

Bridges



Fall 2021

Volume 30
Number 1

A communications link between the Synodical Women's Organization & its women

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Soup Luncheon

Saturday, October 23, 2021

10:00—1:00

St Mark Lutheran Church
One North Road
Circle Pines

The St Paul Area Synodical Women's Organization is sponsoring a Soup Luncheon to follow up the conversation with Toni Carter on August 14th. The day will consist of a panel discussion with time for questions and comments, and lots of good soup. There will be a devotional time at the beginning, and an offering which will be directed to the Advocates for Racial Equity, a work group of the St Paul Area Synod. Please put this on your calendar and plan to attend. Share with your friends, family and any others who might be interested. Racial Equity and Justice are such critical issues at this time, and we choose to be a part of the solution.

Please RSVP to tricia.niesche@gmail.com

Covid protocols will be followed, whatever they happen to be at the time of this event. Prepare to mask if necessary.



Our Mission

*To mobilize women to act boldly
on their faith in Jesus Christ*

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.*





This season has been long. The time from March 16th to September 2021 feels like it has taken forever. I have watched as friends lost loved ones to COVID-19. I have mourned with them, but separately. I have felt lonely, hopeless, fatigued, and everything else that is going around, and yet, I can't help but feel a sense of hope as well. Family members, cousins and their families, have experienced the virus and survived. My sister had an adverse reaction to an infusion for back pain and was nearly lost to us but came back and actually went on to become healthier in the long run. My immediate family, my mom and two sisters, had an excellent vacation at a beautiful cabin by a lake in the North woods. Holidays came and went with no large gatherings in sight, but my family remained healthy. The virus cannot close the world. The businesses, yes. The buildings, yes. But, the people, the family, cannot be closed.

My church building was basically closed from March 16, 2020 through Easter week 2021. We have had meetings in the parking lot and in the backyard, socially distanced, until it got too cold to do so. We worshiped online, and I have had the privilege to participate in the music for Zoom. All over the world churches have become very creative as they find new ways to minister to their church families. We did a drive thru live nativity. 115 cars came through to experience the wonder of Jesus' birth, as well as many neighbors who walked through the display pulling wagons, pushing strollers, or just walking on their own.. There were even live animals! It was a wonderful experience, one to be repeated for many years to come, we hope.

Your WELCA board has been busy as well. Several board members participated in the Pivot not Panic event that replaced the Conference of Presidents in February. In April an in person event was held at Christ on Capitol Hill for Cherish All Children. In August, 29 women met to listen to Toni Carter, Mayor Carter's mom, talk about how God has prepared her for these times and her current calling. September 23rd, the board will host a Soup Luncheon at St Mark Circle Pines which will feature a panel discussion on the topic of racial equity. "How Can We Engage?" The convention is scheduled for April 2, 2022 at Bethesda Lutheran. Theme verse Proverbs 31:25 "She is clothed in strength and dignity and laughs without fear of the future."

Churchwide held its triennial convention virtually. Many amendments were passed and memorials were approved. And congratulations are in order to our own Diane Henning who was elected to the churchwide board! The next convention and triennial gathering will be held in 2023!

Strength and Dignity without Fear!

Proverbs 31:25

Doesn't that sound wonderful? To face the future without fear? We can, you know, because we have Christ who walks with us every step of the way. There is nothing that can separate us except our own choices, and even then, that is our own choice!

The board is looking for a convention chair to help keep all of the details together. Much planning has begun and clusters will be more involved in the planning as well. If you are interested in this vital role, please contact me or any board member. We look forward to working with you!

Fact or Fiction?

*Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said.
Matthew 22:15*

This verse from Sunday's Gospel uses the word "entrap" to describe how the Pharisees were plotting to trick or deceive Jesus in his words about taxes and the Roman empire. Conspiracy theories too, work to trick or deceive people. Let's dispel some myths and conspiracy theories thriving right now on the internet, and identify what *is truly helpful* in ending sexual exploitation and trafficking.

Cherish All Children has supported congregations in preventing child sexual exploitation and trafficking for over 15 years. In this time, significant progress has been made in the movement to protect children and youth, including groundbreaking bipartisan legislation. We've learned there is a great deal we can do together to keep children safe. We learn about the issue, we work to create healthy support systems for young people, we educate children and youth about how to stay safe online and in person, we challenge systemic racism, sexism, heterosexism, and poverty, and we use our voices for policy change. We keep at it, fostering open and honest conversations in families, churches, and communities. And we listen to the experts, organizations like Polaris, which operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, serving victims and survivors since 2002.

