

April 25, 2025

Sent via email, posted publicly and copied to press and media outlets.

Pastors, Presidents, Councils and Congregations of the Alaska Synod (and other synods) of Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Regarding: Urgent Call for Support and Integrity in Church Governance

Dear siblings in Christ,

We invite you to consider the following scenario—not as a theoretical exercise, but as the lived reality of Resurrection Lutheran Church (RLC) in Juneau, Alaska:

- Imagine your congregation answering the call to expand ministry beyond its walls: supporting the unhoused, feeding hundreds weekly, mentoring youth, and stewarding grant-supported community programs.
- Now imagine a bishop—responding to rumors from a few dissenters—bypassing constitutional norms to call a congregational vote to remove your pastor, allowing it to pass with only a 51% vote instead of the two-thirds required by your constitution, without allegations of misconduct or incapacity.
- When your council president objects, the bishop attempts to re-install an illegitimate officer to carry out the vote, and later, through the new bishop, uses the synod council to retroactively bless the violation of your congregation's constitution.
- Eventually, the pastor is removed from the roster, replaced by an interim aligned with the bishop's faction, all while legal proceedings are pending.

This is not fiction. It is our present.

The Reality at RLC

I am Karen Lawfer, the duly elected President of RLC. I write on behalf of our council to seek your solidarity in calling for justice, constitutional integrity, and ethical leadership.

• Harassment and Bullying Ignored: Over two years, repeated reports of bullying went unaddressed. Rather than intervene, Bishop Shelley Wickstrom advised our pastor to "just leave."

- **Unconstitutional Vote**: A pastor's call cannot be terminated by a 51% vote. Yet that is what Bishop Wickstrom imposed. Neither Bishop Wickstrom nor Bishop Oslovich has acknowledged this constitutional breach.
- **Illegitimate Leadership Reinstated**: Bishop Wickstrom reappointed an officer who had been properly removed, bypassing congregational election and disregarding our constitution.
- **Manipulated Adjudication**: After her retirement, a flawed *C15.11* process was initiated by Bishop Oslovich to retroactively justify Bishop Wickstrom's actions. Our council rightly refused to participate in such illegitimate adjudication.
- **Roster Removal**: Pastor Karen Perkins was removed from the ELCA roster in violation of due process. An interim pastor was then installed without consultation or consent of the council.
- **Prejudicial Actions at Synod Assembly**: The 2025 Synod Assembly includes two deeply troubling elements:
 - A misleading report by Bishop Oslovich mischaracterizing the RLC conflict.
 - A resolution to confer the honorary title of *Bishop Emerita* on Bishop Wickstrom, preemptively enshrining her legacy while her conduct is under scrutiny in a lawsuit brought by Ms. Brendle, without congregation or council authority.

The Broader Impact

The actions of a small faction, enabled by bishops, have compromised:

- Homeless Services: Our low-barrier shelter work has been defunded and displaced.
- **Food Programs**: Our pantry and community meals are under threat due to internal sabotage and denial of funds.
- Educational Initiatives: Partnerships with schools and youth programs are unraveling.
- **The Arts**: Juneau Live! Studio faces shutdown amid equipment tampering and utility interference.

A Call to the Faithful

We urge you to read our RLC Council Position Statements:

<u>Understanding Constitutional Violations</u> <u>Authoritarianism, Secrecy and Complicity</u> <u>Challenge to Act Justly, Seek Truth and Fulfill Fiduciary Duty</u> <u>What Happens Next and Your Involvement</u> <u>Synod Assembly 2025 Resolutions and Reports</u>

Visit: <u>RLC Council Position Statements</u>

What We Ask

- Stand with us in affirming the right of congregations to constitutional self-governance.
- **Demand transparency and accountability** from Bishop Timothy Oslovich and Vice-President Leslie Swenson.
- **Urge Presiding Bishop Eaton** to review the removal of Pastor Perkins and intervene where governance has failed.
- **Oppose Resolution 2025-2** as premature and divisive.

Final Word

This letter is not a complaint; it is a call. A call to restore what the Church is meant to be—a place where truth matters, governance is respected, and justice flows like a river.

Peace,

Karen Lawfer, President On behalf of the RLC Congregation Council klawfer@gci.net, (907) 723-2123

cc: Presiding Bishop Eaton (by email to <u>Bishop.Eaton@elca.org</u>)
Alaska Synod Council (c/o <u>rlcoffice@ak.net</u> to forward to Alaska Synod Council members)
RLC Congregation Council (c/o email to <u>klawfer@gci.net</u>)

This letter may be shared with other individuals and groups who may find its content relevant.

Addendums

Helpful Summaries to the RLC Council Position Statements Index to RLC Council Position Statements and Addendums

Links to RLC Council Position Statements

<u>Understanding Constitutional Violations</u> <u>Authoritarianism, Secrecy and Complicity</u> <u>Challenge to Act Justly, Seek Truth and Fulfill Fiduciary Duty</u> <u>What Happens Next and Your Involvement</u> <u>Synod Assembly 2025 Resolutions and Reports</u>