

Resolution 22.01

Reviewing On Leave from Call Removal Process

Whereas, people in the United States increasingly consider themselves not religious, spiritual but not religious, atheist, agnostic, or another variation of unchurched or dechurched and reaching them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ requires adjusting expectations and actions, and

Whereas, the nature of worship and church community is changing, requiring creativity, innovation, and flexibility, and

Whereas, congregations are exploring alternatives to one or more full-time clergy on staff (i.e. part-time ministry, multi-point parishes, contracts), and

Whereas, multi-vocational ministry and unpaid ministry are increasingly encouraged for consideration by synod leadership and seminaries, and

Whereas, individuals, congregations, synods, and the ELCA as a whole invest a great deal of time, money, and energy into training rostered ministers, and

Whereas, ELCA Churchwide and many ELCA synods have been expressing concerns about a clergy shortage for 20+ years, and

Whereas, many ELCA synods experience a shortage of interim/transition/bridge ministers and supply preachers, and

Whereas, synods and synod bishops handle interim/transition clergy calls, specialized ministry calls, calls for deacons, and On Leave from Call status inconsistently, and

Whereas, some rostered ministers experience toxic and/or abusive calls, which may require an extended time before being able to resume called ministry, and

Whereas, deacons in general and BIPOC, LGBTQIA+2S, differently abled, and/or female rostered ministers disproportionately experience extended time in On Leave from Call status, and

Whereas, removal from the roster due to exceeding On Leave from Call status, missing deadlines, or unclear communication is not uncommon, even when rostered leaders actively maintain a Rostered Minister Profile in the ELCA mobility system and/or are serving as an interim/transition/bridge or other minister, and

Whereas, those removed from the roster by exceeding the On Leave from Call time limits have no way to effectively challenge their removal; therefore, be it

Resolved, that the 2022 Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly memorialize the 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to ask the Church Council to suspend removal from the roster due to anything other than resignation or formal disciplinary reasons (i.e. no removal for exceeding maximum time periods for On Leave from Call status, serving in ministry positions that do not offer a formal Letter of Call, or missing communication deadlines), and be it further

Resolved, that the 2022 Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly memorialize the 2022 Churchwide Assembly to ask the Church Council to create a task force to establish guidelines for the consistent practices of handling interim/transition/bridge calls, specialized ministry calls, other non-parish based or innovative calls (with increased attention to calls for deacons), On Leave from Call status, removal from call protocols, removal from roster protocols, and communication protocols, and be it further

Resolved, that this task force propose a process for the clergy to challenge their removal from call and/or roster outside of the synod involved, and be it further

Resolved, that this task force include members who are currently (or have recently been) involved in specialized ministries (interim/transition ministry, campus ministry, outdoor ministry, college or seminary professors, chaplains of all sorts, etc.), as well as those currently On Leave from Call for a variety of reasons (family, personal, disability, between-calls, study, etc.), and to include a minimum of two deacons, and be it further

Resolved, that 2022 Southwestern Minnesota Synod Assembly memorialize the 2022 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA to present a report and recommendation for necessary policy and bylaw at the 2025 Churchwide Assembly.

Submitted by Pastor Kelly France, Circle of Faith Parish, Welcome, Minnesota.

Passed by the Watonwan River Conference Assembly on February 27, 2022

Reviewed and revised by the Resolution Committee March 21, 2022.

Presented by the Resolutions Committee with no recommendation.