



ELCA: Never Let a Crisis Go to Waste

The Crisis. The 2011 ELCA Churchwide Assembly adopted a budget for 2012 that is **\$19.5 million below** the budget for 2011. Giving is down. It's a crisis.

What's to be done? As one wag said: Never let a crisis go to waste; it's a chance to pivot to your agenda.

The agenda: Restructure the church to centralize power in ELCA headquarters.

Back in 2003, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson proposed restructuring headquarters, but his plan was widely perceived as a power grab and was rejected.

At the time Bishop Hanson defended the plan, saying it was central to his call: "It is important to bring responsibilities related to the whole church into **the**

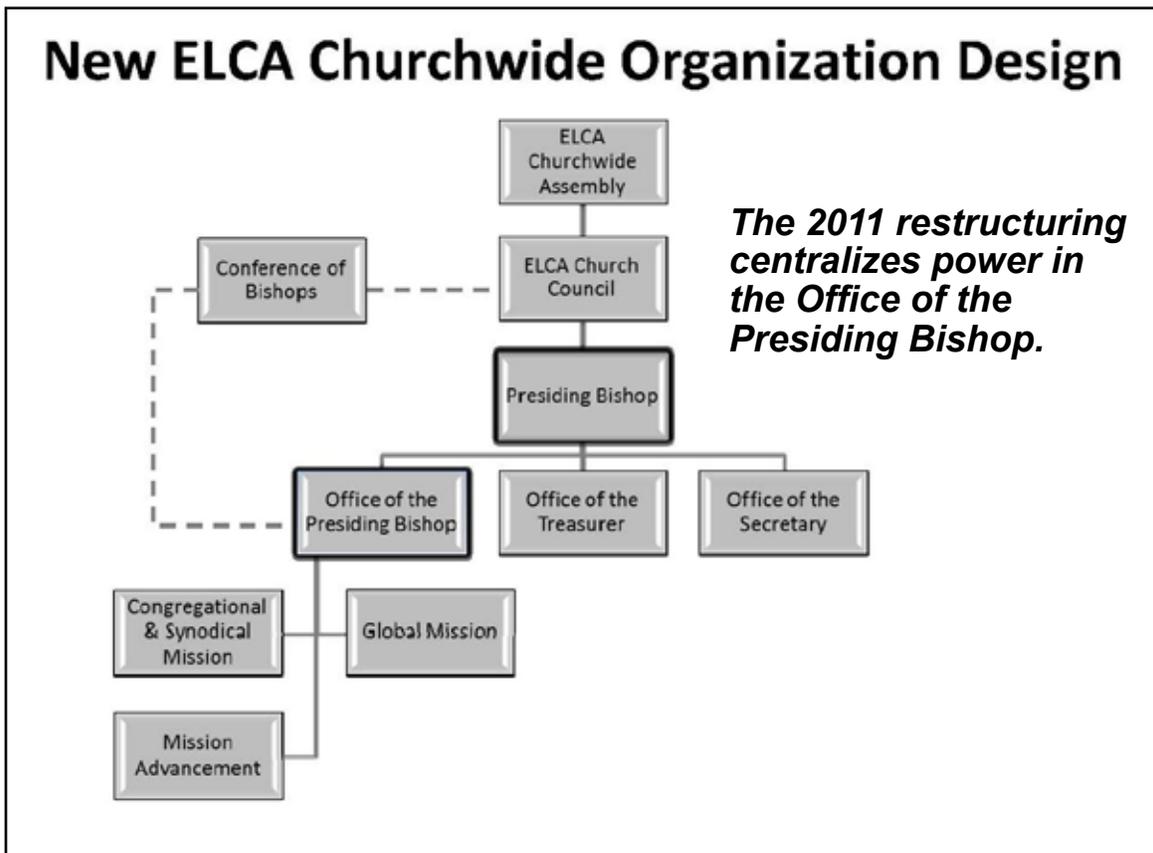
Presiding Bishop's Office, since the Bishop is called to oversee the work of the churchwide organization, Hanson said" (news@elca.org, 10/15/03; emphasis added).

(Why not decentralize? Disperse responsibility? Have more representative leadership from the grass roots up? Have more checks and balances?)

