



## **Revising Congregation Constitutions**

A congregation's constitution should be considered as "an ecclesial, legal, and missional document that reflects the underlying theology and doctrines of this church as well as its polity and governance structures. As the guiding document of one of the three expressions of this church, it reflects that congregations, while fully the church, are not the whole church; they are in an interdependent relationship with synods and the churchwide organization and are part of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church...deeply rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Lutheran Confessions, and the history of this church."

– *Introduction to the Model Constitution for Congregations*

### **Does our congregation need to update our congregation constitution?**

- **YES**, if it has not been revised to include required changes approved during the latest churchwide assembly.
- **YES**, if the congregation has evolved in ways that make its current constitution obsolete.
- **YES**, if no one can find the congregation's constitution or recall when it was last used.

### **Where can we learn about the latest required constitution changes?**

Visit the website of the ELCA Office of the Secretary at [www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Office-of-the-Secretary). Under the "Congregations" tab,

- Download the latest "Model Constitution Congregation" (Word format).
- Download the "Guide for Use of the Model Constitution for Congregations" (pdf format).
- Review the latest "Amendments to the Model Constitution for Congregations" for required changes to all previously adopted congregation constitutions.

### **How do we update our constitution?**

If a congregation's constitution was previously revised to include changes approved during the 2013 Churchwide Assembly, for example, adopting only the required changes approved during the 2016 Churchwide Assembly can be efficiently accomplished at any legally called meeting of voting members of the congregation. (\*C16.04.)

### **What if our congregation's constitution needs more work?**

If a congregation finds that significant changes are needed to more accurately address current or anticipated practices, more than a simple update will most likely be required. Preparing or revising and adopting new amendments, bylaws, or continuing resolutions will likely require the time and effort of a constitution committee and will follow a more complex process.

The chart, "How Do We Change Our Congregation's Constitution?" describes the required procedures for updating, amending, adopting, and approving constitution provisions, bylaws, and continuing resolutions. The steps for each type of change are drawn from the ELCA Model Constitution and referenced to the chapter and sections of that document.

### **Resources**

Go to the synod's website for Congregation Resources, Constitution Resources, and scroll down and click on the Updating Your Constitution tab. (<https://swmnelca.org/for-congregations/constitution-resources/>)