

# Women <sup>of the</sup> ELCA



South Carolina Synodical Women's Organization

**HANDBOOK  
FOR  
CHURCHWIDE  
SYNODICAL BOARD  
CONFERENCE  
AND  
CONGREGATIONAL UNITS**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## SECTION A – Churchwide Women of the ELCA

Purpose and mission statement .....	4
Women of the ELCA logo description and licensing .....	5
Preface and how to use this guide.....	6
Celebrating Women of the ELCA’s history.....	7
Why we exist: our mission and purpose .....	8
How we are organized: our structure .....	9
Expressions within Women of the ELCA .....	9
Triennial convention .....	11
A relational organization .....	12
Focus areas: discipleship, justice, stewardship .....	16
Mission areas: growth, community, action .....	16
Venn diagram.....	17
Timeline for planning .....	18
Women of the ELCA churchwide leadership .....	18
Publications and resources .....	19
Other ELCA resources .....	19
Constitution and Bylaws, Women of the ELCA.....	20

## SECTION B – South Carolina Synodical Women’s Organization

Board of the synodical women’s organization.....	36
Board job descriptions .....	38
Recognizing those who complete their service.....	41
Installation of a synodical board.....	42
SC Women of the ELCA events .....	43
SC synod office and institutions .....	43
Constitution and Bylaws, SC synodical women’s organization .....	44

## SECTION C – South Carolina Conferences

Conference structure .....	54
Conference areas in South Carolina.....	55
Conference guidelines.....	56
Conference business meeting agenda .....	57

## **SECTION D – South Carolina Congregational Units**

The Women of the ELCA unit.....	60
Starting a small group.....	61
Keeping a unit energized with evaluation.....	62
When a unit gets tired.....	63
Getting started.....	63
Setting goals.....	64
Selecting a unit model.....	64
The ministry plan.....	64
The three mission areas – one mission.....	65
Some activity suggestions.....	66
A few icebreakers.....	68
Unit leadership.....	69
Co-leader responsibilities.....	70
Officer responsibilities.....	71
Women of the ELCA offerings.....	72
Constitutions for units.....	73
Model Constitution and Bylaws for Units.....	74

## **SECTION E – Appendix**

Glossary.....	78
History of name change from Thankoffering to Joy Offering.....	82
Forms:	
Conference Meeting/Event Report.....	84
Cash Record.....	85
Conference Offering Remittance and Request for Disbursement.....	86
Conference Leaders Update Form.....	87
Congregational Unit Leaders Update Form.....	88
SC Congregational Unit Offering Remittance.....	89
Women of the ELCA Offering Form B.....	90

## **SECTION A – Churchwide Women of the ELCA**

The purpose statement of Women of the ELCA was adopted by the 1987 Constituting Convention and summarizes the foundational principles of the organization. It tells us who we are and what we do as an organization.

### **Purpose statement of Women of the ELCA**

As a community of women  
created in the image of God,  
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and  
empowered by the Holy Spirit,  
We commit ourselves to  
grow in faith,  
affirm our gifts,  
support one another in our callings,  
engage in ministry and action, and  
promote healing and wholeness in the  
church, the society, and the world.

### **Mission statement of Women of the ELCA**

Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus.

### **Women of the ELCA Logo**



### **Logo description**

Our logo—with the cross, water and a white lily—identifies women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as children of God; baptized, forgiven, adopted into God's family, full of grace and hope in eternal life. It is a reminder of the growth, beauty, and vitality that rises out of that life-giving baptismal water. It is also a reminder of the mission of the church to "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

## **Logo licensing**

Use of the Women of the ELCA logo is expressly subject to and conditioned on agreement to the following terms.

The Women of the ELCA logo is protected under United States and international Trademark Law. Use of these marks, other than in accordance with the terms and conditions of this agreement or as otherwise authorized by law, is strictly prohibited.

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The churchwide organization may grant permission to recognized expressions of the organization to reproduce the logo for fundraising purposes if (1) the fundraising or sale of goods will support that expression's own mission and ministries, or (2) the fundraising or sale of goods will support the mission and ministries of the churchwide organization (for example, to raise money for Katie's Fund, grants, scholarships, or the health initiative).

Recognized expressions of the organization can be synodical women's organizations, congregational, inter-congregational, or special units; and clusters or conferences.

Women of the ELCA grants a nonexclusive, non-transferable license to use the Women of the ELCA logo in accordance with the following guidelines:

1. Users agree not to revise or alter the logo in any way. Our three-color logo consists of black, white and blue (PMS 308). The lily and waves in the cross must be white. No other colors may be substituted. The logo may be reproduced in grayscale, or black and white.
2. Use of the Women of the ELCA logo does not imply approval or endorsement of products or services.
3. Women of the ELCA is and remains the sole owner of the Women of the ELCA logo. By entering into this nonexclusive license, the user does not attain any interest in the logo.
4. Women of the ELCA reserves the right to alter or amend these guidelines at any time and without notice to the user.
5. Permission is never granted to individuals who wish to reproduce the logo on items that will be sold for personal profit.
6. Users agree not to use the Women of the ELCA logo in any manner likely to confuse, mislead, or deceive the public, or to be adverse to the best interests of the Women of the ELCA.
7. Users agree that the Women of the ELCA logo is proprietary to the Women of the ELCA and that Women of the ELCA maintains all rights, title, and interest thereto including, without limitation, all intellectual property and other proprietary rights.

## Preface

Each year women throughout the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are called to ministry on the boards of synodical women's organizations of Women of the ELCA. This guide is meant to enable, equip, and empower those volunteers in carrying out their call. They, together with all women participating in Women of the ELCA, accomplish the organization's mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. This guide relies on the constitutions of our organization as they set out the vision that the founders of our organization had in 1987. The constitutions establish the ways in which we agree to live together.

Women of the ELCA today is supported by countless years of ministry in predecessor bodies, reaching back into the 19th century. The current community of women owes much to these ancestors who brought their God-given gifts to ministry when women's roles within the institutional church were limited or non-existent.

This guide draws on similar guides prepared in the past, the first having been written for Women of the ELCA in 1992. Revisions were published in 1997, 2001 and 2007. We are thankful for the opportunity to build upon previous guides in drafting this one.

Finally, this guide reflects the needs and desires of the synodical women's organizations as they are expressed in the many conversations and questions that staff members of Women of the ELCA regularly encounter through social media, e-mail, phone calls, mail, and personal conversations.

## How to use this guide

Those who drafted and adopted the constitutions of Women of the ELCA offered the organization a huge gift. Because of constitutions and structures, women have great freedom to follow our Purpose Statement and accomplish our mission in ways that support their local context and the needs of those gathered under the umbrella of Women of the ELCA. What the ministry looks like can change as circumstances change and as different women gather under the umbrella. This is true for units and for synodical organizations.

We have order in our organization, thanks to our constitutions. We have commitments and expectations too. We also have great flexibility in how we follow our Purpose Statement and accomplish our mission. This handbook follows those same principles. There are a few things that every synodical organization should be about, and then there is great flexibility in how the synodical organizations follow our Purpose Statement and accomplish our mission.

When a woman is called into service and elected as a leader in the South Carolina WELCA, she should prayerfully begin that ministry by reading our constitutions in this handbook. If some of the terminology is confusing, she should refer to the glossary.

For consistency, words and phrases that have particular meaning for Women of the ELCA follow the style established in the Constitutions and Bylaws. For example:

- **Participant** refers to the individual woman who is committed to the purpose of, and is active within, Women of the ELCA in some way.
- **Member** refers to a congregational, inter-congregational, or special unit.
- **Unit** is the more common word which refers to the local WELCA group.
- **Conference** refers to the area of churches within a specific location of the synod.
- **Executive Board** refers to the board of the churchwide organization.

The latest version of this handbook can be found at [www.scwelca.com](http://www.scwelca.com) by following the "Tools for Leaders" link. It is available as a downloadable PDF.

## Celebrating Women of the ELCA's history

Lutheran women in the United States have been gathering in mission since the 1800s. We owe much to our foremothers who responded to God's call, created a place, and lived out a purpose when women had few roles in the church.

Three groups came together in 1987 to form Women of the ELCA. These groups were the American Lutheran Church Women (of the American Lutheran Church), the Lutheran Church Women (of the Lutheran Church in America) and Women in Action for Mission (of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches). The constituting convention was held June 13-14, 1987, in Milwaukee, Wis., with the theme "Embrace God's World."

Communication tools soon followed. The magazine *Lutheran Woman Today* began publishing in January 1988, and *Newsletter* (the predecessor to *Interchange*) followed in June of that year. The organization's first website was inaugurated in 1995. *Café*, an electronic magazine for young women, launched in 2006, and podcasts soon followed. The organization's first smart phone app was unveiled in 2011, the same year that the magazine took on its new name, *Gather*. For several years now the organization has been publishing an electronic newsletter for participants called *Bold Connections*.

Various program initiatives were launched by the churchwide organization in 1988, some of which continue today—such as the scholarship program. Initiatives came and went, meeting the context for and the needs of women at the time. For example, a literacy program existed from 1988-1996, and "Money, Security, and Spirituality" events were held from 1991-1995. Rachel's Day was initiated in 1996 and continues today.

