

SNOW Newsletter

From the Desk of the President

Special points of interest:

- Leadership Training
- Seminary Stipend
- Silent Auction
- Conference Spring Gathering Highlights
- Katie's Fund Grant Supports Unnamed No More
- Faith Lutheran Bagley
- Prayer Request
- LWR Pick-up Info.



Greetings dear sisters in Christ,

We've been encouraging women of the ELCA from the NW MN Synod to consider attending the 13th Triennial in Des Moines, IA for the past several months and July will be here before you know it. There is still time to register, however all registrations must be completed by June 21st with the Gathering dates to be July 16th through the 19th. Because of the success of the last two synod gathering silent auction events we have a sizeable amount of money to be divided equally amongst those attending but until registration closing date we cannot determine how much will be available

to each attendee as we will not have a final tally of the registrations. In order to be eligible, it will be necessary for you to provide proof of registration to me on or before July 1st after which time we will disburse funds. All registrations must be made online at welcatg.org. Each attendee is responsible for making their own lodging arrangements with hotel information also available on that same website. I do have one registrant who is looking for someone who is interested in sharing a room. Please contact me for additional information if you are interested in sharing a room with her. We also have partnered with the Eastern North Dakota synod to provide bus transportation to and from Des Moines. Information about the cost and the contact information is on our website.

Our website has undergone a facelift! The easiest way to access our new website (which we are still working on with synod staff to make improvements) is to go to the NWMN Synod of the ELCA website, click on the "Ministries" word found on the left side of the first page and select Synod Women's Organization. Searching NWMN Women of the ELCA may take you to our old site which is no longer being updated and the information you are looking for may not be available there.

Mark your calendars and send in your registrations for our own convention/gathering at Trinity Lutheran Church in Crookston on September 18th & 19th. We have a wonderful lineup of breakout speakers and an exciting keynote speaker, Gaye Lindfors, who has promised to bring God's message to us mixed with enough humor to be able to laugh a bit at ourselves. We have an interactive quilting project taking place at our September convention. In keeping with our theme, Button up your faith, we are asking that each of you bring a button with you to convention and sometime throughout the event you will have the opportunity to hand sew your button somewhere on the quilted project. A drawing will be held before the closing worship service and one lucky lady will be taking the quilted project home. Don't forget your silent auction item donation! All registration and related information is available on our new website. Note that we listened to comments related to ala carte registration so you can register for the entire two days' activities or only those in which you are most interested.

On behalf of the board, we hope to see all of you there!

Carol Balk
NWMN SWO President



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Spring Conference Gathering Highlights



Conference 3 held its Spring Gathering on Wednesday, April 25, 2026, at Sand Hill Church in rural Climax. Special guest speaker Nola Smith shared highlights from her recent trip to Tanzania. Nola was one of 15 women and teens from the United States, Tanzania, and Cameroon chosen to participate in last July's Global Engagement Trip. This experience was part of the Women of the ELCA Health for Women and Girls Program, which supports education and mentorship opportunities for women and girls. Nola spoke about witnessing God's work in the lives of the young women and communities they visited. Her stories were both inspiring and encouraging. She also reminded attendees of the importance of supporting Women of the ELCA. Ongoing donations are essential to continue these impactful programs and opportunities for women and girls around the world..



Conference 4 held its Spring Gathering on May 2, 2026 at Calvary Lutheran Church, Park Rapids. Their theme was "Journey of Faith, Be the Light". Sixty women were warmly welcomed by smiling hostesses, red geraniums, and red-and-white gingham tablecloths. Guests enjoyed mini-scones and coffee while visiting during registration. Guest speaker Miss Minnesota 2025, Emma Vrieze, a nursing student at MSUM, shared her journey to becoming Miss Minnesota, including the joys and challenges of competition and her role over the past year. She spoke about how her faith shaped and strengthened her journey and inspired those in attendance. Emma also blessed the group with a beautiful song. The morning was filled with fellowship, encouragement, and a celebration of faith.



Conference 5 Spring Gathering was held on April 22, 2026 at Zion Lutheran Church, Twin Valley, MN. With the theme "Faith, Hope, Love," Guest speakers Sheyna Strommen and her son Clint shared an inspiring message, "Hope in the Hard Times—Raising a Special Needs Child." Sheyna reflected on their journey following Clint's diagnosis of LAMA2 muscular dystrophy, sharing both challenges and moments of grace that revealed God's presence. Grounded in scripture, their story highlighted faith in everyday life—balancing caregiving, work, and celebrating life's milestones. She reminded attendees that simple acts of love and kindness are powerful expressions of God's work. She closed with the words from Romans 5: "...and hope does not disappoint."



