

interchange

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Building the church: One authentic relationship at a time

by Elizabeth McBride

LAST YEAR, I ATTENDED A CONVENTION with the Women of the ELCA in the Southwestern Texas Synod. When I walked into the building, no one asked, “Are you new?” or did anything that made me feel like an outsider. I simply showed up, and my participation was valued.

Many congregations and women’s groups are inclusive, spanning a few generations. Yet sometimes when I hear people say, “We need/want younger women in our church/women’s group,” it seems to come from a place of fear, rather than a place of mutual relationship building. Sometimes there is a belief that individuals born in the ’70s and ’80s are going to somehow save the budget, help meet membership goals and ensure that the church or women’s group is more relevant.

When we focus on how someone looks—young or old—we miss out on building authentic relationships. When we spend too much time trying to “invite them” into our group, we’ve already positioned ourselves as the insiders and them as the “other.”

On the other hand, when we focus on meeting women of any age where they are—where their unique gifts can be added to the collective—we evolve as a faith community based on mutual belief and respect.

All we need to be relevant for younger generations is to be in authentic relationship with each other.

Rather than focusing on filling pews with a particular type of face, let’s live out our call by seeking places to put our faith in action. Let’s leave our comfort zones—going out to meet others where they are—and together build the church. Let’s learn what Jesus’ ministry taught us: that the church is built on relationships.

Jesus is calling us out of our narrow human perceptions and our desire to categorize people as insiders and outsiders. Jesus is challenging us to get the real work done.

See five ways to build relationships on page 7.

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Women of the ELCA Interchange is a publication of the women's organization of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The purpose of *Interchange* is to equip and empower Women of the ELCA participants with the information and resources necessary to carry out the organization's mission. *Interchange* is distributed free of charge to the congregational, synodical and churchwide leadership of Women of the ELCA, and to Women of the ELCA cluster and conference coordinators and newsletter editors.

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womenoftheelca.org.

News Briefs

Turn in memorials by November 30

What's the difference between a resolution and a memorial? We use the term *resolution* when individuals are bringing a piece of business to the floor of a synodical or triennial convention. We use the term *memorial* when one expression is raising an issue (or "talking") to another expression, as when a synodical convention wishes to bring a matter to the triennial convention. A resolution brought to a synodical convention could turn into a memorial



from the synodical convention to the triennial convention if it asks the churchwide organization to do something. (See the spring issue of *Interchange* for a longer explanation.)

Since 48 synodical organizations are holding conventions in 2016, now is the time to consider any matters that should come before the Tenth Triennial Convention (2017). The deadline to submit memorials is November 30, 2016.

Working toward "Faith, Sexism, Justice"

The ELCA is in the process of developing a social statement on women and justice, as called for by the Churchwide Assembly in 2009. For the next year, until August 31, 2017, everyone in the church has an opportunity to participate in the process by engaging in a study called *Faith, Sexism, Justice: Conversations toward a Social Statement*. The study works well in an adult forum or in a monthly circle setting. Complete one or all of the individual sessions on topics such as addressing violence against women and girls and sexism and gender discrimination in the workplace. For more information, go to elca.org/womenandjustice. The study is available as a free downloadable PDF and print copies can be obtained through the ELCA e-store here: <http://resources.elca.org>.

Find us at the Grace Gathering in August

Will you be at the Grace Gathering this August in New Orleans? Or are you a voting member to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly? Women of the ELCA will be there! The Grace Gathering, happening at the same time as the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, will help Lutherans prepare to observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017. Visit the Women of the ELCA booth and look for further gatherings sponsored by Women of the ELCA. Both our executive director, Linda Post Bushkofsky, and the president for the 2014-2017 triennium, Patti Austin, will be present. For more information about the Grace Gathering, go to elca.org/gracegathering.

‘Great Teacher’ leaves Women of the ELCA \$50,000

by Audrey Riley

“**THERE IS ONE GREAT TEACHER**, but Theda comes in second!”

The women of St. James Lutheran Church in Fayetteville, N.C., said this about Theda Johnson Suggs, a longtime leader of Women of the ELCA in the congregation and in the North Carolina Synodical Women’s Organization.

When Theda passed away in March 2015 at the age of 100, her dedication to Women of the ELCA was evident in her will: She left \$50,000 to the community of women she loved and served so devotedly.

Former churchwide president Beth Wrenn of Kill Devil Hills, N.C., remembers that Theda led leadership training workshops for newly elected presidents of congregational units as well as for members of synodical committees and boards. “I can say with confidence that she was one of the most influential women who offered me and many others a solid foundation in leadership skills.”

