

Report of the Women's Organization



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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¹ Executive Committee

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Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*

Statement of Purpose

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Women of the ELCA) is a separately incorporated, self-supporting organization that operates within the framework of the constitution and policies of this church (see churchwide constitution provision 16.40. and related bylaws as well as continuing resolution 16.41.A05. printed in Section X of this

volume). The program and structure of Women of the ELCA are defined in the constitutions and bylaws of both Women of the ELCA and the ELCA. In fulfilling its mandates, Women of the ELCA is committed to working interdependently with all churchwide units and Lutheran, ecumenical, and inter-church agencies and organizations. The women's organization functions within ELCA financial and personnel policies. The women's organization is responsible for establishing and maintaining its finances.

The constitution of Women of the ELCA defines the organization's purpose, principles of organization, governance processes, and responsibilities. The triennial convention is the highest legislative authority of the organization. A 21-member elected churchwide executive board makes decisions on behalf of the organization between triennial conventions. An annual consultation is held with the synodical organizations through the Conference of Synodical Presidents. The president of Women of the ELCA either attends or sends a representative to each synodical convention.

Report of Work 2009–2011

Since Women of the ELCA functions on a three-year cycle, this report of work in 2009–2011 straddles two triennia. The Eighth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA occurs in July 2011, producing newly elected officers and board members, among other things.

Those who are active in Women of the ELCA experience a strong community of women who walk together on their faith journeys. No doubt women want their daughters, nieces, granddaughters, and younger friends to be supported by a strong community of faithful women too. And the reality is that whatever their age, women want to come together with other women to discuss their faith. Women of the ELCA provides a place for that community to gather, a place where fellowship, friendship, and support are nurtured.

Ongoing Ministries and Resources

The women's organization continues its strong ministries in global education, scholarships, anti-racism, grants, Bible study, cross-cultural immersion, and stewardship. The organization's award-winning publications—*Lutheran Woman Today*, *Interchange (Intercambio)*, *Café*, and its two websites—support and inspire the women of this church. In addition to deriving financial support through offerings, Women of the ELCA has an

annual appeal for its Katharina von Bora Luther Fund (known as Katie's Fund). Leadership training is offered annually to synodical presidents, newly elected synodical treasurers, and select networks.

Bold Women's Day—observed annually on the fourth Sunday of February—celebrates all Lutheran women who have acted or are acting boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. 2011 marks the fifth observance of Bold Women's Day. Whether in a group observance or individually, women across this church recognize, honor, and support the boldness God has placed in God's followers.

Women of the ELCA's health initiative, "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls," was launched in July 2005 and continues to support the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and girls in the ELCA. A health column written by nationally recognized author Molly Ginty appears in *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine. During both the 2005–2008 triennium and 2008–2011 triennium, the annual grants program of Women of the ELCA supports domestic and international efforts addressing the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and children. A \$50,000 grant program was launched in 2010, providing seed grants up to \$1,000 for raising awareness, providing education, and promoting wellness among women and girls. Each program receiving a grant brought together women in a congregational unit of Women of the ELCA and the community, met the goals of the health initiative, and was replicable in other settings. A new resource will be published in 2011 that gathers together the programs funded in this project, offering this church new ways in which to support the health and wellness of women and girls.

A new line of programmatic resources, available free of charge in PDF files from www.womenoftheelca.org, was introduced in 2009. More than 25 resources have been published in this line so far, with more scheduled throughout this year. Perfect for congregational units, adult forums, retreats, workshops, and the like, each resource comes with a "how to use this resource" section. Many include bibliographies for further learning. Topics are wide-ranging, including kitchen table philanthropy, the faces of grief, speaking faith through art, journaling, caring for the earth as God's people, shared wisdom (an effective leadership style), practicing resurrection, and mindful knitting.

The organization continues to build on its communication tools that support the community of women. A new e-newsletter, *Bold Connections*, launched in 2009, provides regular, timely news and information from the churchwide organization that connects its readers to the whole of Women of the ELCA, to the organization that is larger than their congregational and synodical women's organizations. *Bold Connections* has more than 6,000 subscribers. A new blog also launched in 2009; it helps connect issues, events, and trends with the mission, purpose, and ministries of Women of the ELCA. Both can be accessed at www.womenoftheelca.org. The organization, its magazine *Lutheran Woman Today*, and its electronic magazine *Café* are active in social networking through Facebook and Twitter.