Like the 2003 plan, the 2011 restructuring plan **centralizes power** in the Office of the Presiding Bishop, the Church Council, and the Conference of Bishops.

The Presiding Bishop as Gatekeeper. The chart below shows that the Presiding Bishop is the

(continued on page 2)



(continued from page 1)

gatekeeper within headquarters and between headquarters and the larger church.

The ELCA website describes the power of the Presiding Bishop:

The presiding bishop of this church serves as president and chief executive officer of the corporation and oversees the staff, budget and overall administration of the church.

The presiding bishop chairs the Churchwide Assembly and provides for the preparation of agendas for the assembly, the Church Council and its executive committee, the Conference of Bishops, and the Cabinet of Executives. The presiding bishop is also the chief ecumenical officer of this church, and provides leadership and care for the bishops of the synods.

He is the public spokesman for the church. Behind the scenes, he is the dominant senior partner controlling appointments, agendas, and the purse.

The Church Council, like a sponge, absorbs power. The 2011 restructuring has eliminated program committees and reallocated their responsibilities to Church Council committees.

No longer does the Council have to work cooperatively with program committees (formerly called boards). (See page six below.)

Serving on the Church Council is a part-time job. In an assembly year the Council meets for four days in April, two in August, plus at the churchwide assembly, and four days in November. In addition, members serve on committees which require additional meetings.

Who has time for all these meetings? Mostly full and part time church workers, retired persons, and the like. Very few lay persons with full-time jobs can afford to serve on the Council.

Moreover, achieving diversity by strict adherence to race, gender, and youth quotas has meant eliminating many knowledgeable Lutherans from leadership and the institutional continuity they embody.

To compensate for the loss of boards, the 33-member Church Council can expand to 45 under a constitutional change adopted by the 2011 Churchwide Assembly. If the Council feels it wants persons with particular expertise, it can ask the assembly to elect up to 12 more members.

The power, however, still resides in the Council, in what they want and who they nominate.

“Consultations” – No power, no money. The 2011 restructuring calls for expanded roles for regions and for consultations as a public relations way of providing input from members and congregations.

Consultations, by their very ad hoc nature – their agendas and speakers – are controlled from the top down. They give the appearance of shared leadership, but real power is retained at the top.

Moreover, there is no money budgeted for consultations to meet. They are for sharing; they have no legislative power.

The 2011 Churchwide Assembly also approved a three-year cycle for churchwide assemblies. This shift will save money (cost of an assembly: \$3 million.). But less frequent assemblies means less oversight on ELCA headquarters.

Centralizing power. The crisis in the ELCA could have led to **decentralizing power.**

This, too, would have saved money and more accurately addressed the real problem: The ELCA was already too much of a **top-down church** out of touch with its constituency and heritage.

But no, the crisis has led to even more power in the hands of the leaders who created the crisis in the first place.

To be sure, there will be “consultations,” but this is token power sharing, **not the real thing.**

“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

- Archilochus, 7th Century BC



Our “one big thing” is to lift high the Cross.

CrossAlone Lutheran Churches are centrist Lutherans affiliated with Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ (LCMC).

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BISHOPS TIGHTEN CONTROL

Bishops tighten control over congregations. The ELCA has lost about 1,000 congregations since 2001. Top leaders are responding to these losses by making **leaving the ELCA more difficult.**

The August 2011 Churchwide Assembly adopted the following constitutional changes which give synod **bishops more power over congregations** seeking to disaffiliate from the ELCA: Henceforth:

- The bishop will oversee a **30-day consultation** with a congregation before its first vote to leave, in addition to a **90 day consultation** after the first vote (§§9.62.a).
- **The bishop will determine** how the consultation will be conducted “in consultation with the congregation’s council” (§§9.62.a).
- **The bishop will appoint** “designees” with whom the congregation must consult (§§9.62.a).
- **The bishop** and his/her “designees” have **the right to speak at any congregational meeting** regarding ending ELCA affiliation (§§9.62.a and d).
- If a congregation’s first vote to leave fails, it must **wait six months** to start the process again (§§ 9.62.j).
- If a congregation’s first vote succeeds but the second vote fails, it must **wait six months**, and it must restart the entire process over (§§ 9.62.j).
- Concurrent with a successful second vote, a departing congregation must vote by two-thirds to join

another Lutheran body or else the congregation will be “conclusively presumed to be an independent or non-Lutheran church” – placing its **property at risk** of an ELCA claim (§§9.62.e and §9.71.e).

