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# **The Evangelical Lutheran Women of the ELCIC: Vitality and Fragile Presence on the Margins**

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## **1. Introduction**

It is now commonly acknowledged that the histories and contributions of women have been at best submerged, or at worst completely excluded from standard church history texts. The historical accounts outlining the development of the Lutheran churches in Canada, written by Walter Freitag, Norman J. Threinen and William E. Horden, are no exception.<sup>1, 2</sup> The primary reason for this is that the history of the Lutheran churches in Canada in general, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) in particular, has been recorded as the history of sequential institutional church mergers and the geo-political and doctrinal issues that either hindered or supported them. Women, by virtue of their exclusion from clerical leadership for most of the period under question (1918-1986), were simply not players in the doctrinal and political negotiations of these mergers.

However, women historically have made up well over half of church membership and together with men were involved in the institution-building of the church. While men were concerned with theological debates and the distribution of power, women ensured the survival of the institution by building social networks, transmitting Lutheran cultural values to the young, and financing the work of the church at all levels through funds often raised by voluntary activities. One would assume that women's essential role in the life of the church would be reflected in any historical account. However, as pre-eminent feminist historian Gerda Lerner observes "traditional history has been written and interpreted by men in an androcentric frame of reference."<sup>3</sup> In reference to American historiography, she urges that:

... historical interpretation of the community-building work of women is urgently needed ... [and that] the archives should be

studied against the traditional record of institution building which focuses on the activities of men.<sup>4</sup>

Her exhortation applies equally as well to the historiography of the Church.

In their introduction to a recent volume of essays about the history of lay women in the Episcopal Church, the editors note that there have been only a handful of books that have treated the recent history of women in the Episcopal Church, and these have all invariably focused on the “struggles that culminated in the ordination of women.”<sup>5</sup>

Canadian Lutheran Church historiography reflects this reality even more starkly. The only examination of women’s history in the church has been the study *With Many Voices* sponsored by the ELCIC which goal in part was “that the history of the ordination of women in the ELCIC and predecessor churches be recorded.”<sup>6</sup> But as the witty title of an online exhibit of the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran in America (ELCA) tracing women’s leadership before 1970 proclaims, “It Didn’t All begin with Ordination.”<sup>7</sup> While the stories of ordained women should continue to be told, theirs by no means is the whole story. Women have been doing the work of ministry in the Lutheran Church long before the issue of women’s ordination was ever considered. If women’s history in the church is seen exclusively as the history of ordained women this continues a pattern so apparent in Cronmiller’s account of viewing church history as shaped predominantly by the contributions of ordained clergy. As the editors of *Deeper Joy* observe, the historical record needs to include the witness of the laity.<sup>8</sup> This seems all the more necessary in light of the church’s recent reassertion and implementation of baptismal ecclesiology.<sup>9</sup> If the emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers” is to be more than an empty slogan, then the histories of lay women must be recorded and interpreted.

This paper’s focus on the contribution of the Evangelical Lutheran Women Inc. (ELW) to the life of the ELCIC is a hopeful contribution towards this end. More specifically, this paper will report on a student research project that used both a quantitative and qualitative approach to gain an understanding of the status of ELW within the ELCIC today. I first examined ELW’s visibility in church electronic and print media; second, I tried to measure the level of awareness of the educational materials of ELW among ELCIC

pastors; and third, I attempted to take a reading of how ELW is construed in the consciousness of congregational pastors.

## 2. Historical Sketch – Overview

When the ELCIC was formed from the merger of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Canada (ELCC) and the Lutheran Church in America – Canada Section (LCA-CS) in 1986, the respective women’s auxiliaries of those two bodies decided to merge as well and ELW came into being.<sup>10</sup> The constitution and administrative by-laws of the ELCIC make provision for auxiliary bodies and ELW under these constitutional provisions is given status as an official women’s organization of the ELCIC.<sup>11</sup> In the language of the constitution and by-laws, ELW is considered to “be an *integral part* of this church” (emphasis mine), and is expected to live out this relationship by “reporting to the national convention of this church,” and by “participation in meetings of the executive staff, liaison and co-operative arrangements for programming and participation in long-range planning.”<sup>12</sup>

This *integral relationship* between ELW and the ELCIC is also reflected in the constitutional documents of ELW where it defines its business in governance bylaws as “[the proclamation] of the gospel of Jesus Christ through its own program and *through the program of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*” (emphasis mine).<sup>13</sup> From the outset, ELW has communicated its vision for supporting the program of the church as a two-pronged approach: first, by strengthening the faith of its members and training them in leadership skills it equips them to do the ministry of the church, and secondly as partners in mission it supports the ministry of the ELCIC through its annual financial gift, “The Praise Offering.”<sup>14</sup>

Since 1986 ELW has provided \$2,200,000 to the ELCIC.<sup>15</sup> This amount reflects the fact that for the last twenty years ELW has met its goal of raising \$100,000 each year to support the ministries of the ELCIC. This accomplishment is all the more remarkable in that the amount is raised primarily through a simple offering taken at the annual “Praise Offering” worship service produced by ELW and dedicated to the mission of the ELCIC. This service is conducted by many ELW groups in their congregations each year.<sup>16</sup> The money collected goes into the general revenues of the ELCIC with no conditions attached as to its use, other than it be designated for the mission and ministry of the ELCIC.<sup>17</sup> The records indicate that at

least from 1986 to 1990 the ELCIC used the majority of these funds (\$75,000-\$90,000) to support the division for World Missionary support/scholarships and the Division for Canadian Mission-Chinese ministry in Canada.<sup>18</sup> Other ministries that have been supported through these funds have been the Divisions for Parish Life, Theological Education and Leadership, Church and Society, and Canadian Mission. These various Divisions of the National Church have used ELW donated funds to support scholarships for native ministry training, the Circle of Life Lutheran Native Ministry Centre in Regina, Youth Gatherings, and the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women – to name only a few.<sup>19</sup>

Funds collected each year in excess of the \$100,000 amount (called Praise Offering Directed [POD]) funds, are used to support ELCIC or ELCIC/ELW shared projects. In 2006, funds were allocated to the Diaconal Ministry Formation event and a project on how women view themselves as an image of Christ in terms of their changed bodies.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the Praise Offering, from 1996-2004 ELW raised additional funds to support the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of India in their development project “Slum Women’s Advancement Project” in Chennai, India. Currently ELW has joined with Canadian Lutheran World Relief (CLWR) to facilitate HIV/AIDS education by supporting the “Human Rights and Health for Women” project in Chamanculo, Mozambique. In addition to these special international projects ELW has also sponsored domestic initiatives such as the ELCIC’s “It’s your Call” program, provided funding for the publication of *With Many Voices* and sponsored the Lutheran Refugee Committee.<sup>21</sup>

The financial gifts of ELW to the ELCIC and its funding of international projects are the most visible support it offers to the life and work of the church. However, ELW also advances the ministry of the church through creative partnerships with other Lutheran bodies. One example is its co-operation with CLWR’s Four Corners organization to sell Alternative Trade products throughout the ELCIC.<sup>22</sup> Another recent example is its collaborative effort with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and the ELCIC to co-sponsor *Take Counsel ... Speak Out*, A North American Consultation on Commercial Sexual Exploitation, which took place in Winnipeg in November, 2006.

