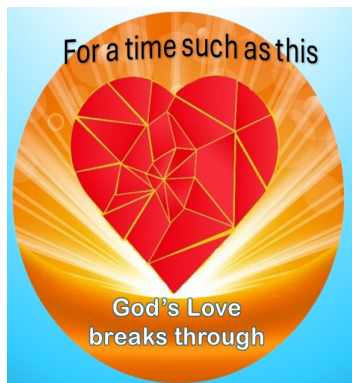


*“Mobilizing women
to act boldly on their
faith in Jesus Christ”*

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.”



Get ready for a weekend of nurturing in the mountains



Life pulls us in many directions, often leaving little time to care for ourselves and reconnect with what truly matters.

This year's fall retreat is an invitation to step away from the noise, breathe deeply, and reconnect with your body, mind, and spirit. Through meaningful conversation, quiet reflection, and worship, explore what it means to care for yourself and reconnect as beloved children of God.

Learn and share practical wellness practices that foster peace in body, mind, and soul, while reconnecting with others through shared stories, laughter, and the gift of community. Whether you arrive feeling weary, curious, or simply in need of rest, this retreat offers space to re-



connect with God, with others, and with yourself.

The weekend's presenter is Pastor Judy Drysdale, an ELCA pastor for 37 years who currently serves as pastor of Emmanuel Lutheran Church in Lincolnton. She is a certified wellness coach, earning this specialty through the Institute for Integrative Nutrition. She is passionate about nurturing the whole person—body, mind, and spirit.

Pastor Judy was the first female pastor invited to preach at First Baptist Church in downtown Charleston, the oldest Baptist church in the South.

Come be a part of this special weekend of nurturing, connection, and self-care.

Registration for the entire weekend is \$210 if you pay by check or \$216.30 if you pay through Tithely. Commuter registration is \$100.00 by check or \$103.00 through Tithely.

A brochure and registration form is attached in this mailing along with your BULLETIN.

For questions, contact registrar Alecia Harrison at alecia.a.harrison@gmail.com or 919-333-6734.

Come as you are.

Leave renewed.

And reconnected.

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.

Greetings from the President: August

Dear Sisters,

This will be longer than my usual reflections, but it has been on my mind since returning from the Triennial Gathering.

North Carolina had a total of 13 women attend the Triennial Gathering in Des Moines, Iowa. It was a very rewarding trip. One of the highlights was seeing our own Pastor CeCee Mills, who brought an inspiring message during the closing worship service on Sunday morning. Bishop Yehel Curry was also in attendance and brought greetings and an update on the ELCA. We had many inspiring workshops to attend, but I especially want to tell you about the pre-event workshop that I attended.

It was titled "Blanket Exercise: A Learning Experience with Vance Blackfox." Vance was a speaker at the Triennial in Phoenix, and I had been impressed then. For this workshop, participation was limited to 50 people and was an interactive experience that walked us through 500 years of Indigenous history. We needed to be able to stand for about an hour.

We entered a large room where chairs lined the walls, while the center of the room was covered with blankets. We removed our shoes, and those who were able stood together on the blankets. Those who remained seated represented the "ancestors."

Vance began reading the history of Indigenous peoples, beginning with Christopher Columbus's arrival in the Americas. As each period of history unfolded, we experienced the losses suffered by Indigenous communities. Throughout the exercise, Vance would gently touch participants on the shoulder. When touched, we quietly left the blankets and returned to our chairs, joining the ancestors. Each touch represented lives lost through disease, violence, forced removal, or other tragic events in history.

It was deeply moving to watch as more and more people joined the ancestors. When Vance reached the history of the boarding schools for Indigenous children, some of those remaining on the blankets were crowded into a much smaller space. Tears filled my eyes as I thought of children taken from their families, stripped of their language and culture, and the heartbreaking reality that so many

never returned home. I felt anger as well as sorrow.

