



July 28 – August 2  
PHOENIX, ARIZONA



## The ELCA Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry

Thanks to the vision and generosity of two members of the ELCA, the Quality of Call Initiative began in 2020. The initiative focuses on three different groups that face discrimination in rostered ministry: (1) women, (2) Black, Indigenous, and persons of color (BIPOC), and (3) LGBTQIA+ individuals. This report focuses on the efforts of the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry over the last five years. In addition to the initial donor gift, the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry has received financial support from the ELCA Mission Development Fund.

The Quality of Call Initiative seeks to support the entire ELCA in being a church that is welcoming to and affirming of ministers so they do not experience bias, discrimination, or harassment. In 2020, the team focused on women in ministry initiated its work through listening to understand and address issues faced by women who are pastors or deacons in the ELCA.

This work was guided by a team including Dr. Mary Streufert (director, Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry and director, Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment), Deacon Shannon Johnson (project coordinator for Quality of Call Initiative and Region 4 candidacy and leadership manager), Ms. Heather Dean (program coordinator, theological discernment), the Rev. Ramie Bakken (former Region 5 candidacy and leadership manager), and the Rev. Christina Montgomery, (team associate and congregation pastor [Oct. 2021–August 2023] and current ELCA Racial Justice manager).

Like most plans developed in 2020, the Quality of Call Initiative for Women changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The team embraced an adaptive approach to its work, which served the goals of the initiative well as team members sought to understand and address the multiple factors that affect a rostered minister's call. The Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry has initiated change through a three-step approach: listen, convene, and act. In some cases, the listening was to women sharing their experiences as rostered ministers; at other times, it was listening to data or gathering policies from across this church and relating them to ELCA social teaching and commitments. In convening partners from across this church, the team invited bishops, synod councils, rostered ministers, seminary leaders, and others to come together, to take what was learned during the listening step, and to consider ways to foster change in their contexts. From the listening and convening steps, action was and continues to be born. An action may be a singular act, such as updating a policy, or more complex, like partnering with other synods to reform boundaries education and training together. Actions across this church were different because they were contextualized. They were actions to address the ways sexism and patriarchy keep people from fully living into the vocation to which God calls them.

The initiative was structured around six strategic goals, which were developed through dialogue involving women in ministry, synod bishops and staff members, and churchwide organization staff members. The following details highlight many of the key activities and accomplishments of the initiative.

### **Strategic Goal 1: Cultivate relationships with and support synods in their role as agents to affect intersectional gender justice for women in ministry.**

#### ***Nearly half of ELCA synods are initiating change through Quality of Call Collaborative Grants.***

An approach of the Quality of Call Initiative that has been effective in creating change has been to support synods in the process of listening, convening, and acting to support change. Early in the initiative, team members gathered stories of empowerment and challenges women in ministry have experienced. To expand what was learned beyond the churchwide team, participating synods were invited to engage in Insights to Action workshops to explore the stories, discuss what was learned, and together discern initiatives to foster change in their contexts.

Insights to Actions workshops led to a larger collective action through collaborative grants. The first collaborative grant brought seven synods together to address issues in their contexts. To date, seven collaborations have been formed involving 32 synods, with \$334,500 awarded in collaborative grants. The goals of these collaborations are varied and unique to their contexts, including, for example, regional boundaries education on gender justice, developing a series on preaching and teaching about women in the Bible, ally training, creative Sabbath-space retreats, connecting and

empowering retreats, and more. Following the pattern of listening, convening, and acting, these collaborations effect change where more than half of active pastors and deacons serve.

