Your church logo

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Congregational Council Member Guide

Your Church Name

2022

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\*This Table of Contents will change according to your document

# Welcome to Church Council

[Insert a letter from the Pastor affirming the member’s ability to lead within this church body and to thank them for their leadership.]

Using the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to serve as a resource for congregational council members in their role and responsibilities as leaders within the church. Whether a new member or a veteran member, creating a document specific to your congregation will give confidence to new members and ensure that all persons understand their role and responsibilities, where to find resources, and how to engage as a key member of this body. The handbook can and should be modified to meet the needs of your specific congregation.

General Council Information [This is sample content]

1. Any voting member of the congregation may be elected to the congregation council (hereafter “council”) (Section C8.02(c)) of the **Your Church** Constitution (presently under update June, 2021) defines “voting members”); (see Appendix A for **Your Church** Constitution and Bylaws)
2. Members of council are elected for a term of three (3) years and may serve no more than two (2) full terms consecutively;
3. The voting membership of the council consists of the pastor(s) and not more than twelve (12) members of the congregation;
4. The tenure of the council members is staggered so that one-third (1/3) will reach the end of their term each year;
5. The responsibilities and duties of the council are set forth in Chapter 12 of the **Your Church** Constitution
6. **Your Church’s** council normally meets monthly on the second Tuesday of each month at 7:00 pm:
   1. Special meetings also may be called in accordance with the **Your Church** Constitution
   2. An Annual Meeting of the Congregation is held in January of each year
7. Each February, the council has a retreat on a Saturday morning to focus on our faith and role as church leaders:

A brief business meeting is held in the afternoon to duly elect and appoint council officers and committee representatives, to review and vote upon the minutes of the previous meeting and the Treasurer’s Report, and to establish and vote upon the calendar of monthly benevolences for the upcoming year.

1. At least one council member is appointed as a representative for each congregational committee (see **Committees** for a description of each committee):
   1. It is the custom of council that the chair of each committee provides a written report to the council by uploading to the **Your Church Docs folder on Google Drive**. (see **Procedure to Upload Monthly Committee Reports to Google Drive)**
   2. The council member for each particular committee may address the matters contained in the written report and any questions council may have about those matters or provide an oral report if no written report is submitted. These oral reports will be documented within the Council Minutes.
2. The council meeting agenda is available in the **Council Minutes & Committee Reports** **folder on the Google Drive.** The agenda includes:
   1. Devotions
   2. Approval of Minutes
   3. External Communications Received
   4. Reports of the Mission and Ministry of Bethlehem
      1. Worship & Music
      2. Christian Education
      3. Stewardship
      4. Fellowship
      5. Youth Ministry
      6. Evangelism
      7. Social Ministry/Health & Wellness
   5. Resources in Support of Mission and Ministry of Bethlehem
      1. Senior Pastor Report
      2. Associate Pastor Report
      3. Personnel
      4. Property
      5. Communications & Technology
      6. Treasurer’s Report
   6. President’s Comments
   7. Unfinished Business
   8. New Business
   9. Closing Comments
   10. Devotion for Next Month
   11. Adjournment
3. Two (2) council members reaching the end of their term (along with three (3) members of the congregation) serve on the nominating committee which prepares a list of candidates (who have agreed) for each vacancy on council, church officers, audit committee and congregation members of the nominating committee for the upcoming year/upcoming term of office.

Roles and Responsibilities

Election to a Congregation Council carries with it the respect and trust of the constituency of your congregation. The value of your willingness to make a contribution to the life of your congregation is significant and appreciated. Your contribution involves your time, expertise, enthusiasm and energy. Saying yes to this responsibility brings some basic duties. In addition to Chapter 12 of the Model Constitution for Congregations of the ELCA, your congregation’s bylaws could include the following responsibilities:

Review– [What You Can Expect and What is Expected of You](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Council_Officers_Job_Descriptions.pdf) when serving on your Congregation Council ([swpasynod.org](about:blank))

Congregation Council Member

* Be a member in good standing of the congregation, regularly attending worship services and involved in congregational life.
* Attend all meetings of the council. Notify the pastor if you are unable to attend.
* Attempt to discover, through prayer and discernment, what is best for the congregation.
* Consider the well-being of the council when dealing with specific issues and ministries.
* Treat all matters relating to council deliberations as confidential, until such time as the information is determined a matter of public record.
* Assist the pastor in nurturing the spiritual life of the congregation.
* Care for the congregation’s membership.
* Ensure that the decisions of the congregation are carried out.
* Be a part of a united body by supporting all decisions of the council, even if you don’t agree with the decision.
* Treat members of the council and staff as brothers and sisters in Christ.
* Be familiar with the governing documents of the congregation.
* Be a leadership presence in the congregation.

Council Officers

Council officers, according to **Your Church** constitution and bylaws include a President/Vice-President, Secretary and Treasurer serving as the executive committee as well as congregational council members. All council members should familiarize themselves with the role and expectations of the church officers.

