

1st May 1994 the newly elected LELCOL archbishop E. E. Rozitis was consecrated.

9 August 1995 Univ. of Latvia Faculty of Theology graduate Kristīne Sūna, who continued studies at Oxford University, was ordained as a pastor, and after finishing studies at Oxford returned to Latvia but was not allowed to serve as pastor.

21 August 1995 Univ. of Latvia Faculty of Theology graduate Zilgme Eglīte was ordained in the LELCOL; before by assignment from archbishop K. Gailītis she served in the Penkule ELCL congregation. Zilgme studied at Louvain University and served the Latvian congregation in Brussels, Belgium.

Association of Lutheran Women Theologians in Latvia

17 July 1995 in Riga the Association of Lutheran Women Theologians in Latvia (ALWTL) was founded. 18 theologians participated in the founding meeting. Of those seven were pastors: Vaira Bitēna, Berta Stroža, Sarmīte Fišere, Austra Reine, Ilze Grenze, Inese Radziņa, Anita Vārsberga, as well as diakone Vija Klīve, serving theology students Marika Vidiņa, Dace Jaunzeme, Sandra Rozenberga, Indra Skuja (absent, but her letter to be considered as a founder was accepted), theology students Kristīne Sūna, Aiva Rozenberga, Ilze Ezerniece, Ilze Geidāne, Ieva Vintere and Dace Vidruska.

The Association's objective – to promote mutual support and friendship at a time when women are being pushed out of the Church community, to organizē educational events in order to inform society about women's and men's service in the Church.

As the Association's president was elected the first ordained woman in Latvia Vaira Bitēna, as vice-presidents – Sarmīte Fišere and Austra Reine.

22 August 1995 a church service devoted to the **20th anniversary of women's ordination** was held in the Riga Dom. This was organized by ALWTL and participating were all the ordained ELCL women pastors and serving students.

Archbishop Jānis Vanags was also invited, but he did not come to the church service.

Participating were LELCOL archbishop E. E. Rozitis and several older, middle and younger generation ELCL male pastors. For this occasion a book "Ej un saki" [Go and tell!] was published by the Ogre Ev. Luth. Congregation under the initiative of Sarmīte Fišere. A special supplement to the "newspaper Neatkarīgā Rīta Avīze" appeared under the editorship of Marika Vidiņa and Indra Skuja.

For those interested:

If you are interested in the history of women's ordination in Latvia, please visit our Homepage www.sieviesuordinacija.lv "ELCL History" section.

The existing materials in the Homepage – publications and archival data – were used in the composition of this booklet.

ASSOCIATION OF LUTHERAN WOMEN THEOLOGIAN IN LATVIA

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Women's Ordination in Latvia – 40

Association of Lutheran Women
Theologians in Latvia – 20

28 July 1975 in an expanded Consistory meeting, the issue of women's ordination was discussed as the second point of the meeting. After each participant had spoken on this issue, archbishop J. Matulis said:

*"If you will be against this issue,
then I will announce an extraordinary Synod
and the Synod
will give women the right to be ordained."*

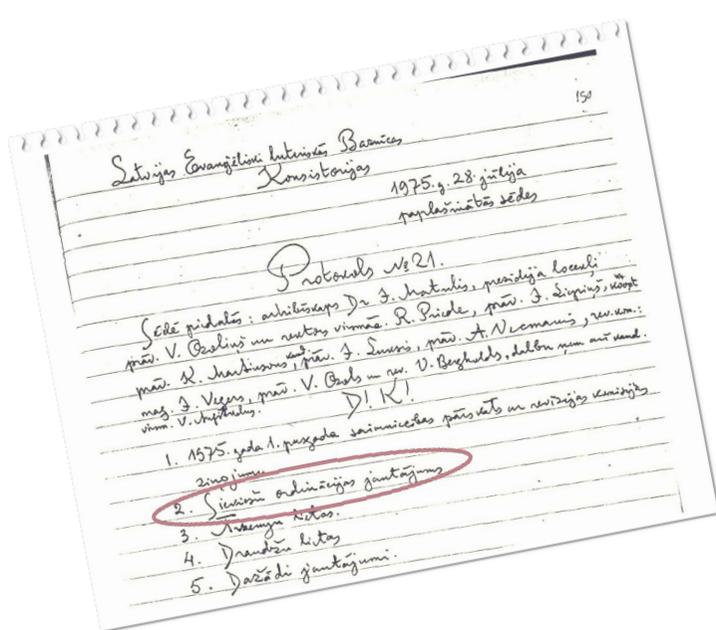
In the larger Lutheran countries, like Germany and Sweden, women were already being ordained. It is possible that the most important aspect was that the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church outside Latvia also was starting to ordain women. In 1974 the first LELCOL woman – Agnese Pone – was ordained.

