

Recommendations for Synod Secretaries

by Secretary Sue E. Rothmeyer
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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This memorandum provides background information and recommendations to assist you in your responsibilities as synod secretary. As you carry out your duties, please do not hesitate to contact the Office of the Secretary.

The office telephone number is: 773-380-2800

The office address is: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Office of the Secretary
8765 West Higgins Road
Chicago, IL 60631-4101

Individual email addresses include: Sue.Rothmeyer@elca.org
Keith.Fry@elca.org
Marit.Johnson@elca.org
Archives@elca.org

A. Responsibilities of synod secretaries: Under required provision †S8.32. in the *Constitution for Synods* of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America:

The secretary shall:

- a. Keep the minutes of all meetings of the Synod Assembly and Synod Council, be responsible for the printing and distribution of such minutes, and perform such other duties as this synod may from time to time direct.
- b. Be authorized and empowered, in the name of this synod, to attest all instruments which require the same, and which are signed and sealed by the bishop.
- c. In consultation with the bishop, classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of this synod.
- d. Submit to the secretary of this church at least nine months before each regular Churchwide Assembly a certified list of the voting members elected by the Synod Assembly.

B. Minutes of synod assemblies: One of your strategic and critical responsibilities as synod secretary is to keep an eye on history. Therefore, prepare the minutes and other synod documents from the perspective that those written chronicles are crucial for the permanent historical record of your synod as well as an immediate record of actions.

1. Content of annual reports: For the sake of archival and historical needs as well as an accurate legal and corporate record, the synod's annual report needs to be comprehensive. Such a report of the Synod Assembly and synod activity should include.

- a. Agenda of the Synod Assembly;
- b. Minutes of the Synod Assembly;
- c. Adopted budget;
- d. Financial reports and audit statements for previous year;
- e. Election report, including terms of elected people;
- f. Complete list of members of the Synod Council, boards and committees, including terms of office;
- g. Ordinations and installations of ministers of Word and Sacrament, with dates and places;
- h. Ordinations and installations of ministers of Word and Service, with dates and places;
- i. Complete listing of all rostered ministers in the synod;
- j. Other information on official rosters of synods, including a necrology of individuals on the rosters;
- k. Updated synod roster of names and addresses of congregations;
- l. Parochial reports and statistics;
- m. Complete text of resolutions and other actions of the assembly;
- n. Reports of the synod bishop and other officers;
- o. Text of salary guidelines for the year; and
- p. Current edition of synod constitution, unless published separately.

2. **Coding of actions:** Your predecessor may have established a coding system for actions of the Synod Assembly, Synod Council and Synod Council Executive Committee. If that has not been done already, please consider following this recommended coding system in your synod:

A TWO-LETTER code that identifies the decision-making body; followed by the YEAR of action; then MONTH of action; and NUMBER of action in the calendar year.

The two-letter code could be “SA” for the Synod Assembly; “SC” for the Synod Council; and “EC/SC” for the council’s Executive Committee.

- Using this pattern, the tenth action of the Synod Assembly in June of 2020 would be: **SA20.06.10**. The text of the completed action then would follow the number, preferably in boldface type. For example,

VOTED

SA20.06.10

To adopt the 2021 budget of the Great Vision Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in the amount of \$2,589,445.

- Under this numbering system, the 24th action of the Synod Council in November 2019 would be: **SC19.11.24**.
- The Synod Council’s Executive Committee is not a separate entity but is a committee of the council. Therefore, an alternate coding related to the council is suggested. As a result, the sixth action of your Synod Council’s Executive Committee in March 2017 would be **EC/SC17.03.06**.¹

3. **Copies of Synod Assembly minutes:** When minutes are available after each Synod Assembly, please upload an electronic copy to the Synod Online Digital Archive (SODA) and notify the Office of the Secretary with an email to SEC@elca.org. After logging in to the ELCA Community site (<https://community.ELCA.org/>), click on the “Synod Portal” tab and a link to SODA will be under the heading “Synod Documents.” Send a paper copy of the minutes to the synod’s archives. (See *Remember the synod archives* below.) **The Office of the Secretary is no longer collecting paper copies of Synod Assembly minutes for its files.**

In addition to the actual minutes portion of the assembly materials, all materials as outlined above in Section 1 also should be uploaded on SODA with the minutes, since that information constitutes the complete record of an assembly.

