

Congregation Constitution Update Procedures

Amended September 2023

NOTE: Each congregation of this synod is required to be incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the State of Michigan. Congregation Constitutions are legal documents, governing the actions of and providing guidance for congregations. As such, they need to be accurate and up to date.

Congregations are also local expressions of this church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Congregation constitutions describe and specify the relationship between local congregations and the synod and churchwide expressions of this church. That is why certain sections of congregation constitutions are mandated provisions – those preceded by (*)

Whenever this church gathers in Churchwide Assembly, changes in synod and congregation constitutions are likely to follow. Constitutional changes will be posted on the ELCA website in the fall, following a Churchwide Assembly. It is vitally important that congregations update their constitutions accordingly and in a timely fashion.

NOTE: Mandated (*) provisions of the Model Constitution for Congregations are applicable when passed by Churchwide Assembly, whether local congregations incorporate them within their constitutions or not.

In order to make this process as efficient as possible, here are some steps to follow:

1. If the only changes to your congregation constitution are those mandated, that is those provisions preceded by (*), and those recommended by the Churchwide Assembly, you may amend your constitution accordingly and simply adopt the changes by a majority vote of the congregation during the next congregational meeting. See section *16.04. of the 20. 22 Model Constitution for Congregations. The amended constitution shall be forwarded (preferably in Microsoft WORD or Rich Text format) to the synod, with the notation that only mandated and recommended churchwide changes were made.
2. If the changes to your constitution include changes or additions to standard provisions, bylaws, or continuing resolutions not mandated or recommended by Churchwide Assembly:
 - a. Download from the ELCA website the latest (2022) Model Constitution for Congregations in MS WORD format: <http://www.elca.org/About/Churchwide/Office-of-the-Secretary/Constitutions>. This document can also be downloaded from the synod website under “Resources for Congregations – Congregation Constitutions. This document can be edited to meet your local needs.
 - b. Do not attempt to simply “cut and paste” changes into an old constitution, especially if it is older than the 2019 Model Constitution. Such a practice nearly always results in errors that have to be corrected later. Remember, you cannot change in any way those provisions preceded by (*), except for those called for by choices enclosed by brackets.
 - c. Add in the bylaws and continuing resolutions appropriate to your setting. Be sure to watch for consistency of nomenclature. For example, the governing body of the congregation is the “Congregation Council,” not the “church council.” Be sure to follow the placement and numbering protocols for bylaws and continuing resolutions outlined in the introduction to the Model Constitution for Congregations.

- d. Check to make sure no bylaw or continuing resolution contradicts any regular provision of your constitution.
- e. Forward the amended constitution to me (thedennisbsmith@gmail.com) in Microsoft WORD or Rich Text format (no hard copies, please) for review by the Synod Constitution Committee. Mandated corrections and recommended changes will be returned to the submitter, usually within 30 days. This review process may require multiple iterations.
- f. With the exceptions of mandated and recommended changes, do not submit a revised constitution to your congregation for adoption before the synod review process is completed.
- g. Upon completion of the review process and recommendation of the Synod Constitution Committee, your constitution will be referred to Synod Council for acceptance and archiving. If any changes to the constitution are made after acceptance by the Synod Council, the review process must begin anew.

Please feel free to email or call me if you have any questions.

Pr. Dennis Smith, Chair – Constitution Committee, N/W Lower Michigan Synod
thedennisbsmith@gmail.com
269-615-1613