The [*Model Constitution for Congregations*](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary)*, in C11.o1.a.,* [insert link to Your Church constitution] outlines the duties of the officers, including the President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer and shall be specified in the **Your Church** bylaws. The actual duties may vary from congregation to congregation. There are, however, certain tasks which the officers should see are accomplished. The following resources are available concerning Council Officers at <https://www.swpasynod.org/congregations/admin>

Congregation President

* Preside at all meetings of the congregation, executive committee and council.
* May call special meetings of the congregation, executive committee or council.
* Direct meetings according to parliamentary rules of order, keeping meetings running smoothly, speedily and efficiently, assisting in discernment of God’s will.
* Encourage each council member to perform his or her duty according to good order and Christian principles.
* Decide in the event of a long discussion whether the issue should be referred for further study.
* Represent the congregation in matters of business and sign or countersign all legal documents.
* Assist in preparing the agenda for council and congregation meetings.
* Uphold the constitution and bylaws and ensure policies are being followed.
* Write annual report for annual congregational meeting.
* Work with the Secretary, Treasurer and Pastor to complete the Parochial Report with the ELCA.
* Attend and support synod and churchwide activities that would benefit from representation of council members.
* Communicate synod news and promote Mission Support to our synod.
* Assist in solving problem areas as they occur.
* Support and advise council members as needed.
* Be administratively responsible for the operation of all parts of the congregation’s program.
* Try to make sure that each committee and board is functioning properly.
* During a pastoral vacancy, serve as liaison between the congregation and a designated pastor as well as the synod.
* During a pastoral vacancy, work with the synod regarding necessary administrative submissions, such as trend (parochial) reports, etc.
* Recognize and seek synod advice and assistance in managing congregational matters beyond the council’s expertise.
* Ensure congregational participation at synod assemblies.
* Ensure that congregational processes and procedures are documented.

Congregation Vice-President

* Preside at meetings of the congregation, executive committee or council at the request or in the absence of the president.
* Arrange for devotions at meetings.
* Perform the duties of recording secretary in the individual’s absence.
* Actively aid the president in the administration of office.
* Chair the Finance Committee and coordinate the financial affairs of the congregation.
* Ensure that the incorporation of the congregation, tax exemptions, etc. are in good standing.
* Review and ensure property, casualty and liability insurance is in good standing and sufficient for the congregation’s needs.
* Serve as liaison to Property Committee.
* Assume other duties as assigned by the council.

Congregation Secretary

* Keep the minutes of all meetings of the congregation, executive committee and council and be responsible for the distribution and publication of such minutes.
* Be authorized and empowered, in the name of the congregation, to attest instruments that require certified authorized signers and may also be signed by the congregation president or pastor.
* Work with the pastor and congregation’s staff, if any, to ensure the storage and protection of all important documents and papers.
* Make sure that annual reports of the congregation’s corporate status are filed with the appropriate office in your state (if required).
* Work with the treasurer and pastor to ensure timely filing of the congregation’s annual parochial report.
* Sign the letter of call for rostered staff at the time of a call meeting.
* Attest to the synod office that the congregation’s records are up to date and under your control at the time of pastoral transition.
* Submit copies of constitution and bylaw amendments to the synod.
* Prepare an annual list of membership changes.
* Carry out correspondence on behalf of the council and the congregation, as directed.

Further resources are available at <https://www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary>

Download **Recommendations for Congregation Secretaries** document

<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Recommendations_for_Congregation_Secretaries.pdf?_ga=1.63465261.302040046.1401725141>

Congregation Treasurer

* Serve as financial officer of the congregation.
* Attend monthly meetings of the council.
* Provide oversight of the financial secretary duties and processes.
* Be responsible for paying all bills, invoices and charges.
* Perform or oversee all of the bookkeeping functions.
* Prepare the monthly (or quarterly) financial reports for the council.
* File all of the required federal and state tax forms.
* Monitor the cash position of the congregation and report monthly to the Finance Committee chair, council president and pastor.
* Invest available funds as directed.
* Borrow funds as directed by the council.
* Provide the congregation with financial information deemed appropriate by the council.
* Assist in the preparation of the annual budget for the council.
* Maintain, develop and improve the reporting and monitoring techniques used to communicate the financial status of the congregation.
* Prepare the annual report of the financial status of the congregation.
* Assist with closing the books for a yearly audit.

Financial Page for Congregations [https://www.elca.org/Resources/Financial#FinanceC](https://www.elca.org/Resources/Financial%23FinanceC)

Download the Congregational Treasurers’ and Bookkeepers’ Financial and Accounting Guide

<http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Congregational_Treasurers_Financial_And_Accounting_Guide.pdf?_ga=1.167070524.302040046.1401725141>

Congregational Financial Secretary

* Oversee and participate in counting the offerings.
* Oversee and participate in creating and depositing receipts.
* Train individuals who count the offerings.
* Ensure that two non-related people are always present for any counting procedures.
* Report to the treasurer the total offerings each week and any special-purpose breakdowns.
* Oversee recording contributions to the individual contribution records.
* Report on levels of giving to the council and congregation.
* Provide periodic (usually quarterly) and annual statements to the contributors for tax reporting.

How to Read the Treasurer’s Report

This report is offered to show the present financial status of our congregation. It is imperative that all council members review and understand this full report. New members may consider meeting with the congregational treasurer to review the specifics of the report.

