



The Bulletin

December 2025

*“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.”



Happy Advent and Merry Christmas, my sisters!

The year has absolutely flown by, and it's hard for me to wrap my brain around the notion that a new year is only weeks away.

I hope you are enjoying the season, not stressing over holiday preparations, and embracing the joy and hope this time of year brings with it. It's so easy to get lost in the festivities and tangled up in the tinsel and Christmas lights -- sometimes literally -- that we lose sight of a tiny baby, a radiant young mother, and a band of angels bringing the most glorious news the world has ever heard.

So enjoy your hot cocoa, Christmas trees, and goofy sweaters... but as you do, pause to welcome Jesus to the world, to your heart, and to all eternity.

*Blessings and peace,
Julie Arndt
Secretary, NC WELCA*



The Bulletin is published monthly by the North Carolina Women of the ELCA. Submissions for photos, news stories, and other items of interest are welcome. Please limit stories to 500 words. Photos should be submitted with a brief caption that explains what is shown, date of the event, and who is shown.

Deadline for monthly submissions is the **6th of each month for publication on or about the 15th of each month.**

Send submissions to Julie Arndt, Secretary and Bulletin Editor, at the following email: **secretaryncwelca@gmail.com** as either word documents or Google documents.

An Advent Primer



Today, most Church scholars agree that Advent begins the 4th Sunday before Christmas and lasts through Christmas Eve.

- **Happy new year!** The first Sunday of Advent is the beginning of the new liturgical year.
- Early Christians began celebrating Advent during the 4th Century.
- The word “advent” comes from the Latin word **adventus**, meaning “arrival” or “coming,” which is derived from the verb **advenire**, meaning “to come to” or “to arrive at.”
- Representing hope and everlasting light, candles have been traditional symbols of Advent for centuries. On the four Sundays prior to Christmas, most churches light an Advent candle, with each candle corresponding to an anecdote from the Bible.

Some Christians also light Advent candles in evergreen

wreaths, called “Advent wreaths.” The green foliage represents eternal life, while pine cones symbolize resurrection, and pine and cedar symbolize strength and healing.

- The Advent wreath tradition originated in Germany, with families lighting one of four candles each Sunday. Now we light t every Sunday in Advent, representing hope, peace, joy, and love with a one candle every Sunday in Advent with a fifth candle lit on Christmas Eve, representing the birth of Jesus.
- The first, second, and fourth Sunday candles are often purple, representing penitence and sorrow, while the third Sunday is rose-colored, representing joy.
- **Why can’t we sing Christmas songs now that Advent started?** Because Christmas and Advent are two different seasons! The season of Christmas, in liturgical terms, begins on Christmas Eve. Advent hymns are about waiting, hope, and preparation for Christ’s arrival, often with a tone of longing, while Christmas hymns celebrate the joy and fulfillment of his birth. On Christmas Eve through Epiphany, we can belt out all the “*Joy to the World*,” “*Silent Night*,” “*Joy to the World*,” and “in excelsis deo” as loud as our little

hearts desire!

- **Advent traditions vary worldwide:**
- Las Posadas in Mexico and other parts of Latin America is a nine-day celebration with processions that reenact Mary and Joseph’s search for an inn.
- Simbang Gabi is a series of nine early morning masses leading up to Christmas in the Philippines.
- In Sweden, families celebrate St. Lucia Day on December 13 with processions and bake sweets to give as gifts on Christmas Eve.
- Italy, the Nativity scene, or ‘**presepe**’, is a central decoration and gifts are often exchanged on January 6. Some towns have bagpipe players and carolers.
- In China, Christians use colorful paper lanterns and some children hang stockings.
- In Australia, Christmas comes during summer, traditions are often adapted for a warmer climate, such as celebrating with beach parties.



Committee Day II Plans underway

Make your New Year's Resolution now! Attend Committee Day II!

It's happening on January 10 from 9 AM-2 PM at Lord of Life Lutheran Church in Garner. Lord of Life is located at 2100 Buffalo Road in Garner.

