

**Scenario Responses**  
**Compiled by Research and Evaluation**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

The responses are presented following the order of these questions.

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?
5. What do you hope that the LIFT Task Force itself will do or accomplish?
6. A description or scenario.

## **Respondent 1**

1. Reaching across faith race, class, gender, sexual preference, age, etc. lines to share the Good News of God's grace in Christ by living the Gospel and using words when necessary to tell our own stories.
2. Churchwide is necessary as a clearinghouse along with synods to disseminate information and offer assistance. I am wondering about the usefulness of conferences in their present form. Seems like an unnecessary layer. If there was more direct contact between the wider church and congregations, I believe it would be healthier for the ELCA as a whole.
3. Not "top down" but a sense of partnership and of mutual ministry. I would like to see covenants on all sides in which the responsibility of each to the other is spelled out. Since I believe one of the problems is that many congregations don't look outside their own walls this would be crucial for them. Then they would have more of a stake and understanding in the larger church and expectations on all sides would be known.
4. I would like to see groups made up of a cross section of members, clergy, and laity from all of the expressions; national, synodical, and congregational.
5. Now that we are emerging from CWA 2009 and those who are leaving are in the process of doing that, I would like to see the LIFT Task Force become the visionary force behind setting our mission and ministry for the future.
6. My scenario is that we will have a bishop and churchwide staff and synods with bishops and staffs, but I see them much more as a clearinghouse and support for the congregations because it's all about congregations. My experience is that all the layers actually get in the way of communication and ministry. I would do away with conference councils. I believe they are either inactive or a place for those who want control, to have thing run "their way", to have and misuse that power. The Synod would become the center for planning events throughout its synod with various clergy and laity from throughout serving on adult education, children's education, congregational caring, and mission evangelism. This would build connections and strengthen relationships with congregations having much more of a connection with the synod and the national church office.

**Respondent 2**

1. Equip us for forming servant leadership schools and coops around needed services and even some pleasures, i.e. coffee shops.
2. We need leaders who know their values and can express them plus get others to know and express their values. Then, any structure can work.
3. Where there is energy and where energy is in proximity to itself.
4. Depends on the level of anxiety or conflict.
5. Get at what are our values.
6. I see a bicycle coop that repairs and sells bicycles as a storefront. Adjacent to it is a coffee shop whose tables can be used from time to time as kaleidoscope Bible study places and theology on tap. Above are classrooms for anything up to seminary level theological study for anyone who wants to learn and a library to match on the 3rd floor is a multi functional room to use for corporate worship or as the community saw fit.

### **Respondent 3**

1. Hunger, poverty, reaching out to youth in an effective way, inclusivity, pastoral support, biblical literacy.
2. Synodical task-forces made of laity and clergy.
3. I think there needs to be a stronger relationship between congregations and churchwide. There are too many gaps leading to cynicism and mistrust on the side of laity and clergy alike. Direct lines of communication are essential, i.e. town hall meetings and opportunities for feedback are critical.
4. I think the system we have works; however, I think it needs to be fine-tuned. I would like to see more accountability on the side of our synodical bishops. I would like to see more areas of support for ministry given by our synods; especially in difficult situations. As far as money goes, congregations in the ELCA should be held accountable for supporting their synodical ministries and also the national church.
5. I hope that this task force will continue to be in dialogue with churches; that they will go as far as making personal appearances in congregations and explain the reasoning behind what they are doing so that people in the pews know what's going on, and feel like they have a stake in things. Because that's really what it's all about.

#### **Respondent 4**

1. Spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ where all are not only welcomed but embraced. Where judgment is a personal sin and not the mission of the hierarchy.
2. The more structure the more it seems top down. But for unity some structure is needed.
3. Accountability at all levels is critical. Studies that are needed must be completed. Communication is critical. Perhaps *The Lutheran* should be a more official voice of the ELCA and sent free of charge to all members as a way of getting the word out.
4. Jointly.
5. A miracle. Have all in agreement with ELCA changes and agree to disagree. As said, a miracle.
6. I'm relatively new to church structure outside of the individual congregation so I don't know too much on how things really work, but I'm learning. I do appreciate that decisions are made by the members, but not all members know that or recognize that the voting members represent ONLY themselves. Is the structure wrong or has there been a lack of communicating when issues arise. Our congregation is Reconciling in Christ but very little was said or discussed regarding the Sexuality Study approved in 2009. That needs to change.

