

LWML SOCIETIES (LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS) AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

Societies and individual members are the foundation upon which the Lutheran Women's Missionary League is built. The entire LWML program begins with participants at the congregational level.

PURPOSE

A woman's involvement in LWML usually begins through the local organization. Local groups

- help each woman draw closer to the Lord;
- encourage and equip women to use their God-given talents in sharing God's love; and
- provide opportunities for service within the congregation and for outreach to the community and world.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is available to any woman who is a communicant member of a congregation in The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

Application, in accordance with the district bylaws for both individual and society membership, is made to the LWML district in which the person or society is located.

SOCIETY

Women who are members of a society affiliated with the Lutheran Women's Missionary League are members of the LWML.

Members of a society may hold elective office and are entitled to full voting privileges at the zone and district levels in accordance with the bylaws of the subordinate organization.

INDIVIDUAL

Women in a congregation, with or without a society, who wish to support the mission and ministry of LWML, but cannot, for a variety of reasons, attend society meetings, may become individual members. (See *Individual Membership Guidelines*, #14345 in the *LWML Catalog*, or order online at www.lwml.org.) Individual members have the same rights and privileges as members of societies and may serve on committees and hold elective office at the zone, district, and national levels.

ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE

The structure taken by an LWML society depends upon the needs of the women involved. A society may adopt, but is not restricted to, one of the following patterns as its framework:

- A separate group formed especially for the purpose of supporting the object of the LWML and participating in LWML programs. Such groups ordinarily have officers (elected and/or appointed), bylaws, and regularly scheduled meetings.
- Part of a women's group formed for another purpose (such as Bible study, social/fellowship, exercise, mother's club, etc.) but committed to the object of LWML. Such groups frequently devote at least one meeting each quarter to the study of missions and to LWML business.
- A women's ministry program organized according to a circle plan. A circle plan unites the women of the congregation in one general LWML society, with smaller groups (circles) working separately in their areas of interest (e.g. altar care, Bible study, missions, nursery, quilting, etc.). Societies using a circle plan usually have quarterly LWML meetings which bring all the circles together for a special program.
- Flexible in structure, with members participating in the object of LWML individually or as a group, but having none or some of the following: schedule of meetings, officers, bylaws. However, members of such groups are invited and encouraged to attend zone, district, and national events when possible.
- A group of LCMS members from different congregations who live in the same environment (college dorm, nursing home, etc.) or work at the same facility (office, factory, hospital, etc.) and form an LWML society to meet at a convenient time and location. Such groups should apply to their district for recognition as a society and placement within a zone so that they are included in zone activities and communication.
- Members of two small churches, geographically close to one another, who unite to form one LWML society.
- An e-society holding "meetings" electronically. (See *Guidelines for an e-society*, www.lwml.org.)

When two or more LWML groups exist within one congregation or other single setting, they are considered a single unit for purposes of representation at the national convention. Representation at zone and district functions is determined according to zone and district bylaws.

THE CIRCLE PLAN

A circle is a group within the LWML society that meets regularly to accomplish a specific purpose.

- The Core Group holds regular meetings or general assemblies monthly or quarterly with an LWML emphasis and gathering of mites. All women in the church are encouraged to take part in these meetings. The core groups choose leaders who meet regularly as an executive board to take care of business that does not need to be brought before the general assembly and to coordinate circle activities.
- The number of small groups or circles is determined by the goals adopted. Circle chairmen may be appointed by the executive board or be selected by circle members.

Circle chairmen serve as members of the executive board. Circles choose their leaders/officers, meeting frequency, time, place, and special projects or service activities. “Participation,” rather than “membership,” is to be emphasized.