Regardless of format, however, please ensure that copies of the minutes of synod assemblies are submitted promptly upon completion.

- C. **Synod Council minutes:** The minutes of Synod Council meetings and the council’s Executive Committee meetings are to be filed promptly in the synod office and in the synod’s archives. Upload electronic copies of the Synod Council minutes to SODA. **The Office of the Secretary is no longer collecting paper copies of Synod Council or Executive Committee minutes for its files.** Any resolution of the Synod Council must be forwarded promptly to the Office of the Secretary, as discussed below.

- D. **Remember the synod archives:** Under †S8.32.c., each synod secretary is assigned the responsibility, in consultation with the bishop, to “classify and arrange all important papers and documents and deposit them in the archives of the synod.” This needs to be an ongoing process so that materials are not lost for the historical record. Official records are required at times for legal purposes and, therefore, must be accurate and complete. Although distribution of documents in electronic form allows materials to get to people more quickly and at less cost, paper

¹Note that the numbering sequence for actions of the Executive Committee is separate from the numbering sequence for actions of the Synod Council. “SC” action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year. Likewise, “EC/SC” action numbers follow one another numerically throughout the year.

copies should be maintained in the synod's archive. Electronic mail concerning matters of significance should be printed out monthly and retained with other correspondence. On the ELCA website, you may consult the "Records Retention Schedule" document for advice. (<http://www.ELCA.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Synods>)

- E. *Prompt reporting:*** As the secretary of the synod, you are responsible for ensuring prompt reporting to the Office of the Secretary — immediately following the Synod Assembly — of the full adopted text of any resolutions or memorials addressed to the churchwide organization, the results of any election or re-election of officers, the adoption of any amendments to the synod's constitution, bylaws or continuing resolutions, and the names and addresses of people elected to serve as voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. As provided in †S18.13., constitutional amendments, apart from those provided by the Churchwide Assembly for the *Constitution for Synods* under †S18.11. and †S18.12., are subject to ratification by the Church Council or Churchwide Assembly. As soon as the synod's constitution is updated, please upload an electronic copy to SODA and send a copy to the Office of the Secretary with an email to SEC@elca.org.
- F. *Memorials and resolutions:*** For recording and proper distribution, all resolutions and memorials are to be submitted by synods only to the secretary of this church and not directly to churchwide units.

Some confusion exists about what may be addressed more appropriately in resolutions to the Church Council rather than memorials to the Churchwide Assembly. Whatever you can do to educate your synod about this distinction will be appreciated.

Although both memorials and resolutions are requests by a synod for action, they are intended to address different issues and are processed differently.

In 1988, the Church Council voted that communications from synods to the churchwide organization and the Churchwide Assembly would be made pursuant to ELCA constitutional provisions and bylaws. Essentially, this action affirmed three avenues for communication:

- (1) the Synod Assembly may address the Churchwide Assembly through memorials;
- (2) the Synod Council may address the Church Council through resolutions; and
- (3) the Synod Council may address churchwide units or offices through the Church Council's Executive Committee (including forwarding resolutions adopted by synod assemblies).

(1) *Synod assemblies may address the Churchwide Assembly through memorials.*

A memorial adopted by the Synod Assembly is submitted to the Churchwide Assembly with a recommendation for action from the Memorials Committee of the Churchwide Assembly. The "resolved" clause of a memorial could begin:

RESOLVED, that the ____ Synod Assembly memorialize the 2019 Churchwide Assembly to . . .

Memorials address broad policy issues and are passed by synod assemblies for consideration by the Churchwide Assembly. The Synod Council is not authorized to adopt memorials for submission to the Churchwide Assembly. A responsibility of the Churchwide Assembly, in accordance with provision 12.21.c, in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, is to "[r]eceive and consider proposals from synod assemblies." Once received by the Office of the Secretary, memorials are referred to the Memorials Committee, which is appointed by the Church Council to review and make recommendations to the Churchwide Assembly, in accordance with bylaw 12.51.02. The Memorials Committee meets following the final Synod Assembly before a churchwide assembly.

(2) *Synod Councils may address the Church Council through resolutions.*

The Synod Council may also forward resolutions adopted by synod assemblies. The final "resolved" clause of such an assembly action should include this provision:

RESOLVED, that the __ Synod Assembly direct the __ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council for consideration and possible action.

