Thirty two women joined together on Saturday morning, October 23rd, to hear from two members of the Advocates for a Racial Equity, a work group of the St Paul Area Synod. Pastors Joy McDonald Coltvet and Jen Collins represented the work group with Pastor Mollie Dvorak moderating the discussion. The pastors responded to questions about what the group is doing, how individuals and congregations can get involved, and what’s keeping them involved. They shared many resources and training events in which people can participate. One was a training called American Indian 101 which the St Paul Area Synod sponsored. The training focused on the treatment of Native American children through the American Indian Schools. What started as a good thing, to help Native Americans assimilate more easily into the dominant white culture, had long lasting negative affects for an entire civilization. Lots more to learn and lots of work to do! We are thankful for the passion and energy of these women and the whole ARE work group.
October 23rd, St Paul Area Synodical Women’s Organization hosted a Soup Luncheon at St Mark Lutheran Church in Circle Pines. Thirty two women were in attendance. Pastors Jen Collins and Joy McDonald Coltvet spoke about the role that Advocates for Racial Equity plays in the synod. What a blessing to be able to gather once again, even with Covid protocols in place!

As we continue to plan and move toward convention in April, a few things continue to be apparent. The more things change, the more they stay the same. We still have the same mission and vision, but how we are getting there is definitely changing. For example, we want to have an ongoing presence in the lives of our members, the communication has been through email blasts and mailings, as well as the quarterly newsletter, the Bridges. We are now moving toward a web page on the Synod website and our own Facebook page, both of which should be up and running by mid November. Synodical Women’s Organization will be the name of the page on the synod website: The Facebook page will have the most current information as it can be updated by our organization. The web page has to go through Mary Smith, Communications director for the synod. Bridges will continue to be published quarterly, but we are moving to most of the subscriptions being email, and free. Printed and mailed will still have a subscription fee, $6.00. (At least at this point, that may change.)

A virtual meeting of the board and cluster leaders was held on October 9th. This was a first in a long while, but very valuable. Together we discussed issues of keeping connected through the pandemic and how the cluster leaders could help us update some contact information for units, and also how the SWO could support the clusters, and how the clusters could continue to support the SWO. Convention this year will be a change, as more input from the clusters will be included. It will also be a one day instead of two day. We are so excited to be planning this event. We will include many of the things that were planned for the 2020 convention, but a few new things as well. There are also lots of positions open and needing to be filled. For the board, we are looking for at least three more board members. We may need four. We are looking for communications coordinator and information coordinator, or one person to take on the two roles. We are also in need of a new historian. We continue to search for a Bridges editor. As you know, our organization is growing older as are the members. As people’s lives change so do their priorities and abilities to continue in some of these roles. None of the roles are difficult, or particularly time consuming, but they are all invaluable as we continue to move forward as a SWO. Please consider how you can help. Or reach out to others and encourage them to use their gifts and talents to support the SWO.

Convention planning is in full swing. Mark your calendars! April 2, 2022 at Bethesda Lutheran, Inver Grove Heights. Proverbs 31:25 “She is clothed with strength and dignity, and laughs without fear of the future.” We will continue our focus on racial equity. Our churchwide representative is Laura Krueger. Bishop Lull is preaching at worship. This is going to be a celebration of being back together as well as a time of fellowship and learning. More information will be coming in the coming weeks and months as we move closer.

Cluster leaders have been updating our membership and contact lists for units. The pandemic has created chaos for a lot of organizations. Ours has not been exempt. Many units disbanded during this time and others have kind of been in hibernation. As we move toward more fully reengaging, please be mindful of the impact on our friends and neighbors in other congregations. Invite participation in events and Bible studies in your own groups if you know that someone has lost their unit connection. We need to be Kind, Welcoming, and Inclusive as we move forward.
Recipes from the Soup Luncheon

**Butternut Squash Soup** 8 servings

Ingredients:

- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 12 oz. uncooked Butternut squash, peeled and cut into 1 to 1 ½-inch cubes*
- ½ large uncooked Vidalia onion, cut into 2-inch cubes
- ½ small fresh apple, peeled and cut into 2-inch cubes
- ¼ tsp table salt, or to taste
- 1/8 tsp black pepper, or to taste
- 1/8 tsp ground nutmeg, or to taste

