

# SNOW Newsletter

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- Convention Highlights
- Thankofferings
- Treasurer's Report
- A Message from The President
- Triennial Convention
- Triennial Gathering

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## 35th Annual Convention Highlights



## 12th Triennial Convention and Gathering



## Mary Magdalene Awards



John tells us that after the Resurrection, Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene and instructed her to "GO TO MY BROTHERS AND TELL THEM" (John 20:17). In response, Mary Magdalene went to the Disciples with the news, "I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!" And she told them that He had said these things to her. (John 20:18) At our 32nd annual convention we honored women from our conferences with our Mary Magdalene Awards. These special and treasured women were given a rose, a certificate, and a monetary donation to a charity of their choice that is associated with the Women of the ELCA.

**Jayne Schouweiler**, Trinity Lutheran, Holms City  
Charity: Pathways/Luther Crest

**Pam Ross**, Trinity Lutheran, Detroit Lakes  
Charity: High School Scholarships

**Cindy Sandahl**, Zion Lutheran, Warroad  
Charity: Pathways/Luther Crest

**Tammy Bjerkness**, Foxhome Lutheran, Foxhome  
Charity: Seminary Stipend for Women

**Sue Smith**, First Lutheran, Baudette  
Charity: Lutheran Campus Ministries

**Else Andersen**, Sverdrup Lutheran, Underwood  
Charity: None Specified

**Beth Rengstorf**, Grove Lake Lutheran, Pelican Rapids  
Charity: Lutheran World Relief

**Janice Sandness**, Central Lutheran, Pelican Rapids  
Charity: None Specified

**Barbara K. Benson**, First Lutheran, Bemidji  
Charity: Seminary Stipend for Women

**Phyllis Neuenfeldt**, First Lutheran, Detroit Lakes  
Charity: Lutheran Social Services

**Carla Gauwitz**, Calvary Lutheran, Perham  
Charity: Pathways/Luther Crest

**Pam Olson**, Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead  
Charity: Lutheran Campus Ministries

**Dolores Simdorn**, Hope Lutheran, Fergus Falls  
Charity: Lutheran Campus Ministries

**Bonnie Swenson**, Our Savior's Lutheran, Barnesville  
Charity: Lutheran World Relief

**Heather Pederson**, Cormorant Lutheran, Lake Park  
Charity: Lutheran Campus Ministries

**Winnie Collins**, First Lutheran, Battle Lake  
Charity: Lutheran World Relief

**Diane Hagen**, Nora Lutheran, Kensington  
Charity: Lutheran World Relief

**Kathy Ortloff**, First Lutheran, Alexandria  
Charity: Pathways/Luther Crest

**Bonnie Underdahl**, Faith Lutheran, Bagley  
Charity: Seminary Stipend for Women

**Irene Vidden**, Little Norway, Fertile  
Charity: Lutheran World Relief



*Well Done Good and Faithful Servants*





## Human Trafficking 101—Kathy Gordon Support within Reach



- **NW Minnesota has the highest amount of self identified traffickers.**
  - At least 5,000 young people between the ages of 15-19 in Minnesota have traded sex. (*Youth who trade sex are considered sexually exploited under Minnesota's Safe Harbor Law*).
  - Sexual exploitation is a public health issue that harms individuals, communities, and populations across the state.

### What to do if you suspect a child is being sexually exploited:

If you suspect that a child or young person has been or is being sexually exploited, Support Within Reach (SWR) recommends that you do not confront the alleged abuser. Confronting them may place the Child in greater physical danger and may give the abuser time to confuse or threaten the victim into silence. Instead, seek professional advice. Discuss your concerns with your local authority's children's services (safeguarding team), the police or an independent organization, such as Support Within Reach. They may be able to advise you on how to prevent further abuse and how to talk to your child to get an understanding of the situation.

**For more information on Human Trafficking in Northwest Minnesota, contact: Support Within Reach, Bemidji 218-444-9524. [www.supportwithinreach.org](http://www.supportwithinreach.org)**



## People's Church—Pastor Birgitte Simpson



Pastor Birgitte Simpson and Brandon Antell spoke about how native spirituality and Christianity complement one another. Brandon told us about native customs and practices. He also told us that we would be welcomed at any of their ceremonies. He gave the women a gift of native articles that are sacred to his people.



