



HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELCA

To: The Congregation of Holy Cross Lutheran Church

From: Pastor Meredith Bedker Musaus and Pastor Andy Fetters

January 19, 2026

Re: Updated Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church Constitution

The *Model Constitution for Congregations* originally was adopted by the Constituting Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The revisions that will be noted in this memo include amendments approved by the seventeenth Churchwide Assembly in 2025 of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). The *Model Constitution for Congregations*, like the other governing documents of this church, reflects the theology and polity of this church as it organizes itself to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, share the sacraments, reach out to the neighbor with good news, and share the love of God in the world. Each expression of this church—churchwide, synod, and congregation—is held together in a relationship of interdependence that encourages each to respond to its context. These documents also demonstrate our commitment to seeing ourselves with others as part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. As such, the *Model Constitution for Congregations* is deeply rooted in Scripture, the Lutheran Confessions, and the history of this church and its predecessors.

Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church (“Holy Cross”) leadership and staff, under the guidance of the Secretary of the Greater Milwaukee Synod-ELCA council, have been reviewing our Constitution and other documents considering these amendments as noted above. This memo will provide a summary of the changes that were either recommended or required following the Churchwide Assembly as of August 2025.

Holy Cross leadership and staff, under the guidance of the Secretary of the Greater Milwaukee Synod-ELCA Council, have been reviewing our Constitution and By-Laws for needed updates and changes.

The revised Constitution for Holy Cross Evangelical Lutheran Church (“Revised Constitution”) was provided via mailing to the Holy Cross Congregational Council (“Council”) and the Revised Constitution was approved via a unanimous vote of the Council members. The revised constitution will be **voted on by the congregation at our regularly scheduled Annual Meeting on January 25, 2026.**

Summary of Changes to the Constitution:

We have attached a red-lined document that shows all the changes to the Constitution for Holy Cross since its last update in January 2016. The asterisked numbers are required to be included in this church’s constitution by the ELCA. We will focus on some of the more significant changes in this memo and will answer any additional questions at the Annual Meeting on January 25, 2026.

Chapter 3.

NATURE OF THE CHURCH

The changes to Chapter 3 add an affirmative statement that this church confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world. As stated in the introductory paragraph, this language demonstrates our commitment to seeing ourselves with others as part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

In addition, the language is updated to reflect that this church participates in The Lutheran World Federation as a global communion of churches, engaging in faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ and in service for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Chapter 4.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Additional clarifying/more descriptive language is added to affirmatively state that this church will advocate for equity for all people, care for the marginalized, and embrace and welcome racially and ethnically diverse populations standing in solidarity with the poor and oppressed.

Chapter 5.

POWERS OF THE CONGREGATION

Updates the powers of the congregation to add "call a minister of Word and Service and terminate the call of the ministers of Word and Service" formerly known as associates in ministry, deaconesses and diaconal ministers.

Chapter 6.

CHURCH AFFILIATION

Updates the language to reflect new terminology, changing from the "clergy roster" to the Ministers of Word and Sacrament roster. "The congregation agrees to call pastoral leadership from the rosters of the Ministers of the Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ..."

Adds new language to the section governing the ability of the ELCA to terminate its affiliation with this congregation (e.g. congregation takes action to dissolve, congregation ceases to exist, congregation is removed from membership in the ELCA according to the procedures for discipline or in accordance with the ELCA constitution and bylaws). If this happens the Greater Milwaukee Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America takes charge and control of the property, this provision does include an appeal right for this congregation.

This section also has new updates to the process and procedure concerning this congregation's ability to terminate its relationship with the ELCA. It adds additional procedural requirements for this congregation if it seeks to take this action including consultation with the bishop of the synod. This congregation is obligated to comply with certain covenants related to the three expressions of this church.

Chapter 7.

PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

This section provides updates to the language governing the title to property in the case where this congregation is removed from membership in the ELCA according to its procedures for discipline or in the circumstances where this congregation elects to leave the ELCA. It also provides language for the situation where the congregation becomes independent or relates to a non-Lutheran church body. In neither case does title to this congregation's property transfer to the synod.

