

SECTION D – SOUTH CAROLINA CONGREGATIONAL UNITS

The Women of the ELCA unit

A Women of the ELCA Unit is a community of women who come together for study, support, and action. Units are members of the Women of the ELCA. There can only be one unit within any single congregation or institution. There can be groups within that unit usually referred to as circles that function separately but come together as a unit to conduct business such as electing officers or leaders, establishing a budget, and supporting a unit project.

The unit's commitment. Constitutionally, units agree to accomplish the purpose of Women of the ELCA. The women in each unit commit themselves to:

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

Under its constitution, the unit is called to work interdependently with the congregation in which it exists. The unit should regularly report to the congregation; that often happens as part of the congregation's annual meeting process. Some units report monthly to the congregational council. All women in a congregation are invited to join the unit, but all do not automatically become a participant. To be a participant, a woman must actively agree to the purpose statement of the organization. A strong Women of the ELCA unit within a congregation strengthens the ministry of the entire congregation. Pastors and other congregational leaders appreciate the energy and commitment of each a mobilized community of disciple-women and what a unit brings to the ELCA worshipping community as a whole.

Kinds of units

Most of our units are “congregational units” within single congregations.

There are also “inter-congregational units” with participants from two or more congregations that have no units. And there are “special units” composed of women in special settings without congregational affiliation.

Some examples of units have small groups that reflect the generations of the women. Women have cross-generational small groups. Some units have both. Some units are large with as many as 13 small groups (sometimes referred to as circles). Some units have five women. In every size unit there is a core group of women who develop the ministry plan and provide the opportunities of this organization to all women with their setting and beyond! Finding women in your congregation and communities with a common need or passion is an excellent way to start a new Circle or Group.

Sample types of circles/groups:

- Bible study
- book clubs
- quilting groups
- lunch or dinner groups
- project groups
- mom's day out groups
- knitting and crocheting groups
- crafting groups

The unit's participants. Each woman who is committed to the purpose of Women of the ELCA is called a "participant" in the unit. Women of the ELCA has no measurement for how often a woman needs to participate to be considered a participant. This enables women who regularly participate to be warmly open and receptive to the women who only participates in one particular event or only financially supports the community. Each supports Women of the ELCA's purpose. It is the unit, in total, that meets all the requirements of the unit criteria as listed in the unit constitutions.

The unit's leadership. Women in *elected leadership* positions in a unit and *elected as voting members* to a convention of the synodical women's organization are expected to be members of a congregation of the ELCA. This is not a requirement for non-elected leaders or for participants in small groups, units, or at our conventions.

Who a unit serves. Within Women of the ELCA units, women share their faith journeys. Units provide a place where women's gifts are affirmed and their baptism and creation in the image of God is embraced and celebrated. A unit develops a ministry plan that encourages as many women as possible to participate. This could be said to be the first task of a unit - to gather women into community for the purpose of growing in faith and discipleship. The very nature of discipleship compels the mobilization of such a community of women growing bold in their faith. As these women support each other in their callings, they are led by God's Spirit into ministry and actions that promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world.

The Women of the ELCA small group. The small group ministry is one way of mobilizing women to boldly act upon their faith in Jesus Christ. Each small group (also called "circle") recognizes its responsibility to its unit. This responsibility is lived out through regular financial offerings for missions and ministries as well as a willingness to serve, as voting members and other leadership roles.

Small groups are commonly established around the needs and interests of women. The women of small groups live out our purpose statement and mission while focusing on the stated needs and interests of the women involved. A unit may have one or more small groups. Most small groups "grow into" the three mission areas but should look at these areas from the beginning. A group gathering to do yoga to experience the relation and reduction of stress of this discipline (personal growth) could incorporate a brief devotion (spiritual growth) on a regular or semi-regular basis. This small group may help others by perhaps doing a yoga class at a domestic violence women's shelter.

Starting a small group

There's no limit to the number of small groups a unit can have. Small groups can talk to unit leadership about getting started at any time. There is no minimum number of times small groups must meet. Small groups can change their focus when they choose. Individual women who want to gather around a selected topic as a demonstration of their commitment to grow in community and in faith make up a small group. Small groups can change women's lives. Small groups allow women to share their passions and share their resources that can change other's lives outside of your small group.

Some small groups grow out of a unit event or activity. For example, a unit doing a Habitat for Humanity workday, may lead a few women to gather as a small group to look in the issues around affordable housing.

Small groups can grow out of a crisis. For example, a group of women may first gather around the shared pain of the rural economic crisis by helping families who have been nearly devastated. They might do political advocacy and write letters to legislators for enactment of bills to protect men, women and children from sex trafficking.

There are small groups that form to share their faith journeys. Like the one small group of single, career women who gather once a month to view a movie and talk about it afterward or serve others through different activities that appeal to them. They enjoy being together as they affirm each other's gifts.

What Small Groups Do

Whether it is young mothers sharing the faith journey of being mothers, or empty nesters sharing transitions, or women of different generations interested in a topic, small groups do different things.

