

Southwestern Minnesota

Women of the ELCA The Communicator



Saturday, May 4, SWO Convention at Gloria Dei.

Theme: Be the Light

Theme Verse: Psalm 82:4

"Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

Theme Hymn: "Christ Be Our Light"

Registration begins at 8 a.m. at Gloria Dei.

The Quilt truck will be back! It will be open from 7:30 to noon.



Peace Lutheran Cosmos Quilt Sunday 2023

The next meetings of the SW MN SWO board

- Saturday, February 24, 10 a.m. at Gloria Dei in Redwood Falls
- Saturday, March 9, at 10 a.m. at Cross of Calvary in Olivia.
- Friday, May 3 Gloria Dei in Redwood Falls
- Saturday, May 4, SWO Convention at Gloria Dei.

Inside This Edition

"A Word from Your Synodical President"	2
A Message from Pastor Heather	3
Mission Community/Justice	4
Mission Growth/Discipleship & Mission Action/Stewardship	5
Prayers & Conference Liasons	6
From the Women of the ELCA Blog	7
2024 Spring Conference Gatherings	8
2023-24 Synodical Board	9

“A Word from Your Synodical President”

A WORD FROM YOUR PRESIDENT...

Words from your President.....

By the time you read this, Christmas will be over, but as we anticipate Christ's birth, we usually have snow on the ground here in Minnesota. So without the snow, it does not feel like Christmas time.

We see the decorations, hear the Christmas music, and the Christmas cards are coming. Some of you would have made cookies and held Christmas parties already. The children are getting excited for their programs, Santa and getting presents. Dad and Mom are busy shopping.

I, myself, have a heavy heart. I have been hearing and reading about how non-believers want to take “CHRIST” out of Christmas. It breaks my heart to hear people say “Happy Holidays” or “Merry Xmas”.

What can we do to help keep Christ in Christmas:

1 - Read the story of Jesus' birth...Luke 1:26-38, Luke 2:1-7, Matthew 1:18-25, Luke 2:8-21, Mathhew 2:1-12 and Mark 1:14-15. Joseph and Mary did not have much, but they had each other and their new baby.

2 -Attend church...there is nothing like church on Christmas eve. The music, and pastor's message and the feeling that comes over us as we think about the birth of Christ.

3 - Shop the holiday sales for others...what a wonderful feeling, when we can shop for someone in need. Why does buying gifts for other people keep Christ in Christmas? Because Christ himself urges us to give! Luke 6:38 “Give and it will be given to you”.

4 - Donate money...support your favorite organization. This is an opportunity to share the love of Jesus.

5 - Donate Items...you don't need to have money to buy new items. Donate gently used items to local shelters. Remember the abundance that God has blessed us with and out of a heart of thankfulness, choose to share God's love with others through the donation of items we no longer use or need.

6 - Volunteer your time...at church, a shelter or another event serving others this Christmas. Visit a nursing home, go Christmas caroling, or just check on an elderly person in your neighborhood.

7 - Listen to Christian Christmas music...most of us like to sing along, so as you sing these Christmas songs, sing them as if you are praising Christ.

8 - Read a Christmas story...read a favorite book. Read to a child.

9 - Literally give the Gift of Jesus...be nice to someone, pray for each other, write a letter, just give someone a hug. Let us say “MERRY CHRISTMAS”.

Just remember to keep “CHRIST” IN CHRISTMAS!!!! This was something I just needed to talk about.

Now I can say Happy Year, 2024! May the Lord grant each and everyone of you a blessed new year.

The SW MN Synodical board is busy planning the 2024 Convention, May 4, 2024, in Redwood Falls, at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church. So please put the date on your calendar and plan to bring a friend or two. We will be working on the convention packets soon. These go out by email to each unit president and secretary. If your email has changed please let Secretary, Gwen Degner know.

April is a busy month with Conference Gatherings and most of you have already been making plans, be sure to get the information to me and the secretary.

I have to apologize for my absence since my surgery in September. My health has not been good, but thanks to all your prayers and thoughts, I am slowly feeling better and with God's help, I will be back feeling better than ever.

