

TAPESTRY

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

August 2026 | Vol. 39, Issue 4

From Your President

I hope that you have been enjoying your summer. It has been a busy one for the Women of the ELCA. The Thirteenth Triennial Convention was held virtually on July 13 and 14. Peggy Ronnekamp and I represented the Florida-Bahamas Synodical Women's Organization (SWO) and sat together for the convention to support each other and to share our understanding of the event. We were blessed to hear from Dr. Jennifer Hockenbery, our executive director, Myrna Wells-Ulland, our president, and the executive board.

The election of president and vice president for the churchwide executive board for the Women of the ELCA is done by ecclesiastical ballot or nominating ballot. *(This is the same way we elect our president for our SWO. See the explanation of this vote on page 2).*

In This Issue

From Your President.....	p. 1
SWO Voting Information.....	p. 2
From Your Treasurer.....	p. 3
Love Offering.....	p. 5
Fall Gathering 2026.....	p. 6
Conference Assignments.....	p. 7
Beyond the Myths.....	p. 8
From the Editor.....	p. 10

☀ Executive Board: 2026-2029 (region and SWO)

Sheena Foster, president (8G)

Gwendolynn Edwards, vice president (4A)

Miranda Searcy, secretary (4C)

Linda Clark, treasurer (5E)

Mary Ann Nelson (1C)

Kristal Shipp (2B)

Marie Lokensgard (3F)

DaMisha McFarland-Pollock (5D)

Paula Dusselejee (6D)

Carmen Colon-Brown (6F)

Noelle Heinrich (7B)

Dawn Talley (7E)

Andrea Lundgrend Osilkova (8D)

Risse Snelgrove (9C)

Ginger Cutrell (9D).

We learned at the budget meeting that a virtual convention costs about \$50,000 with the Executive Board attending in person. An in-person convention, with all voting members in attendance costs about \$900,000. We passed a budget to continue the support of the Women of the ELCA and to include an additional staff position of full-time bookkeeper to free up the executive director (ED) to focus on strategic work and fundraising. Our ED has made us aware of and applied for numerous grants that will help our work.

The voting members passed 10 memorials and one resolution to guide our action for the next triennium. Memorials titled Faithful Friends, Supporting Black Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders of the ELCA, Justice for Neighbors, In Recognition of Creation Care Justice, Unification of Women Around the Intent of the Gospel, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls, Raise Awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Clean Water for People of Kuwaa Land in Liberia, West Africa, Period Poverty, and Immigrant Family Detention Awareness and Action. More information is available on these at www.womenoftheelca.org/thirteenth-triennial-convention-information Please consider prayerfully how you, your unit, and your SWO can act on these memorials and resolution.

The Triennial Gathering was held in Des Moines, Iowa on July 16-19. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend. Some members of our SWO did attend and I look forward to hearing from them regarding their experience. Hopefully, we will have articles for the next *Tapestry* with pictures!

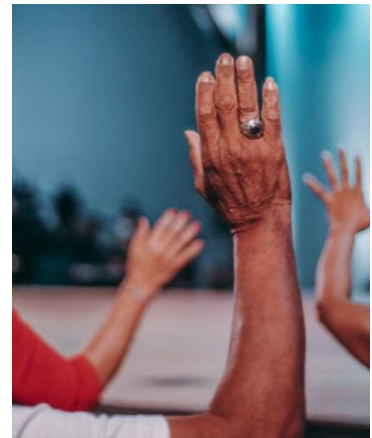
Did you know that WELCA has a Racial Justice Advocacy Network? Living into our baptismal call, we are a network of bold women working toward systemic change through anti-racism education and advocacy. You can be a part of this network. Check out “Racial Justice Advocacy Network of the Women of the ELCA” on Facebook or contact Lorie Burke Garcia at LGarcia@uls.edu.

Blessings to you all as you continue your work for the Women of the ELCA.

— Raeann Purcell, *SWO President*

Voting Information for our SWO

An ecclesiastical ballot or nominating ballot allows us to listen to the Holy Spirit as we choose a leader for our organization. The first ballot allows the voting members to name any woman of the ELCA. The ballot requires three-fourths of the votes cast for an election. The second ballot allows the voting members to vote for anyone named on the first ballot. Two-thirds of the votes cast on the second ballot shall be necessary for election. On subsequent ballots a majority of the votes cast shall be necessary for election. The third ballot shall be limited to the five persons (plus ties) who received the greatest number of votes on the second ballot. An information sheet shall show for each of the five nominees their address, synodical organization, and qualifications for office. The fourth ballot shall be limited to the two persons (plus ties) who receive the highest number of votes on the third ballot.