Directions:

- In large stock pot, combine broth, squash, onion and apple; cover pot and bring to a boil over high heat. Uncover pot and reduce heat to low; gently simmer until squash is very tender, about 10 minutes. Puree soup in pot using an immersion blender (or puree in a regular blender in batches, careful not to splatter hot liquid). Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg; serve. Yields about ¾ cup per serving. Garnish with chopped mint, optional *

*You can purchase already peeled and cubed squash in produce section of a grocery store or use frozen, cubed squash for the fresh.

**Creamy Potato Soup with Chicken** 8 servings

Ingredients:

- 1 small onion
- 1 large carrot, sliced
- 1 pound Chicken thighs
- 1 ½ pound red potatoes
- 32 oz. Chicken broth
- 4 cups water
- 1 ½ cups heavy whipping cream
- 4 oz. bacon
- 2 ½ cups packed spinach, chopped
- 1 ½ tsp salt, or to taste
- ½ tsp ground black pepper, or to taste
- ½ tsp paprika, or to taste

Directions:

- Remove excess fat from chicken thighs, cut into small bite-sized pieces. Cube the bacon. Wash and dice potatoes, cover with water and set aside. In Dutch oven, sauté bacon until crisp. Remove and reserve about 2 TBSP grease. Cook chicken thigh pieces in bacon grease, add salt and pepper to taste. Add onions, cook 3-4 minutes, add carrots, and cook 4-5 minutes longer. Drain water from potatoes and add to pan. Add the 4 cups water, chicken broth, salt, pepper, and paprika, and bring to low boil. Simmer 10 minutes until potatoes are fully cooked. Add chopped spinach, cream, and bacon. Bring to soft boil, then turn off heat and serve.
Safe and Healthy Relationships Youth Guide

Cherish All Children is excited to offer our newest resource for church middle school and high school youth! The sessions are interactive, using engaging activities, video and conversation to guide youth in understanding how they can engage in healthy friendships and dating relationships, and stay clear of exploitative situations.

Sessions include:

- Healthy Relationships
- Online Safety
- Understanding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation & Trafficking
- Making a Safety Plan and Resources

Throughout the sessions, leaders are given the opportunity to reinforce the youth’s value as children of God and to identify safe, supportive adults and friends. Too often, young people may be dealing with a situation that’s happening online, in their school, or with friends, and they’re unsure who to go to or they fear being blamed rather than listened to and given support. Further, connecting with youth to talk through scenarios before they occur provides skill building to prevent a potentially harmful outcome.

Having these conversations in the safe space of their church’s Confirmation class or Youth Group, while encouraging open dialogue at home, provides youth with a network of love and support.

To download or order the Youth Guide and accompanying Leader’s Guide, visit lssmn.org/cherishallchildren/youthguide or email joy.mcelroy@cherishallchildren.org.

Thank you Women of the ELCA for your partnership with Cherish All Children!
Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds. James 1:2 (NIV)

Last month our son called and asked about meeting with us to meet his girlfriend. We were a little surprised since we didn’t know he was seeing anyone at the time. From what he told us, he broke up with his previous girlfriend a few months earlier. He wanted to meet at some neutral location, which we couldn’t figure out why not come to our home? We agreed to a restaurant.

When they showed up at the restaurant, we knew immediately the reason for a neutral location! This was a former girlfriend from his high school years. This girl was banned from our home. They were constantly fighting and were together one day and not the next. After our son graduated from high school, he bought her an engagement ring. Shortly after they broke up again. He had a payment plan on this engagement ring and decided he wasn’t going to pay for it because she had the ring!

After telling him that if the engagement is off, then he gets the ring back. It is not a gift and that he is still responsible for paying for it. He got the ring back, got laid off work, and couldn’t afford the payments anymore. We paid off the ring to protect his credit and told him that we would keep the ring until he made up the payments. (By the way, they got back together two weeks later.) About a week later, she wanted “her” engagement ring back. I told my son that the ring is not negotiable, if his dad and I are not reimbursed for the payments, he is not getting the ring. That wasn’t good enough for her. She decided to call the police and tell them that I stole her engagement ring! The police showed up at our home. I provided the officer the situation of the ring and that if she thought I stole it, she better take me to court. That was about 25 years ago! The ring is still in my possession and it has never been paid for by him or her. We didn’t see her after that, until this luncheon!

