



Reflections...

A Newsletter of the Women of the ELCA + Northern Great Lakes Synod

GREETINGS FROM MARY ELLEN PERKINS, SWO PRESIDENT

A Disastrous Winter



As I sit here in mid-February, composing my article for this March issue, I am reflecting on the strange winter we have been “gifted” by El Niño. We had no snow (except for some minor flurries) over the Thanksgiving weekend, hardly any snow by Christmas Eve, a dump of snow that disappeared with a week-long warm spell in the 40s and 50s (!) in January. Our ground is finally white once more, but on Valentine’s Day/Ash Wednesday we have a high of 40 degrees. I just don’t know what to make of it. And sadly, neither do the local businesses—motels, air BnBs, bars, etc. The local economy is suffering greatly from this uncharacteristically mild winter. Looks like folks will be giving up snowmobiling for Lent.

However, word from my daughter in California is that we are not bearing the worst of it. The Los Angeles area has been getting record rainfalls that have triggered over 475 massive mudslides from hills denuded of vegetation by wildfires. Deep flows of mud have slammed into houses, smashing through walls and even shoving houses off their foundations. The San Francisco area has experienced very high winds that have toppled trees and downed power lines. Nature’s power to destroy is terrifying.

But in addition to natural disasters are the man-made crises we are witnessing around the world. The wars in Ukraine and Gaza have killed innocent people, left populations terrorized and homeless, and have driven refugees from their homelands. This is not new. Every year we see similar devastation all over the globe.

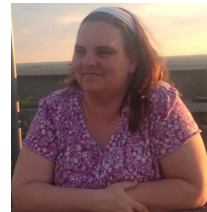
What can we women--we Christians--do in response? First, we must fall on our knees and pray to our God to bring comfort and relief to suffering people. Then we must explore ways that we can be God’s hands in the face of such great need. Many of our women’s groups make quilts that are sent by Lutheran World Relief to people who need the enveloping warmth of a quilt’s “hug.” We can also assemble personal care kits for distribution by LWR. We can send our monetary contributions to Lutheran Disaster Relief and other caring organizations.

During this season of Lent we need to spend time on self-reflection. We must examine where we can step up our efforts to spread God’s love in our communities, our country, and around the globe. Remember, we must confess our sins of omission as well as commission. Where have we failed to act? Let us all seek ways where we can make a difference--not wasting our talents and resources--so God can tell us at the end, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”



A WORD FROM NGLSWO VICE PRESIDENT & HISTORIAN

In respect to the history of the Women of the ELCA, our Foremothers have made significant impacts including, but not limited to the following:



“The magazine *Lutheran Woman Today* began publishing in January 1988 and *Newsletter* (the predecessor to *Interchange*) followed in June of that year. The organization’s first website was inaugurated in 1995. *Café*, our electronic magazine for young women launched in 2006, with podcasts soon to follow. In 2011, *Lutheran Woman Today* changed its name to *Gather*, and continued providing award-winning content (Bible studies and articles) to more than 45,000 readers, with a pass-along rate of 3 additional people per subscriber. The organization’s first smart phone app, [Daily Grace](#), was unveiled in 2011 (available for IOS and Android), the same year that the magazine took on a new name, *Gather*. Various program initiatives were launched in 1988, some of which continue today such as our [scholarship program](#). Initiatives came and went, meeting the needs of the women at the time. [Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls](#), the organization’s health initiative, began in 2005. [Bold Women’s Day](#), an annual celebration of our mission and the women who accomplish it, launched in 2007.”

I have seen the Northern Great Lakes SWO make an impact in the lives of women through the bonds of friendship and support. My mother, who moved to the U.P. 65+years ago, was welcomed into the community as well as the congregation of the ELCA church in Iron Mountain, MI, by a couple of these wonderful Women of the ELCA. Over 65 years later, through many ups and downs, they are still friends. These women support one another, pray for each other (and their families), teach, preach and lead one another. They share their strengths and lean on one another in their weak moments. These beautiful connections are rare, especially these days.

I love to remember those times and have found those lasting, beautiful connections for myself among our Synodical Women's Organization today. Spread the word and invite women to access these resources and bonds that last.

A WORD FROM CAROL ONTTO, NGLSWO SECRETARY

Hello! My name is Carol Ontto. I was elected Secretary of our Synodical Women’s Organization in October. I have to admit I had a rocky start. I was still recovering from nasty gall bladder surgery. My first Board meeting was pretty much a disaster—had trouble with my laptop and missed most of the meeting. I am now ready to get down to business.