- Implementing the Circle Plan
 - Meetings – A coordinated schedule of meetings should establish:
 - Monthly circle meetings;
 - Monthly executive board meetings; and
 - General assemblies.
 - Membership – Circle membership may be determined by:
 - Interest groups or special service areas such as altar guild, quilting, visiting shut-ins, mother’s morning out;
 - Convenience of meeting times; and
 - Geographic locations.
 - Leadership – The Circle chairman should:
 - Prepare agenda and preside at circle meetings;
 - Appoint topic and devotional leaders;
 - Represent circle on executive board;
 - Report board activities to circle meetings; and
 - Report circle activities at general meetings.
- Some successful groups with circles suggest women should have the option of being part of the core group without being a member of a circle. They also have women who want to contribute mites and receive copies of the district and LWML official publications, but do not want to come to meetings. These members are counted as Associate Members or Members at Large. A large Mite Box in the church narthex on predetermined regular Sundays can allow all women (whether they are formal members or participants) to contribute.

PROGRAM

An LWML society will endeavor to

- support the aims of the LWML;
- fulfill the Mission Statement (*LWML Handbook*, page 2);
- promote the object of the LWML (*LWML Handbook*, page 2);
- encourage use of the official LWML publication, the *Lutheran Woman’s Quarterly*; and
- distribute Mite Boxes and gather funds for support of district and national mission grants (*LWML Handbook*, page 1).

OFFICERS

To carry out a program effectively, most societies have a chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer who have specific assigned duties. Some groups may decide to work with coordinators instead of officers. Larger societies may have other officers, such as a vice president, a program chairman, or standing committee chairmen who are elected or appointed. An executive committee (officers and committee chairmen) may serve to plan and evaluate the society program.

For small societies or groups in the early stages of LWML affiliation, an LWML chairman or contact person (or Mite Box collector) may be the only officer. This person's responsibilities include keeping members informed of, and encouraging participation in, LWML activities and submitting mite offerings to the designated district financial officer.

FINANCES

LWML mission grants and programs are supported by voluntary offerings, generally contributed through Mite Boxes available from the zone or district, usually at no charge to the society. Mite Boxes also may be ordered free for the cost of postage by calling the LWML Store. Mission grants to be funded by LWML are selected by voting delegates to the district and national conventions. It is essential that the members at all levels of the organization be united in their efforts to meet the commitments made to fund the adopted mission grants.

Each society may choose its own methods of raising funds for other purposes.

THE SOCIETY AND THE ZONE

The society relates directly to the zone. Zones offer opportunities for participants from different congregations and settings to meet for

- Spiritual development;
- Christian fellowship;
- Mutual encouragement;
- Leader training; and
- Sharing information and ideas.

Societies may keep their link in the organizational chain strong by attending zone functions, communicating with zone officers, and hosting zone activities when possible.

THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE ZONE

Individual members hold the same rights and privileges in relation to the zone that members of societies have, including eligibility to serve as zone officers and as delegates/alternates to district and national conventions. When the district welcomes an individual member, information regarding the new member should be sent to the zone so that the member can be included in mailings and invited to participate in zone activities.

THE SOCIETY AND THE DISTRICT

Through its delegate(s) to district conventions, the society has voice and vote in all decisions of the convention. All LCMS women are encouraged to participate in district workshops, retreats, and other programs as additional opportunities for spiritual development, Christian fellowship, mutual encouragement, and leader training.

THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE DISTRICT

Individual membership is processed through the LWML district in which the member resides. The district provides the new member with a Mite Box and pertinent information about the district and national organization. The individual member should be included in district mailings and encouraged to participate at district conventions, meetings, and events. The member has the same eligibility as any other district member to hold office at the district level.

THE SOCIETY AND THE LWML

The society has voice and vote at the LWML convention through the delegate(s) chosen from its respective zone. The LWML offers outstanding opportunities for Christian growth and service. The LWML relates directly to the society through direct mailings to each congregation. The society should designate an individual to receive the mailings and disseminate the information to members.

