

Revised Constitution Proposes Smaller Church Council

Read the Draft; Learn What's Behind the Changes

For decades, Trinity Lutheran Church operated with three pastors. This made Trinity a very pastorally driven church with members relying on pastors for administration and decision-making. Trinity has gone through several recent years of struggle and transformation. Our goal became finding and developing a better way to structure Trinity for the future.

Recently, our congregation pivoted from the three-pastor model to a structure with two pastors, a full-time administrator, and a full-time youth coordinator. With the help of consultant Cathy Cowling and insights from Pastor Mark Ziemer, we began using the model of Governance and Ministry outlined by author Dan Hotchkiss.

Governance produces minutes, policies, mission statements, goals, and strategic-planning documents. Ministry brings into being worship services, study groups, mission trips, service projects, well-maintained buildings, thriving families, and renewed hope.

A Governance Task Force took shape, and we began to use the Hotchkiss model—first in our Church Council meetings, then as Council connected ministry leaders while adopting policies to guide their work, and finally to begin to update our constitution (which was last revised in 2016) using the ELCA Model constitution as a guide. Our goal for Trinity is to have more clarity for establishing vision, rationale, and priorities with the help of the congregation.

A proposed revision to Trinity's constitution is now available in print and at tiny.cc/TLC21Draft, with the existing constitution printed alongside the new draft as well as notes explaining the differences. Governance Task Force members are currently offering temple talks at worship services to explain the proposed changes—most notably a smaller Church Council with 12 voting members instead of the current 17, with officers selected from within the Council instead of being elected by the larger congregation.

Along with this, the Governance Task Force offers these immediate answers to common questions:

- ***If we reduce the size of Council, won't that mean we have less representation?*** Dan Hotchkiss addresses this in his book: The role of the Council is to have oversight of the entire congregation; it is not "representative" in that the number of Council members is not tied to a percentage of the congregation (unlike the U.S. House of Representatives), nor do various ministries elect one of their members to represent them on Council. While Council members in the past have taken on liaison roles to various committees, they were not elected to represent the interests of that ministry. So, in this



regard, Trinity's Council has never been "representative." As Council seeks to help the congregation set and follow a direction, it does this work in collaboration with the congregation, thus ensuring that members continue to have input into the life of the congregation. Also, a smaller Council allows for more effective decision making and less reliance on an Executive Committee.

- **How will a smaller Council be better?** Decades of studies show that the larger the decision-making group, the less participatory and vocal members are likely to be. Reducing the size of Council will empower it and lessen its dependence on the Executive Committee. The draft constitution also strengthens the role of Council around establishing a vision and priorities for the congregation as well as setting policy.
- **If Council elects the officers, doesn't that mean the congregation has less input in its leadership?** The congregation still elects the Council and thus still has tremendous influence in choosing officers. Ideally, every member of Council is elected because of her or his leadership abilities, with the congregation's confidence that any member of Council could serve as an officer of the congregation.
- **What is meant by the lead pastor as "head of staff"?** To have clear boundaries of authority and accountability, the lead pastor is considered "head of staff." Not all staff directly report to the lead pastor, who may delegate supervisory responsibilities to other staff members.
- **Why was the change made regarding the term length of the youth representative?** The new draft constitution calls for nine at-large Council members with three-year terms as well as one youth representative from grade 9-12 serving a term of one year. Reducing the term from three years to one allows more young people to be considered for that position and makes it easier for them to complete their service. If a young person will remain active in the congregation and wishes to serve more than one year, the provisions in the draft constitution make that possible.
- **What is the vision of Trinity Lutheran Church?** One addition to the proposed constitution is that, every year, the new Council convenes for a council retreat to discern a vision for Trinity. It is annually updated and annually evaluated. The pastors are of course a part of the Council. And a key is that the Council members listen well to God, the congregation, each other, and the community—which also develops clarity for the purpose and goals.
- **What is Governance?** Here is an article on governance: tiny.cc/AboutGovernance. It is a short read and gives a summary of some of the concepts from Dan Hotchkiss that we are talking about.

Want to know more? Trinity will offer **information and discussion sessions**:

- Sunday, Oct. 3, 10:45-11:45 a.m.
- Wednesday, Oct. 13, 7:15-8:15 p.m.
- Sunday, Oct. 17, 9:30-10:30 a.m.
- Wednesday, Oct. 20, 7:15-8:15 p.m.

There will be a special congregational meeting on Sunday, Nov. 14, at 9 a.m. for a first vote to accept changes to the constitution. The final vote to institute the revised constitution will be at the annual congregational meeting on Sunday, Jan. 30, 2022.

