

SNOW Newsletter

From the Desk of the President



Dear Sisters in Christ,

In the darkness and cold of winter, we remember that Christ is the light and love in our world. With the current unrest in our state, it is more important than ever that we live the gospel in our words and actions.

Your SWO Convention Planning Committee is excited to announce the theme and accompanying Bible verse for our 2026 convention event that will be hosted by Trinity Lutheran Church in Crookston on September 18th & 19th. Our chosen theme is "Button up your Faith" and accompanying verse from Hebrews 11:1 reads Now

Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. We are planning an interesting interactive project that all attendees will be asked to assist with through the two-day event and completed by end of day 2. Watch for more details about this Project. Everyone looks forward to the silent auction, and it will be a part of the festivities again this year. It's not too early to start thinking about what your group wishes to bring. Please watch for the first mailing with registration information, nomination forms and other pertinent information you will want to know about the convention. It is important that you share this information with your WELCA group. Come prepared to be refreshed and renewed.

The SWO Board has several positions that need to be filled. As the old Uncle Sam saying goes, "We need YOU." This year, we will be electing a president, treasurer, three board members, and three individuals to serve on the nominating committee. If you are contacted by a member of the nominating committee, we ask that you prayerfully consider your response. If you feel called to serve, please reach out to a member of the nominating committee: Diane Nord (diane_nord@yahoo.com), Dianne Bjerketvedt (bjeraedo@prtcl.com), or Jodie Olson (jlynnolson61@gmail.com). This is a wonderful opportunity to be involved in the important work of our organization.

Planning for the Spring Gatherings has begun in each conference. While some dates and locations are still being finalized at the time of this SNOW edition, updates will be posted on the website as they become available. I look forward to seeing many of you at your Spring Gathering.

There is still time to register for the Triennial Gathering, which will be held in July in Des Moines. Since this location is close to home, it would be wonderful to have a strong coalition from Northwest Minnesota attend. Funds from the Convention Silent Auctions are available to help offset costs, and those funds will be divided equally among attendees. The Convention Plenary Sessions will be conducted virtually, while the Gathering itself will be held in person. "I Am Worthy" is the theme of this year's event. Information about event activities, including registration details, can be found at WELCATG.org. We hope to see you there!

Blessings to all,

Carol Balk
SWO President



Special points of interest:

- Fall Gathering Reports
- Faith Lutheran, Bagley
- Board Position Openings
- Mary Magdalene Nominations
- Scholarships
- Idea Corner
- Seminary Stipend
- Call for Nominations

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Fall Conference Gathering Highlights

The **Conference 2** Fall Gathering was held on Saturday, October 4, at Our Savior's of Thief Lake. The event was hosted by the WELCA women of Our Savior's and First Lutheran of Middle River. This year's theme centered on The Good Samaritan, reminding participants of the call to compassion and service within their communities. Members of the Middle River Ambulance crew led an engaging and informative presentation, sharing insight into their work and the importance of community support in emergency response. Special music was provided by Connie Moe of Grace Lutheran in Grygla, offering a meaningful addition to the day's program. A special offering was collected during the gathering and presented to the Middle River Ambulance crew to support their continued service and dedication to the area. The day was filled with learning, reflection, and community—an inspiring reminder of the impact of coming together in faith and service.



*Be on your guard.
Stand firm in faith.
Be courageous.
BE STRONG.
Do everything in love.*

1 Corinthians 16:13-14

The **Conference 4** Fall Gathering was held October 18, 2025, in Leonard, MN. The theme was "Strong in Faith, Courageous in Love." Devotions were led by Pr. Michael Wright, reminding us to hold on through life's challenges with patience, faith, and trust in God. Music was provided by Pr. Wright with guitar accompaniment by Sarah Imle.

Nola Smith, SWO Board Member, shared highlights from her July trip to Tanzania and her work supporting the African Girls' Scholarship and Mentorship Program. She reflected on her theme verse, 1 Corinthians 16:13-14: "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love."

On Saturday, October 18, 2025, the women of North Buffalo Lutheran Church, rural Moorhead, warmly hosted the **Conference 5** Fall Gathering. Guests were invited to join in the fun by wearing hats, pearls, and all things fancy for a delightful Autumn Morning Tea Party theme. The morning devotion, centered on 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, invited participants to imagine themselves as teapots—pouring out their gifts in service to others, just as God pours comfort and compassion into our lives.

Following a delicious brunch, attendees welcomed guest speaker Pastor Rebel Hurd, Associate to the Bishop for Mission. Her presentation, "Fill, Steep, Pour: A Recipe for Discipleship," encouraged everyone to discover meaningful ways to live out their discipleship within their everyday communities. The gathering was a joyful mix of fellowship, learning, and inspiration—steeping hearts in gratitude and renewing a shared call to serve.