***Women in ministry lead local change through Pop-up Grants.***

Ten Pop-up Grants of up to \$2,000 each were awarded to support efforts of women in ministry across this church to create change on a smaller scale. The grant plans are unique, creative, and directly planned and carried out by women in ministry. They include liturgy development about women in Scripture, spiritual direction cohorts, pulpit-sharing programs for marginalized voices, book studies, education events for rostered ministers against sexism, spiritual practice retreats, and gatherings for women in ministry to connect and identify ministry opportunities.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) The team collected 261 stories from women in ministry in response to the prompt: “Think about a time when you experienced a sense of thriving and/or empowerment, or a sense of struggling and/or limitation, that affected you in your role in your ministry setting. What happened?” This story-based research approach influenced The Lutheran World Federation to adopt a similar approach for its Women in Ministry survey and report (See [Women in Ordained Ministry interim report EN final.pdf](#)).
- 2) The team designed and facilitated Insights to Action workshops with over 100 participants in eight synods. Participants were women in ministry, synod staff, and bishops. Using the collected stories from women in ministry, participants identified themes and, in small groups, explored actions they could take together to make change.

**Strategic Goal 2: Increase compensation for women in ministry.**

***Twenty-three synods (35%) updated parental leave policies between February 2021 and February 2024.***

The team explored compensation, reviewing policies for family leave (leave taken for the care of a family member) and parental leave (leave taken for the addition of a child to the family). Collecting and sharing this data and bringing it into conversation with the social teachings of this church<sup>1</sup> and churchwide actions,<sup>2</sup> led to the production of [this report](#). The report was one means to encourage and support synod bishops, staff members, and councils in revising their policies, with policy updates occurring in 23 synods between February 2021 and February 2024. Most of these updates increased leave time for both parents, with 80% of synods recommending equal parental leave, regardless of gender or caregiving role. Parental- and family-leave policies provide an opportunity to support rostered ministers and to align this church’s understandings of the vocations of family and rostered ministry.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) Eight synods updated their family-leave policies between October 2021 and February 2024.
- 2) The team consulted with ELCA Research and Development to support the study of compensation for ELCA rostered ministers.
- 3) The team revised the call process in collaborating synods, and developed lists of questions to ask and not ask when interviewing a candidate for call.<sup>3</sup>
- 4) The team hosted compensation negotiation training for women in ministry.<sup>4</sup>

**Strategic Goal 3: Respond to and prevent sexual harassment.**

***As 46% of women report experiencing sexual harassment in congregational ministry, bishops and synod staff members responded positively to the comprehensive report and resources to address sexual boundary violations.***

In the [50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Ordination of Woman Survey Report](#), 46 percent of rostered women reported experiencing sexual harassment in congregational ministry. Significant numbers of rostered women experience sexual harassment elsewhere within this church, including in the churchwide organization and in seminary settings. To address this, the team investigated and developed a [comprehensive review](#) of synod policies and resources to prevent and respond to instances of sexual harassment of rostered ministers and other sexual boundary violations like ministerial sexual misconduct and sexual abuse of minors in the church. The team discovered that only two synods offered sample policies that help protect church employees from sexual harassment. The report has led to ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> [Faith, Sexism, and Justice: A Call to Action](#), Implementing Resolution #7, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> [Summary of Actions of the 2022 Churchwide Assembly - ELCA Resources](#) Category B3: Parental and Family Medical Leave

<sup>3</sup> Effort of a collaborative grant.

<sup>4</sup> Effort of a collaborative grant.

conversations with synod leadership, ELCA attorneys, and churchwide organization staff responsible for misconduct prevention to address the issues and support synods with preventative and responsive resources.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) In collaboration with ELCA general counsel, the team developed a sexual boundary violations policy assessment tool and sample policy for congregations and synods to protect against sexual harassment.
- 2) The team collaborated with FaithTrust Institute to develop a workshop for ELCA rostered ministers who identify as women. The objective of this online workshop was to equip participants with effective responses and tools to address sexual and gender-based harassment when people target them with inappropriate behaviors and actions within their ministry roles.
- 3) The team advanced the work of potential partnership with the Criterion Institute by connecting with ELCA partners to introduce the Criterion Institute's "Roadmap" for Christian churches to use their financial investment power to mitigate gender-based violence. ["Roadmap" was inspired by and is rooted in the ELCA social message, "Gender-based Violence" (2015)]. The team made initial contacts and scheduled meetings with Portico, the Mission Investment Fund, and ELCA Corporate Social Responsibility and churchwide organization executives.
- 4) Team members developed and facilitated a session on practical steps to take when facing sexual harassment.

