

To all pastors and Congregation Constitution Committees of the North/West Lower Michigan Synod:

Because the process of revising constitutions and submitting them for approval by the synod can be confusing and often frustrating, please take a moment to review the following before submitting your new or revised constitutions to the synod.

The 2019 Constitution of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

CHAPTER 9: CONGREGATIONS

9.52.

The governing documents of congregations recognized at the establishment of this church shall continue to govern such congregations. When such a congregation wishes to amend any provision of its governing documents, the governing documents of that congregation shall be so amended to conform to 9.25.b. The synod responsible for the review of such amendments may permit, for good cause, a congregation to retain particular unamended provisions in the congregation's governing documents that were in force at the establishment of this church.

9.25.

A congregation newly formed by this church and any congregation seeking recognition and reception by this church shall:

- a. Accept the criteria for recognition and reception as a congregation of this church, fulfill the functions of the congregation, and accept the governance provisions as provided in Chapter 9 of the ELCA constitution and bylaws.
- b. Adopt governing documents that include fully and without alterations the Preamble, Chapter 1, where applicable, and all required provisions of Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 in the *Model Constitution for Congregations* consistent with requirements of this constitution and the *Constitution for Synods* of this church. Bylaws and continuing resolutions, appropriate for inclusion in these chapters and not in conflict with these required provisions in the *Model Constitution for Congregations*, the constitution of the synod, or the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Continuing Resolutions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*, may be adopted as described in Chapters 17 and 18 of the *Model Constitution for Congregations*.

When making major revisions to very outdated constitutions, it is best to start with the latest Model Constitution for Congregations, available on the ELCA website in MS WORD format. Add in your bylaws and continuing resolutions, following the numbering guidelines provided in the introduction to the Model Constitution.

In summary, congregation constitutions, whether simply amended or re-written entirely, must conform to the required provisions and format of the current Model Constitution for Congregations. The latest version is 2019.

In order to expedite acceptance of amended or newly minted congregation constitutions, congregations are encouraged to proceed as follows:

1. Submit the entire amended or new constitution to the Synod Constitution Committee for review prior to any congregational vote of acceptance. The Congregation Council should endorse the document prior to forwarding to the synod Constitution Committee.

Electronic submission is encouraged. Text, PDF, or WORD documents may be sent to: thedennisbsmith@gmail.com. MS Word is the preferred format.

2. The Synod Constitution Committee will review received documents and return any corrections or questions to the submitter, normally within 30 days of receipt. In order to expedite the approval process, constitution committees are encouraged to call or email me with questions prior to submittal. Requirements for congregation constitutions, along with helpful suggestions for writing bylaws and continuing resolutions are available on the ELCA website. Instructions for numbering bylaws and continuing resolutions are provided in the “Introduction to the Model Constitution for Congregations.”

<http://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions>
(just copy and paste this link into your browser's http: address line)

3. Corrected versions of constitutions are subject to a repeat review process.
4. Constitutions conforming to the provisions of the current Model Constitution for Congregations will be recommended to Synod Council for acceptance and archive.
5. Once the constitution is accepted by Synod Council, it may be brought, unaltered, to the congregation for adoption. **It is strongly advised not to bring a constitution to the congregation for adoption until after it has been accepted by the Synod Council.**
6. If, before the Synod Council has accepted the document, a new or significantly edited constitution is needed by the congregation in order to hold elections or conduct business, a “provisional” acceptance may be granted by the Synod Constitution Committee, subject to full acceptance by Synod Council at a later date.

I hope this helps. Please call me if you have any questions. Thanks for your cooperation.

Dennis Smith, Chair – North/West Lower Michigan Synod Constitution Committee

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