

Recommended Changes to the Synod Governing Documents Pertaining to the Representation of Voting Members at Synod Assembly

Background and Context

The ELCA's representational principles for the legal composition of a Synod Assembly's voting members have recently been a point of emphasis from the Office of the Secretary. In many synods, including the Greater Milwaukee Synod, Synod Assemblies find it challenging to meet the constitutional requirement that "at least 60% of the voting membership shall be composed of laypersons" (†S7.21.).

The Greater Milwaukee Synod's governing documents, as they currently exist, combined with the increasing status of retired rostered ministers in our synod, make it exceedingly difficult to hold a Synod Assembly that meets the legal standards of 60% lay voting members.

- As of March 1, 2022, the GMS has 155 rostered ministers on the active roster.
- As of March 1, 2022, the GMS has 155 rostered ministers on the retired roster.
- As it currently stands, per our constitution and bylaws, all 310 of these rostered ministers are automatically counted toward the 40% total as voting members, whether or not they attend the assembly.
- In order to reach the 60% standard for lay voting members with 310 rostered ministers, there must be at least **465** laypersons eligible to register as Voting Members at this year's Synod Assembly.
 - To reach this total, the Synod Council was required to adopt a continuing resolution that allowed each congregation to elect a "bonus" voting member in order to ensure 60% lay participation, keeping the numbers in line.
- The trends and forecasts suggest the number of retired rostered ministers will increase.

It is of note that at earlier Synod Assemblies, previous changes to these bylaws were proposed, but no changes were adopted.

In response to this issue, The Synod Council Executive Committee engaged in research around the practices of other synods to discern the best path forward to resolve this issue while maintaining voice and vote for retired rostered ministers across this synod.

The following amendments were recommended for adoption by the Synod Assembly by the Synod Council at its 17 March 2022 meeting.

- †S7.21. The membership of the Synod Assembly, of which at least 60% of the voting membership shall be composed of laypersons, shall be constituted as follows:
- a. All ministers of Word and Sacrament under call on the roster of this synod in attendance at the Synod Assembly shall be voting members.

- b. All ministers of Word and Service, under call, on the roster of this synod shall be voting members in the Synod Assembly.
- c. A minimum of one lay member elected by each congregation with fewer than 175 baptized members and a minimum of two lay members elected by each congregation with 175 or more baptized members related to this synod, typically one of whom shall be a man and one of whom shall be a woman, shall be voting members. The Synod Council shall establish a formula to provide additional lay representation from congregations on the basis of number of baptized members in the congregation. The Synod Council shall seek to ensure that at least 45 percent of the lay members of the assembly shall be women and 45 percent shall be men.
- d. Voting membership shall include the officers of this synod.

S7.22.01. All rostered ministers ordained ministers, associates in ministry, deaconesses, and diaconal ministers who are retired, on leave from call, or designated as disabled, and whose names appear on the rosters of this synod, shall be voting members of the Synod Assembly.

Comment: *This amendment addresses the primary issue at hand. Removing all retired rostered ministers from automatically serving as voting members allows the percentages of laypeople and rostered ministers to remain in 60/40 balance without further need to adjust the number of lay voting members from congregations. Research reveals that most synods do not grant automatic voice and vote to all retired rostered ministers.*

Yet, new bylaws must address how retired rostered ministers are represented at the Assembly.

S7.22.02. Retired ministers of Word and Sacrament on the synod roster formally serving in transitional ministries in congregations of the synod shall be voting members of the Synod Assembly.

Comment: *This bylaw gives further specificity to allow retired rostered ministers actively serving in congregations, but not under call, automatic voice and vote at Assembly. This provision is similar to language in the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin.*
An increasing number of retired rostered ministers are not under call, but under contract as transitional pastors, bridge pastors, or pastoral care providers. These contracts are often facilitated in the mobility process and are usually on file with the Synod Office.

S7.22.03. Retired ministers in this synod shall elect additional voting members from their roster to the Synod Assembly. The number of retired rostered ministers serving as voting members, including those under S7.22.02., shall not exceed more than fifteen (15) percent of the retired roster; all other retired ministers rostered in this synod shall be advisory members to the Synod Assembly, with voice, but not vote.

Comment: This bylaw institutes a practice similar to many synods across the ELCA, whereby retired rostered ministers would elect a percentage of their roster to have both voice and vote at the Synod Assembly. The Synod Council discerned 15% as a fair total based on average Synod Assembly attendance of retired rostered ministers over the past 5 years. This is a higher percentage than most other synods in the region. The Bishop and Synod Staff are confident that the election process could take place via email and, if necessary, the retired ministry lunch meeting will be used to caucus and select voting members for Synod Assembly

It is of note that all retired ministers are still welcome to attend Synod Assembly with voice, but not vote, at a discounted registration rate.

~~**S7.21.A22.** All congregations may add one voting member to the number allotted in S7.21.A18. to assure 60% of voting members are laypersons. This is in addition to any youth or young adult voting members added under S7.21.B18.~~