Chapter 8.

MEMBERS

This section adds a new membership category. Seasonal members- these are voting members of other congregations of this church who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation. The language indicates that they will have limited voting rights in this congregation and specifies the privileges and duties in which they cannot participate.

Chapter 9.

ROSTERED MINISTER

Adds additional duties for the minister of the Word and Sacrament:

- Seek out and encourage qualified persons to prepare of the ministry of the Gospel.
- impart knowledge of this church and its wider ministry through available channels of effective communication
- witness to the Kingdom of God in the community, in the nation, and abroad;
- speak publicly to the world in solidarity with the poor and oppressed, proclaiming God's love for the world, advocating dignity, justice, equity for all people, working for peace and reconciliation among the nations, caring for the marginalized, and embracing and welcoming racially and ethnically diverse populations.

Adds additional duties for each pastor with a congregational call.

- with the council, administer discipline;
- endeavor to increase the support given by the congregation to the work of the churchwide organization and of the (Greater Milwaukee Synod) ; and
- encourage adherence to covenantal relationship with this church as expressed in the *Constitutions, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*.

Adds additional clarifying language and processes to be followed for termination of the mutual arrangement between a minister of the Word and Sacrament and this congregation. Provides additional process guidance when allegations of disability or incapacity or ineffective conduct come to the attention of the bishop of the synod. It also outlines the specific process to be followed where there is not assent (agreement) by either party

with the recommendations of the bishop's committee concerning the pastor's call and this congregation desires to dismiss the pastor.

Adds language as to how this congregation can retain the services of a temporary pastor via a contract in a form approved by the synod.

Adds a new process and procedure for calling a deacon. The deacon can be called only if the deacon is a member of the roster of Ministers of the Word and Service of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or a candidate for the same. The deacon must meet the requirements for a Deacon in the ELCA. It also provides a termination process for the deacon.

Chapter 10.

CONGREGATION MEETING

Meetings may be held by remote communication, including electronically or by telephone conference if there is the opportunity for simultaneous communication.

Chapter 11.

OFFICERS

The president, vice president, treasurer and secretary shall be selected from the elected membership of the Congregation Council. If the treasurer is not selected from the elected membership of the Council, the treasurer will have voice but no vote at Council meetings.

Chapter 12.

CONGREGATION COUNCIL

Adds additional details around the voting membership of the Congregation Council. In addition the language outlines terms and sets the maximum number of terms served at three. Meetings may be held by remote communication, including electronically or by telephone conference if there is the opportunity for simultaneous communication.

Chapter 13.

CONGREGATION COMMITTEES

Updates to some committee appointments, processes and terms.

Chapter 14.

ORGANIZATIONS WITHIN THE CONGREGATION

No changes

Chapter 15.

DISCIPLINE OF MEMBERS AND ADJUDICATION

Changes to the section on adjudication which involves a disagreement between or among factions within this congregation that cannot be resolved by the parties, members of this congregation can petition the synodical bishop for consultation. A Consultation Committee of the synod can be utilized to find an appropriate solution.

Chapter 16.

AMENDMENTS

An updated section on amendments is added to the constitution. It indicates that those sections not required, in accord with the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, may be amended following the stated process. Amendments under this section are approved by a majority vote of those voting members present.

Chapter 17.

BYLAWS

A new section provides that the congregation may adopt bylaws. They must not conflict with this constitution. This section outlines the process and procedures for adopting or amending bylaws.

Chapter 18.

CONTINUING RESOLUTIONS

This section outlines the enacting continuing resolutions. These continuing resolutions must not conflict with the constitution or bylaws of this congregation.

Chapter 19.

INDEMNIFICATION

No changes

Chapter 20.

PARISH AUTHORIZATION

This provides updates and additional processes and procedures to be utilized upon creating a parish relationship between one or more congregations. Currently Holy Cross is not part of a parish arrangement.