Now, in a year of so much fear, pain and divisiveness – conspiracy theorists are using the power of social media to up-end much of this long-term work. QAnon and Save Our Children theories include sensationalized stories of hundreds of thousands of children missing and trafficked through operations by well known political figures, celebrities and retailers. **This is not how trafficking occurs.** It is harmful to actual survivors and victims seeking support. And it is harmful to the many reputable organizations working to truly end the exploitation and trafficking of children.

Some have asked, "Isn't this raising awareness of the issue so that's a good thing overall?" The short answer is "No" and here are the primary reasons:

- Survivors are re-traumatized for the purposes of sensationalism, political divisiveness, and advertising dollars. "As a survivor, when I see it [QAnon theories], I feel exploited again. I feel like my trauma and the trauma of people like me is being exploited for purposes other than ending trafficking." ~Christy Croft, Survivor & Activist
- Conspiracy theories shared via social media have worldwide reach, harming decades of work that has centered actual survivors' experiences and how we actually combat this crime.
- Critical resources – from law enforcement following baseless claims to the National Human Trafficking Hotline inundated with conspiracy calls – are taken away from the real victims seeking support and the real work to end trafficking.
- And finally, this refuels the "saving" and "rescuing" mentality that centers the "rescuer" rather than empowering and supporting children and youth that are impacted.

Let's work together with thoughtful, committed steps to change the conditions that lead to exploitation and trafficking. Let's be very cautious when reading and forwarding online messaging, making sure our sources on such critical issues are reputable and working in the true best interest of children and youth. #traffickingtruths

God, guide us in truth. Amen.

For more info, go to <https://polarisproject.org/myths-facts-and-statistics/>

Written by Joy McElroy, Cherish All Children Executive Director, and community advocate for racial justice.

(This is a Wednesday prayer offered several months ago, but still very valid.)

WOMEN OF THE ELCA OPTS FOR A SMALLER, MORE INCLUSIVE EXECUTIVE BOARD

From the Women of the ELCA website

ABOUT 260 WOMEN OF THE ELCA voting members approved constitutional changes that reduced the size of its churchwide board from 21 to 15 members while making it more inclusive. They also elected new churchwide officers and an executive board, adopted a 2022 budget, and approved several memorials during an online meeting, Aug. 3-5.

Women of the ELCA's newly revised constitution now reads that the make-up of the executive board *shall be* at least 20 percent women of color or whose primary language is other than English, *and* at least 20 percent will be under 45 and/or members of the LGBTQIA+ community, according to churchwide Executive Director Linda Post Bushkofsky.

The churchwide executive board for the 2017-2020 triennium had a vision of making the organization more welcoming, inclusive, and nimble, said Bushkofsky. "They sought to lead by example." Following the election, "one-third of the new board are women of color or primary language other than English, exceeding the constitutional mandate of 20 percent," she said. "Three women are under 45 and/or members of the LGBTQIA+ community."

NEW OFFICERS AND BOARD

Joy Michalicek of Duluth, Minn. (Northeastern Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization), is the churchwide president through August 2023, when the following convention is held in Phoenix, Ariz. Freddie Jordan of Columbus, Ohio (Southern Ohio Synodical Women's Organization), is vice president; Angela Bell of Palos Heights, Ill. (Metro Chicago Synodical Women's Organization), is secretary; and Raeann Purcell of Deland, Fla. (Florida-Bahamas Synodical Women's Organization), is treasurer.

"I have had the privilege to serve you over the last four years on the churchwide executive board and executive committee," said Michalicek, who has served on the executive board since 2017. "We will keep working as an organization, and I thank you for your faith in me. This organization is important to us as women," she said. "Jesus is calling and is leading us. We as Women of the ELCA are needed more now than ever."

Other elected board members are Jean Pishaw (Oregon Synodical Women's Organization), Tracy Williams (Southwest California Synodical Women's Organization), Laura Krueger (Grand Canyon Synodical Women's Organization), Diane Henning (Saint Paul Area Synodical Women's Organization), Miranda Searcy (Arkansas-Oklahoma Synodical Women's Organization), Lorie Garcia (Southwestern Texas Synodical Women's Organization), Dawn Wicklund (Northwest Synodical Women's Organization of Wisconsin), Elizabeth Burgess (New England Synodical Women's Organization), Jennifer Armstrong-Schaefer (Southwestern Pennsylvania Synodical Women's Organization), Lynette Todd (Delaware-Maryland Synodical Women's Organization), and Yma Mulero (Caribbean Synodical Women's Organization).