**Respondent 5**

1. First and foremost the proclamation of the gospel here in the U.S. where we are placed.
2. I think that congregations, synods, and churchwide are necessary. I think that regions and conferences within synods are not. Regional clusters for stewardship and evangelism could be accomplished without regions.
3. The heart of the church is congregations. Synods and churchwide expressions serve as extensions of congregations and to facilitate the mission of congregations.
4. Major decisions and changes need to be made at the most basic levels or require ratification of congregations. Decisions and money should flow up to the churchwide rather than being dictated by churchwide down to synods and congregations.
5. Reduce the overhead of the church and move people and money into local mission.

**Respondent 6**

1. If you love Jesus, feed His sheep. I think the mission of the ELCA should focus on helping those who do not have the resources, advantages, and opportunities of northern European whites.
2. The three components listed are all necessary but there needs to be much greater communication and exchange of information. The genetics task force is an example of something that is having virtually no impact on the congregations. Fix that.
3. I am on the ELCA Church Council and have been on a synod executive committee and a congregational council treasurer. I estimate that 90 percent of the exchange of information between them has been at my initiative. I also believe that many pastors are so involved with their congregation that they have no interest or time for the other components.
4. Churchwide assemblies are expensive and time consuming and there should be other ways to get the pulse of the congregations and communicate how the ELCA functions.
5. At least get some energy toward greater exchanges of information and accomplishments.
6. Somehow we need to find a way to make being Lutheran more than being northern European white. My home church has had an exchange of youth groups with a Mong community. The youth went to a ghetto too. I see a focus on youth that brings in their friends.

### **Respondent 7**

1. Congregations - missional congregations, new congregations, new campuses, and workers. Offering whatever support, be it financial or other, to the congregations.
2. Rank in importance: 1. Congregational support - financially, ministerially, musically. 2. Synod support - offering help and partnership for congregations. 3. ELCA support - prayers and mission funding support if necessary
3. We need very strong communication between these three bodies. However, what we need to develop is a TRUST between bodies. If one body needs help, the other two should be equipped to support.
4. From a missional standpoint, I believe congregations should take the lead in this category. Money for missions should be a congregational impetus with synod and churchwide offering help as needed.
5. Not just be a Web site with a mailing list. I hope and pray LIFT will actually be able to implement changes and growth in the ELCA.
6. Let's say my church, Grace, decides to start a second congregation, a satellite campus in another part of town possibly near a housing/business development. Grace would then use its own pastor through an expansion of its staff and a musical director as the foundations for a new mission. Grace would offer the financial support, location support, and whatever the foundations need. ESPECIALLY emotional support! The synod should help in any research and offer support when asked. The ELCA can offer support with prayers, connections with other new missions in the church, like a support network specifically for missions that are less than five years old.

**Respondent 8**

1. To faithfully seek to know and do God's will for the people of God's good creation.
2. Congregations, regions, national. Local and synod-like organizations should form naturally on the basis of need and opportunity. Regional offices and the national church should encourage and support these efforts.
3. The national church should have oversight of common concerns - education, certification, national and international ministries, etc.
4. Decisions should be made much as they are with lots of conversation, prayer, deliberation, and then action by those empowered to take action.
5. Anything is better than nothing. The world is changing. People are changing. To date the church has resisted or not embraced change in spite of its prayers that the Holy Spirit move and inspire us to minister effectively in a changing world.

