Women of the ELCA

Fall 2026

Northwestern Minnesota
Synodical Women's Organization of the ELCA

# SNOW Newsletter



## Letter from our President

Dear Sisters in Christ,

**Button Up Your Faith** was the theme of our 2026 NWMN Women of the ELCA Convention and Gathering. Were you there? If you were, please share your experience with someone who was not and encourage them to show up for our 2027 event which will be in Bemidji at First Lutheran Church on September 17th & 18th. For those of you were unable to join us I want to recap some of the highlights. While not as exciting as being part of the Gathering, the plenary sessions are a necessary and important part of the convention. Our voting delegates elected two new women to your synod board, Patti Cummins, representing Conference 6, who will replace Gretchen Henrikson and Sue Ellwanger, Conference 8, who will replace Nola Smith. Thank you, Gretchen and Nola for your unwavering service to the Women from the NW MN Synod. Welcome to the board, Patti and Sue. Additionally, we elected Sandy Knutson as our new treasurer who will replace Janet Olson in February of 2027, and I was reelected as your president. As importantly we are seeking two additional people who are willing to serve as members of the Nominating Committee. Julie Jones will serve as the chair, however, to fill the committee we need two volunteers. The work of this committee is crucial to the operation of our synod board. If you or anyone you know has an interest or desire to learn more about serving in this role, please contact a board member. Our contact information is available on the synod website. Simply go to the NWMN Synod of the ELCA, click on the ministries tab and you will find the Synod Women's Organization. Click on that tab and scroll down to Leadership where you will find the listing of board members and conference representatives.

The Gathering portion of our get-together is always the best part and although it officially doesn't start until Saturday, I always think it kicks off with the Friday banquet and entertainment. We had a great time entertaining ourselves with the singing of well know Christian songs, lead by Pastor Michele Jensen. We sang for a full hour and believe it or not we had comments on the evaluation sheets that the attendees wanted more songs! Saturday morning kicked off the Gathering as we heard from the Churchwide President's representative, Marie Lokensgard who hails from the SE MN Synod, followed by Bible Study offered by Pastor Ali Haugrud. Devotions were lead by SAM Jodie Olson. Our keynote speaker for the day was Gaye Lindfors from St. Paul who perfectly tied our theme into her time with us and gave us many opportunities to laugh at ourselves as she spoke of her experiences in her walk alongside our Savior. Attendees had the opportunity to attend two of the four breakout sessions offered in the afternoon. Dana Johnson is a Victim/Witness Coordinator who works with the Polk County Attorney's Office, accompanied by Silas, a therapy dog, spoke of her work with victims of violent crimes; Carolina Diaz, Executive Director of Care and Share in Crookston, spoke of services offered to those experiencing homelessness, lack of basic services, assisting them to find stable housing and long-term stability;

Nola Smith spoke on her travel with other Women of the ELCA, working with young women to continue their education, utilizing resources from the ELCA's "Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls" program; Bishop Bill Tesch updated us on actions and ministries throughout our synod as well as fielded questions posed to him about the mission of the ELCA. Our ever-popular silent auction was not a disappointment! I believe we had 88 items donated with the proceeds being earmarked for 50% of the money for those attending the next Triennial and the other 50% remaining in the synod treasury for the purpose of keeping the cost of our future NWMN Synod convention/gatherings more affordable amidst rising costs. We also had an interactive quilting project. A wall hanging featuring a cross was constructed by the women from our Vice President, Luella Thom's church. Attendees had an opportunity to sew a button on the border of the hanging to carry out our Button Up Your Faith theme. A drawing was held for the completed project, won by Bonnie Wagner who just happens to be Conference 2 Board Representative.

We closed our time together with worship service lead by Bishop Bill assisted by SAM Jodie Olson. Mark your calendars now for our 2027 event and join your sisters in Christ in a faith-enriching two days! You won't be disappointed.

Blessings to all, Carol Balk, NWMN SWO President



# 2026 Mary Magdalene Award Recipients

15 Amazing Women have modeled the love of Christ and servanthood in their daily lives

Joy Ehlers



Elaine McGeary



Patricia Cummins



Janice Thoreson



Deb Koep



Etta McDonald



Carolyn Turnwall



Elva Fiedler



Virginia Deeds



Jill Anderson-Tharoldson




Linda Kaul



Esther Nesheim



Candace Dahl



Lois Bylund



Not pictured: Arlou Swenson

Well Done Good and Faithful Servants

2026 NW MN Synodical Women's Organization's Annual Convention
Trinity Lutheran Church
Crookston MN

**'Button Up Your Faith'**

***Hebrews 11:1***

***Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.***



Elected Board Members: Sue Ellwanger, Conference 8, Carol Balk, President
Sandra Knutson, Treasurer, Bonnie Wagner, Conference 2,
Patricia Cummins, Conference 6

Guest speaker, Gaye Lindfors delivered an inspiring message on being women of faith with humor interwoven throughout her presentation! It was great to hear the sanctuary filled with laughter!

