

Resolution to Continue the Collaborative Work of the Allegheny Synod Begun During the 24-25 Transition

Proponent: Rev. Traci Marriott, Dean of Blair Huntingdon Conference
Deacon Alicia Anderson, Dean of Nittany Conference
Rev. Vicki Beilfuss, Dean of Clearfield Conference
Rev. Kathy Popp, Dean of Bedford Conference
Rev. Nancy Hoover, Dean of Johnstown Conference
Rev. Tyler Graham, Dean of Laurel Highlands Conference

Whereas

Whereas the Allegheny Synod entered an unexpected period of leadership transition in August of 2024 with the resignation of the Bishop, and

Whereas the Allegheny Synod Council, at the request of members of the clergy, agreed to an extended period of reconciliation and discernment under interim leadership and postponed Synod Assembly and the election of the Synod's next Bishop until October of 2025, and

Whereas the Allegheny Synod's Transition Team, Synod Council, Rostered Leaders, Lay Members, and the Office of the Bishop prayerfully discussed and discerned specific expectations for the next Bishop of the Allegheny Synod, stating that we pray for a bishop who is a faithful servant of Christ, grounded in a Lutheran identity, feels called to lead others in God's mission, and brings:

- knowledge of and commitment to the people, congregations, and ministries of the Synod
- strong and developed leadership skills that inspire vision, encourage teamwork, and can effectively administer the responsibilities of the Office of the Bishop
- interpersonal skills that model caring, warmth, acceptance, and joy in ministry
- loving, positive, and even-tempered presence in person and through all means of communication
- joy and desire to build healthy relationships across the entire synod territory, offering support and encouragement for others to do the same.

Whereas identified priorities for the future administration of the Allegheny Synod include:

- evaluating committee structure and rebuilding engagement and accountability
- evaluating and re-establishing responsibilities and policies for paid, volunteer, and elected leadership
- comparing constitutional requirements to the needs and realities of our current ministry
- considering options for a sustainable and effective staffing structure

Resolved

Therefore be it resolved that this Allegheny Synod Assembly direct the Bishop-Elect, Synod Council, and Deans to hold each other mutually accountable for pursuing these shared leadership goals and continuing the work the Synod has discerned as vital to the witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ in this region.

Be it further resolved that these Synod leaders will communicate regular updates of this ongoing work.

Proponent: Benjamin Hoffman, Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church, Karthaus, PA

Resolution:

Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America met in Churchwide Assembly in Phoenix, Arizona from July 28 – August 2, 2025; and,

Whereas, not all topics were addressed at that assembly, and unfinished business was forwarded to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for consideration and action; and,

Whereas, no action was taken on an item in the Bulletin of Reports, Section VII, Category C8 *Social Message on Rural Life and Ministry* (Text referenced below), and it was therefore referred to the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and,

Whereas, the Allegheny Synod exists in a primarily rural context, and thus is comprised of congregations that face the unique challenges and opportunities in pursuing ministry in rural settings; and,

Whereas, congregations in rural settings across the ELCA would benefit from the Church Council attending on the above-mentioned business and the insights such considerations might result; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, that the Allegheny Synod meeting in Assembly, October 31 to November 1, 2025, vote to concur with and support the memorial from the Montana Synod; and,

Resolved, that the Allegheny Synod Assembly urge the Allegheny Synod Council to study and explore the above-mentioned business for how it might generate insights and directions that would benefit pastors and congregations conducting ministry in rural settings; and

Resolved, that the Allegheny Synod Assembly encourage the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to make it a priority to act on the above referenced item of business; and,

Resolved, that the Allegheny Synod Assembly directs the Allegheny Synod Council to forward this resolution to the Church Council for consideration and possible action.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED

Benjamin Hoffman

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REFERENCED TEXT:

Category C8: Social Message on Rural Life and Ministry

1. Montana Synod (1F) [2025]

WHEREAS, nearly one-third of ELCA congregations minister in rural and remote communities; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Census marks a significant population movement from rural to urban communities indicating challenges for rural congregations to maintain membership and giving; and

