

Dear ELCA Church Council,

As the leaders of the ELCA seminaries, we are writing in response to the draft of *Trustworthy Servants of the People of God*. We wish to request that the ELCA Church Council defer any action on the draft document until at least its next meeting in order to afford time for wider participation in developing the document. The focus for our request relates to the process of drafting, which now seems inappropriately narrow and unduly rushed. We name three particular concerns.

1. Only members of the Conference of Bishops have been involved in the drafting of the most recent draft. While synods and their bishops are certainly key partners in the discernment and candidacy processes, at the formal level of ELCA governing documents they are not the only partners. The group of the seven ELCA seminary leaders was not as a whole invited into the process, even though we participated in part of the Conference of Bishops meeting where the Pastoral Message and draft document were approved. At a basic level, then, full partnership among candidacy partners was not honored.
2. This narrowing also excluded other voices that could have enriched the process. As the *Pastoral Message* indicates, the misuse of *Vision and Expectations* “has disproportionately been borne by those who have been historically marginalized or excluded from leadership in the church because of their gender, sexuality, race, or status.” Yet these same persons were to our knowledge never widely consulted in the drafting, which only reinforces earlier harm and signals that their concerns still do not matter. For example, Extraordinary Lutheran Ministries offered at several points to participate in the process but was not included, nor were the perspectives of other current candidates or rostered ministers fully invited. It is troubling that a draft document intended to redress an old wound may now create renewed harm and deeper alienation.
3. The period for public comment was unduly brief for so significant a topic. The *Pastoral Message* was posted after the Conference of Bishops concluded on 4 March, followed a few days later by the draft document. The deadline for comments was 18 March, which meant that affected parties had less than two weeks for response. The pace of this response period sends entirely the wrong message about our mutual conversation on important matters – especially when the ELCA website notes that other parties (e.g., the Domestic Mission staff and the Conference of Bishops) evidently had considerable time to present and revise earlier drafts. Rushing the comment period now in order simply to meet a deadline for the upcoming Church Council meeting conveys an artificial urgency to conclude this important process.

It is still within your power to slow down the timeline, involve a wider range of voices and stakeholders, and thus generate a wise and more widely-affirmed outcome. For these reasons, we implore you to defer Church Council action. May God bless you as you deliberate the course of action you take on behalf of our whole church.

Sincerely,

Richard Green, United Lutheran Seminary

Kathryn Kleinhans, Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University

Louise Johnson, Wartburg Theological Seminary

James Nieman, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

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