



"FOOTSTEPS  *TO LEADERSHIP"*

**CHURCHWIDE WOMEN'S
ORGANIZATION**

WHAT IS THE CHURCHWIDE WOMEN'S ORGANIZATION?

The Churchwide Women's Organization (**CWO**) has a staff that reports to the Women of the ELCA Executive Board through the organization's Executive Director. The Executive Board is composed of 21 women including four officers, elected by the delegates to the triennial convention. The board meets at least twice annually, in the spring and fall.

Relation to the ELCA

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is the women's organization of the church. As one of the units of the church, Women of the ELCA is no longer an auxiliary but an integral part of and partner in the ministries of the ELCA. Each year the women's organization gives a gift to the ELCA of as an expression of this partnership in mission. Women of the ELCA, while a unit of the church, is also an independently-funded organization. The organization has three legislative expressions:

- the **congregational unit (CU)** / intercongregational or special unit
- the **synodical women's organization (SWO)**
- the **churchwide women's organization (CWO)**

Clusters or **conferences** are program arms of the synodical women's organization. Women of the ELCA has 64 synodical women's organization and 600 clusters/conferences.

Membership and participation

The congregational/intercongregational or special unit is the **member** of the organization. Congregational units may be structured in the ways that best meet the needs of women in the congregation(s) and best support the mission and ministry efforts of the organization.

Individual women are called "**participants**". The organization is very flexible in how it defines participation. *"Participation in this organization shall be open to all women in the ELCA and other women who subscribe to the purpose statement of this organization."*

For some women participation may be attending one yearly function organized by the congregational unit. For others, it could be regular attendance at a monthly small group, plus using her gifts as an officer or other leader of the group. Yet another may support the organization financially, sending her offering when her schedule does not allow her to attend meetings or events. Her neighbor may set aside a day a week for a work group.

They are all participants in good standing.

EMPHASIS AND THEMES

The organization's program emphasis is "women and children in crisis"--with a focus on women's and children's health, women and children living in poverty, AIDS issues, and domestic violence concerns. Every three years the organization adopts an emphasis and program activities around this theme.

MISSION AREAS

Women of the ELCA carries out its purpose statement in three mission areas. These mission areas are intentionally interdependent and overlapping.

Mission: Community

To enable each woman to value herself and others as created in God's image and redeemed through Christ; and to build up and celebrate relationships that are global, diverse and interdependent.

Mission: Growth

To provide a variety of learning experiences that strengthen each woman as a whole person, develop her potential and equip her for ministry.

Mission: Action

To enable women to articulate and act upon their faith as disciples of Christ in all areas of life.

ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

The governance for Women of the ELCA calls for the Executive Board to establish the "ends"--the vision, the goals--for the organization. The staff of the Women of the ELCA provides the "means"--the resources, opportunities, and ways in which the ends may be achieved. The ends are statements of what we, as an organization, value and the clarifying phrases are our desired outcomes. While all of the ends are important to ongoing work and continue to be addressed in various ways, the Executive Board has the flexibility to choose which one(s) they would emphasize each triennium.

ENDS STATEMENTS AND CLARIFYING PHRASES

Spirituality

Women freed to embrace and celebrate the relationship God offers to them

Outreach

Women living the Gospel of Jesus Christ by testifying to, witnessing to and reflecting God's love

Leadership

Women, accountable to God, developing as servant leaders

Families

Families nurtured in their faith development and in their commitment to live in harmony with one another and in the community

Diversity

Women celebrating God's created diversity

Anti-racism

Women intentionally confronting their own prejudice and racism, affirming diverse gifts and partnering with one another in God's ministry

Structure

- Vital, healthy congregational units functioning interdependently with synodical women's organizations and the churchwide women's organization and within congregations
- A vital, healthy synodical women's organization in every synod functioning interdependently with congregational units and the churchwide women's organization and relating to its own synod
- A vital, healthy churchwide organization functioning interdependently with synodical women's organizations and congregational units and within the Evangelical Lutheran Church I America

Stewardship

Women recognizing that all they are and have belongs to God

Justice

Women working to change systems and structures that oppress and alienate

Education

- Women understanding that community includes affirmation of each person's God-given worth
- Full and equal access to education for all women aware of opportunities for global ministries
- Women recognizing that education is a continuing and life-long journey for the individual and the church

Worship

Women gathering as the baptized, with worship central in their life together

Gender issues

A safe place where women who process issues of gender are validated in making choices that affect their own destinies

Peace

Women in community pursuing that which makes for peace

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Churchwide Executive Board and Staff

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