I live in Harvey and am the Office Administrator at Prince of Peace Lutheran, here in Harvey, I am also a member at Messiah Lutheran/Marquette. Both keep me busy. In my free time I love to knit, read and walk my the dog Frankie and occasionally we go rock hunting,

The committee I have been assigned to is Community Action (Justice). I decided to take on the problem of poverty. It is something that has always be with us and has been on my mind for a really long time. I don't know any answers on how we can solve this. What I am trying to do, is make people aware of it and the causes of it. And maybe is some small way, we woman can make a difference in our communities. (continued)

The face of poverty for most Americans may be the vision of run-down urban housing where industries have left. The true face is found in rural areas (especially in the rural South and Southwest.)

A definition of poverty is the human condition of being unable to obtain or provide a standard level of food, water and shelter, Some causes of poverty are: income inequality, inflation ,unemployment, debt traps, access to a quality education, hunger and other basic services, and social discrimination.

If you want to read something eye opening, google the U. of M. Poverty solutions fact sheet. It will give you the the patient-to-doctor ratio by county.

Peace

A Lenten Reflection...



Give up complaining; focus on gratitude
Give up harsh judgments; think kindly thoughts
Give up worry; trust divine Providence
Give up discouragement; be full of hope
Give up bitterness; turn to forgiveness
Give up hatred; return good for evil
Give up negativism; be positive
Give up pettiness; become mature
Give up jealousy; pray for trust

A WORD FROM BARB MARDEN, NGLSWO TREASURER



A blessed Lenten season to everyone. I don't have much to say this month, except to give a quick year-end financial report. We ended the 2023-24 fiscal year with a checking account balance of \$7,667.35 and a savings account balance of \$990.05.

COMMENTS FROM JOANN NURMI, CLUSTER 1 REPRESENTATIVE



My name is JoAnn Nurmi. I'm a life time member of All Saints Lutheran Church. I've been involved there by being greeter communion assistant, greeter, second time on council, and have been going to Fortune Lake since I've been old enough to go.

COMMENTS FROM CONNIE SCHMIDT, CLUSTER 6 REPRESENTATIVE

'Be persistent in prayer, and keep alert as you pray, giving thanks to God.'

Colossians 4:2



Step up ... BE INVOLVED ... spread the kingdom (my last sentence in August 2022 year end article). I and others think about this especially since covid hit us and people seem to have slowed down activities. We have the Mkuza Girls School we support - to give students a successful future developed thru Christian faith to help spread peace and understanding in their communities/and the world. WE PRAY

Our world is restless, our churches face problems, our families have challenges. We need to be in community to encourage one another thru all of this. WE PRAY

At our Triennial in Phoenix in September, I met my friend from Africa telling me about how they are teaching men in their communities to love, honor, and cherish women to improve their communities. WE PRAY

A question in her presentation was - What do you always do to embrace 'Just Love' (our Triennial theme 2023) in one word. So those in attendance came up with - smile, listen, advocate, accept, justice, positive, care, hugs, fair, hospitality, willingness, informed, presence, etc. There was further discussion on each word to help foster a better world. WE PRAY

We need to do this in our homes, our families, our churches, our communities, unit/cluster gatherings, our time at FLLC -Place of Grace - Women Fall Retreat, our conventions, and working together in SWO helping to foster community. Invite others ...personal invitation goes a long way ! WE PRAY

Together...BEING INVOLVED...caring...developing peace and understanding we improve community here and now! Start - say 'YES' - JUST DO IT - it will happen as the Holy Spirit moves thru your heart to action and building of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ ! WE PRAY

COMMENTS FROM DIANE GENDRON, BOARD MEMBER AT LARGE

The covid pandemic which began back in 2020 changed many things for us ,one being how we were able to get together for bible study. Church services were being streamed online through Facebook and YouTube, but yet for women of the church, the fellowship was missing.



Then a member of the church invited us to think about doing a virtual bible study through zoom. An account was set up and it was decided that we would do the studies in the *Gather* magazine (a publication of the Women of the ELCA) for 1hr 1 day a week.

The group started out with five women meeting every month except for July. It was then suggested that we should extend a invitation to women outside of our church family to widen our ministry. We now have 9 individuals that participate in the Virtual Bible Study. We usually use the *Gather* magazine for our weekly discussions along with participating in the NGLS scripture study, Dwelling in the Word.

The virtual format is a gift of being able to reach out to participants near and far, the homebound those with physical barriers or on the road for work or vacation time. We now have a formed prayer chain with prayer concerns for those in need of prayers of hope and healing, or those raising prayers of thanks and praise.

I look forward to doing this study each week with the bonds and friendships we have formed. We each have grown in our faith while exploring our different perspectives in relation to God's word. We respect each other opinions and remember to keep what is said in our group stays in the group. All are welcome to join.