Check out her videos and books at gayelindfors.com







104 women attended the convention





Thank you to the Trinity Lutheran Women, the SWO Board, the committees, all who provided food, and everyone who attended the inspiring 2026 NW MN SWO Convention!

- 39th Annual Convention
- September 17 & 18, 2027
- First Lutheran Church
- Bemidji, MN

- Follow updates on:
- *The SWO website- nwmnsynod.org
then click onMinistries/Synod Women's Organization
- *Facebook page-
NW MN Women of the ELCA









The sanctuary was filled with beautiful *music* and *inspiring faith filled messages* at the closing worship service!

Thank you to all who participated.

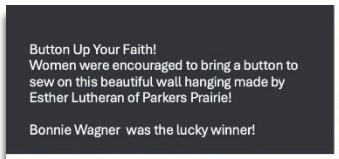






Button Up Your Faith!
Women were encouraged to bring a button to sew on this beautiful wall hanging made by Esther Lutheran of Parkers Prairie!

Bonnie Wagner was the lucky winner!











88 Silent Auction items were donated

2027 SWO Annual Convention
September 17-18
First LutheranChurch
Bemidji,MN

# Bemidji's First Lutheran Church Women "Over 80's Celebration"



The Women of First Lutheran Church, Bemidji, hosted an "Over 80's" event on August 13, 2026, to celebrate all FLC women over 80 and their long-lasting contribution to First Lutheran Church. The event's theme was "His eye is on the sparrow", with bird nests, birds and birdhouses to decorate each table. Guests enjoyed a delicious dessert served by the women of FLCW and each guest also received a "bird theme" notepad/ pen gift. Over 40 attendees and their guests filled the Fellowship Hall. Zoey Magner, from Neilson Spearhead Nature Preserve, gave a special presentation about Minnesota Birds, their unique features and sounds. Beautiful music was provided by organist, Sarah, and singers Peter and Shelby. A commemoration candle lighting ceremony was held to honor those women who have passed. The event was a very special time of celebration for all.

# October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

More than one in three women and one in four men have been victims of [some form of] physical violence by an intimate partner within their lifetime, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV).

On average, 20 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States—more than 10 million women and men a year, according to the NCADV.

If you or someone you know is a victim of Domestic Violence, help is available. Speak with someone today.

**National Domestic Violence Hotline**
Languages: English, Spanish, and 200+ through interpretation service
Hours: 24/7
**Call: 800-799-7233**
**Text: BEGIN to 88788**



**Women of the ELCA blog**
Take action against Domestic Violence in your church and community. Read "What can you do to end Domestic Violence?" from the Women of the ELCA blog, and Download A Litany for Domestic Violence Awareness Month.




**SNOW Newsletter Deadline**
**December 30, 2026**





# Kindness Rocks!

Zion Lutheran Church of Amor held a kindness rock painting day as an event after our WELCA General Meeting. Prior to the event, a few of us painted two coats of base paint on the rocks and let them dry. We found a bunch of quotes and sample ideas for people to use if they choose to do so. We advertised through the church that we were doing this and a lot of people came with their own ideas. The event was attended by approximately 25 people. It was a very fun event and so fun to hear the talking and laughter as they were painting their rocks. After the paint dried, we sealed the rocks with a clear acrylic sealer and placed them in our church courtyard and God's Acres Park. Our wish is to share kindness with everyone who sees them.

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**To watch: go to https://www.womenoftheelca.org/event/2026-women-of-the-elca-thankoffering-service**







**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

## OUR MISSION

Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

## OUR 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, the society, and the world.

# Faith Lutheran of Bagley Keeps Busy Serving Others




They recently welcomed the director of Heart's Haven Shelter, formerly known as the Northwoods Battered Women's Shelter, as the guest speaker at a meeting. Members collected a thank offering of personal hygiene products, snacks, kitchen necessities, and items for children, including diapers, books, coloring books, and crayons. Cash donations were also received to support the shelter and its important work. The director shared information about the many services available at Heart's Haven Shelter and discussed the opening of its much-needed new facility. For more than 50 years, the shelter operated out of a converted home before moving into a facility better suited to meet the needs of those seeking safety and support. Statistics about domestic violence and the continued need for shelter services remain alarming. The shelter provides vital assistance to individuals and families facing difficult circumstances, offering hope, resources, and a safe place when they need it most. Through their generous donations, Faith Lutheran WELCA members demonstrated their commitment to supporting Heart's Haven Shelter and the individuals and families it serves.



