

LEADERSHIP NEWS FROM Women of the ELCA 

interchange

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Will you be our Faithful Friend?

by Audrey Novak Riley

*Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter;
whoever finds one has found a treasure.
Faithful friends are beyond price;
no amount can balance their worth.
Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;
and those who fear the Lord will find them.
Sirach (Ecclesiasticus) 6:14–16*

AS THE SCRIPTURE ABOVE SAYS, faithful friends are a treasure, and I thank God for them every day.

Women of the ELCA as an organization has faithful friends, too, and these Faithful Friends are more precious than ever. Because so many of us are not gathering in our circles and at our events these days, the offerings we would have made just aren't happening. But WELCA's Faithful Friends, just like our own in-person faithful friends, really are life-savers, just as the Scripture says.

Right now, about 150 Faithful Friends are faithfully supporting Women of the ELCA through our automatic giving program. **And we have a goal to increase that number to 1,000 by our Gathering 2021 next August.** Let's all talk with our circle of in-person faithful friends and ask them to join the giving program.

When you join Faithful Friends, you choose the amount you'd like to give every month, and that amount is automatically charged to your credit card or checking account. It's easy and safe for you, and incredibly powerful for the organization we all love.

The monthly offerings made through Faithful Friends support the ongoing ministries of the churchwide women's organization, just like any undesignated gift. These ongoing ministries include our racial justice and advocacy programs, our online and print communications channels, and so much more.

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“Financial support — with prayer — will help our organization continue to grow.”
—Lynette Todd, Baltimore, Maryland

welca.org/faithfulfriends



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Women of the ELCA 
interchange

Download *Interchange* with
clickable links by visiting
the "Publications" tab at
womenoftheelca.org.

Giving freely is the seventh mark of discipleship and a heart exercise

Editor's note: *Christian discipleship is a lifelong journey of living out and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ so that others may believe. This is the final installment of the seven marks of discipleship found in "Lessons for Today's Disciples" written by Valora K Starr. You can find this and other resources at welca.org/resources.*

GIVING IS A HEART EXERCISE and one of God's unexplainable mysteries. This lesson will reveal that when we decide to give, things happen.

Giving does not start with our pocketbooks. Rather, it begins with our hearts. We must know (not intellectually but in our hearts) that everything belongs to God. Giving is merely the mechanism for distributing the resources needed (time, gifts, dollars, actions) to care for God's creation. Giving is often confused with "giving up" or losing something or creating scarcity and deficiency. This mark

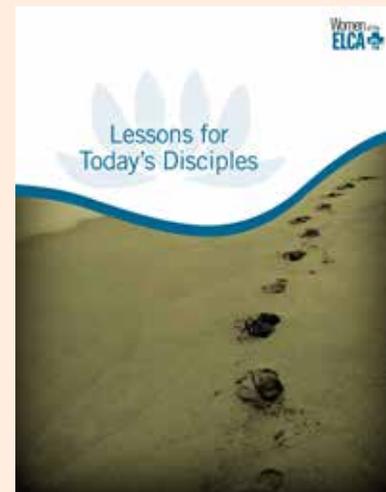
of discipleship is the toughest to grasp because of our culture's practices around giving and receiving and the power of resources. However, the mystery is that when we give generously and freely, we find that the more we give, the more there is to give. This practice is too complex for our heads, but not for our hearts. Our attitudes about giving and its importance to God's plan are more important than the amounts we give (Luke 21:1–2).

Read 2 Corinthians 9:1–15. Paul was on his third mission trip to raise money for the impoverished churches in Jerusalem. While in Macedonia, he witnessed an overwhelming act of sacrificial giving. The churches in Macedonia were poor themselves but collected an offering and presented it to Paul. They wanted to help. Their giving was genuine and from the heart. Paul had not been expecting it—he had made judgments about this "poor" church and their ability and desire to give. He soon learned an important lesson: We all have something to give.

Reflect on these familiar words: "Merciful Father, we offer with **joy** and **thanksgiving what you have first given us**—ourselves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord" (from the liturgy). Concentrate on the bolded words.

Do you generally think of what you might give as what God has first given you—yourself, your time, and your possessions? Look again at verses 6–15. What are the benefits of generously giving to God's work?

Read again 2 Corinthians 9:1–15: Remember that everything belongs to God. Giving helps us participate in God's mission as full partners making things happen!



How can you use Women of the ELCA blogs?

by Linda Post Bushkofsky

LET'S TALK about the Women of the ELCA blog (womenoftheelca.org/blog).