Many small groups focus on Bible study. This may be Women of the ELCA's most popular kind of small group. Many units use the Bible Study session found in the *Gather Magazine* published by churchwide Women of the ELCA. There are other Bible study and program resources found on the WELCA website. Women of the ELCA encourages units to use Bible studies that are theologically reflective of the Lutheran faith traditions.

Keeping a unit energized with evaluation

Energized units come in all sizes. If your unit cannot be described as energized or is unclear on what its goals are the Getting Started section may be helpful. A healthy, energized unit can do an *annual evaluation* as an important step to maintain its health! An annual evaluation of a unit is like a health "checkup."

The value of unit goals. Unit goals determine the direction of a unit's ministry. Without goals, how would a unit know what it is trying to achieve? In the Goal Setting exercise in the Getting Started section of this handbook, every woman in the community has the opportunity to develop goals that they can truly own. Once goals are established, they serve as witnesses to all that a unit does. A unit's goals can be re-established fresh every three to four years, but sooner if needed.

Annually evaluating your unit's goals. Evaluating the performance of a unit in meeting its unit's goals helps keep it on track. Both current leaders and regular participants can re-visit the unit's goals on an annual basis by rating the unit's success at meeting its goals. One way of doing this is to use a one to four rating with four (4) being "wonderfully done," three (3) being "mostly done," two (2) being "less than half done," and one (1) being "totally missed."

Evaluating participant experience. Evaluating the experience of regular and not-so-regular participants is also important. Mini surveys can be done while sharing a coffee and dessert reception, before a planned event, or even mailed out with a tea bag. Online survey applications are free and very easy to set up and send by email to your participants. Check out www.surveymonkey.com as a possible way to create a survey. To be of greatest use, these mini surveys should provide a place for women to sign their names if they desire. Whatever method is used doing such an evaluation, along with active follow-up, will help a unit remain energized.

Example mini survey

1. The most enjoyable thing our unit did in the past year was _____
2. What made it so good for me was _____
3. Something we could do to make things work better in the area of ____ is _____
4. Something that could be done to improve our business meetings is _____
5. What I think would be fun to try differently next year is _____
6. The one thing we didn't do this year that I would want to help us do next year is _____

Compiling your findings. An ad hoc committee can complete the results of both evaluations. A report can be written and presented to the elected leaders of the unit. The leaders use these findings to plan the unit's ministry identify new leaders, and as a tool to identify possible new small groups. Remember, an evaluation is only as good as the plan of action that results from the information gathered.

When a unit gets tired

When women in a unit get tired it is important for them to take a caring, yet critical, look at what is making them tired. Tired feelings can be caused when what a unit does is no longer meeting the need of the women involved.

Women of the ELCA is really a flexible organization. Too often women are being tired out by operating with a model of organizing a unit that served it quite well at one time, but now, it only makes the women involved feel inadequate. Hopefully, this handbook might help units realize their ability to change before feelings of hopelessness begin to take root. In this way, women can retain the feelings that once had for being part of a community of women seeking to grow in faith and discipleship.

One woman called churchwide from a unit of thirty or so, and shared that they were tired of coming to monthly business meetings. At the same time, new women were coming to small group activities. When the caller realized that unit business meetings didn't have to be monthly and that offerings could be gathered at the small group events, new life and energy was breathed into the unit. In this case, the unit's leaders were tired while being faced with growth.

Getting started

Women have different seasons in our lives. Sometimes women are active. Sometimes women withdraw from participation as their responsibilities change. Planners keep this in mind by providing women choices in time, day of week and in the content of ministry opportunities. If you are starting a new unit, or working to revise or renew an existing unit, we suggest that you contact the South Carolina synodical women's organization's president or board member, and we will be happy to help you.

The assessment team or committee. Do an assessment if you are starting a new unit or if your current unit needs reviving or renewing. Begin with the women you have. The more women who get involved in developing or redeveloping your unit the more fun you will have. As a planning team or committee, keep all the women of the congregation or institution in your mind and prayers.

The first three tasks of the assessment.

1. Know the women in your congregation or institution
2. Ask what the women want to do and when they want to do it
3. Identify three to five goals for your unit's work that will carry it through the next several years.

Have conversation with the women in your congregation. Here are some suggests questions to stimulate conversation:

1. Describe how you feel you are an important part of the total mission of the church.
2. What are you passionate about?
3. Do you have a job or career? What do you do?
4. Do you have children at home? What are their ages?
5. What are your hobbies or what do you do in your spare time?
6. What do you wish women in this congregation could do together?
7. How often would you like to come together for Bible Study?
8. What day and time is best for you to gather with other women?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about your possible participation in a unit?

Setting goals

Example of a goal setting exercise

Supplies needed: pens or pencils, sticky notes (enough for each woman), some clear wall space, several sheets of blank notebook paper, stickers (three stickers each of circles, stars, or another), 3-5 sheets of newsprint and markers. Write on a black board, poster board or wipe board the following statement: *The benefit I expect our congregation and the women in it to gain from being a part of Women of the ELCA are...*

In order to develop goals women will be able to own, ask women to write on the three sticky notes. Have them complete the statement by writing only one idea per sticky note. Have women share their responses by reading out loud what they have written prior to placing their sticky notes on the wall. After all women have put up their sticky notes, have the group identify any key words or phrases that are repeated. As these are identified, group the sticky notes into like or same idea categories. Ask the clarification for any sticky note that is not quickly understood. Throughout the discussion, bring the focus on three to five desired outcomes for your unit and have the women prioritize the groupings.