Registration will begin at 8:30am with coffee and light refreshments available upon your arrival. Our hosts, the women of Lord of Life, will also provide a lunch for \$10.00. Please try to have correct change with you. If you

pay by check, make your check payable to Lord of Life WELCA.

For those traveling more than 150 miles one way the NC WELCA will reimburse \$50.00 per

person for a hotel room to attend Committee Day. The Reimbursement Policy and Expense

Forms will be available at Committee Day II. If you need a hotel room, we no longer get a discount at any hotel. An online search will offer several options for hotels in Garner.

We'll hear plans for Spring Gathering programming,



touch base with committees, and discuss plans for the June Gathering at Lenoir- Rhyne.

If you're not currently serving on a committee, this is your opportunity to get involved.

"A penny saved is a penny earned:" *Change for Change* campaign

By Lori Schaefer, Stewardship Committee

Given the news that our country will no longer be minting pennies, it is time to give you an update on our "Pennies Project".

For 2025 your generous donations have netted almost \$3500.00 for the Diaper Bank of NC. Contributions may continue to be made until the end of January 2026.

We have updated our special endeavor to reflect on the changing times. Going forth in 2026 the campaign will be known as "Change for Change". The recipients will be Robeson County Church and

Community Center in Lumberton, NC and the Fuller Center for Housing/Disaster Rebuilders.

The **Robeson County Church and Community Center** is the oldest and largest faith based non-profit emergency social assistance organization in Robeson County. They operate a large food pantry with three food assistance programs, provide emergency assistance with utilities, rent, and medicine, and build handicap ramps, perform small home repairs and install grab bars and other safety for equipment for seniors. In addition, they operate a thrift shop to assist those who cannot afford typical retail necessities, are burned out of their homes or are moving out of the Southeastern Family Violence Center facilities.

Fuller Center Disaster ReBuilders is a 501(c)(3)

Christian organization dedicated to serving the victims of major disasters in the United States. Organized in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we have supported rebuilding in most major hurricane disaster areas since then. We serve uninsured, low-income homeowners using volunteer labor to make our rebuilding effort more affordable. The program is financed from donations and grants.

Fuller Center Disaster ReBuilders is currently operating in eastern North Carolina (Hurricane Florence), Dawson Springs, Kentucky (EF-4 tornado), and western NC (Hurricane Helene).



From the President

Dear Sisters in Christ,

I know you are all busy preparing for Christmas—making lists, organizing schedules, and making time for your families. In the midst of everything, please remember to take care of yourselves as well.

As you look ahead to the new year, please be sure to mark your calendars for Committee Day on Saturday, January 10, at Lord of Life in Garner. Committees will be making plans for the remainder of 2026 and into 2027.

- The Discipleship Committee will continue planning One Day Retreats and Spring Gatherings.
- Conference Leaders will be supporting the Nominations Committee and preparing for Spring Gatherings.
- We will need congregational units willing to host the One Day Retreat in February and Spring Gatherings in April or May. If you can, please also consider planning ahead to host a Fall Gathering in October.
- Other committees meeting that day include Gathering

Planning, Stewardship, and Justice.

Please also note that our Annual Gathering will be held June 12–13. We hope you will make plans to attend our new two-day format.

Thank you for reading the articles in the **Bulletin**. Please continue to submit any news from your congregational unit—we love hearing from you.

Your sister in Christ,

Terri Brown

President, NC WELCA

A Christmas message

By Peggy Long, Discipleship Committee

God's grace and peace to all.

At this time of year, we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. It's a season filled with joy, color, and activity—shopping, decorating, parties, and family gatherings. Yet, in the midst of all the excitement, it's easy

for the Christ of Christmas to slip quietly down the list.

But the Christ is the heart of it all. He is the greatest gift ever given, a gift of grace, hope, and everlasting love. And the best gift we can give in return is to share Christ's light with a world that needs Him so deeply.

