



# RECOGNIZED SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

## LCMS Bylaws and Policies

**Organizations applying for RSO status must agree to operate in accordance with Synod Bylaws and LCMS Board of Directors policies applicable to RSOs. The applicable Bylaws and policies are copied below.**

**6.2.1** The granting of recognized service organization status by the Synod signifies that a service organization, while independent of the Synod, fosters the mission and ministry of the church, engages in program activity that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod, is in harmony with the programs of the boards of the Synod, and respects and does not act contrary to the doctrine and practice of the Synod.

(a) Under the governance and policies of its own board, a recognized service organization operates with freedom and self-determination, structurally independent of the Synod and its agencies, in the establishment and evaluation of its own objectives, activities, and programs, in organization and administration, and in financial matters.

(b) A recognized service organization respects the rights and obligations of Synod's members, individual and congregational. Respecting proper evangelical supervision, counsel, and care of church workers and congregations, a recognized service organization accepts and agrees to facilitate the respective district president's ecclesiastical supervision of its rostered workers and his role in the recognized service organization's call process. A recognized service organization recognizes a congregation's right and duty to regularly call its own pastor and agrees not to extend pastoral ministry to a congregation without the specific consent of the congregation and the congregation's district president.

(c) A recognized service organization respects the authority of Synod's districts. A recognized service organization working within a geographical district, or with a congregation of a non-geographical district, accepts and agrees to facilitate the ecclesiastical oversight of the respective district's president over the organization's activities within his district. The overseeing district president shall report unresolved doctrinal and practical concerns to the Synod mission office granting status.

(d) A recognized service organization operating domestically respects the role of all districts impacted by its mission planning. A recognized service organization shall pursue church planting or establishment of preaching stations/missions only after consulting with and obtaining the concurrence of the same districts' president and boards or committees responsible for missions.

(e) A recognized service organization operating internationally agrees to inform, seek the counsel of, and cooperate with the Office of International Mission in its international work and respects protocol documents that may exist between The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and her partner churches that have been made available to the recognized service organization.

(f) Each recognized service organization shall be required to give its assurance in its governing documents that recognition as a service organization is not an endorsement by the Synod or a guarantee of financial responsibility for the debts and obligations of the organization or for services provided or offered.

**6.2.2** Policies shall distinguish the three classes of recognized service organization, with criteria, procedures, and benefits appropriate to each, further distinctions being drawn within the categories as needed:

(a) A witness service organization, under the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, engages in Word or Word-and-Sacrament ministry (including chaplaincy), religious media/programming, mission society activity, support of specific missions, mission-and-ministry training, church worker

professional development, church worker care, or other work directly related to the church's proclamation. A witness service organization is governed solely by Synod (or partner church) congregations or a board comprised solely of members of member congregations of the Synod (or its partner churches).

(b) An educational service organization, under the Scriptures and Lutheran Confessions, operates a Christian school (other than one governed solely by a Synod congregation or congregations), camp (with Christian programming), or the like. (Schools governed solely by Synod congregations, by virtue of their recognition as such by their districts, do not need recognized service organization status and have the rights and responsibilities of parish schools without obtaining recognized service organization status.)

(c) A mercy service organization facilitates the church's extension of the divine mercy without compromising the church's scriptural and confessional standards. It does so in areas in which cooperation in externals is possible, in demonstrated coordination and connection with member congregations of the Synod or its partners and, wherever possible, in close proximity to the Word-and-Sacrament ministry of the Synod and/or its partners.

**6.2.2.1** Policies of the Board of Directors and the mission boards and offices of the Synod may distinguish, within the educational and mercy service classes (educational service organization and mercy service organization), tiers of status recognizing different degrees of churchly governance and support and commensurate expectations for performance of activities and realization of mutual benefits.

**6.2.2.2** The right to extend a Synod-recognized, regular call to a rostered worker is afforded to the board of directors of a recognized service organization, provided that:

(a) the board's composition contains at least the proportion of members of Synod member congregations required by recognized service organization program policies; and

(b) the appropriate district president is properly consulted in the call process; and

(c) the call document is approved by the district president who would assume ecclesiastical supervision of the member as clearly stating that the organization:

(1) expects that the worker will, without compromise or constraint, carry out the ministry for which ordained or commissioned, and to which called, according to the doctrine and practice of the Synod.

(2) agrees to accommodate and encourage the ecclesiastical supervision of the worker by the appropriate district president.

(3) submits, as an exclusive remedy, to the dispute resolution process of the Synod for the resolution of any issues arising under the divine call.

(d) the organization demonstrates to the district president its ability to provide for the reasonable needs of the called worker for the duration of the period of the call.

**6.2.3** Program administration shall be carried out by the Offices of National and International Mission according to these bylaws, and according to policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, mission boards, and mission offices.

(a) The Board of Directors of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod shall adopt common policies and criteria for granting of recognized service organization status by Synod's mission offices, such polices relating to expectations for the corporate structure and governance of the organizations, statements regarding their legal and corporate independence from the Synod, and the necessary relation of their work to the mission and ministry of the Synod as generally expressed in its Constitution and Bylaws. The Board of Directors shall approve the standard form of agreement to be entered into by the Synod and each recognized service organization.

(b) Each mission board of the Synod in consultation with the Council of Presidents shall adopt further policies and criteria, related to its area of responsibility for granting of recognized service organization status by its respective mission office, such policies relating to the organizations' alignment with and augmentation of the mission and ministry of the Synod, as the Constitution and Bylaws relate to the board's area of responsibility and as further expressed in the Synod's triennial emphases and the board's specific goals and activities.

(c) Each mission office shall, subject to 6.2.3 (a) and (b) above, adopt further policies and criteria, for granting, renewal, and withdrawal of recognized service organization status, and shall develop such instruments as are necessary for coordination with districts.

**6.2.4** Subject to policies adopted by the Synod's Board of Directors and the respective mission board, recognized service organization status may be granted by the Office of National Mission or the Office of International Mission to a service organization (other than an auxiliary) that extends the mission and ministry of the Synod but is not part of the Synod as defined by its Constitution and Bylaws.

(a) Applications for recognized service organization status shall be made to the Office of the Secretary of the Synod, which will facilitate the application as follows:

(1) Educational service organization status is evaluated by the geographical district in which the school or camp is located, unless all voting members of its Board of Directors are members of a non-geographic district, on the basis of an instrument jointly developed by the Office of National Mission and the Council of Presidents. The instrument, completed by the organization and district, is reviewed and approved by the Office of National Mission. The status of schools is managed on a per-site basis.

(2) Witness or mercy service organization status, if the organization's activity is entirely within a single geographical district, may, if the policies of the Board for National Mission permit, be evaluated by the relevant district on the basis of an instrument developed by the Office of National Mission. The instrument, completed by the organization and district, is reviewed, further investigated, if needed, and finally approved by the Office of National Mission. Until and unless such policies and instrument are developed, applications for witness service organization or mercy service organization status shall be handled under (3) below.

(3) Status of all other organizations, and the application therefor, is administered directly by the Office of National or International Mission, as appropriate, with district presidents exercising ecclesiastical oversight of the operations of recognized service organizations within their boundaries.

(b) Within the area of its responsibility and in accordance with policies and criteria developed by the Synod Board of Directors, the respective mission board and office, each mission office shall determine to which organizations recognized service organization status will be granted.

(c) Granting offices may be authorized to set and charge application, renewal, and maintenance fees to recoup the cost of administration, subject to policies set by the Board of Directors of the Synod.