- If the bishop decides that a departing congregation has failed to comply with “each of the forgoing provisions in 9.62,” that congregation must “receive synodical approval” before leaving – again placing its **property at risk** of an ELCA claim (§§9.62.g).
- Congregations which have received mission funds will be required to “satisfy all financial obligations” to the ELCA before leaving (§§ 9.62.i).

This pay-back rule hurts especially small black and ethnic congregations who want to disaffiliate from the ELCA but lack the money to do so.

New loyalty covenants for congregations. The Churchwide Assembly also adopted the following:

To request **congregations**, in collaboration with synods, to begin, develop, review or redefine their unique mission plans **by the end of 2012**, so that **each congregation strengthens its capabilities and resources** for witness and mission;

The sample covenant (Exhibit 1D) emphasizes that **every congregation** “shall ... motivate its members to **provide financial support**” to the ELCA.



TURN LEFT AT THE ELCA

“Full steam ahead.” After years of struggle for the soul of the ELCA, the battle is over. It was evident in the large majority votes at the Churchwide Assembly. As one voting member said: “All boats were paddling in the same direction.”

What direction is that? ELCA leaders identified two priorities for the churchwide organization of the ELCA: 1) To accompany congregations to be growing centers of mission, and 2) **“[T]o alleviate poverty and work for justice and peace.”**

Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson declared: “We are a church clear about who we are.” “Full steam ahead” – reported *The Lutheran*.

Social statements? Full steam ahead. Prior to the Assembly it had been widely reported that the ELCA was pulling back from politics. The Church Council recommended a **halt** to social statements:

“To bring no social statements other than *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility* to any Churchwide Assembly until completion of a review of the process for addressing social concerns based on a spirit of communal discernment.”

The Assembly, however, voted (680-265) to complete the review process by **November 2012**, present the social statement on Criminal Justice to the 2013 Assembly as planned, and continue producing the social statement on Justice for Women.

“Social statements are important documents for us as a church.” They “guide us as we ‘step forward as a public church’ because they form the basis for both **this church’s public policy** and **my public speech as presiding bishop**,” ELCA Presiding Bishop Hanson told the Assembly.

The Presiding Bishop is to be the **“prime catalyst”** in the revised process of communal discernment on public policy issues (*The Lutheran*, 9/2011, p. 22).

Big budget item: Public Church. The Assembly approved a 2012 budget totaling \$80,202,900 (which includes \$18,500,000 from the World Hunger Appeal) – a 19.5% decrease from the 2011 budget.

According to *The Lutheran*: “Nearly **half of the ELCA budget**” goes for **“stepping forward as a public church”** and “supporting congregations and outreach ministries” (*The Lutheran*, 9/2011, p. 23).

Bishop Hanson praised the World Hunger Appeal, which enables the ELCA to “achieve things on a

scale and scope we simply could never do as a single congregation or as synods...[including] advocate for policies and priorities that reduce poverty” (*The Lutheran*, 9/2011, p. 50).

Which policies and priorities? A few examples:

- Federal regulation of school lunch programs, Dec. 2010: Presiding Bishop Hanson announced that the new federal school lunch law is “essential to combating poverty.” The ELCA Washington Office for Public Policy coordinated a churchwide effort to lobby for the law, which costs \$4.5 billion and gives the federal government power to regulate school lunch menus.

- Global warming, Nov. 2010: ELCA leaders called on the US Senate to leave intact the power of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to regulate greenhouse gases and ozone emissions.

- Fellowship with Muslims, Nov./Aug. 20110: Hanson at the Town Hall Forum: How do we avoid “what we saw in response to the 9/11 wanting to build a mosque near Ground Zero and all that tragically unfolded that gave such **bad testimony to the world about how we live in this country with our differences?**”

ELCA leaders invited Sayyid M. Sayeed, General Secretary of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), to give an official greeting to the 2011 Churchwide Assembly.