Fall Conference Gathering Highlights Continued



The **Conference 7** Fall Gathering was held on Saturday, October 25, 2025, at Zion of Amor Lutheran Church in Battle Lake. The theme for the day, "Where Spirits Fly," was grounded in Matthew 19:14: "Let the children come to me and do not stop them because the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Pastor Kate Bruns opened the gathering with a devotion based on the theme verse, reminding attendees that Jesus saw every child—welcoming and blessing them without hesitation. In the same way, Jesus welcomes each of us, seeing and accepting us fully. The gathering began with the beloved hymn "Jesus Loves Me," with music provided throughout the event by pianist Sandy Sedivy.

The keynote speaker, Caitlin Malin, Director of Services at Camp Knutson, shared an inspiring presentation about the impactful work happening at the camp, a ministry of Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota. Located near Crosslake, Camp Knutson offers individualized, one-to-one support for campers with a wide range of health and physical challenges including autism, heart disease, cancer, Down syndrome, skin conditions, and experiences of grief following the death of a parent or sibling.

Camp Knutson partners with 17 nonprofit organizations to provide specialized medical and program support, ensuring campers can fully participate in activities such as horseback riding, swimming, boating, fishing, and arts and crafts. Caitlin emphasized that Camp Knutson is a place "where kids can just be kids," discovering they are not alone and that their challenges do not define them.

The gathering concluded with the hymns "Shall We Gather at the River" and "Children of the Heavenly Father." Attendees then joined together in the Lord's Prayer and received the Benediction. A delicious lunch, prepared by the women of Zion of Amor, provided a lovely finish to the day of learning, worship, and fellowship.

"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:26 (KJV)

Conference 8 held its Fall Gathering on October 11, 2026, with the theme "Hear God's Call and Walk in Faith." The verse for the day was Matthew 19:26: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Pastor Mark Matthews led devotions and communion, reflecting on Mary Magdalene's call to "Go and Tell."

Betty McBrady Thomes served as the guest speaker, sharing the work of Action for Children – Zambia, where her sister Carol has served for over 23 years.

Known by many as "Grandma Carol," she supports children living on the streets in a country where 65% live in poverty and many families cannot support all of their children. Through God's guidance, the mission has built housing, a church, and safe spaces for boys, girls, and abused children—needs that remain constant. Carol's work continues to reduce the number of children living on the streets, offering hope and care to the most vulnerable.

Nola Smith urged our churches to look for opportunities to help those who are homeless in our towns and communities so that we continue caring for God's children with love and intention.

More Photos from Conference 5—Autumn Tea Party



25th Annual Community Christmas Day Dinner *Hosted by Faith Lutheran, Bagley*

Faith Lutheran Church of Bagley joyfully hosted its 25th annual Community Christmas Day Dinner at noon on December 25, 2025. This long-standing tradition once again brought together friends, neighbors, and volunteers to celebrate the season through food, fellowship, and service.

This year's event served approximately 150 meals through delivery or pickup, while another 160 guests enjoyed their Christmas dinner in the church's fellowship hall. Attendees were treated to a delicious ham dinner complete with all the traditional holiday sides, and everyone went home with a festive "treat bag."

The celebration was made possible by about 50 volunteers from seven local churches. Ranging in age from 3 to 83, these dedicated helpers assembled treat bags, prepared food, served meals, delivered plates across the community, and handled clean-up afterward. Their teamwork and generosity embodied the true spirit of the season.

The Community Christmas Day Dinner continues to be a meaningful opportunity for connection—bringing people together, sharing joy, and reminding everyone of the importance of meeting and caring for our neighbors.



Lila Strandline, with Gladys & Albert Luecken



Keith and Phyllis Baumann



Family of Volunteers

Faith Lutheran Church Women Serve Through Mission Work



The Women of Faith Lutheran Church in Bagley gather on the fourth Tuesday of each month to carry out meaningful mission work together. Their January gathering was especially productive as they tied quilts and assembled 62 health care kits for Lutheran World Relief (LWR). The group is grateful and energized by LWR's expanded outreach, which now includes support for needs within the United States in addition to their global efforts. Knowing their work can bless neighbors both near and far brings renewed purpose to their ministry.

Active WELCA Group at Faith Lutheran, Bagley—Backpack Challenge

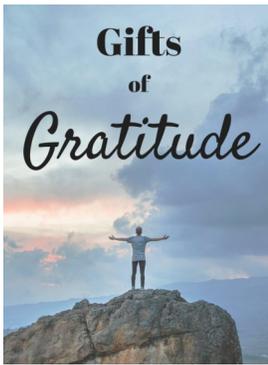
Last summer we distributed 79 school backpacks with supplies to local elementary students. This winter, we also organized the Salvation Army Red Kettle campaign, recruiting volunteers from our church along with the Rotary and Lions Clubs. Thanks to generous community support, over \$2,900 was raised—providing a strong boost for Clearwater County and ensuring we can continue the backpack program again next year.



SILENT AUCTION BASKETS NEEDED



Once again we will offer a Silent Auction at the WELCA SWO Convention on September 19 and 20 at First Lutheran Church in Alexandria. 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.



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 and then divided equally and given to each student as a gift in January 2027 to use in any way they wish.