Legend has it that the lighted Christmas tree owes its origin to Martin Luther. One Christmas Eve, while walking home

through the forest, Luther was struck by the beauty of the stars shining through the snow-covered evergreens. Wanting to share that moment of wonder with his family, he brought a small fir tree into his home and decorated it with lighted candles to remind them of the starry sky above Bethlehem on that first Christmas night. [Maymie Richardson Krythe, *All About Christmas*. (New York: Harper & Brothers)]



Blue Christmas virtual service offered by WELCA churchwide

The Christmas season can be difficult for those experiencing loss or hardship.

Join Women of the ELCA for our annual Blue Christmas Service via Zoom. This service takes place on the Winter Solstice, Sunday, December 21, 2025 at 7 pm (CST) which is the longest night of the year.

A Blue Christmas service, also known as a "Longest Night service," is a special church service during the holidays that offers comfort and hope to those experiencing grief, loss, loneliness, or sadness, acknowledging that Christmas isn't joyful for everyone. These services create a supportive space with quiet reflection, scripture, special music (like "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"), prayer, and candle-lighting rituals to honor sorrow while affirming God's presence in darkness, often held around the winter solstice.

The Blue Christmas service validates feelings of sadness, loss (death, divorce, illness, depression) that the typical Christmas cheer can intensify.

It focuses on hope, using themes of light in darkness, reminding people that God meets them in their pain, offering healing and wholeness. It provides a safe, non-judgmental space to share sorrow and find solidarity with others.

You can register to receive a ZOOM link on the Women of the ELCA website: **womenoftheelca.org**



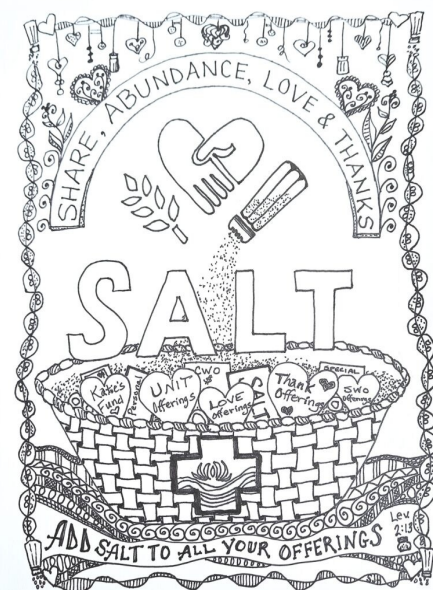
Give today to the SALT Appeal to multiply your impact

Women of the ELCA's SALT Appeal (Share Abundance, Love, and Thanks) is one way to close last year's funding gap of \$250,000. To help us achieve this goal and ensure that we can continue day-to-day operations and ministries, including racial justice programming, Gather magazine, Bold Café, Triennial Gatherings,

scholarships, and grants, your gift to the SALT Appeal is greatly needed.

Right now, Julia Hong Sabela, Churchwide Executive Board member, has given a matching gift of \$50,000 to the SALT Appeal, which means she will match every dollar donated up to \$50,000!

Now, every dollar you donate toward the SALT Appeal will be doubled. Give today to double your impact and help us reach our goal!



Have you ever heard a whisper?

Christmas Message by ELCA Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry

Presiding Bishop Yehiel Curry offers the church a tender and imaginative children's sermon—inviting all of us to listen for the quiet ways God speaks. Bishop Curry begins with a simple question: “Have you ever heard a whisper?” Whispers, he reminds us, make us stop, lean in, and pay attention. Christmas is a season when the heavens themselves whispered the good news—through twinkling stars, songs of angels, and the quiet wonder of the manger.

Drawing directly from the narrative of his children's message, Bishop Curry describes Bethlehem on that silent night:

“It was as if the whole sky was whispering: ‘Something wonderful is happening.’”

The whisper, he says, pointed to a tiny child—Jesus—God's gift of love to the world. Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the Wise Men all sensed God's quiet presence in their own ways.