In addition to the initiatives of the National ELW, “many congregational ELWs actively participate in service and outreach

projects of their own congregations.”<sup>23</sup> An example of one such outreach project is the commitment of the congregational ELW of King of Life Lutheran Church, in Coquitlam British Columbia to provide assistance to the *Coquitlam Women’s Transition House* – an emergency shelter and supportive network for women and children who are victims of domestic violence.<sup>24</sup>

The preceding overview has attempted to demonstrate that ELW – through its significant financial support, collaborative partnerships, and local initiatives – takes seriously its relationship to the ELCIC as an integral partner in mission. If ELW is perceived as an *integral partner* in mission by the church, a working assumption of my research project was that it would enjoy a high level of support for its activities both at the congregational level as well as from the national church and regional synods. In order to test this hypothesis, I examined church websites to see if they had an external link to the national ELW website. The presence of a link was used as an indicator of this support.

### **3. The Status of ELW on Church Websites**

With the proliferation of electronic media, many congregations have developed web sites in the hope that a visit to their virtual location on the web will translate into an actual visit to their “bricks and mortar” location on Sunday morning. In addition to employing the web pages as a marketing tool, congregations also use their websites to communicate with their membership. Calendar pages with a list of activities as well parish newsletters are often made available online. Many congregational webmasters also take advantage of the hypertext platform of the World Wide Web and provide a list of links that connect visitors to other websites that have been judged to be of interest and have relevant content. Thus, many ELCIC congregational websites have links to the ELCIC national and regional Synod websites as well as links to the web pages of the CLWR, the LWF, and others. Providing these links helps to situate the local congregation within a larger missiological community and communicates that other Lutheran organizations are partners in mission with the local congregation. The proposed hypothesis with regard to ELW is that the inclusion of an external link to ELW website on a congregation’s website is an indication that ELW is considered a partner in mission alongside other Lutheran bodies.

Working from these pre-suppositions, I examined the web pages of 123 congregations with web sites listed on the ELCIC online congregational directory database.<sup>25</sup> I first examined websites to see if information about ELW meetings – most often on calendar pages or under headings listing church committees, groups or activities – indicated the presence of a local ELW group. If the website listed information about their ELW group, I then examined the website for links to other Lutheran websites. All of the websites which had external links, without exception, included links to the websites of the national ELCIC as well as the regional Synod of which the congregation was a member. I then checked congregational websites that included links to the national ELCIC and regional Synod for a link to ELW website.

My survey of congregational websites showed that while 81% of congregational websites with ELW groups links to the National ELCIC and regional Synod websites, only 47% of congregations with an ELW group included an external link to the national ELW website. These results seem to indicate that over half of ELCIC congregations do not consider ELW as a partner in mission on the same level as other Lutheran bodies such as regional Synods, the national church, the LWF, and others. Perhaps this judgement is too harsh, and the statistic reflects only the bias of the individual webmaster rather than the whole congregation. The webmaster may simply be ignorant of the fact that ELW has a website, the onus of which to communicate this falls on the leadership of the local ELW. However this omission may be rationalized, the absence of a link renders ELW invisible to website visitors and the opportunity is missed to place ELW as a partner in mission in the consciousness of church members who are the most frequent website visitors.<sup>26</sup> Given that “technological connectivity can enhance human connection” and build human community<sup>27</sup> – a fundamental task of Christian ministry – congregations as well as ELW would benefit from examining their websites to see if their designs and content serve this purpose.<sup>28</sup>

#### **4. The Educational Materials of ELW**

*Esprit Magazine, ELW Bible Study, ELW Program Resource Package*

In order to fulfill its mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ ELW has developed its program in three areas of concentration: spiritual growth, affirmation and service, and global witness.<sup>29</sup> At the

center of its program to facilitate the spiritual growth of its membership is an ELW published Bible Study – the only Lutheran theologically reviewed Bible study in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.<sup>30</sup> The Bible Studies are published in *Esprit*, the official magazine of ELW and as a separate full volume. A Leader's guide is also published. The purpose of these studies is “the development of [members'] faith, in relating scripture to their own lives and understanding and responding to people within and beyond their own organization and church.”<sup>31</sup> It has been the practice of ELW to subject every Bible Study, Leader's Guide, as well as every article of *Esprit*, and the resources contained in their program resource package to a review by a theologian of the ELCIC. This review has been the practice since the beginning of ELW 20 years ago.<sup>32</sup> Two recent topics explored in the Bible Study have been the role of mentors in faith development as well as ecumenical co-operation in the service of justice.<sup>33</sup> The 2006 Bible Study has also been edited and developed for use in English as a Second Language (ESL) ministry both in Canada and abroad.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to the Bible Studies, ELW also develops a comprehensive package of devotional, topical, and organizational resources which it publishes annually as the *Program Resource Package* for use by local leaders in their congregational ELW group program.

In 2005 and 2006, the *Program Resource Package* included a complete package of materials for an interactive educational presentation on HIV/AIDS, “Stones in Our Shoes: Walking with Our Brothers and Sisters with HIV/AIDS.”<sup>35</sup> Through an exploration of faulty assumptions about HIV/AIDS and communication of accurate information about the disease, the presentation aims to raise awareness about the plight of people suffering from this illness. The material is suitable not only as a presentation to ELW members, but can also be presented to the general membership of a local church, in the context of a congregation's larger Christian education program.

### *Promotion of ELW Educational Materials by ELW*

The *Esprit* magazine, published quarterly, is the primary vehicle for the dissemination of the values and vision of ELW. Its content reflects the annual ELW theme which is also the focus of the Bible Study published in each issue. There are currently about forty-eight hundred

subscribers. This represents a 46% drop from 1997 levels.<sup>36</sup> ELW members are encouraged to subscribe to *Esprit*, and the National ELW president promotes the magazine in her reports to the delegates of the biennial national conventions of the ELCIC.<sup>37</sup> ELW also publishes small ads (one-eighth of a page) in the *Canada Lutheran* promoting *Esprit* and its Bible Study to the general constituency of ELCIC.<sup>38</sup>

The Program Resource package on the other hand is published for use by regional and local Congregational ELW leaders and is therefore only promoted through the ELW website, and annual regional leadership events “designed to inform participants of the new program materials that have been developed for the next year.”<sup>39</sup> Participants in these events are thereby “equipped to go back to their congregations and share information about programs and to lead programs.”<sup>40</sup> Whereas awareness of the *Esprit* magazine, and ELW Bible study can be gained from printed and electronic media, awareness of the educational resources published in the Resource Package is more strictly dependent on personal face-to-face conversations by ELW leaders with pastors and a congregation’s education committee members.