Significant efforts were expended in:

- banning plastic-foam cups,
- celebrating anniversaries of women's ordination,
- exploring cross-cultural programming,
- developing an anti-racist identity,
- supporting women and children living in poverty,
- traveling globally,
- eliminating landmines,
- supporting fair trade, and
- understanding and working to end human trafficking.

Within units and synodical organizations, participants have made significant contributions to their communities by supporting domestic violence shelters, programs for the homeless and hungry, and women's empowerment initiatives, to name but a few. Traditional activities like Bible study and relief quilt making have been joined by service and advocacy projects, both at home and abroad. Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls, the organization's health initiative, began in 2005. Bold Women's Day, an annual celebration of our mission and the women who accomplish it, launched in 2007.

The organization has prepared an assortment of resources through the years in addition to the annual Bible study published in the magazine. Resource books were popular in the first years of the organization. Themed series followed. Most recently, the organization has produced program resources designed to assist women in living out the mission and purpose of the organization. While resources were available for purchase early in the life of the organization, more recently most resources have been available as free downloadable PDFs.

The staff grew to 30 by 2002; but the size has slowly been reduced since then, primarily due to financial considerations. Today the executive director and her staff of 8 oversee the day-to-day operations of the churchwide organization. They are the only paid staff located within the churchwide organization. In all other expressions of the organization, volunteers carry out the organization's mission.

The churchwide women's organization currently functions with an annual budget of approximately \$3 million. The primary source of revenue is contributions from participants, either in the form of Regular Offerings or Thankofferings. If the organization had more disposable income, it would make an unrestricted annual gift to the ELCA, often about \$1 million. In 2007, however, considering declining revenue, the executive board determined that the organization could no longer make an unrestricted gift to the ELCA. The organization continues to transmit all designated gifts from women and units to the various ministries of the ELCA.

The organization has assets held in endowments, some of which were created during the life of this organization and some of which were passed down from predecessor women's organizations (the oldest was created more than 100 years ago). The interest earned on these endowments is used consistent with the original donor's intent, and that ranges from scholarships to international mission.

A special endowment fund was created by the organization on its tenth anniversary and named the Katharina von Bora Luther Fund (Katie's Fund, for short). The interest earned on this fund is used by the churchwide organization for ministries that involve leadership development, global connections, and faith in daily life. In 2007, the executive board created a current fund as part of Katie's Fund. Since 2008, gifts can be designated for either current needs or the endowment. An annual appeal for Katie's Fund began in 2008. The endowment fund now exceeds \$1 million.

## **Why we exist: our mission and purpose**

The mission of Women of the ELCA, in all its expressions, is to mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. All efforts of the women's organization should support this mission. The statement of purpose of Women of the ELCA further expands on that mission, identifying ways in which we support that mission:

*As a community of women, created in the image of God,  
called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit,  
we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts,  
support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action,  
and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.*

All efforts of the women's organization, in all its expressions, should be done in order to accomplish this purpose. All who participate in the organization must agree to this purpose. When women gather together in our organization, all of their work should be measured against our mission and purpose.

When women gather together, many amazing things can be accomplished. **Together we accomplish more than we ever could accomplish alone.**



## **How we are organized: our structure**

Women of the ELCA is the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It is separately incorporated, and it is not an auxiliary of the church. It is financially independent and responsible for its own financial affairs. Under the current structure of the church, it is identified as a "separately incorporated ministry," as are Lutheran Men in Mission; 1517 Media; the ELCA Foundation; and the Mission Investment Fund. By the terms of our constitution, the churchwide organization follows the personnel policies and financial policies of the ELCA.

The constitutions govern how this organization operates. We have four constitutions and accompanying by-laws and continuing resolutions:

- Approved Model Constitution and Bylaws, **Congregational or Inter-congregational Unit**
- Approved Model Constitution and Bylaws, **Special Unit**
- Approved Constitution and Bylaws, **Synodical Women's Organization**
- Constitution and Bylaws, **Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

The constitutions reflect the values and expectations of the women in this organization. In the constitutions, we agree how we will live together and carry out our mission and purpose. Constitutions change from time to time, reflecting the changing needs of the organization and the world in which we live. Changes can originate organically within the participants of our organization or with the churchwide executive board. Proposed changes are considered and voted upon at the triennial conventions of our organization which is the highest legislative authority. Voting members to the convention are elected by synodical organizations. Between conventions, the churchwide executive board conducts the business of the organization.

## **Expressions within the Women of the ELCA**

As its constitutions provide, Women of the ELCA is comprised of three elements called "expressions:"

- A. Congregational, inter-congregational and special Units (Unit)
- B. Synodical Women's Organizations (SWO)
- C. Churchwide Women's Organization (CWO)

### **A. Congregational, inter-congregational and special units (Unit)**

At the heart and center of Women of the ELCA are the congregational units. All others – the conference, synodical women's organization, and the churchwide women's organization – exist to help the congregational units carry out specific ministries. To accomplish the purpose of Women of the ELCA, the constitution states that women in this unit shall commit themselves to:

- a. come together for study, support and action;**
- b. participate in the ministry of Women of the ELCA beyond the congregation;**
- c. support financially the total program of Women of the ELCA; and**
- d. designate leadership that shall be in communication with the synodical and churchwide women's organization.**

The way that each unit lives out these commitments may vary, limited only by the imagination and resources of the women participating in the unit. As to Commitment a., some units may meet monthly, others quarterly. Some units may consist of a handful of women; other units may have many women who meet in smaller groupings, organized around interests. Some units may sponsor a retreat while other units sponsor service projects.

Likewise, for Commitment b., there are many ways to participate in the ministry of Women of the ELCA beyond the congregation. Some units will be active in conference events while others participate in synodical or regional events. Many units will attend events sponsored by the churchwide organization, including the triennial gathering. All are encouraged to subscribe to the organization's publications and use its resources.

When it comes to "support financially the total program of Women of the ELCA," Commitment c., units do several things. They collect Regular Offerings and submit a portion of them to their synodical organization, which in turn, submits a portion of those regular offerings to the churchwide organization. Units hold one or more Thankoffering services each year and that offering goes directly to the churchwide organization. Units also participate in special offerings and designated gifts.

Commitment d. simply designates a participant who will be in communication with the synodical and churchwide organizations. Depending upon how the unit organizes its life together, it will usually be the president or chair of the unit who fills this role.

## **B. Synodical Women's Organization (SWO)**

The second expression is the synodical women's organization. The constitution states: "The purpose of this synodical women's organization shall be to assist units within its territory to fulfill the purpose of Women of the ELCA." Women of the ELCA has 64 synodical women's organizations. Depending upon its geography, history and leadership, each synodical organization carries out the responsibility of assisting units in a different way, led by a changing group of elected volunteers.

The legislative function of the synodical organization is fulfilled by the synodical convention, held either annually or biennially, with the synodical board (elected volunteers) exercising interim legislative authority. While planning and carrying out a convention can be a large task, it should not overshadow the work of the board in assisting units to fulfill the purpose of Women of the ELCA.

It is the responsibility of the synodical organization to be in close contact with the units in its territory. Contact with established units should include but is not limited to:

- establishing and maintaining contact information for the unit's leadership;
- informing units of actions taken by the churchwide executive board;
- introducing resources produced in the churchwide office;
- informing units of programs available through the synodical organization and presenting said programs at their meetings;
- assisting with the formation of new units; and
- communicating the emphasis selected by the synodical board for projects, programs, and events.

Congregations that do not currently have an established unit of Women of the ELCA should be contacted, and every effort should be made to establish a new unit in those congregations. Keep a list of active units so that the following can be used to:

- contact active congregational units and send them:
  - the synodical newsletter,
  - synodical board meeting minutes,
  - synodical convention minutes, and
  - notice of planned events;
- determine how many voting members should be attending synodical conventions (all voting members must be a participant of an active unit)
- determine how many voting members the synodical organization is allowed to elect for the triennial convention (all voting members must be a participant of an active unit).

### **C. The Churchwide Women’s Organization (CWO)**

The third expression of the organization is the churchwide women’s organization. Like the synodical organizations, the churchwide organization exists to support women in units as they carry out our shared mission and purpose. The churchwide organization also coordinates the ministry of women across the church, exercising many functions and responsibilities.

### **Triennial Convention**

The three expressions of Women of the ELCA are connected most visibly at the Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA. “The Triennial Convention shall be the highest legislative authority of Women of the ELCA and shall deal with all matters that are necessary in the pursuit of the purpose and functions of this organization.” The executive board members (elected volunteers) exercise interim legislative authority and serve as the board of directors.

Women of the ELCA operates on a three-year programming cycle called a “triennium.” Elections for the executive board are on a 3-year cycle. Units nominate participants to be voting members at the Triennial Convention. Voting members are elected at the synodical women’s organization convention one or more years in advance of the triennial convention at which they are to serve. The number of delegates from the SWO is based on a census of units within each SWO. Currently, one voting member is assigned for every 25 active congregation units within the SWO.

By voting and presenting resolutions to the convention, voting members to the triennial convention determine the direction and develop the policies of Women of the ELCA for the upcoming three years. This direction and these policies affect all three expressions of the women’s organization. In addition, synodical women’s organizations in convention may adopt resolutions to submit to the triennial convention. Such resolutions are called memorials, and they also help give direction to the organization.