Christmas reminds us that God often speaks not in noise or spectacle, but in gentle whispers of love, kindness, and peace. Bishop Curry encourages us to listen closely this year:

“Hello!”

Can you all whisper back to me?



Whispers are quiet, gentle, almost like a secret. You have to lean in close to hear them.

And I wonder if it's possible for the heavens to whisper at Christmas?

One silent night, far away, in a town called Bethlehem, the stars twinkled brighter than ever. And the angels were there, too. It was as if the whole sky was whispering: “Something wonderful is happening ...”

Let's all look up at the ceiling like we're looking at the stars. Can you twinkle your fingers like stars?

Now let's whisper together, “Something wonderful is happening ...” The heavens weren't shouting.

They weren't making a big noise. They were whispering, because whispers make us stop, listen and pay attention. And what was the whispering about? A baby. A tiny baby lying in a manger.

His name was Jesus.

The night Jesus was born, the shepherds heard the whisper in the sky when the angels sang. The Wise Men sensed the whisper in the star that guided them. And Mary and Joseph felt the whisper in their hearts: “This child is special. This child is God's gift.”

Sometimes we think God only speaks in loud voices or through big miracles. But Christmas reminds us that God often whispers. God whispers love and kindness and peace.

Can you think of one kind thing you could whisper to someone this week?

So, this Christmas, listen closely. The heavens are still whispering: “Jesus is here. God loves you. Share that love with the world.”

Let's all whisper together: “Jesus is here.”

Whispering Faith: Lesson taught by a penguin

By Karen Birkedal, Conference Leaders

Recently I saw a Facebook post showing Bishop Curry of the ELCA giving a children's sermon about the Holy Spirit whispering to us this Advent season. It reminded me of an unexpected chance I had to share with one of my grandchildren over Thanksgiving as the Holy Spirit whispered encouragement to me and hopefully to my grandchild.

One of my youngest grandchildren had given me a hand drawn crayon picture of a penguin as a gift. Looking on another grandchild said, "Why do you like to collect penguins, Grandma?"

I replied, "Well, have you ever noticed that penguins waddle along on land but when swimming they go so fast? When I try to do things on my own, I feel like I waddle along, but when I remember to pray and trust I can feel like God is there to help smooth the way."

It was a little encounter, but it was a chance to share about God's provision.

May this Advent and Christmas season be a time when God whispers in unexpected ways to encourage us and our families.

As we look forward to Committee Day II, you may wonder how or if you can contribute, or if you can travel to Garner to the event on January 10. Board members are praying that God will whisper to you about participating and smooth your way to attend. God's Holy Spirit helps us to do more together because of you!

Penguins are fascinating! Some fun facts for your information!

- **Little blue penguins, or fairy penguins, are the smallest species of penguin.** At 13- to 15-inch cuties, they weigh no more than 3 pounds. In contrast, the largest penguin, the Emperor, reaches an average they measure close to 4 feet tall – about the height of the average six year old.
- Scientists have discovered fossils of an ancient breed of penguin from about 60 million years ago that stood 5-foot-10 and probably weighed 220 pounds.
- Scientists still don't know for sure how many kinds there are. Estimates usually fall in the range of 17 to 20.
- Penguins can swim at speeds over 10 miles per hour. Gentos are the fastest penguins, at around 20 mph, but most species dart around at a more modest 4 to 7 mph.
- They can also dive down over 800 feet. The deepest penguin dive ever recorded was an amazing 1,850 feet. The longest-known dives have lasted 22 minutes!
- Some penguin species mate for life.
- Emperor penguins incubate eggs on their feet.
- Penguins are social butterflies. The largest penguin colonies — called rookeries or waddles when assembled on land — include hundreds of thousands of birds. A group of penguins in the water is called a raft.
- They're super friendly with people. Their main predators are in the water, so they feel safe with tourists and researchers.
- Not all penguins live at the Arctic. Galápagos penguins stay warm living near the equator. In fact, they're the only penguin species found outside of the Southern Hemisphere.
- Male penguins gift female penguins with rocks in order to woo them. Female penguins prefer chubby mates. They are better equipped to survive long periods of fasting while incubating eggs, demonstrating that they will be devoted and reliable fathers.