FROM BARB RICE, REFLECTIONS EDITOR

As I write, we are experiencing odd weather...or is it normal? Nothing about the weather trends since November feels right and leaves me unsettled. For there to be snow on the ground and 16 degree temperatures on Feb. 28 is what I would expect, certainly not the 67 degree temperatures we saw yesterday nor the 50 + degree temperatures predicted for tomorrow and the weekend! I fear for the plants that have to negotiate these temperature swings. Yikes!



Aren't we fortunate to have our faith in the one guaranteed constant in our world, the love of Jesus Christ? We have to believe that God will see us through all the ups and downs in life, even as we are charged with taking care of our earthly home.

Speaking of nature, I would like to encourage those of you who have not subscribed to the WELCA magazine, *Gather*, to do so. The Bible study that has been ongoing since January, has guided us to study scripture that relates to our earth and its flora and fauna. It has helped me to really be conscious of our responsibility to be good stewards of natural resources through the lens of scripture readings and the excellent writings of the author of the study. That is one of the reasons I personally find *Gather* to be a wonderful publication as it focuses on having a faith life in the here and now. Take a look at an online edition from the past to see what a great magazine *Gather* is. <https://www.gathermagazine.org/digital-edition/2021-issues/>

NEWS FROM IRON-GOGEVIC-ONTONAGON (IGO) CLUSTER 1

The members of Zion and Salem Women of the ELCA Units have joined together to share in hosting events for the cluster and offering other activities for their individual units. Covid created a large dry spell for fellowship and activities, and it took us a while to get back into the swing of things. We hope that what we have been able to do will boost interest in other groups in the cluster to regain some momentum in women's activities within their churches and the cluster. Our unit leaders include Kris Carlson (Salem), Sue Hill (Sharon) and Melzee Jacobson (Salem). Our SWO Board Liaison is JoAnn Nurmi (All Saints).

Last Spring (Sunday, April 23, 2023) Zion and Salem women hosted our first spring cluster meeting since the end of the pandemic. We met at Zion Lutheran Church for a presentation (more of a question-and-answer discussion) on Discipleship. We discussed thoughts of what the word meant to each of us, that there is a study published by Churchwide on the subject and even talked about spiritual gifts. There were 13 attendees. A light supper was provided.

Another activity that took place at Salem was a collection of good winter socks for the homeless. We used a Thrivent Choice grant and purchased winter socks from a local merchant, who also donated some socks that they were no longer selling to the cause. Members from Zion and Salem collected socks, and some were given locally to groups who could use them and the others were taken to Duluth for distribution through a site that was local.

The two units are meeting monthly on the 1st Thursday of the month. We hope to vary times throughout the year. On the First Thursday of December 2023, we joined together and had a Christmas Tea at Salem with finger foods and several varieties of tea flavors. We sang Christmas Carols and decorated premade Christmas cards along with having donated hand-made special cards from our active card making group. We collected nonperishable items which added up to 54 pounds that was taken to St. Vinnies along with the cards to be given to families that were served. It worked out wonderfully because as we were finishing up the Little Finland Chorus was performing across the street at Our Lady of Peace, so many ladies attended that also. We held a Christmas tea last year for the ladies from Zion and Salem and we had approximately 30+ attend. This year we invited members from All Saints, Sharon, St. John's, and St Paul and we hosted 40. We experienced good fellowship, good food and enjoyed the activities.

This Spring our IGO Cluster meeting will be held at All Saints Lutheran Church and will be hosted by the ladies from Sharon and All Saints. Our theme will be Bloom Where You Are Planted. It will be held on Sunday May 19th starting at 1:30 pm CT in the fellowship hall. A light supper will be provided. Our plan is to invite a Master Gardener to do a presentation on gardening. We hope that all the churches will publicize in their newsletters the information that will be forwarded covering this event. Whether your unit is active or not, you are still invited to attend the cluster events. We also want you to know that there are now six formats for having a unit that can be used. The unit leaders would be happy to help you to obtain a copy of this and work with you in bringing your unit back into action.

We may be older and a little more tired, but we still have things that we can do to work in God's mission fields. Just remember that God Loves You and that We do too and He is still calling you to follow Him.

Kris Carlson kriskarin@sbcglobal.net	304 Lake St, Ironwood, MI 49938	906.932.0476
Sue Hill sueh146@yahoo.com	609 N Chicago Mine Rd, Wakefield, MI 49968	906.364.4584
Melzee Jacobson imlizrd@yahoo.com	527 E Margaret St Ironwood, MI 49938	906.282.0169
JoAnn Nurmi	316 N Chicago Mine Rd, Wakefield, MI 49968	906.364.2095

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REFLECTIONS Newsletter – March 2024



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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

Our Mission

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