

SOUTHWESTERN TEXAS SYNOD PROPOSED CONSTITUTION AND BYLAW AMENDMENTS

At last year's 2025 Churchwide Assembly, several changes were made to the required provisions in the ELCA's constitution for synods. According to †S18.11, amendments to required provisions are automatically incorporated into the constitutions of individual synods.

Among other amendments passed by the Churchwide Assembly are additional recommended changes. At the November 2025 Synod Council meeting, these recommended changes were reviewed and discussed. The Synod Council voted to endorse all recommended changes and forward them to the 2026 Synod Assembly for approval.

In accordance with the synod's constitution:

- Recommended constitutional provision changes identical to the ELCA's Constitution for Synods may be adopted by a majority vote at the Synod Assembly. This applies to changes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 listed below.
- Bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds vote at a Synod Assembly. This applies to change 17 listed below. The synod council proposes the following amendments, which will be presented for adoption at the 2026 Southwestern Texas Synod Assembly:

CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

Change #1– Synod Seal

S1.21– Remove dagger (make non-required)

RATIONALE:

The change provides flexibility without altering practice.

Change #2– Voting Membership for Synod-Authorized Ministers and Lay Representatives

S7.26 This synod may establish processes through the Synod Council that permit **persons currently serving as synod-authorized ministers and/or** lay representatives of congregations under development and authorized worshiping communities **and/or outreach ministries** of the synod, which have been authorized under ELCA bylaw 10.01.04., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with †S7.21. outreach ministries of the synod, which have been authorized under ELCA bylaw 10.01.04., to serve as voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with †S7.21.

RATIONALE:

This provision reflects evolving models of ministry within the ELCA and provides a mechanism for synod-authorized worshiping communities and outreach ministries to participate in Synod Assembly. It aligns synod practice with ELCA bylaw 10.01.04 and strengthens representation across ministry contexts.

Change #3– Elections by Majority Vote

S9.02– Remove dagger (make non-required)

RATIONALE:

The change provides flexibility without altering practice.

Change #4 - Bishop Election Process

S9.04. The bishop shall be elected by the Synod Assembly by ecclesiastical ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the legal votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the five persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the second ballot, and two-thirds of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the three persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the third ballot, and 60 percent of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the legal votes cast shall be necessary for election. These ballots shall be limited to the two persons ~~(plus ties)~~ who receive the greatest number of legal votes (including ties in the final qualifying position) on the previous ballot.

RATIONALE:

This amendment clarifies ballot progression and voting thresholds in the election of a bishop. It maintains a strong consensus requirement in early ballots while ensuring the process can move toward majority election if necessary. The revision promotes both discernment and procedural clarity.

Change #5– Compensation of Synod Council Members

S10.05 ~~No e~~Elected members of the Synod Council shall not receive compensation solely for ~~such their~~ service as council members.

RATIONALE:

Corrects grammatical inconsistencies while preserving the long-standing governance principle that elected Synod Council members are not compensated for their service.

Change #6– Eligibility for Synod Council

S10.06 No person related to a synod staff member shall be eligible for nomination to or membership on the Synod Council. For this purpose, a related individual is one who, with respect to the synod employee, is a spouse, parent, son, daughter, sibling, uncle, aunt, niece, nephew, grandparent, grandchild, including corresponding members of blended families and in-laws (parent, son, daughter, or sibling of a spouse, spouse of a sibling, or the parent or sibling of the spouse of a sibling).

RATIONALE:

Adds a comprehensive definition of “related individual” to strengthen conflict-of-interest safeguards and promote transparency and trust in synod governance.

Change #7, 8, 9 – Renumbering Subsequent Provisions

S10.0607

S10.0708

S10.0809

RATIONALE:

Renumbering subsequent provisions for consistency

Change #10 – Synod-Authorized Worshiping Communities

S13.40 Synod Authorized Worshiping Communities and Outreach Ministries

RATIONALE:

Added for consistency with other provisions

Change #11 – Synod-Authorized Worshiping Communities and Outreach Ministries

S13.41 ~~Authorized worshiping~~ Worshiping communities and outreach ministries, authorized by the synod and acknowledged under criteria, policies, and procedures approved by the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall accept and adhere to the Confession of Faith and Statement of Purpose of this church, shall be served by leadership under the criteria of this church, and shall be subject to the discipline of this church.