### *The (Dis)Appearance of ELW in the Canada Lutheran*

In examining the pages of the *Canada Lutheran*, I believe I found evidence of the mechanism proposed by Gerda Lerner by which women’s significant contributions to society become invisible to that society. In her book, *The Majority Finds Its Past*, after observing that women have often been community builders, Lerner outlines the following pattern: 1) women perceive a social or community need, 2) begin to meet it in practical ways – often by raising the funds necessary through voluntary activities, 3) and then the project is taken over by enfranchised parties, 4) at which point the evidence of women’s contribution disappears or “if it is in the record at all it is visible only as a ladies’ auxiliary group or as unpaid unrecognized volunteers.”<sup>41</sup>

I saw evidence of this pattern at work in connection with ELW’s provision of funds through the ELCIC for sponsorship of CLWR’s project in Chamanculo, Mozambique. In the July/Aug 2005 issue of the *Canada Lutheran*, a report on the Tenth Biennial National Convention featured ELW’s outreach project with the CLWR in

Mozambique. A subsequent issue featured a full page ad by the CLWR regarding its HIV/AIDS programming in Africa. While perusing the ad, I noticed a glaring omission. While the logo of the ELCIC was prominently displayed as a sponsor of this CLWR project, ELW logo was absent! This seemed to verify Lerner's thesis. While ELW donates significant funds to worthwhile projects, its contribution gets taken over by enfranchised parties – in this case the ELCIC and CLWR – and ELW's witness and contribution becomes invisible, or at best gets lost in consciousness as a footnote to a news report about convention proceedings.

In the pages of the *Canada Lutheran*, coverage about ELW is limited to local group activities that are embedded in the reports from Synod correspondents. This type of coverage usually features stories and photographs of quilters, anniversary celebrations, and reports from convention meetings.<sup>42</sup> These reports are necessary in order to uphold the value of our common life together, but where are the stories of ELW's prophetic witness? Last November ELW together with Women of the ELCA (WELCA), the ELCA, the LWF, and the ELCIC sponsored the North American Consultation on Commercial Sexual Exploitation in Winnipeg. The official magazine of the ELCA, *The Lutheran*, carried a feature report about the consultation in its January 2007 issue. Meanwhile, the story of this important event which happened on Canadian soil remains to be told and reported on in the pages on the *Canada Lutheran*. What is behind this regrettable omission? The complete absence of coverage – even that of a few lines in the regular “News” page – could be construed as a failure to meet the basic task of ethical Christian journalism: healing the world through a commitment to truth telling. The truth of commercial sexual exploitation needs to be told, but how will it be brought to the attention of the church if the front line work of ELW undertaken in partnership with significant ecclesiastical partners is not reported on?

## **5. ELW Educational Resources: The best kept secret of the ELCIC? – A Quantitative Survey**

Seventeen years ago, Lutheran church historian, L. De Ane Lagerquist, observed that, “The educational role of women's organizations has probably been underestimated; demonstration of this thesis requires more evidence about the content and use of the

materials women produced.”<sup>43</sup> An article in a recent issue of *Dialog* examining the contribution of American Lutheran lay women’s published bible studies to faith and spiritual formation is an encouraging sign that Lutheran scholars are finally pursuing Lagerquist’s proposed agenda.<sup>44</sup> In the article the authors observe:

One of the ELCA’s best kept secrets is how many thousands of lay women every year explore the Bible through the Women’s Bible Study featured in [the magazine] *Lutheran Women Today*.<sup>45</sup>

What is the situation here in Canada? Is ELW Bible Study published in *Esprit* similarly the ELCIC’s best kept secret? To test this hypothesis as well as gauge the level of awareness of ELW educational resource “Stones in our Shoes, Walking with Our Brothers and Sisters with HIV/AIDS”, short telephone interviews were conducted with pastors of the ELCIC.

The Bible Study was a focus of this study, because it forms the back bone of ELW’s program and has a long tradition extending back to ELW’s predecessor auxiliary bodies. It has been structured from the beginning so that the women can lead it themselves, and does not require a pastor’s participation. In many congregations the ELW Bible Study has been a long-standing fixture on the congregation’s monthly events calendar page. Because of its established history, a pastor may be aware of the Bible Study as an activity that occurs inside the walls of his/her church building without necessarily having face-to-face partnering conversations with the local ELW.

The “Stones in Our Shoes” group presentation on HIV/AIDS on the other hand, in its specificity as an ad hoc resource, does not occupy any space in a congregation’s or pastor’s local historical consciousness. Neither does it enjoy the Bible Study’s “high” exposure in the *Esprit* magazine but is embedded and “hidden” in the Program Resource Package targeted to ELW leaders. Pastors’ awareness of this resource is therefore dependent on a face-to-face “partnering conversations” where local ELW leaders would “show and tell” about the resource to their pastors.

The following is in answer to the question that may be asked as to why this study focused on the material on HIV/AIDS. In his column published in the March 2007 issue of the *Canada Lutheran*, National Bishop Raymond Shultz addressed the church saying that “speaking to the compelling questions and issues facing our global community” needs to be a priority for the Lutheran Church in

Canada.<sup>46</sup> In the same letter, Bishop Shultz lent specificity to this general exhortation by identifying HIV/AIDS as one of the “great, global challenges” that our church needs to speak to.<sup>47</sup> In efforts to bring about greater justice in the world, recognition of a need is the first step, a step which most churches do not have too much trouble in articulating. The real challenge comes with the next step, when we ask the question, “What are the practical means through which the church can speak to the needs challenging the global community?”

As part of its mandate to help the church answer this question, the Lutheran Office for Public Policy (LOPP) issued a discussion paper in response to the Tenth Assembly of the LWF in Winnipeg in 2003, in which it stated that the Tenth Assembly “gave Canadian Lutherans a window on a suffering world in desperate need of healing.”<sup>48</sup> Under a section discussing how the church can respond to the global HIV/AIDS pandemic, the paper not only outlined the church’s responsibility in broad terms but also offered practical suggestions on how the church could respond. One such concrete action urged by the paper was for the church to “collaborate with ELW to encourage education about the HIV/AIDS pandemic.”<sup>49</sup>

In his March 2007 column in the *Canada Lutheran*, Bishop Shultz urged the church to “to be present with and among people in the political, social and ethical arenas.”<sup>50</sup> Often what blocks the way for some rank and file church members to stand in solidarity and be present with those suffering from HIV/AIDS are fear and prejudice based on misinformation about the disease. The ELW educational presentation, “Stones in Our Shoes” combats this prejudice and is therefore a valuable resource to help the church fulfill its ministry of healing in the world. By asking pastors if they were aware of this resource, this research project hoped to gauge whether the collaboration between the church and ELW called for in the LOPP discussion paper was taking place at the congregational level – the level at which ELW resources are intended to be used, and the level at which rank and file church members are equipped for ministry in the world.

