



LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY DEBUTS 1988



20TH ANNIVERSARY OF WOMEN'S ORDINATION 1990

WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN POVERTY EMPHASIS BEGUN 1993

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMMING DEVELOPED 1994



ANTI-RACISM STAFF HIRED; ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION TRAINING LAUNCHES 1997

FOUNDED 1987



1ST TRIENNIAL CONVENTION 1990

2ND TRIENNIAL CONVENTION 1993

3RD TRIENNIAL CONVENTION 1996

4TH TRIENNIAL CONVENTION 1999

WOMEN OF THE ELCA

# 25 YEARS

WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by Kathy Magnus



WOMEN OF THE ELCA WEB SITE INAUGURATED 1995



KATHERINE VON BORA LUTHER ENDOWMENT FOUNDED 1998

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.

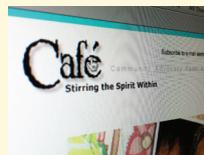
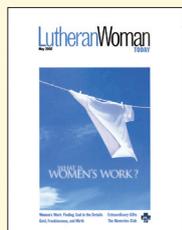
—Purpose Statement of the Women of the ELCA

I found it while cleaning out my desk. It had been forgotten in the far back corner of the middle drawer, along with dog-eared photos, a 1997 handwritten note from my dad, an old tube of lipstick, a 3-cent postage stamp, and a variety of non-working ballpoint pens. It was a small worn beige business-sized card that read:

The 1980 Lutheran Church Women (Lutheran Church in America) Triennial Convention VOTED: "That the members of LCW refrain from purchasing the products of the Nestle Company and any of its subsidiary organizations until such time as the international Code of Conduct for the marketing and promotion of infant formula is developed and there is documented proof that Nestle has complied with that code." On the back, are listed 41 Nestle-owned corporations and products.

In some very real ways that small card changed my

LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY  
REDESIGNED 2001



WWW.BOLDCAFE.ORG  
DEBUTS 2006



LUTHERAN WOMAN TODAY  
BECOMES GATHER 2011

4TH TRIENNIAL  
CONVENTION 1999

5TH TRIENNIAL  
CONVENTION 2002

6TH TRIENNIAL  
CONVENTION 2005

7TH TRIENNIAL  
CONVENTION 2008

8TH TRIENNIAL  
CONVENTION 2011



**Pour Justice to the Brim**

90 TON CHALLENGE  
LAUNCHED 2003



BOLD WOMEN'S DAY 2007



MALARIA CAMPAIGN  
2012

life. I realized that I had the power to act for change. I was appalled to learn that infant formula marketed by Nestle led to infant deaths in developing countries. Big, beautiful billboards in these countries showed laughing, healthy babies drinking the formula. Women sales staff dressed in “nurse whites” sold the coveted formula. In reality, the expensive formula was often mixed with unclean water, and once mixed there was no way to refrigerate it. This frequently resulted in severe diarrhea in infants and thousands of senseless infant deaths. Breast milk was far safer for babies and we needed to take action to save lives.

In 1980, I added my voice and actions to thousands of Lutheran women in the United States and around the world to demand change. We stopped buying Nestle chocolate, and oh how I loved Nestle Crunch bars! We stopped buying Nestle cheese. We understood ourselves to be in solidarity with, and in advocacy for, our global sisters. We explained to our children, our

spouses and our friends why we were making these choices. We *believed* we could make a difference. In 1984 the boycott ended when Nestle agreed to implement the World Health Organization’s International Code of Marketing Breast-milk Substitutes. We *did* make a difference.

#### OUR HISTORY

Twenty-five years ago, Women of the ELCA was born. The organization was created from the rich fabric of its predecessors. Our vitality today is in large part due to the faithful women with vision who came before us. Our history overflows with commitments that give life to our Purpose Statement.

Bible study was foundational for our predecessors and remains so for us today. We are women of faith who are empowered by Scripture. Thousands of Lutheran women continue to gather each month in small groups to read God’s word, to discuss what that

word means for us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As women called into action for others by our faith, we have continuously broadened our world view, worked within systems to create change, and educated ourselves and others on countless issues. We have made a difference.