## Respondent 9

1. We should be focused on loving God with all that we are and loving our neighbors as ourselves. This means that we are fearlessly spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ and imitating His life-giving ways in sharing our privileges.
2. We need local faith communities to be the immediate discipling bodies and evangelistic workers. We need regional specialists who can support the work of the faith communities through networking education and mission development. We need national specialists who can leverage the local faith communities to address international partnerships and relief work, emergency disaster response, publishing ministries, and training of missional leaders.
3. We need to do community discernment on all levels depending on the type of decisions that need to be made. Regional and national specialists should be set apart from those across the country who have demonstrated gifts for the specialized ministry they do. We need to stay connected on all levels and can via the multiple virtual avenues technology has put at our disposal. Every level of specialists needs a team of advisors who have been set aside to provide accountability. We also need to be open to leaders who hold us accountable as prophets.
4. Our decisions need to be made using the best wisdom we have to resource community discernment. Delegates to assemblies should be appointed based on their gifts of wisdom and discernment and be able to carry a sense of the most faithful discernment of the community from which they have been sent. This process should not be one that is allowed to be breached by actions like the one undertaken at the 2007 Assembly when protesters hijacked the proceedings. It should also not be a process where special interest groups from any side of a decision are allowed to host advocacy training sessions and have "headquarters" at assemblies. This is not a loving way of entering into a time of discernment. This is taking some of the worst of secular governance and letting it be our model. Instead, we should trust those who have been sent to these gatherings to prayerfully use their gifts to make the best decisions they can so help them God. For what it is worth, Robert's Rules may need to be exchanged for a model closer to consensus to make this happen.
5. I hope that the LIFT Task Force will take the time it needs to gather a sense of our national gathering of faith communities in the ELCA and make some bold statements to us. Then we, as faith communities, need to be able to respond in some way. We need a call to action with meat behind it. No just a random statement like "1000 evangelists" and then no mechanism to follow up on it. Trust that God will issue a word to you in your discernment and live boldly into that word.
6. In ten years, the ELCA could be focused on equipping and strengthening many small local faith communities through digital networking and education. Community leadership would be shared between those in the community whose gifts set them apart for specific tasks for a specific time. These communities would lift up members who should be educated and disciplined for specialized ministries like evangelism, discernment, organizing, educating, and pastoring. We consecrate those who complete that formation process and call them into their roles. There would no longer be a distinction between ordained and lay Christians. Instead there would be faithful followers serving the Body of Christ as they have been gifted to serve. As part of this discernment and discipling process the daily life of the local faith communities would be about steeping themselves in the Word through sacraments, worship, service, education, and prayer. This would include all ages encountering the Word as they are able. This practice of daily discipleship would allow the faith communities to help each

member discern his/her own callings that build up the Kingdom of God. Such a community holds each other accountable to living in the Word by those standards our Lord has given us in the Greatest Commandments and elucidated in the Ten Commandments. This community speaks difficult words in love to each other. In certain tasks, the Body of Christ can act better on regional and national levels. For these tasks, members of the faith communities across the region and nation will be lifted up to serve based upon their gifts. Such tasks would include the dissemination of educational resources, organization of large scale compassionate action, relationship building with international partners, and planning for gatherings of the larger Body. Regional and national specialists would also organize discipling communities to train specialized ministers who have been lifted up from their local and regional communities. Regional and national specialists would also work to network the local faith communities to share material and fiscal resources to build up those who have little, especially those communities who are struggling to begin or who may have had great sadness from economic or natural disasters. This group will be honest enough with one another to say to each other, "Your concern is too much for us today. Out of love for our weakest members we must wait until tomorrow." At the same time, they will be strong enough in the Spirit to discern when to be Christ means to repent and begin anew despite unpopularity of the confession. We also can say to one another: "Go with Godspeed" if another community calls to them without malice or torture only the grief of loss.