Conference 7 Spring Gathering was held on April 13, 2026 at Sverdrup Lutheran Church of Underwood. Centered on the theme "Rebuilding Your Life" and 2 Corinthians 5:17, Pastor Zinta Sundby shared a meaningful devotional, comparing the new life of spring to the new life we have in Christ. Attendees welcomed representatives from the Welcome House thrift store and Barbara House of Fergus Falls, a faith-based transitional recovery home for women. Wendy Erlandson, Tammy Anderson, and Julie Scott shared how Barbara House supports women through personalized plans, spiritual guidance, recovery programs, and help securing permanent housing. A former resident, Lilly, offered a moving testimony of her journey through addiction and hardship, and the life-changing impact of Barbara House. Conference 7 churches also contributed by donating needed supplies to support this important ministry.



May is MMIWGR Awareness Month



Engage in advocacy for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Relatives (MMIWGR)

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Relatives (MMIWGR) movement advocates for an end to the violence against and raise awareness about the alarming rates of disappearances and murders of Indigenous women and girls. Review the resources listed on our website.

Visit the MMIW page on welca.org

Engage in advocacy by accessing a list of resources, a Bible study by Deborah Nyquist and Shannon Klescewski, a downloadable toolkit, and blogs by the Rev. Wanda Frenchman, Prairie Rose Semiole, and Jennifer Hockenbery. Visit the Women of the ELCA MMIW page.



NWMN Synod WELCA Leadership Day! Friday, October 30, 2026

Leaders from units, conferences, and the synod are invited to join us. We're here to provide the support and resources you need to succeed in your role.

Join us at:

Little Norway Church
10802 423rd St SE
Fertile, MN

Guest Speaker: Pastor Genelle Netland

No Charge, and lunch will be provided!
More details in the coming months.

To Register: Contact Marlene Block (SWO Board Member)
Marleneb@gvtel.com or call 218-289-4046 by Oct. 15th

Seminary Stipend Fund



Give a gift of Gratitude in 2026

The Seminary Stipend Fund provides a way for you to show your support and gratitude for our ELCA women seminarians. Monies donated to this fund will be collected throughout the year, divided equally and give to each student seminarian as a gift in January 2027 to use as they wish.

Donations can be sent to the SWO Treasurer Write "Seminary Stipend for Women" on the memo line or use the Offering Form A

Send to: Janet Olson
PO Box 567
Warroad, MN 56763

Thank you for your kindness and generosity!

Engage in Advocacy for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Relatives



Women of the ELCA has a history of concern and advocacy to stop human trafficking and domestic violence. Our concern extends especially to the need to recognize the epidemic of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Relatives (MMIWGR) who are trafficked, abused, and murdered at rates much higher than the national average. WELCA, alongside the ELCA, has committed itself to "...advocacy for and being in solidarity with Tribal nations, MMIWGR organizations, families, and friends who have long been searching for their loved ones—Indigenous women, girls, and relatives—who have gone missing or who have been murdered." (Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to American Indian and Alaska Native People, p. 4)

May 5th is a day marked for planned recognition and commitment. Sunday, May 3rd, is the Sunday that many congregations will encourage advocacy for MMIW. We invite you to consider how you will recognize this situation and advocate for change.

Deborah Nyquist has provided some ideas for sharing your concern and advocating for solutions. They are:

- ◆ Invite church members to wear red on Sunday, May 3rd, as a visible sign of their recognition for missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and relatives.
- ◆ Fill the sanctuary with red, the color of remembrance, to show relatives and families they are not forgotten. Include prayers for individuals and families who are affected in your liturgy.
- ◆ Host or participate in a community prayer vigil. You can join Women of the ELCA's virtual prayer vigil at 7pm on May 5th, a vigil for MMIW – Women of the ELCA
- ◆ You can hold your own in-person vigil using this template and liturgy. "Candlelight Vigil for Murdered and Missing Women," written by Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy. Download the vigil.
- ◆ Join or coordinate a local MMIWR awareness session using this Bible Study created by Deborah Nyquist and Shannon Klescewski. This Bible study was created for the Alaska Synod Assembly on April 24-26, 2026. Download the Bible study Powerpoint.
- ◆ Post a photo of yourself wearing red on May 5th to social media with hashtags like #MMIW, #MMIWG2S, and #NoMoreStolenSisters
- ◆ Facilitate a community meeting to develop paths of MMIWR advocacy and assist in bringing relatives home: actively aiding families through search, financial support, supporting legislation using resources found here.

This crisis, of course, is not limited to one day in the calendar year. Thus, neither should our commitment be only for one day of the year. May 5th is the beginning of a new year of advocacy. Please consider all the ways you can pray for justice and work towards safety for Indigenous women and girls. For further reading, please read these two blogs written by Indigenous members of Women of the ELCA.