#### **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

For decades our gifts for leadership were called forth and practiced within the women's organizations. We developed confidence to speak out publicly in meetings and developed skills to organize and lead programs long before the church welcomed our leadership.

#### **WOMEN'S ORDINATION**

In the 1960s we joined forces with other advocates for the ordination of women. We attended meetings, served on committees and spoke out for women's full participation in the leadership of the church. We celebrated when our church bodies overcame centuries of tradition and approved women's ordination in 1970. We elected women to church councils and invited women seminarians and pastors to speak and preach at our conventions. We created a wave of change.

#### **QUILTS**

Generations of Lutheran women stitched their way into mission in thousands of congregations every month. Our quilts provide comfort in refugee camps. They are roofs of temporary homes in a desert and they wrap themselves around newborn babies in the far corners of our world. Our quilts provide shelter from the cold for homeless youth in our own country.

#### **ANTI-RACISM**

During the 1960s we began educating ourselves on racism. Actions and strategies for change were proposed, and the long education process began to change our understanding, our attitudes, and our actions one-by-one. We read, we researched, and we talked

with one another and community leaders. We prayed for change. Some risked taking action and marched and sang in protest. In the late '60s we challenged the church to invest some of its funds in the newly emerging banks run by African Americans. This was a visible, corporate action that spoke to our commitments.

In recent years, we have organized anti-racism training through the Today's Dream Tomorrow's Reality (TDTR) network. We have come a long way and yet there is much more to be done. We remain committed to teaching anti-racism within our homes, our churches, schools and communities.

#### **LITERACY**

We became change agents through literacy training in the 70s. Hundreds of women across the church were equipped to teach English as a Second Language (ESL), and changed thousands of lives forever.

#### **RELATIONSHIPS**

Strong, creative programs around the globe created relationships between North American women and women from Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and Europe. Our lives were forever changed by study trips and exchange programs where we lived and learned together. Our houses and churches may have looked different from one another, but our conversations were the same; women talking together about our hopes for our children, education, and faith.

#### **CROSS CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS AT HOME**

In the '70s and '80s there were opportunities to venture beyond the comfort zone of our own neighborhoods to visit women in very different North American settings. City women visited women in the farmland, Appalachian women visited suburban women. The visits were reciprocal and our education and awareness of issues grew with each new relationship. We came together easily—our faith bound us together and allowed for

deep conversation about the environment, quality of education for our children, access to health care and our hopes for the future.

#### **APARTHEID**

Our world view was stretched in the 1980s as we learned about anti-apartheid efforts in Namibia. Apartheid was the rigid policy of enforced segregation in South Africa. The Rev. Abisai Shejvali and his wife, Selma Shejvali, from Namibia were international scholarship students at Wartburg Seminary. They shared the difficult reality of apartheid in their homeland. The seminary hosted an advocacy event and included women leaders. These leaders then shared information with women in congregations, and advocacy actions began to grow.

Women in the Southern Wisconsin District American Lutheran Church participated in a Woman to Woman program with women in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. Relationships were building. As we learned the evil realities of apartheid, we wrote letters and urged the divestment of church funds invested in South Africa. We added our voices to tens of thousands of voices worldwide. A sign of our effectiveness became very public when a South African newspaper published a list that included Lutheran Women of Wisconsin as a subversive organization opposing apartheid!

#### **LANDMINES**

In 1996 we learned about landmines at a Women of the ELCA convention when we heard then Lutheran World Relief president Kathryn Wolford deliver a powerful keynote. Landmines lie dormant for years until a person or animal triggers their detonating mechanism. Mines cannot be aimed; they indiscriminately kill or injure women, children, farmers, and aid workers alike. Over 100 million landmines are scattered across 70 countries. Some 45,000 of us signed petitions as we joined an international effort to ban them.

#### **FAIR TRADE COFFEE**

We love our coffee. We learned specifics about the big business of growing and selling coffee; how it is produced, how small coffee growers in rural areas of poor countries barely make a living growing it and how child labor is a common practice. In 2003, we accepted a challenge from Lutheran World Relief to buy 90 tons of fairly traded coffee for our homes and churches. This coffee was produced in ways that benefited small farmers and communities. We not only did it, we surpassed the goal by several tons!

