



Report of the Women of the ELCA

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²Standing Committee on Budget and Finance

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Ms. Phyllis L. Wallace, member and representative of the ELCA Church Council
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Mr. Dan Joy, Lutheran Men in Mission
Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director

Statement of Purpose

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a separately incorporated, self-supporting organization that operates within the framework of the constitution and policies of this church (*see* ELCA 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 both in the constitution of the ELCA and in the organization's own governing documents. In fulfilling its mandates, Women of the ELCA is committed to working interdependently with all ELCA churchwide units as well as 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 own 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 churchwide president either attends or sends a representative to each synodical convention.

Report of Work 2007–2009

Since Women of the ELCA functions on a three-year cycle, this report of work in 2007–2009 straddles two triennia. The organization's 2008–2011 triennium began last summer with the Seventh Triennial Convention and Triennial Gathering (*see below*).

As the organization matures, Women of the ELCA faces new challenges. Styles of organizing and the content of programming is changing to reflect newer and younger participants. Included are women who may have only known the ELCA as adults and who have little, if any, recollection of predecessor bodies, and women who are not cradle Lutherans but who are new to the Christian faith. Changing lifestyles and obligations of participants require flexibility in all expressions of the organization. Fewer women participate in Women of the ELCA today than two decades ago. One consequence of fewer participants has been a slow but steady decline in offerings received by the organization.

The organization has been stereotyped in many places as elderly women engaged in Bible study and quilting. While that is a part of who we are as an organization, it is certainly not the sum total. Some see the organization—at least in its stereotype—as an anachronism, as something belonging to a previous time, to a previous generation, as something that should die a natural death. The organization is not an anachronism, though.

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 also to be supported by a strong community of faithful women. 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 Web sites—support and inspire the women of this church. In addition to deriving financial support through offerings, Women of the ELCA launched this year 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.

Among strategic collaborations that assist the organization in meeting its mission while best serving its participants is Women of the ELCA's membership in the Women's Funding Network, a community of domestic and international women's and girls' funds committed to improving the status of women and girls locally, nationally, and globally.

On the fourth Sunday of February each year, the organization observes Bold Women's Day, an opportunity to celebrate the varied ways in which women act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

Women of the ELCA's health initiative, "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls," was launched in July 2005 and continues to offer a myriad of resources that 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. Women of the ELCA, through its executive board, endorsed the HEART for Women Act, pending federal legislation that would support heart health in several different ways, becoming the only religious organization to endorse this pending legislation. During both the 2005–2008 triennium and 2008–2011 triennium, the annual grants program of Women of the ELCA has supported domestic and international efforts addressing the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and children.

The organization kicked off the introduction of several new resources in 2008 with "Created in the Image of God: A Community of Women," a DVD highlighting the organization's ministries and portraying the many ways the women of the organization live out the mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. This DVD is reintroducing Women of the ELCA to women all across this church and invigorating women's ministries. (Free copies are available by calling 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2730.)

A new line of programmatic resources is available free of charge in .pdf format from www.womenoftheelca.org. Included are *Lessons for Today's Disciples*, which helps women discover or recover the seven marks of discipleship, and *Grace-Full Living*, which helps women look at their financial health as integral to their overall well-being. These are multi-session resources flexibly designed for group use. *Sacred Spaces*, designed for individual use, examines personal

sacred space for prayer, meditation, and thought as part of spiritual self-care.

Two new do-it-yourself retreat resources are being published in late Spring 2009. They, too, are available free of charge in .pdf format from www.womenoftheelca.org. *Paths to Wholeness* helps participants recognize their spiritual path to God and the different (or same) paths others experience. It offers an eye-opening look at how humans approach the divine. *I am She*, grounded in the organization's mission statement (mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ), is designed to help participants discover their "boldest bold."

In addition, a variety of short, easy-to-use resources are being posted monthly on www.womenoftheelca.org. These range from brief devotional materials related to the liturgical, cultural, or seasonal calendar to Bible studies and short programs supporting the program emphases of Women of the ELCA, especially the health initiative, "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls."