THE INDIVIDUAL MEMBER AND THE LWML

Individual members are encouraged to attend national conventions, to use LWML materials and to participate in events and programs sponsored by the national organization. An individual member who is active in the zone has the same eligibility as other zone members to serve as a delegate/alternate to national conventions. The member is also eligible to serve on national committees and to be nominated for national office.

FORMING A NEW LWML SOCIETY AND THE MEMBERSHIP CERTIFICATE

A new society begins when a group of women in a congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, or in various other settings where groups of LCMS women live or work, wish to share their delight in serving the Lord through the LWML with others. Often a good way to start a new group is with a Bible study group, using material from the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, free downloadable studies from the LWML website, purchased through the *LWML Catalog*, or in the online LWML Store. The mission and ministry of the LWML can gradually be introduced, relating the purpose of the LWML to the Great Commission. Mission grants (both in the district and national LWML) can be introduced, with a Mite Box given to each participant, encouraging both prayer and monetary support. Developing personal relationships among the women is also important, to mentor and assist one another along life's path. Free downloadable resources, including devotions, Bible studies, leader helps, PowerPoints on LWML basics, ideas for programming, and why LWML women do what they do, can be found on the Resources tab of the website; check the Leader Development Committee and HOPE Committee pages. A "Starter Kit" is

available as a free download on the HOPE Committee Web page; it outlines the specific steps to take to become a formally-chartered group of the LWML.

The sequence of steps to officially form a new society include:

- The prospective new local group contacts their district LWML president and informs her that a new group wishes to be affiliated with the LWML.
- The district president sends the district's new society form (if available; otherwise the form in the "Starter Kit" can be used) to the new local leader; the leader of the new society fills it out and submits it to the district president.
- The district president completes the LWML New Society Report form (found in the *LWML Leaders Manual*). She mails, scans, or faxes the form to the national LWML president.
- The national LWML president sends (through the LWML office) the new society a letter of welcome, an *LWML Handbook*, and a gift box of various LWML resources.
- The society is now added to the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* mailing list and becomes a part of the LWML family.
- Membership certificates give identity and recognition of name to new societies and relate them to the national organization. Blank membership certificates can be found in the *LWML Catalog* and in the online LWML Store for a small fee. A free, downloadable certificate can be obtained by district presidents from the secure log-in portion of the website. The certificate may be placed in a frame, if desired, before presenting it to the new society. Presentations are often made by the district president at zone rallies; the new group is then announced and recognized at the next district LWML convention.

BYLAWS

Organizations differ and each society should write basic bylaws that best describe its structure and method of transacting business. The person responsible for drafting the society's bylaws may contact the zone or district bylaws chairman for help and information as needed. Below are sample bylaws which societies may adapt to fit their particular situations. Articles on object, membership, and parliamentary authority must conform to national bylaws.

SAMPLE SOCIETY BYLAWS

BYLAWS

(Name of the Organization)

ARTICLE I—NAME

The name of this organization shall be _____ of _____ Church, (City), (State). This organization shall be affiliated with the Lutheran Women’s Missionary League (hereinafter referred to as LWML).

ARTICLE II—OBJECT

The object of this organization shall be

- a. to develop and maintain a greater mission awareness among the women of (congregation name);
- b. to provide opportunities for spiritual growth and Christian fellowship among the women of the (congregation name);
- c. to gather funds for mission grants;
- d. to assist (congregation name) in its ministry to build the Kingdom of God; and
- e. to foster and support the program of LWML.

ARTICLE III—MEMBERS

Any woman who is a communicant member of (congregation name), who expresses a desire to join and has made the object of the organization her own, is eligible for membership.

ARTICLE IV—CONVENTIONS

Delegates and alternates shall be selected to represent the organization at (district name) District LWML conventions.

[LWML units using alternative structures such as the circle plan should insert a different “Article IV – Structure” at this point and describe the organizational plan, then renumber the subsequent articles (i.e. Article V – Conventions, Article VI – Officers, etc.)]