## INSTALLATION SERVICE



OUTGOING BOARD MEMBERS



VOTING MEMBERS TO THE 2023 TRIENNIAL CONVENTION



2023-2024 OFFICERS AND BOARD MEMBERS

### NW MN Synodical Women's Organization of the ELCA

**Outgoing Board Members** (left to right): Ardys Horner, Diane Nord, Diane Teigland, and Carol Gealow

**Triennial Voting Members** (left to right): Arlene Teigen, Terry Pipho, Ardys Horner, Sue Ellwanger, Julie Jones, Marilyn Grandstrand, Nola Smith, and Lois Balko

**2023-2024 Officers and Board Members** (left to right): Marlene Block, Luella Thom, Terry Pipho, Arlene Teigen, Julie Jones, Marilyn Grandstrand, Nola Smith and Nominating Committee Member; Shawn Brunelle



#### 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.



## A Message from the President



Dear Sisters in Christ,

What an awesome September! We were able to gather as a community of women at our annual convention at Zion Lutheran in Thief River Falls MN. We had an amazing day growing in faith and engaging in ministry in action. We did not count the blessing bags that were brought to the convention, but there were many! Thank you! Each participant at the convention was asked to take at least one blessing bag and give it to someone that needed a blessing. Have you given your blessing bag to someone? People's Church, Churches United, Someplace Safe, and Hope Haven are just a few of the organizations that were blessed with blessing bags. Women in ministry and action!

We had interesting and informative speakers on human trafficking, how native spirituality and Christianity complement each other, and on leadership. We had morning

devotions with Pastor Kristin Ostercamp, we recognized 20 women for their go and tell spirit with the Mary Magdalene award, we raised money for the next triennial convention through the Silent Auction, we were inspired by Pastor Rebel's Bible Study, and guided through worship by Pastor Stephanie White and Bishop Bill Tesch. We elected Luella Thom as Vice President and Pam Bowman as secretary. We also elected the following Board Members: Marlene Block, Julie Paulson, and Tracy Buchholz.

Please mark your calendar for next year's annual convention – September 20-21, 2024 at Christ the King Lutheran Church in Moorhead MN. Our keynote speaker will be Deb Hadley. She will tell you her heartbreaking story of how her tragedy brought her closer to God. You do not want to miss this convention!

Later in September, 18 women from the Northwest Minnesota Synod Women's Organization made our way to Phoenix AZ for the Triennial Convention and Gathering. Myrna Wells-Ulland (formerly of the NE MN Synod) was elected president and Merrily Burmeister (NW MN Conference 3) was elected to the executive board. Triennial 2026 will be in Des Moines IA. Are you thinking road trip?

The Triennial Gathering featured amazing workshops, the exhibit area was set up in groupings of hands-on activities and varied vendors. There was so much excitement in the air, it was great to be there.

Leadership is so vital to our organization. We need you to step up and say yes to serving in a leadership role. NW MN Fall Servant Leadership Retreat will be at Camp Emmaus on November 10 & 11. I am encouraging all board members, conference leaders, unit leaders, and ANYONE who is feeling the call to leadership to join us. It will be a superb experience. Please contact Terry Pipho (terry.pipho@gmail.com) with your reservation. This training is limited to the first 30 people.

Finally on a personal note – I have accepted a call as SAM (Synod Authorized Minister) at Good Shepherd Lutheran/Our Savior's Lutheran in Clearbrook/Leonard MN. My first day there was October 23. I am in the process of moving to Clearbrook. My new address is 417 3rd Ave SW, Clearbrook MN 56634. My email address and phone number remain the same.

I am excited to start a new year with the Women of NW MN. My prayer is that all women find their calling and pray it includes the Synod Women's Organization.

May Christ bless you!

Marilyn Grandstrand  
NWMN SWO President  
763-258-9217  
[Mgrand1000@ymail.com](mailto:Mgrand1000@ymail.com)



# Treasurer's Report of the 2023 Convention

September 9, 2023 Zion Lutheran Church, Thief River Falls, MN.