Sayeed praised Presiding Bishop Hanson for “saying truth to the difficult issues” about the suffering of the Palestinians, for speaking against anti-Muslim bigotry in the United States, and for establishing an ELCA committee on Muslim-Lutheran relations.

ISNA is one of the largest Saudi funded umbrella groups whose purpose is to advance the cause of Islam in North America.

The Assembly gave Sayeed three standing ovations.

- Immigration, July 2010: “The time has come for immigration reform,” claimed Bishop Hanson in a pastoral letter to all congregations, adding: **“The biblical witness for reform is clear.”**

The 2011 Churchwide Assembly (870-61) voted for comprehensive immigration reform, endorsed the DREAM Act, and asked the ELCA Presiding Bishop to communicate this support to President Obama and the US Congress.

Full steam ahead.

LCMC: DECENTRALIZED FOR MISSION

Lutherans ask: What structure serves mission?

Martin Luther supported several kinds of church structure: episcopal, presbyteral, and congregational – as long as **no particular structure is required**.¹

His Reformation echoes the New Testament. Roman Catholic scholar Jerome D. Quinn writes about the many forms of ministry in the New Testament:

“It is historically more accurate and eventually more instructive theologically **to respect the differences in structuring the Ministry** that existed simultaneously in different churches (Jerusalem; Corinth; Ephesus; Rome, etc.).”²

In short: Gospel freedom includes freedom for the church in every generation to vary its structures for the sake of mission.

What about today? Which structure serves mission best in the twenty-first century?

LCMC (*Lutheran Congregations in Mission for Christ*), a centrist Lutheran body (721 congregations, 653 in the USA), is decentralized for mission.

LCMC: Decentralized but not diffuse. LCMC has a “short and sweet” constitution and a longer, more complex set of bylaws containing the operational details of the organization.

LCMC has annual conventions to which every congregation sends **delegates who represent** the interests of the congregations.

Amendments to the constitution must be approved by the national convention and ratified by a majority of LCMC congregations.

Between conventions the LCMC **Board of Trustees** runs the organization. Elections to the Board are done by geographical area. Candidates for the Board are permitted to campaign for election and entitled to the names and addresses of the electorate.

The LCMC **Board of Ministry** certifies pastors for call. Congregations and pastors open for call deal directly with each other. For LCMC disciplinary and legal procedures, see www.LCMC.net.

LCMC has free-standing districts which provide networking for calls, fellowship, and education. Districts may be geographical or non-geographical. Because districts have no organizational power in LCMC, there is minimal conflict among them.

LCMC **congregations** maintain complete control over their property. They may leave LCMC at any time

with their property.

LCMC does not produce social statements nor employ lobbyists. Congregations send their benevolence dollars directly to intended beneficiaries.

Congregations are asked to give \$1,000 a year to LCMC, if possible. No giving is required.

LCMC has a first rate pension program held by American Funds and administered by Edward Jones Investments.

¹ Jarslov Pelikan, *Spirit vs Structure: Luther and the Institutions of the Church* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

² Jerome Quinn, “Ministry in the New Testament,” in *Eucharist and Ministry*, L/RC Dialogue IV; pp. 99-100; emphasis added.

The gospel reason for LCMC

LCMC was founded in 2000 after the ELCA **changed its constitution** in 1999 to **require** an Episcopal bishop to ordain all new ELCA bishops and to build gradually within the ELCA an sacramental hierarchy with special powers.

This constitutional change was actually an attack on the gospel of the all-sufficient cross. The ELCA now has a priesthood of believers **plus** a sacramental episcopate. It is now a **gospel-plus** church.

Power in the ELCA has shifted to bishops who have **exclusive power** to ordain – giving pastors **special priestly grace** (which laity lack) to make Christ present in the Eucharist.

LCMC was founded to uphold Luther’s rediscovery that a **necessary consequence** of the gospel is the church as **one** priesthood of all believers.

The church cannot have a sacramental priesthood representing Christ because that would mean he is absent. Rather, he is living now and is truly present wherever his Word is **purely** preached and his sacraments **rightly** administered.¹ As a consequence, every baptized Christian is a priest.

A church body properly reflects the gospel when it allows laypersons, in authorized situations, to preside at communion. This practice shows that **all the power of salvation is in the Word alone**, not the clergy.

¹Augsburg Confession, Article VII. “Purely” = salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, against all gospel-plus institutions.

WORLD WATCH

EDINBURG, TEXAS

Bound conscience: I want what I want

“What seems most obvious about ‘conscience’ in [the ELCA’s] *Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust* is the novel **psychologization** of the concept. Instead of regarding ‘conscience’ as a vehicle for grasping external and objective independent moral norms and for convicting us of violations of those norms, ‘conscience’ is evidently now a mode of expression for an individual’s private and subjective opinions and values.

What all of this suggests is that the ELCA may be proposing a **larger innovation**: a new theological anthropology, one that takes as its point of departure the primacy of an individual’s internal **subjective states as the source and origin of moral normativity**... Is ‘conscience’ typically bound solely to other internal psychological states? If so, in what way is a ‘bound conscience’ to be distinguished from a stubborn adherence to a personal preference, or from a mere resistance to change?”

Thomas D. Pearson, “Response to John Stumme on Conscience,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, Dec. 2010; emphasis added.

CHICAGO

Power flows to the ELCA Church Council

The ELCA, in its 2011 restructuring, eliminated program committees. This is a big loss of persons who represented their constituencies and ministries, especially in missions and education.

Under the guise of saving money (these committees met twice a year), and over the course of several restructurings from 1988 until now, these committees have been diminished in power and importance.

- Outreach/Congregational Mission: 14 + 4 advisors
- Global mission: 17 + 1 advisor
- Vocation/Education: 15 + 11 representatives
- Church in Society: 17 + 4 advisors
- Multicultural Ministries: 15 + 8 advisors

Total: 78 committee members and 28 advisors.

To be sure, the ELCA Church Council may compensate for these losses by adding “experts” of various kinds to its membership (up to 45 persons).

But even this compensating process is top down. It is dependent on and limited by the Council’s own perception of its needs. (See pp. 1-2 above.)

MONTREAT, NC

Billy Graham regrets getting involved in politics

“I’m grateful for the opportunities God gave me to minister to people in high places ... but looking back I know I sometimes crossed the line, and I wouldn’t do that now.”

Billy Graham, *Christianity Today*, 1/2011

GREEN BAY

Marian apparition in Green Bay now official

A Marian shrine in Green Bay WI is one of only a handful in the world – and the **sole location in the United States** – officially designated as places where the Virgin Mary has appeared.

The Green Bay shrine received official status in December 2010. Green Bay joins other famous Marian apparition sites such as Lourdes, France; Guadalupe, Mexico; and Fatima, Portugal.

According to the Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, the Virgin Mary appeared there to Adele Brise, a Belgian immigrant, three times in 1859.

NEW YORK

How welfare destroyed the black family

“Even in the antebellum era, when slaves often weren’t permitted to wed, most black children lived with a biological mother and father. During Reconstruction and up until the 1940’s, 75% to 85% of black children lived in two-parent families. Today, more than **70% of black children are born to single women**. **The welfare state** has done to black Americans what slavery couldn’t do, what Jim Crow couldn’t do, what the harshest racism couldn’t do,’ Mr. Williams says: ‘And that is to **destroy the black family**.’”

Wall Street Journal, 1/22/11, interview with Walter Williams by Jason L. Riley; emphasis added

CYBERSPACE

Benjamin B. Warfield (1851-1931)

A lady once met famous Princeton Seminary professor Benjamin Warfield during the week of the General Assembly. “Dr. Warfield, I hear that there is going to be trouble at the Assembly. Do let us pray for peace.”

“I am praying,” replied Warfield, “that if they do not do what is right, there may be a mighty battle.”

On another occasion a friend of Warfield’s asked if he was worried about the possibility of a split in the Presbyterian Church. Warfield responded: “No. You can’t split rotten wood.”

SAINT PAUL

Guarding priestly uniqueness

The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of St. Paul has notified its parishes that only priests, not laity, can deliver the homily before Mass.

The Archdiocese is enforcing a 2005 Vatican policy change which forbids laity, even those with Master's degrees in theology, to preach before Mass.

The Catholic hierarchy is in a bind. Because of the shortage of priests, laity have taken over many priestly tasks. Inquiring Catholic minds want to know: Why not let them preach, consecrate, and absolve? The Vatican says, No, because it wants to build a firewall around the priesthood, protecting its sacramental uniqueness.

Moreover, the Vatican forbids women doing anything significant in the worship service. Even allowing them to help serve Communion has now been severely curtailed.

This policy change, forbidding laity in the pulpit, is part of the gradual turning of the Roman Catholic Church in a more conservative direction.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

ELCA PB Hanson "joins" Obama administration

President Barack Obama appointed ELCA Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson to a one-year open-ended appointment to the Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

President Obama described Hanson and the other appointees as those who "have agreed to join this administration." Lutheran Russell E. Saltzman wryly observes:

"Oh, I hope they have not 'joined' the administration. But given that the membership has or at one time did include Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefforts Schori and *Sojourners* publisher Jim Wallis, maybe 'join' is the exact word. To be fair, there are a smattering of Jews, Evangelicals, and Orthodox on the council, along with a nun and a lesbian elder from the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. But to 'join' an administration suggests a whole level above 'advising' one."

(Russell E. Saltzman, "The Pastor as Political Appointee," *First Things*, 3/17/11).

BUFFALO

ELCA-Episcopal Bishops celebrate 10 years

In May 2011 the Presiding Bishops of the ELCA and The Episcopal Church (TEC), along with their Canadian counterparts, celebrated ten years together.

Episcopal Presiding Bishop Katherine Jefforts Schori

said: "Increasing numbers of congregations regularly share the gift of pastoral and **sacramental ministry** with a pastor or priest from the other tradition."

In July 2011, the ELCA and TEC jointly "appointed" Sarah Dreier to serve as their political lobbyist in the public square on US foreign policy issues.

In July 2011, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (152,500 members) voted to approve of same-sex clergy and same-sex marriage and family. The Convention also voted to downsize from five to three synods and move from biennial to triennial conventions.

ROANOKE

Evangelicals divided

Evangelical leaders are splitting in ways that threaten their common future, according to Gerald McDermott of Roanoke College (*First Things*, April 2011).

Some evangelicals call for a decision for Christ; others hold to predestination and reject a decision for Christ. What to do?

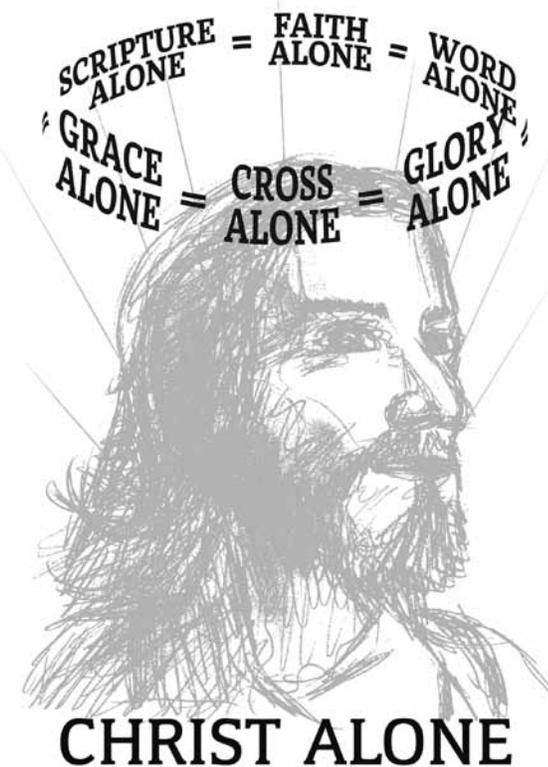
McDermott answers: Hold to "the Great Tradition." The problem is that there is **no such thing** as "the Great Tradition." There are only traditions; "The Great Tradition" is a mirage. Not all churches agree on the number and authority of ecumenical councils and ecumenical creeds.

* * * * *



Succession from Peter (the Saint)
At best is exceedingly quaint.
But when it's required,
In law we are mired,
And a church of the gospel we ain't.

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