



FAQs re Deeming a Congregation Defunct Policy and Procedures

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why do we need this policy?

A: It is clear that circumstances are changing for congregations in the synod. An increasing number of congregations are experiencing declining membership numbers and, along with that, the difficulty of functioning according to the requirements of their constitution and bylaws. We experience this as a loss yet we hold onto the promise that God will make all things new (Revelations 21:5). This policy will help us navigate through these transitions.

Q: Is this something new?

A: No and yes. The Model Constitution for Congregations and the Synod Constitution have for many years included a provision authorizing the synod to deem a congregation defunct. To the best of our knowledge the provision has never been exercised, so there are no precedents and no policy. There is a need for clarity on the part of both congregations and synod.

Q: Does the synod have plans to close certain congregations?

A: No. But if present trends continue, Synod Council can anticipate that the constitutional provision may need to be exercised at some point in the future. Leaders in our church – of congregations and the synod – will benefit from being better prepared when that time comes.

Q: Will the Synod close our congregation if we fail to meet one of the constitutional requirements?

A: We have no desire to close congregations. Our mission is to preach the Gospel and make disciples throughout the territory of the synod, and that ministry is carried out principally by congregations. We would prefer to open more congregations, not close the ones we have.

Q: Then why set out a list of legalistic requirements that congregations must meet?

A: Those requirements are already in constitutional documents that are quoted in the policy. The policy aims to provide clarity so that congregations and their leaders know how the constitution will be interpreted.

Q: Is this just an attempt by the synod to take congregational assets and use them for the Synod's own purposes?

A: The policy is built around the concept of risk management. Congregational constitutions set out checks and balances designed to ensure good governance and careful stewardship of

resources. When a congregation can no longer fulfill those requirements, various kinds of risks can arise, including governance, financial and reputational risks. For example, reductions in property maintenance might contribute to the risk of a member or visitor suffering a personal injury. The congregation, and potentially the Eastern Synod, might be sued for damages. The resulting liability could be quite serious. Situations like this pose the risk that financial resources could be lost to Gospel ministry and be used for other purposes. The synod has a responsibility to ensure that future generations of church members have the financial resources to carry out ministry in their time.

Q: How will the bishop decide when to use this policy?

A: Decisions will be made on a case-by-case basis. The bishop, and those with responsibility for decision-making, will be guided by the principle of how we best take care of the resources that God has blessed the church with.

Q: Will we have a say in the process?

A: The pastor and members of the congregation will be invited to make written submissions to the consultative committee, and the committee will confer with members of the congregation to gather relevant information.

Q: What can we do if we feel the decision is wrong?

A: The congregation can request the Synod Council to review the decision.