



Resurrection Lutheran Church  
740 W 10th Street, Juneau, AK 99801 | 907 586 2380 | 907 586 6225 fax  
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## **RLC President Karen Lawfer**

*RLC Council and Congregation Member Statement in the Conflict with the Alaska Synod Bishops of the Congregation Council of Resurrection Lutheran Church, Juneau, Alaska*

### **How Did We Get Here?**

In early 2023, a “listening team” visited Resurrection Lutheran Church (RLC) in Juneau to hear concerns about congregational life. At the time, I was serving as President of the Council. Based on their findings, and input from then-Bishop Shelley Wickstrom, our Council organized working groups to explore the issues raised. This was part of a broader discernment process we were conducting with the help of Rev. Laurin Vance.

At no point was this “listening team” presented to us as a formal Consultation Committee under the ELCA’s constitutional provisions. No recommendation was made to terminate Pastor Karen Perkins’ call. Had we been informed that this team was acting as a Consultation Committee—as defined under the constitution—we would have followed an entirely different constitutional process.

At our 2024 Annual Meeting in February, the congregation passed a budget that explicitly funded a full-time pastoral position. At the April 30 Council meeting, we confirmed that the teams’ work was concluding and that we would use their findings—along with results from a congregational survey—to continue our discernment prayerfully and faithfully.

Just days later, at the bishop’s request, then-President (as we believed at the time) Lisa Brendle unilaterally called a congregational meeting for June 9 to vote on reducing our pastoral call to part-time. This meeting was never discussed, authorized, or approved by the Council.

Around the same time, Council members brought forward concerns about violations of our church’s Meeting Code of Conduct during the officer elections, which I had chaired. After an internal review, seven of the thirteen Council members signed affidavits detailing how they voted—or would have voted but for the violation. This led to a correction of officers, and I was re-elected President.

Throughout May 2024, and up to the day before the June 9 meeting, I asked Bishop Wickstrom to clarify the constitutional authority under which she was calling a congregational vote on the pastoral call—especially at a 51% threshold instead of the required two-thirds. Her explanations shifted. On June 7, she claimed—for the first time—that the 2023 “listening team” had been a formal Consultation Committee and that it had recommended reducing the call. Their written report does not make any such recommendation. Had we known they were acting in that constitutional role, we would have proceeded accordingly.

On June 8, I emailed the congregation to cancel the June 9 meeting, citing its lack of constitutional basis. Despite this, Bishop Wickstrom arrived at RLC on June 9, unilaterally declared who she believed to be the legitimate officers of the congregation, and proceeded with the vote to terminate Pastor Perkins' call—using the improper 51% threshold. We know that fewer than 22 of RLC's 52 voting members were present, and many did not receive timely notice.

Since then, Ms. Brendle—who was constitutionally ineligible to serve on Council beyond March 2023 due to having served six consecutive years—filed a lawsuit in Alaska Superior Court naming me, Pastor Perkins, and Synod Council Member Bradley Perkins. Her suit seeks to have the court declare her the rightful President based solely on the fact that Bishop Wickstrom “said so.” This action was never authorized by the congregation, the Council, or even the Executive Committee.

A trial is scheduled for August 2025.

In the meantime, Ms. Brendle and others have taken further unauthorized actions, including the unilateral withdrawal of \$205,000—the entirety of RLC's savings—from the church's bank account, without Council knowledge or approval. These funds include restricted grant monies that must be spent by June 30, 2025, or returned—threatening vital ministries, including our kitchen, TV studio, and food programs.

As Sunday worship became increasingly marked by harassment and intimidation, the Worship and Music Committee—with Council support—established a Saturday afternoon Service of the Word at 2:00 PM, following our community lunch. This change was made to restore a safe, welcoming space for worship. Unfortunately, we continue to experience repeated sabotage of sanctuary equipment—microphones, livestream cabling—apparently aimed at preventing remote access for members who are homebound or traveling.

My heart breaks for our congregation. We were a vibrant, active church doing meaningful ministry in Juneau. This conflict might have been avoided if our discernment process had been allowed to proceed with prayer and integrity. Still, we remain committed to RLC's future—and to truth, justice, and healing—for the good of our church and the community we serve.

*Prepared on information and belief, subject to reasonable amendment.*

Links to RLC Council Position Statements

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[Authoritarianism, Secrecy and Complicity](#)

[Challenge to Act Justly, Seek Truth and Fulfill Fiduciary Duty](#)

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