RATIONALE:

Clarifies that such ministries operate under ELCA-approved criteria and are accountable to synod and churchwide standards. This ensures theological consistency and appropriate ecclesial oversight.

OTHER CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

Change #12– Mutual Ministry Committee

S11.04 ~~The synod shall have a Mutual Ministry Committee...~~

RATIONALE:

This is a non-required provision. Deleting it allows the bishop and synod staff to structure advisory and accountability relationships in ways that best serve current leadership models. Flexibility is increased while oversight remains available through other governance mechanisms.

BYLAW AMENDMENTS

Change #13– Place of Meeting

~~S1.02.02 Meetings of the Synod Council, all Ministry Teams, Committees, Subcommittees, and Working Groups shall be at the principal office of the Synod unless a different location is specified in the notice of the meeting.~~

(Deleted in its entirety.)

RATIONALE:

This provision is unnecessarily restrictive and does not reflect current practice, including virtual meetings and meetings held in various locations across the synod. Deletion increases flexibility.

Change #14 – SAWC Voting members for Assembly

~~S7.26.01 The membership of synod authorized worshipping communities may elect voting members of the Synod Assembly, consistent with the requirements for congregations expressed in S7.21.~~

RATIONALE:

This matter is addressed in the Standing Rules of the Synod Assembly. Deletion avoids redundancy and clarifies governance structure.

Change #15 and #16 – Churchwide Assembly Voting Members

~~S9.01.01 Churchwide Assembly voting members makeup...~~

~~S9.01.02 CWA substitutes...~~

RATIONALE:

These provisions are superseded by ELCA Constitution 12.41.11 and 12.41.12. Removing duplicative language ensures consistency with churchwide governing documents.

Change #17 – Consultation Committee

S11.02.01 CONSULTATION COMMITTEE: There shall be a Consultation Committee consisting of 8 persons, of whom half shall be Rostered Ministers ~~ministers of Word and Sacrament.~~

RATIONALE:

Recognizes both rosters of the ELCA—Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service—allowing full participation of deacons in synod governance processes.

Change #18- Mutual Ministry Committee

~~S11.04.01 Mutual Ministry Committee elected, for staff...~~

RATIONALE:

This deletion aligns with the removal of S11.04 and ensures consistency between constitution and bylaws.

Change #19- Ministry Teams

~~S11.11.02 To provide oversight, coordination and impetus for the work of this synod as God's People, there shall be Ministry Teams formed...~~

RATIONALE:

Embedding specific structural requirements in the bylaws limits adaptability. Deletion allows ministry teams to be created, restructured, or dissolved as mission needs evolve.

Change #20 – Holy Experiments Team

~~S11.11.04 The HOLY EXPERIMENTS TEAM...~~

RATIONALE:

Specific ministry initiatives are better established through continuing resolutions or council action rather than permanent bylaw language, allowing greater flexibility.

Change #21- Leadership Team

~~S11.11.05 The LEADERSHIP TEAM...~~

RATIONALE:

As above, governance flexibility is strengthened by not codifying specific teams in the bylaws.

Change #22 - Notices

~~S11.11.08 Notices of all regular and special meetings of ministry teams and working groups shall be sent to the bishop.~~

RATIONALE:

No longer necessary given current administrative and communication practices.

Change #23- Self-Organizing Ministry Teams

S11.11.06.02 b. After a group has been recognized by Synod Council, A Self-Organizing Team has the following privileges:

1. Use synod communications...

~~2. Request money through a granting process or a budget line request if funds are available.~~

3. Host events...

4. Partner with other Self-Organizing Teams.

5. Dissolve the group when they decide to do so.

c. A Self-Organizing Team will not automatically be entitled to receive staff support or money allocated in the budget.

RATIONALE:

Affirms grassroots, volunteer-led ministry while clarifying that recognition does not guarantee budget allocation. This promotes fiscal responsibility and appropriate oversight.