Before the historic voting „for” women's ordination, J. Matulis said:

*"This we need to do – to involve women in
pastoral work."*

Rev. Vaira Bitēna remembers:

“A rural congregation in Viļķene asked for me and said this: either they would allow me to work and they would keep the keys, but if I was not allowed to work, they will give the keys to the government and liquidate the congregation, for the church was in terrible condition. The male pastor refused to serve there and said: ‘There is nothing to do here – there's no congregation, no church.’”



Since archbishop J. Matulis fought for the saving of every church, assigning students as congregation pastors was a solution. So in 1972 V. Bitēna was assigned a congregation in the Viļķene district of Limbažu region. The church was in a catastrophic state and demanded a complete reconstruction. With energetic action and the support of many friends and the congregation, Vaira Bitēna accomplished this task.

The Introduction of Women into the Profession of Pastor in the ELCL

23 August 1975 archbishop J. Matulis in St. John's Church (Riga) for the first time in Latvian history ordained at the first level (with the title of assistant pastor) three women: Theology Seminar students V. Bitēna, B. Stroža and H. Valpētere. That was a historic day in the ELCL.

Later the three already mentioned women were ordained at the full level of pastor **17 July 1976** in Riga in the New Gertrude's Church and presented with silver crosses as a symbol of their profession. The order of service of ordination was performed by archbishop Prof. Dr. J. Matulis with his assistants dean V. Ozoliņš and senior pastor rector Prof. R. Priede, who gave the ordination speech.

After a while other women were ordained. Archbishop J. Matulis ordained Aleksandra Dombure (1976), Irma Kalēja, Milda Vainovska (1981) and Valda Krūmāja (1985).

19 August 1985 came the death of archbishop J. Matulis. Until a Special Synod could take place, the Consistory Presidium led the Church.

In 1986 a Special Synod was summoned. Eriks Mesters was elected archbishop and as one of the Consistory's counsellors pastor Kārlis Gailītis. According to E. Mester's memory, "The 1986 Special General Synod brought up the question of whether a review could be made that the Gospels and New Testament foresee women's ordination and work in the life of the Church. Young pastors Modris Plāte and Juris Rubenis were the ones who brought forth this question, on what basis women could be ordained. It was recommended to form a Commission 'On the future usefulness of women's ordination'".

August 1986 pastor Berta Strože was one of the persons, who prepared and submitted arguments to this Commission.

24 November 1986 on behalf of the ELCL Consistory a letter was written to inform the pastors that from August 1986 a commission "On the future usefulness of women's ordination" was at work. Its leader was Juris Rubenis. The letter was also signed by commission member K. Gailītis. The letter said that the commission found that the theological arguments "for" and "against" women's ordination were equally strong on both sides.

1989 in the 14th General Synod an announcement was made about the results of the commission "On the future usefulness of women's ordination". The Synod decided to accept women's ordination. "Voting for women's ordination were 46, against 21. This issue has a long history in our Church, in order to research it a special commission was formed but did not give an unequivocal answer. The issue was settled by voting," thus wrote Jelgavas deanery head Alfons Vecmanis in 1990 Church Calendar of the ELCL. In this Synod Kārlis Gailītis was elected archbishop.

9 September 1989 archbishop Kārlis Gailītis ordained as pastor Sarmīte Fišere.

13 December 1989 Railvija Rozīte was ordained as assistant pastor.

17 March 1991 Aida Prēdele was ordained as pastor.

21 July 1991 Dace Rubļevska was ordained as pastor.

In 1992 at the 15th ELCL General Synod archbishop K. Gailītis responded to the opponents of women's ordination in totally clear language: briefly referring to the Bible's text, which was the basis for his conviction, that is – the first story of Creation, where it is written: "And God made man after his likeness and image, after His likeness He created them male and female. And God looked over everything that he had done and saw that everything was very good." (Gen. 1:27 and 31). In this Synod, he declared that he would continue to ordain women.

From 1990 to 1993 by assignment from the archbishop, the same as male students, working in the congregations were women theology students Gija Brokāne (Zaube congregation), Ivanda Cejere (Augstroze), Māra Dzērve (under dean A. Ālers in Tukums), Zilgme Eglīte (Penkule), Anita Tukiša (Valdemārpils), Marika Vidiņa (Bolderāja), Aija Zvirbule (Straupe). During this time women pastors enjoyed the Church's and archbishop's loyalty and respect, they were included in various delegations, representing the ELCL in larger Church forums.

November 1992 – the sudden death of archbishop Kārlis Gailītis [in a car accident] occurred.

26 January 1993 – On this date was held the Special ELCL Synod, where pastor Jānis Vanags was elected as archbishop, who in his candidate speech expressed his negative stand on women's ordination.

From 18 to 20 March 1993, the LELCOL Executive Board at its plenary session in the Catskills [New York, USA] unanimously decided: A Side recognizes that all LELCOL congregations and districts wish to continue to renew a united Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church; the B Side recognizes that before it is possible to form a united structure there has to be agreement on the issue of women's ordination.