**Strategic Goal 4: Decrease instances of gender-based discrimination.**

***Candidacy committees engage in workshops on ways to support candidates and promote gender justice in formation after findings from a story-based study on formation for rostered ministry in the ELCA.***

After conducting story-based research on the formation experiences of individuals preparing for rostered ministry in the ELCA, the team facilitated a workshop at the ELCA Digital Candidacy Summit to share ways to promote gender justice and support candidates. When the candidacy process was designed, the majority of candidates shared these identity markers: male, white, straight, just graduated college, and living on a seminary campus; candidates might or might not be married. For some time, a majority of ELCA candidates have not shared these characteristics, with candidates representing a number of varied identity markers and life situations. A number of updates have been made to the candidacy process, and the ELCA Candidacy Leadership Development Working Group is continuing this work. In the meantime, the Gender Justice and Formation workshop taught gender justice basics and suggestions of "dos and don'ts" to support candidates.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) The team facilitated a workshop at the 2024 Rostered Ministers Gathering on language and images related to God.
- 2) The team facilitated educational sessions with two candidacy committees to address intersectional sexism.
- 3) The team collected and analyzed 176 stories from rostered ministers about their experience in the formation process to become a rostered minister and provided analysis to multiple partners working on candidacy.
- 4) The team facilitated a conversation series on sexism in ministry with the ELCA Systems Academy.
- 5) The team sponsored and promoted a four-part coaching series, "Already Enough: Unlocking Your Power as a Woman in Ministry," led by Dr. Crystal Hall, for nearly 200 registrants.

**Strategic Goal 5: Increase opportunities for women in ministry.**

***Twenty-four women in ministry received scholarships to participate in a supervisory course.***

The skills and dynamics for supervising a ministry staff are different from supervising in other professional settings and an area in which many rostered ministers do not feel they have had formal training or preparation. Whether leading a large church staff or supervising a part-time church secretary, supervisory skills are needed. Feedback from participants in the "Stepping Up to Supervision" course through Faith+Lead, facilitated by the Rev. Susan Beaumont, shared that the course changed their ministry and provided tools to supervise stronger teams and manage staff and volunteer dynamics more effectively.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) The team supported the women's session, "Women, Power, and Influence," which was added to a supervision course offered to rostered ministers in Region 9 and presented by Pastor Beaumont, with 80 women in participation.

- 2) The team supported a book study in womanist biblical interpretation, using the Rev. Dr. Angela Parker's book, *If God Still Breathes, Why Can't I? Black Lives Matter and Biblical Authority*. The Quality of Call Initiative purchased more than 80 books for participants and provided honoraria to the book study facilitators.
- 3) The team sponsored a cohort of 20 ELCA women in ministry to attend the Katie Geneva Cannon Center for Womanist Leadership Conference in 2023.
- 4) The team sponsored 24 partial scholarships for women in ministry to participate in the *Stepping Up to Supervision* course hosted by Faith+Lead and facilitated by Pastor Beaumont.
- 5) The team sponsored and facilitated the Global Learning Partners course "Meetings Reimagined" for women in ministry and a partner from their context.
- 6) The team sponsored and coordinated with an ELCA coach for group coaching sessions in Spanish for women in ministry whose primary language is Spanish.

**Strategic Goal 6: Collaborate with ELCA partners to address sexism and patriarchy through an intersectional lens.**

***Collaborated with partners to pilot an effort to support the next generation of women teaching theologians who are Black, Indigenous, or persons of color (BIPOC) and who focus on womanist, mujerista, feminist, decolonial, and/or queer Lutheran theologies to teach at ELCA institutions.***

There is a generation gap among ELCA teaching theologians who are women of color, with the few remaining women of color nearing retirement. In an effort to meet this need, the Quality of Call Initiative for Women partnered with Trinity Lutheran Seminary in recognizing Dr. Denise Rector as the first recipient of a two-year pilot doctoral scholar residency for ELCA women of color in liberative theologies. The residency allowed Dr. Rector to gain teaching experience at the seminary and compensation, support, and time to complete her dissertation. The positive effects of this pilot will be experienced not only by Dr. Rector and Trinity Seminary, but also by Dr. Rector's students and the ministries they will serve throughout this church. *Living Lutheran* covered [this story](#), which went on to inspire a first-call pastor who is a woman of color who had been discerning doctoral studies. She shared that she read about it, and her heart "lit up;" she has the article posted in her office.