My shoulder was touched during the history of the late 1800s and the forced displacement of tribes. I held my breath for a moment as the weight of that history settled over me. I returned to my chair to join the ancestors.

When the exercise began, there were more women standing than sitting. By the time I was seated, there were already more ancestors than participants still standing, and Vance had only reached the year 1900. The room remained almost completely silent except for his voice telling the story.

I have never participated in an activity that affected me so profoundly. I began the exercise simply curious about what was going to happen. As the history unfolded, curiosity gave way to sadness, anger, and deep grief. I also felt ashamed that so much of this history was either never taught to me or was presented in ways that failed to acknowledge the suffering endured by Indigenous peoples.

I found it difficult to finish writing this reflection, dear sisters, because the emotions are still very real. Yet perhaps that is exactly why I needed to share it with you. Sometimes faith calls us not only to celebrate God's blessings but also to listen to painful truths, to lament the injustices of the past, and to seek reconciliation wherever we can find it.

This experience reminded me that history is not simply something we read in books. It lives in the memories of people and communities whose stories deserve to be heard. As followers of Christ, we are called to listen with humility, to learn with open hearts, and to work toward healing and justice for all God's children.

I left the Blanket Exercise changed. I know that I cannot change the past, but I can choose to remember it, to learn from it, and to walk forward with greater compassion and understanding. For that gift, I am deeply grateful.

Your sister,

***Terri Brown, President
NC Women of the ELCA***



Women coming together to worship, learn, connect

By Robin Stuart, NC WELCA Vice President

Editor's Note: Robin was the first recipient of the newly-established Maxine Amos Triennial Scholarship, and First-Time Triennial Attendee

Attending the WELCA Triennial convention was a memorable experience for me. It was wonderful to be with women of all ages from all over the country worshipping and praising God. We met groups from all over the country, some of them in the Charlotte Airport terminal, where they waited for connecting flights to Des Moines.

We spent Wednesday getting there. Susan, Tamarah, Jane and I traveled together to the airport where we met Terri and Lisa. A minor mishap on the escalator for Tamarah and Jane thankfully resulted in no injuries more serious than some aches and pains.

We wandered around that evening, exploring the city, finding the convention space, and were excited to run into Merrily Burmeister, our church-wide representative at the Annual Gathering in June. She was quite amazed that we remembered her and wanted to spend time with her. We enjoyed supper at a place called Buzzard Billy's that was a block away from our hotel. During the trip we enjoyed trying new restaurants.

Merrily joined us for opening worship on Thursday. Opening worship was very emotional for me as I felt so grateful for the opportunity to attend this remarkable event with some of my sisters from NC Synod. After opening worship, we spent the day exploring the expo center and looking at the many displays. Several of the displays offered free giveaway items, so we picked up a few, and exchanged things with people from other states.

Our very own Karen Birkedal represented Adults Saving Kids, so we helped her prepare the glasses that would be given away at the display table.

Friday and Saturday's activities started with a bible study and speakers, which led into breakout sessions in the afternoon based on what we were interested in. They offered two sessions and four classes each day. One of the sessions ran for a little over an hour, while the second one was for minutes. It would have been helpful if the ses-

sions had been offered more than one time, and the time allotted for each one had been equal. And we quickly learned that the classrooms set up for the sessions were not big enough to accommodate almost 1100 people.

I attended a breakfast on Friday morning for first-time attendees, and while I did not particularly enjoy the menu, we made up for it by having lunch at Buzzard Billy's and supper was at Noah's Ark, which was by far my favorite of the places we tried.

On Friday, I went to a session led by Elise Seyfried titled What to Expect When You Weren't Expecting This - Taking Your Mental Health Field Guide Home. In this session we explored and reflected on situations in our lives, taking time to dig deeply and write about them. There was time allowed for some sharing and discussion of the thoughts/writings of some of the participants.