Twenty-seven pastors of the ELCIC participated in this research project. Nineteen were from the BC Synod, six from the Eastern Synod, and two from the Manitoba Synod. Of the twenty-seven, thirteen were women. Six pastors were serving rural congregations, while the rest were serving suburban or urban congregations.

The pastors were asked seven closed-ended questions and one open-ended question regarding their awareness of ELW and its educational resources. Pastors were first simply asked if there was an ELW group in their congregation. If there was no ELW in their congregation the interview proceeded nevertheless, since it was assumed that pastors' awareness of ELW and its resources was not limited to knowledge gained from the context of their present call. They were then asked directly if they were aware of ELW resource, "Stones in Our Shoes" and if it had been used in their congregation by ELW or any other group in any of the educational programs in their congregation.

Fourteen out of twenty-seven pastors or 52% were aware of the "Stones in Our Shoes" resource. When breaking down the results according to gender, eight of the thirteen female pastors or 62% were aware of this resource, while six of fourteen male pastors or slightly under 50% said yes. These results may indicate some gender bias but whether these figures are statistically significant may be questionable due to the small number of pastors surveyed. Further study with a larger sample size is needed to determine if gender does play a role with respect to this issue. Because of the small sample size, perhaps it is better to think of these results in terms of ratios. Roughly two out of three female pastors were aware of the resource, while only two out of every five male pastors were aware of the "Stones in Our Shoes" resource.

While over half of the pastors surveyed were aware of this resource only four pastors or 23% were serving congregations where ELW had presented the "Stones in Our Shoes" material either to their local ELW group or to the general membership of the congregation. Three out of these four pastors were female. Again this may indicate a gender bias, but further study is required to see if these results would be duplicated. What perhaps is more significant is that three out of the four congregations where the "Stones in Our Shoes" was presented had members who held or had held leadership positions in ELW at the regional or national level.

The pastors were then asked if they were aware of any other educational resources, and if so, which ones were they aware of and how were they being used in their congregation. *Esprit* was the resource most often named by pastors as an educational resource, with ELW Bible Study a close second. Seven pastors also named the

annual “Praise Offering Service” as an educational resource, with one of them identifying it as a means to raise congregational awareness regarding international issues.

The results of the telephone interviews examining congregational pastors’ awareness of ELW educational materials were encouraging. The majority of pastors, or almost 80% of those surveyed, were aware of the magazine *Esprit*. This percentage held true for both female and male pastors. This confirms the long recognized fact of the important role that print media play in promoting corporate identity. Roughly 8-10% fewer pastors were aware of ELW Bible Study than *Esprit*. However a figure of 70% is still a significant number and probably demonstrates the long history of the Bible Study as a fixture of ELW local group activities. The results may indicate a gender bias in awareness levels of this educational resource, in that 77% of female pastors versus 64% of male pastors were aware of this resource. Again, due to the small sample size, further study is required to determine if gender does play a role with regards to this issue.

Although the results of the study indicate that the ELW Bible Study is in fact “not the best-kept secret” of the ELCIC, the question of how this resource is evaluated by pastors and other theologians of the ELCIC was not addressed. In their recent study of the WELCA Bible Study, Jacobson *et al.* cited one of the Bible Study writers who opined that:

... the [seminary] faculties and the pastors treat those Bible studies and the women who do them with some disdain. In fact, while the studies are clearly written for a different purpose than seminary classroom work, they are much closer to the way the church has historically read the Bible ... and this reading has been the preservation of the narrative web of scripture in the life of the congregations.<sup>51</sup>

While four pastors out of the twenty-seven pastors surveyed expressed a positive view of the Bible Study in the open ended portion of the telephone interview, such as “the studies are very impressive” and “their Bible Studies are very good,” the opinions of the remaining participants remain unknown. Although the leader’s edition of the ELW Bible Study includes an evaluation form, it is designed to only reflect a group response from the participants.<sup>52</sup> However, if ELW modified their evaluation survey to include

responses from individual pastors as well as from the Bible study group itself, this would yield important information as to the reception of this resource by congregational pastors. Their valuable feedback could then be incorporated into the development of future resources.

## **6. The Construal of ELW in Pastor's Consciousness: a Qualitative Study**

The last question of the telephone interviews with ELCIC pastors was open-ended in nature, and asked them to comment about the role of ELW in the life of their congregation. Their answers were recorded as semi-transcripts which were then subjected to a qualitative analysis which yielded several themes.<sup>53</sup> One theme – that ELW plays a positive role in the life of the church – was expressed by sixteen of the twenty-seven pastors. These positive evaluations were easy to identify by either the unequivocal nature of the comments offered such as “ELW plays a positive role” or “ELW is essential,” or “it is the backbone of the congregation,” and through the results of textual analysis.<sup>54</sup> Of the remaining ten pastors, six expressed a thematically neutral position toward the role of ELW, three evaluated it negatively, and one pastor abstained from answering the question. Two out of three negative evaluations were grounded in the perception that ELW functioned at least locally as a para-church organization that competed with the mission of the church. Responses were considered qualitatively neutral toward the role of ELW if they did not express a clearly unequivocal positive or negative evaluation. Gender did seem to play a role in how respondents viewed the role of ELW. Seven of the nine respondents who expressed thematically negative or neutral positions toward ELW, were male. Of the seventeen respondents who expressed a thematically positive position toward ELW, eleven were female.

Most of the neutral responses were grounded in a stance which could be termed as a “sceptical position” which questioned whether separate women's groups still played a relevant role in the church today. Two sets of questions functioned as warrants for this position. One set observed that women's groups arose historically in a time when women were predominantly homemakers in society and were disenfranchised from leadership roles in the church. At the time, women's auxiliaries provided a means for women to be trained in

leadership skills and have a voice and influence in the church's affairs. The voices of the "sceptical position" observed that women today gain leadership skills through post-secondary education and career opportunities. Furthermore, these voices asked, now that women are welcomed into the political structures of the church, and presumably have a voice in the running of the church's affairs, are segregated women's groups still necessary? A counterpart to this position was offered by two female pastors who credited ELW with equipping them with leadership skills that they still employ in the context of their parish ministry, and who still see women's leadership development as a valid role for ELW.

Those expressing this "sceptical position" also called attention to the influence of the changing demographic on strictly practical grounds. They observed that the majority of women today are in the workforce, either by choice or necessity, and ELW membership is simply not a priority for them. Often a Sunday morning commitment to worship and Sunday school is all that women today can squeeze into their busy schedules, and when they do choose to be involved in the church, there are other avenues of service and learning that are more fulfilling for them than the program of ELW.