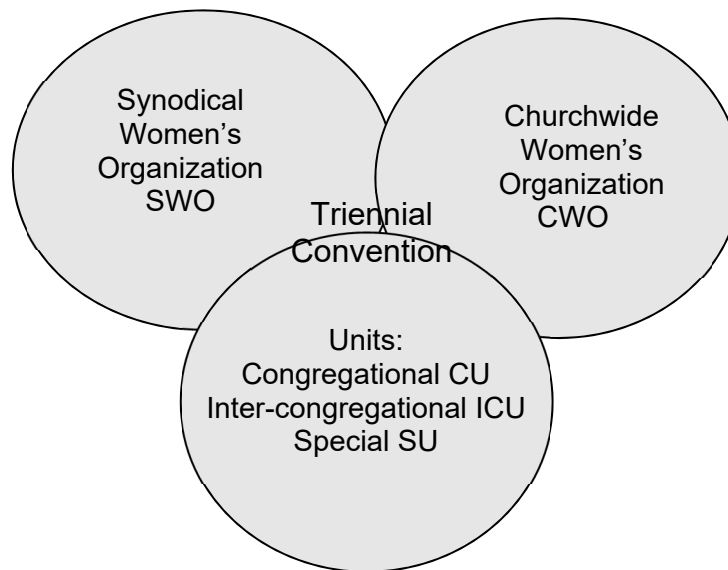
The Triennial Gathering is a relational event held after the triennial convention. At the Triennial Gathering Women of the ELCA worship together, learn together, strengthen our mutual commitment, and affirm our sisterhood in mission and ministry.

## “Expressions,” not “Levels”

Units, synodical women’s organizations and the churchwide women’s organization each live out its own mission while being intimately interconnected with the others as we share responsibility for fulfilling the common purpose of Women of the ELCA. Each in its own way is an “expression” of Women of the ELCA. While each expression is *fully* Women of the ELCA, no one expression is the *whole* Women of the ELCA.

Note that the term “expression” is preferred to “level” because it implies relationships of equality among CWO, SWO and unit instead of hierarchical relationships. We can also see that communication can take place directly between units and the churchwide women’s organization without going “through” synodical women’s organizations.

We can see in the diagram of interconnected circles that what affects one expression of Women of the ELCA affects all expressions of the organization. We live out our mission as Women of the ELCA in partnership and interdependence. “Each part shall recognize that it is in a partnership with the others to share in God’s mission.”



## A relational organization

Women of the ELCA is a relational organization. Our purpose statement makes it clear that we are a community of women living in relationships to God, one another, the church, the society and the world. Our structure, the Constitution and Bylaws of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Constitutions and Bylaws of Women of the ELCA help us understand and live out those relationships.

Below are some of the ways that the synodical women’s organization may relate to other expressions of Women of the ELCA.

### To the Churchwide Women’s Organization

Conference of Synodical Presidents. Presidents of synodical women’s organizations meet annually to learn about and share information about emphases, mission-related policies, and plans of the organization. Conference also provides an opportunity for synodical presidents to develop leadership skills and to gather for

mutual support and the sharing of ideas, information, and resources. While the Conference of Presidents has no legislative authority, recommendations are made from the Conference of Presidents to the executive board.

President's Representative to the Synodical Women's Organization Convention: A member of the churchwide executive board brings a report to each synodical convention describing the activities, plans, and programs of the churchwide organization. She also functions as a "listening post" to convey concerns and information from the synodical organization to the president and executive board. Between synodical conventions, the president's representative may act as a personal liaison to the synodical women's organization.

Printed Communications from the churchwide women's organization: Published Communications from the churchwide women's organization include Gather Magazine, Bold Café, and Bold Connections. All subscriptions are available online at [www.welca.org](http://www.welca.org) under Publications.

Synodical Women's Organization reports to the Churchwide Women's Organization. These reports include regular mailings of the synodical newsletter, reports following synodical conventions, information regarding proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws for the Synodical Women's Organization and other reports which may be requested.

## **To Congregational Units**

The synodical convention is the highest legislative authority of the synodical women's organization and must be held at least biennially. At the synodical convention, voting members from units elect synodical officers and board members, determine policies and direction for synodical women's organization. The synodical board reports on its work since the previous convention and its plans for the future.

Communication: The synodical women's organization frequently serves as the liaison between the churchwide organization and the unit. This role may be performed in a variety of ways, including a regular synodical newsletter (The Ripple), email news blast, letters to units, telephone contact with unit leader, personal visits to unit meetings and on the SWO Website ([www.scwelca.com](http://www.scwelca.com)).

Support: The synodical women's organization supports units by providing resources for programming (such as leadership training), helping new units organize and nurturing active units. To accomplish these functions, synodical board members must be aware of the needs of individual units and be creative in the ways they address those needs.

## **To Conferences**

Conferences exist to work cooperatively with the synodical women's organization in assisting units in fulfilling the purpose of Women of the ELCA. These are not legislative groups and do not have a constitution.

Conferences are simply practical geographical groupings of units, intended to enhance relationships and offer opportunities to build community. Where the geography of a synodical organization is great, a conference offers a more workable size for the gathering of women and delivery of services. Women can more easily gather in conferences with smaller geographical boundaries. Conferences are charged with working interdependently with the synodical women's organization and the units to fulfill the purpose of Women of the ELCA through activities. Conferences are designed to be bridges between the congregational unit and the synodical women's organization.

## **To the South Carolina Synod of the ELCA**

Under its constitution, the synodical women's organization is also called into an interdependent relationship with its synod. The SWO to "establish a relationship" with its synod, and shall "invite the bishop of the synod or her or his appointee to serve as a representative of the synod to the synodical women's organization and to provide reports to its convention and board meetings." (SWO Constitution, Article IV, Section 4.) Other ways in which that relationship can be established, nurtured, and supported include:

- When a synodical president is elected, she should arrange to visit with the synod bishop, introducing herself, discussing the vision of the board for its ministry in the next two-year period and ways in which the SWO and synod can support each other in ministry.
- The synodical president or her representative should provide a report of the past year's synodical women's activities – a written report for the Bulletin of Reports, and an oral report/greeting in a plenary session during the Synod Assembly.
- The synod office and the bishop or her/his appointee should receive the synodical newsletter and other important synodical women's communications.
- The synodical president and board should subscribe to the synod eNews and be informed of other media communications on the synod website.
- Stay informed of Synod Council meeting highlights - <https://scsynod.com/synod-council/>
- Major synodical women's organization events should be included on the synod calendar and vice versa. Dates for SWO events should be set in consultation with the synod office so as not to conflict.
- The bishop or a synod staff member can be approached for assistance, such as leading a team-building exercise when a new SWO board is formed or facilitating discussions in a dysfunctional situation.
- The synodical president of Lutheran Men in Mission and the president of the Lutheran Youth Organization should be included in regular communications. Many opportunities for partnerships may result from developing good relationships with these organizations.
- At synod assemblies, the SWO president should have an opportunity to bring greetings in a plenary session. The SWO should have an exhibit, if exhibit space is available.

## **Partner synods**

Since 2002, partner synods have existed within the ELCA, providing ways in which synods from different locations can work together to form community and partnership. This partnership originated within the Conference of Bishops as a way to allow synods to become familiar with the history, customs, culture and faith practices of their ELCA brothers and sisters. Within Women of the ELCA, we have mirrored these partner synods.

South Carolina Synod (9C) is in partnership with Greater Milwaukee Synod (5J). The number refers to the specific region of the ELCA. The letter refers to the specific synod within that region. South Carolina Synod is in Region 9 of the ELCA which includes six synods: 9A is the Virginia Synod, 9B is the North Carolina Synod, 9C is the South Carolina Synod, 9D is the Southeastern Synod, 9E is the Florida-Bahamas Synod, and 9F is the Caribbean Synod.

## Other connections

Companion synods. Currently the SC Synod has three companion synods outside of the United States in Tanzania, Japan, and Colombia. Women active in Women of the ELCA often participate in travel to and programming in the companion synods while also hosting representatives from the companion synods at activities in the synod and SWO.

Other women’s organizations. By its governing documents, the churchwide organization of Women of the ELCA is called to relate to other women’s organizations ecumenically and globally. For instance, we celebrate World Day of Prayer the first Friday in March of each year which is sponsored by Church Women United.

Lutheran World Relief, Lutheran World Federation. Internationally, Women of the ELCA has been active in supporting Lutheran World Relief, not only through financial support, but also through hundreds of thousands of quilts and kits made by Lutheran women and distributed by LWR around the globe. Through these connections we have increased our understanding of, and mutual respect for, other cultures and people.

## Women of the ELCA and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Women of the ELCA is not an “auxiliary” of the ELCA. While we are separately incorporated self-supporting and have our own constitution, we operate with the Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and with the policies of the church. Women of the ELCA reports to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly and to the ELCA Church Council.

Parallel Structure, Different Language. The structure of the Women of the ELCA parallels that of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and follows the same geographic lines. Our language for the three expressions of Women of the ELCA is slightly different from the language of the church.

ELCA	Women of the ELCA
Local Congregation or Institution	Local congregational, inter-congregational, or special unit (“Unit”)
Synod	Synodical Women’s Organization (“SWO”)
Churchwide Organization	Churchwide Women’s Organization (“CWO”)
Assembly	Convention
Voting Member	Voting Member
Conference	Conference

Being consistent in the language we use helps us to be clear in our communication when we are talking about the ELCA and when we are talking about Women of the ELCA.