Putting it together. At this point the planning team or committee has in their possession three important and critical components for starting or reviving a unit.

1. The unit's three to five goals
2. The best days and times for gathering the women
3. Additional ideas for small group/unit activities

The final step in the assessment is to organize the written goals and the records of the one-on-one conversations.

Selecting a unit model for the new unit

With the unit's goals in hand, now is the time to consider what unit model of organizing will be most helpful for the women of your unit. Elected leadership, regardless of model has an overseeing and active role in developing the Ministry Plan, which is the next step in the following section. Decide what unit organization model makes the most sense to them.

See details in the Women of the ELCA resource: "Six Models for Mission"

1. Board and Committee (each committee has a representative on the board)
2. Coordinating Committee (develops the ministry plan for the unit)
3. Coordinating Council (4-9 council members, each representing a subgroup of women)
4. Co-leaders (2 elected or appointed leaders to coordinate ministries and unit programs)
5. Covenant (women meet for a specific purpose and specific length of time to try out Women of the ELCA)
6. Team Model (leadership is short-term and decisions are made by consensus)

The ministry plan

The Ministry Plan reflects Women of the ELCA's mission, "to mobilize women to boldly act upon their faith in Jesus Christ." Refer to the three focus areas (discipleship, justice, and stewardship), and the three mission areas (growth, community, and action) in Section A of this handbook. Plan opportunities for:

- personal growth,
- fellowship,
- community experiences,
- service opportunities,
- relationships with each other, and
- events that reach out for the involvement of new women.

Communicating Your Ministry Plan. Your unit's ministry plan should be written down and well communicated. The entire year of opportunities open to all women can be put on a handout piece of paper and distributed. If the population of women is particularly large or your events numerous, you may also want to mail or email quarterly listings of upcoming events. Events should also be published in the church/institution newsletter, promote using flyers, and email blast as appropriate. The best way of communicating your unit's ministry plan is through personal invitations in many and various ways. Offering childcare or rides to non-participant women is a warm and welcoming gesture. Refuse to be discouraged if women do not respond immediately.

Three mission areas – one mission

Mission: GROWTH

Goal: 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.

What does this mean? 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.

How might this be done?

- Providing opportunities for women to broaden their theological understanding of God's word.
- Promoting daily prayer in a style that suits individuals.
- Organizing prayer groups or chains.
- Identifying individual spiritual gifts of women and encouraging these women in developing those gifts.
- Promoting an understanding of the scriptural mandate for Christian action and stewardship.
- Organizing group and individual Bible studies.
- Providing opportunities for witness.

The question to be pursued: How will the selected ministry event or activity assist in faith development?

Mission: COMMUNITY

Goal: To enable each woman to value her and others as disciples created in God's image and redeemed through Christ; and to build up and celebrate relationships that are global, diverse, and interdependent.

What does this mean? Mission Community is about relationships among women of faith. These relationships are disciple relationships that include God, family, other persons of faith, the global community, Women of the ELCA units, and the unchurched.

How might this be done?

- Assisting women in understanding that stewardship of time, talent, and resources is a way of life.
- Openly publicizing events and activities, assuring hospitality to all.
- Encouraging all women to show their discipleship through acts of faith and justice.
- Supporting women as they articulate and act upon their faith as led by the Holy Spirit
- Staying informed by local, national, and international issues related to human needs, peace with justice, the environment, and encouraging active interest in these issues.
- Communicating non-imperialistic support for the oppressed through advocacy and partnerships.
- Promoting education on justice issues.

The question to be pursued: How will the selected ministry event or activity assist in community outreach?

Mission: ACTION

Goal: To enable women to articulate and act upon their faith as disciples of Jesus Christ in all areas of life.

What does this mean? 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.

How might this be done?

- Assisting women in understanding that stewardship of time, talent, and resources is a way of promoting life and action in the world.
- Encouraging all women to show their discipleship through acts of faith and justice
- Supporting women as they articulate and act upon their faith as led by the Holy Spirit.
- Staying informed about local, national, and international issues related to human needs, peace with justice, the environment, and encouraging active interest in these issues.
- Communicating non-imperialistic support for the oppressed through advocacy and partnerships
- Promoting education on justice issues

The question to be pursued: How will the selected ministry event or activity provide opportunities to put faith into action?

Some activity suggestions

This section includes examples of how the three mission areas can be incorporated into one activity or event. These suggestions can be used to stimulate your own creativity.

A few words about location: The nurture of the activity should determine the location. A small Bible study can travel from dining room table to kitchen table to the patio table depending on the needs and wishes of the women involved. Just be sure that everyone knows where the location is and how to get there.

Outreach tip: Does your congregation have a hostess who is only peripherally involved (or not at all) with your unit? Maybe she would enjoy hosting a Bible study in her lovely home on occasion? Is there a woman who is of your larger community who sells beauty products? Might she not partner with a spiritual facilitator to help provide a half-day of body and spiritual pampering for new (and seasoned) women?