Theda, who was widowed in 1961 and leaves behind no family, served her congregation as devotedly. She took part in services and Sunday school every week as late as her 97th year. She worshipped faithfully and served faithfully:



Theda Suggs

St. James’ records name Theda Suggs as chair of the altar guild, chair of Christian education, superintendent of the Sunday school, chair of the worship and music ministry and much more. She once said with a smile, “On occasion, I butt in on things to see that they’re done according to me, I guess.”

Theda’s forethought and generosity will make a big difference for Women of the ELCA now and into the future. Theda Johnson Suggs did things “according to her” – and we are all grateful.



Audrey Riley (Audrey.riley@elca.org) is director for stewardship for Women of the ELCA.

You too can support Women of the ELCA in your estate plan, as Theda Suggs did. Your financial advisor can help you structure your estate plan in the way that works best for you and your family’s needs.

New racial justice advocacy resources available

AT A TIME when ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton is asking congregations to have conversations about race, Women of the ELCA has released three resources that can help.

The resources include “How to have helpful conversations about race in the church”; a Bible study, “Listening to the third slave”; and a historical timeline.

Written by Inez Torres Davis, director for justice for Women of the ELCA, the resources are available for free download from womenoftheelca.org/racialjustice or under the “Resources/Alphabetical” link.

“How to have a helpful conversation about race in the church” offers an entryway for congregations to get started on talking about race. “Listening to the third slave” takes a fresh look at the parable of the talents/10 pounds

in Matthew and Luke. The historical timeline details racism beginning in 1452, with the [Doctrine of Discovery](#) that unleashed a European conquest on indigenous peoples.

An anti-racism Bible study written by Torres Davis in 2002, “[The Story of Peter & Cornelius](#)” has been updated. Women of the ELCA held its first anti-racism training retreat in April 1997. After almost 20 years of learning and sharing ways of addressing racism and White privilege, Davis is set to release a new version of “Today’s Dream: Tomorrow Reality” (TDTR), a three-part anti-racism curriculum. The curriculum is being field tested in preparation for a release at a Kansas City Women of the ELCA retreat.

Much of the content on Women of the ELCA’s new racial justice advocacy web page is from the TDTR curriculum.

Call for nominations: July 30–November 30

Voting members to Tenth Triennial Convention to elect officers, board for 2017-2020 triennium

THE TENTH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION of Women of the ELCA is July 11–13, 2017, in Minneapolis, Minn. The voting members of the convention, the highest legislative body of Women of the ELCA, will elect four officers and 17 women to serve on the churchwide executive board as part of the business they will conduct.

The president and vice president are elected at the convention by nominating ballot; thus no advance nominations are needed for these two positions (see the churchwide women's organization constitution, Article XIV, Section 5, items 1–2).

Nominations will be received by the nominating committee for secretary, treasurer and board members. You should obtain the consent of the person being nominated before submitting her name for consideration.

The information on these pages, plus an online nomination form, can also be found on the Women of the ELCA website (womenoftheelca.org) under the tab News and Events/Tenth Triennial Convention. Nominations will be accepted between July 30 and November 30, 2016. Nominations must be made online. Only nomination forms submitted online will be accepted.

Questions & Answers

Q: Who may submit a name for consideration?

A: Under the terms of the churchwide constitution, two categories of women may submit a name for consideration: voting members-elect (i.e., voting members to the 2017 triennial convention) and units (Article XIV, Section 4, Item 4).

Q: Who is qualified to be a nominee?

A: Each nominee shall be a participant in a unit and a member of the ELCA (Article XIV, Section 3, Item 2). Each nominee also should have the requisite skills for the particular position for which she is nominated.

Q: Who is best suited to be nominated?

A: Each nominee must understand that the work of the churchwide board is around visioning and setting policies, around steering the organization in the right direction to meet its mission while providing oversight and ensuring resources to fulfill that mission.

Each nominee should be able and willing to share her own gifts with Women of the ELCA. She must be available for at least two three-day meetings per year, generally in Chicago, and willing to serve on a board committee (with meetings in person at the board meeting and often by telephone between meetings). She must be available to represent the churchwide organization at synodical conventions, comfortable with public speaking and willing to offer workshops. She must be comfortable in traveling across the country. She must have regular access to the Internet, using e-mail and other forms of online communication. She must be willing to engage in the goals of the stewardship development policy of the churchwide executive board (a copy is available at womenoftheelca.org).

She must realize that, if elected, she must resign immediately from any positions held within a synodical women's organization (SWO) or networks of the organization. She must also realize that board meetings, committee work and SWO conventions demand considerable energy and time commitment, and she must therefore trust in God that her time will be stretched and her energy will be replenished.

Q: Who serves on the nominating committee?

A: The committee consists of nine women nominated from the roll of the triennial convention voting members-elect and then elected by the churchwide executive board. The board will take this vote at its October 2016 executive board meeting.