Dr. Elyssa Salinas-Lazarski led the second session I attended: Claiming My Sacred Sex. Dr. Salinas-Lazarski shared the personal story of her experience with human trafficking, and how close she came to becoming a victim. She spoke about how she was able to stay safe during this extremely scary situation, and that experience has helped her in her life to be proactive in staying safe and aware of her surroundings.

On Saturday I attended MOSAIC - Hands on Art Activity with Mosaic led by Linda Timmons, Executive Director of MOSAIC Ministries. She spoke about ways that Mosaic ministry helps individuals with disabilities become more independent and able to take care of themselves. Guided by a jewelry maker who is one of their participants, we all made a pair of earrings.

Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy led a session called Storytelling: I AM WORTHY - Even When the Ground Shakes. I admit that I struggled to get anything out of this session. It didn't appeal to me like I thought it would. This was my least favorite thing of the entire experience in Iowa. When I left early, however, I ran into Bishop Curry, which was a nice surprise.

See "Triennial," continued next page



Triennial experience

Continued from previous page

Sunday was closing worship. After worship we ate lunch and then relaxed a little bit, and then decided to walk to the Asian Gardens.

Monday we woke up to flight delays and that seemed to progress throughout the day until the issues were resolved and we were able board our flight, leave Des Moines, and head home. When we landed in Charlotte and sorted everyone's luggage and transportation, everyone traveled home.

It was a privilege to attend this extraordinary event, thanks to the Maxine Amos Triennial Scholarship. And it was made more special because I was able to share the experience with friends and sisters.

North Carolina ladies taking on the Triennial Gathering in Des Moines, Iowa! They even found a few familiar faces:

In the top photo, our very own Pastor CeCee Mills, now Secretary of the ELCA. We sure do miss her here in North Carolina!

In the middle photo, some of our group met Merrily Burmeister, who attended our Annual Gathering in June as a churchwide representative. Merrily was a hit with everyone and was happy to see our group.

And look who else our ladies met while in Des Moines? ELCA Bishop Yehiel Curry, who led closing worship and was visible at the event, meeting and greeting the WELCA groups from all over the country.



Supporting Our Sisters

Does your women's group need a little seed money to start a new project? Or, do you have a project in the works and need a little extra support financially?

If you answered "Yes" to either of these questions, you need to apply for a Supporting Our Sisters (SOS) Grant. The application is on our website under the Scholarships and Grants tab. Once you complete the fillable form, send a copy of it to Debra Weinel. You will find all the information on the SOS site.

Several women's group applied this summer after hearing more about it at the annual Gathering. There is around \$2,500 available. Each Grant is \$250. After your project is completed, you will send a short report about who benefited and how the money was spent. Please send pictures to be used for publicity purposes.

The fall is also the time that we ask for donations to the fund. Could you send a yearly \$10

donation? Or maybe your women's group wants to send a lump sum.

Send your contributions to NC WELCA Treasurer at this address and help your sisters:

Nena Babb

6130 Heavner Rd.

Vale, NC 28168.



North Carolina Women of the ELCA Calendar of Events August–November 2026

August 2026

No Date: Fall Gathering, Southwestern, Ascension, Shelby

September 2026

Suicide Prevention Month

Sept. 12 Fall Gathering, Rowan, Holy Cross, Mocksville

Sept. 13 God's Work Our Hands Sunday

Sept. 19 Fall Gathering, Catawba, St. Paul, Startown

Sept. 19 Fall Gathering, Triangle, Lord of Life, Garner

Sept. 26 Fall Gathering, Cab/Stanly, Mt Hermon, Concord

Sept. 26 Fall Gathering, Sandhills, St James, Fayetteville

October 2026

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Oct. 2–4 Fall Retreat at Blowing Rock

