

Congregation Council Vacancies and Annual Ministry Spending Plans (Budgets)

When your congregation cannot hold an Annual Meeting due to COVID

Some congregational councils are beginning to wonder: if we cannot hold an Annual Meeting, what options does the congregation have to fill vacancies on the congregation council and to approve an annual ministry spending plan?

Your Congregation Constitution likely presents some options. The most important thing to do is check your own congregation constitution to see what provisions are made. The 2019 ELCA Model Constitution can serve as a guide (but you still must check your own constitution):

1. For members of council:

C12.03. Should a member's place on the Congregation Council be declared vacant, the Congregation Council shall elect, by majority vote, a successor until the next annual meeting.

1. This is the cleanest way to tend to the end of a term, even if the person appointed could serve for a second term. The council should appoint them and then elect them at your next meeting.

2. For the budget:

***C5.03.** Only such authority as is delegated to the Congregation Council or other organizational units in this congregation's governing documents is recognized. All remaining authority is retained by this congregation. This congregation is authorized to: f. approve the annual budget;

C12.05. The Congregation Council shall be responsible for the financial and property matters of this congregation.

d. The Congregation Council shall prepare an annual budget for adoption by this congregation, shall supervise the expenditure of funds in accordance therewith following its adoption, and may incur obligations of more than \$_____ in excess of the anticipated receipts only after approval by a Congregation Meeting. The budget shall include this congregation's full indicated share in support of the wider ministry being carried on in collaboration with the synod and churchwide organization.

e. The Congregation Council shall ascertain that the financial affairs of this congregation are being conducted efficiently, giving particular attention to the prompt payment of all obligations and to the regular forwarding of mission support monies to the synod treasurer.

In consultation with the ELCA Office of the Secretary about similar language in the Synod Constitution, I would suggest that pursuant to C12.05. the council could vote to *continue* (this is the legal, Robert's Rules of Order term) the current spending plan into the following year / until the next congregation meeting. This allows the council to meet its obligation to supervise the expenditure of funds in accordance with the approved budget. This also reflects the Council obligation to ascertain that the financial affairs of the congregation are being conducted efficiently. Again, you need to check your constitution to see what language is used.

If you have questions, please contact Pastor Kelly Bayer Derrick at bayerderrick@vasynod.org