WHEREAS, rural communities face significant inequities in health, education, and economic opportunities when compared to urban communities; and

WHEREAS, the ELCA has not produced materials for theological reflection on the challenges facing and gifts provided by rural communities since its inception; and

WHEREAS, rural and remote congregations offer models of innovation and adaptation to economic and sociological constraints for ministry; therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Montana Synod memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to commission a study and the production of a social message on the challenges facing rural and remote communities and gifts provided by ministry in rural and remote contexts; furthermore, be it

RESOLVED, that Montana Synod memorialize the 2025 Churchwide Assembly to encourage and equip synods and member congregations to dedicate a time of study on rural and remote issues and rural ministry; and be it further

RESOLVED that this message reflect the diversity of rural communities across geographic regions to include consideration of remote communities and sovereign tribal nations.

Background

As the preamble of this memorial notes, a significant percentage of ELCA congregations are in rural communities. These congregations and communities face significant challenges and present unique learning opportunities for ministry.

Since 2020, rural communities in the US have experienced modest growth in population.

However, rural congregations continue to face the challenges identified in this memorial, including maintaining and growing members in remote areas. In addition, the inequities listed in the memorial present significant challenges that should be addressed.

Yet, as the memorial also notes, rural communities and congregations have gifts to offer for theological and ecclesial reflection, including models of innovative and adaptive ministry. The memorial thus calls for development of a social message that addresses both the challenge and promise of the context of rural life and ministry.

The memorial does not indicate awareness of the establishment of a Rural and Small-Town Ministry Desk by the ELCA in 1998. However, it rightly notes a lack of current resources and ELCA social teaching on the topic.

There are few references to rural congregations and communities in current ELCA social teaching. Most often, these references only describe the challenges faced by rural or farming communities, without attention to the gifts rural ministry provides. For example, the social statement *Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor* (2003) calls for priority in addressing rural health inequities. Social policy resolutions on “Family Farms” (CA95.05.44) and “Economic

Crisis in Rural America” (CA99.03.09) call for prayer, advocacy, and education about family farms. A 2001 social policy resolution on “The Family Farm” (CA01.05.21) echoes these earlier documents and calls for support of rural congregations and ministries.

There are three questions for assessment of a request for a new social message: 1) Is a social message the most appropriate vehicle to address the concerns? 2) What is the capacity of this church for this process? 3) What would be the costs involved?

To the first question, social messages “address the contemporary situation in light of the prophetic and compassionate traditions of the Scriptures,” are “narrower in scope and complexity or of less controversy than social statements,” and “expand theological and pastoral address and analysis” of contemporary issues (Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns (2018). Given the nature of the topic of rural and remote ministry, a social message would be the most appropriate resource for addressing the needs identified in this memorial. However, social messages address social issues. Such a social message, thus, would address the context in which rural ministry happens, rather than congregational ministry more narrowly. Report of the Memorials Committee • Page 80 • ELCA.org/cwa

To the second question, the capacity of the church involves significant leadership commitment and effort across the church because of the communal moral deliberation process. This also includes the significant investment of time needed from Theological Discernment staff in the Office of the Presiding Bishop. In general, there is capacity for development of one social message per year. There are already requests for a new social message on White Supremacy and for reconsideration of the social messages on "Homelessness" and "End-of-Life Decisions." To the third question, development of a new social message would cost approximately \$10,000-15,000. This would include compensation and potential travel for a contract writer, design, editing, translation, and printing.

Recommended for assembly action

To receive with gratitude the memorial from the Montana Synod for development of a new social message on the challenges facing rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations, and gifts provided by ministry in rural and remote contexts;

To direct Theological Discernment staff in the ELCA churchwide organization to review the request for a new social message on rural, remote communities, and sovereign Tribal Nations and bring a recommendation to the ELCA Church Council no later than the Spring 2026 meeting on what means should be authorized to address the questions involved; and

To direct Christian Community and Leadership staff in the ELCA churchwide organization to assess available resources on rural congregations and communities and to provide a report and recommendation for resource development to the ELCA Church Council no later than Fall 2026.