



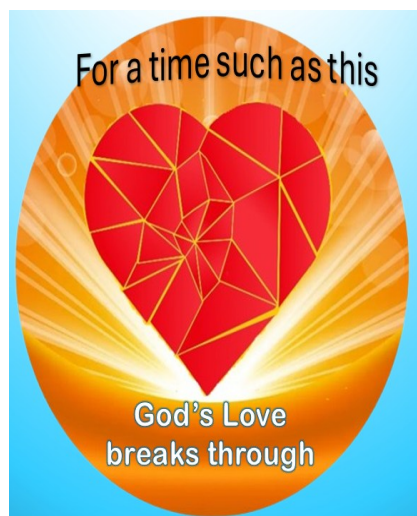
The Bulletin

April 2026

*“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.”



Dear Sisters,

Happy Spring! I greet you this month with a favorite spring-time poem from E.E. Cummings. His father was a Harvard professor and ordained minister of South Congregational Church in Boston. In this poem, Cummings' own theology comes through — influenced by both traditional Christianity and the transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson — in a playful, modernist take on a classic Elizabethan sonnet.

I thank you God for most this amazing...

*i thank You God for most this amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes*

*(i who have died am alive again today
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings; and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)*

*how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?*

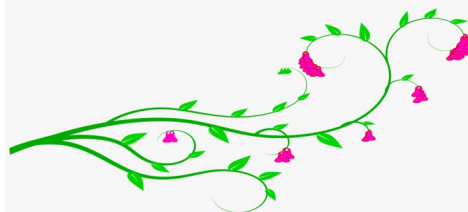
*(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)*

Enjoy the images and the pure joy in Cummings' work. It always feels fun and new and fresh to me, like a day in April.

Be blessed, my sisters!

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.

Dear Sisters,

Alleluia! Christ is risen indeed!



Last weekend I attended the Spring Retreat at the Isle of Palms, where the

topic was “Speak Love, Show Christ.” We talked about the five languages of love and how we experience love in different ways. The retreat was a wonderful time with old friends and rewarding to meet new friends. You will hear more about the retreat in another article in this newsletter.

Spring is in glorious bloom and it makes me want to start cleaning. The cleaning in my house would take months; I have years of accumulated things. So instead, I am starting by clearing the clutter in my mind. This is a time to let go of the “should do” lists, the worries, and the distractions that keep me from fully embracing God’s peace and purpose.

When we clear out some of the mental clutter, we begin to rediscover the beauty within ourselves - something worth sharing with others. In that renewal, we grow stronger, regain our rhythm and continue to flourish in each new stage of life.

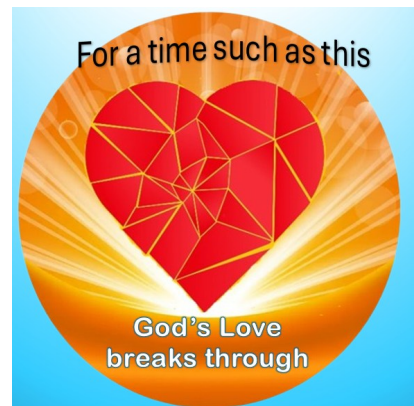
I have previously written about the Annual Gathering on June 12 and 13 and the associated costs. In this newsletter, you will find a “Gathering at a Glance,” so I encourage you to take a moment to see all that is planned. It promises to be a meaningful time of fellowship, learning, and renewal. You will also receive a copy of the registration form for the Gathering, in case you need one.

You will also find a calendar of upcoming events at the end of the newsletter.

I appreciate each of you and pray that you have a wonderful month.

In Christ’s love,

Terri Brown, President



North Carolina Women of the ELCA Gathering at a Glance

When: June 12-13

Where: Lenoir-Rhyne University, Hickory, North Carolina

Quick Packing and Planning Notes:

- sheets to fit a twin bed (full size ; flat sheets work well), blanket, pillow, towels comfortable clothes and shoes; Belk Centrum can be cold, so you may want to bring a sweater or shawl.
- A printed Gathering Program and Reports (GPR) will be given to all registered participants.
- Tee shirts must be ordered before May 10
- Robeson Church & Community will be collecting gift cards from Walmart, VISA or any chain grocery store.
- Fuller House will be collecting gift cards from Lowes
- Bring your Red Dress to display. These will be displayed in the Belk Centrum Lobby to bring awareness to Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women/People
- Leap of Faith Bookstore will be in Cromer Center