They also distributed backpacks to pre-K to sixth grade students. FLC WELCA teams with Salvation Army and the Red Kettle bell ringing to acquire funds for this project. Modern Woodmen had their theme this year education. They graciously purchased all the backpacks and assisted on distribution day.




**Go to https://nwmnsynod.regfox.com/rethinking-rural-ministry-thief-river-falls-workshops to register**



# First Lutheran Church Bemidji

Merrily Burmeister, a member of Bemidji First Lutheran Church, was elected to the National Women's Evangelical Lutheran Church Board in 2003. Her term is up this year, but she has been steadfast in attending meetings, in person and online, and also has attended WELCA conventions nationally. She recently attended the Thirteenth Triennial Convention/Gathering , July 13-19, in Des Moines, Iowa and reported back with the following information:

At the Convention, Sheena Foster was elected President. Gwen Edwards was elected Vice President, Miranda Searcy, Secretary, and Linda Clarke is Treasurer for the next Triennium! The Strategic Plan was implemented and Memorials and Resolutions were approved with special emphasis for inclusion and love for all people.

There were 1100 plus women attending the Gathering. Meaningful and inspirational church services were held at the Opening and Closing of the Gathering. Bishop Amy Current gave the inspiring sermon at the opening service and Rev. Lucille Antionette Mills gave an inspiring sermon at the closing service. Featured speakers were Rev. Martha Ambarangu, a pastor of the ELCA in Tanzania, Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazsarski, a recent graduate from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, and Elise Seyfried, the author of five humorous spiritual essays.

**Highlights:**

$165,000 in scholarships was distributed by Churchwide to women studying in undergraduate colleges and seminaries.

$300,00 was distributed by Churchwide to be used to help hospitals in Tanzania, South Sudan, Liberia and India.

Women of the ELCA gave to LWR; 90,000 quilts, 45,000 school kits, 20,000 personal care/hygiene kits, 12,000 baby kits and 1500 fabric kits.

The Fourteenth Triennial will be held in Louisville, Kentucky in 2029. Plan to attend as you will have memories and friends to last a lifetime! **Thank you to Merrily for her service to the Women of the ELCA!**

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# Lutheran World Relief Pick-Up Sites

**Wadena**: **December 7th-12th**, M-F
Polman Transfer Inc, Hours: 8 am-5 pm
63425 Hwy 10
Wadena, MN 56482

**Fargo**: **October 19th-23rd**
Midwest Motors Express, Hours: 9 am-4 pm
314 27th St N
Fargo, ND 58103

**Grand Forks: October 22nd-23rd**
Midwest Motors Express, Hours: 9 am-4 pm
2215 N Washington
Grand Forks, ND 58203

**Roseau: November 6th**
USPS, In parking lot east of the Post Office, Hours: 12 pm-2:30 pm
114 Center St E
Roseau, MN 56751

**Thief River Falls: November 7th**
Hours: 8 am – 12 pm
604 Atlantic Ave N
Thief River Falls, MN 56701

**Osakis: October 28th**
Hensley's Pallet Shop, Hours: 8 am – 10 am
3811 MN 27 SE
Osakis, MN 56360



NW MN SNOW
Newsletter
Mandy Arvidson
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Parkers Prairie, MN 56361
Cell: 320-808-3617

# UP COMING EVENTS

**2026 Fall Gatherings of the NW MN Synodical Women's Organization**

| Conference # | Date | Location/contact person | Time | Cost | Theme | Speaker |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Saturday Oct. 17 | Wabanica Lutheran near Baudette | | | | |
| 2 | Saturday Oct. 17 | Silver Creek Lutheran Rural Thief River Falls | 8:30 AM reg. 9:00 program | $10 | A TIme To Laugh | Glenice Johnson |
| 3 | | No Fall Gathering | | | | |
| 4 | | No Fall Gathering | | | | |
| 5 | Saturday Oct. 17 | Our Savior's Moorhead | 9:30 AM | $10 | "Who is my sister, Who is my brother?" | Kevin Wallerand |
| 6 | Saturday Sept. 26 | Trinity Lutheran Detroit Lakes | 8:30 AM reg. 9:00 program | $15 | Dancing in the Rain | Tanya Todd |
| 7 | Saturday Oct. 24 | First Lutheran Fergus Falls | 9:00 AM reg. 9:30 Biz. mtg. 10 brunch 11:30 Program | $14 | Faith in Action, James 2:18 | Rev. Develyn Brooks, Churches United |
| 8 | Saturday Oct. 24 | Grace Lutheran Brandon MN | 8:15-9:00 reg. | $ | International Health Partners-Tanzania James 2:17 *Faith without works is dead.* | Paula Lofstorm |