## INCOME

Convention Registration	\$7,025
Other Income	\$ 295
Convention Offerings Received	\$3,417
Total Income	\$10,737

## EXPENSES

Board expenses	
postage	\$385
Printing	\$320
Gifts	\$122
Misc.	\$ 23
Mary Magdalene supplies	\$130
Lodging and meals	\$1,351
Mileage	\$ 268
Honorariums	\$1,200
Catering	\$1,236

## Benevolences

Women of the ELCA, churchwide 50% of offering	\$1,709
People's Church (25% of offering)	\$854
Support Within Reach (25% of offering)	\$854
Mary Magdalene Award donations	\$500

**Total Expenses** \$8,952

**Balance** \$1,785

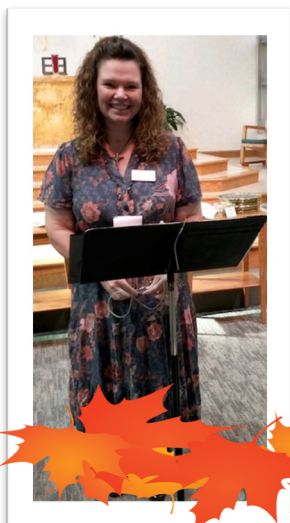


The balance will go toward supporting the budget for 2023-2024 including AMMPARO, Katie's Fund, and other benevolence and missions.

The NWMNSWO helped support 18 women to attend the Triennial Gathering in Phoenix in September.

We are very grateful for your generosity in giving of your offerings and your commitment to the work of empowering Women of the ELCA. Please continue to send your offerings and gifts to Northwestern Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization, in care of Terry Pipho, Treasurer, 323 - 49<sup>th</sup> Ave SW, Moorhead, MN 56560. If you have any questions, you can call me at 701-866-3495 or email me at [nwmnsw@outlook.com](mailto:nwmnsw@outlook.com) You can download Offering Form A on our webpage to use for Regular offerings. <https://www.nwmnsynod.org/pages/swo-forms>

Women of the **ELCA**





# Triennial Convention & Gathering—Phoenix, AZ



# 12th Triennial Convention Highlights



More than 251 Women of the ELCA voting members worshiped together, conducted business and elected new officers and churchwide executive board members during the Twelfth Triennial Convention, Sept. 18-21, in Phoenix, Arizona.

The voting body elected Myrna Wells-Ulland, Phoenix, Arizona (Grand Canyon Synodical Women's Organization), as president. "Women of the ELCA is a wonderful organization," said Myrna Wells-Ulland, elected on the fourth ballot as the organization's president for the 2023-2026 triennium. "I love the things we do [and] all of the initiatives we have. I know they are challenging... I am really excited about the capabilities we have for this next triennium. [In Hebrew], hineni means 'Here I am, Lord. You called me. Use me. So I'm going to close with that. Hineni.'"

Other officers elected are: Lorie Garcia, Corpus Cristi, Texas (Southwestern Texas Synodical Women's Organization), vice president; Gwen Edwards, Bellevue, Nebraska (Nebraska SWO), secretary; and Jennifer Armstrong-Schaefer, Latrobe, Pennsylvania (Southwestern Pennsylvania SWO), treasurer.

Those elected to serve on the churchwide executive board are: Jean Pishaw, Forest Grove, Oregon (Oregon Synodical Women's Organization); Maria Lokensgard, St. Peter Minnesota (Southwestern Minnesota SWO); Jennifer Ackerman, Elyria, Ohio (Northeastern Ohio SWO); Julia Sabella, Hillsborough Township, New Jersey (New Jersey SWO); Sheena Foster, Silver Spring, Maryland, (Metropolitan Washington, DC, SWO); Anna Jetson, Spring Grove, Minnesota (Northeastern Iowa SWO); Tracy Williams, Long Beach, California (Southwest California SWO); Yma Mulero, Carolina, Puerto Rico (Caribbean SWO); Ginger Cutrell, Manchester, Tennessee (Southeastern SWO); Joyce Brooks, Detroit, Michigan (Southeast Michigan SWO); **Merrily Burmeister, Bemidji, Minnesota (Northwestern Minnesota SWO)**. Officers and churchwide executive board members will serve the 2023-26 term.