Friday, June 12

Registration 10:30am-4:00pm Belk Centrum
 Voting Member Orientation 11:45am Belk Centrum
 Opening of Gathering 12:00 noon Belk Centrum
 Greetings
 All voting is completed on Friday
 Bible Study by Gathering Chaplain
 Dinner 4:30-5:30pm Cromer Center
 Choir Practice 5:30-6:00pm Belk Centrum
 Evening Session 6:00pm Belk Centrum
 Special Guest Greetings

SWO Board Skit
 Address by CWO Representative
 Dorm Devotions Fritz Conrad Meeting Room
Saturday, June 13
 Breakfast 7:30-8:30 am Cromer Center
 Registration 7:30-9:00 am Belk Centrum Lobby
 Morning Matins 8:45-9:15 am Grace Chapel Prayer Garden (Alternate location- Fritz Conrad Mtg Room)
 Friday Recap 9:30 am Belk Centrum
 Awareness Sessions I 9:45-10:30am Rhyne Building
 Awareness Sessions II 10:45- 11:30am Rhyne Building
 Lunch 11:30 am-12:30 pm Cromer Center
 Keynote/Program by Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina 1:00-2:15pm Belk Centrum
 Snack Break 2:30-2:45 pm Belk Centrum Lobby
 Choir Practice 2:30-3:00pm Grace Chapel
 Worship Service 3:00pm Grace Chapel
 Installation of Officers and Board Members
 Close of Gathering 5:00pm



Red dresses: statement of more than style

By Susan Harris, Gathering Planning

The Red Dress became the symbol for women and heart disease awareness in 2002, but the red dress has also become a symbol of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW).

First conceived in 2010 by artist Jaime Black, the REDress Project represents remembrance and justice. Empty red dresses hanging in public space are a tangible way to express grief, demand accountability, and stand in solidarity.

Christian Allaire in Vogue magazine, writes, “In the U.S., homicide is the third-leading cause of death among Native women ages 10 to 24, according to the Urban Indian Health Institute, and Native women are victims of murder more than 10 times the national average, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.”

Prairie Rose Seminole, the former Program Director of the American Indian Alaska Native Ministries with the ELCA, wrote, “The red dress has become a powerful symbol of remembrance, resilience, and justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR). Across North America, Indigenous



communities and allies gather to wear red, hang red dresses in public spaces, and speak the names of those who have been taken. This act of remembrance is more than symbolic; it is a call to action, a way to honor the lives lost, and a means to amplify the voices of those fighting for justice.”

This year, during our Annual Gathering, we would like to display red dresses. If you have red dress in your closet, whether it still fits or not, we would love for you to bring it to the Annual Gathering. Bring your red dress on a hanger when you come to Lenoir-Rhyne in June!

Wonder Watcher photos sought for Triennial Banner

Remember the Wonder Watchers program from last year’s Spring Conference Gatherings and Fall Gathering (Northern Conference)? It is the program where we exchanged names to become conference prayer sisters and wore those funny glasses.

Karen Birkedal has been invited to present at the Triennial Gathering for the organization Adults Saving Kids. Adult Saving kids would like to highlight North Carolina Synod and its work with prayer partners across the Synod.

A banner will be displayed showcasing Wonder Watchers participants in those goofy glasses.

If you have any photos that you would like to submit for this banner, please contact Karen

Birkedal at pkbirke@gmail.com

Thank you for your help with this project. It is going to be great fun and will potentially connect women across the entire church in prayer.



Red Sand Project: Filling in cracks

By Julie Arndt, Board Liaison, Sandhills Conference

As of 2025–2026, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) estimates that there are approximately 4,200 unsolved missing and murdered cases involving Indigenous people in the U.S. While reports often focus on 2016 data showing over 5,700 cases, the crisis is ongoing, with over 5,800 American Indian and Alaska Native females reported missing in 2023 alone.

While homicide is a leading cause of death for Native women, who face a murder **rate ten times higher than the national average**, and almost **85 percent** of Native American women experience abusive relationships, research indicates **less than half** of violent victimizations against Native women are reported to police.