Donations can be sent to the SWO Treasurer. Use Offering Form A or send a check and write "Seminary Stipend For Women" on the memo line.

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

Thank you for your kindness and generosity!

Mark Your Calendar
SNOW Newsletter
Deadline
April 30, 2026

SWO High School Scholarships Available

If you, or anyone you know is a high school senior graduating this spring, and is planning to attend an ELCA College, they may be eligible for a scholarship through the SWO W/ELCA. A letter detailing the qualifications, plus a form to fill out can be found online at: nwmnsynod.org/assets/High-School-Scholarship-Letter-and-Application.pdf

The four criteria for eligibility are:

1. Be a graduating High School Senior with a "C" average or above.
2. Be a member of an ELCA Church.
3. Be a resident of the Northwestern Minnesota Synod of the ELCA.
4. Be attending an ELCA College.

If you have questions, or want to submit a completed form, contact:

Luella Thom
 PO Box 103 Carlos, MN 56319
 Phone: 320-815-7701
thom17@wisper-wireless.com



Looking into the Mirror

Women of the ELCA

Looking into the Mirror

A Lenten Reflection

Lent is about looking into the mirror. Not the compact in your purse or the mirror above the bathroom sink, and not the big mirrored doors in a hotel room that show more than you might care to see. It's not even the 360-degree mirror made famous by the TV show "What Not to Wear." The mirror of Lent creates reflections even larger than that, for as author Annie Dillard reminds us, "how we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives." To ask questions about how we give, how we pray, and how we care for our neighbor is to hold a metaphorical mirror up to our souls. It is to lay open and bare before God our very lives, including all the things we hide from others and even that which we try to hide from ourselves.

Lent is good time for 40 days of reflection, 40 days of spiritual evaluation—an annual check-up, as it were.

This resource, available under the Resources tab on the Women of the ELCA website.

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



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.

Call for Nominations

At the convention this year, we will be electing a **President, Treasurer, and 3 board members**. All 2 Year Terms. *(The goal is to elect 1 board member from Conferences 1,2,3; 1 board member from Conferences 4,5,6; and 1 board member from Conferences 7,8.)* **3 Nominating Committee Members (1-Year)** if you or if you know someone that would be interested in any of these positions, please contact:

Diane Nord (diane_nord@yahoo.com),
Dianne Bjerketvedt (bjeraedo@prtcl.com), or Jodie Olson
(jlynnolson61@gmail.com).



The Idea Corner



Are you looking for ways to put your faith into action?



Crossroads at MSUM provides free meals to students on Thursdays before worship. Would you, your church, or other group be interested in providing a meal one time or once a month? Please email Deacon Yvonne at steindaly@gmail.com to get on the list. They would also welcome your donations of gift cards toward our meals. Some favorites are Dairy Queen, Pizza Ranch and Olive Garden OR snacks from Target. Thank you!



September 18&19, 2026

**NWMN SWO
Annual Convention**

**Trinity Lutheran Church
205 S Broadway
Crookston, MN 56716**



Mary Magdalene Award

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 annual convention, we will honor a woman from each of our conferences with our Mary Magdalene Award. These special and treasured women will be given a rose, a certificate, and a monetary donation to a charity associated with the Women of the ELCA. Do you know a woman who has been faithful to Jesus' command to **"GO and TELL"**? Please nominate her for this award.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Congregation _____ Conference _____

Please indicate your charity preference below:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School Scholarships | <input type="checkbox"/> Katie's Fund |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran World Relief | <input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran Campus Ministries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pathways/Luther Crest | <input type="checkbox"/> Seminary Stipend for Women |

On a separate sheet of paper write a brief paragraph that tells us how your nominee demonstrates the Command "Go and Tell". Also please **SUBMIT A BRIEF BIO OF THE NOMINEE**. Be sure to encourage this person to attend the fall convention. Have your unit help pay her registration! (Person submitting form: please fill this part out so we can let you know if she received the award)

Your Name _____ Phone Number _____

Email _____

Mail or email by **July 15, 2026**, to: **Luella Thom**
PO Box 103 304 Main Ave
Carlos MN 56319
Cell: 320-815-7701
Email: Thom17@wisper-wireless.com



Northwestern Minnesota Synodical Women's Organization of the ELCA

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Conference Spring Gathering's 2026

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|--------------|----------|-------------------------------|--|
| Conference 3 | April 26 | Sand Hill Lutheran, Climax | Registration at 9:00—Speaker: Nola Smith |
| Conference 4 | May 2 | Calvary Lutheran, Park Rapids | Registration at 9:00 Speaker: Former Miss America |
| Conference 5 | TBD | Zion Lutheran, Twin Valley | |
| Conference 7 | April 13 | Sverdrup Lutheran, Underwood | Registration at 4:00 PM |
| Conference 8 | April 18 | Bethesda Lutheran, Alexandria | Speaker: Peggy Kallevig Women of Valor; Mary, Sister of Lazarus |

Please check the website for updates at : <https://www.nwmnsynod.org/pages/swo-conference-meetings>