## Women of the ELCA Respond

Through various program areas, Women of the ELCA’s community of women provide services in their churches, communities, and even the world. We engage in ministry; we take action through advocacy; we promise healing and wholeness; and we support one another in our callings.

We offer anti-racism training; address domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation, and human trafficking; and support families with special needs. We assist participants in their desire to discern God’s call in their lives and to discover their spiritual gifts through workshops, retreats, resources, scholarships, and global

education. We offer grants to not-for-profit organizations, both domestic and international, that support healing and wholeness for women of all ages through the affirmation and advancement of women's emotional, physical, and spiritual health. **We make a difference in the world.**

## **Focus areas: discipleship, justice, and stewardship**

Our Purpose Statement helps us carry out our mission and should be the focus of our activities. Congregational Units may organize to grow in faith, engage in ministry, and support one another in friendship and fellowship while helping others throughout the world with much more flexible approach than the traditional "board" structure. All can work together to carry out our mission and are encouraged to utilize programs and resources to assist in sharing the Good News and spiritually enriching our own faith. In carrying out the mission of this organization, we focus on three categories of ministry: Discipleship, Justice and Stewardship.

Discipleship: Discipleship is a lifelong journey of living out and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. Disciples are followers of Jesus who are intent on carrying out the great commission (Matthew 28:19-20 and Acts 1:8). Women of the ELCA participants are active disciples in many ways. They practice the seven marks of discipleship: praying, studying, worshiping, inviting, encouraging, serving and giving. Whether it be making quilts and kits for Lutheran World Relief or studying the Bible together or assisting in worship, they grow in faith and share what they've learned with friends and neighbors.

Justice: Justice is faith in action. Justice addresses inequities in political, economic and social systems. Justice is equity and impartiality, mercy, and compassion. Justice includes serving God in ways that bring healing and wholeness to the church, the society, and the world. The Women of the ELCA justice initiative includes combating commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, and supporting families with special needs through our online resources. We advocate for racial and cultural equity through our anti-racism training, and our cross-cultural programming. Women active in Women of the ELCA also work for justice by supporting partner organizations who lift up women and children such as the 1,000 Days Movement, Lutheran World Relief, ELCA Good Gifts, Our Companion Synods, and many other initiatives. Women of the ELCA is well regarded for their important work in justice and advocacy, including our work on domestic violence, commercial sexual exploitation, and environmental justice.

Stewardship: Stewardship is careful and responsible management of the money, property, and resources that God has entrusted us. Stewardship is also providing for the ministries that God has entrusted to our care. Women of the ELCA creates educational resources about giving and managing money, including devotions, Bible studies, and program materials for individuals and small groups. Learn about Regular Offerings, Thank Offerings, Katie's Fund, and more in the "Your Offerings at Work" stewardship guide available from Churchwide. Share in the mission and ministry through your congregational units, conferences and synods. Part of our purpose as active women in this church is to provide assistance to others through our stewardship dollars as well as to help one another recognize our own power through stewardship.

## **Mission Areas: Growth, Community and Action**

Programs and activities of Women of the ELCA are organized around three mission areas: Mission Growth, Mission Community, Mission Action. Most programs and activities represent more than one mission and constitute a balanced effort. Together, these mission areas provide a holistic approach to living the gospel of Jesus Christ in today's world. They provide opportunities for women to grow in faith and mission.

Mission: Growth (*Our Relationship with God*): Seeks to provide a variety of learning and growth experiences that strengthen each woman as a whole person, develop her potential and sense of call as a disciple and child of



God, and equip her for ministry. Mission Growth nurtures spiritual growth through enabling and encouraging women to share the good news as disciples of Jesus Christ in their daily lives. It also provides opportunities for each woman to identify her own gifts and leadership skills and makes available resources for Bible study and personal faith development.

Mission Community (*Our Relationship with One Another*): Seeks to enable each woman to value herself and others as created in God’s image and redeemed through Jesus Christ, and to build up and celebrate relationships among women of faith that are global, diverse and interdependent. These relationships are disciple relationships which include God, family, other persons of faith, the global community, Women of the ELCA units, and the un-churched.

Mission Action (*Our Response to God*): Seeks to enable women to articulate and act on their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ and in all areas of life. Mission Action is about being in direct servant roles. We act to ensure that all people have access to basic human needs, equality, justice, and safety. This includes developing active partnerships with workers of God’s justice to provide tangible goods and services, education, and advocacy against injustice.

**One Mission - Three Perspectives**

Our Women of the ELCA Purpose Statement is carried out through three different perspectives: Growth, Community, Action. They cannot be separated any more than God the Father (Creator), God the Son (Redeemer), and God the Holy Spirit (Sanctifier) can be separated. Instead of wondering which issues, programs or resources belong to Growth, which belong to Action, and which belong to Community, know that all issues, programs and resources need all three perspectives to be wholly addressed. Women of the ELCA consists of three interrelated mission areas: each unique but cohesive and interdependent elements of the focus (center of activity).

**Venn Diagram**



## **Timeline for planning**

### January

15<sup>th</sup> – Mail offerings by today for inclusion in fiscal year that is ending.

31<sup>st</sup> – End of fiscal year.

### February

1<sup>st</sup> – Starting date for new treasurers

- Conference of Presidents, usually third or fourth weekend

### March

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in March – Bold Women’s Day

1<sup>st</sup> Friday in March – World Day of Prayer

### April

1<sup>st</sup> – Deadline for active unit assessment data submission, every third year

- Churchwide executive board meeting

### May

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in May – Rachael’s Day (to stop gun violence)

### June

- South Carolina synodical women’s convention

### July

- Triennial convention and gathering, every third year (month may vary)

### August

- Nominations open for executive board, secretary and treasurer, every third year

- Conference calls with presidents in each region

### September

15<sup>th</sup> – Deadline for submitting proposed constitutional changes to executive board

### October

- Churchwide executive board meeting

### November 30<sup>th</sup>

- Deadline to submit memorials from synodical organizations to churchwide organization
- Deadline to submit roster of voting members for triennial convention, every third year
- Deadline to nominate women for executive board, secretary and treasurer, every third year

### December 15<sup>th</sup>

- Deadline, seed grant applications, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls
- Application period opens for scholarship program

## **Women of the ELCA Leadership**

The executive board of the Women of the ELCA provides vision and enacts policies which are brought to life by the staff of the Women of the ELCA. The executive director and staff plan a comprehensive program that supports women within the organization as they live out our mission and purpose. This plan involves leadership development, communication resources and networks, racial justice resources and network, global education, a health initiative, financial support, program resources, and more. Click [www.womenoftheelca.org/staff](http://www.womenoftheelca.org/staff) or [www.womenoftheelca.org/executive-board](http://www.womenoftheelca.org/executive-board).

Officers and Board Members may be contacted by sending a message to the churchwide office

<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/contact>

Phone: 800.638.3522, ext. 8730, Fax: 773.380.2419

## Women of the ELCA Publications

Lutheran Women have a long history of Bible study, discipleship, and desire to deepen their spiritual life and learn about issues. Your offerings provide resources to support you on your journey of faith as well as to provide for ministries. Referenced below is a list of some of these resources and how you may access them. For publications, click: <https://www.womeoftheelca.org/publications>

*Gather* - a magazine of Women of the ELCA, offers a mix of articles, theological reflections, devotions, and stories of comfort and challenge that help readers grow in faith and engage in ministry and action. *Gather* is published 10 times a year with combined issues in January/February and July/August.

*Bold Cafe'* - an award-winning web-based magazine for young adult women who want to build community, participate in advocacy, and strengthen their faith can relate to everyday life.

*Bold Connections* - A free monthly e-newsletter from Women of the ELCA. Whether you participate a lot or a little in Women of the ELCA, you'll find helpful news and information on our programs and activities, and stories of how together we live out our purpose and mission.

*Daily Grace* - A free devotional app for daily inspirations.

## Women of the ELCA Resources

Free downloadable program resources in English and Spanish help you grow in faith and engage in ministry and action. Click: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/resources>

**Stay connected** - through Women of the ELCA's online community:

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/womenoftheelca](http://www.facebook.com/womenoftheelca)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/womenoftheelca](http://www.twitter.com/womenoftheelca)

Pinterest: [www.pinterest.com/womeoftheelca](http://www.pinterest.com/womeoftheelca)

## Other Resources of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

- ELCA Good Gifts: [www.elca.org/goodgifts](http://www.elca.org/goodgifts)
- ELCA World Hunger: [www.elca.org/hunger](http://www.elca.org/hunger)
- Lutheran Disaster Response: [www.elca.org/disaster](http://www.elca.org/disaster)
- Always Being Made New: [www.elca.org/Campaign](http://www.elca.org/Campaign)
- ELCA Global Links: [www.elca.org/globalmission](http://www.elca.org/globalmission)
- Augsburg Fortress: [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org)
- Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service: [www.lirs.org](http://www.lirs.org)
- Lutheran World Relief (Headquarters): [www.lwr.org](http://www.lwr.org)
- Upstate Lutheran World Relief: [www.worldrelief.org/upstate-sc](http://www.worldrelief.org/upstate-sc)
- Global Health Ministries: [www.ghm.org](http://www.ghm.org)

## Constitution and Bylaws

### Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The provisions of the Constitution and these Bylaws that pertain to the same subject have been placed together. The three types of provisions are identified in the following way:

**Constitutional provisions appear in bold type.**

Bylaws appear in regular type.