From Your Treasurer

☀️ Greetings, SWO Sisters! ☀️

The Dog Days of Summer are upon us! A phrase that provokes images of long, hot, lazy days often prompting people to seek shade, rest, and air conditioning! And 2026 has proven to be one of the hottest summers we can remember! So, think about lovely fall days! Think about the 2026 SWO Fall Gathering – where friends re-connect, days are cooler, food and fellowship abound, worship is amazing, learning opportunities abound – **NOW** is the perfect time to choose your voting member!

Every active unit is entitled to send one voting member to help shape the future of our organization. This is your opportunity to have your unit's voice heard as we conduct important SWO business—and don't worry! Business sessions are scheduled so your voting member won't miss any of the wonderful worship, workshops, fellowship, or fun that make the Fall Gathering so special.



Is Your Unit Ready?

Keeping your unit active is easy! Just make sure you have completed these two requirements:

✓ 1. Constitution or Affirmation of Membership on File

Our SWO Vice President, Wilma Shively, maintains these records.

- Not sure if your unit has one on file? Contact Wilma at wjshively@aol.com or (910) 273-8257.
- Need to submit an Affirmation of Membership? Download the form at flwelca.com/resources.
- Need to establish or update your Constitution? Visit womenofthelca.org/tools-for-leaders/constitutions for the latest templates that can be used as written or adapted for your unit.

✓ 2. Support the Ministry of the SWO

Each active unit should send at least one regular offering to the SWO Treasurer during the year.

- Wondering if your unit has already sent an offering? I'd be happy to check! Contact me at fbswotreasurer@gmail.com or (941) 373-5596.
- Ready to send your offering? Complete Form A (available at flwelca.com/resources) and mail it with your check to:

Michele Hilton
100 New Leatherwood Dr.
Palm Coast, FL 32137

Help a Sister Experience the Fall Gathering



One of the greatest gifts we can give is the opportunity for another woman to attend the Fall Gathering.

Please consider making a donation to one of our scholarship funds:

- ✦ Let Your Light Shine — provides scholarships for youth attendees.
- ✦ Share the Spirit — helps adult women attend who might otherwise be unable to participate.

Both scholarship funds are running low, and every gift—large or small—helps ensure that more sisters can worship, learn, grow, and share in this wonderful gathering.

Please make checks payable to FL-BA Synodical Women and note either “Let Your Light Shine” or “Share the Spirit” in the memo line, or include a completed Form A. Contributions may be mailed to the address above (on page 3).

Thank you for keeping your unit active, supporting the ministry of our SWO, and helping make this year's Fall Gathering a blessing for women across our synod.

We can't wait to see you in November!

Blessings!

— Michele Hilton, *SWO Treasurer*

A Letter from the Love Offering Coordinator



Dear Sisters in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

One of the greatest blessings of being part of Women of the ELCA is the opportunity to come together in faith and share God's love with others through our Love Offering. Each gift we give is a reminder that we are connected as sisters in Christ and called to care for those in need. Thank you for your continued generosity and your willingness to give.

Martin Luther taught that caring for others is an important expression of our faith. He believed we should not wait until someone asks for help but instead look for ways to share God's love through kindness, compassion, and generosity.

This year, our Love Offering will support **Forward Paths Foundation**, an organization that helps homeless, unaccompanied youth, and young adults transitioning out of foster care. Through housing support, education, transportation, job training, and other resources, they help young people find stability, hope, and a brighter future.

Pastor Steve Winsor, my pastor at Nativity Lutheran Church, shares the important reminder that we are called to **“Love God and love God’s people.”** These words reflect the heart of Christian discipleship and remind us that our faith is shown through the way we care for others. Our Love Offering is one way we put God’s love into action. Through our giving, we can share Christ’s love, provide hope, and make a difference in the lives of those who need support and encouragement.

Jesus reminds us in Matthew 25:40, **“Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”** Paul also reminds us in 2 Corinthians 9:7 that God loves a cheerful giver. Our giving is not just a donation—it is an act of love and worship.

As we prepare for our gathering, I invite you to prayerfully consider your Love Offering. Every gift, no matter the size, can make a difference. Together, our generosity can bring hope, encouragement, and support to young people who need a caring community.