So why do so many cases of violence against Indigenous women fall through the cracks? There are a couple of reasons.

- **Jurisdiction.** Crimes on tribal land often involve a confusing mix of tribal, federal (FBI), and state jurisdiction, which can lead to delays in investigations and a "finger-pointing" scenario where no agency takes lead responsibility.
- Tribal police departments are often severely underfunded, understaffed, and cover vast, remote geographic areas, making timely in-

vestigation difficult.

- Missing persons are frequently misclassified as white or Hispanic, and many are never reported to federal databases like NCIC..
- Law enforcement and media often display bias against Indigenous women, particularly if they are victims of domestic violence or involved in sex work, leading to cold cases. So, due to historical trauma and past failures of justice, many families do not trust police.

In preparation for their Spring Gathering, focusing on MMIW, the women of St. Mark's/Lumberton (Sandhills conference) decided to look for ways to "do something."

"We wanted to find a tangible activity to reinforce what we learned about during the gathering, watching *We Ride for Her*," said Sandra Britt, president of St. Mark's WELCA chapter. "After a little research we found the Red Sand Project, and it seemed like just what we wanted."

Red Sand Project is an activist artwork initiative in 2014 to raise awareness about human trafficking and exploitation. Participants pour red sand into sidewalk cracks, symbolizing vulnerable individuals who "fall through the cracks" of social, economic, and political systems.

"We first gave everyone who came to the Gathering a bag of red sand to take home and pour into a crack in the sidewalk, wherever they want to... someplace visible. Then we took it a step further and went to our

prayer labyrinth, where we walked the labyrinth, leaving red sand around the edges while we prayed," Sandra explained.

One participant said, "This felt like actually doing something, making a statement that this is



wrong and has to end. These missing women are our sisters, children of God. They're moms, daughters, aunties, friends... They deserve better that to fall between the cracks of the justice system. They didn't fall between the cracks in God's sidewalk."



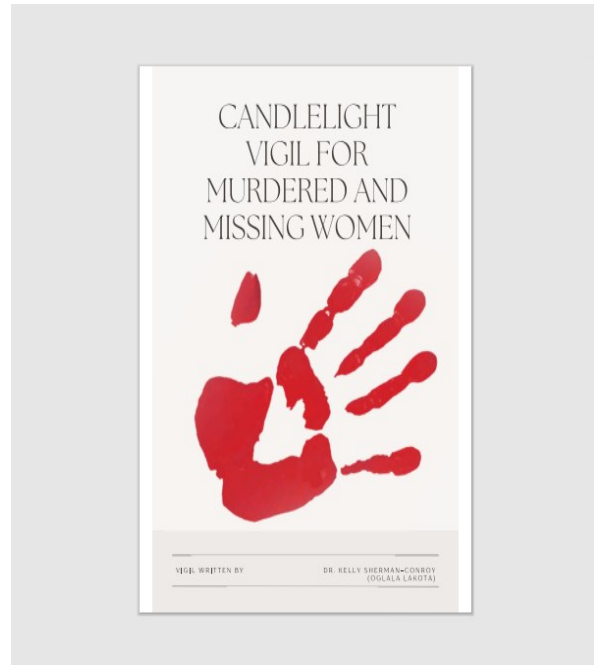
Red sand on the prayer labyrinth for missing and murdered women and girls, whose stories often fall through the cracks.

Candlelight Vigil for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW), May 5

In honor of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women's Day, Monday, May 5, join leaders, staff and others to pray together, "Candlelight Vigil for Murdered and Missing Women," written by Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy. Vigil materials can be downloaded from the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women webpage on the ELCA website.

Join the vigil via Zoom webinar, Monday, May 5.

For more information visit the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women webpage on the ELCA website.



Practicing Discipleship: Daily, Weekly, On-Going

By Marguerite Taylor, Discipleship Committee

Practicing discipleship is about intentionally shaping your life around the way Jesus taught us through reflection, repentance, renewal and joyful living. We have just completed the season of Lent and are now entering Holy Week. So, it begins.

Lent tends to be a season of formation:

- Prayer/deepening our relationship with God
- Fasting/ letting go
- Almsgiving/ loving and serving others
- Repentance/ confession and accepting Grace.

At my church we heard stories and sermons of moving from the darkness in our own lives to becoming Children of Light. (Matthew 5:16) Each Sunday we sang hymns with the theme of Light.