2022 BUDGET

Voting members approved a fiscal year 2022 budget of \$1,636,250. The budget proposes revenue will come from Thankofferings (\$400,000); Regular Offerings (\$200,000); SWO convention offerings (\$25,000); other offerings (\$151,250); and special offerings (\$5,000). The budget also sets income from *Gather* magazine at \$850,000 and consignment sales at \$5,000. The budget proposes expenses of programs (\$30,000); communication (\$703,300); administration (\$275,000); salaries and benefits (\$622,950); and governance (\$5,000).

CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES

The convention approved updates to the organization's constitutions and bylaws. Highlights include:

- Participating in a congregational unit is encouraged but no longer required for leadership in either the synodical or churchwide expressions of Women of the ELCA; however, voting membership in an ELCA congregation is required.
- Reducing the number of churchwide executive board members from 21 to 15, including the four officers.
- Creating more flexibility for synodical women's organization boards: The board may number "3 or more" without requiring approval from the churchwide executive board to change the number of SWO board members.
- Allowing two members of the same congregational unit to serve as leaders of an SWO; one as an officer and the other as a board member.
- Offering more flexibility in SWO leaders' titles: leaders may be called presidents and vice-presidents, chairs or co-chairs, conveners or co-conveners, or coordinators.

The constitution had not originally provided for digital conventions. Voting members from the Tenth Triennial Convention (2017) were called into action and, in a mail-in ballot last month, approved a constitutional amendment to hold conventions remotely or virtually, provided participants are sufficient to constitute a quorum, thus paving the way for the historic first digital convention of Women of the ELCA.

MEMORIALS ADOPTED

Voting members adopted several memorials that included:

- continuing to fight human trafficking
- continuing to support solar energy in Liberia
- supporting and participating in Thursdays in Black
- encouraging the practice of using reusable bags
- encouraging immigration reform
- engaging in education against school violence and mass shootings
- focusing on unjust treatment of women and girls by providing education and prayers for those who have been victimized and giving voice and support to those who willingly acknowledge such treatment by saying #METOO.

Two matters of business will be referred to the churchwide executive board because of their importance. They are:

- that first-time voting members at this convention be allowed to serve as first-time voting members at the Twelfth Triennial Convention of Women of the ELCA.
- the dilemma of a synodical organization whose board members have served for seven years and are no longer eligible for re-election according to their constitution and bylaws.



Bold Connections is the free monthly e-newsletter of Women of the ELCA. Whether you participate a lot or a little in Women of the ELCA, and no matter what your role, you'll find helpful news and information on our programs and activities, and stories of how together we are living out our purpose and mission. Sign up at www.womenoftheelca.org for **Bold Connections** today!

2021—2022 Saint Paul Area Synodical Women's Organization

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Cluster Key:

(N) North (NC) North Central (S) South
(EC) East Central (SE) South East (SC) South Central

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Help Wanted!

Communications Coordinator Email blasts, Bridges mailings and convention mailings. Wanda Hurtgen and Lois Berg have served faithfully in this ministry for years and are both looking to step down. Please consider serving in this way.

Bridges editor We have been without an editor for several years. It is published quarterly and the board plus various other contributors do the writing. It requires someone who likes the puzzle of lay-out and design. Please prayerfully consider this position for yourself or someone you know.

Women to serve on the board. We are gearing up for convention and looking for people to run for the board.





Saint Paul Area Synod
of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
in America.
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Calendar of Events

*Mark
your
calendar*

Saturday, October 23, 2021 Soup Luncheon

Saturday, April 2, 2022 CONVENTION

“She is clothed in strength and dignity and laughs without fear of
the future.” Proverbs 31:25

Bridges is published four times a year.
Information for the Winter 2022 issue must be submitted by
November 25th.

Send Bridges articles via e-mail to: Tricia Niesche
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Bridges is emailed as a PDF file to all churches in the Saint Paul Area Synod.

Please encourage your church to post or link it to their website, and share with other women in your church.

If the email is not being received, or another address should be used, please contact **Tricia Niesche**
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Thank you to the Saint Paul Area Synod Office for providing this service to us!