

Living Into the Future Together: Renewing the Ecology of the ELCA (LIFT)

A Request for Scenarios for Our Future

The ELCA's task force on renewing the church, the LIFT Task Force, is asking this church's members and friends to visualize the future of the ELCA. Specifically, the LIFT Task Force is asking for help in creating a set of scenarios that describe what might be, what could be, what should be. We want to know your dreams for our whole church, for all the ways the members of the ELCA can express the life of Christ within them.

Imagine how the ELCA's mission will be accomplished in the next 5-10 years. Three scenarios are proposed as possible starting points. You can respond to one or all of them, or you can make up something of your own. You may find yourself imagining the ELCA changing only a little bit, or changing a great deal. Background material that may be helpful includes recent research, available on the LIFT Website, about what members of the ELCA believe and how they behave. The ELCA Website is also a good source for information about current patterns of life, mission, and organization.

This is much like the work the LIFT Task Force itself is doing. The task force is looking for your ideas to help shape its own.

1. What should be the mission objectives of our church?
2. What are necessary structural components?
3. How should the parts of our church relate to each other and what kind of mutual accountability should there be?
4. How should decisions be made and how could money be shared?

With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, tell us what you imagine. Think outside the box, but base it on real world experience. Describe changing our church so that we remain faithful servants of God as the world changes around us. Please be as specific as possible. There is no prescribed length or format for responses. The LIFT Task Force will profit from some common information in any response that you choose to make, no matter where you start. Try to help us know what you think. Responses would be most helpful if received by September 10. Identification and contact information for the author is helpful but not required.

The members of the LIFT Task Force believe that the Holy Spirit will work through the imaginations of many people to show us ways that the ELCA's mission will be accomplished in the next 5-10 years.

Three Scenarios

One possibility:

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America does its work in three expressions – congregations, synods, and churchwide organization. The ELCA presently has 4.5 million members and 10,000 congregations. There are 65 ELCA synods. The ELCA has a churchwide organization that accomplishes its ministry through a system of programmatic units with advisory committees. There are 8 seminaries, 26 colleges and universities, and other agencies and institutions. This structure was originally designed to create organizations of interdependent responsibility and accountability.

Write a scenario based on what you know about the ELCA and what you see in the world around you. Which ministries and activities of the ELCA need to be strengthened and renewed? What could we let go? How could our life be energized and integrated for present tasks and for what you think lies ahead? How could the ELCA be reshaped to be more effective in its work in the future?

Another possibility:

The ELCA accomplishes God's mission primarily by being centered in partnerships at all levels. Members, congregations, synods, and the churchwide organization do their work through partnerships with each other, and with social ministry organizations, educational institutions like colleges and seminaries, and with ecumenical partners and companion churches in this country and all over the world.

Write a scenario that gives major importance to all the partnerships that the ELCA enjoys. What faithful and efficient ways could the work of the gospel be divided and shared? What kind of framework should hold ministries and missions together? What would be the ELCA's unique role among the layers of partnership and sharing that you see in the world around you today? What form and structure would sustain a church body that thought of itself primarily as partnerships?

A third possibility:

Share a scenario that starts with Christian people and their relationships. What sort of networks and structures should hold the members of the ELCA together? How could these networks be strengthened and made more resilient? What institutions and forms of community life does the ELCA need in its networks? What covenants or forms of accountability and support do the ELCA networks require?

These possibilities are proposed to inspire your thinking, not limit it. We seek scenarios that grow from your experience and your faith journey. We want to know what you think the ELCA should look like, should do, and should stand for. We want to know what you think the Holy Spirit is calling us to now, and in the future as you imagine it.

May God's will for us be revealed as we pray and imagine together. May the Son of God be glorified as we share our hopes and dreams with one another for the sake of the world.

In Jesus Christ,
The Members of the LIFT Task Force.