



Report of the Women of the ELCA

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Ms. Susan Alston-McRae, Jersey City, N.J. (2008)⁴
Ms. Deborah Ash Goode, Mesa, Ariz. (2008)^{1,4}
Ms. Marlene Bergum, De Pere, Wis. (2008)²
Ms. Rosalind Brathwaite, Astoria, N.Y. (2008)²
Ms. Diane Brauer, Lincoln, Neb. (2008)⁴
Ms. Linda Buckel, Bittinger, Md. (2008)⁴
Ms. Desiree Cole, Waukegan, Ill. (2008)⁴
Ms. Elizabeth Gaskins, *vice president*, Spencer, Ind. (2008)^{1,2}
Ms. Susan Humphrey, Tulsa, Okla. (2008)³
Ms. Cam Martin, Minocqua, Wis. (2008)⁴
Ms. Rebecca Olson, Moorhead, Minn. (2008)³
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Ms. Ida Jeanne Smith, Scotland, Pa. (2008)³
Ms. Charlene Spillmann, Kyle, Texas (2008)³
Ms. Marie Tesch, Waseca, Minn. (2008)²
Ms. Geneva Wallace, Windsor Mill, Md. (2008)^{1,4}
Ms. Bunny B Wessinger, Irmo, S.C. (2008)⁴
Ms. Beth Wrenn, Kill Devil Hills, N.C. (2008)^{1,4}
Ms. Donna Yourell, Muskego, Wis. (2008)³

Advisory Members

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Ms. Phyllis L. Wallace, ELCA Church Council
Bp. Warren D. Freiheit, Central/Southern Illinois Synod
Mr. Daniel Joy, Lutheran Men in Mission
Ms. Heather Newberger, Lutheran Youth Organization

¹Executive Committee

²Standing committee on Budget and Finance

³Standing committee on Constitutions

⁴Standing committee on Program and Communication

Statement of Purpose

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 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are defined both in the churchwide constitution and the governing documents of the organization. In fulfilling its responsibilities, 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. As is true of other separately incorporated units of this church, the women's organization functions within ELCA financial and personnel policies, although 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 women's organization between triennial conventions. An

annual consultation is held with synodical organizations through the Conference of Synodical Presidents. The churchwide president either attends or sends a representative to each synodical convention.

Report of Work for 2005-2007

As the organization celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2007, Women of the ELCA faces a significant transition. 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 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. While some may mourn what seems to be the passing of the women's organization as they once knew it, we can, at the same time, celebrate what is and what is to come.

Act boldly

"Act boldly" is the theme for the 2005-2008 triennium of Women of the ELCA. This theme comes from the organization's mission of "mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ." The churchwide organization is supporting and nurturing the women of the church as each woman "finds her bold"—that is, finds the ways in which each can act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Three national events and new resources support these efforts. Stories in the organization's various publications regularly highlight bold women. An inaugural Bold Women's Day was observed in February 2007, a day to celebrate bold women of today and the past.

Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls

Women of the ELCA's health initiative, "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls," was launched in July 2005 and continues to offer myriad resources that support the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and girls in the ELCA. Two national health events were held and they are being replicated throughout this church in local and regional settings. New resources have been produced, including *Living from the Heart of God: A Journal for Life's Stages*. A health column written by nationally recognized author Ms. 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 co-sponsor this pending legislation. During the 2005-2008 triennium, the annual grants program of Women of the ELCA is supporting domestic and international efforts addressing the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and children.

20th Anniversary

Women of the ELCA joyfully celebrated its 20th anniversary this year, offering participants many ways in which to join the celebration. An anniversary brochure was created, highlighting the organization's history through a timeline, offering ways to observe the celebration, and requesting financial gifts for an anniversary offering. That offering will support the ongoing ministries of Women of the ELCA as well as two ministries that were lifted up through actions taken at the Sixth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA (2005): Augusta Victoria Hospital and clean water efforts through the work of the ELCA Hunger Appeal and Lutheran World Federation. An extended history of the organization was written by Ms. Nancy Stelling and appeared in the June 2007 issue of *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine. A special anniversary trip to Germany was taken by 82 women and men in April where bold women from the Reformation through the present were the focus. The women's organization worked with the ELCA Wittenberg Center to coordinate this trip.

Ongoing Ministries

Throughout the triennium, the organization has continued its strong ministries in global education, scholarships, grants, Bible study, cross-cultural immersion, and stewardship. The organization's publications—*Lutheran Woman Today*, *Interchange* (*Intercambio*), and *Café*—and its two Web sites support and inspire the women of this church. Leadership training is offered annually to synodical presidents and newly-elected synodical treasurers, and in 2007, triennial gathering promoters from all synodical organizations received training. A new *Synodical Leader's Handbook* was published in 2007, and plans are in place to publish a new handbook for congregational units in 2008.