**Council Overview Report:**

[sample wording] This report is an overview of present balances by month used for consideration of average monthly budget (C) amount and actual income/expenses (D, E) and cumulative income/expenses (H, J) in accordance with council approved yearly budgeted (C:14) amount. This report keeps council on track for staying within the yearly budget (L:6) by showing positive or negative balances toward the yearly budget amount.

[Insert sample pages of the report used by Your Church with explanations of how to read the report]

**Statement of Assets and Liabilities:**

[Insert sample pages of the Treasurer’s report]

This report shows all present assets and liabilities pertaining to ministry and operations.

**Investments (Lines 9-12):**

Mortgage Fund-An amount of money set aside to pay the mortgage if funds are not available through monthly contributions.

Mission Investment-A ministry of the **Your Church** with faith and finance at its core. A source of financing to **Your Church** congregations and ministries. A vehicle for **Your Church** congregations, ministries, and individuals, to invest in the work of our church. Financial Services for ministries and individuals. Loans for church and ministry building projects, land purchases and refinancing. More information available at www.mif.elca.org

[Insert sample pages of explanation of purpose and intentions of specific funds or debts]

**Statement of Expenditures with Net Income**

Review and discussion of this Treasurer’s Report will be held at each meeting. At times, discussion will question the use of funds from a fund or the transfer of money among funds.

Technology

As a member of the **Your Church** Council, you have access to a Google Drive that serves as the warehouse for information pertaining to *internal* information such as reports, archives, and especially important, “**Council Minutes & Committee Reports**.” The two most pertinent folders are below:

* + New Council Member Information
  + Council Minutes & Committee Reports (and subfolders by month)

To access this information, go to Google Drive (you may have to download the app at https://www.google.com/drive/download/). You must have permission from an administrator to gain this access. If not already granted, please contact the Communication & Technology Committee Admin- [Add contact information]

Each council member serves as liaison to a committee. The committee reports are to be uploaded to the appropriate Committee Reports file for member review prior to the monthly meeting. The upload procedure is accessible at [Insert Your Church access link]

The Council Meeting

The council meets on the [insert Your Church council meeting time] and usually lasts 1-3 hours depending on the agenda.

All members gather having reviewed all of the reports offered on the Google Drive and have prepared any questions or concerns to voice within the meeting.

Each meeting begins with prayer and devotion. Devotion is offered by a volunteer council member.

The agenda is set and the council president moves the meeting through the agenda items beginning with sharing any correspondences received.

Approval of last month’s minutes will be requested.

The secretary documents the meetings minutes throughout the meeting. These will be uploaded soon after the meeting to the Google Drive for your review.

Committee reports are offered. There is no need to report on items that are already within the offered report for that committee. If nothing has occurred within the month for a committee, the member will just say, “Nothing to report.” If there is nothing to add to what has been offered in the printed report, the member may say, “I submitted the report, there is nothing to add.”

At the time of the committee report, anyone with questions or concerns for the committee liaison will be given time to address them.

The pastors share their reports which offer important information often including the forward movement of the congregation, implementation of a new action, or concerns to be addressed.

Personnel, Property, and Communications & Technology will offer their reports. These are usually topics of deeper discussion and impact within the congregation.

President’s Comments

Unfinished Business/New Business

Closing Comments

Devotion for Next Month (volunteer)

Adjournment

Robert’s Rules of Order Cheat Sheet (also in the Google Drive)

The council utilizes Robert’s Rules of Order which is a parliamentary procedure used by organizations to conduct meetings and make decisions as a group. The full document can be accessed in the Your Church Docs Google Drive. Each member of council should be familiar with these rules of order (e. g. making a motion, seconding a motion). Download a full PDF of [Robert Rules of Order for Churches https://www.pastoralcareinc.com/resources/robert-rules-of-order/pastoralcareinc.com](about:blank)

Committees

Each month council members serving as a committee liaison complete and upload a **Your Church Committee Report Form** (available on Your Church Docs on the Google Drive “shared drive”) into the monthly folder within the Council Minutes & Committee Reports folder. Descriptions of each committee is offered on the **Your Church** website.

**Mission and Ministry**

Worship & Music Committee

Christian Education

Stewardship

Fellowship

Youth Ministry

Evangelism

Social Ministry/Health & Wellness

**Resources in Support of Mission and Ministry**

Personnel

Property

Communications and Technology

If you have any questions during the meeting, feel free to ask for clarification or explanation of a term used or a proposal made. Remember to review the report prior to the council meeting so you can ask any pertinent questions.

Appendix A

**[Insert] Your Church** Constitution and Bylaws

Resources:

Evangelical Lutheran Church of America [www.belc.org](http://www.belc.org)

Robert’s Rules of Order <https://robertsrules.org/robertsrules.pdf>

Southwestern Pennsylvania Synod [www.swpasynod.org](http://www.swpasynod.org)

Manual for Congregational Mission Planning (SYNOD) <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5d9505bd02785c6b188bca5f/t/5e540f844bf69a70ae54cac7/1582567301632/Manual+for+Congregational+Mission+Planning.pdf>