If you are doing a spiritual retreat: Use a serene and quiet location where the retreat can be free of outside interruptions. In addition, time should be taken to "set the mood" using candles or fresh flowers as centerpieces or in groupings. If it is wintertime, a fire in the fireplace is a nice focal point and provides soothing feelings and sounds. The sound of a portable water fountain or softly played music can be used during times of meditation. Incorporating slow breathing exercises, soothing head rolls, shoulder shrugs or other simple stretching exercises are a good way to bring the entire body into the renewing experience of a spiritual retreat. Times of silence to pay attention to our bodies are also helpful. Women often need physical as well as spiritual nurturance. A combination "spa experience" and spiritual retreat could be developed where women give each other manicures or pedicures or facials during a time of silence or soothing talk about God.

Essential oils used in the Bible. Ask a representative selling essential oils to partner with a Bible study of the essential oils used in the Bible and how they were used.

An Epiphany retreat. *While this retreat is written using the Epiphany church season, it can be developed using a different Biblical text.*

This retreat is structured around the story of the three kings. A collection of canned foods can be made at the door for a local shelter as an emulation of the magi bringing gifts. While women should be directed to bring their Bibles, it is always good to have extra Bibles on hand. Pre-registration is a good idea for this retreat so that the facilitator will know ahead of time the participants and what they do as their gifts of service.

Allow ten minutes for greetings and settling in. All cell phones should be silenced so that all the cares of what they have left at home fall away. Start the retreat by singing an appropriate hymn of God's faithfulness. Follow this with a simple devotion that recalls the story of the three kings. Ask the women to close their eyes and meditate about how the story of the three kings has meant different things to them at different times in their lives. What kinds of wonders and ideas has this Biblical story brought them during their lives? After the meditation, invite the women to open their eyes and have a large group sharing of what they had remembered or thought about the story of the three kings. (Women may have memories of pageants, Christmas creches, etc.) Close with community prayer.

Next have the women move to different areas for small group discussions that consider God's faithfulness in the lives of selected women in the Bible. (Sara, Hannah, Esther, Elizabeth, Ruth, the maiden Mary are examples.) Have the women's names and Bible texts on slips of paper and divide the women into groups. To encourage discussion, women can be given questions such as: Do you think this woman ever doubted God would be faithful? What did it mean to this woman to endure the wait, experience the journey? What must it have been like for her to finally have evidence of God's faithfulness?

After the small group discussions, ask the women to sit back, close their eyes and do quiet slow breathing. The facilitator can follow this by reading a selected psalm of faithfulness or other appropriate reading in the silence of the setting. Then each woman is invited to move to a separate space by herself and take fifteen minutes in silent prayer and meditation of God's faithfulness. Small slips of paper with "God is Faithful," "God Answers Prayers," "God is Timely," or "God is Love" written on them can be distributed as meditation or prayer prompts. Add additional phrases as you wish. The facilitator may share how silence can seem so strange and unaccustomed to us in today's culture. Remind them that taking quality time for God and with each other is in itself a "work" of faith.

At the end of the meditation and prayer, the facilitator has the women gather back together for another short devotional or psalmody of God's faithfulness. Invite the women to share with one another what they have felt and thought during their private time of prayer and meditation. For a break, refreshments can be enjoyed in an adjacent area. During the break, the facilitator will arrange the seats in a large circle with flowers, candles, a Bible, a cross and an offering basket in the center of the circle.

After the break, invite the women to return to the retreat space. The facilitator can then pass around two or more tubes of good hand cream and invite the women to take some lotion for their hands. As the women massage the cream into their own hands, the facilitator can point out how God has shown His faithfulness in many instances through the things done by the hands of women, such as: feed the hungry, soothe the sick, work a job, provide for others, write words of encouragement or comfort, prepare delicious meals, applaud the success or efforts of other. The facilitator then begins to specifically acknowledge the "hand" work of each of the women present, how their hands serve God by enhancing the lives of others. Examples: Clara uses her hands in service to God to count the offerings, Lisa uses her hands in service to God teaching school, Keisha uses her hands in service to God as a nurse to hold a dying patient's hand, Laura uses her hands to knead bread for communion, Barbara uses her hands to serve God by making quilts for Lutheran World Relief and those she loves.

The facilitator then invites the participants to share their own stories of God's faithfulness in their lives. Bearing witness to God's faithfulness is an ancient custom. Think of Miriam's song! (And all the psalms!) Sharing our

stories not only encourages others but strengthens our own spirits as we recall anew the faithfulness of God! To close the sharing, the facilitator thanks the women for sharing and invites the group to sing the remaining verse of the hymn that began the retreat or another hymn of God's faithfulness. The reading of another psalm or reading about God's faithfulness and five minutes of meditation on the psalm or reading follows this singing. Close the meditation with a facilitator-led prayer. A nice parting gift for women would be small samples of hand lotion or a small votive candle for them to use as they meditate upon God's faithfulness in their lives in the following weeks.

Check out all of the programs on the Women of the ELCA website at www.womenoftheelca.org/resources. Categories include Personal, Retreat, Short Sessions, Liturgical Year, Multi Session, Racial Justice Advocacy, and Stewardship.