It was the first time the convention had met in person in six years, after many changes wrought by the pandemic. As executive director Linda Post Bushkofsky told voting members in her report, "Few things remain the same... The pandemic and all that it brought caused us to focus, with laser precision, on what really matters. It caused us to try different ways of being together in community."

Far from taking its last breath, the Women of the ELCA is evolving, changing and being transformed, Post Bushkofsky said. "Does a dying organization launch a \$1 million campaign, expand its hospitality to those in the margins or recommit to its anti-racism work? Does a dying organization embrace online learning and worship in new and diverse ways? No. ... The Holy Spirit is pushing and pulling us forward. Some of us are jumping on board, moving into that future. [Others] of us won't be making that journey, resisting the reality of where we are going. But the good news is, that the journey has begun. ... We are a big, beautiful, flawed community, created in the image of God, [living] as disciples of Jesus."

In a range of actions during plenary sessions, voting members:

- Encouraged Women of the ELCA participants to participate in the Truth and Healing Movement and to ask their congregations to create their own land acknowledgment statements.
- Recommended that Women of the ELCA participants engage in Now Is the Time: A Study Guide for ELCA Declaration to People of African Descent, which "stresses realism, self-examination and accountability as the church acknowledges and apologizes for the history and impact of slavery and systemic racism," according to [www.elca.org/Resources/Racial-Justice](http://www.elca.org/Resources/Racial-Justice).
- Rejected two attempts to reduce future triennial convention costs, via a memorial and a proposed bylaw change that would have set the number of voting members to three per synod in addition to synodical presidents.
- Adopted a 2024 churchwide budget of \$1.9 million.
- Received a greeting and a special "Just Love" plaque from Faustina Nillan, National Director for Women and Children, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania. The plaque was to commemorate the Women of the ELCA Just Love Triennial Gathering, which began after the convention closed.

by Cindy Novak and Elizabeth Hunter

(read the full article at <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/news/elections-support-for-antiracism-and-healing-work-feature-large>)



## 2023 TRIENNIAL GATHERING FOCUSES ON “JUST LOVE”



Nearly 800 women from across the country converged on the Phoenix Convention Center to learn, grow, worship and serve together during Women of the ELCA's 2023 Just Love Gathering, Sept. 21-24. Workshops, Bible studies and plenaries covered a range of topics, including immigration, human trafficking, climate change, the Truth and Healing Movement and allyship.

Servant events allowed women to give back by donating blood, making quilts for Lutheran World Relief, participating in the “Run, Walk and Roll” 5K to benefit Women of the ELCA's Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls initiative, donating in-kind gifts for Phoenix-area non-profits, and knitting and crocheting “Knitted Knockers” breast prostheses.

The Just Love Gathering opened with a Thankoffering service in which the Rev. Irma Bañales, director for evangelical mission in the Northern

Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, preached and the Rev. Deborah Hutterer, bishop of the Grand Canyon Synod, presided. **Nearly \$20,000 in Thankofferings** were received in the service based on the 2023 Thankoffering service (<https://www.womenoftheelca.org/thankofferings>) written by the Rev. Melissa Bills, director of college ministries and college pastor, at Luther College, Decorah, Iowa. Following the service and the first plenary session, attendees spilled out on the Canyon on Third and enjoyed refreshments, music and dancing, a long-awaited reunion and fellowship opportunity.

**The Rev. Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy**, a Native American theologian, led a Bible study session that focused on immigration. “Immigrants are not threats or a burden but our siblings,” she said. “We need to have open hearts and minds and see the face of God in all.” Sherman-Conroy said the command to love your neighbor as yourself (see Matthew 22:37-40) mirrors Lakota philosophy “to value all,” she said. “It is a call to action to embrace others the same way you embrace yourself.” Sherman-Conroy shared ideas on how to provide welcome to immigrants. “It starts with dialogue,” she said. “Advocate and volunteer. Create community where everyone feels valued, included and part of God’s creation.”

