

A Sample Timeline for Ratification of a Congregational Constitution

Proposed Dates	Timing	What's Needed	Constitution References
It's time to update the constitution	This process can take anywhere from 6 -18 months	BUILD YOUR TEAM: Determine who will be serving on your constitution review team. Locate your current version of your constitution as well as the <i>most recent</i> Model Constitution for Congregations on www.elca.org .	
Near the beginning of revision process	On your own and with the committee if you are enlisting their help at this stage	CONSULT WITH SYNOD CONSTITUTION REVIEW COMMITTEE: Learn what is needed, where to find resources, and who you can call on with questions. See the synod website: http://www.spas-elca.org/resources/for-congregations/constitution/ to get started.	
Soon after	Begin asking committees, teams, organizations, etc. for them to review their portions of the document; give a clear deadline for when revisions are due	GROUP WORK: Each committee/team/organization of the congregation may be included in the constitution in some format either as bylaws or continuing resolutions. Use this process to find out how they currently work. Ask: <i>Is what is in the constitution currently an accurate description? If not, what needs to be changed?</i> Make them accountable. This may take their groups several months, so as not to slow down your timeline, ask them to start very early in the process. Be sure to provide for them how the current constitution reads.	Especially: Chapter 11 - Officers Chapter 12 - Congregation Council Chapter 13 - Congregation Committees/Teams Chapter 14 - Organizations
<p>MAKE A TIMELINE PLAN: This example of a timeline is meant to help you recognize the "important" dates up front. It is only an estimate, but it can help to keep things on track. Below is an example of a constitution that will require amendments (2 congregational votes) to be updated. If you are only updating bylaws, this only requires a single congregational vote.</p>			
<p><i>Note that amending the constitution to only bring it into conformity with a section(s) required or not required by the Model Constitution of the ELCA as most recently amended by the Churchwide Assembly only requires approval by a majority of voting members present and voting at any legally called meeting of the congregation. Presentation at a prior meeting of the congregation is not required, provided that the Congregation Council has submitted the proposed changes to members at least 30 days prior to the meeting (see *C16.04).</i></p>			

<p><i>EXAMPLE DATE:</i> Tues 6/16/15 June Council Mtg</p>	<p>Give your council leadership at least one month to read the constitution before the vote.</p>	<p>Provide a DRAFT of the revised constitution in writing to June leadership/council meeting, Invite members of council to read through and send questions to the Constitution Team BEFORE the next month's Council Meeting. Be sure to mark the DRAFT as a "Draft" in the title.</p>	
<p>Tues 7/21/15 July Council Mtg</p>	<p><u>60 days before</u> a regular or special congregational meeting</p>	<p>COUNCIL APPROVAL: Allow additional time or call a special council meeting to focus on the constitution. Go over council member questions sent prior to the meeting. Make changes as needed. Vote to approve a draft. Vote to call a special congregational meeting 60 days or more after this meeting.</p>	<p>*C16.01, see also *C10.02 for details on special congregational meetings.</p>
<p>On or around 7/22/15</p>	<p>Following July council meeting - expect this part to take at least a month's time.</p>	<p>FINAL READ THROUGH BY SYNOD CONSTITUTION REVIEW COMMITTEE: Send copy to Synod office for a read through by a member of the Synod Constitutional Review Committee. You will be notified of any edits that need to be made within 30 days.</p>	<p>*C16.03</p>
<p>On or before 9/13/15</p>	<p>Notice to voting members <u>at least 30 days in advance</u> of a regular or special Congregation Meeting</p>	<p>FIRST CONGREGATIONAL VOTE NOTIFICATION: Notify the congregation and indicate the Council's recommendation; put into September Newsletter by signature of President and Secretary (or a separate mailing or electronic means).</p>	<p>*C16.01 (30 days' notice)</p>
<p>Su 9/27/15 & Su 10/4/15</p>	<p>Two Sundays BEFORE special congregational meeting</p>	<p>NOTICE GIVEN: Official notice given at services of worship two consecutive Sundays prior to meeting date. Have copies of proposed constitution available for congregation to pick up to read ahead of the special congregational meeting.</p>	<p>C10.03 (2 Sundays)</p>
<p>Sun, 10/4/15 or 10/11/15</p>	<p>At the latest this could be the Sunday of the special congregational meeting</p>	<p>POSSIBLE TOWN HALL MEETING: Suggest having a town hall meeting to go over the highlights of the changes made to the constitution. This will help ensure your congregational meeting is not drawn out.</p>	
<p>Su 10/18/15 (60 days from 7/21)</p>	<p>At a special congregational meeting</p>	<p>FIRST CONGREGATIONAL VOTE TAKEN: Proposal adoption requires: 1) a quorum present, 2) majority approval of those <i>present & voting</i></p>	<p>C10.04 and C10.06 and/or*C16.02</p>

On or around 10/19/15	Bishop reviews constitution	BISHOP'S REVIEW: Notify the synod office of the results of your vote; if affirmative, the Bishop will read your final draft and affirm that it is ready for ratification.	*C16.03
On or before 1/21/16	Written notice to voting members <u>at least 30 days in advance of annual congregational meeting</u>	SECOND CONGREGATIONAL VOTE NOTIFICATION: Notify the congregation members– put into December Newsletter (or a separate mailing or electronic means).	*C16.01 (30 days) for Amendments *C17.03 (30 days) for Bylaws
1/16/16 and 1/24/16	Two Sundays BEFORE annual meeting	NOTICE GIVEN: Official notice given at services of worship two consecutive Sundays prior to meeting date.	C10.03 (2 Sundays)
1/31/2016	Annual meeting	SECOND CONGREGATIONAL VOTE TAKEN Quorum must be present Proposal (amendments) must be ratified <i>at the next annual meeting without change</i> by 2/3 vote of <i>those present & voting</i> . Must include effective date in the resolution motion. (i.e. 01/31/2016)	C10.04 and C10.06 and/or *C16.02
On or after 2/1/16	Following annual meeting	Ratified changes to constitution should be sent as full, final copy of constitution with effective date on the constitution to the Synod office by the Secretary of the Congregation.	*C16.04 (for amendments) & *C17.04 (for bylaws)

FINAL NOTES:

It might also help to make sure all leadership receives a copy of the constitution when they begin a terms as an officer or council member. At your annual council retreats, cover the highlights of the roles and duties of the Officers, Congregation Council, Committees/teams descriptions in the constitution (Chapters 11-13) and go over other pertinent information with them such as: what it means to call a Rostered Minister and how to terminate a call (Chapter 9), the distinctions about calling congregational meetings and the kinds of business that can occur at each meeting (Chapter 10), how matters of member discipline might be handled (Chapter 15).

It is also suggested to keep copies of governing documents for organizations within the congregation with your church constitution, i.e.: some Women of the ELCA (WELCA) church chapters have their own governing documents.

Always remember if you have questions, you can be in contact with your Synod Constitution Review Committee member or the Synod office as a resource. If we do not know the answer, we know who to ask!!!