The male penguins keep them warm under a loose fold of skin. They stay that way for months until the eggs hatch — not even leaving even to eat!



Judging books by their covers: Book Banning in 2025

By **Tonie Neal, Justice Committee**

[Source: Alex Wermer-Colan and Sara Grace Stefan, *Fayetteville Observer*, November 24, 2025]

Freedom of speech faces unprecedented challenges in our world, and the books we read, books that have been part of school curricula for decades, are being pulled from the shelves of school and public libraries at rates not seen since the 1950's under McCarthyism.

According to the nonprofit Pen America, there have been 1,600 books banned in American public schools and public libraries since 2021. The American Library Association (ALA) documented 2452 ti-

tles as challenged, the third highest number ever documented by the organization. This disturbing trend continues an "extremist campaign to suppress access to books," according to ALA.

Book bans are primarily determined by local and state-level officials, including school boards, administrators, or state legislators, often prompted by parents or community groups challenging materials. Librarians and teachers are often a line of defense against banning, but will usually fall in line and comply with mandates.

Books are banned due to concerns about sexual content, offensive language, LGBTQIA+ themes, and racial issues. Banning is often framed as protecting children from age-inappropriate material, but is also driven by reli-

gious objections, political ideologies, and desires to control narratives or uphold community values. Common motivations include preventing exposure to violence, drug use, or topics deemed subversive, blasphemous, or challenging to traditional views.

The attacks have expanded to include public libraries this year. The Department of Education has been eviscerated.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services faces possible elimination. Millions in grant money support museums and libraries.

Banning books doesn't change cultural, racial, sexual or gender diversity. But it does "jeopardize these institutions' mission to promote free and open access to information in the community where Americans live and learn".

Most Frequently Banned Books 2024-2025

The Bluest Eye, by Toni Morrison

A Clash of Kings, by George R.R. Martin

A Court of Frost and Starlight, by Sarah J. Maas

A Court of Wings and Ruin, by Sarah J. Maas

Empire of Storms, by Sarah J. Maas

The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood

The Haters, by Jesse Andrews

The Hate U Give, by Angie Thomas

Identical, by Ellen Hopkins

Kingdom of Ash, by Sarah J. Maas

The Kite Runner, by Khaled Hosseini

Living Dead Girl, by Elizabeth Scott

Looking for Alaska, by John Green

Lucky, by Alice Sebold

Man o'War, by Cory McCarthy

Milk and Honey, by Rupi Kaur

Out of Darkness, by Ashley Hope Pérez

Perfect, by Ellen Hopkins

Red Hood, by Elana K. Arnold

A Stolen Life, by Jaycee Dugard

Thirteen Reasons Why, by Jay Asher

This Is Kind of an Epic Love Story, by Kacen Callender

Tilt, by Ellen Hopkins

Tower of Dawn, by Sarah J. Maas

Tricks, by Ellen Hopkins

Water for Elephants, by Sara Gruen

What Girls Are Made Of by Elana K. Arnold

Nineteen Minutes, by Jodi Picoult

A Clockwork Orange, by Anthony Burgess

Breathless, by Jennifer Niven

Sold, by Patricia McCormick

Last Night at the Telegraph Club, by Malinda Lo

Forever..., by Judy Blume

The Perks of Being a Wallflower, by Stephen Chbosky

Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West, by Gregory Maguire

Mad about book banning? Here's what you can do!

To advocate against book bans, you can take action by:

- speaking out at local school board meetings and voice your support for the freedom to read and oppose bans
- writing to local officials and newspapers, and supporting organizations that defend intellectual freedom. Join or donate to organizations like the American Library Association, Freedom to Read Foundation, PEN America, or the Authors Guild.
- Engage on social media: Use hashtags like #FreeTheBooks to share your story and raise awareness.
- Organize locally: Work with others in your community to form a local action group.
- Vote: Support candidates who champion intellectual freedom and oppose censorship. Contact your school board, local representatives, and school administrators to express your views.
- Report book bans: Report local book bans to organizations like PEN America.



