

TAPESTRY

A Publication of the
Florida-Bahamas
Synodical Women's
Organization of the
ELCA

December 2025 | Vol. 38, Issue 5

In This Issue

From Your President.....	p. 1
Fall Gathering Reflection.....	p.2
Thank You.....	p. 3
Forms, Funds & Finances.....	p. 4
Election Results.....	p. 5
Praise Report Journals.....	p. 6
Social Justice, Advocacy, & Reconciliation.....	p. 7
Love Offerings.....	p. 9
From the Editor.....	p. 10

From Your President

Waiting and Watching

Advent is the time of the year where we prepare; but do we allow the callings of the world to shape our journey or is it an intentional walk? Check out the resource, “A Different Kind of Journey. Advent as a Walk, Not a Sprint.” Many suggestions share how you can be focused this year. The resource suggests that you begin by asking, “What wants to be born in me now?”

The Women of the ELCA have several initiatives you could research such as: MMIW, AMMPARO, domestic violence, Human Trafficking, support families with special needs, and many more. The ELCA has an initiative called Pray without

Ceasing. Maybe Advent is the time to understand this project and see if it is for you. Advocacy is an action of education, letter and email writing, and calling your representatives. Journaling, reviewing Advent hymns, art, or storytelling could be disciplines for you to explore. Hopefully, your Advent will be an intentional adventure as you wait, watch, and prepare.

— Racann Purcell, *President*



Fall Gathering 2025

Another great Fall Gathering is in the books. One hundred eighteen women gathered at Warren Willis Conference Center the weekend of November 7-9 to conduct the business of WELCA, worship together, refresh and recommit to God and one another. Our weekend worship leader, Rev. Kari Niedermaier, Pastor of All Saints Lutheran in Port Orange, brought messages that were powerful, insightful, and something we all needed to hear. Our Bible study leader, Rev. Margarita Romo, founder of Farmworkers Self-Help, Inc. and Pastor of Resurrection House Mission in Dade City, led us through a study of our weekend scripture, Romans 8:14. We heard and learned from our Churchwide WELCA Vice-President, Lorie Garcia. Lorie sat in on our Board meetings, business sessions, and workshops. Greetings were brought from the Bishops Office by Assistant to the Bishop, Rev. Carlos Ham. We also had several staff from Bishop Suarez's office attend our gathering.



The workshops covered a variety of learning experiences from managing your unit as elected officers to topics such as crafting, jail ministry, managing finances, gun violence, music, and making spaces for one another in our busy lives. We were also presented with a Resolution titled "Support our ELCA Leaders of Color." I am proud to say that this resolution, resolving to support our elected Churchwide leaders of whom for the first time in ELCA history, three of four are persons of color. All Synodical

Women's Organizations are being asked to present a version of this resolution and we, the women of the Florida-Bahamas Synod passed it unanimously. This year we posted QR codes in various locations to allow attendees to download the schedule and online offering pages. We saw quite a few using the QR codes and we hope the QR codes made things convenient.

Registration was down again this year. This means the Synodical Board will be taking a hard look at what we can do to attract more participants and where we can cut expenses. We heard suggestions that we need to plan activities for non-voting members so that they have something to do during business sessions.





Suggestions we heard were: offer a guided tour of the camp facility, or possibly a scavenger hunt, or enlarging the hospitality room and have activities there. We also had to discuss the cost of the book we print. This year, the cost was over \$1,000. The question has been asked if we need to raise registration fees or possibly offer the book in digital format with a small charge for members who want a printed copy. By now, you should have received an evaluation form to complete on the Gathering overall. I hope you answered what you thought went well, not so well and offered suggestions on things we can include in future Gatherings.

Lastly, but very important. We have new Board members. Elected were Donna Person, Vice President; Michelle Hilton, Treasurer; Marilyn Kreitzinger and Irene Brissell, two-year terms; Lakesa Ferguson, one year term. The newly elected join existing Board members, Raeann Purcell, President; Wilma Shively, Secretary; and Stacia Carter.

Please mark your calendars for our 2026 gathering, November 13-15, 2026. See you next year!!

—Stacia Carter, *WELCA Board*

A Heartfelt Thank You from Diane Brown

This THANK YOU goes out to all of the ladies who brought Christian books, many in bags and boxes, for the Women's Jail Ministry at the Lake County Jail in Tavares. A total of 112 books were donated and the ladies at the jail truly appreciate them. They stand in line for their turn at the Christian book cart and often comment on how thankful they are. You truly understand that we are God's hands here on earth and you are making a difference in the lives of the women at the jail. I am truly thankful for you and your generosity.

God bless you!

Pictured: Worship at the Fall Gathering.



Forms, Funds, & Finances...