- * Blog 1: Honoring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, girls and relatives (MMIWGR) May 5 by Wanda Frenchman
- * Blog 2: The Power of the Red Dress: Honoring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIWR) by Prairie Rose Seminole

By Jennifer Hockenbery

Dr. Jennifer Hockenbery is interim executive director for Women of the ELCA and editor of the Journal of Lutheran Ethics.



KATIE'S FUND GRANT SUPPORTS UNNAMED NO MORE, A MINISTRY RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month (NCAPM). This month focuses on raising awareness, supporting families, and preventing child abuse through community efforts. Child abuse happens more often in our congregations than we may realize. Many people in our churches have been harmed. Our children are at risk, and some members are living in unsafe homes or relationships. Too often, churches respond to these issues with silence or denial. Sometimes, the church even adds to the harm by moving predators, silencing children and vulnerable adults, or making things harder for survivors.

The ELCA has recently made child and vulnerable adult protection a key Christian responsibility. In November 2025, the ELCA adopted a social message on Child Protection. Bishop Curry highlighted the urgency of this message as part of his Pastoral Message on Child Protection.

Many congregations lack the structure needed to put the social message's recommendations into practice. Unnamed No More, A Lutheran Safe Church Ministry, helps fill this gap. Founded by Staci Stought, Pastoral Care Minister at Messiah Lutheran Church in Columbus, Ohio, Unnamed No More helps faith communities talk openly and respond to gender-based violence. "How can churches faithfully respond to abuse?"

Staci Stought founded this safe church ministry while pursuing her degree at Luther Seminary. Stought is a retired Sexual Assault police officer with specialized forensic experience in child abuse. She uses her background in child abuse investigations, offender safety planning, and child protection to combine professional knowledge with faith-based reflection for the church. What began as an answer to a final assignment question in an Old Testament course, grew into a Bible study and is now an organization. Unnamed No More's mission is to equip Christian leaders and congregations to minister to people affected by abuse, and to address harm from a faith perspective. Unnamed No More partners with congregations through a range of ministries, including Bible studies, sermons, ministry workshops, Sex Offender Safety Planning, Pastoral Care Support, and helping churches to follow through with the recommendations of the ELCA Social Message on Child Protection.

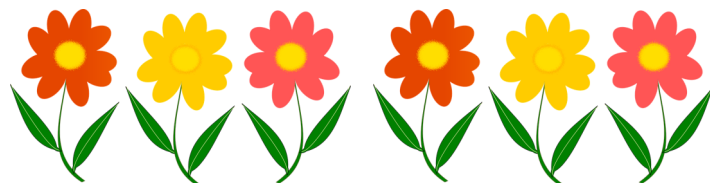
Unnamed No More focuses on caring for people affected by abuse, including those currently experiencing abuse, those healing from past harm, those who have caused harm, and vulnerable adults and children. The ministry uses trauma-informed theology to address these issues in ways that avoid retraumatizing survivors or ignoring harm. It aims to reflect God's justice, accountability, and hope.

Currently, 15 Lutheran congregations have engaged in more than 40 sermons, trainings, Bible studies, and workshops. In 2024, the ministry was selected for a Lutheran SEEDS Fellowship through Luther Seminary. Unnamed No More received a Women of the ELCA (WELCA) Katie's Fund grant in 2025. Unnamed No More envisions a future in which churches are no longer silent in the face of gender-based violence. Rooted in the call to "consider, take counsel, and speak out" (Judges 19:30) and grounded in Christ's promise of abundant life (John 10:10), this ministry works toward sanctuaries that are safe, accountable, and life-giving for all.

Learn more about Unnamed No More.

Apply for a Katie's Fund Grant: The Katie's Fund Grant will have two annual grants cycles. The first cycle will open on June 30th each year, with all completed applications due by September 1st. The second cycle will open on November 1st each year, with all completed applications due by February 1st.

by Staci Stought



Nola Smith Featured in Gather Magazine



Ladies, be sure to read the article in the summer edition of Gather Magazine! Board member Nola Smith shares about her trip to Tanzania last summer as part of a churchwide group. Many may remember Nola from our fall convention, where she wore her bright orange and black African dress. During the trip, the group worked with women and young girls, highlighting the importance of education, networking, and faith. You can find Nola's article on page 22. Congratulations, Nola, on being selected for this meaningful experience and for contributing to Gather Magazine. You make the women of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod proud and inspire us through your faithful example.



You're Invited!

It was encouraging to hear during roll call at this spring's gatherings that, at each of the four I attended, participation had increased since last fall. While this is wonderful news, it was also noted that approximately 40% of churches in each conference were not represented. This sparked meaningful discussion at our recent board meeting about how to better include more women. One idea that emerged is the **"Buddy System."** We invite those who regularly attend gatherings—or any WELCA events—to personally reach out to a neighboring church or woman and invite them to join you. You may hear that a church no longer has a WELCA group—but the truth is, they do. Every woman who is a member of an ELCA congregation is part of Women of the ELCA. Be sure to share that message and extend a warm welcome. Be a Mary Magdalene and share the good news! Many of us became involved because someone invited us—now it's our turn to do the same.