Thank you for your prayers, your compassion, and your commitment to serving God’s people. It is a blessing to serve alongside each of you as we continue to love God, love God’s people, and share Christ’s love with the world.

May God bless you as you give from the heart.

In Christ’s Service,

— Lakesa Ferguson, *Love Offering Coordinator*

Fall Gathering
November 13-15, 2026
Warren Willis United Methodist
Camp & Retreat Center in Fruitland Park

Are **YOU** ready for a Spirit-filled weekend?

Your planning team is working hard putting the final details on this event.

Join us for:

Worship Fellowship Music Crafts

Workshops *Games* Bible Study AND
a special “Spirit-filled” Saturday Night Event!

Pastor Jen Moore and Dori Dunham will be
leading us in worship along with
George Algozzina who will provide the music.
The youth leader will be Ms. Rachel!

Registration is now open on www.flwelca.com.

More details coming soon.



We look forward to seeing YOUR spirit shine!

Your Planning Team:
Lisa Klima & Tracy Moffatt, *Fall Gathering Co-chairs*
Jan Keller & Denise Coller, Nina Jageler & Rachel Ulrich

FALL GATHERING 2026 CONFERENCE ASSIGNMENTS

CONFERENCE	FALL GATHERING ASSIGNMENT	CONFERENCE LEADER	BOARD CONTACT PERSON
Broward-Bahamas & Miami-Dade/Monroe	Ushers	Lena Putzer	Marilyn Kreitzinger
Space Coast & Tradewinds	Saturday Devotions	Vacant	Irene Brissel
Flagler-Volusia	Communion	Raeann Purcell Michele Hilton	Lakesa Ferguson
First Coast	Hospitality	Peggy Ronnekamp	Stacia Carter
Heart of Florida & Lake	Elections	Leone Goding	Donna Person
Pinelands	Registration	Jan Keller	Michele Hilton
Caloosa & Panhandle	In-Kind Gifts	Julie Hunter Karen Painter	Wilma Shively
Mid-Gulf	Sunday Devotions	Gayle Backiel	Irene Brissel
Suncoast/Tampa	Credentials	Sharon Koelsch	Donna Person
Gulf Coast	Prayer Lounge	Kathy Drach Ellen Lapinski	Wilma Shively
Youth	Rachel Ulrich		Nina Jageler
Audio Visual	Karen Weinrich		
Scholarships			Donna Person

**Items in blue are updates from the August board meeting*

Beyond the Myths of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Few topics generate as much debate as Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). Depending on who is speaking, DEI is described as a necessary effort to expand opportunities or as an unfair system meant to give special advantages to certain groups. The current political narrative is people of color are the primary beneficiaries of Affirmative Action and DEI policies.



This narrative continues to perpetuate fear in many that DEI is some type of handout unfairly given to people of color and that DEI excludes White people from the same opportunities. Before asking who has benefited the most from DEI, it is important to understand what these three words actually mean.

Diversity is making sure there are varied voices, opinions and experiences considered when decisions are made. This is Diversity. Equity is making sure things are fair and or impartial. Think of it this way. You are in a bookstore and many of the books are on high shelves but there is no one to assist reaching those books. A taller person can easily reach the higher shelves without assistance. A shorter person needs something to make those shelves accessible, so a step stool is often provided. This is Equity. Inclusion means making sure everyone is included.

That's why public buildings have wheelchair ramps, to give access to everyone. This is also why televisions offer closed captioning. So that the hearing impaired can be INCLUDED when watching television. This is INCLUSION.

DEI is often portrayed as a hiring preference rather than an effort to expand opportunity. The targeted audience still needs to be qualified to get past the screening process. What DEI does is get your resume looked at so that you can get an interview. It gets your test scores reviewed so that a college or university will consider your application. DEI policies no longer allow applications by women or minorities to be discarded into a pile to be ignored. ALL qualified applicants must be considered. This has led to women as well as people of color making significant strides in attaining leadership roles. However, research from the Bureau of Economic Research indicate White women have statistically been the primary beneficiaries of Affirmative Action/DEI programs. Not people of color. Yes, White women. Learning this, I am going to primarily focus on the gains of women for the rest of this article.