The question of redundancy was also raised in some responses from a theological position, which asked about the meaning of ministry itself. Can or should the ministry of the church be divided along gender lines? In other words, are there those areas of service which are considered solely the purview of "women's ministry" rather than the ministry of the whole church? But while the concerns of those who question the necessity and wisdom of duplicate ministries – such as an ELW prayer chain functioning alongside a general congregational one – are justified, other participants in this study saw value in increasing diversity by multiplying the gifts of ELW. One pastor in this study, seeing the value of biblical formation, wished that the men in their congregations would also have their own bible study. Of course, men and women should study the Bible together, too. But this gender inclusivity does not have to happen by eliminating the ministry of ELW. If ELW resources are valued rather than seen as redundant duplicates, then ELW groups can be encouraged to open up their Bible studies to the men in the church and the men encouraged to join. One pastor in this study has had success with this approach.

Respondents who viewed ELW positively did not do so uncritically. Attention to the changing female demographics of church membership was also expressed by this group. However, for these respondents, this was seen as challenge to be overcome rather than a warrant to question ELW's relevance as an organization. The need to renew ELW by attracting younger women was identified by nine of the seventeen respondents who evaluated ELW positively. This theme was also present in seven of the nine neutral/negative responses.

Another interesting finding was the types of local ELW activities that were identified according to gender. It seems that activities that have traditionally been identified as belonging to "women's sphere" such as quilting, looking after babies (administering the cradle roll), and providing funeral lunches were only visible or valued enough to be named by female respondents. The same held true for ELW functions that were identified as serving to promote the well-being of women such as: "giving women a voice" and "standing in solidarity with women in other countries." Male respondents only seemed to "see" those women's activities that were more public in nature such as fund-raising and congregational leadership. Although the sample size is small, the findings do seem to support the view that there is an androcentric hierarchy of values in which women's activities on their own behalf are not visible and in which greater value is placed on activities associated with the public sphere over those associated with the private sphere.

## **7. An Inside-Outside Response to the Results** <sup>55</sup>

What do the findings of this research project communicate regarding the ministry of ELW and the status that this lay women's organization enjoys in the ELCIC?

The opinion is often heard in clergy circles about the biblical illiteracy of the laity. If however, ELW Bible Studies like the WELCA Bible Studies promote Bible literacy by "preserving the narrative web of scripture in the life of congregations,"<sup>56</sup> then pastors would be wise to consider ELW Bible Study an integral part of the teaching ministry of the church. Some pastors in this study did in fact regard it as such. No pastors in this present study dismissed the Bible Study out right. However, if ELCIC pastors are like their colleagues in the ELCA, referred to in the Jacobson study, then it can be assumed

that there are some who inscribe ELW with a marginal status – as simply an innocuous spiritual activity the women do rather than a serious engagement with the Word. Those who do may be forgetting “the finite bearing the infinite” principle of Lutheran theology. The infinite Word not only bears the humiliation of being carried on the finite words of pastors involved in the ministry of proclamation, but the living Word is also carried on the finite humble words of women sitting in bible study circles who teach each other the meaning of the living Word in their lives.

The significant level of awareness (52% of pastors surveyed) of the educational resource “Stones in Our Shoes,” which currently is almost entirely dependent on face to face conversations between local ELW leaders and pastors indicates that these important conversations are occurring. More of these need to take place. The national ELW recognizes this and is continuing to emphasize the need for promotion of their materials and has included a workshop, “Getting the Word Out” on the topic of developing a plan for local communications initiatives in their 2007 Resource Package.<sup>57</sup> The onus, however, should not rest entirely with ELW. Local pastors, as part of their teaching and pastoral responsibilities, should initiate conversations with their local ELW leaders. The results indicate that gender may perhaps play a role although the mechanism is not clear. Are women pastors more supportive of ELW and take a greater interest in ELW affairs, or is it simply that a local female ELW leader will find it easier to approach a pastor when she is woman? Pastors, however, regardless of gender, need to demonstrate their commitment to the ministry of all the baptized by regarding ELW leaders as partners in ministry, and be interested to learn about what materials ELW has developed which may be employed for “the common good” of the congregation and the well-being of the entire community.

The National Church office and regional Synods can also do their part in promoting the educational resources of ELW. This can easily be done through the columns that the national and synod bishops publish in the *Canada Lutheran*, as well as letters that are sent to ELCIC pastors from time to time.

In 2005 ELCIC bishops concerned to promote bible literacy among rank-and-file church members, sent all active pastors a copy of Robert Kysar’s book *Opening the Bible*.<sup>58</sup> At least one Synod accompanied this mail-out with a cover letter giving suggestions for

how it could be used as well as information about a study guide that was published by the ELCIC.<sup>59</sup> One bishop also drew attention to this resource in his column published in the *Canada Lutheran*.<sup>60</sup> Although ELW Bible studies, written by ELCIC pastors and theologians do not have the cachet that the name of a well known biblical scholar carries, they nevertheless provide “the tools for engaging in responsible and mature theological reflection” that another bishop in his column said was necessary in the church today.<sup>61</sup> The promotion of the Kysar book by ELCIC bishops in their public correspondence demonstrates how easily ELW Bible Studies and other educational resources could be promoted by the National and Synod offices if there were the will to do so.

I believe that this kind of communications initiative employing pastoral letters and the regular episcopal columns in the *Canada Lutheran* should be undertaken by the National Church Council to promote ELW educational resource “Stones in Our Shoes.”<sup>62</sup> In this manner, the National Church council can follow up on the LOPP recommendation that the ELCIC “collaborate with ELW to encourage education about the HIV/AIDS pandemic.”<sup>63</sup> Without such concrete actions, ELCIC’s partnership with ELW outlined in corporate constitutional documents remains only a theoretical rather than material reality, or at best only a one way reality. It is one way if ELW’s support of ELCIC’s mission through financial gifts and the development of educational resources is not reciprocated by mutual gift giving on the part of the ELCIC. The gift that would most benefit ELW as well as the wider church is the gift that only the national church and her official leaders can give – the gift of using the authority of their office to promote and thereby give the educational resources of ELW the greater profile and legitimacy they deserve.

Two important themes raised by participants of the interviews were the questions of the relevance and theological legitimacy of segregated women’s organizations posed on the grounds that they are no longer necessary because women have achieved equality and integration both in society and the church. A corrective word of caution must be spoken regarding this liberal feminist perspective which assumes a hegemonic uniformity to women’s experience. While many women in the church consider themselves enfranchised members of society enjoying equality with men as they pursue careers in the public sphere, this is not the experience of all women.

In spite of the gains made by second wave feminism, there are many women today who still occupy marginal positions in many contexts and struggle to find their voice. It may surprise some to learn that church communities are one such context.