*Continuing Resolutions appear in italics.*

#### ARTICLE I—NAME AND INCORPORATION

##### SECTION 1. Name

The name of this organization shall be Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

##### SECTION 2. Designations

For the purpose of this constitution and the accompanying bylaws, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is designated as “ELCA” or “the church,” Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as “Women of the ELCA,” “this organization,” or “the organization,” and local organizations of Women of the ELCA (congregational, inter-congregational, and special) as “units.”

##### SECTION 3. Incorporation

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America shall be incorporated.

#### ARTICLE II—PURPOSE

##### SECTION 1. Statement of Purpose

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.

##### SECTION 2. Functions and Responsibilities

To accomplish this purpose, Women of the ELCA shall

- Item 1. Establish and support units to carry out God’s mission in the church, the society, and the world;
- Item 2. Equip participants and encourage all to grow as whole persons, value themselves and others, articulate and act upon their faith, and witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- Item 3. Advocate for the oppressed and voiceless, urge change in systems and structures that exclude and alienate, and work for peace and justice as messengers of hope;
- Item 4. Relate to other women’s organizations ecumenically and globally;
- Item 5. Provide for development and distribution of resources and a periodical for its participants;
- Item 6. Provide for flexible structures and decision-making processes that foster interdependence and involve people in making decisions that affect them; and
- Item 7. Provide opportunities for the financial support of Women of the ELCA and manage the assets and processes for planning and evaluation to ensure fulfillment of the mission of Women of the ELCA.

##### SECTION 3. Mission Statement

Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

## **ARTICLE III—PRINCIPLES OF ORGANIZATION**

### **SECTION 1. Unity of Purpose**

**As a community of women called and empowered by the Holy Spirit, the participants shall commit themselves to full discipleship and oneness in Christ.**

### **SECTION 2. Affirmation of Individual Worth**

**Recognizing that each woman is created in God's image and uses her varied gifts in diverse ministries, this community of women shall affirm in its life and work the worth of each woman.**

### **SECTION 3. Inclusiveness**

**This community of women shall be inclusive because in Baptism God makes all people one in Christ and shall have the objective of proclaiming and practicing this inclusive unity in the life of its participants together.**

### **SECTION 4. Flexibility**

**An openness to change and the ability to allow for diversity in functioning shall be among the desired results of the structure of this organization. Change shall be viewed as an ongoing process following regular review and evaluation. The process for changing procedures and policies shall be clearly stated and uncomplicated.**

### **SECTION 5. Stability**

**The principle of good order shall be followed. Policies and procedures shall be held in healthy tension with the principle of flexibility.**

### **SECTION 6. Interdependence**

**All entities of the ELCA, the units, the synodical women's organizations, and the churchwide women's organization shall function interdependently and share responsibility for fulfilling the common purpose.**

### **SECTION 7. Decision Making**

**Structures and processes shall foster mutuality and interdependence and shall involve people in making decisions that affect them.**

### **SECTION 8. Leadership**

**Leaders in this community shall practice interdependence and teamwork and strive to enable others to carry out their responsibilities. They shall provide a leadership that supports and empowers others within the community. They shall recognize their accountability to the triune God, to the ELCA, to Women of the ELCA, and to others with whom they serve.**

### **SECTION 9. Stewardship and Mutual Support**

**This community of women shall acknowledge itself as a steward of the resources entrusted to it. It shall commit itself to the effective use of these resources in its life and work and in the life and work of the church.**

### **SECTION 10. Wholeness of the Church**

**This community of women shall work toward wholeness of the church.**

### **SECTION 11. Governing Documents**

**Each unit and synodical women's organization in its governing documents shall include the statement of purpose (see Article II, Section 1) and such structural components as are required in this constitution. Whenever a synodical women's organization proposes to amend its constitution or bylaws, the synodical board shall submit the proposed amendments to the churchwide Executive Board for review and action. Proposed amendments must be submitted by March 15 for consideration at the April Executive Board meeting and by September 15 for consideration at the October Executive Board meeting.**

## **SECTION 12. Governing Authority**

Each convention, board, committee, task force, or other body of this organization shall be conclusively presumed to have been properly constituted, and neither the method of selection nor the composition of any such convention, board, committee, task force, or other body may be challenged in a court of law by any person or be used as a basis of challenge in a court of law to the validity or effect of any action taken or authorized by any such convention, board, committee, task force, or other body.

## **SECTION 13. Anti-Racist Identity**

This community of women shall claim and practice an anti-racist identity and actively seek full participation and shared power in determining its mission, structure, constituency, policies, and practices.

## **ARTICLE IV—MEMBERSHIP**

### **SECTION 1. Composition**

Women of the ELCA shall be a composite of its units.

- Item 1. Only one unit from each congregation shall be eligible for membership in this organization.
- Item 2. Special units may be established outside the congregation when approved by the Executive Board.

## **ARTICLE V—PARTICIPATION**

### **SECTION 1. Individual Participants**

Participation in this organization shall be open to all women in the ELCA and other women who subscribe to the purpose of this organization.

### **SECTION 2. Commitment**

This participation shall be involvement that indicates a commitment to the purpose of this organization.

## **ARTICLE VI—AUTHORITY**

### **SECTION 1. Policies**

Women of the ELCA shall take such steps as are needed to realize its purpose. It shall function within the policies of the ELCA and the constitution of this organization.

### **SECTION 2. Corporate Responsibilities**

Women of the ELCA shall have and may exercise all powers assigned to nonprofit corporations by the laws of the State of Minnesota except as limited by the charter and the constitution and these bylaws of this organization.

### **SECTION 3. Management of Funds**

In conformity with the laws of the State of Minnesota, Women of the ELCA shall manage its own funds under the financial policies of the ELCA.

## **ARTICLE VII—RELATIONSHIPS**

### **SECTION 1. Relationships within Women of the ELCA**

- Item 1. Women of the ELCA shall seek to function interdependently through units, the synodical women's organizations, and the churchwide women's organization. Each part shall recognize that it is in a partnership with the others to share in God's mission.

- Item 2.** Women of the ELCA shall be divided into synodical women's organizations whose number and boundaries shall normally coincide with those established by the ELCA for its synods.
- Item 3.** Each synodical women's organization shall strive to provide for groupings of units into clusters or conferences whose boundaries shall normally coincide with the boundaries of clusters or conferences established by the synods of the ELCA.

#### **SECTION 2. Relationships with Other Organizational Units**

The churchwide women's organization, together with the synodical women's organizations, may decide to carry out programmatic functions and responsibilities through the nine ELCA regions.

#### **SECTION 3. Relationships with Interchurch Agencies and Councils**

The churchwide women's organization shall report to the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA and in the interim to the Church Council.

- Item 1.** The churchwide women's organization shall work interdependently with all churchwide units of the ELCA.
- Item 2.** The churchwide women's organization shall develop working arrangements in areas of mutual responsibility with the ELCA publishing house.

#### **SECTION 4. Relationships with Other Women's Organizations**

The churchwide women's organization shall relate to other women's organizations ecumenically and globally.

### **ARTICLE VIII—UNITS**

#### **SECTION 1. Definition**

A unit shall be a community of women coming together for study, support, and action in local and other settings of Women of the ELCA.

- Item 1.** There shall be only one unit in each congregation. This unit may consist of one or more groups of women within the congregation.
- Item 2.** There may be an inter-congregational unit for women from two or more congregations that have no congregational units.
- Item 3.** There may be special units composed of women who want to come together in special settings as authorized by the Executive Board.

#### **SECTION 2. Criteria for Recognition**

A unit shall be recognized if it

- Item 1.** Agrees to the statement of purpose of Women of the ELCA (see Article II, Section 1);
- Item 2.** Agrees to come together to demonstrate commitment to the mission and purpose of Women of the ELCA;
- Item 3.** Agrees to participate in the program activities of Women of the ELCA beyond the congregation;
- Item 4.** Agrees to support financially the total program of Women of the ELCA; and
- Item 5.** Agrees to designate leadership that shall be in communication with the synodical women's organization and the churchwide women's organization.

#### **SECTION 3. Structure**

The purpose of Women of the ELCA may be carried out through differing structural models.

#### **SECTION 4. Reporting of Units**

- Item 1.** The unit shall report to the annual meeting of its congregation(s), unless it is a special unit as authorized by the Executive Board.
- Item 2.** Special units shall report annually to the synodical women's organization board in the territory in which they are located.