A few icebreakers

Having an outreach event? How many women are you inviting? Need a new way to get into an event? You want to get women to mingle more with other people? The nice thing about these icebreakers is that they can be used more than once and for more than one reason.

Puzzle pieces. If you have ten women, this icebreaker requires a ten-piece jigsaw puzzle. When the women arrive, give them each a puzzle piece. After the starting prayer, have the women put the puzzle together.

Complete me. This icebreaker is fun with Christmas Carols or favorite hymns, but it can be done with popular scripture texts as well, or anything else your community is uniquely familiar with. Plus, it is homemade. Write, type, or print the beginning and end of a phrase from a Christmas Carol. For examples: "It came upon" and "a midnight clear." These are cut in half and distributed to people as they arrive. The task is to go around asking others to "complete me" with either the first or second part of the phrase that you have in your hand. Funny combinations are made sometimes...but that is part of the fun! The pairs just "made" can be used later as well such as: "As we do this project, sit with the one who made you 'complete' in our icebreaker exercise!"

Pairs of cards. Having an inter-generational event? Use two decks of cards or pairs of Memory Game cards, (This is a children's card game with either baby and mama animals, or two of the same shape of animal). You'll have to pull out as many pairs of cards as you need beforehand. If you are expecting fourteen people, you will need seven pairs of cards. This icebreaker can also be used to form groups of three or four by preparing a deck of playing cards with three or four of a kind numbers. Shuffle and hand them out. Everyone who has the matching cards will be in a group. This match-up exercise can also be done with colored beads or buttons, too. Be creative and have fun!

The talking stick. Some of our American Indian sisters will be familiar with the talking stick. If you have an American Indian sister in your unit, ask her to share this with your group prior to use.

The talking stick is a proper stick usually with meaningful carving or ornamentation reserved for use by the elder in the tribe's council. It is the elders who make tribal decisions, and the talking stick is used for discussion. The person holding the talking stick is the only one talking at any time. To make your own talking stick, use a short (approximately 18 inches) dowel approximately 1 inch in diameter. You can give it added meaning by tacking a "Women of the ELCA" blue ribbon to the end as a streamer. One Indian tribe used the talking stick principle in a group discussion of diverse people as a way to invite all to speak. The stick was placed in the middle of the floor where people were sitting in a circle. The one who first wished to speak got up, took the stick, and spoke. This stick was then offered to others.

At points in the discussion, others put out their hands signaling they wanted to speak. In this way, only one person spoke at a time, invitations were made to those who were sitting silent (by offering them the talking stick) and discussion was done in good order and quietly – the only one speaking was the one holding the talking stick. You may choose other objects to use such as a ball, a balloon, knitting needles etc.

The community prayer. There are many ways to do community prayer. Women gather in a circle, perhaps holding hands, and one person begins the prayer by addressing God and inviting others to continue the prayer as the Spirit leads them closing their petition with “Lord in your mercy.” To which all respond, “Lord, hear our prayer.” And then the next person led by the Spirit shares a petition. Sometimes the facilitator may warmly and helpfully supply the “Lord in your mercy” if the Petitioner omits this. The facilitator closes the community prayers by thanking God for his faithfulness and the knowledge that God has heard the prayers. Sometimes the community prayer goes around the circle. At other times the prayer moves in a back-and-forth manner through the circle.

Unit leadership

This section addresses the business functions of unit leaders. Officers are not required for units. Only one model for organizing units has officers. If you look at our model constitution the wording used is “leaders (officers)” who are selected for a term of one year with one reelection. Lutheran women today, like women everywhere, are not as eager to take volunteer leadership roles. Opportunities for leadership aren’t as scarce as they were years ago. Also, as the demand on time and energy continue to grow, women want volunteer leadership roles to be heavy in value and light in busy-ness.

General leader responsibilities for business meetings. The minimum functions that are needed at any business meeting are that of the presider and recorder. The primary areas of unit leader responsibilities are:

- records transmitted for use in reports to Women of the ELCA and the congregation or institution
- communication within the unit and to the other expressions
- development of the ministry plan for the unit
- bookkeeping and transmittal of offerings
- in some cases, representation on the church council within a congregation or program committee within an institution

Business meetings. “To meet or not to meet,” that can be the question. Business meetings do have to happen. Yet, there is no prescribed number of times a unit has to have business meetings in a calendar year.

The number of units that are having business meetings on a quarterly basis is growing as women are finding other ways to collect, record, and submit the offerings of women between business meetings. In this way, no part of mission service lies dormant between business meetings. On the contrary, new energy for more effective or additional ministry has been freed up and financial support to both synodical and churchwide continue.

Business meetings require the presence of elected leaders but are open to anyone interested in attending. Some units prefer that only business be done at business meetings. A brief devotion is desired as is praying for the known needs of people. Some units prefer programs included with their business meetings. This is something on which the leaders of the unit should seek consensus.

Time is saved when committee work is not brought to the business meeting to be completed or rehashed. Those who are entrusted to do “committee work” can fulfill their responsibilities without having their chair (or designated leader) discuss anew things already discussed. Of course, this does not mean that the coordinating

council can't be asked its feelings on a given topic, but committee decisions are best made within committee meetings.