American Lutheran women have a long tradition of gathering regularly in Bible study through the women's organization. Today is no different. In *Lutheran Woman Today*, the magazine of Women of the ELCA, a nine-session study is offered each September through May, and a three-session study is offered in the summer issues. The 2011 summer Bible study, "Renew, Respond, Rejoice!" is written by Pr. Cathy Malotky and Pr. David Engelstad. Designed to help women of all ages reflect on the theme of this summer's triennial gathering and Paul's admonition to the Philippians found in Philippians 4:4–9, the study explores how we can renew our faith lives, respond to God's call, and rejoice in our many blessings. The 2011–2012 study, written by Pr. Patricia Lull of Augsburg College, is "To Lead and to Serve: The Gospel of Mark." She has designed the 2011–2012 Bible study for both experienced and novice readers of Scripture, challenging all to read this gospel narrative as an invitation to discipleship in the 21st century. The theme verse for the study is Mark 10:49b, "Take heart; get up, Jesus is calling you." For more information, visit www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

Lutheran Woman Today is exploring a name change and re-branding, making the magazine available to a broader audience. Information about the name change will be announced at this summer's triennial convention.

Café (www.boldcafe.org) is a free monthly electronic magazine for younger women. Our readers include pastors, seminary and college students, and other young women who use *Café* as a Bible study resource individually or with their congregations. Many also use it to learn more about what the Lutheran church has to say about certain issues and to start discussions with friends or classmates. *Café* incorporates a Lutheran perspective for women of Christian faith interested in how one's faith informs women's issues. For six consecutive years, *Café* has received a "Best in Class" Award of Excellence from the Associated Church Press in the Independent Website or E-zine category. *Café* is also available as a monthly podcast.

A smart phone app is in production, to be launched in March. It will deliver a daily message of encouragement for the spiritual journey, drawing on the deep well of resources of Women of the ELCA. To learn more, visit the App Store at iTunes or www.womenoftheelca.org.

As of the writing of this report, more than 150 congregations that have left the ELCA had congregational units of Women of the ELCA. Conversations are ongoing with those women, providing them with various options regarding their relationship with Women of the ELCA. Meanwhile, several synodical boards have been faced with vacancies when a board member has had to step down because her congregation left the ELCA.

Through a reduction in force, seven women—representing one-third of the staff—ended their service with Women of the ELCA in October 2009. This reduction in force was necessitated by reduced income to the churchwide women's organization. The current staff of 12 plus the executive director provides the best and most efficient service and support to the women of the organization.

Eighth Triennial Convention

The Eighth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA will be held July 12–14, 2011, in Spokane, Washington. More than 400 delegates from across this church will deal with a range of issues while conducting the business of the organization. Officers and a churchwide executive board for the 2011–2014 triennium will be elected, and a budget for fiscal year 2012 will be considered. The 2011 Triennial Convention offering will be designated as follows: 50 percent to Women of the ELCA for ongoing ministries, 25 percent to the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia, and 25 percent to ELCA Outdoor Ministries. These designations were made by action of the churchwide executive board and are in response to memorials passed at the Seventh Triennial Convention in 2008. More than \$100,000 was collected in offerings at the 2008 convention.

2011 Triennial Gathering

The Triennial Gathering, which follows the convention on July 14–17, 2011, will bring together more than 2,000 women of all ages under the theme, “Renew, Respond, Rejoice!” The two featured speakers are Leymah Gbowee and Nora Gallagher. Leymah Gbowee boldly gathered together Christian and Muslim women in war-torn Liberia who had had enough of death, destruction, rape, and physical violence. This unassuming Lutheran woman led an effort that challenged warlord Charles Taylor, called the elected leadership of Liberia and the opposition gangs to account, and ultimately brought peace to Liberia. Gallagher, an Episcopalian, is the author of several books, included her latest, *The Sacred Meal*, part of the Ancient Practices Series published by Thomas Nelson. Worship leaders for the gathering include Pr. M. Wyvetta Bullock, Pr. Susan Briehl, Dr. Jane Redmont, Pr. Mary Louise Frenchman, and Pr. Megan Torgerson. Among the many new offerings at this year’s gathering are a prayer shawl collection, a quilt challenge, and a banner project.

Major Directions for 2011–2013

Building upon its strengths, Women of the ELCA will continue its mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ by :

- Communicating ways and means to develop and nurture relationships;
- Building community and relationships;
- Enabling authentic and diverse relationships;
- Strategically developing resources that support the mission and purpose;
- Building up healthy, balanced communities;
- Increasing financial support to the organization; and
- Equipping disciples to boldly live out their faith.

In doing so, Women of the ELCA will live out its 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, society, and the world.

Ms. Beth Wrenn, *president, 2008–2011 triennium*

Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*

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