In one congregation represented in this study, the women of the church – the majority of whom identified with ELW – felt they had no voice and experienced themselves as marginalized and functioning on the edges of church life. Not only was the church council entirely made up of men, but the women felt in some respects that their local ELW was like an illegal or quasi-legal organization which was forced to carry on its activities underground. It is important to note, that it is not the women themselves who considered themselves a para-church organization, but that they were regarded as such by others. It is only when the congregation called a pastor who regarded ELW as essential to the life of the church, that the women experienced themselves as enfranchised.<sup>lxiv</sup> The pastor's words which in effect said, "No, you are included, you are a part of the church and your contribution is both needed and welcome," led to a shift in congregational consciousness.<sup>65</sup> These words, addressed not only to the women but to the entire community, not only brought ELW from the margins to the center of community life, but also led to the integration of women into the church's political structures as they were finally elected to sit on church council.<sup>66</sup> This experience illustrates the right use of the power of the pastoral office to speak a prophetic word of liberation. It is this authoritative word of liberation, spoken in community that empowered the women to claim their place as "fellow-workers in the vineyard."

Women's integration as equal partners in the ministry of the church is still not women's universal experience. Although women's full participation on church councils is assumed to be the reality in the ELCIC, no concrete statistics are available.<sup>67</sup> A quantitative survey of such gender representation would provide much needed data in this area. This data, when coupled with statistics of the percentage of women ordained clergy, would give a clearer picture of the actual political status of women in the ELCIC.<sup>68</sup>

The question of the legitimacy of segregated women's organizations was also raised by some pastors in this study from a theological perspective. The question was asked. "Is not the mission of the church one mission, inclusive of gender?" The same question

was being asked by the Anglican Church of Canada back in the 1970's when it was debating the future of their women's auxiliary, the Anglican Church Women (ACW).<sup>69</sup> The Anglicans decided that women's ministry organized under the segregated structures of separate women's organizations undermined the ideal of an inclusive church. As the Anglicans moved toward including women in church leadership through ordination, they decided to dissolve the ACW in 1971.<sup>70</sup>

There are those who argue that the time has come for ELW's devolution as well, on the basis of a similar ecclesiology that emphasizes the unity of the church over diversity. However, the church needs to look at subsequent developments in the Anglican experience before deciding that the time has come to sound a requiem for ELW. A fact unknown to most is that after living with "full integration" in the church for 30 years, Anglican women once again want to have a separate women's organization. Apparently, "Anglican women are frustrated because they do not have an official organization in their church structure and they are struggling to be heard within their church ranks."<sup>71</sup> These comments indicate that while ordained women may be enfranchised within clergy ranks, their lay sisters remain on the margins. At best, enfranchisement has been achieved unevenly. ELW – a far from being considered irrelevant – is regarded with respect and admiration by our female full communion partners, who are turning to ELW to assist them in their efforts to organize themselves once more as a separate women's organization within the church.<sup>72</sup> It seems that the church's adoption of the liberal feminist strategy to fight sexist fire with genderless fire has not succeeded. Perhaps the church needs to take a lesson from the pages of third wave feminism which acknowledges gender difference. Can the unity of the church be envisioned as unity of purpose through diversity of expression rather than unity through hegemonic uniformity?

As to the greying of ELW ranks – this has been present with ELW since its inception. The leadership recognizes that business as usual is not an option and has struggled to find the key – a program, an emphasis, or structure that would attract younger women and provide the answer for the renewal of their ranks. But as ELW continues to find ways to re-tool itself, the rest of us in the church need to be careful before we regard their white haired ranks as a phenomenon

exclusive to ELW and therefore indicative of a problem peculiar to them. It must be emphasized that ELW has an aging membership *because* the church's membership is aging, and has been for quite some time. As Bishop Schultz has pointed out, "the Boomers and Generation X have both abandoned the church."<sup>73</sup> Before we point to ELW and question its relevance, we must look to the same grey heads sitting in our church pews and wonder why we have failed to reach two generations.

## 8. Conclusion

Throughout the church's history, women, either individually or as groups, have carved out a space for themselves on the margins of ecclesiastical institutions where they have exercised a prophetic role.<sup>74</sup> In many mainline churches it was the prophetic witness of women's auxiliaries that challenged the church to transform its polity so that women would be included in its leadership as ordained clergy.<sup>75</sup> ELW continues to follow in this tradition. While tending to their own spiritual growth, the women of ELW have continued to work not only on their own behalf but also on the behalf of others who are oppressed or dehumanized by unjust social structures. Even today, women everywhere – in the church and in the world – continue to be "mistreated, trivialized, kept out, put down, ignored, laughed at or discriminated against because of their gender."<sup>76</sup> Perhaps it is the experience of God's mercy in their brokenness that energizes the women of ELW to follow in the footsteps of their predecessors who while laying "claim to their own hearts and voices, instructed their hands, feet, and purses to follow in bold action toward others."<sup>77</sup>

Twenty years ago, shortly after the ELCIC's inception, Canadian church historian Oscar Cole-Arnal called upon this church to discover and celebrate the prophetic voices within the history of Canadian Lutheranism.<sup>78</sup> ELW is one such prophetic witness. From its position on the margins of the church ELW waits for the church to discover and value both its witness and its considerable resources which it is eager to share with the broader church in the service of the gospel. What the evidence of this study proves, is the important and singular role that leadership can play in bringing ELW from the margins into the center of the church. While at times it seems that the ELCIC's partnership with ELW fails to meet the test of mutuality, nevertheless, the women of ELW should continue to take advantage

of their considerable freedom on the edges of institutional life to shape their vocations as doers of justice and lovers of kindness.<sup>79</sup> We, who are closer to the center, are much the richer for it whether we realize it or not. Perhaps the vitality of our institutional life depends on their fragile presence on the margins.<sup>80</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Walter Freitag, *Prospect and Promise of Lutheran Unity in Canada*, (Calgary: Foothills Lutheran Press), 1974; William E. Horden, "A Partially Achieved Dream: Theological Issues in Recent Canadian Lutheran History," *Consensus*, 13/2 (1987): 7-20; Norman J. Threinen, *Toward Union: Lutheran Merger Negotiations in Canada, 1972-1978*, (Winnipeg: Lutheran Council in Canada), 1979; *Fifty Years of Lutheran Convergence: The Canadian Case-Study*, Lutheran Historical Conference Publication No. 3, (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers), 1983; Threinen, Norman J. ed., *A Look at Lutheran Identity in Canada*, (Winnipeg: Lutheran Council in Canada), 1977; "Pivotal Points in Early Canadian Church History," *Consensus* 13/2 (1987): 21-34.
- 2 A monograph by Carl R. Cronmiller does briefly acknowledge the role of women in shaping the history of the church under a short section titled "Women's Groups," *A History of the Lutheran Church in Canada*, Vol. 1, (The Evangelical Lutheran Synod of Canada, 1961), pp. 225-229.
- 3 Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), p. 1.
- 4 *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.
- 5 Fredrica Harris Thompsett and Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, eds., *Deeper Joy: Lay Women and Vocation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Episcopal Church*, (New York: Church Publishing Inc., 2005), p. 3.
- 6 *With Many Voices: Twenty-Five years of Ministry by Ordained Women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada*, Executive Summary published online on the ELCIC website at <<http://www.elcic.ca/Website/docs.nsf/wvoices?OpenPage>> accessed on February 22, 2007.
- 7 <<http://www.elca.org/archives/ordination/>> accessed on February 22, 2007.
- 8 *Deeper Joy*, p. 3.

