

# LCMS 2026 Convention Issues

A print-friendly elder briefing for LCMS congregational conversation

**Purpose: Help elders identify what may most affect shepherding, worship, mission, governance, and pastoral care.**

## Core read

The 2026 convention is not merely about one headline issue. It gathers questions of trust, formation, doctrine, worship, supervision, mission focus, LCMS institutional identity, and congregational sustainability. For an LCMS congregation, the practical question is: Which convention actions could shape how we call pastors, care for souls, guard the altar, form leaders, serve families, and keep Gospel mission clear?

## One-sentence summary for elders

This convention may not immediately change Sunday morning, but it may shape the environment in which an LCMS congregation does ministry, forms leaders, calls pastors, handles conflict, works with LCMS institutions, talks about worship, and teaches families.

## Highest practical impact

| Priority | Issue                                 | Why it matters locally   |
|----------|---------------------------------------|--|
| 1        | Pastoral formation and shortage       | Future pastors, vacancies, mission starts, SMP, church planting, and smaller congregations.              |
| 2        | Worship and Communion practice        | Elders help guard the altar and support faithful, clear, gracious worship practice.                      |
| 3        | Dispute resolution and supervision    | Congregational conflict, online accusations, discipline, pastoral accountability, and due process.       |
| 4        | Mission priorities and sustainability | Shapes how the LCMS supports congregations in witness, discipleship, and local mission.                  |
| 5        | AI and pastoral authority             | Trust, truthfulness, proclamation, confidentiality, and sermon preparation boundaries.                   |
| 6        | Lutheran identity in LCMS education   | Formation pipeline for workers, teachers, pastors, musicians, and lay leaders.                           |
| 7        | Life, sexuality, family, and mercy    | Pastoral care for real families facing infertility, sexuality, adoption, mental health, and mercy needs. |

Use this page as the elders meeting overview. The following pages give the fuller briefing, with questions worth asking before and after convention.

## 1. Pastoral formation, SMP, and future pastor supply

**Why elders should care:** Probably the most practically significant issue for congregations. The convention materials include a major cluster on seminary formation, residential and non-residential routes, SMP, alternate routes, online or hybrid theological education, pastoral shortage, co-vocational pastors, continuing education, sabbaticals, lay service, and the boundaries of the pastoral office. This affects future vacancies, church planting, mission starts, ethnic ministry, smaller congregations, and whether congregations can receive pastors in a timely way.

**Elder question:** How do we uphold faithful pastoral formation while addressing the real pastoral shortage with urgency, not institutional shrugging?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch overtures around 6-14 through 6-35 and 6-79 through 6-88, especially seminary formation, SMP, co-vocational pastors, continuing education, sabbaticals, lay service, and pastoral office boundaries.

## 2. Worship, Sacraments, and local practice

**Why elders should care:** This touches congregational life directly. Watch overtures on worship oversight, hymnal preparation, approved worship resources, review of worship practices, children's sermons by laity, chalice, weekly Communion, first Communion before confirmation, closed Communion, and pastoral exceptions. Elders often help the pastor guard the altar, care for visitors, support worship order, and handle hard pastoral conversations.

**Elder question:** Are our elders equipped to explain Communion practice with both clarity and warmth, not merely because Synod said so, but because Christ gives His body and blood for repentant faith?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch 5-16 through 5-18, 4-23 through 4-31, and 4-40 through 4-42.

## 3. Mission priorities and congregational sustainability

**Why elders should care:** There are competing proposals about mission priorities, mission emphases, Tell the Next Generation, Abiding in the Word, and congregational sustainability. This is not merely branding. It asks what story the LCMS tells about itself and how that story supports local mission. A convention emphasis can either help congregations focus on Gospel witness, or it can become another slogan in a binder wearing a tiny Synodical sweater.

**Elder question:** Does this action help local congregations make disciples, strengthen households, raise up leaders, and send people into the community with Christ?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch Committee 4 mission-priority overtures, especially 4-01 through 4-12.

## 4. Ecclesiastical supervision, dispute resolution, and social media conflict

**Why elders should care:** This may be less visible on Sunday morning, but it could carry major long-term consequences. Watch proposals that reform or replace dispute-resolution and ecclesiastical-supervision processes, especially where social media accusations, transparency, confidentiality, appeals, and public accountability collide. Congregational conflict, pastor-congregation disputes, public accusations, online fights, and discipline questions are not theoretical anymore.

**Elder question:** How do we preserve Matthew 18, due process, pastoral care, and public accountability without turning church discipline into public spectacle?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch Committee 10, especially Bylaw 1.10 reform or replacement, plus social-media dispute proposals such as 4-49.

## 5. AI, truthfulness, sermons, and pastoral authority

**Why elders should care:** AI is not merely a tech issue. It is a truthfulness and trust issue. The convention materials already warn about AI-generated overture content that manufactured or mangled facts and references. Overtures also address AI use generally and reject sermons created by artificial intelligence. A pastor may use tools for research, organization, editing, and study, but the sermon must remain the pastor’s faithful proclamation of God’s Word to the flock entrusted to him. AI can be a shovel. It cannot be the shepherd.

**Elder question:** What faithful boundaries should our congregation expect around AI use in sermons, teaching, pastoral care, and public communication?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch 4-51 and 4-52, and any guidance around AI, sermons, confidentiality, and digital trust.