With the help of many hands, a large heavy wooden cross was placed in the sanctuary. On this cross our church family has been asked to give serious thought to some prayers they would like to share. These can be prayers for family, friends, community, justice, peace, our world, just to name

a few. We are encouraged to craft our own prayers. Paper is provided to write on and nails to be used so they can be nailed upon the cross. Holy Week has been proclaimed as "Prayer Week" at my church.

Easter gives us an opportunity to continue our practice of discipleship. Easter isn't just one day – it's a whole season of celebration and living new life. Celebrate our Lord's resurrection.

- Reflect on the victory of Jesus over sin and death.
- Be joyful and grateful in your worship.
- Read the resurrection stories from all 4 gospels.
- Live the New Life. Ask yourself "How am I changing some of my daily habits to be more reflective to others of Christ's love for them?"

A final question to ponder – "How am I becoming more like Jesus – and helping others do the same."

Think about it.

So, Let your Light Shine!

Spring is a time of new life, growth and renewal. Take a moment to reflect on the ways God has brought about these qualities in your own life. Easter is the perfect time to begin anew.

Book Review: *The Insanity of God* by Nik Ripken

By **Patty Schmid, Justice Committee**

The foundation Nik Ripken's 2013 book, *The Insanity of God*, is the personal and lifelong journey of an ordinary couple from rural Kentucky who thought they were going on an ordinary missionary pilgrimage, but discovered it would be anything but.

After spending over six hard years doing relief work in Somalia, and experiencing life where it looked like God had turned away completely and He was clueless about the tragedies of life, the couple had a crisis of faith and left Africa asking God, "Does the gospel work anywhere when it is really a hard place? It sure didn't work in Somalia.

Ripken asks his readers to consider several questions:

- How does faith survive, let alone flourish in a place like the Middle East?
- How can good truly overcome such evil?
- How do you maintain hope when all is darkness around you?
- How can we say "greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world" when it may not be visibly true in that place at that time?
- How does anyone live an abundant, victorious Christian life in our world's toughest places? Can Christianity even work outside of Western, dressed-up, ordered nations? If so, how?

These questions form the foundation of the book, which resides in the stories of Christians who minister to individuals and communities around the world, especially Muslim communities.

Imagine how difficult it is to minister to Christians in the US and now add the intense scrutiny and apprehension of Muslim communities, no matter what country they live.

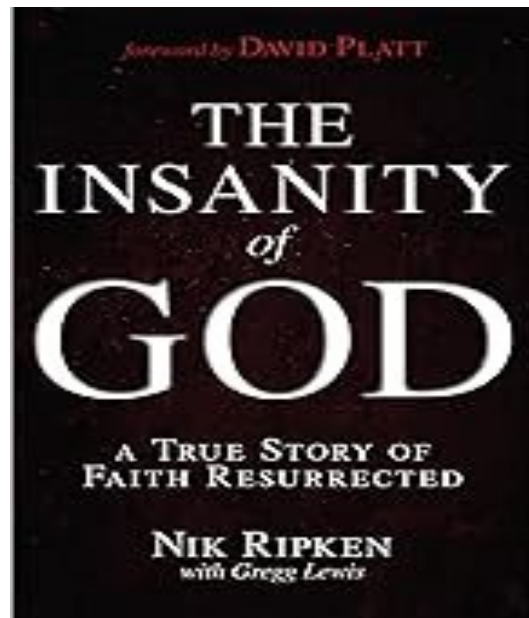
Nik Ripken is the world's leading expert on the persecuted church in Muslim contexts. He is a missions veteran of 30 years, having served primarily

in North Africa and the Middle East. He is the author of *The Insanity of God* and the new book *The Insanity of Obedience*. He and his wife have done extensive research on the persecuted church, and on Muslim background believers, in approximately 72 countries.

His story of growing up in Kentucky finding God and his faith and then seeking to extend and expand a ministry into Africa, Russia and beyond. His entire family tirelessly work to minister to all individuals, mostly non-believers and Muslims.

The book is filled with personal stories of faith, loss and restoration of many people (often over senseless wars and conflicts). Imagine literally starving for food and the word of God at the same time. Stories of hidden Bible readings, clandestine church services and baptisms give a feeling of urgency to accounts of faith and ministry. Some of the individuals in Ripken's narrative were later executed and or harmed. Despite these spiritual battles, many found true faith and comfort, filled with joy.