Yes, she was his “new” girlfriend, but have been dating off and on again for the past 2 ½ years! Actually, he introduced her as his “fiancé” and asked if we recognized her! She never came around during the past 2 ½ years, and the girlfriend we thought he was dating was just a friend of both of them – a stand-in girlfriend and was coming around.

Our lunch date did not start out that well. Right after we received our food, they told us that they were getting married in two weeks at the Mall of America! None of our family was included in their decisions and none of us were invited to the wedding! We were not very happy - there seemed to be no joy in this luncheon! Well, there was some joy...my lunch was very good, but I had to choke it down since they waited until I took a bite to tell us! It also allowed me to gather some thoughts before I blurted out what I wanted to say! God certainly has a weird sense of humor! At least they didn’t say she was pregnant, too! - Another joy!

I just had to say a prayer: Thank you, Lord, for all of the wonderful things you provided me! Oh, by the way, please give me the patience to deal with them without knocking their chairs out from under their butts!

She has been married once or twice before and has three kids. We are now confronted with three more grandchildren! These “new” grandchildren are around the same ages as our other grandchildren. We just doubled the number of grandchildren in a luncheon! What is in the water these days?!

We told them that they are big kids and can do whatever they want, but when it comes to the children in the relationship, they are more important because they can’t take care of themselves! Even though I love my children, I love my grandchildren even more!

How in the world are we going to get through this? It felt as if our world was crashing in! This seemed to be terrible news! Not so much for doubling our number of grandchildren, but because she is not the person we wanted in our lives because of the terrible things she did when they were first dating!

They waited this long to tell us that this relationship has been a secret for the past two and a half years, there must be something extremely wrong to keep it a secret! Oh goodness, I was not very happy, but I got my points across. My husband was holding onto my hand and squeezing it every once in a while. I think it was to prevent me from jumping across the table and choking the two of them! God did provide me with the patience because I didn’t jump across the table!

Instead, we invited both of them to our church. Our son hasn’t been in church for many, many years; and now they are both attending our church every other weekend. They have the children on the other week-
ends. Maybe someday they will all attend.

Two weeks after our luncheon, our son married her. There must be a reason she is back in our lives. Because we can’t “pick” the mates for our children, we are doing our best to forgive her and trying to include her into our family. Everything comes full circle, and we are back at the start again!

Joy is very difficult to find some days. The day of the luncheon was very difficult for us, but there were many joyous things that happened that day as well. We learned to forgive what has happened in the past. The conversation did not get out of control, no one walked out, and it seemed as if she was a different person than who we knew back in the days. We also gained three grandchildren! AND, my husband quit squeezing my hand!

I hope you can find some real joy in your day! I truly believe there is always something very good when things seem so bad. God will drop in and show you the joy as long as you let him. He has provided me with patience with this change in our family dynamics, and I know that I will be very grateful for it — someday, hopefully soon!

reprinted from March 2021

Dear Sisters in Christ,

The theme for Lent at my church in Lindstrom is “Hope Changes Everything.” The discussion emphasizes that Hope is renewable and pivots with each changing situation. Hope is there in good times or bad. The covid-19 vaccines have brought Hope that things will go back to normal. Now with more and more people getting the covid-19 vaccines each day we can see the Hope growing in our communities by the smiles on the faces.

Women of the ELCA Churchwide leadership theme for this year is “Pivot Don’t Panic!” In a way both themes are very similar, meaning with Hope we can Pivot to find new ways to serve and grow in our faith. Churchwide offers many resources to support our faith journey, such as “Daily Grace” (offering a faith reflection each day on your smart phone); Gather Magazine Bible Study, Café online magazine for young adult women, a monthly BYOD (bring your own dinner) Boldcafe.org podcast, and more.

Last year (2020) was very difficult for non-profit organizations. When people are not gathering or fundraising or observing a need, money is not donated.