I also wanted to let everyone know that I have a new email address. It's (ilenepen45@gmail.com) Please use my new email address to email me instead of my old one. Thank you.

*Ilene Penk,
your SWMN Synodical President*



Message from our SW MN Synod Minister



A Message from Pastor Heather

As we enter our winter season here in Minnesota, as the hours of daylight seem so short, as we feel the colder winds creep in, we begin to

watch the weather for news about snowstorms. Snow is such a normal, typical expected part of our Minnesota winters. Whether we look forward to the snow or not, it is a background of many of our experiences. Remember going sledding as a child and the exhilaration of zipping down the hill with your friends? Or maybe you remember making snow forts and snow angels in your yard. Perhaps you are someone who has snowshoed or skied as your winter activity. Snow is a part of our lives here, where we live each day. But often when we think of the Bible, we don't generally think of snow. We think of a land of vineyards and dusty roads, olive trees and desert. Now we may think of a land, Israel, torn apart by war. But when we think about the Bible and the places of the Bible, we don't normally imagine winter and snow. YET, the Bible does mention snow and it does actually snow in Israel, though mainly more in the higher elevations and the mountains. Sometimes snow in the Bible is a sign of holiness and purity, like we hear in Psalm 51, verse 7: "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow." Snow, perfect new snow, indeed can remind us of holiness and a fresh start as this line from Psalm 51 reminds us. Also in the Bible, snow and rain are signs of God's promise, as we hear in the Prophet Isaiah Chapter 55, verses 10 and 11: "As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it." Snow and rain come down into our world nourishing the ground so that life can continue to grow. God's promise is like the snow and rain providing for us, making the world flourish, not returning empty.

During these next snowy months, as you perhaps are out enjoying the snow or even as you are out shoveling the driveway or sitting home while avoiding a blizzard, remember that snow can be a sign of God's presence and God's promises.

Pastor Heather Culuris

SW MN Synod Minister for Engaging Leaders

Email: Heather.culuris@swmnelca.org

EDITORS CORNER:

Note for Units and Conferences: Please send me special Items that may be of interest to others in our Synod. I don't guarantee to have room in the Communicator or on the Website for everything but, I will try to put out there what I can. Stay in contact with your Liaisons or send items direct to swmnelca@gmail.com

Jane Tongen



Jerusalem Wakes Up Under A Blanket Of Snow

BOARD COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS 2023-2024

MISSION ACTION (Stewardship) Noreen Beranek,
Carolyn Enstad , & Carmen Maus

MISSION COMMUNITY (Justice) Connie Dallmann,
Kathy Harwick, Barb Borth

MISSION GROWTH (Discipleship)
Branda Danielson, Karen Skarphol

SYNOD NOMINATING COMMITTEE LIAISON:
Kathy Harwick

ADMINISTRATION/FINANCE

Ilene Penk, Jane Leitzman, Gwen Degner,
Karen Quistorff

Always keep our Board in your prayers
Grant them the gift of effective communication.
Help them to listen attentively to each other
and to the needs of our Synod. Guide Their
words and actions so that they convey Your love
and truth. May their discussions be filled with
grace, fostering an atmosphere of open dialogue
and understanding. Amen.



Mission Community/Justice



MISSION COMMUNITY
Congregational units are the largest expression of Women of the ELCA and are the heart of the organization. This past November for Thankoffering Sunday,

our local WELCA unit, Peace Lutheran of Cosmos, observed the day with leading the worship service. Displayed over the backs of the pews were many of the 132 quilts that our quilting group made during the past year. It was strikingly beautiful to walk in to our sanctuary to see the quilts opened up. These quilts go to many places that have a need in addition to Lutheran World Relief: places such as women's shelters, police & fire departments, local shut-ins to name a few. Also, the group makes a quilt for each of the graduating seniors in our congregation. When the worship is over, the congregants grab the quilts and in short order have them folded & put in the waiting boxes for shipment. After this the group served egg



bake, french toast bake & cinnamon rolls for coffee hour. This day was surely an example of the purpose statement of WELCA in action. The hours spent in service and fellowship are many and varied depending on each



congregation's culture and history. Another area of ministry that I became aware of this past September at the Crow River Conference Fall Gathering held at First Lutheran, Litchfield, is the Meeker Area