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>10</sup> <<http://www.elw.ca/HistoryofELW.htm>> accessed online on February 23, 2007.
- <sup>11</sup> Article XVII paragraph 1, of the ELCIC constitution, and Part XV Section 1 of the Administrative By-laws. ELCIC constitution published online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/Website/docs.nsf/>>.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Section 2 of governance by-law 1/96 of the Evangelical Lutheran Women Inc., of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.
- <sup>14</sup> ELW Report, Minutes of the *First Biennial Convention of the ELCIC* (July 8-12, 1987), Ottawa.
- <sup>15</sup> Ruth Vince, Executive Director of ELW Inc., personal e-mail, February 21, 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> ELW website at <<http://www.elw.ca/PraiseOfferingServices.htm>> accessed on February 23, 2007.
- <sup>17</sup> Report of the Treasurer, *Tenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 21-24, 2005, Winnipeg, Manitoba, accessed online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/doc/2005Conv.nsf/title/>>.
- <sup>18</sup> ELW Report, Minutes of the *Third Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 10-14, 1991, Edmonton, Alberta.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ruth Vince, Executive Director of ELW Inc., personal communication, September 17, 2007.
- <sup>21</sup> National ELW Board Manual, ledger of disbursements of Praise Offering Directed Funds, for the third and fourth Quadrenniums, 1997-2000 and 2001-2004.
- <sup>22</sup> ELW Inc. Promotional Brochure, March, 2005.
- <sup>23</sup> ELW Report, Minutes of the *Third Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 10-14, 1991, Edmonton, Alberta.
- <sup>24</sup> Webpage of King of Life Lutheran Church, Coquitlam, B.C., <<http://members.shaw.ca/kingoflife/programs.htm>>, accessed online on February 24, 2006.
- <sup>25</sup> ELCIC online congregational directory at <<http://www.elcic.ca/>>.
- <sup>26</sup> Neil MacQueen, "Building a Better Church Website," published online at <<http://www.sundaysoftware.com/webpage.htm>> accessed online, March 21, 2007.
- <sup>27</sup> John P. Jewell, *Wired for Ministry: How the Internet, Visual Media, and Other New Technologies Can Serve your Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI:

Brazos Press, 2004); reviewed by Bob Howard in “The Electronic Corner,” *Homiletic* 29/2: 49.

- 28 “Building a Better Church Website,” observes that first time visitors to a church website as well as members are “looking to belong” and offers the following tips: “[the website] should be user friendly, warm, cozy, family-style, relational. Not institutional, not cold, not perfunctory, not letterhead-ish. No shouting, and no hype. In study after study, people identify “warm vs. cold” by the look on people’s faces. Have great warm and “real” looking photos ... [outside] visitors are least likely to be interested in a church’s institutional concerns or affiliations.... They are also the least likely group to be overly concerned with your doctrinal positions. Members are ALSO looking for a sense of belonging. They need that nurtured and renewed on a periodic basis. Your church website should reinforce our sense of “church family.”
- 29 ELW Report, Minutes of the *First Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 8-12, 1987, Ottawa, Ontario.
- 30 ELW website at <<http://www.elw.ca/BibleStudy.htm>> accessed on February 23, 2007.
- 31 ELW Report, Minutes of the *First Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 8-12, 1987, Ottawa, Ontario.
- 32 Ruth Vince, personal e-mail, January 30, 2007. Ruth Vince also wrote that if there are any discrepancies between the writer of the resource and the theologian, ELW then seeks the wisdom of another theologian from one of the seminaries of the ELCIC, and on occasion if necessary, the view of the National Bishop.
- 33 Nancy Kelly, *Show Us the Way*, ELW Bible Study, 2006 (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Women Inc., 2004); Gordon Jensen, *Walking Together in Christ*, ELW Bible Study, 2007, (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Women Inc., 2005). Former ELCIC bishop, Telmor Sartison, also authored the 1991 ELW Bible Study *Teach Us to Pray*; ELW Report, Minutes of the *First Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 10-14, 1991, Edmonton, Alberta.
- 34 Report of ELW, Minutes of the *Tenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 21-24, 2005, Winnipeg, Manitoba, accessed online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/doc/2005Conv.nsf/title?OpenPage>> on February 22, 2007.
- 35 Cathryn Aune, 2005 *ELW Program Resource Package*, (Winnipeg: ELW Inc., 2004); Cathryn Aune is a professional community health nurse and member of Peace Lutheran Church in Vernon, British Columbia.

- 36 Ruth Vince, Executive Director of ELW Inc., personal e-mail, March 11, 2007; Report of ELW Auxiliary Board to the first Biennial Convention of the ELCIC, July 8-12, 1987, Ottawa.
- 37 Report of ELW, Minutes of the *First Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*. July 8-12, 1987, Ottawa, Ontario; Report of ELW, Minutes of the *Third Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 10-14, 1991, Edmonton, Alberta; Report of ELW, Minutes of the *Tenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 21-24, 2005, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- 38 *Canada Lutheran* 22/1, p.12; 21/1, p.30; 20/7, p.8; 20/6, p.6; 20/5, p.8.
- 39 Report of ELW to the *Tenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC*, July 21-24, 2005, Winnipeg, Manitoba, accessed online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/doc/2005Conv.nsf/title?OpenPage>> accessed online on February. 23, 2007.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 *The Majority Finds Its Past*, p. 142.
- 42 For representative examples of this type of reporting see *Canada Lutheran* 22/1 (Jan-Feb 2007), p. 24; also 20/2 (March, 2005), p. 20.
- 43 “A Three-Lens Approach to American Lutheran History: Considerations of Gender, Ethnicity, and Congregation,” in *Lutheran Historical Conference Essays and Reports*, Vol. 13 (1990), p.58.
- 44 Diane Levy Jacobson, Carol Schersten LaHurd, and Susan Wilds McArver, “Luther’s Legacy in American Lutheran Women’s Bible Study,” *Dialog* 45/1 (Spring 2006): 29-35.
- 45 Ibid.: 29.
- 46 “Sixty years of Global Vision,” *Canada Lutheran* 20/2 (March 2007), published online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/clweb/index.html>> accessed on March 24, 2007.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 David Pfrimmer and Rhonda Lorch, “A World and a Nation in Need of Healing,” an ELCIC Response to the Message from the Tenth Assembly (of the LWF). A discussion paper prepared by the Lutheran Office for Public Policy, March, 2004. Published online by the LOPP, at <[http://www.elcic-lopp.ca/lwf\\_discussionpaper.pdf](http://www.elcic-lopp.ca/lwf_discussionpaper.pdf)> accessed on March 14, 2007.
- 49 Ibid., 10.
- 50 *Canada Lutheran* 20/2 (March 2004), p. 42.
- 51 Diane Levy Jacobson, Carol Schersten LaHurd, and Susan Wilds McArver, “Luther’s Legacy in American Lutheran Women’s Bible Study,” *Dialog* 45/1 (Spring 2006): 29.