Oct. 10 Fall Gathering, Alexander/Iredell, Amity, Cleveland

Oct. 17 Fall Gathering, Central/Salem, Our Saviour, Welcome

Oct. 25 Reformation Sunday

Oct. 31 Halloween

November 2026

Native American Heritage Month

Nov. 1 All Saints Sunday

Nov. 6–7 Board Meeting at High Rock Lake

Nov. 7 Fall Gathering, Meck/Union, A Mighty Fortress, Charlotte

Nov. 22 Christ the King Sunday

Nov. 26 Thanksgiving

Nov. 29 1st Sunday of Advent

Adults Saving Kids Workshop at the Triennial

By Karen Birkedal, Co-Chair, Justice Committee

In a packed room at the Triennial in Des Moines, Iowa, Rev. Al Erickson, director of Adults Saving Kids gave a very informative and challenging presentation about human trafficking and what we can do to prevent it. He recognized on Women of the ELCA presidents from the various synods that had worked with ASK.

Our own President, Terri Brown, was called forward to the microphone to express how the NC Women of the ELCA had been involved with ASK over the years. Karen Birkedal, justice committee co-chair, gave an account of how prayer partners had been set up across the conferences in our synod. Karen also shared about how her church at Mt. Olive, Hickory, had prayer partners for the whole church. Some members at Mt. Olive competed study sessions found on the ASK website that challenge parents and grandparents to gain information and be faithful in their callings to guide and protect

youth. Karen asked the all the participants to write down the names of children that they would be praying for during the workshop. Karen collected the over 170 names and continues to pray for the children.

Adults Savings Kids was named in a church-wide memorial calling for the safety and protection of our children.

1- To discover what God has provided so our kids grow up faithful to Christ, wise and safe.

2- To reveal what Adults Saving Kids has found that can help participants go home with a new vision and tools to bring back to their congregation.

3- To help participants learn how they can be an important person in the lives of young people they care about.

Look for more information about Adults Saving Kids in future editions of the BULLETIN. Adult Saving Kids has been designated as the recipient of our Spring Gathering offerings.



This says it all... North Carolina ladies love to have fun and share their spirit of wonder and sisterhood wherever they are, including the Triennial Gathering in Des Moines!

See the story on the following page from Karen Birkedal, about the excitement and surprise from women around the country to our Wonder Glasses!

Surprised By Wonder

By Karen Birkedal

"Wonder invites us to be surprised by God's mystery, to let God be big, to half understand God and to enjoy for a moment how God fills us and this world with beauty, even when the world around us looks anything but beautiful. Wonder leaves us feeling more connected rather than alone in this world."

You might remember this quote from the Wonder Watchers program we did across our Spring Conference Gatherings last year, along with fun glasses we wore, as we connected with a prayer sister across the synod.

The Synodical Board decided to share the fun and give attendees across churchwide the opportunity to become prayer partners at the Triennial Gathering. Fun glasses were purchased to give away as gifts from the NC Women. What resulted was an explosion of prayer partnerships, fun encounters, meaningful conversations and thanksgiving for our generosity.

Our NC women took the glasses around to joyful women wanting to get a pair of glasses. We were surprised and delighted by the wonder of God's work among us. Many expressed how it was great to be able to have so much fun!

- Women danced back to the booth saying, "Look who I found to be my prayer partner! She is from way across the county!"
- One woman said, "My sister is having chemo. Can a take a pair for her?"
- Another woman expressed that she had

just been in a car accident and was feeling so sore. She said the glasses made her feel like smiling.

- One woman started crying and stated that her husband is on Hospice. She wanted to take a pair for her husband so that they could laugh together.
- One college age woman said, "I didn't know that I would have so much fun here!"
- One young girl said, "Could I have 3 flamingo glasses? My mom, dad and I pray with each other. I think it would be fun if we all wore the fun glasses while we pray!"
- Countless women said, "I'm going to surprise my kids or grandkids when I wear these and tell them I'm praying for them"

The band even wore our glasses as they sang!

There are too many wonder-filled situations to describe here.

Please know that many women wanted to express thanks for the generosity or our fun loving, praying, NC Women of the ELCA!



Sporting stylish new eyewear and a renewed sense of surprise and wonder, these ladies visited NC WELCA at the Triennial Gathering. (Photo: WELCA Facebook post)

Get ready for mid-term elections! November 3 is coming!