Ministries. This group is "providing Housing Opportunities for People in Meeker County" (HOPE). It is a non-profit organization guided by people within Meeker County including clergy, support service providers, business people and community members. Their mission is to help the often unseen homeless population in Meeker County to achieve self-sufficiency. They do this by helping people with their immediate need of shelter while they seek employment and permanent housing. They currently maintain 3 apartments in Litchfield: two are one bedroom apartments for individuals or couples and one two bedroom apartment for families in transition. All apartments are simple, yet fully furnished and include cookware and bedding supplies. They are located near support services to help individuals and families attain self-sufficiency. This ministry can be contacted at 320-693-7911, or by mail at 120 N. Sibley Ave., Litchfield MN 55355. Also email meekerareaministries@gmail.com

Connie Dallmann
Mission Community/Justice



Mission Growth/Discipleship

With Christmas behind us, we start the new year remembering the message from Luke... The angels told of the shepherds that Jesus was born. They went to see him and told what the Angels had been said to them about this child. Mary treasured all those things and pondered them in her heart. I remember the birth of my children and the pondering in my own heart. I was so full of thankfulness at the miracle of a healthy birth. That word 'ponder' has a very deep meaning. It is to think about something carefully. Are you thinking about this new year and what it might have in store for you and your family? Have you made a New Years Resolution to eat healthy or make better use of your time? Will you pray faithfully for your neighbors? I ponder my choices and am thankful that I have choices.

We move through the time of Epiphany when Jesus has called his followers and they saw the first miracle at the Wedding at Cana and then many more. They listened to him preach and like us today didn't understand everything he said. Do you feel that way too? I don't understand the war in the Middle East. Why can't we all just get along? Jesus came for all people and died for all people. The Samaritan woman at the well came to believe Jesus, a Jew, was the Messiah she had been told about.

As we travel through the seasons of the church year, we enter the 40 days of Lent, ending with the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Then his Last supper with his disciples and followed by his being sacrificed by hanging on the cross to save you and me from our sins. He died and was buried but he didn't stay in the tomb. He rose again on Easter Sunday which falls on March 31st this year. It seems like a long time since we were celebrating his birth and now, we are left to carry on the message of love.

Please pray for peace on earth. Also pray for your neighbors both here and abroad, who are struggling with war.

Maybe the end times are coming.

Mission Growth/ Discipleship

by Karen Skarphol

Mission Action/Stewardship

FAITHFUL FRIENDS

“[Faithful Friends](#)” is an easy way for you to support Women of the ELCA – automatically! You can start [giving online](#) right now.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

When you sign up for “[Faithful Friends](#),” you choose the amount to be automatically charged to your credit card or automatically withdrawn from your checking account.

“[Faithful Friends](#)” supports the Women of the ELCA general fund, which makes it possible for your churchwide organization to act quickly and flexibly in response to any need that may arise.

Isaiah tells us that God says, “I am about to do a new thing” (43:19a). And “[Faithful Friends](#)” is one way you can help Women of the ELCA be ready for whatever new thing God has in store.



You are Called to be Faithful Friends

Highlights & Special Items



OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

“As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.”

A prayer for the people of Israel and Palestine.

Jesus, walk amongst your people in the great divide happening right now. We pray that peace would fall upon the heads of each person in that land, and those related to those conflict in lands far away. We pray peace would dwell in their hearts, thoughts, and communications.

Prayer for the people in the Ukrainian

Lord God, we ask for you to be with all – especially children who are suffering as the crisis in Ukraine deteriorates. Lord for those who are anxious and fearful, for those who are bereaved, injured or who have lost their lives, and for those who have lost loved ones.

