

Summary of Model Constitutional Changes

Some might wonder where the ELCA model constitution is written. I certainly had questions. Does it come down from an “Ivory Tower” or maybe just an out-of-touch document with the needs of a church individual? After extensive research, I found that it is a healthy process of discussion, debate, and voting which comes from the Churchwide Assembly. By the power of our representatives, this is an organization-living document that brings together a combination of officers of the church and layperson who really are on the ground and from within the church body. It has been reviewed and voted on every three years. Therefore, as a voting member of the ELCA, we have already had debate on this document. Accepting the Model is almost a foregone conclusion. I have included, at the end, some excerpt from the ELCA website describing the Churchwide Assembly.

When the ELCA was formed, they did not want the church ruled by an ivory tower. Instead, they felt it was critical to have a diverse group of members of the churches and offices make up the body of voting members to discuss, debate, and vote on the governance of the ELCA.

To compare our current constitution to the model constitution which highlights and compares the two documents side-by-side I used the program called Beyond Compare (see screenshots below). When I compared our constitution to the ELCA model it did not take long to recognize the clarity of the language of the model. In the examples below, you will find the text in blue as the Model Constitution and the text in red is our current constitution.

In places our current constitution does not break up the thoughts into meaningful sections. Instead, it combines points into one thus making the document less understandable (C3.02). The model constitution used improved grammar over our current constitution (C5.03). The model constitution in many cases uses verbiage which better aligned itself with the language of the church today (C6.03.c). The model also included a few helpful additions such as the seasonal members and the rules associated with this type of membership (C8.02.e).

Listed below are examples to highlight these points:

*C3.02. This church confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world.

C3.02. The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfillment in the universal community of the Church, and the universal Church exists in and through congregations. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, therefore, derives its character and powers both from the sanction and representation of its congregations and from its inherent nature as an expression of the broader fellowship of the faithful. In length, it acknowledges itself to be in the historic continuity of the communion of saints; in breadth, it expresses the fellowship of believers and congregations in our day.

C5.03 ...this congregation governing document...

C5.03 ...the congregation governing document...

C5.03.c call or terminate the call of associates in ministry; deaconesses, and diaconal ministers in conformity with the applicable policy of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;

Divided into two parts

C5.03.c “call a minister of Word and Service;” and

C5.03.d “terminate the call of a minister of Word and Service in conformity with the constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America;”

C6.03.c

...roster of Ministers of Word and Sacrament of the Evangelical Lutheran...

...clergy roster of the Evangelical Lutheran...

New Addition

C8.02.e Seasonal members are voting members of other ELCA congregations who wish to retain such membership but desire to participate in the life and mission of this congregation, including exercising limited voting rights in this congregation. The Congregation Council may grant seasonal membership to such persons provided that this congregation is a member of a synod where the Synod Council has approved seasonal member voting on its territory. Such seasonal members shall have all the privileges and duties of voting members except that:

- 1) they shall not be eligible for elected office in, or for membership on the Congregation Council or on a call committee of, this congregation;
- 2) they shall not have the right to vote on any matter concerning or affecting the call or termination of call of any minister of this congregation;
- 3) they shall not have the right to vote on any matter concerning or affecting the affiliation of this congregation with the ELCA;
- 4) they shall not be eligible to serve as voting members from this congregation of the Synod Assembly or the Churchwide Assembly;
- 5) they shall not, even if otherwise permitted by this congregation, vote by proxy or by absentee ballot; and
- 6) they shall not, within any two calendar month period, exercise voting rights in this congregation and in the congregation where they remain voting members.

Screen Shots of Beyond Compare

ELCA Model Constitution

Chapter 3.
NATURE OF THE CHURCH

*C3.01. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this congregation are to be carried out under his rule and authority.

*C3.02. This church confesses the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church and is resolved to serve Christian unity throughout the world.]

*C3.03. The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfil

*C3.04. This church, inspired and led by the Holy Spirit, participates in The Lutheran World Federation as a global communion of churches, engaging in faithful

*C3.05. The name Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA or "this church") as used herein refers in general references to this whole church, including its

Chapter 4.

ELCA Current Constitution

Chapter 3.
NATURE OF THE CHURCH

*C3.01. All power in the Church belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ, its head. All actions of this congregation are to be carried out under his rule and authority.

*C3.02. The Church exists both as an inclusive fellowship and as local congregations gathered for worship and Christian service. Congregations find their fulfillment

Chapter 4.
STATEMENT OF DOCTRINE

Excerpts for ELCA web site

Churchwide Assembly

Duties of the ELCA Churchwide Assembly:

- Review the work of the churchwide officers, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- Review the work of the churchwide units, and for this purpose require and receive reports from them and act on business proposed by them.
- Receive and consider proposals from synod assemblies.
- Establish churchwide policy.
- Adopt a budget for the churchwide organization.
- Elect officers, board members, and other persons as provided in the constitution or bylaws.
- Establish churchwide units to carry out the functions of the churchwide organization.
- Have the sole authority to amend the constitution and bylaws.
- Fulfill other functions as required in the constitution and bylaws.
- Conduct such other business as necessary to further the purposes and functions of the churchwide organization.

http://www.elca.org/About/Leadership/Churchwide-Assembly?_ga=2.73941842.1981631070.1519015969-622015811.1519015969

Churchwide Officers

Along with the shared leadership of congregations, synods and the churchwide organization, there are four elected churchwide officers who bring their enthusiastic faith and unique skills to their service on behalf of this church and its mission.

ELCA churchwide officers are elected to serve six-year terms through the actions of the Churchwide Assembly or the Church Council (Treasurer). The current officers are:

- Presiding Bishop ([Elizabeth A. Eaton](#))
- Vice President ([Bill Horne](#))
- Secretary ([Chris Boerger](#))
- Treasurer (Coming soon!)

Their work, in partnership with and support of other leaders throughout the church, helps assure that we pursue our mission in this ever-changing world with integrity, mutual support and accountability, thoughtful planning and vision, effective administration, financial responsibility and consistent processes for decision making. In all of this, we are guided by the Holy Spirit and deeply rooted in Scripture, Lutheran theology and the traditions that nourish us and enable us to be a church that is both resilient and always being made new.

<http://www.elca.org/About/Leadership/Churchwide-Officers>

FAQ

What is a congregation observer, and how does this participant register?

Each congregation of the ELCA may register one congregation observer for the Churchwide Assembly. Congregation observers will have reserved seating in the observers section of the plenary hall. Such observers have neither voice nor vote in plenary sessions of the assembly. They will be able to download ELCA Guidebook on a personal device using the Guidebook app. Registration for a congregation observer is now closed. Transportation, accommodations, meals and other related expenses are the responsibility of the registered observer or the sending congregation.

<http://www.elca.org/CWA-2016/FAQ>

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Constitution Revision Committee