## **SECTION 5. Termination of Relationship**

**The relationship of any unit with Women of the ELCA shall be terminated**

- Item 1. By notification to the churchwide women's organization that the unit plans to dissolve.**
- Item 2. If the congregation ceases to exist as a congregation of the ELCA.**

## **ARTICLE IX—SYNODICAL WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION**

### **SECTION 1. Definition**

**Each synodical women's organization shall consist of the units located within its territory, which normally coincide with the boundaries established by the ELCA for each synod.**

### **SECTION 2. Relationships**

- Item 1. Each synodical women's organization shall establish a partnership with units in its territory and with the churchwide women's organization.**
- Item 2. Each synodical women's organization shall strive to establish clusters or conferences of units within its territory.**
- Item 3. The synodical women's organizations, together with the churchwide women's organization, may carry out programmatic functions and responsibilities through the nine ELCA regions.**

### **SECTION 3. Purpose**

**Each synodical women's organization, in partnership with the churchwide women's organization, shall assist units in its territory to fulfill the purpose of Women of the ELCA.**

### **SECTION 4. Officers**

- Item 1. The officers or leaders of each synodical women's organization may be a president, a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer (or convener(s), coordinator(s), or co-chair(s), a treasurer, and a secretary/communicator), henceforth referred to as SWO leaders.**
- Item 2. These SWO leaders shall be elected by the convention of the synodical women's organization. Each SWO leader shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit.**

### **SECTION 5. Synodical Women's Organization Convention**

**Each synodical women's organization shall have a regular convention, which shall be its highest legislative authority. The convention of the synodical women's organization shall meet at least biennially.**

- Item 1. Voting membership of the convention shall be the SWO leaders, the board members of the synodical women's organization, and one voting member from each unit.**

### **SECTION 6. The Board of the Synodical Women's Organization**

- Item 1. Each synodical women's organization shall have a board that shall serve as the interim legislative authority between conventions of the synodical women's organization, except that it may not take any action that is reserved exclusively for the convention of the synodical women's organization or that is in conflict with action taken by the convention.**
- Item 2. The board of the synodical women's organization shall consist of the SWO leaders and three or more board members.**

### **SECTION 7. Clusters, Conferences, and Committees**

- Item 1. Each synodical women's organization shall strive to provide for groupings of units into clusters or conferences. Within each cluster or conference the synodical women's organization shall work cooperatively with the units to fulfill the purpose of Women of the ELCA through activities that**
  - a. provide experiences for learning and leadership development;**
  - b. build community;**



- c. provide opportunities for joint ministry and action;
  - d. provide opportunities for monetary offerings, stewardship education and financial support of the total program of Women of the ELCA; and
  - e. establish networks for communication.
- Item 2. Each synodical women’s organization board may establish such committees and task forces as it deems necessary to carry out effectively the functions assigned to the synodical women’s organization.

**ARTICLE X—CHURCHWIDE WOMEN’S ORGANIZATION**

**SECTION 1. Functions and Responsibilities**

The churchwide women’s organization shall

- Item 1. Plan a comprehensive program that enables women to
  - a. articulate and act upon their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ in all arenas of life;
  - b. grow as whole persons, develop their potential, and be equipped for ministry; and
  - c. value themselves and others and build up and celebrate relationships that are global, diverse, and interdependent;
- Item 2. Witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ as it proclaims reconciliation, dignity, and hope for all persons;
- Item 3. Advocate for the oppressed and voiceless, urge change in systems and structures that exclude and alienate, and work for peace and justice as messengers of hope;
- Item 4. Establish an organization-wide program and network for recruiting, preparing, and supporting leaders;
- Item 5. Facilitate local initiative in creating programs and in identifying alternative structural models that encourage and support flexibility;
- Item 6. Develop networks for communication within the organization and among women locally, ecumenically, and globally;
- Item 7. Foster cooperative and interdependent relationships among units, the synodical women’s organizations, and the churchwide women’s organization to implement the purpose of Women of the ELCA;
- Item 8. Develop policies that enable it to fulfill its purpose;
- Item 9. Relate to other women’s organizations ecumenically and globally;
- Item 10. Engage in research in cooperation with the ELCA;
- Item 11. Provide materials and historical information for the archives of the ELCA;
- Item 12. Provide opportunities for the financial support of the total program of this organization and manage the assets of the churchwide women’s organization; and
- Item 13. Work independently with all units of the ELCA in designing and implementing programs of mutual concern that enhance the ministries and participation of women in the church and in the world.

**SECTION 2. Description**

- Item 1. The legislative function of this churchwide women’s organization shall be fulfilled by the Triennial Convention.
- Item 2. The Executive Board shall exercise interim legislative authority and shall serve as the board of directors of the corporation.
- Item 3. The leadership of Women of the ELCA shall be vested in the officers, members of the Triennial Convention, and members of the Executive Board. The officers shall be a president, a vice president, a secretary, and a treasurer.

### **SECTION 3. General Fiscal Policies**

- Item 1. Within the financial policies of the ELCA, and within the limits established by the Triennial Convention in the constitution and bylaws, the Executive Board, as the board of directors of the churchwide women's organization, shall establish the fiscal policies of Women of the ELCA.
- Item 2. On the basis of estimated income, and in consultation with those receiving support from Women of the ELCA, the Executive Board shall authorize expenditures within the budget for the fiscal year, and those receiving support from the single treasury may incur financial obligations up to the specified amounts. Expenditure authorizations shall be subject to revision, in light of changing conditions, by the executive board in consultation with those receiving support from the single treasury of Women of the ELCA.
- Item 3. The monitoring of investment of funds of the churchwide women's organization shall be the responsibility of the executive board.
- Item 4. The fiscal year of the churchwide women's organization shall coincide with the fiscal year of the ELCA.
- Item 5. An audit of the financial records of this organization shall be made annually by a certified public accounting firm.

### **SECTION 4. Financial Policy Statement**

- Item 1. All income, whether received by the unit, cluster or conference, synodical, or churchwide organizations, shall be viewed as being given to the total program of Women of the ELCA. Four ways for giving are established.
  - a. Regular Offerings shall be given in support of the ministries of Women of the ELCA and the ELCA. These offerings may also be given by individuals who choose to give periodically or who pledge to give a stated amount although they may be unable to participate in the scheduled events of this organization. Offerings received shall support unit, cluster or conference, synodical, and churchwide programming.
  - b. Thankofferings shall be gifts from individuals in gratitude for blessings. These offerings shall be received by the unit and transmitted in full to the churchwide organization for the support of the ministries of this organization and the church.
  - c. Designated Gifts shall be given by one or more individuals for specifically designated ministries of the churchwide women's organization or the church. These gifts may be received by all entities and shall be transmitted in full to the churchwide women's organization for disbursement. Gifts may be given for special occasions or in memory or in honor of an individual.
  - d. Occasionally, Special Offerings and Gifts may be received for specific programs that are not identified in the churchwide women's organization budget but that are consistent with the policies of Women of the ELCA.
- Item 2. Women of the ELCA shall work cooperatively with the ELCA Foundation in assisting women as they prepare their personal wills, bequests, and other planned giving instruments.
- Item 3. Each entity of Women of the ELCA shall be responsible for the development of a financial plan or budget that reflects interdependence in meeting the financial needs of this organization.
  - a. Each unit shall develop and administer its own financial plan or budget. Each unit shall regularly transmit funds to the synodical women's organization and churchwide women's organization in accordance with established procedures.
  - b. Each cluster or conference shall work cooperatively with the synodical women's organization in funding the cluster or conference and synodical women's organization program and projects.
  - c. Each synodical women's organization shall develop and administer its own budget. The budget shall include the synodical women's organization program and operating cost and reflect the interdependent relationship between the synodical women's organization

and the churchwide women's organization. The proposed budget shall be presented as information to the churchwide women's organization executive board within 30 days of its adoption by the synodical women's organization. There shall be an elected treasurer in each synodical women's organization with specific responsibilities for assisting in building the budget and disbursing funds. There shall be an elected or appointed person responsible for leadership in the areas of promotion, interpretation, and financial stewardship education.

- d. The executive board shall approve the churchwide organization's budget, prepared by the executive director and staff, which includes support for the churchwide women's organization, and recommend it to the Triennial Convention for adoption. The executive board shall approve and adopt the budget in the years in which a convention is not scheduled.

Item 4. The executive board shall provide financial reports periodically through the official publications of this organization.

## **ARTICLE XI—CONVENTIONS**

### **SECTION 1. Convention Authority**

**The Triennial Convention shall be the highest legislative authority of Women of the ELCA and shall deal with all matters that are necessary in the pursuit of the purpose and functions of this organization. The powers of the Triennial Convention are limited only by the provisions of the articles of incorporation, this constitution and these bylaws, the policies of the ELCA, and the convention's own resolutions.**

### **SECTION 2. Triennial Convention Program**

**The Triennial Convention shall provide opportunities for witness, growth, and community.**

### **SECTION 3. Triennial and Special Conventions**

**Women of the ELCA shall meet in convention triennially. Special Conventions may be called by a two-thirds vote of the executive board, and Special Conventions shall be called by the president of Women of the ELCA at the request in writing of at least two-thirds of the boards of the synodical women's organizations.**

- Item 1. The time and place of the Triennial Convention shall be determined by the executive board. The Triennial Convention may be held solely by one or more means of remote or virtual communications, provided that the number of participants is sufficient to constitute a quorum.
- Item 2. The secretary shall give notice of the time and place of each Triennial Convention by publication thereof at least 90 days in advance in the periodical of Women of the ELCA.
- Item 3. At least 20 days prior to the Triennial Convention, the secretary shall distribute preconvention reports to each voting member-elect.
- Item 4. The arrangements for agenda, program, and worship shall be under the supervision of the executive board.
- Item 5. The churchwide women's organization shall be responsible for the costs of the Triennial and Special Conventions, including the reasonable costs for travel, housing, and board for the voting members and members of the executive board.
- Item 6. A majority of voting members registered at the Triennial or Special Convention shall constitute a quorum.
- Item 7. Immediately upon the issuance of the call for a Special Convention, the secretary shall give written notice to voting members seated in the preceding Triennial Convention, provided they have not ceased to participate in a unit within the synodical women's organization from which they were elected or are not superseded by election of new voting members.