- 52 Ruth Vince, Executive Director of ELW Inc., personal communication, September 16, 2007.
- 53 Semi-transcript here means that respondents' answers were not transcribed word for word from an audio recording. The interviewer endeavoured to capture the key points of participants' "live" answers during the telephone interview itself, and transcribed these simultaneously using word processor. These semi-transcripts were then subject to textual analysis which searched for word repetitions, key words and phrases in context. These were then categorized and subjected to further analysis to identify what ideas, concepts and themes these phrases were used to represent. For example a textual word search of the term "work" yielded the following word combinations and phrases: "Good work", "work to create good atmosphere," "work of the church is being done." When these phrases were further examined it was discovered that they could be grouped together under the category, "positive evaluation of the role of ELW group in the life of the church." Similar word searches also yielded the categories of "negative" and "neutral" evaluations of the role of ELW, as well as the theme of "appeal to older vs. younger or working women."
- 54 See comments regarding textual analysis in the previous note.
- 55 The term "Inside-Outside," is here used to represent my observational stance in this study. On the one hand my views are informed by my status as an insider, in that I am a woman. The questions I ask are influenced by my experiences *as a* woman. On the other hand I also stand as an outsider taking on the stance of a detached observer of the phenomena under study. In another respect, the insider-outsider designation captures my ambiguous relationship to both ELW and the cadre of ordained clergy. While I am a woman I do not consider myself to be a member of ELW (although ELW automatically considers all women members of the ELCIC as members of ELW). Also, while I am a seminarian studying to be eligible for ordination in the ELCIC, I am not a member of the clergy. So the inside-outside term is intended to capture the complex and ambiguous nature of my identity as it influences my evaluation of the results.
- 56 Diane Levy Jacobson, et al, "Luther's Legacy in American Lutheran Women's Bible Study," *Dialog* 45/1 (Spring 2006): 29
- 57 Information page regarding contents of 2007 Resource Package published online at <<http://www.elw.ca/2007.htm>> accessed on March 2, 2007.
- 58 Robert Kysar, *Opening the Bible: What It Is, Where It Came From, What It Means for You* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1999).

- 59 Michael J. Pryse, Undated letter to pastors of the Eastern Synod, published online at [http://www.easternsynod.org/docs/resources/bishop/otb\\_Invitation.pdf](http://www.easternsynod.org/docs/resources/bishop/otb_Invitation.pdf) > accessed on March 21, 2007.
- 60 Stephen P. Kristenson, “No Challenges Too Great,” *Canada Lutheran* Vol. 20/2, (March 2005), p. 24.
- 61 Michael J. Pryse, “Believing Thomas,” *Canada Lutheran* 20/2 (March 2005), p. 33.
- 62 This study did not investigate whether “Stones In our Shoes” has been promoted by Synod and the National Church through the use of letters from Synod offices, and therefore no definite judgement can be made. However, although it is possible that such letters were employed, this writer believes that it is improbable. What this study did examine was the Bishops’ columns in *Canada Lutheran* from 2005-2007, and found no evidence of any mention of this resource there.
- 63 Pfrimmer and Lorch, “A World and a Nation in Need of Healing,” a discussion paper submitted by the LOPP to the ELCIC National Church Council, March 2004, note 47.
- 64 These events occurred within the last five years.
- 65 The quotation marks here do not represent a direct quote, but are used as rhetorical device.
- 66 This congregation is situated in a regional urban centre with a population of 110,000. Source details not provided because their potential to jeopardize the protection of confidentiality of the research project participants.
- 67 I could not locate church documents giving exact dates of women’s suffrage as well as when they became eligible for elected office on church councils as well as regional and national church bodies of the ELCIC and its predecessors. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod extended suffrage to women in 1969. I assume that ELCIC’s predecessor bodies extended these rights to women prior to or around this same date as well.
- 68 As of March 2003, only 13% of the ELCIC roster of ordained pastors were female; Millennium Study of Leadership Needs, published online at < <http://www.elcic.ca/WebSite/docs.nsf/>> accessed online, March 21, 2007.
- 69 Wendy Fletcher, “Through Heart and Hearth: Redefining Womanhood as a Missiological Work,” in *Deeper Joy: Lay Women and Vocation in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Episcopal Church*, Fredrica Harris Thompsett and Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, eds., (New York: Church Publishing, 2005), pp. 160f.

- 70 Ibid., p. 161.
- 71 *The Columbine*, The Newsletter of the Eastern Synodical Evangelical Lutheran Women, published online at <<http://www.easternsynod.org/docs/Columbine%202001%20Spring.pdf>> accessed online on February 23, 2007.
- 72 “Standing Up for ELW,” Newsletter of the Tenth Biennial Convention of the ELCIC, Winnipeg, 2005 published online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/convention/2005/elw.html>>
- 73 Bishop Raymond Schultz, Sermon, Eastern Synod Pastors Study Conference, 2001, published online at <<http://www.elcic.ca/bishop/20011030.html>> accessed on March 21, 2007.
- 74 Jane Shaw, “Women, Gender, and Ecclesiastical History,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55/1 (January, 2004): 108.
- 75 Fletcher, “Through Heart and Hearth,” p. 162.
- 76 Barbara Findlen, *Listen Up, Voices from the Next Generation*, (Seattle: Seal Press, 1995); quoted in review by Stephanie Gilmore, “Looking Back, Thinking Ahead: Third Wave Feminism in the United States,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12 /4 (Winter, 2001): 216.
- 77 <<http://www.womenoftheelca.org/20years/history.html>>
- 78 “An Agenda for Canadian Lutheran: The Search for Prophetic Soil,” *Consensus* 13/2 (1987): 52-66.
- 79 Micah 5:8b, NRSV, loosely paraphrased.
- 80 Margaret R. Miles, “Mapping Feminist Histories of Religious Traditions,” Roundtable Discussion, Feminist Religious History, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 22/1 (2006): 51.