During a plenary session, **Dr. Jacqueline Busse**, author of *Love Without Limits*, looked at the issue of immigration through the lens of the story of Jesus healing the man with edema on the Sabbath, angering religious leaders. (See Luke 14:1-6)

“It was a scandalous healing,” she said. “He went beyond the normal boundaries to show love.”

Busse said we can apply this lesson to caring for immigrants. “Agape love is excessive,” she said. “It enlarges the circle of care. God’s love busts the binaries and widens the ‘we.’ We belong together. We are kin.”

**Krish O’Mara Vignarajah**, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, explained how every minute, 20 people are forced to leave their homes. That’s nearly 30,000 people per day. “Imagine the sheer terror of fleeing your home, leaving everything behind, [leaving] your community,” she said. “The fear of the unknown is palpable, yet it is safer than the known.” “As people of faith, we believe that every person is a reflection of the divine, deserving of dignity, respect and protection. Faith calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. But who is our neighbor in a globalized world? Isn’t it all the families driven from their homes by flooding, drought, wildfires, sea level rise, and other disasters? We are called to reach out to them, to welcome them, and to stand with them in their time of need.

**Pat Bellingham**, a Women of the ELCA participant from Erie, Pennsylvania, described the SOAP (Saving our Adolescents from Prostitution) ministry she and other members of her women’s organization participate in.

To date, the group has distributed 15,000 bars of soap, labeled with the Human Trafficking Hotline number, to hotels throughout Northwest Pennsylvania. The group also gives hotel front-desk and hospitality staff a packet of information describing human trafficking red flags. Red flags can include: seeing young girls check into hotels by themselves or seeing someone check in for only a few hours instead of overnight.

by Cindy Novak and Elizabeth Hunter

(read the full article at: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/post/2023-triennial-gathering-focuses-on-just-love>)

# MY MOTHER'S THANKOFFERING BOX



## 1 Thessalonians 5:18

"Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

My mother's Thankoffering box had its own place of honor on the windowsill in the kitchen. It welcomed the morning light, observed the crops growing, heartened to the birds' call, watched for the first flakes in winter. And through every season, and every circumstance, my mother would offer her thanks, putting a dime, or a quarter, or a dollar in the box. Often it was for a special concern – in thanks when her college daughter returned home after traveling, safety after a fierce storm, in thanks for a bountiful garden harvest, for occasions when extended family could be together. Sometimes an

offering, a daily thanksgiving for simple things, or God's mercies new every morning. Her offering box was a symbol of my mother's thankful heart, her grateful spirit, her trust in God's care.

Some journal their daily affirmations or gratitude. Others, like a friend of mine, post on social media each day one thing for which she is thankful. I love reading each day just what has stirred her heart with thankfulness. We can each learn to pay attention, to notice things and people and circumstances and to offer our thanks. And we can mark those with a gift in gratitude placed in our Thankoffering box.

My own Thankoffering box has a place of honor on my kitchen windowsill. It is actually a repurposed salted nut can with a slit in its lid. In Advent or Lent I most often use a special offering box from ELCA World Hunger.

November is traditionally the month in which we gather our Thankofferings and offer them in worship, or in our circles or congregational group. Shared with churchwide Women of the ELCA, these gifts and offerings continue to support the work and service of women in our church and in communities around the world, supporting training women leaders, communication, and program development.

May our Thankofferings be a daily awareness, and a daily commitment to the ministry of women and of the Women of the ELCA. Holy One, open our eyes and hearts in daily awareness of your gifts and in gratitude. Help us to live in thankfulness, service, and praise. In Jesus' name. Amen

By The Rev. Gail Heidtke  
Retired ELCA pastor living in Palatine, IL.



Download [Giving Thanks to God – All Day, Every Day](#), a series of prayers to use throughout the day that will help you build the discipline of thanking God in all circumstances.

Learn about the history of Thankofferings by downloading [All About Thankofferings](#) and share that history with those in your congregational unit.