Q: If a name is submitted, will that person automatically become a nominee?

A: No. The nominating committee must submit a slate of candidates that contains two nominations per position. That's a total of 38 names. Many more than 38 names will likely be submitted to the committee.

Q: How does the nominating committee select nominees?

A: The committee considers the biographical information on each submission as well as geographical diversity, variety of ages and diversity of experience (Article XIV, Section 2, Item 2). At least 10 percent of the members of the

Call for nominations

continued

executive board shall be persons of color and/or persons whose primary language is other than English (Article XIV, Section 3, item 1).

The committee may nominate no more than one person from a synodical women's organization (Article XIV, Section 4, Item 5).

Q: Are nominations from the floor permitted?

A: Yes, for those positions for which nominations have been made by the committee (Article XIV, Section 4, Item 7).

Q: Can members of the nominating committee be nominated?

A: The answer is a qualified "yes." Members of the nominating committee cannot be nominated by the committee; they may, however, be nominated from the floor (Article XIV, Section 4, Item 6).

Q: What is the term of service?

A: The secretary and treasurer are each elected to one three-year term, with no reelection to that particular office. An officer may be eligible for election to another office or to a term as an executive board member, serving a total of two consecutive terms but no more than seven consecutive years (Article XII, Section 5, Item 1). Terms begin at the close of the triennial convention (Article XII, Sections 3–5). Board members are elected to a three-year term; they may be reelected to the board or to an office, serving a total of two consecutive terms but no more than seven years consecutively.

The terms begin at the close of the triennial convention (Article XIII, Sections 1–3).

Excitement builds as registration opens Sept. 6

TRIENNIAL GATHERINGS bring Lutheran women together from across the church with life-changing workshops, worship, Bible study and more.

The Tenth Triennial Gathering, July 13–16, 2017, will be no exception. Women will gather in Minneapolis, Minn., under the theme "All Anew."

Registration opens on September 6. Early-bird registration, through January 6, 2017, is \$310; after that registration is \$350. Day registrations are \$175. Register at welcatg.org or email women women.elca@elca.org for a registration packet.

Featured speakers, preachers and workshop leaders will bring the gathering themes to life. Devotions exploring the themes will be posted on the website in mid summer.



Because the Tenth Triennial Gathering falls during the observance of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation in 2017, the theme resonates with reformation and transformation images. At the gathering, participants will explore ways in which the Holy Spirit changes us, acknowledging that reformation and transformation have happened and continue to happen within the community of women known as Women of the ELCA.

Information about triennial gatherings can be found at welcatg.org. Speakers and workshops will be

added as they are confirmed.

Check out *Gather's* upcoming Bible studies

ARE YOU ENJOYING *Gather* magazine's new format of shorter Bible studies? Have you appreciated having the leader guides printed in the magazine, rather than having to order them separately? Have you noticed the larger, more diverse group of writers? We hope these changes can help you to encourage more women to join study groups.

Here are *Gather's* upcoming Bible studies:

SEPTEMBER THROUGH NOVEMBER 2016



Meghan Johnston Aelabouni, a pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Fort Collins, Colo., shares a three-session study on "When God's not fair: coming to terms with a merciful God." The texts explore the stories of Jonah, the Prodigal Son and the

conversion of Paul. Meghan, and her spouse, Gabi, who is also an ELCA pastor, have three young children.

When God's not fair—coming to terms with a merciful God

SESSION 1: Jonah and the terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day: When God forgives the guilty

SESSION 2: Jesus and the evil eye: When God blesses the undeserving

SESSION 3: Paul and the power of failure: when God chooses the unlikely

DECEMBER 2016



Sonia C. Solomonson, an award-winning writer, freelance editor and certified life coach, shares a devotional around the theme of Advent waiting: what wants to be born in you?

Each December, *Gather* plans to feature a devotional that centers on some aspect of Advent or Christmas. (This could become a reader favorite. We received many positive comments from readers who enjoyed last year's devotional, written by Valora K Starr, Women of the ELCA's director for discipleship.)

JANUARY THROUGH APRIL 2017



Kathryn Kleinhans is writing a Reformation Bible study called: "Galatians: Christian faith and Christian freedom." Kleinhans is the McCoy Family Distinguished Chair in Lutheran Heritage and Mission, Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa.

Galatians: Christian faith and Christian freedom

SESSION 1: No other gospel (Galatians 1:1—2:21)

SESSION 2: Children of God through faith (Galatians 2:19—3:29)

SESSION 3: Heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:24—4:31)

SESSION 4: For freedom Christ has set us free (Galatians 5:1—6:18)

She writes: "Biblical scholars describe Paul's letter to the Galatians as the Magna Carta of Christian freedom. Martin Luther called it 'my Katie von Bora.'