The St Paul Synodical Board appreciates all the regular and convention offerings that were submitted even during this time of limited gatherings. As a Board, we collected one-fourth of our normal revenue. When the Convention and the Cluster Gatherings were canceled the registrations and offerings were not collected. In 2020,
the Board only hosted two events before the shutdown. The LSS Cherish Our Children Breakfast in January and our annual February Soup Luncheon where Sandy Iverson introduced us to the ELCA’s AMMPARO social justice project.

For 2021, it is the Board’s Hope that we will begin to Pivot and find ways to accomplish many of the events and fundraisers we did prior to the pandemic. One church shared that even though their “2020 Vendor Fair” was physically canceled, vendors and customers were still asked to contribute what they may have spent. They were very pleased that their fundraising met its goals equal to the prior year.

May we all find ways to Pivot and continue to support the St. Paul Area Women’s Synodical Organization. Continue to send in your regular offerings. Create a Thankful Offering box/jar to deposit money for the blessings you receive each day. Share with board members how you are working in your community despite the pandemic.

The Churchwide collections are also down. Eight of their ten staff are now part-time and if collections don’t improve by August 2021, seven positions will be eliminated. Our Synodical Board supports Churchwide by sending fifty percent of the offerings to Churchwide. Our support of Churchwide fell short in 2020 by $5,525. Alternatively, individually we can become a “Faithful Friends” and donate directly to Churchwide through monthly debits. Check out the Women of the ELCA website to become a Faithful Friend.

We are looking forward to gathering together again soon. You are all in our prayers that Hope will allow you to Pivot and continue to grow in your faith and serve your congregation and communities. Please continue to send your offerings to the St. Paul Area SWO, which are here to help you. Just ask.

In God’s Service

Karen Seaver
Puppy Breath

by Tricia Niesche

This summer I embarked on a journey to bring a Hearing Ear dog into my life. I started by looking into how to qualify for a dog. My audiogram qualifies me, and my hearing, if it follows the course of my grandmother and my father’s hearing loss, will only continue to decline. Most of the animals placed are larger breeds, labs and such. I live in a two bedroom apartment that doesn’t allow dogs. Next step, find a smaller breed that can be trained and get a service dog exemption for where I live. I interviewed several rescue dogs but couldn’t find a good fit. Finally, I decided to look at puppies. Puppy breath, warm on my neck, I could just imagine the sweet feeling. Tummy rubs and goofy games. My imagination ran wild with puppy thoughts. I met a couple of sweet pups, but one stood out. She was a small beagle, four months old. Very people oriented, smart, and curious. Her breeder had chosen her as the pup to keep, but then circumstances changed. A puppy that had previously been adopted had to be returned due to a move and job change. That pup was not as social and curious when she returned as when she left. The breeder decided to keep her and list his first choice for adoption. I saw her posting and contacted the breeder. I fell in love with her. I knew that this was the dog to fill my need.

After much conversation and consultation with the apartment owner, I finally got approval to bring her home, almost four weeks later. Sadie came home on October 25th. Then the real work began. How can one small dog be so sweet, mellow, loving, trusting, and STUBBORN? In my frustration, I sometimes wondered why I thought this would be a good idea. Self-train a service dog, from a pup that needs to have training first for basic skills like potty, crate, come, sit, stay, relax, down, etc. What was I thinking? Then I thought about my role in this partnership. I am the alpha dog. Just like when I was parenting my son, I am not a friend, I am a parent, a teacher, a leader. Sadie needs to see me as in charge, not her adoring roommate. I imagine that God often feels the same frustrations with us. Sadie and I go for a mile long walk only to come home and have her poop in the living room. Potty seems pretty good most of the time. Poopy, not so much. How often does God give us a job only to have us not follow through or make a mess of it? How often do our choices get in the way of His plans? It doesn’t mean He loves us less, but He must be disappointed. I love my little lady, and overall, I am very glad I made this choice. I know that Sadie, once fully trained, will immensely improve the quality of my life. It is the getting there that is hard, and sometimes overwhelming. How can God keep loving us through our “training” and patiently teach us the same skills over and over, as many times as we need? But He does! He loves us so much and wants the best for us and from us. Just like any good parent, teacher, or trainer, He focuses on the goal, rewards the positive, redirects the missteps, disciplines the negative, and keeps loving us through the messes we make. Thank God, He does!
American Indian 101