Other time saving methods that can be tried are:

- The minutes to the previous business meeting and all committee meetings are distributed well before the scheduled business meeting.
- Committees limit their report on any actions taken for the sake of the organization and any recommendations made to the board.
- Offerings expected to be reported at the business meeting are provided to the unit's financial recorder (or treasurer) far enough in advance to allow for records to be completed and distributed prior to the business meeting.
- The agenda is prepared and distributed prior to the business meeting.
- Everyone commits herself to be on time.
- Consider having your business meetings after worship since the women on the board will likely already be present.

Co-leader responsibilities

Co-leaders can work together on the agendas. A simple agenda of devotion or prayer, roll call, old business (things needing further discussion) and new business (things to discuss for the first time), financial reports and closing prayer can be typed or even handwritten as used as a form for developing future agendas. While it is true that the co-leader not presiding could take the minutes at each meeting, there may be another woman in the unit willing to do this task. The written record of business meetings can be handwritten. Minutes shall be saved in a manner that they can be located easily for future reference.

Co-leaders oversee the development of the unit's ministry plan. They can take turns presiding at business meetings. They do not necessarily lead non-business meetings or activities. The process the unit uses for making decisions can be either consensus or voting. Whatever process is used, it needs to be one that enables the unit to make the best progress. The co-leaders will help the unit decide what method of making decisions it will use. Co-leaders provide the annual report. Highlight the activities and events women of your unit have been involved in during the previous year.

Communication co-leader. This co-leader makes sure the unit's non-financial records are properly maintained. This would include the minutes of the unit's business meetings as well as the record of any standing rule that the unit adopts. The Communication Co-leader can have a unit mailbox or basket in the church office. Mailings that have Women of the ELCA's logo or addressed to the women of the church along with any communication for the SC Synodical Women's Organization can be placed in the mailbox. One of the Co-leaders should pick up the unit's mail on a regular basis.

While this co-leader receives the information about events where unit representation is desired, both co-leaders take turns with others to represent the unit at conference meetings, activities or events, the synodical women's organization activities and convention, and the churchwide organization. Follow the process for voting member representation at SWO conventions and the CWO triennial conventions.

Keep the names and address list of unit participants. Maintain a relationship between the unit and the church secretary or church councilperson that handles membership information. Changes of address can be shared.

The communication co-leader also makes sure the annual ministry calendar is distributed to all the women of the congregation. (See the Ministry Plan section.) Verbal reminders and emails about business meetings are also

provided in addition to a bulletin announcement. When publicizing an activity or event, the Communication Co-leader will want to work with other leaders to come up with the best ways to get the warm invitation to as many women as possible! Fliers, bulletin board postings, bulletin inserts, personal invitations, carpool arrangements, and the like, make clear the welcoming intent of the unit.

The financial recording co-leader. The financial recording co-leader is encouraged to participate in any treasurer's training available within the synodical women's organization. The South Carolina SWO treasurer will stay in touch through regular correspondence, providing offering remittance and receipt forms which are individualized for the specific unit. This co-leader provides a full financial report annually or as the unit's bylaws prescribe. Keep records that reflect money received and money expended. All units decide where their funds go. When sending offerings to either synodical or churchwide Women of the ELCA, cash should be converted to a check.

Officer responsibilities

The following job descriptions are examples based on listings found in Robert's Rules of Order. They are only examples. Elected leaders in other models can also use the officer job descriptions as informal task checklists.

President/Presider:

- Develops the agenda, in consultation with others.
- Leads in the development of an annual Ministry Plan for the unit.
- Oversees the facilitation of the Ministry Plan.
- Either herself or her designee prepares the business meeting place.
- Presides at unit business meetings and at executive/officer meetings.
- Prepares annual reports to the unit, the congregation and synodical women's organization (if such reports are requested.)
- Oversees and affirms relationships of unit with any conference activities or events, the synodical women's organization activities and convention, and the churchwide organization.
- Represents Women of the ELCA at other local and appropriate ministries/functions or appoints a designee to take her place.
- Introduces/Affirms process for decision making that allows unit to make the best progress. (Does not have to be Robert's Rules).
- Make sure any standing rules that the unit may adopt are published and distributed.

Vice President. If the president for any reason vacates or is absent, the vice president takes the chair or president's role in conducting the tasks of the president. To this end, the vice president should be:

- Current in all matters affecting the unit including the Ministry Plan.
- Be knowledgeable and supportive of the president's desired outcomes for a business meeting.
- Speak in unison with the president on matters decided.
- In many circumstances it is the vice president who works in partnership with the president as her designee in appropriate situations and as assigned.

Secretary/Recorder:

- The recording office of the unit and custodian of all unit records—unless otherwise designated.
- Provide other board members with whatever documents are required for the performance of their duties.
- Maintain name and address list of officers, unit participants and any committees.
- Provide written record of meetings.
- Send out notices of each business meeting. This can also be done informally.
- In the absence of both the president and vice-president, presides over meeting.
- Provide and handle correspondence as needed.