Faith Lutheran Church of Bagley in Action



Blood Drive Success—Faith Lutheran Church WELCA of Bagley hosted its annual blood drive on March 5, exceeding expectations. While the goal was 37 units, an impressive 46 units of blood were collected from donors ranging from high school students to those over 85 years old. Many donors were inspired by personal connections, while others, like Alice Eischens, have faithfully given for years. Alice donated her 80th pint that day and continues to give to help others. Thank you to all who donated and supported this life-saving effort. To participate in a future drive, visit Vitalant.org or call 877-258-4825. Pictured is Linda Kaul and Mary Hood, and Alice Eischens.

Ode to Spring—Faith Lutheran Church of Bagley hosted its 9th Annual Ode to Spring on April 18, featuring a "Master Gardener" theme and a full house of attendees. Guests enjoyed a delicious brunch served by the "Men of Faith," dressed in white shirts and black bow ties. The "Sometime Singers"—Cathy Feeney, Jeanine Brand, Becky Agnew, and Chris Ross—provided lively entertainment with music, costume changes, and a garden-themed program, including the "Johnny Appleseed" table grace. Guest speaker Joyce Rairdon, a Master Gardener, shared helpful tips on planting and plant care. Special guests included current and past NWMN WELCA presidents, Carol Balk and Marilyn Grandstrand. The day included fellowship, great food, gardening glove favors, and many door prizes for all to enjoy.





Coming Soon!
Summer Retreat for Women!
Sabbath at the Lake
Tuesday, August 18th, 2026
Trinity Point on Maple Lake
Mentor, MN

“CASTING YOUR BURDENS ON HIM”
Special speaker: Marilyn Grafstrom,
Roseau, MN

Registration cost: \$30.00
8:45 – 3:00

All are invited for a day of praise,
relaxation and inspiration!
Lunch Catered by Erickson Catering
Fertile, MN

Accepting Nominations for Mary Magdalene Award

We are now accepting nominations for the Mary Magdalene Award. We will be honoring Women from our conferences at our annual convention. These special and treasured women will be given a rose, a certificate and a monetary donation to a charity of their choice that is associated with the Women of the ELCA.

The nomination form can be found on the Synod website:
www.nwmnsynod.org.

Please send your nomination form to:

Luella Thom

PO Box 103 Carlos, MN 56319

Phone: 320-815-7701 or email: thom17@wisper-wireless.com



SILENT AUCTION BASKETS NEEDED



Once again we will offer a Silent Auction at the WELCA SWO Convention on September 18 & 19 at Trinity Lutheran Church, Crookston, MN. All WELCA units are encouraged to create baskets to contribute to this auction. The baskets need not be large. Better to have more small baskets that are less expensive than one extra large one. Popular themes for this auction have been: baby, gardening, spa, popcorn/movie night, chocolates, homemade items, fresh vegetables. Proceeds from the auction will help to defray costs for women to attend the upcoming Triennial Convention. Auction items may be brought to the convention on Friday or Saturday.



Prayer Request for Amy Palazzolo, President of our sister synod in New Jersey. Amy has recently been diagnosed with Cancer and is presently undergoing chemo treatments.

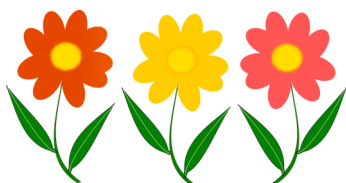
Many of you may have met her at our convention/gathering in Alexandria last year. The board encourages your prayers for her recovery as well as asking individuals and WELCA units to send cards or notes of encouragement to her at: 10 High Street, Wharton, NJ 05788.

Lutheran World Relief Pick-Up Sites 2026

Fargo- May 18—22, 9 AM-4 PM
Midwest Motors Express
314 27th St. N
Fargo ND

Grand Forks- May 21-22, 9 AM-4 PM
Midwest Motors Express
2215 N. Washington
Grand Forks ND 58203

St. Paul, MN—Jan 1—Dec 1, 2026
Monday—Thursday 7:30 AM—4 PM
Call to verify hours before delivery
398 E Richmond St.
South St. Paul, MN 55075





Northwestern Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization of the ELCA

NW MN SNOW Newsletter

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UP COMING EVENTS



38th Annual NW MN SWO Convention

September 18-19, 2026

Trinity Lutheran Church

205 S Broadway

Crookston, MN 56716

The 2026 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering

will be held in **Des Moines, Iowa, July 16-19, 2026.**

Registration for this event is available online at: <https://na.eventscloud.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=763420&>

Registration Closes on June, 21, 2026.