## Respondent 10

1. And He said to them, AGo into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.@ Mark 16:15 . Or to say it another way, as it says on seminary professor Tim Wengert=s business card, APreach the damn Gospel.@ It is about following Jesus doing God=s work!
2. I think that the structure of this denomination has some positive aspects that need some tweaking. It is my belief that with today=s technology we could reduce the total number of synods and make better use of our nine regions by beefing up resource staff at that level. Regional support for additional staffing that could support both the churchwide body and synods as needed. Example: additional staff for disaster response/hunger, candidacy, youth and communications Two of these seem to be areas that some synods are having difficulty finding resources to support, youth and communications. These two areas are the future and how we tell the story. As we continue to cut staff in Chicago these positions would be able to assist in the vital areas at the time of the Youth Gathering, the largest gathering of Lutherans in one place, and allow for better coverage of news and events. Adding support closer to where the churches are will give the denomination a better feel for the needs of its synods and congregations.
3. While the structure of three equal bodies is great in theory it presents a big problem of accountability. Churchwide needs money and sets some ideal situations. Local congregations can choose to participate or not. Synods have expectations placed on them from churchwide and the local congregations. One area that is an issue is that local congregations can just say . . . Awe aren=t going to give@ whatever the reason and there isn=t a whole lot a synod can do about it. Yet, the synod still is still expected to meet the financial needs of churchwide. It seems most, if not all of the power, lies at the local church with no consequences when they don=t participate.
4. As to how money should be shared, I will start with a question for you. What percentage of mission support do other denominations send to their churchwide bodies? I don=t recall the other protestant denominations expecting 50 percent of income to the judicatories to be forwarded up the line. In the Episcopal Church, PC (USA), and the UMC the judicatories send about 20 to 30 percent to their churchwide bodies. How can synods function sending 50 percent to support churchwide and still serve congregations when they are forced to cut the staff in half to make their budget?
5. It is my sincere hope and prayer that there will be a vital and capable churchwide staff left after layoffs that have already taken place and will likely take place again in the near future. My fear is by the time the bureaucracy moves we will have had to cut the talented churchwide staff down to a point where it will take years to replace the missing talents.

6. Which ministries and activities of the ELCA need to be strengthened and renewed? Key areas for the future of the church are youth, Book of Faith, mission, and communications. There will be no ELCA without future generations and getting younger. As Bishop Hanson referred to in the ELCA Identity 2006 Synod Assembly Video by 2046 the ELCA could statistically age itself out of existence. He and I agree that will not be likely. However, the raw numbers and cold statistics need to be a wake up call. We do very well at putting on the Youth Gathering. I had a youth from my congregation six years ago attend a Gathering. When I asked her thoughts on the experience she told me Ait was amazing yet I will never get to experience that style of worship in any Lutheran congregation I know of.@ She was fed an amazingly prepared meal of worship and music but she believes and knows in her heart that she will never get that from our denomination. She now attends a very conservative non-denominational church and is being fed with music and a worship style that suits her. Yet many synods and churches eliminate this area as a paid position when money gets short. More on this in a moment. Without knowledge of the Bible how can it be understood? To me this means we must be fluent in the Bible in order to discuss its meaning. The Book of Faith initiative is a good start and it needs continued and expanded support. I have no idea who my synod=s Book of Faith coordinator is. I pay attention and have asked and can=t find out. How can that be? The Mission Interpreter movement is great and needs to be supported expanded and given measurable goals. Now for communications, this is another area that when money gets short is eliminated. How can a consistent message about the amazing mission work of this denomination get out to the public and how can a positive and consistent brand be maintained when there isn=t a well trained, paid, and accountable person in each synod and region? Bringing back in youth. To have a consistent message and to have knowledgeable people ready to step in and help at events I have an outside of the box thought. What if the churchwide supported synods for these positions similar to the way they do with the Director of Evangelical Mission position? If churchwide would give say eight hours a week to each synod and a full time position for each region for each of these positions churchwide would then have a trained pool to draw on for events like the Youth Gathering or communications for events like the Hunger Gathering, WELCA, etc. The communications aspect would also boost the number of reporters for the Lutheran and LivingLutheran.com. What could we let go? Political positions! II Corinthians 5:20 says ASo we are Christ=s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us.@ It doesn=t say so the government is Christ=s ambassador.