



Report of Women of the ELCA

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25 YEARS TOGETHER IN CHRIST

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¹ Executive Committee

² Budget and Finance Committee

³ Constitution Committee

⁴ Programs and Communication Committee

Advisors

Pr. M. Wyvetta Bullock, *executive for administration*, Office of the Presiding Bishop
 Mr. Dan Joy, Lutheran Men in Mission
 Bp. Wilma S. Kucharek, bishop of the Slovak Zion Synod and representative of the Conference of Bishops

Leadership Staff

Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*
 Ms. Deborah Calvert, *associate executive director*
 Ms. Gabriela Contreras, *director for meeting planning*
 Ms. Emma Crossen, *director for stewardship and development*
 Ms. Inez Torres Davis, *director for justice*
 Ms. Kate Elliott, *editor*, Gather
 Ms. Ann Hightower, *executive administrative assistant to the executive director*
 Ms. Terri Lackey, *managing editor*, Gather
 Ms. Elizabeth McBride, *director for intergenerational programs and editor/designer*, Café
 Ms. Valora K. Starr, *director for discipleship*
 Ms. Eva James Yeo, *director for membership*

Constitutional Responsibilities

Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) is a separately incorporated, self-supporting ministry that operates within the framework of the constitution and policies of this church. (See constitutional provision 17.50., related bylaws, and continuing resolution 17.50.A11. which are available in Section XII of the e-binder and *Pre-Assembly Report*). The program and structure of Women of the ELCA are defined in the constitutions and bylaws of both Women of the ELCA and the ELCA. In fulfilling its mandates, Women of the ELCA is committed to working interdependently with all churchwide units and Lutheran, ecumenical, and inter-church agencies and organizations. The women's organization functions within ELCA financial and personnel policies. The women's organization is responsible for establishing and maintaining its finances.

The constitution of Women of the ELCA defines the organization's purpose, principles of organization, governance processes, and responsibilities. The triennial convention is the highest legislative authority of the organization. A 21-member elected executive board makes decisions on behalf of the organization between triennial conventions. An annual consultation is held with the synodical organizations through the Conference of Synodical Presidents. The churchwide president either attends or sends a representative to each synodical convention.

Report of Work 2011–2013

Women of the ELCA functions on a three-year cycle, with the current triennium running from 2011 to 2014. The Ninth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA will occur in July 2014, producing newly elected officers and board members, among other things.

Those who are active in Women of the ELCA experience a strong community of women who walk together on their faith journeys. No doubt women want their daughters, nieces, granddaughters, and younger friends to be supported by a strong community of faithful women too. The reality is that whatever their age, women want to come together with other women to discuss their faith. Women of the ELCA provides a place for that community to gather, a place where fellowship, friendship, and support are nurtured.

On-Going Ministries and Resources

The women's organization continues its strong ministries in global education, scholarships, racial justice, grants, Bible study, cross-cultural immersion, and stewardship. The organization's award-winning publications—*Gather*, *Interchange (Intercambio)*, *Café*, and its website—support and inspire the women of this church. In addition to deriving financial support through offerings, Women of the ELCA has an annual appeal for its Katharina von Bora Luther Fund (Katie's Fund). Leadership training is offered annually to synodical presidents, newly elected synodical treasurers, and select networks.

Bold Women's Day—observed annually on the fourth Sunday of February—celebrates all Lutheran women who have acted or are acting boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ. Whether in a group observance or individually, women across this church recognize, honor, and support the boldness God has placed in God's followers.

Women of the ELCA celebrated its 25th anniversary from June 2012 through May 2013. The organization launched a special 25th anniversary appeal with 50 percent of the total offerings designed for the ELCA Malaria Campaign; those dollars will be earmarked for medicine, clean water, and advocacy efforts. A limited edition pewter Christmas ornament celebrating the anniversary is available, with \$6 of the \$12 purchase price going to the appeal. As of June 10, 2013, total giving to the appeal was \$122,120.85. An anniversary trip to Liberia occurred late in 2012, with participants meeting with 1,000 women in congregations, many of whom are connected with Women of the ELCA through the long-standing grants made available through the organization. The delegation met with Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Ms. Leymah Gbowee, peacemaker, and Ms. Vabah Gayflor, Liberia's Minister of Labor, among other dignitaries. Celebrations and observances of the anniversary have occurred across the church in a variety of ways.

Awards are made annually within the Women of the ELCA grants program and the Women of the ELCA scholarships program.