## Practical AI guardrails for an LCMS congregation

| Guardrail       | Local application   |
|-----------------|---|
| Allowed help    | Research organization, summaries, editing, formatting, brainstorming, and administrative support. |
| Pastoral limit  | AI must not replace exegesis, prayer, pastoral judgment, or proclamation to the flock.            |
| Confidentiality | Do not enter sensitive pastoral-care details into AI tools without strong privacy safeguards.     |
| Human review    | Public teaching and communication should remain reviewed and owned by responsible church leaders. |

## Scripture anchor

*Matthew 18:15: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother.”*

## 6. Lutheran identity and LCMS institutional trust

**Why elders should care:** Committee materials include overtures on LCMS educational structure, Lutheran identity, worship practices, prior approval, transparency, and institutional trust. This matters because the church receives future workers, teachers, musicians, pastors, and lay leaders through LCMS institutions. Congregations do not float in isolation. We receive workers and leaders from LCMS schools, seminaries, districts, and Synod structures.

**Elder question:** How do we support LCMS institutions while also expecting clear Lutheran identity, transparency, and trustworthiness?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch 7-04 through 7-07 and 7-14 through 7-24.

## 7. Life, sexuality, family, and mercy

**Why elders should care:** Watch overtures on IVF and sanctity of life, sexuality and family care, LCMS service-organization accountability, cohabitation, adoption, foster care, immigration resources, worker wellness, telehealth counseling, and mercy work. These are not merely convention culture topics. These are pastoral-care topics. Elders will encounter families wrestling with infertility, children, sexuality, cohabitation, gender confusion, immigration anxiety, mental health, and worker exhaustion.

**Elder question:** Can we speak clearly according to Scripture while caring tenderly for people who are hurting, confused, ashamed, or afraid?

**Overture/theme watch:** Watch 5-19 through 5-21, 4-32 through 4-37, and Committee 3 mercy overtures.

## Law and Gospel posture

The best elder posture is not panic. It is watchful, prayerful, clear, and local. Convention issues should be weighed through Scripture, the Confessions, love for the flock, and the congregation's mission to proclaim Christ crucified and risen.

*John 1:14: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."*

## Must-watch overture and theme clusters

Do not hand elders all 374 overtures unless you want their eyes to glaze over like a donut under fluorescent lights. Use these clusters to focus discussion.

| Cluster                  | Watch   | Local elder angle   |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Pastoral formation       | 6-14 through 6-35, 6-79 through 6-88                    | Seminary formation, SMP, online/hybrid routes, co-vocational pastors, continuing education, sabbaticals, lay service, pastoral office boundaries. |
| Communion and worship    | 5-16 through 5-18; 4-23 through 4-31; 4-40 through 4-42 | Closed Communion, pastoral exceptions, worship resources, children's sermons by laity, chalice, weekly Communion, first Communion.                |
| AI and digital trust     | 4-51 and 4-52   | AI use, AI-created sermons, truthfulness, confidentiality, pastoral authority.  |
| Supervision and disputes | Committee 10; 4-49                                      | Bylaw 1.10, dispute resolution, social-media accusations, transparency, confidentiality, appeals.   |
| Lutheran identity        | 7-04 through 7-07; 7-14 through 7-24                    | LCMS educational institutions, worship practices, identity standards, prior approval, transparency.   |
| Life, family, and mercy  | 5-19 through 5-21; 4-32 through 4-37; Committee 3       | IVF, sanctity of life, sexuality, cohabitation, adoption, fostering, immigration, worker wellness.  |

## Elder meeting discussion guide

| Part                 | Prompt  |
|----------------------|---|
| Opening posture      | Pray first. Read charitably. Refuse panic. Assume brothers and sisters are trying to serve Christ, even when wording is clunky.       |
| Shared concern       | We want the congregation to remain faithful in doctrine, clear in worship, wise in pastoral care, and joyful in mission.              |
| Clarifying questions | What is the proposal trying to solve? Is the concern doctrinal, practical, procedural, relational, or rhetorical?                     |
| Confessional anchor  | Do not bind consciences beyond Scripture and the Confessions. Do not use mission language without Gospel substance.                   |
| Mission lens         | Does this support Gospel witness without weakening Lutheran confession? Does it build trust with high accountability and low control? |
| What to avoid        | Avoid faction labels, motive-reading, slogan wars, and turning preferences into doctrine. That road has potholes and no rest stop.    |

# Suggested elder framing question

## Use this in the meeting

**Which convention issues could affect our calling to shepherd souls, guard the altar, support the pastor, form disciples, care for families, raise up leaders, and keep the congregation focused on Christ crucified and risen?**

## The pastoral read

The greatest concern is not that the LCMS is discussing hard things. That is healthy. Acts 15 was not exactly a church picnic with potato salad and light minutes. The concern is whether the convention can distinguish doctrine from preference, confession from control, mission from branding, pastoral care from public combat, accountability from bureaucracy, the Office of the Ministry from clericalism, lay service from office-confusion, and technology as a tool from technology as a substitute for shepherding.

## Closing Gospel frame

*1 Corinthians 15:20-22: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."*

That is the center. Not process. Not politics. Not institutional anxiety. Christ is risen. The church belongs to Him. Elders do not need to carry the Synod on their shoulders. They are called to care for the people Christ has placed in front of them, with Scripture open, Gospel clear, and the coffee reasonably strong.

## For prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, keep Your church in the true faith. Give repentance where we are proud, courage where we are timid, clarity where we are confused, and love where we are tempted to devour one another. Send Your Spirit to make us faithful witnesses, for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Prepared as an LCMS elder briefing from the provided 2026 convention issue summary. Review final floor-committee resolutions and adopted convention actions before making congregational decisions.