As I was proofreading this for submission, a tribute to Mary Wallace Funk came on Good Morning America. This was a name I was unfamiliar with. Turns out "Wally" as she preferred to be called, was a trailblazer in aviation. Wally received her pilot's license at age 17. In 1961 Wally became a member of the Mercury 13 team when she was selected as a participant in the "women in space" program by NASA to train future astronauts. Wally and her female classmates successfully completed their training even though none in her group would ever fly a NASA mission. This group

did not include any women of color as women of color were not invited to apply. It was 16 years later, in 1976 when women of color were finally allowed to apply for the NASA Astronaut Corps. This triggered my memory of watching the movie *Hidden Figures*. A historical movie about black female mathematicians or “human computers” as they were called while working at NASA in the mid-1900s. Again, when this program of hiring women was started, it was open to white women, only. In 1943 NASA started hiring Black “human computers” out of necessity due to labor shortages caused by WWII. I am not writing this to accuse white women or anyone else. I am just pointing out how false information has perpetuated inaccurate perceptions that affirmative action or diversity programs have only advanced people of color. By my examples cited, you can see this is not true.

White women currently hold nearly 19% of all C-Suite positions while women of color hold just 4% despite having the same education and qualifications. Many people also believe Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Managers are mostly people of color. Again, NOT TRUE. According to a Medium.com report, 76.1% of all Chief Diversity officers are White. Philadelphia Women’s Network Connection has published data showing that businesses owned by White women, have greater access to capital, business loans and government contracts through programs not offered to others. And Corporate organizations? They have also benefited heavily because companies with diverse hiring practices have been proven to do well financially.

What does this mean to the audience reading this? I’m writing this article for the *Tapestry* whose readers are primarily female, Lutheran, and white. So, let’s discuss this in real terms. When you (white, female, Lutheran) vote against policies supporting DEI, vote against policies against making sure everyone is invited to the table, you are voting against yourself. Even if you are no longer in the workforce, you still have daughters, granddaughters, nieces, cousins, or other loved ones in the workforce. You are supporting policies that hurt your loved ones. When you say you don’t want diversity in the workplace are you saying you want to go back to a male dominated voice? Do you want men to make the decisions without consulting capable, educated, intelligent women? When you vote against providing equity for women, are you saying you don’t believe a simple solution such as a step ladder should be available, or desk chairs should be adjustable to each person’s height? When you vote against inclusion, do you really want your friend, your granddaughter, or even yourself to not have access to a wheelchair ramp in their workplace? NO, none of these scenarios affects a woman’s or a person of color’s abilities.



Please, let’s stop making DEI the bogeyman. Let’s stop listening to others pander to racist fears. Let’s step through the doors so they are open to all women. Let’s reach a hand to the woman behind you and tell her to stand beside you in this race called life. Please remember this as you consider policies that may affect your loved ones or the woman sitting in the pew across from you, no matter her ethnicity.

—Stacia Carter, *Justice, Advocacy, and Reconciliation Board Representative*

From the Editor

**“Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?”**

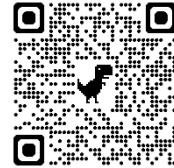
—end of “The Summer Day” by Mary Oliver

August always makes me think of going back to school. A time of expectation. What will that class be like? Who will I sit with at lunch? What new things are ahead?

I want to approach this August and the fall with that same curiosity. Instead of an academic calendar, I’m shaping my own schedule and looking at my own progress. Sewing a new pair of pointe shoes after a year of pointe work as an adult, and writing down things I want to work on this year. Approaching my typewriter and freewriting without interruptions from autocorrect. Brainstorming things to add to the fall months of my calendar.

What are your plans for the fall (other than attending Fall Gathering, obviously 😊)? What things are you starting or returning to? When are you taking moments to rest?

**I attended an arts high school and majored in Creative Writing, and I was given a paperweight with this quote on it when I graduated. It remains one of my favorite Mary Oliver poems. Scan the QR code or visit <https://poets.org/poem/summer-day> to read the full poem.*



Thank you for reading! Remember to email your articles and photos to me at fltapestry@gmail.com. Your stories and photos are always welcome!

Upcoming issues:

October 2026 Issue (send articles by September 15)

December 2026 Issue (send articles by November 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

Marilyn Kreitzinger

manyjoys2u@gmail.com

Irene Brissell

ibrissell@gmail.com

Lakesa Ferguson

lakesa36@gmail.com

Social Justice, Advocacy, and
Reconciliation

Lutheran World Relief

Global Missions

Love Offering

Advisory Members

Diane Cummings

sworegistrar1@gmail.com

Nina Jageler

njageler@gmail.com

Registrar

Fall Gathering

Workshop Coordinator



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

October 2026 Issue

(send articles by September 15)

December 2026 Issue

(send articles by November 15)

Email Gina Olson at fltapestry@gmail.com