Greetings SWO Sisters,

All God's Children gathered at Warren Willis United Methodist Camp in mid-November for a great weekend filled with workshops, worship, and lots of great fellowship. If you missed this year's Fall Gathering, make plans now to attend next year!

It has been an honor and pleasure to serve at the SWO Treasurer for the past four years. Michele Hilton was elected the new SWO Treasurer at the Fall Gathering and will be replacing me starting February 1, 2026. She will do an awesome job, I know! Information on where to send offerings will be communicated as we get closer to the transition date.



Thank you to all who shared their generosity at Fall Gathering in both our regular Communion Offering and our Love Offering for GraceWay Village. Please remember all Love Offering donations made until January 31, 2026 will go to GraceWay Village. Our New Love Offering will receive all donations sent after February 1, 2026. Several donations were also received for our Fund for Leaders Scholarship and Scholarships for attending the Fall Gathering.

Here are the totals:

Communion Offering: \$2,854.00 (50% will be sent to Churchwide)

Love Offering: \$3,564.00 (Includes cash, checks, and gift cards)

Total gifts to GraceWay Village so far this year are: \$9,428.00

Thanks to ALL who contributed! Also, many thanks to Kim Raymond, Michele Hilton, and Wilma Shively for their expert help in counting the offerings over the weekend. Please reach out to me with



any questions about offerings and all things Treasurer:

fbswotreasurer@gmail.com or
(239) 848-7274.

Donations are always graciously accepted to any of the funds above. Make checks payable to FL-BA SWO and mail to: SWO Treasurer, Tracy Moffatt, 1944 Crestview Way, Naples, FL 34119

—Tracy Moffatt, *Treasurer*

Election Results from the 2025 Fall Gathering Convention

	<u>Outgoing</u>	<u>Incoming</u>
SWO/ 2 Year Term-Vice President:	Denise Beumer	Donna Person
SWO/ 2 Year Term-Treasurer	Tracy Moffatt	Michele Hilton
SWO/ 2 Year Term-Board Members	Sallie Haley	Marilyn Kreizinger
	Leone Goding	Irene Brissel
SWO/ 1 Year Term-Board Member	Lisa Klima	Lakesha Ferguson



Praise Report Journals: A Quote to Reflect On

Diane Brown brought journals for participants of the Praise Report Journal Workshop so everyone could start their own. In each of them, she wrote the following quote:

“In a society that has you counting money, pounds, calories, and steps, be a rebel and count your blessings instead.” —*Lisa Heckman*



Social Justice, Advocacy, & Reconciliation

Human Trafficking 2025

This is the third article I've written on human trafficking. I've used the dictionary to define human trafficking as "the unlawful act of transporting or coercing people in order to benefit from their work or service, typically in the form of forced labor or sexual exploitation." I've used US law to define it as "the use of force, fraud or coercion to compel a person into commercial acts and/or labor against their will." No matter how it is defined, it seems as if human trafficking is getting worse each year despite efforts to combat it. However, we really don't know if that is true. We do, however know, that the sale of humans for sexual favors or forced labor is illegal and horrific. Human trafficking is modern slavery.



We also know that through increased awareness of public media campaigns, television ads, training, signs in restrooms, train and bus stations, etc., more victims are being identified. We are also seeing victims come forward asking for assistance. Law enforcement has stepped-up their efforts to detect, apprehend and prosecute offenders. However, the question remains unanswered, are there more victims now or are we more aware of trafficking victims because of better detection?

Globally, including in the US, we also have better tools to track victims and offenders. We have



become more aware of factors contributing to human trafficking. Millions of people are being displaced due to worldwide armed conflicts, natural disasters, and oppressive conditions in their home countries. Millions are also experiencing income loss that make them vulnerable to false job promises and people willing to exploit their economic situations. And technology, I am reading of many instances where people are recruited via technology in chat rooms, gaming sites, and various online platforms such as dating sites. Then we have what I believe is a major problem. As a society, we still tend to blame the victim. A woman is assaulted; she is asked what she was wearing. An immigrant is forced into unpaid labor, that person gets asked why they crossed the border looking for work. Some victims never report it because they are ashamed or embarrassed. Then too often when the victim does speak up, tries to press charges, no one listens or we turn a blind eye to the charge because the accused is wealthy, well-known, powerful, or all the

above. We've had celebrities and politicians accused and even sent to prison for trafficking underage girls right here in Florida. We've had politicians who've been accused and even convicted of sexual battery, sexual coercion, or assault and still win elections despite proven charges against them. We have employers in this state who've gotten away with only paying a fine for exploiting their workforce, not paying workers, then threatening them when they complain, coercing them into silence. That is human trafficking.