Southwestern Conference delivers gift

The Southwestern Conference held their meeting on October 11 and our host church chose as an inkind gift-toilet paper for Amy's House.

Amy's House, founded in 1993 by citizens who were concerned about domestic violence issues. Amy's House provides a safe haven for families displaced by violence, offering shelter and support, services.

The women of the Southwestern Conference collected 280 rolls of toilet tissue, which Conference Presider Bambi Heavener delivered to Amy's House.

St. Mark's WELCA celebrates special birthday

The women of St. Mark's, Lumberton wanted to honor their beloved friend Maxine Amos, who passed away this summer, and decided that they would throw her a party in honor of what would have been her 90th birthday.

Maxine loved St. Mark's after-service fellowship, so the group, small, but determined to carry on in the path Maxine so faithfully established, planned a reception featuring a few of Maxine's favorite goodies on Sunday, December 14. (Maxine's actual birthday was December 16.)

"We just wish everyone who knew and loved Maxine could have been here with us to celebrate her and her remarkable legacy," said Sandra Britt, president of St. Mark's WELCA chapter. "She was our friend, our surrogate mother, our mentor, and our heart. She is dearly missed."

Happy Birthday Maxine.

Reflection:

“Hey! Unto you a child is born!”

By Julie Arndt, Secretary, NC WELCA

If you have ever directed, or tried to direct, a Christmas pageant, you can attest to the truth of the next words you are about to read: you never really know what is going to happen on the night of the show.

You can prepare. Rehearse. Coach. Encourage. But the truth is... all that falls by the wayside when kids are on a stage in front of their parents and peers, wearing bathrobes, tinsel, and plastic crowns acting out the Christmas story.

Lines are forgotten. Stage fright sets in. Mothers are anxious that their little star won't be perfect. Props get dropped. Sets fall over. I remember one year when all the audience could see of baby Jesus was a bare pink plastic bottom because he was swaddled face down, upside down. Oops.

So all this is why I so whole-heartedly love Barbara Robinson's story *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*.

The story centers around, you guessed it, a Christmas pageant at a local church that takes an unexpected turn, or series of turns, courtesy of the “worst kids in the history of the world.” The Herdman kids lied, stole, smoked cigars, cursed their teachers, set fires, terrorized other kids and adults alike, and were in general, a rowdy, unkempt, undisciplined lot.

Then, for reasons that no one in the story really understands, the horrible Herdmans strongarm their way into the Christmas pageant and not only upset the church establishment who expect the pageant to be the usual

sweet, benign, predictable spectacle it has always been with a nice orderly Mary, adorable little angels, and well-behaved wise men.

What they get... well, suffice it to say that they don't get what they bargain for. They get a lot more: a fiercely protective Mary with a dirty face and ragged clothes, Wise Men who come bearing NOT gold, frankincense and myrrh, but a ham, and a herald angel who climbs to the top of the set and yells down to the shepherds, “HEY! Unto you a child is born! Get going! Hurry up!”

What I love about this is that the Herdmans' understanding of the Christmas story is... well, practical, I guess. Those kids lived a hard life, as alluded to in the story. They got that Mary and Joseph were facing hard times and uncertainty. They were probably not bandbox-fresh when they reached that stable. They were probably dirty, tired, hungry and scared.

I like the image of a fierce Mary with fire in her eyes protecting her tiny child from Herod's stormtroopers.

I like the urgency of the angel.

This was important news. It deserved urgency.

It still does.

It should be bellowed from the top of a mountain for anyone in earshot and beyond to hear.

Unto us, unto all of mankind, this child is born. Jesus is our gift from God.

Even the Herdmans of the world.

Get out there and tell 'em.

If you get a chance, check out one of the two film adaptations that are available. Better yet, read the book. You won't be sorry.