

## **Why the proposed updates to Calvary's Constitution?**

In the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, 60% of Lutheran churches have fewer than 100 people in worship each week. 30% fewer than 50. Attendance in the ELCA has declined by more than 30% since 2003. Today, 85% of US churches are either declining or plateauing.

By contrast, Calvary is a vibrant congregation that is resisting that trend and growing! Calvary is among the top 5% of churches in the country in worship attendance. Our weekly worship attendance has grown from around 400 just a few years ago to well over 700 today. We now have four distinct worship opportunities each week. Sunday mornings at 8:30 we continue our commitment to a traditional style of worship where we consistently average 175 people in worship. At 10:45, we are bombarded by families and kids eager for an informal style of worship – 275 people worshipped at 10:45 last week alone. Wednesday nights we average 200 in worship as the building is packed with a crowd of primarily middle school and high school students and their families who gather in the sanctuary for a modern worship experience, and Saturday night another faithful 100 gather for an informal, mellow worship experience. And that's not to mention "Calvary at the Lake" that engages up to 600 a weekend – as it did this past 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend.

In addition, Connect Groups are engaging more people than we have ever had in small groups where nearly 200 people are growing deeper in relationship to one another and to God. There are circles and service groups, Bible studies and countless worship volunteers. We have partnerships with Backpack Attack, the Food Shelf at the high school, and Lutheran World Relief, that engage our entire congregation in service. The Faith for Life Speakers series bring nationally recognized speakers like Nadia Bolz-Weber here to Alexandria (900 people came to hear Nadia). Most sessions of our preschool are at maximum capacity. Calvary is constantly playing host to community groups like Narcotics Anonymous, a free tax clinic, and the blood mobile. To meet all this need, our staff has increased to 24 members.

**Calvary has quickly become a complex organization. And, to lead this church, we want to foster a more deeply committed council to meet this growing complexity.**

To this end, the church council took the past year to study our board structure and best practices. We have researched current trends in church leadership, consulted other churches and the ELCA. Over the year we have made a number of observations:

- Much has changed in our church and in our culture since our constitution was put together, even in the last 25 years:
  - Families have increasingly busy lives with demands that put stress on the work/family balance, from student activities to demands of our modern work life.
  - Empty nesters and retirees are more mobile than ever, and because of this they are also busier than ever.
  - We see the results of these two observations in national church trends today: Whereas the average engaged member of a church used to consider "faithful attendance" attending 4 times per month, today "faithful attendance" looks more like 1 or 2 times per month, at most.
  - We also experience this trend in attendance at board and committee meetings.

**While we are experiencing these trends, which are not unique to our community, Calvary continues to grow in size and complexity – which, again, requires deeper levels of more highly committed leadership.**

To meet the need for deeper and more highly committed leadership, we researched church governance models, sought legal advice and are making the following recommendations that we believe will give us deeper and higher level of commitment in our leadership:

- To ensure this leadership, we propose a reduction in term length for council members from 3 years to one year, thus allowing each member of the council to recommit or step away at the end of each year of service if their life situation changes. Members can recommit up to 6 years, which is our current limit. (Amendment #4)
- As we grow in complexity, consistency in senior elected lay leadership is also critical to meet the depth and complexity of our organization. We believe a president should be allowed to serve one additional year – changing the term limit from 2 to 3 years consecutively. (Amendment #2)
- To allow young adults with children, empty nesters and retirees the opportunity to make the commitment to serve on council: We are inviting the congregation to allow electronic communication for council meetings, allowing members to participate even though they may be away on a business trip, wintering in Arizona or taking care of grandkids in Minneapolis. (Amendment #6)
- Again, to meet the reality of busy schedules, we are recommending the constitution leave open the possibility of quarterly retreats – rather than rushed 1-1 ½ hr meetings once a month that don't leave time for the depth needed due to time constraints. At a minimum, the council would meet quarterly. We imagine the council engaging in quality retreats – for an entire day or even two - at which time we can delve deeper into the complex issues of our organization. This would allow the council to actually spend more time together in a way that better meets with busy demands of families. We again believe this will increase the likelihood that those who previously couldn't serve may have the opportunity. (Amendment #5)
- One of the other things we found in our research parallels a struggle we have experienced. Due to the complexity of our church, we have found that the Executive Council has functioned more and more as a discernment body, and the council functions more as an approval or dissent body, which is less than ideal, but necessary due to the constraints of our group size. The proposed Amendment #3 will virtually eliminate the need for a separate Executive Council, giving everyone who serves full responsibility to make decisions and be accountable for them. We found that 60% of nonprofit and church boards are 8-11 members in size. Different than even 25 years ago, nonprofit boards rarely have full attendance when they have over 12 board members. Because of time restraints in today's society, members have less free time to engage one another and staff, relationships are less substantive and work becomes more passive in nature. To deepen the engagement of every member on council, we are suggesting we move from a council of 14, plus the pastor and treasurer, to a council of 8 members, plus the lead pastor and treasurer, for a council of 10 members. We feel this will give us a more deeply committed and engaged team, and along with changes above, allow a wider diversity of membership. Together with the move to quarterly retreats, we will have higher expectations for service and leadership from those who agree to stand for election. And, we believe the congregation can expect more intentional leadership in return. (Amendment #3).
- Finally, changes unrelated to above and required ELCA changes:
  - First, we would allow for electronic means to communicate to the congregation for the announcement of congregational meetings. If we have no email on record, a mailing will always be sent. This will save us thousands of dollars every year. (Amendment #1)
  - Second. The availability of a quality pastor is becoming a great challenge throughout the county. According to the constitution the Nominating Committee has one charge: to recommend names to the council for a call committee. The model constitution of the ELCA leaves two options for this work: either the council presents names for a call committee or the nominating committee. Because of the shortage of pastors and need to be nimble to attract pastors today, it was recommended that we suggest the council now serve as the body to recommend names for a call committee, though the congregation ultimately has the final say approving all candidates for pastor. (Amendment #7)

- Lastly, the largest portion of the recommended constitutional changes are required changes handed down from our greater church body, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. Most are related to differences in terminology around the rostering of pastors and non-pastoral church staff (Ministry of Word and Sacrament and Ministers of Word and Service).

We are blessed at Calvary. **We are a growing congregation and with that growth comes increasing complexity. To meet that complexity requires deeper and more committed leadership from the council.** We believe the proposed updates would better meet the realities and challenges of today and allow us to move into the future with confidence that the congregation is being well served by its elected leaders.

Sincerely,

Sarah Suchy, Council President, on behalf of Calvary's Church Council

Resources:

- ELCA: <http://www.elca.org/Constitution>
- *"Inside the Large Congregation"* by Susan Beaumont, leading church consultant and researcher with the Alban Institute ([www.insidethelargecongregation.com](http://www.insidethelargecongregation.com))
- *"Sticky Teams"* by Larry Osborne, nationally recognized pastor, leadership author and speaker
- *"How to Break Growth Barriers"* by Carl George