Treasurer:

- Entrusted with the custody of the units' funds which includes bookkeeping and transmittal of offerings to synodical and churchwide expression.
- Desirably bonded through congregational insurance policy.
- Disburse funds only by authority of the unit or as the unit's bylaws prescribe.
- Provide full financial report annually or as unit's bylaws prescribe.

Women of the ELCA offerings

These gifts, as outlined in the constitution, are the primary source of support of all our ministries together. Women gather for study and/or action and make a voluntary offering. The unit treasurer collects these offerings and deposits them in the unit's checking account for disbursement as the unit desires. All offerings which are sent to and through the synodical women's organization must be sent with the SC WELCA remittance form and will be listed on the annual report of congregational unit offerings in the South Carolina SWO Bulletin of Reports.

There are six types of offerings.

1. Regular offerings. As recommended by the churchwide board, the unit keeps a share of all offerings received for its own ministries, and forwards 50% or more to the synodical women's organization. The synodical women's organization then keeps a share for its own ministries, and forwards 50% or more to the churchwide organization.

Make one check payable to SC Women of the ELCA, fill in the remittance form provided by the SC WELCA treasurer, and mail it to the treasurer at the address at the bottom of the form. After the treasurer deposits the check, she will reply with an acknowledgement form which identifies all receipts by check number, date, and designation of the gift(s) for the current fiscal year. The remittance and receipt forms provided by the synodical treasurer are pre-printed with the unit's church address and congregation ID.

Regular offerings sent to the South Carolina Women of the ELCA help provide the following ministries:

- support leadership development,
- organize synodical events,
- provide Bible study retreats,
- publish newsletters,
- provide a website for resources,
- support mission growth, community, and action activities,
- train congregational officers,
- provide scholarships for women to attend synodical conventions and the triennial gathering.

Regular offerings sent to Churchwide Women of the ELCA help to provide the following ministries:

- operational expenses (i.e., rent, salaries, insurance, travel, etc.)
- Gather magazine, Daily Grace, and Café
- program resources
- social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest)
- grants and scholarships
- Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls Initiative
- Racial Justice
- Katie's Fund for Women in Leadership

2. Thankoffering. This is an offering which cannot be designated and must be sent with Form B to the churchwide women's organization. (See appendix for Form B.) Thankoffering supports the same churchwide ministries as regular offering and is not included on the annual report of congregational unit offerings in the synodical bulletin of reports.
3. Joy Offering. South Carolina Lutheran women have collected Thankofferings since the late 1800s in gratitude for blessings received. They were forwarded to world-wide ELCA ministries. This was a separate offering from regular offering which supports local, synodical and churchwide Women of the ELCA ministries. At the merger, Churchwide Women of the ELCA adopted the practice of collecting Thankofferings but put in the constitution that all Thankoffering received was to be kept for its own programming expenses. In order for the South Carolina women to continue our custom of supporting world-wide ELCA ministries, a resolution was passed at the 2011 synodical convention to rename our Thankoffering to "Joy Offering." Because it is renamed, we are allowed to continue giving our gratitude offering in support world-wide ELCA ministries, specifically to the Good Gifts program. (See appendix for the history and resolution.) Joy Offering is traditionally brought to the annual synodical convention, but it can also be remitted to the synodical treasurer at other times of the year, such as at Thanksgiving.
4. Designated offering. This is an offering collected for a specific charity or organization as determined by the congregational unit, or by the synodical organization. Designated gifts must be specified on the SC WELCA unit's remittance form. These may include designated gifts to churchwide which the synodical treasurer will forward to churchwide. If sent directly to churchwide, the check must be accompanied by Form B.
5. Conference offering. Submitted by the units at each conference meeting/gathering. Conference offering may also include personal offerings by the women attending the conference. The conference determines where it will be disbursed. The conference financial secretary completes the SC WELCA conference remittance form and forwards the offering check(s) to the synodical treasurer. Each conference has a unique account within the synodical checking account. The SWO treasurer writes a check to the conference-requested charity or organization and sends an updated conference statement to the conference financial secretary.
6. Convention offering. Submitted by the units and visitors at the annual synodical convention during the convention ingathering service. Half of this offering helps defray the cost of the convention and half goes toward the convention projects.

To learn more about Churchwide and Synodical Women of the ELCA offerings and the ministries they support, contact the synodical treasurer.

Constitution for units

When a unit is started, it adopts a constitution taken from the model and made specific to itself in the title and within the brackets. Also, portions without an asterisk may be modified as needed. Amendments may be made according to the last section of the constitution. Constitution Provisions are in bold and are the basic general practices. Bylaws are in regular type and explain the details of the provisions.

The model Constitution and Bylaws for Units follows. It is approved by Churchwide Women of the ELCA and may be found on the Women of the ELCA website, along with versions for inter-congregational units and special units and is available in Spanish. The following model may also be found on the SC WELCA's website: www.sewelca.com.

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

NOTE:

Portions marked with an asterisk (*) are needed to fulfill the criteria for membership.

The provisions of the Constitution and Bylaws that pertain to the same subject have been placed together.

The two types of provisions are identified in the following way:

- Constitutional provisions are printed in **bold** type.
- Bylaws are printed in regular type.