A 2024 study commissioned by the state and conducted by the University of South Florida reported that Florida currently ranks third in the nation for human trafficking. The report estimated that more than 500,000 people were exploited in labor and 200,000 were sex trafficked in 2023. The study also reported that more than 50% of the sex trafficked victims were minors and one fourth of the labor victims were minors. Factors contributing to our rating included our population, easy accessibility to numerous airports, many of our cities serving as hosts to international events and major industries such as agriculture and tourism. All these factors make it easy to exploit both adults and children.

In 2023, Florida Dept of Child and Families reported 2,100 cases of human trafficking. 1,627 of those cases involved children. Broward County had 164 reports of human trafficking while Miami Dade County had 222 cases reported. Northwest Florida (the panhandle) reported 242 cases in this same period.



In October of 2024, more than 150 people were arrested in a joint operation between Orange, Osceola, and Polk County Sheriff's offices. In May to September of this year, Polk County Sheriff's office led a multi-jurisdiction operation resulting in more than 240 arrests. The total of potential victims identified or rescued in either of these operations was not provided in the info I found.

Compare the number of arrests in the two operations conducted in central Florida to a 2024 operation conducted by Europol and Interpol in 39 countries that led to 219 arrests, identifying 1,374 potential victims. Or a multi-agency operation in California earlier this year that included more than 100 law enforcement agencies resulting in 500 arrests. This reportedly rescued 177 victims. There were close to 400 arrests in three counties in Florida alone compared to 500 in the state of California or 219 from 39 countries combined in the European operation. Florida, we got a problem. Neither law enforcement, DCF, or other agencies know how to solve this issue. When we look at demographics provided by US federal databases, the average trafficker is 36 years of age and male. More than 55% of traffickers are US citizens and 15% are identified as foreign nationals. Worldwide, 63% of people prosecuted for trafficking are male. In labor trafficking, women have been identified as the trafficker

in 43% of all cases. Because human trafficking doesn't honor borders, the ethnicity and race of the traffickers varies so the Dept of Justice didn't seem to have hard data on race and ethnicity of those complicit. However, we know human trafficking no matter whom it's committed by, or the type of trafficking done, it's illegal, dehumanizing, and traumatic for the victims.

We live in a state where human trafficking is prevalent. If you have an opportunity, attend a training or seminar on human trafficking and learn how to identify victims, what to do if you discover what may be a case of human trafficking, and what programs are available to assist victims. Maybe at your next Spring Gathering, have someone come in and speak on how we as a group can combat human trafficking. I highly recommend downloading the app "TraffickCam" onto your smartphone. When you are traveling and staying at a hotel, snap a picture of your hotel room. After you've taken the first picture, the app will ask you to take a few more of various parts of your hotel room, then type in the hotel and location. Once these pictures are submitted, they are matched with pictures on the internet to establish locations of where traffickers may be housing victims or coercing victims into sex crimes. Lastly, pray. Pray that we all overcome our perceptions of trafficking victims, that we open our hearts to those who may be in trouble and need our help. Pray that no one we know falls prey to a trafficker. Pray that we stop turning a blind eye because the trafficker is rich and powerful. Pray that Florida drops to #50 because #3 isn't an honor. Let's pray for the wellbeing of all and the grace of God as we go through our lives. In His name, we pray.

—Stacia Carter, *WELCA Board*

Love Offerings

Love Offerings are chosen every two years. The current Love Offering is GraceWay Village. Monetary Offerings can be made through the end of January 2026.

Thank you for the support that you have given to GraceWay Village.

—Diane Spicer, *Love Offering Coordinator*



GraceWay Village



Thank you for welcoming GraceWay Village at the Fall Gathering of the FL-BA Synodical Women's Organization. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of everyone who attended and were truly overwhelmed by the abundance of gift cards, clothing items, and funds collected on our behalf. Your willingness to recognize the needs of our neighbors and to respond with such compassion will make a meaningful difference in the lives of many. Thank you again for your kindness and support of GraceWay Village!

—Chrissie Hoeffner, *Operations Manager of GraceWay Village*

From the Editor



**“This, this is Christ, the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing.”**

—*“What Child is This”*

It was so nice to meet many of you at Fall Gathering!

And now it is Advent. How are you spending your Advent?

My church has a tradition of putting up our Chrismon tree, crèche, Advent wreath, and other appropriate things on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. It's a time of fellowship and fun each year.

I hope you have a meaningful Advent and a beautiful Christmas!

Please email your articles and photos to me at fltapestry@gmail.com.

Enjoy the following photos of Fall Gathering 2025.