These are just a few of the issues that the women's

### **CONVENTIONS AND GATHERINGS**

Women have come together every three years to do the legislative business of the organization. We have come together in gatherings where we heard from inspiring and challenging speakers such as Sister Joan Chittister and Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee. Through workshops, servant opportunities, worship and fellowship, we have learned and grown and been uplifted as a community of women.

Have you attended any of these events? What are your favorite memories of these gatherings?

"Embrace God's World," Constituting Convention  
Milwaukee, Wis., 1987

"Celebrate God's Creation," Anaheim, Calif., 1990

"God's Gift of Hope," Washington, D.C., 1993

"Proclaim God's Peace," Minneapolis, Minn., 1996

"Live God's Justice," St. Louis, Mo., 1999

"Listen: God is Calling," Philadelphia, Pa., 2002

"Act Boldly," San Antonio, Texas, 2005

"Come to the Waters," Salt Lake City, Utah, 2008

"Renew, Respond, Rejoice," Spokane, Wash., 2011

organization has addressed in its long history. There was global education, We have believed that we could make a difference. We did make a difference.

### **CALLED INTO THE FUTURE**

This article is a taste of the impact we have made on so many lives, in so many ways, over so many years. As we celebrate this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we celebrate our historic role as change makers. We know we are being called into future discernment on issues of justice that promote healing and wholeness in the world.

### **2012 MALARIA CAMPAIGN**

Malaria is a mosquito-borne infectious disease found in tropical regions of the world. It affects nearly 300 million people annually. *One million* people die from malaria each year. Ninety percent of the deaths occur in sub-Saharan Africa and the majority of deaths are children.

We now have the privilege to act boldly and join the global effort to prevent, treat and contain malaria by 2015. Our efforts will support the ELCA Malaria

Campaign. We can do it! We can once again add our passion, our voices, our resources and prayers to the thousands of others who believe we can contain malaria.

This effort is deeply personal for me. My beautiful, four-year old granddaughter Meron was adopted from Ethiopia. Our family has been directly affected by the devastation of malaria in her village. I know I must step up and make a difference. Will you join me as together we once again are change makers? Your action, added to my action, added to thousands of others around the globe, have the ability to halt this insidious disease.

When the 50th anniversary of Women of the ELCA is celebrated, I pray there will be a story written about how Lutheran women of faith stepped up to the challenge in 2012 and helped eradicate malaria. Making a difference, one by one by one by one. Just like we've always done. I believe we can! 🌿

**Kathy J. Magnus** served as the vice president of the ELCA 1990-1997 and for several years as staff of the Lutheran World Federation. She and her husband, Richard, live in the Twin Cities and are members of Edina Lutheran Community Church.

## **PUBLICATIONS, RESOURCES, AND PROGRAMS**

Over the years, Women of the ELCA has produced a multitude of programs, resources, and publications.

The women of the church have had a long commitment to Bible study that has continued intentionally throughout all the years of Women of the ELCA. A Bible study session, part of a larger Bible topic, appeared in every issue of what was then called *Lutheran Woman Today* (now *Gather*). But regardless of the magazine name, no issue leaves the press without a Bible study in its pages.

Along with the print magazine, Women of the ELCA publishes an award-winning online e-zine called *Cafe*, which is focused on young adult women, and a newsletter, *Interchange*, that is sent to congregational units and synodical leaders.

The organization's latest resources are offered on the website. Resource topics are wide-ranging—everything from dealing with grief to knitting and spirituality to how to lead a Bible study to water stewardship to the church seasons. They are all free and are easily adaptable for individual or group use, or for retreats.

We encourage you to follow Women of the ELCA on Twitter and Facebook. On Facebook you can join more than 6,000 fans of Women of the ELCA and check in for lively conversation. And last year, the women's organization produced the ELCA's first iPhone app, "Daily Grace."

You can find out more about Women of the ELCA publications, resources, blog, social media, iPhone app, and programs at [www.womenoftheelca.org](http://www.womenoftheelca.org).