- Item 8. *Robert's Rules of Order*, latest edition, shall be the governing parliamentary procedures of the Triennial or Special Conventions, except as otherwise provided in this constitution and these bylaws.

#### **SECTION 4. Members of the Triennial Convention**

**The voting members of the Triennial Convention shall be the voting members of Women of the ELCA. The requirements for voting members of the convention and other members shall be specified in the bylaws.**

#### **SECTION 5. Voting Members of the Triennial Convention**

- Item 1. The voting members of the Triennial Convention shall be the officers of the churchwide women's organization; the members of the churchwide executive board; the president, one convener, coordinator, or co-chair of each synodical women's organization; those women elected as voting members by the conventions of the synodical women's organizations; and those appointed as "at large" voting members by the churchwide organization.
- Item 2. Each synodical women's organization shall elect one voting member for every 25 congregational, inter-congregational, or special units (or a fraction thereof) within the synodical women's organization, and each synodical women's organization shall have at least two elected voting members in addition to the president of the synodical women's organization. At least 10 percent of the voting member body shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English. As defined in ELCA continuing resolution 5.01.C00, "persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English" shall be understood to mean African American, Black, Arab and Middle Eastern, Asian and Pacific Islander, Latino, American Indian, and Alaska Native people. This definition, however, shall not be understood as limiting Women of the ELCA's commitment to inclusive participation in its life and work.
- Item 3. The president or SWO leader of the synodical women's organization shall submit to the churchwide women's organization at least six months before the Triennial Convention a certified list of the regular and alternate voting members elected by the convention of the synodical women's organization.
- Item 4. The roster of voting members shall be final 30 days prior to the opening of convention.
- Item 5. Each voting member of the Triennial Convention shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit.
- Item 6. Voting members elected to serve at the Triennial Convention shall continue serving until voting members are elected for the next regular Triennial Convention.

#### **SECTION 6. Nonvoting Members of the Triennial Convention**

- Item 1. The Bishop of the ELCA, or the bishop's representative, shall have seat and voice in the Triennial Convention.
- Item 2. Other categories of nonvoting members may be established by the Triennial Convention.

#### **SECTION 7. Committees of the Triennial Convention**

**The Triennial Convention shall have a Reference and Counsel Committee, a Memorials Committee, and a Nominating Committee selected from among the voting members of the Triennial Convention. The description of these committees shall be in the bylaws. Other committees may be authorized as the Triennial Convention shall deem necessary.**

- Item 1. A Reference and Counsel Committee, appointed by the president of the churchwide women's organization with the approval of the executive board, shall review all items submitted at the convention that are not germane to items contained in the stated agenda of the Triennial

Convention. The Reference and Counsel Committee shall make appropriate recommendations for convention action.

- Item 2. A Memorials Committee, appointed by the president of the churchwide women's organization with the approval of the executive board, shall review memorials from the conventions of the synodical women's organizations and make appropriate recommendations for action by the Triennial Convention.
- Item 3. A Nominating Committee shall be elected by the executive board. The Nominating Committee shall nominate two persons for each position for which an election will be held at the Triennial Convention with the exception of the offices of president and vice president.

## **ARTICLE XII—OFFICERS**

### **SECTION 1. President**

**This organization shall have a president elected by the Triennial Convention for one term, with the office held until the next convention. The president shall be ineligible for election as an officer or executive board member in the succeeding triennium. The president shall a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit. The president shall**

- Item 1. Preside at the Triennial Convention and Special Conventions of the churchwide women's organization;**
- Item 2. Preside at all meetings of the executive board, Executive Committee, and Conference of Synodical Presidents;**
- Item 3. Appoint members of all committees for which election procedures are not provided and make other appointments as necessary;**
- Item 4. Represent the churchwide women's organization at, or appoint representatives to, the convention of each synodical women's organization;**
- Item 5. Present a report to the Triennial Convention;**
- Item 6. Be ex-officio member of all committees of the executive board except the Nominating Committee; and**
- Item 7. Represent the churchwide women's organization at, or appoint representatives to, inter-Lutheran and ecumenical associations and councils in which this organization participates.**

### **SECTION 2. Vice President**

**This organization shall have a vice president elected by the Triennial Convention for one term, with the office held until the next convention, and with no reelection to this office. The vice president shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit. The vice president shall**

- Item 1. Act in the absence, disability, or resignation of the president; and**
- Item 2. Perform other duties as requested by the president or the executive board.**

### **SECTION 3. Secretary**

**This organization shall have a secretary elected by the Triennial Convention for one term, with the office held until the next convention, and with no reelection to this office. The secretary shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit. The secretary shall**

- Item 1. Be the secretary of the Triennial Convention, the executive board, and the Executive Committee;**
- Item 2. Be responsible for recording and distributing minutes of the Triennial Convention, the executive board, the Executive Committee, and the Conference of Synodical Presidents;**
- Item 3. Give notification of the Triennial Convention at least 90 days in advance in the official periodical of this organization;**
- Item 4. Keep a correct register of the roll of units, presidents of the units, and officers and board members of the synodical women's organization;**

- Item 5. Be the secretary of the corporation;
- Item 6. Provide for the gathering and the preserving of historical records and documents; and
- Item 7. Perform other duties as requested by the president or the executive board.

**SECTION 4. Treasurer**

**This organization shall have a treasurer elected by the Triennial Convention for one term, with the office held until the next convention, and with no reelection to this office. The treasurer shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit. The treasurer shall**

- Item 1. Provide for financial record keeping and, on behalf of the executive board, be accountable for all funds of the churchwide women’s organization in accordance with the financial policies of Women of the ELCA and the ELCA;
- Item 2. Interpret the financial condition of the churchwide organization to the executive board;
- Item 3. Present a complete report, including an audit, to the Triennial Convention and an interim report to each executive board and Executive Committee meeting; and
- Item 4. Perform other duties as requested by the president or the executive board.

**SECTION 5. Eligibility and Terms**

- Item 1. Except for the president, an officer may be eligible for election to another office or to a term as an executive board member, serving a total of two consecutive terms but no more than seven consecutive years.
- Item 2. Terms of the officers shall begin at the close of the Triennial Convention.

**ARTICLE XIII—EXECUTIVE BOARD**

**SECTION 1. Composition**

**The executive board shall be composed of the four officers and one representative from the territory of each of the nine ELCA regions, plus two at-large members, to make a total of 15. Of the 15, at least 20 percent shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, and at least 20 percent shall be under the age of 45 and/or persons of the LGBTQIA+ community.**

**SECTION 2. Members and Terms**

- Item 1. **The 15 board members shall be elected by the Triennial Convention for one term, with the position held until the next convention. Each elected member shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit.**
- Item 2. **Board members may be reelected to the board or to an office, serving a total of two consecutive terms but no more than seven years consecutively.**
- Item 3. **Terms of the board members shall begin at the close of the Triennial Convention.**

**SECTION 3. Purpose and Meetings**

- Item 1. **This organization shall have an executive board that shall be the board of directors of this corporation and shall serve as the interim legislative authority between the Triennial Conventions.**
- Item 2. **The executive board shall meet at least two times each year, in person or electronically. Additional meetings may be called by the president or by a two-thirds vote of the executive board. Meetings may be held solely by one or more means of remote or virtual communications, provided that the number of participants is sufficient to constitute a quorum.**
- Item 3. **The actions of the executive board shall be in accord with the actions of and policies established by the Triennial Convention and the constitution and bylaws of this organization and of the ELCA.**
- Item 4. ***Robert’s Rules of Order*, the latest edition, shall be the governing parliamentary procedure of the churchwide executive board.**

#### **SECTION 4. Mail, Digital Technology, Conference Call, and Electronic Meeting Vote**

- Item 1.** In an emergency, as determined by the president and the executive director, a vote by mail, by digital technology, conference call, or e-mail may be taken.
- Item 2.** In a mail vote, responses must be postmarked on or before the date established in the letter, and an 80 percent vote in the affirmative of the total board shall be necessary to adopt the vote taken by mail.
- Item 3.** In a digital technology or conference call vote, if all board members participate, the vote necessary for adoption shall be a majority vote; if fewer than 100 percent of the board members participate, the vote necessary for adoption shall be a two-thirds vote in the affirmative of the total board.
- Item 4.** In an email vote, responses must be sent on or before the date established in the letter and an 80 percent vote in the affirmative of the total board shall be necessary to adopt the vote taken by email.
- Item 5.** The results of the action taken by mail, digital technology, conference call or e-mail shall be emailed immediately to all board members and shall be reviewed and adopted at the next meeting of the board.

