



Congregation Constitutions

The 2019 Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA adopted several changes to the Model Constitution for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Every congregation is to make these changes in your constitution to be in sync with the ELCA constitution. The procedure is simple: your Congregation Council passes a motion to send the proposed changes to your next Congregation Meeting (which in most cases is in January). The congregation must be notified of the proposed changes at least 30 days in advance of the meeting at which the vote will be taken. Upon a majority vote of members at the Congregation Meeting, the amendments will take effect. They do not require review and approval by the synod.

Please note: If you have changes in your constitution in addition to the ones needed to conform to the Model Constitution, then you must follow the procedure for amendments, which is described in Chapter 16 of your constitution. This includes submitting revised constitutions to the synod for review and approval. However, we request that the above changes be addressed no later than your next Congregational Meeting.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Office of the Bishop. Once your congregation has approved these changes, we ask that you notify the Office of the Bishop in writing or by e-mail that the changes have been made to bring your constitution into conformity with the Model Constitution.

All asterisked (*) provisions in the Model Constitution for Congregations and ELCA Churchwide approved amendments for the Model Constitution for Congregations may not be altered, revised, or changed in any way. Provisions that do not have a (*) may be edited per each congregational context.

Suggestions for Updating Your Constitution

On the first page of your constitution, state the name of the congregation, the city and state, and the date of the latest revision, so you can quickly see if you are looking at the most current version. Next, include the following:

- Table of Contents,

- Codification Explanation (as written in the Introduction to the “ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations”),
- Required Provisions statement in quotations (as written in the Introduction to the “ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations”), and,
- A list of dates the constitution has been amended by the congregation and approved by the synod, at the end of the constitution

Dealing with Optional Amendments, Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions - unique to each congregation

1. Optional Amendments suggested by ELCA are not marked with an asterisk *.
2. Revise your congregation’s bylaws and continuing resolutions as needed. Follow the process as stated in Chapter 17. Bylaws and Chapter 18. Continuing Resolutions
3. Plan to integrate bylaws and continuing resolutions into the constitution (see the Introduction to the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations 2019). You may place the bylaw or continuing resolution following the appropriate constitution provision. A bylaw or continuing resolution will be distinguished by its numbering. For example:
 - C10.01. The annual meeting of this congregation shall be held at a time specified in the bylaws.
 - C10.01.01. The annual meeting shall be the third Sunday in January.

Suggested Procedure

1. Form a small committee (3 to 5 people) to look at all documents listed in the model constitution as well as the congregation’s current constitution, bylaws and continuing resolutions. It is okay to consult the synod Constitution Review Team at any time through the process: better earlier than later!
2. Prepare a draft of revisions: use underline for additions and strikethrough for deletions to show how the current document will change.
3. Share the draft with the Synod Constitution Review team for possible changes.
4. Present suggested revisions to Congregation Council. (More than 30 days before congregation meeting for required amendments, 60 days before congregation meeting for optional amendments and bylaws. *C16.03, *C17.03) Continuing Resolutions may be enacted or amended by Congregation Council or by the congregation. (*C18.01 and *C18.02)

5. Mail to all member households at least 30 days before the congregation meeting (*C16.01, *C16.04 and C17.03). This could be a separate mailing or in your monthly newsletter. If Continuing Resolutions are to be voted on by the congregation, rather than Congregation Council, use the same notice as for Bylaws.
6. OPTIONAL - You may have a Sunday morning discussion of amendments a few weeks before the congregation meeting.
7. Present the revisions at the congregation meeting (be sure the president has this item on the agenda). Vote.
8. The secretary of the Congregation Council sends approved amendments to their Synod Constitution Review team representative for synod approval (*C17.03 and *C17.04). Also send a copy of the amended total constitution. Bylaws and Continuing Resolutions do not need to be approved by the Synod Constitution Review team but must be sent for suggestions and to be sure they do not conflict with the constitution (*C16.04 and *C18.01).

Note: References above to *C16.03, *C17.03, etc. are to Chapters and Paragraphs of the *ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations*.

Thank you for your efforts in keeping your congregation's governing documents up to date.

For additional assistance, contact:

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