Upcoming issues:

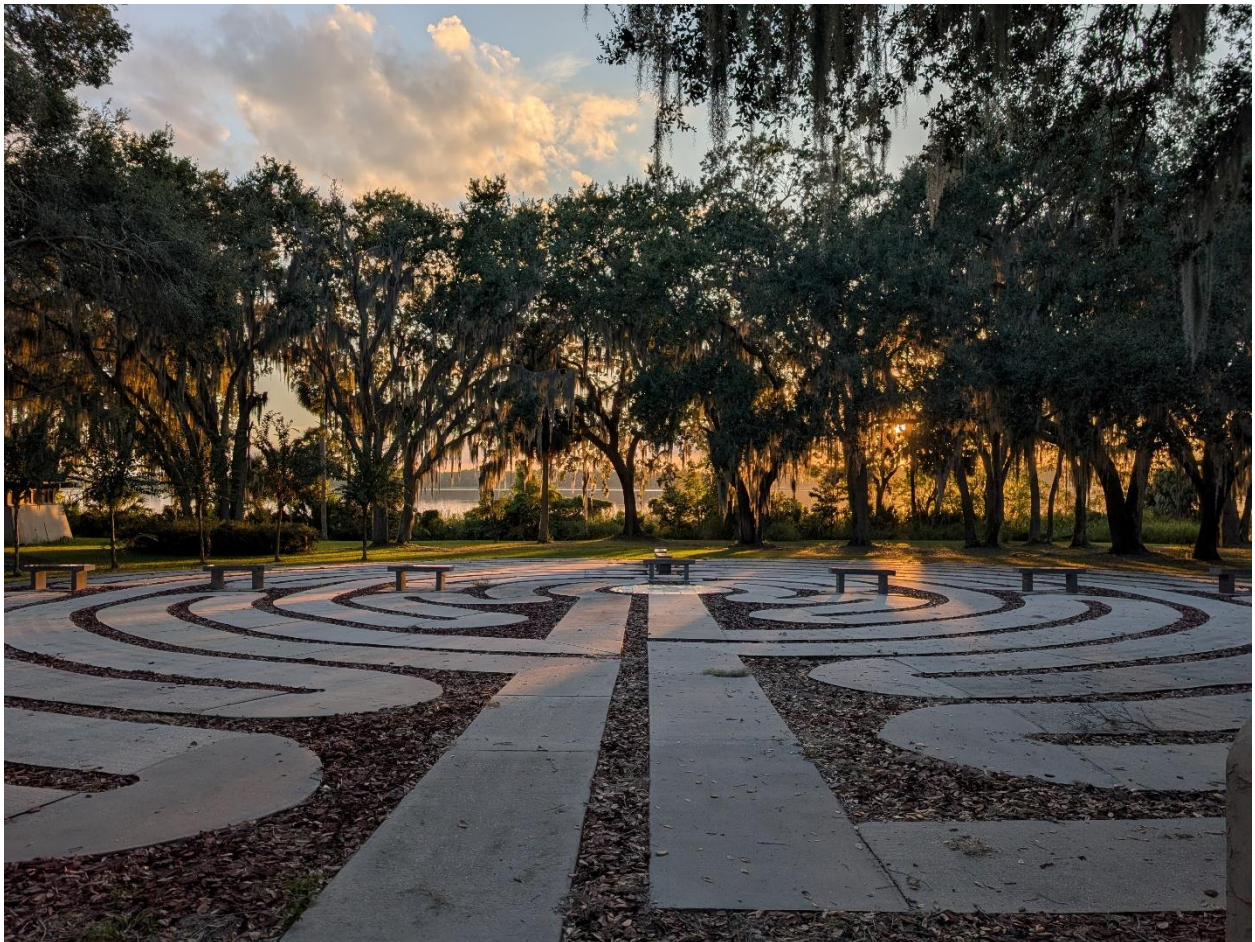
February 2026 Issue (send articles by January 15)

April 2026 Issue (send articles by March 15)

—Gina Olson, *Editor*







Florida-Bahamas Synodical Women's Organization Directory

President Raeann Purcell raeannpurcell@hotmail.com	Vice President Donna Person dperson7@aol.com	Secretary Wilma Shively wjshively@aol.com	Treasurer Michele Hilton micheleahilton@aol.com
--	--	---	---

Board Members

Stacia Carter	staciamlc@gmail.com	Social Justice, Advocacy, and Reconciliation
Marilyn Kreitzinger	manyjoys2u@gmail.com	LWR
Irene Brissell	ibrissell@gmail.com	
Lakesa Ferguson	lakesa36@gmail.com	

Advisory Members

Diane Cummings	sworegistrar1@gmail.com	Registrar
Diane Spicer	spicerdiane3@gmail.com	Love Offering



What does our logo mean?

Our logo—with the cross, water and a white lily—identifies women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America as children of God; baptized, forgiven, adopted into God's family, full of grace and hope in eternal life. It is a reminder of the growth, beauty, and vitality that rises out of that life-giving baptismal water. It is also a reminder of the mission of the church to "Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).

UPCOMING ISSUES

February 2026 Issue
(send articles by January 15)
April 2026 Issue
(send articles by March 15)

**Email Gina Olson at
fltapestry@gmail.com**

