context
- Cannot conflict
- Bylaws & resolutions

# 2025 Amendments at a Glance

12

Provisions Amended

8

Chapters Affected

4

Key Changes

## Chapters Affected

1 (Name) · 5 (Powers) · 7 (Property) · 9 (Rostered Ministers) · 10 (Meetings) · 15 (Discipline) · 16 (Amendments) · 20 (Parish)

### Focus Areas

Flexibility in governance · Clarity in language · Full communion partnerships · Cross-reference corrections

# Synod Assembly Delegates

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\*C5.04

## Before

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*"This congregation shall elect from among its voting members laypersons to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly..."*

## After

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*"This congregation or the Congregation Council shall elect from among the voting members of the congregation laypersons to serve..."*

## What This Means

Lay voting members for synod assembly can now be elected either by the full congregation OR by the Congregation Council. This provides flexibility for congregations that find it difficult to hold congregation-wide votes for this purpose.

# Interim Pastors

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\*C9.06

*"...an interim pastor ~~shall~~ **may** be appointed by the bishop of the synod..."*

Changed from mandatory to permissive

## Rationale

It is not always possible for a synod bishop to appoint an interim pastor for every congregation experiencing a pastoral vacancy. This change acknowledges practical realities while maintaining the bishop's role in supporting congregations during transitions.

# Full Communion Partners

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\*C9.15

**This provision changed from RECOMMENDED to REQUIRED**

## What It Covers

Allows ministers of Word and Sacrament from full communion partner churches to serve temporarily as pastor of a congregation, subject to synod bishop approval and congregation concurrence.

## Rationale

With increasing use of exchangeability with full communion partners, all congregations should make allowance for this possibility.

# Additional Changes

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\*C9.03 & \*C9.23

## **Rostered Minister Responsibilities**

Restores "proclaiming God's love for the world" to responsibilities (omitted in 2019)

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\*C15.01

## **Member Discipline**

Adds "willful and repeated harassment or defamation" as grounds for discipline

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\*C16.02

## **Amendment Ratification**

Clarifies amendments must be ratified "unchanged" (consistent language)

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C10.02

## **Special Meetings**

Recommends using fixed percentage (not specific number) to request meetings

# How to Adopt Amendments

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## Provisions

Chapter 16

- 1  
. 30 days notice to members
- 2  
. Majority vote
- 3  
. Effective immediately
- 4  
. Notify synod

## Bylaws

Chapter 17

- 1  
. 60 days to Council
- 2  
. 30 days to members
- 3  
. 2/3 vote required
- 4  
. Notify synod

## Continuing Resolutions

Chapter 18

- 1  
. No advance notice
- 2  
. Majority at meeting
- 3  
. OR 2/3 of Council
- 4  
. Submit to synod for review

# Questions?

Contact the Office of the Synod Secretary for guidance  
or to submit your revised constitution for review.

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Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod

[elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions](https://elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions)