



ELCA Global Mission  
**COMPANION  
ENGAGEMENT  
TEAM**

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# DOING A NEW THING



In the spirit of mutual accompaniment and shared leadership, this report presents recommendations from a design sprint focused on shaping a new Companion Engagement Team—proposed to strengthen global engagement across the ELCA ecology.

In the year leading up to the design sprint, 11.5 hours of intentional listening took place across 10 ELCA synods. The desires, hopes, and insights of stakeholders, synod leaders, and global companion communities were collected. Needs that surfaced from this research included:

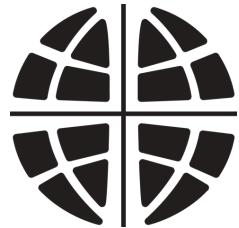
- Widespread accompaniment education
- Travel support and cultural competency
- A space for mutual learning and exchange of ideas
- Opportunities for global updates and storytelling

In May 2025, the design team gathered at Lutherhill Ministries in La Grange, Texas for a 3-day design sprint. The research insights were utilized to lay the groundwork for this proposed Companion Engagement Team. What follows are the findings and recommendations developed through this collaborative design process. This report is intended to guide and support the formation of the new Companion Engagement Team as it moves from concept to reality.

*Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
Isaiah 43:19*

# MINISTRY CONTEXT

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As a church committed to accompaniment, justice, and global mission, the ELCA affirms that our relationships with companion churches are not just symbolic—they are vital expressions of our shared calling to be the body of Christ in the world. The Companion Synod Program, housed within the Global Mission Team in the Service and Justice unit, brings this calling to life by fostering more than 120 companion relationships between ELCA synods and Lutheran churches around the globe. These connections, grounded in accompaniment and rooted in the communion of The Lutheran World Federation, embody the church's commitment to walk together with companions in faith and mission.

To strengthen and sustain this important work, the Program Director for Companion Engagement is seeking to launch a new Companion Engagement Team. This report outlines how the proposed team is designed to enhance the impact, coordination, and vitality of global relationships—advancing the ELCA's commitment to empowering leaders and building a "Connected, Sustainable Church." By creating space for shared learning and collaboration, the Companion Engagement Team will help ensure that companion synod relationships are nurtured with care, grounded in both local and global contexts, and aligned with the church's constitutional call to mission, service, and justice alongside churches and organizations around the world.

In a time when the world and the church are being reshaped by global challenges and opportunities, this team will serve as a bridge—supporting synods and congregations in growing their capacity to accompany, advocate, and learn across borders, cultures, and communities. Through this work, we respond faithfully to God's call to be church together, for the sake of the world.

# TWO YEAR GOAL AND METRICS



In two years time, the Companion Engagement Team will be an embodiment of accompaniment, empowering and equipping intergenerational leaders to strengthen global engagement across the ELCA ecology.

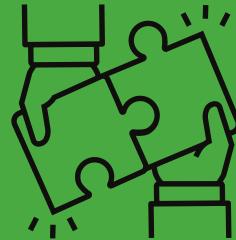
## METRICS OF SUCCESS

**75% of all synods feel more equipped to engage with their companions**

**80% of synods' global mission teams reflect generational diversity**

**70% of synods indicate that their work in their local context has been influenced by collaboration with global companions**

# COMPANION ENGAGEMENT TEAM



## Who is on this team?

- Two companion synod leaders from each of the nine ELCA regions who serve 3-year staggered terms with the ability to renew (18)
- Six at large members chosen based on specific skill sets and diversity who serve 3-year staggered terms with the ability to renew (6)
- Bishop Advisor who serves a 2-year term with the ability to renew (1)
- ELCA Companion Engagement Program Director



## How are the members of the Companion Engagement Team selected?

- ELCA Companion Engagement Program Director will make the team appointments in consultation with the synod bishops



## What are the qualifications of a potential team member?

A Companion Engagement Team member:

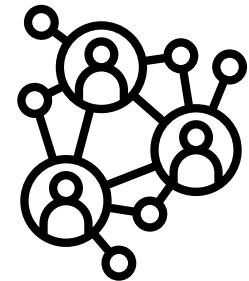
- is familiar with global engagement and the companion synod program
- embraces the values and principles of the accompaniment model
- has a strong relationship with their respective companion church(es)
- is able to commit to the position's term and frequency of meetings
- can attend virtual and in-person meetings
- practices good communication skills
- is a lifelong learner



## Will Companion Engagement Team members be compensated?

- No financial remuneration is offered. However, travel expenses will be covered/reimbursed.

# TEAM CULTURE & ONBOARDING

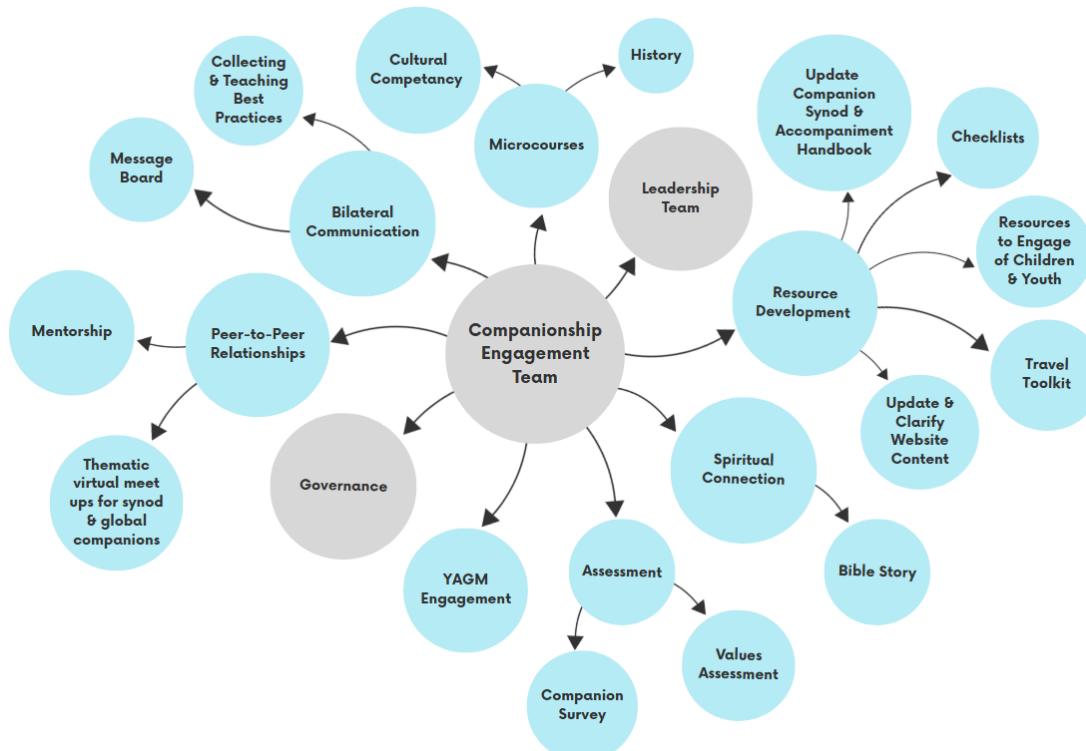


## TEAM CULTURE

To create a culture that aligns with the accompaniment model, we have designed a Companion Engagement Team ecosystem that endeavors to distribute power, responsibilities, decision making, and knowledge sharing in a manner that is interdependent and mutual based on the sociocratic theory of governance.

The work of the companion engagement team is multi-dimensional and driven by the particular priorities identified by the co-designers after intentional listening to the companion synod program participants. We are grateful for the diverse perspectives of the team members, who commit to show up and support the work of the companion synod program.

This is an initial attempt at visualizing a new collaborative team ecosystem that promotes accompaniment values practiced through the ELCA's Companion Synod Program.



# TEAM MEETING CADENCE

The dynamic nature of the Team structure means we have opportunity for several rhythms based on the team needs. Quarterly online and biennial in-person Team meetings form the core of our rhythm, while team working group meetings are held as needed.



## QUARTERLY TEAM MEETINGS (VIRTUAL)

- All team members
- Workshopping emerging issues/challenges in companion synod relationships (may be smaller, contextual)
- Examples of quarterly foci might include:
  - Focused on goals
  - ELCA Churchwide Update (partner organizations)
  - Equipping Synodical Engagement
  - Equipping Congregational Engagement
  - Companion Spotlight

## BIENNIAL TEAM MEETINGS (IN-PERSON)

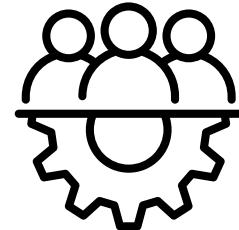
- Emphasizes the importance of in-person relationships and experiences
- Opportunities for connecting/networking, inspiration, worshiping together, sharing knowledge or best practices, and workshopping emerging trends (larger, multi-contextual experiences)

## TEAM WORKING GROUP MEETINGS (VIRTUAL)

- Working Groups meet at various frequencies depending on need
- These working groups are formed according to the needs, challenges and priorities of the Companion Synod Program.
- Working Groups (ad hoc) are formed to focus on specific issues. They may be ongoing or may be disbanded when the work is complete.

# ONBOARDING

The Companion Engagement Team is made up of a diverse group of committed people from across the ELCA. Our onboarding pattern helps to ensure team members understand their commitment and are integrated well into the function of the team.



## ONBOARDING PATTERN

- Invitation, Welcome & Team Member Expectations
- Required Microcourses (revisit biennially)\*
  - Accompaniment Model Microcourse
  - Companion Engagement Team Governance/ELCA Toolkit
- Follow-up Conversation with a Leadership Circle Member

\*The first iteration of this team will not include micro courses as they won't be ready.

# RESOURCES

The resources needed to sustain the functioning of the Companion Engagement Team may be understood in three areas: human resources, technical resources, and financial resources.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

- Companion Engagement Team Members
- Churchwide Organization Staff
- Advisors and other invited guests

## TECHNICAL RESOURCES

- Development and ongoing management of digital platform
- Microcourses and their development
- Virtual meeting spaces and tools

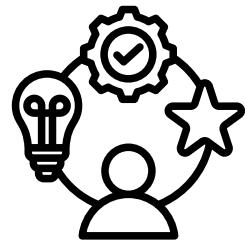
## FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- In-person meeting expenses
- Stipends for contractors (content development, speakers)
- Support personnel for the Team (intern, communication, etc.)

# CORE EXPERIENCE

## DECISION-MAKING

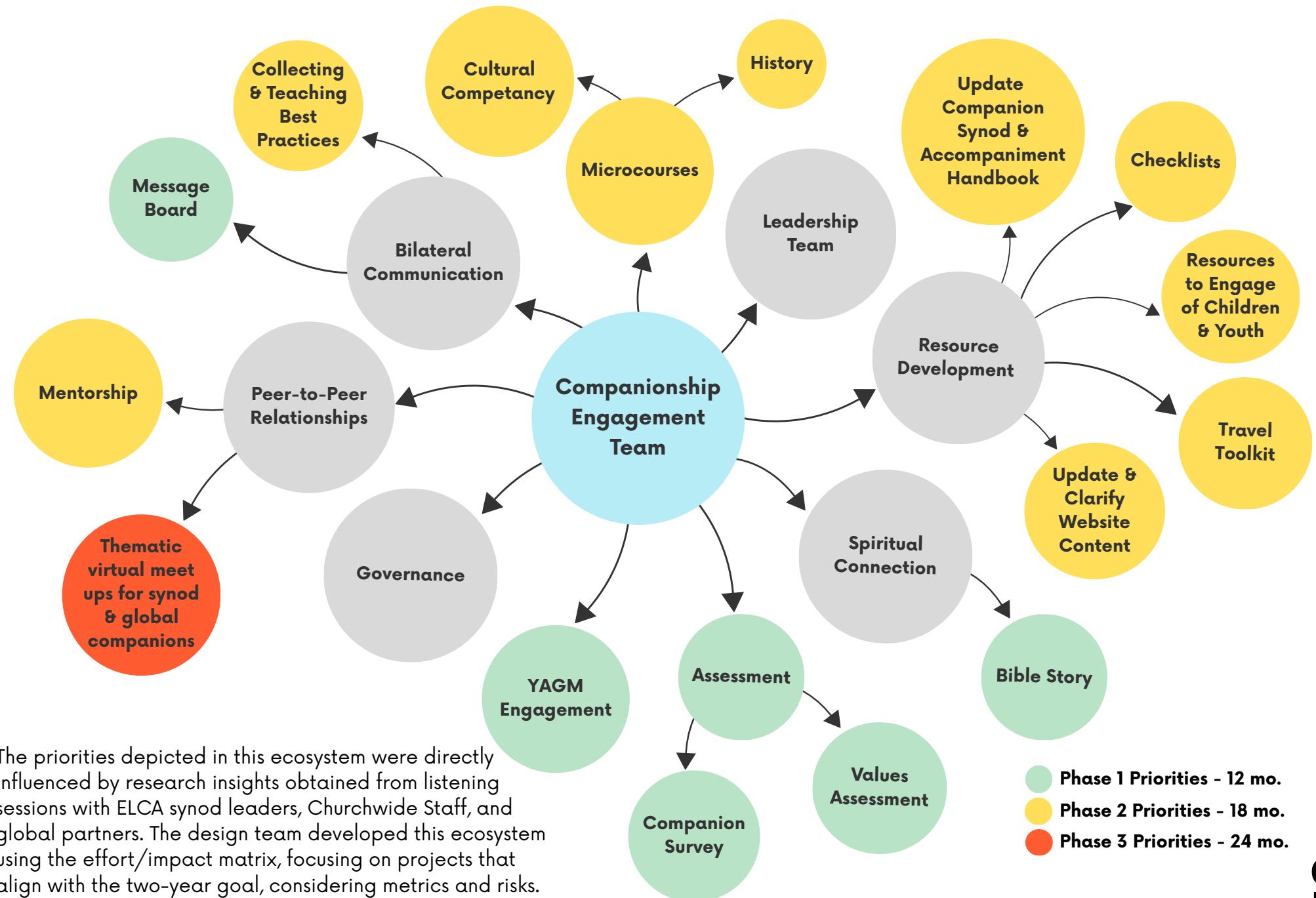
Decisions will be made by collective consensus, facilitated by the Team Chair. The team will take action in decision making through informal consensus building within working-groups, prayerful consensus in large-group discernment, and a light touch of Robert's Rules



## ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Team Chair**
  - Work closely with the Program Director for Companion Engagement to:
    - Convene the team and leadership circle
    - Set meeting agendas
    - Oversee regional communication
    - Lead meetings
- **Leadership Circle**
  - Identify and invite experts into working-group projects to address specific topics
  - Serve as the planning team for in-person events
  - Oversees the collective work of the team, ensuring it is aligned with the overall vision and priorities
  - Determine which team members will be intentional communicators with intersectional stakeholders (ELCA Churchwide, LWF, Companion Churches)
- **Team Members**
  - Work on specific projects, based on their gifts, expertise and experience
  - Bilaterally communicate with the companion synod relationship leaders or teams in their ELCA regions
  - Share regular project updates with the Leadership Circle
- **Bishop Advisor**
  - Communicates on behalf of the team to the Conference of Bishops
  - Advises the Leadership Circle as needed

# COMPANION ENGAGEMENT TEAM ECOSYSTEM



# CONCLUSION

The completed research and design sprint process surfaced a clear and compelling call: global companionship in the ELCA needs more intentional support, connection, and care. The proposed Companion Engagement Team responds to that call by offering a new engagement team—rooted in equity, mutuality, and shared leadership—that can strengthen companion synod relationships across the globe.

This report reflects the insights of diverse stakeholders, the wisdom of ELCA synod leaders and global companions, and the collective creativity of cross-ELCA expression collaborators. What's outlined here is not a finished product but a foundation—ready to be built upon with continued discernment, leadership, and investment.

As we look ahead, key next steps include finalizing the selection process for members, defining support mechanisms, and securing resourcing for sustained implementation. With thoughtful action, the Companion Engagement Team has the potential to embody the ELCA's commitment to global relationships and shared ministry.

We offer this proposal with deep gratitude and hope—trusting that the Holy Spirit is already at work in what has begun.



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