

Amending the Southwood Lutheran Church Constitution

What is the Southwood Constitution:

The Southwood congregation constitution is our primary governing document for our church.

- Each congregation in the ELCA has its own constitution. However, the synod and ELCA require certain provisions in the constitution and review congregations' constitutions.
- The congregation constitution contains many provisions important to the governance, practices and beliefs of the church.
- In addition to our congregation constitution, the Synod and the ELCA also have their own constitutions different from congregations which match their organization practices and all these constitutions and governance structures work together. Therefore, our constitution cannot conflict with the provisions of the Synod or ELCA constitutions.
- Our congregation's constitution must contain certain provisions. These provisions are contained in something called the Model Constitution for Congregations. The Model Constitution has some provisions that are required for congregations to add to their constitution and some that are recommended.
- The Model Constitution for Congregations originally was adopted by the Constituting Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and has been amended by subsequent churchwide assemblies every three years.
- The most recent amendments were approved by the sixteenth Churchwide Assembly in 2022.

Many of the portions of the current Southwood constitution are very different from the ELCA Model Constitution for Congregations. Many of these provisions that are in the model constitution are important to include in our constitution so that our processes work with the synod and ELCA churchwide organization.

Southwood has not made a major update to our constitution since 2004. When a congregation proposes amendments to a constitution, they are REQUIRED to update the required provisions from the model. We have not added the required language since 2004 so there have been many amendments since then.

What are we proposing?

We are proposing amending our constitution at the annual congregation meeting to put our constitution into conformity with the ELCA Model Constitution for congregations by adding the required provisions and a few recommended provisions language. These amendments take one vote of the congregation at a congregational meeting.

We are also proposing other amendments that make changes to the provisions regarding the endowment fund. These would take two votes of the congregation at separate meetings.

We also are adding some bylaws to the constitution to bring our constitution into accordance with Nebraska nonprofit laws and to further clarify our current governance structure.

How do I read the amendments?

Why are some portions marked with an asterisk *. These provisions are required by the Model Constitution and we have to mark them to show that.

- The sections of the model constitution marked by [*] are required provisions when a congregation amends its governing documents. These provisions MUST be included. These sections must be used without alteration or amendment of the text in any manner (i.e., neither additions nor deletions are permissible).

Why is there sometimes not consistent numbering between provisions?

- The Model Constitution for Congregations also has recommended provisions. These provisions provide suggested wording that congregations may find useful. They may be included, omitted, or altered at the discretion of the individual congregation. The skips in numbering are where the council and legal counsel made the decision that those provisions are not necessary for our constitution.

Why do some provisions have three sets of numbers?

- The provisions with three sets of numbers are bylaws. These are provisions proposed by the council to clarify our current governance practices and to comply with Nebraska laws.
- The Model Constitution says that if a congregation chooses to adopt bylaws, they should be codified with three sets of numbers, each followed by a period: the chapter number (preceded by a "C"), the related constitutional provision number, and a two-digit bylaw number. For example, a bylaw could be codified as C5.03.01.
- Bylaws are adopted and amended in accordance with Chapter 17 of the Model Constitution for Congregations.