#### **SECTION 5. Responsibilities**

##### **The executive board shall**

- Item 1. Provide for long-range planning for the churchwide women's organization and coordinate its work with other churchwide units;
- Item 2. Ensure that programs are implemented that meet the priorities of the churchwide women's organization;
- Item 3. Set policies required for effective and efficient functioning;
- Item 4. Transact necessary business and make decisions between conventions;
- Item 5. Promote and encourage participation in the organization and in fulfilling the priorities for the churchwide women's organization;
- Item 6. Promote and interpret the life and work of the organization to members, the church, and the public;
- Item 7. Set financial policies, recommend budgets, manage assets, be accountable for all funds of the churchwide organization, and interpret the financial commitments of the organization;
- Item 8. Develop working arrangements in areas of mutual responsibility with the ELCA publishing house;
- Item 9. Fill vacancies on the board until the next regular Triennial Convention;
- Item 10. Determine the fact of the incapacity of an officer or board member to perform her duties and determine whether she shall be removed from her office in accordance with the policies and procedures of the executive board (for removal of an officer or board member, a two-thirds vote of the total board shall be required; a mail vote shall not be used to effect the removal of an officer or board member);
- Item 11. Under the personnel and financial policies of the ELCA, elect its executive director, authorize other staff positions, establish the salary structure for staff, and arrange for an annual review of the executive director;
- Item 12. Set time and place for the Conference of Synodical Presidents;
- Item 13. Determine the number of voting members from each synodical women's organization to serve as voting members of the Triennial Convention;
- Item 14. Prepare proposed agenda, rules of procedure, and program for each Triennial Convention;
- Item 15. Report its actions and work to the Triennial Convention;
- Item 16. Act as the Constitution and Bylaws Committee;
- Item 17. Report to the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA; and
- Item 18. Establish ecumenical and global relationships with other women's organizations.

## **SECTION 6. Committees**

**The executive board shall establish committees and nominate or elect such persons as necessary to carry out the functions assigned to it. The descriptions of the committees shall be:**

- Item 1. There shall be an Executive Committee.**
  - a. The Executive Committee shall be composed of the four churchwide organization officers and three board members elected by the executive board. At least one executive committee member shall be a person of color or whose primary language is other than English.**
  - b. The Executive Committee may act between board meetings within the policies of this organization.**
- Item 2. There shall be a budget and finance committee composed of the treasurer and members of the executive board appointed by the president.**
- Item 3. There shall be a constitution review committee composed of members of the executive board appointed by the president.**

## **SECTION 7. Non-voting Members of the Executive Board**

- Item 1. The Bishop of the ELCA or the Bishop's representative and a Conference of Bishops's representative shall have seat and voice but not vote at all executive board meetings.**
- Item 2. Terms of advisors shall coincide with the term of office in the respective unit and/or organization they represent.**
- Item 3. Other categories of non-voting members may be established by the executive board.**

## **ARTICLE XIV—NOMINATIONS AND ELECTION PROCESS**

### **SECTION 1. Procedures**

**The churchwide women's organization shall elect such officers and such other persons as the constitution and bylaws may require and according to procedures set forth in the bylaws.**

### **SECTION 2. Guidelines for Nominations**

- Item 1. At least 20 percent of the nominees shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, and at least 20 percent shall be persons under the age of 45 and/or persons of the LGBTQIA+ community.**
- Item 2. Consideration shall be given to geographical location, variety of ages, and diversity of experience.**

### **SECTION 3. Provisions**

**The following provisions shall govern the nomination and election process:**

- Item 1. It shall be the responsibility of the executive board to assure that this organization maintains its commitment to inclusive representation. At least 20 percent of the members of the executive board shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English, and at least 20 percent shall be persons under the age of 45 and/or persons of the LGBTQIA+ community.**
- Item 2. Each nominee for an elected or appointed position in this organization shall be a voting member of an ELCA congregation and shall strive to be a participant in a unit.**
- Item 3. In all Triennial Convention elections, except that of the president and vice president, a majority of the votes cast shall elect.**
- Item 4. When there are floor nominations, the first ballot shall include the names of the nominees presented by the Nominating Committee and the names of the persons nominated from the floor.**
- Item 5. All elections shall be by ballot.**



- Item 6. Board members shall be elected in such a manner that at least one person and no more than two persons are elected from the territory of each of the nine ELCA regions. Further, no more than one shall be elected from any one synodical women's organization.
- Item 7. No board member shall hold two positions of leadership simultaneously in a synodical women's organization and/or the churchwide women's organization.

**SECTION 4. The Nominating Committee**

- Item 1. This committee shall consist of nine persons nominated from the roll of the Triennial Convention voting members-elect and elected by the executive board.
- Item 2. This committee shall be selected on the basis of the inclusiveness guidelines and shall include one member from the territory of each of the nine ELCA regions.
- Item 3. This committee shall meet no earlier than 170 days and no later than 140 days prior to the Triennial Convention.
- Item 4. This committee shall prepare the slate of nominees for the offices of secretary and treasurer and for members of the board from names submitted by the Triennial Convention voting members-elect and units. If the names submitted to the Triennial Convention Nominating Committee do not fulfill the nominations criteria, the committee may recruit other names from congregational units, voting members, and churchwide officers to fulfill its goals.
- Item 5. This committee shall nominate no more than one person from a synodical women's organization.
- Item 6. Members of the committee shall be ineligible for nomination by the committee to any position to be filled. Committee members may, however, be nominated from the floor.
- Item 7. This committee shall present two names for each position to be filled. Nominations may be made from the floor for those elections for which nominations have been made by the committee.

**SECTION 5. Election of the Churchwide Women's Organization Officers**

- Item 1. The president shall be elected by the Triennial Convention by a nominating ballot. Three-fourths of the votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. Two-thirds of the votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the five persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot. An information sheet shall show for each of the five nominees her address, synodical organization, and qualifications for office. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the highest number of votes on the third ballot.
- Item 2. The vice president shall be elected by the Triennial Convention by nominating ballot. Two-thirds of the votes cast shall be necessary for election on the first ballot. If no one is elected, the first ballot shall be considered the nominating ballot. On subsequent ballots a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. On the third ballot, the voting shall be limited to the five persons (plus ties) receiving the highest number of votes on the second ballot. An information sheet shall show for each of the nominees her address, synodical organization, and qualifications for office. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) receiving the highest number of votes on the third ballot.
- Item 3. The secretary and treasurer shall be elected by the Triennial Convention. The Nominating Committee shall present two names for each position to be filled. Additional nominations may be made from the floor.

**SECTION 6. Election of Board Members**

The election of the board members of the churchwide women's organization shall be by the Triennial Convention according to procedures set forth in this constitution and these bylaws.

## **ARTICLE XV—CONFERENCE OF SYNODICAL PRESIDENTS**

### **SECTION 1. Composition**

**The Conference of Synodical Presidents shall consist of one president or SWO leader of each synodical women’s organization and shall meet at least annually. The conference may be held solely by one or more means of remote or virtual communications, provided that the number of participants is sufficient to constitute a quorum.**

### **SECTION 2. Functions and Responsibilities**

The Conference of Synodical Presidents shall

- Item 1. Provide and receive information related to emphases, priorities, and projected programs of Women of the ELCA;
- Item 2. Make recommendations to the executive board;
- Item 3. Develop leadership skills; and
- Item 4. Foster community and renewal.

### **SECTION 3. Other Conference Participants**

The president and secretary of the churchwide women’s organization and the executive director of Women of the ELCA shall attend the conference. Other members of the executive board and staff may attend as deemed necessary.

## **ARTICLE XVI—STAFF**

### **SECTION 1. Employment of Staff**

**This organization shall have the authority to employ staff and engage in other contractual arrangements in accordance with the constitution, bylaws, and personnel practices of the ELCA.**

- Item 1. The staff of Women of the ELCA shall consist of an executive director and such staff positions as the executive board may determine.
- Item 2. The executive director shall be the chief executive officer of the organization. She shall carry out the policies of the organization and work collegially with the staff. She shall work interdependently with other churchwide units. She shall prepare the reports of the executive board to the Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA and the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA.

## **ARTICLE XVII—CHURCHWIDE OFFICES OF WOMEN OF THE ELCA**

### **SECTION 1. Location**

The principal office of Women of the ELCA shall be in the same location as that of the ELCA.

## **ARTICLE XVIII—AMENDMENTS AND BYLAWS**

### **SECTION 1. Amendments to the Constitution**

**The constitution of this organization may be amended through either of the following procedures:**

- Item 1. **The executive board may propose an amendment and send an official notice to the voting members-elect at least six months prior to the next regular Triennial Convention. The adoption of such an amendment shall require a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting at the Triennial Convention.**
- Item 2. **An amendment may be proposed by 25 or more voting members of the Triennial Convention. The proposed amendment shall be referred to the executive board for its recommendation to the next Triennial Convention. Adoption of such an amendment shall**

**require passage at two successive regular Triennial Conventions by a two-thirds vote of the members present and voting.**

**SECTION 2. Amendments to the Bylaws**

**Bylaws not in conflict with this constitution may be adopted or amended at any regular meeting of the Triennial Convention when presented in writing by the executive board or by at least 15 voting members of the convention. An amendment proposed by members of the convention shall immediately be submitted to the executive board for its recommendation. No amendment shall be placed before the convention for action sooner than the day following its presentation to the convention. A two-thirds vote of the members present and voting shall be necessary for adoption.**

**SECTION 3. Continuing Resolutions**

**Provisions relating to the administrative functions of this organization shall be set forth in the continuing resolutions. Continuing resolutions may be adopted or amended by a majority vote of the Triennial Convention or by a two-thirds vote of the executive board.**

*Revised by Eleventh Triennial Convention (2021)*