*Additional achievements in this area:*

- 1) The team contributed to the ELCA Boundaries Education Working Group to support synods with guidelines on boundaries education and resources for shifting to a three-year model of boundaries education that includes boundaries basics, gender justice, and racial justice.
  - a. At least 24 synods have adopted this model, and 18 of these synods shifted to this model in partnership with the Quality of Call Initiative.
- 2) The team facilitated workshops or presentations about the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry for:
  - a. The Conference of Bishops
  - b. The ELCA Church Council
  - c. The Bishops' Advisory Council
  - d. The Assistant/Associate to the Bishop's Gathering
  - e. Directors for Evangelical Mission
  - f. The Rostered Ministers Gathering
  - g. The Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering
  - h. Synod assemblies
  - i. Candidacy committee education
  - j. The ELCA Attorneys Association
  - k. "Region 10" collaboration retreat

**Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry Coming to Close**

After five years of working toward being a church that is welcoming and affirming of ministers so they are not experiencing bias, discrimination, and harassment, the Quality of Call Initiative for Women in Ministry is transitioning to a close. This transition is not because there is no longer bias, discrimination, or oppression toward women in ministry. This work was designed as a grant-funded initiative for a set number of years, and it has initiated many new ways to support women in ministry, many reforms to promote better systems, and partners throughout this church who will continue the work of listening, convening, and acting to address sexism and patriarchy.

As this work transitions, some aspects will shift to the churchwide Gender Justice and Women's Empowerment for ongoing support.

This transition only affects the focus of the Quality of Call Initiative for women in ministry, not the remaining two foci for rostered ministers who are BIPOC and rostered ministers who identify as LGBTQIA+.

It is worth noting that the gap in specific and sufficient staff support and budgetary resources through the churchwide organization to support and connect women in ministry has left a gap in this church.

### **Roles related to the Quality of Call Initiative**

#### ***Quality of Call for Women in Ministry***

The Rev. Ramie Bakken, former Region 5 candidacy and leadership manager

Ms. Heather Dean, program coordinator for theological discernment

Deacon Shannon Johnson, project coordinator for Quality of Call Initiative and Region 4 candidacy and leadership manager

The Rev. Christina Montgomery, team associate and congregation pastor (October 2021–August 2023) and current racial justice manager)

Dr. Mary Streufert, director for gender justice and women's empowerment and director for the Quality of Call Initiative

#### ***Quality of Call for Ministers who are BIPOC***

Ms. Jennifer De Leon, director for racial justice and director for the Quality of Call for ministers who are BIPOC

#### ***Quality of Call for Ministers who Identify as LGBTQIA+***

To be identified

#### ***Executive Oversight and Support of the Quality of Call Initiative***

The Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, presiding bishop

The Rev. Philip Hirsch, executive director, Christian Community and Leadership (primary executive with immediate project oversight)

Ms. Kathryn Lohre, executive for ecumenical and inter-religious relations and theological discernment

Deacon Mary Ann Schwabe, executive for synod relations

Ms. Rachel Wind, executive for development

Ms. Alix Schwindt, donor communications strategy manager

#### ***Advisory Bishops***

Advisory bishops serve as a listening, advising, and supportive body for the Quality of Call Initiative. Bishop advisors have no decision-making role but provide counsel, questions, and insight for the vision, planning and implementation of the work of the Quality of Call Initiative. They help to interpret and promote the work of the Quality of Call Initiative, especially in the contexts of the Conference of Bishops, synods, and congregations.

Bishop Susan Candea, Central States Synod

Bishop Laurie Jungling, Montana Synod

Bishop Leila Ortiz, Metropolitan Washington, D.C., Synod

Bishop Kevin Strickland, Southeastern Synod

Report prepared by:

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