

Serving on your Congregation Council – what you can expect and what is expected of you

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:

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.
- 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.

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 of council activities for annual meeting.
- Attend and support synod and churchwide activities that would benefit from representation of council members.
- 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.

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.

Congregation 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.

Additional resources containing position descriptions for council, officers and committee chairs, as well as other volunteer and staff positions, can be found at:

[Recommendations for Congregation Secretaries](#)
[ELCA Financial and Accounting Guide](#)