- (3) ***Synod Councils may address churchwide units or offices through the Church Council's Executive Committee.*** The Synod Council may also forward such resolutions adopted by synod assemblies. The final “resolved” clause of such an assembly action should include this provision:

RESOLVED, that the ___ Synod Assembly direct the ___ Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council’s Executive Committee for proper referral and disposition under the bylaws and continuing resolutions of this church.

Resolutions are requests from synods to the Church Council or to units or offices of the churchwide organization. Either synod assemblies or synod councils may originate resolutions. Frequently, the Synod Council passes resolutions between meetings of the synod assemblies and forwards them directly to the Church Council for consideration or to the Church Council’s Executive Committee if the desired action involves referral to a unit or office of the churchwide organization. As a practical matter, resolutions have a narrower focus than memorials because they are requests for consideration or action by individual units or offices or by the Church Council. Thus, for example, a request for the Church Council to recommend a parliamentary rule or action by a unit would be the subject of a resolution, but a request to change an ELCA policy should be a memorial.

A resolution and a memorial are *not* to be combined in one action. In addition, a synod should not address both the Church Council and the Churchwide Assembly on the same subject. The Office of the Secretary, with the concurrence of the Executive Committee of the Church Council, may treat a proposal characterized as a memorial as a resolution or vice versa. In these circumstances, the synod will be notified promptly of the re-classification.

It also is important to point out that resolutions and memorials *cannot* direct the Churchwide Assembly, Church Council or churchwide organization to take action. They are proposals *requesting* the specified action.

Please encourage your assembly’s Reference and Counsel Committee or Resolutions Committee to use resolutions in preference to memorials. Resolutions follow a more direct route and receive a faster response than memorials, which must go to the next triennial Churchwide Assembly and await the assembly’s response.

Interdependence, as well as stewardship of resources, requires care to avoid resolutions and memorials that impose unreasonable financial demands on synods and the churchwide organization. If a proposed resolution or memorial will impose an unfunded mandate if adopted, the Synod Council is requested to review the proposed action before submission to the Synod Assembly. Synods also are requested to advise their councils and synod assemblies that the churchwide organization may not be able to support requested resolutions or memorials for budgetary reasons and that, if adopted, such proposed actions may have adverse consequences on existing programs or ministries. As interdependent partners, it is important for synods and the churchwide organizations to work collaboratively. If questions exist regarding the potential implications of a proposed resolution or memorial, inquiries to the Office of the Secretary are encouraged.

1. ***Writing resolutions and memorials:*** To prepare or edit the texts of resolutions and memorials, your assembly’s Committee of Reference and Counsel or Resolutions Committee will find information on proper language in *Robert’s Rules of Order*. Here are a few basics.

Normally, the “whereas” clauses concisely describe the issue, concern, problem and basis for or need of the resolution. They state the case but technically are not part of the resolution. They should be accurate and factual and should not misrepresent the issue being addressed or offer a false foundation for the proposed action. They should not be argumentative.

“Resolved” clauses point to proposed solutions and define requested action. “Resolved” clauses should define clearly the following: To whom is the request for action addressed? What should be done? What may the action cost and how is it to be funded? When should the action be done? To whom should the results be reported?

Clarity in the text of any resolution or memorial is important. A good test is, “Is this statement clear? Will the resolution make sense to someone who was not present at the assembly?”

Under *Robert's Rules of Order*, the Reference and Counsel Committee or Resolutions Committee is empowered to screen all resolutions and memorials. At a minimum, this means ensuring clarity and accurate information. If authorized by the assembly's Rules of Organization and Procedure or Standing Rules, the committee also may edit substantively such resolutions and memorials. For all cases, if issues exist with respect to the clarity or accuracy of resolutions and memorials, the committee should attempt to confer with the authors to address the issues.

- 2. *Filing resolutions and memorials with the Office of the Secretary:*** Immediately after Synod Assembly or Synod Council meetings, please send electronic copies of resolutions and memorials to SEC@elca.org in the Office of the Secretary. The bishop will be sent an acknowledgment that they have been received and indicate when they will be considered.

Thanks for your partnership: Thank you for your conscientious service on behalf of this church as secretary of your synod. The staff of the Office of the Secretary of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is committed to supporting and assisting you as you fulfill your strategic responsibilities as synod secretary.