Seventh Triennial Convention

The Seventh Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA will be held July 8-10, 2008, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Delegates to the convention currently are being elected, and synodical organizations are sending matters to the convention via memorials passed at synodical conventions. In addition to those matters, delegates will elect officers and a churchwide executive board for 2008-2011 and pass a budget for fiscal year 2009.

2008 Triennial Gathering

Lutheran women will gather in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 10-13, 2008, under the theme "Come to the Waters." The triennial gathering will feature inspirational presentations, worship, workshops, service opportunities and more. Among the currently confirmed presenters are the Rev. Karen G. Bockelman, Sister Joan Chittister, the Rev. Marysol Diaz-Feliciano, Bishop Elizabeth "Liz" Eaton, and the Rev. Heidi B. Neumark. All women in the ELCA are invited to this inspiring and uplifting weekend.

Contributions Made to the Life of the ELCA

Under the constitutions of the ELCA and Women of the ELCA, this organization is called to work interdependently with all units of the ELCA. This work occurs in many ways. Staff

members actively participate in the four strategic alliances of the ELCA. Nearly every staff member serves on some inter-unit team or task force, sharing gifts, expertise, and experience. The executive board, through its budgetary oversight, has provided for an annual gift of at least \$500,000 to the ELCA by Women of the ELCA.

Three particular efforts should be highlighted. Women of the ELCA is working with the Mission Investment Fund (MIF) to secure the creation of 1,000 new personal accounts by June 2008. This continues the vital role the women's organization has played in this church over many decades.

Women of the ELCA continues a long tradition of partnership with ELCA Global Mission in the jointly sponsored annual global education and advocacy seminar. After traveling around the globe through this program, the seminar has taken on a new emphasis, involving greater numbers of young women so they can see the women's organization and this church as supporting global efforts and so they can connect young women and empower them to action.

Staff and board members introduced Women of the ELCA to young women and their advisors alike at the 2006 ELCA National Youth Gathering, producing a great first impression and offering a different image of what Women of the ELCA can be. Readership of the organization's free e-zine grew by 50 percent through the gathering. Through the display, tips and reflections were gathered and coasters and resources were shared with young women and their advisors. The organization invested much time, energy, and money but will continue to reap the benefits of that investment for years to come.

Inter-Lutheran and Ecumenical Partnerships

By its governing documents, Women of the ELCA is called to relate to other women's organizations ecumenically and globally. This mandate is carried out in many ways. The 2005-2008 executive board has been attentive to both inter-Lutheran and ecumenical partnerships, nurturing them and helping them to expand.

North American Lutheran women's organizations are brought together through the Lutheran Women's Cooperating Committee. That committee includes representatives from Women of the ELCA, the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Evangelical Lutheran Women (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada) and the Lutheran Women's Missionary League-Canada (Lutheran Church Canada). This committee meets annually, sharing ideas, projects and resources. It has as its mission, "Lutheran women linking in dialogue, education and Christ-centered partnering."

In January 2007 Women of the ELCA and Lutheran World Relief (LWR) jointly sponsored two trips to Tanzania, an outgrowth of combined efforts around fair trade coffee. Coffee farming was highlighted on the trips, but participants also learned about the delivery and use of LWR kits and resources.

The board and staff also connected with the Lutheran World Federation, working with the Evangelical Lutheran Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the ELCIC, and the ELCA in sponsoring a North American consultation on commercial sexual exploitation, held November 2006 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Also, the executive director

currently serves as the North American regional coordinator for the Women in Church and Society desk of the LWF.

Ecumenical connections for Women of the ELCA are maintained in several ways. The churchwide president and executive director of Women of the ELCA hold positions on the Common Council of Church Women United (CWU). The executive director also serves as a member of the CWU Board of Directors, representing denominational staff. Additional ecumenical connections are maintained through staff presence on the World Day of Prayer North American Committee and the Justice for Women Working Group of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

As time, money, and circumstances have allowed, the president, her representative, or staff members have participated in conventions or annual meetings of other women's organizations, including Episcopal Church Women (The Episcopal Church), Lutheran Women's Missionary League (The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod), Presbyterian Women (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), the women of the United Church of Christ and the Disciples, and the United Methodist Women (The United Methodist Church).

Additional information about the women's organization can be found online (www.womenoftheelca.org).

Carmen K. Richards, *president*

Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*

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