**Thank You, LORD!**

Winter SNOW Edition  
Deadline for Articles will be January 30th—Conference Recorders, please send minutes and photos for publication. Also any Conference Spring Gathering dates and information will also be published in the Winter Edition  
[snoweditor@gmail.com](mailto:snoweditor@gmail.com)





# “We have felt the power of your prayer”

## Gather Bible study leader continues work in Jerusalem

Following the Oct. 7 Hamas attack on southern Israel and the Israeli siege of Gaza, many *Gather* readers contacted Women of the ELCA churchwide staff to ask about the safety of *Gather* Bible study author the Rev. Dr. Meghan Johnston Aelabouni and her family. Many of the inquiries came after the ELCA's difficult decision to evacuate the ELCA Young Adult in Global Mission (YAGM) volunteers serving in the West Bank and country coordinators ELCA pastors Adam and Jordan Miller-Stubbendick, with their young children.

Johnston Aelabouni reported: “We are safe in Jerusalem and continue our work [accompanying the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and other partners], which is now more important than ever.” Johnston Aelabouni serves as ELCA Theologian in Residence for the Middle East and North Africa desk. She and her spouse, the Rev. Gabi Aelabouni, an ELCA pastor, have three children.

“Participants in Women of the ELCA grow fond of authors they read, and so it’s no surprise that many have contacted the churchwide offices to ask about the wellbeing of the author of the current Bible study published in *Gather*, the Rev. Dr. Meghan Johnston Aelabouni, and her family,” said Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director, Women of the ELCA.

“Even before the recent violence between Hamas and Israel, many participants have been praying for the Aelabouni family,” Post Bushkofsky said. “Now those prayers have expanded—both in number and breadth—prayers of peace and wellbeing for all who live in the Middle East, prayers of peace and justice throughout the world. In the words of our Purpose Statement, participants are actively promoting healing and wholeness in the church, the society and the world.”

### Incredibly thankful

“We remain incredibly thankful for the outpourings of prayer and love for our family and for all the people of the Holy Land,” Meghan and Gabi shared in an Oct. 21 special update. “We have felt the power of your prayer; it has sustained us. We truly do feel safe where we are; and we also feel deeply called to be where we are ... to offer whatever help we can as we accompany our local partners on behalf of the ELCA.”

Johnston Aelabouni also serves as co-pastor, alongside ELCJHL pastor the Rev. Sally Azar, at Lutheran Church of the Redeemer, an international congregation in Jerusalem. Azar is the first female Palestinian pastor to be ordained in the Holy Land. During their congregation’s October 15 worship service, Azar and Johnston Aelabouni led the singing of an Advent hymn, “Come Now, O Prince of Peace,” that spoke to the current realities.

“These are such heavy, terrible days in Jerusalem,” Johnston Aelabouni said in her sermon that day. “Such unthinkable violence against children, parents, grandparents, young people. So many lives ended—and every one of them a human being with a name, a story, a place in this world. They are Jewish, Muslim, Christian; Palestinian and Israeli. Dancers in the desert, families huddling together, moving from house to house only to find that no place is safe. And now in Gaza, there is a war—a war not against Hamas only, but a war against 2.3 million people who have nowhere else to go and whose water, food, electricity and medicine are running out. Half of them are children.”

Yet death and violence will not have the last word, Johnston Aelabouni said. “The last word belongs to the God who will swallow up death forever. To that hope may we cling, even as we mourn, and pray, and wait. May it come soon, O God. May it come now.”

You can help: *Make a gift to Lutheran Disaster Response at <https://community.elca.org/gaza>*

Get news updates: *<https://elca.org/Israel-Hamas%20War>*





Northwestern Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization of the ELCA

NW MN SNOW Newsletter

Lois Bylund, Editor

1911 19th Street S

Moorhead, MN 56560

Cell: 701-261-3481

E-mail: snoweditor@gmail.com

Women<sup>of the</sup> **ELCA** 

## UP COMING EVENTS

**The 2026 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering**  
will be held in **Des Moines, Iowa, July 16-19, 2026.**

Advanced discounted registration for this event is  
available online at: [https://na.eventscloud.com/ereg/  
index.php?eventid=763420&](https://na.eventscloud.com/ereg/index.php?eventid=763420&)



**36th Annual NW MN SWO Convention**

**September 20-21, 2024**

**Christ the King Lutheran Church  
Moorhead, MN**