The takeaway? A difficult read but quite rewarding. I encourage all of you to pick-up any book and learn other tales about the search for faith and the peace it brings to many and perhaps yours.



Purchase a copy of the book mentioned in this review at your favorite bookseller.

Love is many languages

By Susan Harris, BULLETIN Correspondent

What language do you speak? I'm not asking about a foreign language, but rather what "Love" language do you speak?

The 2026 Spring Retreat, "Speak Love, Show Christ," held at the Retreat Center on Isle of Palms, SC, helped those attending identify their "Love" language. Presented by Deanna Deaton, Heidi Gibson, Carolyn Miller, and Dr. Jes Sloan, the women explored the five love languages: Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, Physical Touch, and Words of Affirmation. Each of the five sessions focused on one of the languages.

During the first session, Words of Affirmation, we considered some of the affirmations in scripture and discussed how we can share spoken or written expressions of love, appreciation, encouragement, and support.

In the second session, we looked at the physical touch aspect, especially when Jesus used his touch to heal people.

As we looked at Acts of Service in the third session, we were reminded that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples, and we talked about simple acts of service we all can perform.

Whether you realize it or not, Quality Time is a love language, just being present, engaged, and emotionally connected to someone. In the Gospels, we witness as Jesus spends quality time with the woman at the well, with Zaccheus, and most often with his disciples.

The fifth "Love" language we considered was Receiving Gifts, tangible symbols of love and thoughtfulness, and we reflected on the verse from Acts (20:35), "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Interspersed with the sessions was time for arts and crafts. My favorite art project was rock painting. One of the other activities, we were encouraged to share words of affirmation with one another in writing or in small token gifts. On Sunday morning during closing worship, we privately read the notes the others had shared with us. After sitting quietly with the comments I had received, I noticed I was not the only woman in the room who had tears in her eyes.

During the weekend retreat, our women spent time experiencing all these "love" languages, as we ate, worshipped, and sang together.

I hope you will consider attending a future retreat sponsored by the NC Women of the ELCA Discipleship committee. The next one will be the Fall Retreat to be held at the Blowing Rock Conference Center October 2-4, 2026. Look for registration in the coming months.



Some of the ladies of North Carolina WELCA enjoyed the spring retreat at Isle of Palms, SC. (Photo: Robin Stuart)



It's always a good day at the beach. (Photo: Robin Stuart)



“Speak Love, Show Christ” NC WELCA Spring Retreat Explores Love Languages

A popular project at the retreat is pictured in the photos at left. The painted rocks bear words of affirmation and love messages. (Photos by Susan Harris)



Presenters Deanna Deaton, Heidi Gibson, Carolyn Miller, and Dr. Jes Sloan

Shoutout to the chefs for the weekend! Lorri Montrose and Patty Schmid truly love to cook and to serve others. We love them too! Thank you both for all your hard work and preparation for our wonderful meals this weekend. (Photo: Robin Stuart)



North Carolina Women of the ELCA 2026-2027 Calendar

April 2026

April 5	Easter Sunday
April 10 – 12	Spring Retreat at Isle of Palms
April 11	Spring Gathering, Nativity, Arden Spring Gathering, Christ the King, Cary
April 15	Tax Day
April 18	Spring Gathering, St Paul, Dallas Spring Gathering, Macedonia, Burlington Spring Gathering, St. Luke, Mt Ulla Spring Gathering, Mt Zion, Conover Spring Gathering, Sharon, Statesville Spring Gathering, 1st Lutheran, Lexington

May 2026

May 2	Spring Gathering, Morning Star, Charlotte
May 5	MMIW Day of Awareness
May 5	Cinco de Mayo
May 10	Mother's Day
May 24	Pentecost
May 25	Memorial Day
May 28-30	NC Synod Gathering

June 2026

June 12 & 13	Annual Gathering at Lenior Rhyne
June 14	Flag Day
June 19	Juneteenth
June 21	Father's Day
June 26-27	Board Meeting at Synod office

July/August 2026

July 12-14	Triennial Convention (voting)
July 15	Travel Day
July 16-19	Triennial Gathering
August	Committee Day