American Indian 101, an educational seminar, was held via Zoom, on Thursday, November 11th, from 6:30-8:30 pm. It was presented by Pastor Jen Collins who works with the Advocates for Racial Equity through our St. Paul Synod. She introduced Vance Blackfox, who led the seminar. Vance started with a history lesson of the Indian boarding schools; from the Moravian church leaders, after being invited by the Cherokee Nation, to teaching children in the 1800’s, through 1868-President Grant’s “Peace Policy”, when different church denominations were assigned to various Indian Nations and set up schools, to 1879, when the Carlisle Boarding School was first started, funded by the U.S. Government. For another 100 years, Indian boarding schools existed where it was legal for Indian children to be taken from their homes and sent to schools to be “assimilated”. This policy stopped in 1970, but the damage has been tragic, with documented cases of abuse and even death. Vance believes every Indian family in the U.S. has been impacted by boarding schools. How can we help rectify this injustice? By learning the truth and advocating for healing.

Suggestions: Advocacy - The ELCA has a webpage on letter writing to support legislation (learn about our Native Indians in our Gov’t) for boarding school healing. Learn about boarding schools on the internet.

Reading: Bookshop.org/shop/native reads and “An Indigenous People’s History of the U.S.”.

Learn about healing at www.boardingschoolhealing.org.

Keep watch for other events listed on our St. Paul Synod webpage: https://spas-elca.org.

Melissa Struve

Christmas is Coming Soon

Are you ready? Have you made your list? Checked it twice? Have you started baking, shopping, cleaning, or whatever else needs to be done in order for Christmas to come at your home? Oh, wait, Christmas comes whether we are ready or not. Christmas comes whether we prepare or not. Christmas comes because God loves us and wants to give us the gift of eternal life through His Son, Jesus Christ! We don’t need to do anything. In fact, nothing that we do really makes a difference in God’s gracious gift to us. We are simply the recipients of His love and grace. How cool is that?

We don’t want to take Christmas for granted. That is why the shopping, cleaning, baking, and all else is done. We love those near and dear to us as well as our communities, those near and far. We respond to God’s great gift by giving of ourselves, our time and talents, and giving to others. If you have resources, share them with those who don’t. If you have time, share it with others who are alone or afraid. Take time to help make Christmas happen for someone else. We are called to be the hands and feet of Christ, and that sometimes means stepping out of our comfort zone.

The pandemic has changed how Christmas happens for a lot of people. Some families are still not gathering due to health concerns. Some churches are still mostly online, especially as numbers continue to climb. Just as the past 20 months have taken a toll on us emotionally, physically, and financially, it has affected how Christmas is celebrated. It still comes. The gift is the same. The carols, the special foods, the worship, and the decorations may not be the same, but the awe and wonder, the magic of the season need not change. Christ came as a baby born in a manger. He was wholly God and wholly man. No matter how difficult that is to understand, the gift never changes, just our circumstances. Be blessed this Christmas season and find a way to bless others. That continues the gift.
## Executive Board Members

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<th>Role</th>
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- (N) North
- (NC) North Central
- (S) South
- (EC) East Central
- (SE) South East
- (SC) South Central
To continue your present subscription or to begin receiving Bridges please send $6.00/year and this form to: Lois Berg, 5590 Norwich Parkway #108, Oak Park Heights MN 55082.

For more information call Lois at 651-275-3520 or lois_berg@comcast.net

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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.

**Historian** Barb Greaves has been our historian. She is no longer able to fulfill this role. This job involves keeping photographic and written history for the SWO.
Bridges is published four times a year. Information for the Spring 2022 issue must be submitted by February 15th. Send Bridges articles via e-mail to: Tricia Niesche tricia.niesche@gmail.com

For subscription information contact:
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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 tricia.niesche@gmail.com

Thank you to the Saint Paul Area Synod Office for providing this service to us!