Women of the ELCA's health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls, was launched in July 2005, and the annual grants program continues to support domestic and international efforts addressing the emotional, spiritual, and physical health of women and children. A \$50,000 seed grants program for congregational units of Women of the ELCA was launched in 2010, providing grants of up to \$1,000 for raising awareness, providing education, and promoting wellness among women and girls. Each program receiving a grant brings together women in a congregational unit and

the community, meeting the goals of the health initiative. *Planting Seeds for a Healthy Tomorrow* gathers together the programs funded in the first year of the seed grants program, offering the whole church new ways in which to support the health and wellness of women and girls. Like other program resources offered by Women of the ELCA, *Planting Seeds for a Healthy Tomorrow* is available as a free download from womenoftheelca.org.

More than 40 program resources are available as free downloadable PDFs. Perfect for congregational units, adult forums, retreats, workshops, and the like, each resource comes with a “how to use this resource” section. Many include bibliographies for further learning. Topics are wide-ranging, including how to lead a Bible study, kitchen table philanthropy, the faces of grief, opening your spiritual gifts, prayer, practicing resurrection, and understanding and responding to human trafficking. More than half of these free resources are also available in Spanish.

The organization continues to build on its communication tools that support the community of women. *Bold Connections*, a monthly e-newsletter launched in 2009, provides regular, timely news and information that connects women in the pews to the whole of Women of the ELCA, to the organization that is larger than their congregations and synodical women’s organizations. A blog, also launched in 2009, helps connect issues, events, and trends with the mission, purpose, and ministries of Women of the ELCA. In 2013 the Associated Church Press named the blog “Best in Class” in Social Media. Both can be accessed through womenoftheelca.org. The organization, its magazine *Gather*, and its electronic magazine *Café* are active in social media through Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest.

In 2011 Women of the ELCA launched *Daily Grace*, an on-the-go companion for the faith journey. *Daily Grace*, an iPhone app, offers brief reflections every day. This summer *Daily Grace* becomes available in an Android format. The daily reflections are also available at womenoftheelca.org.

Women across the ELCA have a long tradition of gathering regularly in Bible study through the women’s organization. Today is no different. In *Gather*, the magazine of Women of the ELCA, a nine-session study is offered each September through May and a three-session study is offered in the summer issues. The 2013 summer Bible study, “All Who Hunger Gather Gladly,” is written by Ms. Audrey Novak Riley, who works with ELCA World Hunger. When the hungry crowd gathered, Jesus told his friends to give the people something to eat, and then he made sure they could. He helped his friends help the people when they needed food. Modern-day friends of Jesus can still count on his help. This three-part study is available as a free download from womenoftheelca.org.

The 2013–2014 study written by the Rev. Kay Ward, a bishop in The Moravian Church, is “In Good Company: Stories of Biblical Women.” She has invited nine women from the Old Testament, several from the New Testament, and a handful of women she knows to stop in for a visit. Their stories will draw readers into Bible study, worship with the Psalms, and provide opportunities for readers to tell their own stories.

Gather is now available in a digital format on womenoftheelca.org and on iPad and Android tablets. Search for “Gather magazine” in Google Play or on the iTunes store to download the app and a free copy of the magazine. It’s available through Kindle as well. The June and July/August issues are available for free download. Beginning in September, only print subscribers will be able to access the magazine digitally.

Café (boldcafe.org) is a free, monthly electronic magazine for younger women. Readers include pastors, seminary and college students, and other young women who use *Café* as a Bible study resource individually or in groups. Many also use it to learn how our Lutheran Christian faith informs contemporary issues. Honored multiple times with a “Best in Class” Award of Excellence from the Associated Church Press in the Independent Web site or E-zine category, *Café* is also available as a monthly podcast.

The organization participated in three significant ways at the ELCA Youth Gathering in July 2012: facilitating a workshop led by a grantee of the women’s organization, hosting an interactive center hot spot, and hosting a spa space for adult leaders. The latter was the most successful and allowed direct contact with about 1,000 adult leaders, the bulk of whom got to know Women of the ELCA in a whole new way.

A new line of sterling silver jewelry featuring the organization’s logo is now available, created by Ms. Deirdre Olson of Deirdre Handcrafted Jewelry (Minneapolis, Minn.). At womenoftheelca.org click on “shop now” to view and purchase a necklace, charm, pin, or earrings.

Participants are actively supporting Lutheran World Relief’s 2013 Quilt Challenge, designed to grow the number of quilts made in a year by 25 percent. Churchwide staff members of Women of the ELCA are participating too, devoting time each week to creating quilt tops and assembling quilts.