ARTICLE V—OFFICERS AND ELECTIONS

SECTION 1

The elected officers shall be: President (or Coordinator, or Director, or Chairman, or other title), Secretary (or Recorder, or other title), Treasurer (may be combined with office of Secretary as Secretary-Treasurer).

SECTION 2

These officers shall be elected by ballot at the (season or month) meeting to serve for a term of one (1) year (or two years, or three, etc.) or until their successors are elected, and shall be eligible for reelection. If there is only one (1) candidate per office, a voice vote may be taken. A majority vote shall elect.

SECTION 3

Newly-elected officers shall assume their duties at the close of the meeting in which they are elected (or insert date).

ARTICLE VI—DUTIES OF OFFICERS

SECTION 1

The President shall:

- a. preside at all regular and special meetings, or arrange for someone to do so;
- b. be authorized to sign checks in the event of an emergency;
- c. perform such other duties as the organization may prescribe.

SECTION 2

The Secretary shall:

- a. keep minutes of all regular and special meetings of this organization;
- b. conduct needed correspondence;
- c. keep records of current bylaws and standing rules;
- d. perform such other duties as the organization may prescribe.

SECTION 3

The Treasurer shall:

- a. receive all moneys and deposit them in a financial institution approved by the members;
- b. keep an itemized account of all receipts and disbursements;
- c. make all authorized disbursements;
- d. regularly remit Mite Box offerings to the designated district LWML financial officer;
- e. submit regular financial reports to the organization;
- f. submit records for financial review at the close of each fiscal year and with the change of officer;
- g. perform such other duties as the organization may prescribe.

ARTICLE VII—MEETINGS

Meetings shall be held as specified by the members. Special meetings may be called by the President or at the request of (insert number) members.

The members present at any duly called meeting shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE VIII—FINANCES

SECTION 1

There shall be no dues, but voluntary offerings will be accepted at each regular meeting.

SECTION 2

Mite Box offerings shall be gathered at each regular meeting and submitted to the designated district financial officer.

ARTICLE IX—FISCAL YEAR

The fiscal year shall be from (month, day) to (month, day) inclusive.

[If a society wishes to cite a parliamentary authority, that article should be inserted here; the authority must be the current edition of *Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised* to be in compliance with national, district, and zone bylaws.]

ARTICLE X—AMENDMENTS

These bylaws may be amended by a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members present and voting at a regular meeting.

Date organization became an LWML society _____

Date of original bylaws _____

Date of last amendments/revision to bylaws _____

LWML RESOURCES FOR SOCIETIES AND INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

The LWML produces a variety of resources to assist local groups and to enable individual women to grow in their Christian walk:

- *LWML Starter Kit*—document for use by groups wishing to become formally affiliated with the LWML (available as a free download from the HOPE Committee page of the website).
- Free downloadable resources are available at www.lwml.org including *Just a Cup of Coffee*; *LWML 101—The Basics*; *LWML 102—What to Do? What to Do!*; and *LWML 103—The Heart of LWML* which are PowerPoint presentations with scripts to encourage more LCMS women to participate in the mission and ministry of the LWML.
- Officer and committee handbooks
- Individual Membership Guidelines (#14345)
- *Designed for You* — tool for designing a new group or redesigning an existing one
- Society Membership Certificates
- Ideas for program planning
- Leader training
- Bible studies
- Devotions
- Short dramas
- Mission service/human care suggestions
- Personal development aids
- Audio and video resources
- Ethnic resources
- Inspirational books
- Mission motivation resources
- Greeting cards
- LWML logo apparel
- Jewelry

Many LWML resources are available online as free downloads. Most items, including a free *LWML Catalog*, may also be ordered from:

Lutheran Women's Missionary League
P.O. Box 411993
St. Louis, MO 63141-1993

314-268-1530
1-800-252-LWML (5965)
Fax: 314-268-1532
lwml@lwml.org
www.lwml.org