

# MISSION MOMENT

## **ELCA Future Church design affirmed by ELCA Church Council**

The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) has affirmed the proposed Future Church design that is focused on a renewed purpose to activate the entire church so that more people may know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love. The council, which serves as the ELCA's board of directors and legislative authority for the church between churchwide assemblies, held its electronic meeting Nov. 12-14.

Future Church is based in the belief that members, congregations, synods and the churchwide organization must work together to share the powerful witness of the gospel in the world and to invite more new, young and diverse people to experience God's grace in action. The new design identifies three priority areas: a welcoming church that engages new, young and diverse people; a thriving church rooted in tradition and radically relevant; and a connected, sustainable church that shares in a common purpose and direction.

The Future Church structure will be implemented in the churchwide organization on Feb. 1, 2021. The structure will introduce three new home areas: Christian Community and Leadership, led by the Rev. Philip Hirsch; Innovation, led by Ms. Mikka McCracken; and Service and Justice, led by the Rev. Rafael Malpica Padilla. Approximately 5% of the churchwide organization staff will be separated as a result of the new design.

For more than 30 years the ELCA has experienced a rich history of ministry, but the church has also witnessed a pattern of significant decline with aging members and a membership profile that does not reflect the diversity of God's creation.

ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton told the council that the COVID-19 pandemic had brought into sharper focus the need to respond more quickly to this rapidly changing world.

"Whether there had been a pandemic or not, we know we need to change. I think the pandemic helped us to see the urgency," Eaton said. "We are presenting this design because we believe that this is the way God will enable us to move more quickly, more faithfully, and reach more people so that more people may know the way of Jesus."

William B. Horne II, ELCA vice president and chair of the Church Council, said he believes the new design provides the opportunity to be church together, bringing about collaboration throughout the broader church.

In response to the continuing trends in membership and diversity and the data from an innovation readiness survey, the following new criteria were affirmed for the ELCA:

1. Prioritize the engagement of new, young and diverse people.
2. Unite all expressions of the church (congregations, synods and the churchwide organization) into one church—together.
3. Align decision-making, accountability and leadership where best suited.
4. Operate in agile, flexible and speedy ways.
5. Act based on data and measurable impact.
6. Eliminate silos and divisions.

In other business, the council:

- Approved a 2021 fiscal year current fund spending authorization of \$65,847,000; and a 2021 ELCA World Hunger spending authorization of \$21,500,000.
- Elected Ms. Alyssa J. Cobb and the Rev. Daniel W. Gerrietts to the Church Council for terms ending in 2022.
- Received an update from the Committee on Appeals about drafted updates to the church's *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline*. The document describes the grounds for which officers, rostered ministers, candidates for rostered ministry, congregations and members of congregations may be subject to discipline according to the practice of this church.
- Deferred the question of developing a document outlining this church's high aspirations for rostered ministers until after spring 2021 when *Definitions and Guidelines for Discipline* is further redeveloped.
- Deferred questions of developing a social message on U.S. national drug policy, aging, gender identity or gun policy until the spring 2021 Church Council meeting
- Approved reconsideration of the social message on Suicide Prevention (1999) for editorial changes for the sake of accuracy and relevance to the contemporary social context.
- Encouraged the continuation of research and work toward economic justice and the study of reparations and engagement in anti-racism and racial justice work, and requested a report on the naming of an annual Day of Repentance, including a liturgical resource of lamentation and repentance to accompany this annual Day of Repentance, to the spring 2021 Church Council meeting.
- Urged this church to continue its efforts to repent the sin of racism and white supremacy and to raise awareness of the Emanuel 9 commemoration.
- Adopted the Mission Investment Fund Deferred Compensation Plan and the Mission Investment Fund Supplemental Executive Retirement Plan.
- Approved additional voting members for the 2022 Churchwide Assembly.
- Approved amendments to the Portico Benefit Services Plan and Trust.
- Approved amendments to the articles of incorporation of Luther Seminary. Luther is one of seven ELCA seminaries.
- Adopted amendments to continuing resolutions in the *Constitution, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.
- Approved amendments to the corporate social responsibility documents to serve as the basis for ongoing corporate social responsibility work in this church.
- Elected members to the governing bodies of Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, United Lutheran Seminary, Wartburg Theological Seminary, and National Lutheran Campus Ministry Inc.
- Elected members to fill vacancies to the board of trustees of 1517 Media, the publishing house of the ELCA.

The council also received reports from the church's presiding bishop, treasurer, secretary and vice president, and from the ELCA Conference of Bishops. <https://www.elca.org/News-and-Events/8083>