Eighth Triennial Convention

The Eighth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA was held July 12–14, 2011, in Spokane, Wash. More than 400 delegates from across the organization conducted the business of the organization. Officers and a churchwide executive board for the 2011–2014 triennium were elected and a budget for FY2012 was approved. Ms. Jennifer Michael, of Pensacola, Fla., was elected president. Serving with her as officers are Ms. JoAnn Fuchs of West Columbia, Texas, vice president; Ms. Jackie Wilson, Hot Springs, Ark., secretary; and Ms. Ely Smith, Fircrest, Wash., treasurer. The Rev. Jessica R. Crist, bishop of the Montana Synod and chair of the Conference of Bishops, preached at the opening worship, and the Rev. Wilma S. Kucharek, bishop of the Slovak Zion Synod, led the Bible study.

At the convention delegates endorsed the 1,000 Days Movement addressing the 1,000 day window of opportunity in good nutrition for pregnant mothers and infants, from conception through to the second birthday. *Women of Faith for 1,000 Days* is the name of the ecumenical women's effort for this that is being coordinated by Bread for the World staff. Part of Women of the ELCA's commitment is that each woman in this organization would have 1,000 conversations about nutritional health needs in 1,000 days.

The executive board received a referral from the Eighth Triennial Convention on gender justice that asked the board to consider United Nations Security Council Resolution 1988, and in response

- The organization joined the International Campaign to Stop Rape & Gender Violence in Conflict (stoprapeinconflict.org)
- The board encouraged all participants to take the campaign's pledge
- The board encouraged all synodical women's organizations to advocate for gender justice through and within their companion synod relationships.

The triennial convention offering was \$84,932 with two ELCA ministries receiving \$21,233 each: the Evangelical Lutheran Coalition for Mission in Appalachia and ELCA Outdoor Ministries. The remaining portion of the offering was designated for the ongoing churchwide ministries of Women of the ELCA.

Ninth Triennial Convention

The Ninth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA will be held July 22–24, 2014, in Charlotte, N.C. More than 400 delegates from across this church will deal with a range of issues while conducting the business of the organization. Officers and a churchwide executive board for the 2014–2017 triennium will be elected and a budget for FY2015 will be considered. The 2014 Triennial Convention offering will be designated as follows: 50 percent to Women of the ELCA for ongoing ministries, 25 percent to Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2014) and 25 percent to On Eagle's Wings Ministries, a North Carolina-based organization that restores women and girls who have been sexually exploited through the commercial sex industry. These designations were made by action of the churchwide executive board and are in response to memorials passed at the Eighth Triennial Convention in 2011.

2011 Triennial Gathering

More than 2,000 women assembled for the 2011 Triennial Gathering, July 14–17, 2011 in Spokane, Wash. Under the theme of "Renew, Respond, Rejoice!" women gathered for workshops, featured speakers, worship, servant events, and more. The two featured speakers were Lutheran peacemaker Ms. Leymah Gbowee and Episcopal author Ms. Nora Gallagher. Worship leaders for the gathering included the Rev. M. Wyvetta Bullock, the Rev. Susan Briehl, Ms. Jane Redmont, the Rev. Mary Louise Frenchman, and the Rev. Megan Torgerson.

The women's organization presented \$10,420 in gift cards and 11,160 minutes of phone cards to Transitions, a Spokane-area organization that works to end homelessness and poverty for women and children, and The Women's Hearth, a day program run by Transitions that provides shelter and educational programs to women who are homeless. Women of the ELCA also presented the organizations with 600 health kits and hundreds of school supplies. The Women's Hearth received grants from Women of the ELCA in 2009 and 2010.

Fifty-eight clothing support kits, nearly 800 bags of socks, and 2,225 prayer shawls went to Lutheran Community Services Northwest for distribution to Spokane-area hospitals. The clothes and prayer shawls are given to women and children affected by rape and domestic violence. Women of the ELCA also presented 80 completed quilts to Lutheran World Relief as part of the gathering's global gift.

2014 Triennial Gathering

The Triennial Gathering, which follows the convention July 24–27, 2014, will bring together more than 2,000 women of all ages under the theme, “of many generations.” Registration opens this September.

Major Directions for 2013–2016

Building upon its strengths, Women of the ELCA will continue its mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ by

- Communicating ways and means to develop and nurture relationships
- Building community and relationships
- Enabling authentic and diverse relationships
- Strategically developing resources that support the mission and purpose
- Building up healthy, balanced communities
- Increasing financial support to the organization
- Equipping disciples to boldly live out their faith.

In doing so, Women of the ELCA will live out its purpose: 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, society, and the world.

Ms. Jennifer Michael, *president*, 2011–2014 triennium

Ms. Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*