Heavenly Father,
as the Wise Men journeyed towards Bethlehem led by the star, so by your heavenly light, guide the ELCA to walk together with all Christians during this time.

As the Wise Men were united in their worship of Christ, lead us closer to your Son and so to one another, so that we become a sign of the unity that you desire for your Church and the whole creation. We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen

What is Katie’s Fund?

Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. Through Katie’s Fund, Women of the ELCA honors her life by supporting global connections, leadership development and living theology.

2122: Growing Katie’s Fund for the next 100 years

is a one-million-dollar campaign for Katie’s Fund that is designed to support the organization into the next 100 years of mission and ministry.

2122

Growing Katie’s Fund for the next 100 years

CONFERENCE LIAISONS 2023-24

CROW RIVER (CR): Connie Dallmann

GLACIAL RIDGE (GLR): Gwen Degner

GREAT RIVER (GRV): Jane Leitzman and
Barb Borth

LAC QUI PARLE (LQP): Kathy Harwick

LAKELAND (LL): Carmen Maus

MINNESOTA VALLEY (MV): Brenda Danielson

PRAIRIE (PR): Carolyn Enstad

SCENIC VALLEY (SV): Noreen Beranek

SHETEK (SK): Karen Skarphol

WATONWAN RIVER (WR): Ilene Penk

GIFTS THAT SHAPE THE COMMON GOOD

BY EMMA CROSSEN

NOW THERE ARE VARIETIES OF GIFTS, BUT THE SAME SPIRIT; AND THERE ARE VARIETIES OF SERVICES, BUT THE SAME LORD; AND THERE ARE VARIETIES OF ACTIVITIES, BUT IT IS THE SAME GOD WHO ACTIVATES ALL OF THEM IN EVERYONE. TO EACH IS GIVEN THE MANIFESTATION OF THE SPIRIT FOR THE COMMON GOOD. 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-7

STEWARDSHIP OFTEN BEGINS WITH THIS QUESTION – “HOW DO I USE MY GIFTS TO BENEFIT THE COMMON GOOD?” WE EVEN ASK IT OF OTHERS TO HELP THEM GET MORE INVOLVED. HOW CAN SHE USE HER GIFTS TO BENEFIT OUR COMMON GOOD?

WE SHOULD BE CAREFUL, THOUGH, OR ELSE WE’LL USE THIS QUESTION TO AVOID CHANGE.

CONSIDER A WOMEN’S GROUP THAT SAYS THE COMMON GOOD REQUIRES FOUR OFFICERS, MONTHLY BIBLE STUDY, AND AT LEAST TWO ANNUAL FUNDRAISERS. TO SUPPORT THIS “COMMON GOOD,” THEY SET OUT TO FIND WOMEN TO FILL THESE ROLES AND CARRY OUT THESE ACTIVITIES. WHAT HAPPENS IF THE WOMEN IN THIS CONGREGATION ARE TIRED OF DOING BUSINESS MEETINGS BUT LOVE MONTHLY BIBLE STUDY? WHAT IF THEY CAN’T FIND FOUR WOMEN TO SERVE AS OFFICERS BUT THEY DO HAVE NEW WOMEN WHO BRING GIFTS FOR ORGANIZING RETREATS, PLANNING SERVICE PROJECTS, AND BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH PRAYER?

WHAT IF THEY LET THESE NEW GIFTS RESHAPE THEIR VISION OF THE COMMON GOOD? INSTEAD OF NEEDING FOUR OFFICERS, THEY COULD APPOINT A COORDINATING TEAM. THEY MIGHT REVIVE A PRAYER CHAIN THROUGH EMAIL AND FACEBOOK, INVITE MORE WOMEN TO JOIN, AND SEE HOW THOSE PRAYERS SHAPE NEW RELATIONSHIPS. THEY MIGHT REPLACE THE SPRING LUNCHEON WITH AN ANNUAL RETREAT AT A NEARBY STATE PARK.

