



South Dakota Synod
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Annual Meeting "Tip Sheet" for Congregational Presidents

By Bishop David B Zellmer

I continue to lift up in prayer our congregational presidents as you have faithfully served the people of our synod in your leadership role in your congregation. I have prepared a list of items that I have found to be helpful.

Pray: Surround your annual meeting with prayer and God's word. In the weeks leading up to the annual meeting, include pertinent petitions for God's guidance in the Prayer of the Church. Invite council members and other disciples to spend some focused time in prayer during the week prior to the meeting. At the meeting itself, include ample time for centering yourselves in God's presence (including silence), dwelling in God's Word, and surrounding the meeting with prayer. And don't hesitate to take "prayer breaks" during the meeting itself. God's people are strengthened—especially when debate becomes confused or contentious—when they pause for prayer in the midst of a meeting.

Review Governing Documents: Review thoroughly the congregation's constitution and bylaws before the day of the annual meeting. Note especially the policies pertaining to nominations, elections, adopting a budget, etc. Have copies of the constitution/bylaws available on the day of the meeting for any voting members who request them.

Brush up on Parliamentary Procedure: Although many congregations use an informal approach to parliamentary procedure, it is helpful for you as chairperson to review some of the basics pertaining to motions, debate, voting, etc. The ELCA Office of the Secretary offers a chart summarizing these motions at <http://www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Office-of-the-Secretary/Congregation-Administration/Legal-Issues-for-Congregations/Questions-About-Parliamentary-Procedure.aspx>. (If link doesn't open, try copying and pasting it into your browser.)

Purposes of Annual Meeting: Remember that an annual meeting is about looking back (reviewing the previous year of mission and ministry) and looking ahead (at the priorities, goals and initiatives in ministry you'll pursue in the year to come). Spend some time during the meeting reviewing reports—not necessarily having each report read aloud if it has been printed in the annual report, but drawing attention to each report and asking if there are questions any voting member might have. Please also find ways to celebrate (e.g. via a PowerPoint slide show perhaps) what God has done in your midst over the past year and to thank persons who have helped lead the congregation. Then "frame" each item of "new business" in terms of the missional goals, priorities and vision of the congregation for its future.

Agenda: Prepare and publish—several weeks before the meeting date—a draft agenda for the annual meeting. This is often done by the congregation council, with input invited from members of the congregation. (Note especially any "carry over" items from previous congregational meetings—make sure these are built into the agenda for your annual meeting.) At the start of the annual meeting present this draft agenda, ask if there are any proposed amendments to the agenda, and then adopt the agenda as amended. This thoughtful, orderly process of agenda-building helps voting members to anticipate and start reflecting upon all the topics that will be discussed.

Voting Membership: As you review your governing documents, take special note of the provisions regarding voting membership and quorums.

Budget and Nominations: Good advance preparation by the nominating committee and the budget committee will assist the voting members in conducting these items of business in an efficient way. If possible, avoid spending lots of time asking voting members to come up with nominations from the floor (because the nominating committee failed to present a complete slate of candidates) or micro-managing details of the budget.

Congregational Leadership Form: The pastoral and lay leadership of your congregation is important to the continued ministry in your congregation, as well as for the continued ministry of the South Dakota Synod and Churchwide Organization. After your annual meeting, please complete the 2011 Congregational Leadership Form and return it to Crystal McCormick, 2001 S Summit Ave, Sioux Falls, SD 57197. This information may also be submitted online at <http://tinyurl.com/sdsynodleadership>.

Statement of Intent: Following adoption of the congregation's budget, please make sure that your Statement of Intent for mission support of ELCA/synod ministries is filled out and returned promptly to Lois Borchardt, Business Manager, South Dakota Synod, 2001 S Summit Ave, Sioux Falls, SD 57197. This information may also be submitted online at <http://tinyurl.com/sdsynod12intent>.

Issues Regarding ELCA Affiliation or Support: Members of the congregation may want to discuss the congregation's affiliation with or support for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the South Dakota Synod. If you anticipate such discussions, please consider the following suggestions: Please "frame" the issues for conversation with thoughtfulness and goodwill. How we frame an issue affects how we discuss and deal with it. Please ask voting members to avoid framing issues in one-sided, inflammatory or inaccurate ways. Strive to frame your conversations in accurate, balanced, respectful, and hope-filled ways.

Have accurate information available, such as the many resources on the synod website at <http://www.sdsynod.org/images/stories/resources1109.pdf>.

Please inform me or another member of the synod staff if your congregation is struggling with a response to the 2009 Churchwide Assembly actions on human sexuality, e.g. adopting a declaration regarding where your congregation stands on these issues, or considering any redirection of your congregation's mission support giving. We on the synod staff are ready to assist you in preparing for such discussions—so please call us.

Items that need to be ruled "Out of Order"

First, a resolution to leave the ELCA is not in order at an annual meeting. The ELCA Constitution states: "A resolution indicating desire to terminate its relationship must be adopted at a legally called and conducted special meeting of the congregation by a two-thirds majority of the voting members present." Note that it must be a special meeting, not the annual meeting. [9.62.a.] It is possible to discuss this issue at the annual meeting and the congregation can take a vote to "initiate the process" of disaffiliation, but a motion from the floor to leave the ELCA must be ruled out of order.

Second, a motion to terminate a pastor's call may not be made from the floor at an annual meeting. According to the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "The call of a congregation, when accepted by a pastor, shall constitute a continuing mutual relationship and commitment, which, except in the case of the death of the pastor, shall be terminated only following consultation with the synodical bishop" and for specific stipulated reasons. [C9.05.f.]

Third, absentee voting or voting by proxy is not permitted at congregational meetings, according to the Model Constitution for Congregations. [C10.05.]

Finally, "open-ended" meetings—for instance, a meeting that is convened on a Saturday and allowed to continue through Sunday-morning services—are prohibited according to Robert's Rules of Order: "A meeting of an assembly is a single official gathering of its members in one room or area to transact business for a length of time during which there is no cessation of proceedings and the members do not separate, unless for a short recess, as defined below." [10th edition, page 79.] Robert's Rules govern meetings except where the constitution specifies otherwise [C10.07.].