ARTICLE I—MEMBERSHIP AND NAME

***SECTION 1. Membership**

This [congregational] [inter-congregational] unit shall be a member of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, hereinafter designated as “Women of the ELCA.”

***SECTION 2. Name**

The name of this [congregational] [inter-congregational] unit shall be [name(s) of congregation(s)] Unit of Women of the ELCA, hereinafter designated as “the unit.”

ARTICLE II—STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

***SECTION 1. 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. Commitment**

To accomplish the purpose of Women of the ELCA, women in this unit shall commit themselves to

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

ARTICLE III—PARTICIPATION

***SECTION 1. Composition**

This unit shall be composed of those women who participate in activities that indicate a commitment to the purpose of Women of the ELCA.

***SECTION 2. Participation**

Participation in this unit shall be open to all women in the(se) congregation(s) and other women who subscribe to the purpose.

***SECTION 3. Congregational Membership**

Women elected to leadership in this unit and elected as voting members of a convention of the synodical women's organization shall be participants in this unit and voting members of an ELCA congregation.

ARTICLE IV—RELATIONSHIPS

***SECTION 1. Congregation**

This unit shall participate in the life and work of [name(s) of congregation(s)] and report to the annual meeting(s). It may report regularly to the congregational council(s).

***SECTION 2. Cluster or Conference**

This unit shall participate in activities within the cluster or conference to which it is assigned.

***SECTION 3. Synodical Women's Organization**

In an interdependent partnership with the [name of synod] Synodical Women's Organization, this unit shall participate in the convention of the [name of synod] Synodical Women's Organization by

***Item 1.** Electing a voting member and an alternate to represent the unit; and

***Item 2.** Cooperating in the process for nomination of officers and board members of the synodical women's organization.

***SECTION 4. Churchwide Women's Organization**

***Item 1.** This unit shall participate in the process for nomination of voting members of the Triennial Convention.

***Item 2.** This unit shall participate in the process of nomination of officers and board members.

ARTICLE V—MEETINGS

SECTION 1. Program

Women of this unit shall come together regularly [designate dates, times, etc.] for study, support, and action.

SECTION 2. Business

There shall be a business meeting(s)† held in [name of month(s)] for purposes such as receiving reports, projecting plans, electing leadership, and adopting an annual budget.

† At least annually

ARTICLE VI—LEADERSHIP

SECTION 1. Leaders (Officers)

This unit shall have [names of leadership positions], elected for a term of one year with one reelection.

SECTION 2. Duties of Leaders (Officers)

SECTION 3. Duties of Unit (Board) (Coordinating Committee) (Coordinating Council)

ARTICLE VII—PLANNING

SECTION 1. Program Areas and Goals

This unit shall engage in planning, giving attention to the program areas and goals established by Women of the ELCA.

SECTION 2. Program Planning

The unit (board) (coordinating committee) (coordinating council) shall be responsible for the total program planning for the unit.

ARTICLE VIII—NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS

SECTION 1. Nominating Committee

There shall be a Nominating Committee of at least three persons to present nominees for [names of leadership positions] for election by this unit.

SECTION 2. Elections

All elections shall be for a term of one year with one reelection.

ARTICLE IX—FINANCE

SECTION 1. Fiscal Year

The fiscal year and the budget year for this unit shall be determined by this unit. SECTION 2. Administration

This unit shall develop and administer its own financial plan or budget that shall reflect support for the total program of Women of the ELCA.

SECTION 3. Transmittal

This unit shall transmit funds regularly in accordance with established procedures.

SECTION 4. Reports

This unit shall provide annual financial reports to participants.

SECTION 5. Financial accountability

An annual accounting compilation or review of this unit's financial records shall be conducted by a financial review committee of the unit.

ARTICLE X – DISSOLUTION CLAUSE

In the event of the dissolution of this congregational/inter-congregational unit, any surplus property remaining after the payment of its debts shall be disposed of by transfer to the churchwide women's organization or its successor provided that said organization is, at the time of dissolution, a qualified organization as described in section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Code of 1986 or comparable provision, and, if not, to the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America or its successor, and, if not, to one or more organizations so qualified in such proportions as the leadership of this unit shall determine.

ARTICLE XI—BYLAWS AND AMENDMENTS

SECTION 1. Bylaws

This unit may adopt bylaws not in conflict with this constitution by a majority vote, provided they have been presented in writing at the previous meeting.

SECTION 2. Amendments

- Item 1. This constitution may be amended at any regular business meeting or special meeting of this unit by a two-thirds vote of the women present and voting, provided the proposed amendment has been presented at the previous meeting and is consistent with the purpose of Women of the ELCA.
- Item 2. Amendments to the bylaws may be adopted by the unit by a majority vote after having been presented at the previous meeting.
- Item 3. Whenever the secretary of Women of the ELCA officially informs the congregational/inter-congregational units that the Women of the ELCA Triennial Convention has amended the approved Model Constitution and Bylaws for Congregational/Inter-congregational units, whether by setting out alternate clauses or otherwise, such provisions shall be introduced at once into this constitution and notice of this action shall be forwarded to the synodical president.

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

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