As the mid-terms approach, we are hearing more about fraud votes. Consider the latest statistics for NC from the right-wing foundation Heritage Foundation.

In the last 38 years, counting 39 elections, with 81,677,000 ballots cast, five cases of fraud were reported. That is 0.00000710%.

It's time to start doing our homework to be prepared for 11/3 election.

- Check NCSBE voter search to check your registration. When sample ballots become available, you will be able to get them at this

site.

- Research who your state and federal representatives are and which are up for reelection. Study the voting record of each to see which agree with your needs and concerns.
- Study those newcomers in your district to determine what they plan to support.
- Roy Cooper and Michael Whatley are running for Senate.
- If you are able, financially support a candidate you feel strongly about.

But without doubt, the most important action any of us can take is just to get out and cast a vote.

We women need to be sure that our voices are heard.

Women matter at the polls

Women make up the outright majority of registered voters in North Carolina, accounting for approximately 54.8% of the state's total electorate. They consistently register and vote at higher absolute volumes and percentages than male voters.

The demographic breakdown, turnout habits, and political status of female voters in North Carolina reveal several distinct patterns:

- Women vastly outnumber men on North Carolina's voter rolls, with men making up roughly 44.1% of registered voters.
- Roughly 31% of registered female voters in the state are under the age of 37.
- Unaffiliated registration rises dramatically among younger women. Barely 20% of the youngest female voters choose to register as Republicans.
- Younger registered voters show significant diversity. Fewer than 60% of Gen Z registered female voters are white, while 32% identify as persons of color.
- Women historically outpace men during North Carolina's early voting window. During general election cycles, women have been tracked casting roughly 55% of early

and absentee ballots, often outpacing men by hundreds of thousands of total votes.

- Registration among women varies drastically by county. The highest female registration rates are traditionally found in northeastern and southern border counties like Hertford County and Robeson County (at 56%). Conversely, counties like Anson and Madison average lower concentrations.
- Despite making up 51% of the state's total population and the majority of active voters, a deep representation gap persists for North Carolina women in elected office.
 - Women hold roughly 25% of the total seats within the North Carolina General Assembly.
 - Women fill only about one-third of statewide elected executive office positions.
 - North Carolina has zero female representation in the U.S. Senate.



"The mountains are calling..."

By Julie Arndt, Secretary, NC WELCA

Naturalist John Muir wrote this line in a letter to his sister Sarah in 1873. "The mountains are calling and I must go..." Muir was an early advocate for the preservation of U.S. wilderness. Dubbed the "Father of the National Parks," he worked to preserve the land that became Yosemite and Sequoia national parks. He not only explored and fought for preservation of wild places in the west, but he also explored the Blue Ridge and fell in love with Grandfather Mountain, calling the air "healing."

Muir felt the exact same way about the North Carolina Mountains that I do. We just returned from trip to the mountains, and I left feeling new. There is a kind of tranquility there, that I don't imagine exists anyplace else. The mountains enfold your spirit. They wrap around your senses, pulling you in and making it hard to leave.

As you explore the winding roads through the Blue Ridge Parkway, it's easy to imagine the dense green forest as it was once, when only natives like the Cherokee lived there and before explorers like Muir and Daniel Boone roamed the hills and valleys, hunting bear and deer in the woods and fishing the dark, icy streams for trout.

It's a place apart, apart from time, a place where towns and cities grew up as people filtered in and chopped the trees, carved into the rock, and tried to tame the land. Sometimes you forget that you are only a few miles from "civilization," a mere exit away from modern conveniences like fast food and shopping malls.

Car windows are always rolled down. To do otherwise seems wrong somehow, even criminal. Sometimes the only sound is wind through the trees, whispering ancient secrets known only to the birds and animals that live there.