American Lutheran women have a long tradition of gathering regularly in Bible study through the women's organization. Today it is no different. In *Lutheran Woman Today*, a nine-session study is offered each September through May and a three-session study is offered in the summer issues. For example, the popular 2008–2009 study was "The Hidden Hand of God: Wisdom Stories from Ruth, Daniel, and Esther," written by the Revs. Gwen Saylor and Ann Fritschel of Wartburg Seminary. The 2009 summer Bible study, "Mary: A Woman for All Seasons," was written by the Rev. Christa von Zychlin, who currently is teaching in the People's Republic of China. It is designed to help women of all ages reflect on the seasons of their lives. The 2009–2010 study, written by the Rev. Sarah S. Henrich of Luther Seminary, is "To God's Beloved: Paul's Letter to the Romans." For more information, visit www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

Beyond the hard-copy Bible studies, Women of the ELCA offers a free monthly Bible study through its electronic magazine *Café* (www.boldcafe.org), which is also available as a podcast. *Café* incorporates a Lutheran perspective for women of Christian faith interested in how one's faith informs women's issues. Designed especially for younger women, *Café* is enjoyed by women of all ages.

This year, Women of the ELCA facilitated a five-month churchwide discussion of *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*, written by the Rev. Stephanie Spellers. Additional resources supporting the book, including a blog and a monthly live chat, provided ways to study and discuss what it means to be a fully welcoming organization. Local discussions of this book continue.

Seventh Triennial Convention

The Seventh Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA was held July 8–10, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah. The more than 350 delegates from across this church dealt with a range of issues while conducting the business of the organization. In addition to those matters, delegates elected officers and a churchwide executive board for the 2008–2011

triennium and passed a budget for FY2009. The convention offering of approximately \$100,000 was distributed as follows: one-fourth to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service for its work to end commercial sexual exploitation, one-fourth to a “Stand with Africa”–Lutheran World Federation clean water project in Zimbabwe, and one-half to the ongoing churchwide ministries of Women of the ELCA.

2008 Triennial Gathering

The Triennial Gathering, which followed the convention, brought together nearly 2,300 women of all ages under the theme, “Come to the Waters.” Sister Joan Chittister, a renowned author and speaker, offered a rousing keynote address on women, war, and peace. Workshops, worship, and servant opportunities helped participants explore the triennial theme.

The \$100,011 offering collected in 2007 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Women of the ELCA was celebrated at the gathering. One-fourth went to Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem, and one-fourth to a “Stand with Africa”–Lutheran World Federation clean water project in Zimbabwe. Representatives from both ministries shared stories of transformation through these ministries. One-half of the anniversary offering went to the ongoing churchwide ministries of Women of the ELCA.

Participants at the gathering also celebrated that more than 500 women invested nearly \$3 million dollars in the ELCA Mission Investment Fund as part of a special challenge leading up to the gathering. Offerings collected at the gathering supported the annual grants program of Women of the ELCA, Katie’s Fund, and the ongoing churchwide ministries of Women of the ELCA.

“Individual partnerships” were introduced at the triennial gathering. Individual partnerships are a new way for women to connect with Women of the ELCA. An individual partner will receive a subscription to *Lutheran Woman Today* and *Café* as well as to a semi-annual electronic newsletter. The cost is \$20, to be renewed annually. By becoming individual partners, women who are in congregations without a unit of Women of the ELCA can participate in the organization’s programs, use its resources, and contribute financially to the organization, all in a way that works for them. Women of the ELCA currently has units in slightly more than 7,000 congregations, which leaves more than 3,000 congregations and their women without access to Women of the ELCA. Women who are in a congregation with a unit of Women of the ELCA might also become individual partners. There could be any number of reasons why a woman in such a congregation might not be involved with the existing congregational unit. By becoming individual partners, a connection is forged with the organization. The women, once they get to know the organization through its resources, may be moved to participate in the congregational unit, perhaps even helping grow the organization in new and exciting ways. The third group of women who are prime candidates to become individual members are those who have drifted away from the ELCA or who have tenuous connections to a

congregation. Articles and other resources in the gift package, supported by the gentle love of a grandmother, mother, or aunt, might be opening points for those young women and an invitation to the faith community. To learn more about the individual partners program, call 1-800-638-3522, ext. 2730.

Major Directions for 2009–2011

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 the following:

- Deepening women’s understanding and expression of financial stewardship
- Expanding membership and active participation in Women of the ELCA
- Broadening and revitalizing the image of Women of the ELCA
- Expanding the reach and influence of the organization’s publications and resources

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 this church, society, and the world.

Beth Wrenn, *president*

Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*

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