

WESTERN NORTH DAKOTA (WND) WOMEN OF THE ELCA (WELCA)
REPORT TO 2025 WND SYNOD ASSEMBLY



OUR PURPOSE – This is who we are...

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 – This is what we do...

Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

Our 2024 Western ND WELCA Biennial Convention hosted 67 attendees at Trinity Lutheran Church in Bismarck on June 21-22, eighteen of whom were first timers! Our opening day activities included a lovely opening worship led by Pastor Martha HarriSon of Trinity Lutheran, with a message centered on our theme of “Peace Like a River.” Jackie Stebbins, JD, of Bismarck was our keynote speaker, sharing about her life and health experiences of autoimmune encephalitis.

We were led through two Bible study sessions, “Swimsuits” by Rev. Shirley Teske of First Lutheran, Fessenden and “Get a Grip, Don’t Slip,” by Janel Shannon of Bottineau, as well as 8 different awareness breakout topic sessions.

Three business meetings were conducted during the convention with no new resolutions being introduced. Michelle Lauckner was elected president & Rev. Shirley Teske was elected vice president of the WND Synodical Women’s Organization (SWO). They joined Secretary Helen Grant and Treasurer Linda Hanson, who were re-elected. Cluster representatives were affirmed and voting delegates were elected for the 2026 13th Triennial WELCA Convention: Alvina Skogen, Cheryl Lacey, Lois Schmalz, Loanne Olson, Helen Grant, and Valerie Saylor, with Sharon Heilman as alternate. Offerings and collections were amassed throughout the weekend:

Haven Hills Foster Care Community, Bismarck \$1,353.25 (matched by SWO) = \$2,706.50

Ministry on the Margins, Bismarck \$1,353.25 (matched by SWO) = \$2,706.50

Many items from the ND Human Trafficking Task Force “Wish List” were collected and donated.

Six of the seven clusters/conferences held gatherings in the spring & the fall of 2024 with educational speakers, Bible study, fellowship activities and collections of monetary donations and/or items to meet the needs of charitable organizations throughout our region. The Badlands Cluster chooses to meet only in the fall.

The Churchwide Organization (CWO) of WELCA has been exploring the current experience of WELCA and what the future of this organization should be. Lois Post Bushkofsky retired from the position of executive director after 22 years of faithful service and the current interim executive director, Dr. Jennifer Hockenberry has been leading the organization through an evaluation of current work and into the development of new guidance resources and efforts to re-engage the women of our ELCA denomination. The 2025 WELCA Strategic Plan and updated leadership documents are available, along with a myriad of existing tools, resources and studies on the www.womenoftheelca.org website.

Our WND SWO board is working very hard to support the women active in our synod's churches and engage those women who are in need of encouragement & direction. We are seeing more requests to become "inactive" from congregational units which is distressing in a world so in need of the faithful support available through this great organization. Research demonstrates that the combined efforts of groups or individuals produce a result greater than the sum of individual contributions.* [Vitasek, Kate. "Why Collaboration Yields Improved Productivity (And the Science Behind It)." *Forbes*, 8 Mar. 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/katevitasek/2022/03/08/why-collaboration-yields-improved-productivity-and-the-science-behind-it/>.] The churchwide expression of WELCA encompasses over 4,000 congregational units. Our WND WELCA currently includes 117 active units in 158 ELCA churches in our synod. Thank you so much to those smaller units that have maintained their active status even as their numbers have dwindled. Units remaining active are so important to our congregations and communities – women groups have proven time and time again that they can fulfill needs and get things done. This faith has kept our projects, Bible Studies, and fellowship so important in our churches and our lives; it strengthens us in our knowledge to do God's work. If your Unit is considering becoming inactive, please contact your Cluster Board or the SWO Board first. It only takes a small amount of effort, time or funds to remain "active." Consider the \$10,500.00 that our WND SWO & congregational units were able to come together to gift to the seven Women in Seminary Education (WISE) to support their ongoing education in 2024. We are so thankful and proud of these women from WND that are answering the call and filling the need for pastors to serve our churches.

I'd love to share more with any cluster group, congregational unit or individual about the impact that we can all make together. Please reach out to any of the SWO board members or me, as the WND SWO president. Our WND WELCA now has a Facebook page www.facebook.com/WNDWELCA and a webpage on the WND Synod website where we are trying to keep active communication available. All of our contact information can be found there, as well as in our quarterly newsletter the Western Whirlwind, also available on the WND Synod website under Outreach Ministries.

With peace,
Michelle Lauckner, WND SWO President