INSTEAD OF TRYING TO SQUEEZE EACH OTHER’S GIFTS INTO AN OLD VISION OF THE “COMMON GOOD,” WHAT IF THEY ASKED EACH OTHER, “HOW IS MY VISION OF THE COMMON GOOD CHANGING BECAUSE OF THE GIFTS YOU BRING?”

1 CORINTHIANS REMINDS US THAT THE COMMON GOOD HAS MANY EXPRESSIONS. WOMEN OF THE ELCA DESCRIBES THE COMMON GOOD IN BIG, BROAD, LANGUAGE THAT LEAVES ROOM FOR VARIETY AND CHANGE. IN THE WORDS OF OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT: WE COMMIT OURSELVES TO GROW IN FAITH, AFFIRM OUR GIFTS, SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN OUR CALLINGS, ENGAGE IN MINISTRY AND ACTION, AND PROMOTE HEALING AND WHOLENESS IN THE CHURCH, THE SOCIETY, AND THE WORLD. THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO LIVE OUT THIS PURPOSE WITH A VARIETY OF GIFTS, ACTIVITIES, AND SERVICE. AS SCRIPTURE SAYS, “IT IS THE SAME GOD WHO ACTIVATES ALL OF THEM IN EVERYONE.”

JANUARY, WITH A FOCUS ON NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS, IS A PERFECT TIME TO REFLECT ON CHANGE. WHAT WILL BE THE COMMON GOOD FOR YOUR CONGREGATIONAL UNIT IN 2024?

PRAYER: GOD WHO IS ONE, GUIDE US TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH OTHER AND THE GIFTS WE BRING, SO WE CAN FURTHER OUR VISION AND PURSUIT OF THE COMMON GOOD. AMEN.

EMMA CROSSEN PREVIOUSLY SERVED ON THE WOMEN OF THE ELCA STAFF. A VERSION OF THIS DEVOTION APPEARED IN THE MARCH/APRIL 2014 ISSUE OF INTERCHANGE. TO LEARN ABOUT THE GIFTS WE EACH BRING, LOOK AT

GIFTS FOR YOU: OPENING YOUR SPIRITUAL GIFTS.

COPY AND PASTE THE LINK BELOW INTO YOUR WEB SEARCH

[HTTPS://WWW.WOMENOFTHEELCA.ORG/FILEBIN/PDF/RESOURCES/SPIRITUALGIFTS.PDF](https://www.womenoftheelca.org/filebin/pdf/resources/spiritualgifts.pdf)

2024 Spring Conference Gatherings

Conference	Date/Time	Location	Program
Crow River	Saturday, April 20th Registration 8am Brunch at 8:30	Peace Lutheran, Cosmos	Speaker will be from Terebinth Refuge, a shelter for hope & healing.
Glacial Ridge	Monday, April 15 Registration 4:00 pm	Trinity Lutheran, Benson	To Be Announced
Great River	Saturday April 6th		To Be Announced
Lac Qui Parle	Tuesday April 16 8:30 a.m.	Garfield Lutheran, rural Madison	To Be Announced
Lakeland	Not planned at this time		
Minnesota Valley	Saturday April 13 th Registration at 11:30 lunch at 12	Grace Lutheran in Brownton	To Be Announced
Prairie	Saturday, April 20, 8:30 a.m.	Bethany Lutheran, Arco	theme is "ANGELS AMONG US". Our speaker will be Scott Gottschalk
Scenic Valley	Wednesday April 24, 2024 Registration 5 p.m.	St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Evan	
Shetek	Saturday, April 20 th snow date April 27 th 9:30 am to noon	Jasper Evangelical Lutheran Church, Jasper	Allan Bakke speaking on Human Trafficking.
Watonwan River	Not planned at this time		

Please reach out to your Conference Officers if you would like more information about Gatherings.

SYNODICAL BOARD 2023-2024

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Elected 2023 for one year term
Served 1 year-with reelection in 2024 for 2 yr. term

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May be re-elected for 1 yr. in 2024

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Augustana Lutheran/Gibbon
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Total years served in 2024: 4 years

At this time there is one open
Board Member At Large position

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