Sometimes the roads take you above the clouds. It is a curious feeling to be higher than the clouds, to look down into the valleys I think of as God's thumbprint, and watch them drift through the branches like children playing tag. Occasionally one of the clouds bring a random rain



shower. And if your eyes are sharp and the timing is right, and you are at the right elevation, you might catch a glimpse of a Bald or Golden eagle riding the updrafts, soaring along the ridges.

If you explore enough of the mountains on the right roads, you learn where to find waterfalls with romantic sounding names like Bridal Veil and Looking Glass. Makes you wonder about the backstory. Sometimes you encounter spots where water breaks through the rock face and creates a mini-waterfall. In the winter, when water drips through the cracks and freezes, the mountain looks frosted with icicles.

They endure, these mountains, as they have for millions of years. Some say over 1 billion. The majestic mountains of the Blue Ridge were created by the lifting tectonic plates at least 250 million years ago. Whatever their age, the Blue Ridge Mountains are among the oldest in the world. They endure in spite of human intrusion and desire to clear and build. They endure even in the wake of natural disasters like Hurricane Helene, which only two years ago left a path of destruction that means years.

God left his mark on these mountains.

His power and majesty in the rising and falling of the mountains themselves. It's as if he left his thumbprint so we would know he had been there.

His delicate touches in the patches of wildflowers dotting the roadsides, hidden among trees and bushes and the music of birdsong floating in the air.

His humor in the playful creatures like otters and chipmunks.

The mountains will call again, and I will always answer.

US policies still impeding aid to women

by *Tonie Neal, Justice Committee*

Last year, \$10 million dollars of aid in the form of contraceptives sent to assist Belgian women were destroyed.

An update to this story appeared in the *Fayetteville Observer*, June 17, 2026. Jennifer Rigby and Ammu Kannampilly reported that in July, 2025 our administration froze U. S. foreign aid in January 2025, leaving the contraception going nowhere. Belgium was being paid to handle this destruction.

A more recent update from Reuters stated that the U. S. is spending almost \$25,000 every month to store the same products that were sent overseas to be used in poorer countries but are now unusable.

“Around \$9.7 million worth of contraceptives,

including implants and pills have been stuck in a Belgian warehouse since January last year, when the US first froze foreign aid.”

Reuters reported that neither the U. S. government nor Chemonics, the contractor that managed the procurement and delivery of the contraceptives for U.S. responded to questions.

“It is indefensible that at a time of acute global need, millions of dollars’ worth of lifesaving family planning supplies has been left to rot for nearly a whole year, while U. S. taxpayers face an every-mounting storage bill” said Beth Schlachter, senior director of external relations and advocacy at MSI Reproductive Choices.

The article further states the U. S. reversed the order to destroy the supplies, but it arrived after \$8 million in supplies had become unusable due to poor storage. When not given more instructions Chemonics tried to donate the last of the usable supplies to Uganda, at a cost of under \$240K.

The legacy of Lizzie Drum

By *Denise Henry,*

In 2014, there was vibrant programming for our young ladies in high school, college and post-college. Lizzie Drum was part of the core group of those young women.

In 2016, Lizzie attended Committee Day with her mom, Lisa Philbeck. Lizzie was full of ideas and ways to continue growing the faith of our young ladies. It was her senior year of high school. Tragically, she was killed that May in a car accident.

She made a lasting impact on those she encountered. The scholarship named in her memory, under the leadership of the Discipleship Committee, will help her impact to continue touching lives.

The scholarship isn’t just for young women. It will enable any of our women to attend our Retreats and the Annual Gathering.

It is our hope it will also provide special programming. This scholarship will impact all women just as Lizzie impacted others.



Pictured above are the members of the 2014 core group of high school, college and post-college young women who participated in the vibrant programming for their age group. Here they are wearing the scarves from the keynote presenter, Kimberly Rae. That year, we all learned ways to support victims of human trafficking. These young ladies planned their programs and retreats under various leadership from the NCWELCA. As a member of the Discipleship Committee during much of this time, Denise Henry said, “It was exciting to watch them grow into their faith.”