"Like his marriage to Katie, Luther's relationship with Galatians was a rich and lasting one: over a period of 20 years, he published six commentaries on the epistle. Luther's reformation was centered in the doctrine of justification by grace through faith for Christ's sake, which he saw as the heart of Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia. It is also the heart of Paul's—and Luther's—message for us today."

SUMMER 2017



Kelly Fryer will explore "All anew," a three-session Bible study that shares the theme of the Tenth Triennial Gathering in Minneapolis. Kelly has more than 20 years of experience in turning around ministries and organizations and has written faith-related books. She wrote *Gather's* summer 2007 study: "Act Boldly for Mission."

**Subscribe now at gathermagazine.org.
Don't miss these new Bible studies.**

Building the church

continued from page 1

Build new multigenerational relationships

Here are some ideas to celebrate the multigenerational relationships we already have and build new ones as we do Christ's work together.

1. **Identify entry points.** All events are opportunities for participation. Think about the advocacy projects that your group is already doing. For example, do you have a quilting group that sends quilts to Lutheran World Relief? If your quilting group meets at times that conflict with women's schedules, work hours, nap times for small children, etc., why not reschedule to get the most participation?
2. **Increase your visibility.** Have you thought about taking your meetings out of the church building? For example, what if you held your Bible study circle at a local café?
3. **Accessibility is inclusion.** Is the location of your event easy to get to—even if people do not own a car? Are there events that could take place in a retirement home or in other locations? Many church buildings do not offer entrances for individuals with mobility issues, so

consider this when planning an accessible location.

4. **Look for partnerships.** Are there other ministry partners in your community and synod you could connect with? For example, is there a local campus ministry group that addresses bullying or human trafficking? When coordinating with other groups, find a time when you could have the highest participation. Ask different generations what times would best for them.
5. **Be realistic about the level of participation.** Don't expect newcomers to participate immediately at the same level you do. We cannot know the demands on another's time. The object of intergenerational events is to build relationships.



Elizabeth McBride (elizabeth.mcbride@elca.org) is the director for intergenerational programs and editor of *Café*. A longer version of this article was published in the May issue of *Gather*.

Calendar

For information on any of these events, contact Women of the ELCA at 800-638-3522, ext. 2730, or email Women.ELCA@elca.org.

JULY 2016

- 23 **Upper Susquehanna SWO convention**, Camp Mount Luther, Mifflinburg, Pa.
- 28–31 **Central States SWO convention**, Ramada Inn, Springfield, Mo.

AUGUST 2016

- 4–5 **West Virginia-Western Maryland SWO convention**, St. John XXIII Pastoral Center, Charleston, W.Va.
- 5–6 **Virginia SWO convention**, Epiphany Lutheran Church, Richmond, Va.
- 20 **Lower Susquehanna SWO convention**, St. Mathew Lutheran Church, Hanover, Pa.

SEPTEMBER 2016

- 16–18 **Northern Great Lakes SWO convention**, Fortune Lake Lutheran Camp, Crystal Falls, Mich.
- 16–18 **Rocky Mountain SWO convention**, St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Cheyenne, Wyo.
- 16–18 **Southeastern SWO convention**, Hilton Atlanta NE, Peach Tree Corners, Ga.
- 16–18 **Texas-Louisiana-Gulf Coast SWO convention**, Memorial Lutheran Church, Texas City, Texas
- 16–17 **North Dakota SWO convention**, United Lutheran Church, Cavalier, N.D.

- 16–17 **Metro New York SWO convention**, Wartburg, Mt. Vernon, N.Y.
- 16–17 **Northwestern Minnesota SWO convention**, Calvary Lutheran Church, Perham, Minn.
- 16–17 **Northern Illinois SWO convention**, Immanuel Lutheran Church, Yorkville, Ill.
- 23–25 **Arkansas-Oklahoma SWO convention**, Joy Lutheran Church, Tulsa, Okla.
- 23–24 **New Jersey SWO convention**, Zion Lutheran Church, Oldwick, N.J.

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Dated material for immediate delivery

Summer 2016

Please route to:

- Women of the ELCA leaders**
- pastor(s)**
- other church leaders**

Please copy and share with the women in your congregation!



all anew

WOMEN OF THE ELCA

TENTH TRIENNIAL GATHERING

Minneapolis, Minnesota

July 13–16, 2017

REGISTER BEGINNING SEPTEMBER 6

Kelly Fryer, pastor, teacher, entrepreneur and communicator, will explore the triennial theme, "All anew," in a three-session Bible study in the 2017 summer issues of *Gather* magazine. She will lead the study in Minneapolis at the Tenth Triennial Gathering in 2017.

For more information, visit welcatg.org or call 1-800-638-3522 ext. 2730.