What's a blog? It's an online journal, a place for reflections. Some are written by just one person. Others, like the WELCA blog, includes many voices. Our blog is one of 600 million blogs.

Who writes all the blog posts? Staff, board members, some SWO leaders, and other women whose work we encounter.

What's the purpose of the blog? With our blog, we seek to regularly feed and nourish our community. The blog posts discuss current events, trends, and topics through the lens of our mission and purpose statements.

How often are blog posts published? We publish blog posts twice a week, every Monday and Thursday. Often on Thursday we participate in #ThrowbackThursday by publishing something we've published before, either on the blog or in one of our other publications.

How long has WELCA had a blog? The blog celebrated 10 years in August! That's a lot of blog posts! Few topics have gone uncommented on over those 10 years, as you can imagine. You can use the website's search feature to find blog posts on many topics.

How can you use the blog?

- Read it every Monday and Thursday, perhaps as part of your daily devotions.
- Let others know about it. We post about the blog on social media each Monday and Thursday, so you can share the social media posts.
- Adapt blog posts when you are asked to lead devotions.
- With proper attribution, you can use the content of a blog post in your newsletter or other print or online project. Simply indicate who wrote the piece and when/where it appeared, and you can use the content.
- Include a link to the blog on your SWO website.
- Use a blog post as a jumping-off point for discussing a topic.



Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.

Will you be our Faithful Friend?

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Our own in-person faithful friends refresh and renew our spirits. Women of the ELCA's Faithful Friends do the same for our organization. Please join Faithful Friends today and invite a friend to join along with you. It'll do your heart a world of good. *Thank you.*

Two ways to join:

Join online with a credit card. Go to www.welca.org/faithfulfriendsonline to get started right away. Choose the amount you'd like to give, fill in your information, and then click the CAPTCHA button to prove you're not a robot. And then (last step!) click the Donate Now button. It's incredibly easy and incredibly powerful. Thank you!

OR

Join by mail with a credit card or voided check. Go to www.welca.org/faithfulfriends to get started. Download the Faithful Friends form, print it out, enter your information, and mail it with a voided check to

Women of the ELCA Faithful Friends
Gift Processing Center
P.O. Box 1809
Merrifield VA 22116

Faithful Friends like you really are life-saving medicine, just as the Scripture says. *Thank you!*

Can the church be a place of hope for those with HIV/AIDS?

by Andrena Ingram

DECEMBER 1 IS WORLD AIDS DAY. Of the one million people in the U.S. diagnosed with HIV, nearly one in four are women. How is the church being called to serve women and girls—both those who are living with HIV/AIDS and those who desperately need the education to prevent this disease?

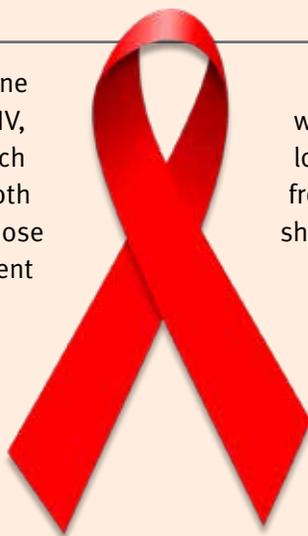
Considering my traumatic childhood, what can I, a grown woman living with HIV, tell my younger self? What can I tell women about being aware of who they are, about treasuring and respecting their bodies and teaching others to do the same?

More to the point, what can I, a religious woman living with HIV, do to help the faith community reach out and serve the women and girls living with this disease? What can I share with you about how to better help them avoid contracting this disease in the first place?

I believe this can be an opportunity to live into our Christian calling. The work of educating others about HIV/AIDS is something Christians are called to do. This is a humanitarian issue which needs the help and communication from all faith communities.

The work of educating others about HIV/AIDS is something Christians are called to do. This is a humanitarian issue which needs the help and communication from all faith communities.

The church is a place where we hear about God's grace in troubling times. Where some of us once went to church to hear sermons centered around the stories in the Bible, now we Zoom in and hear the stories of current events: a pandemic virus, mass shootings, kidnappings, the reasons for the creation of the Black Lives Matter movement, the murder of our LGBTQIA siblings in Christ, and more.



I believe that the church, an institution which proclaims the expansiveness of God's love, mercy and grace, should not shy away from sensitive subjects. It is in these spaces we should learn about sanctuary and acceptance.

We can teach compassion and self-care in our homes. Unfortunately, many young people do not receive required sex education at home or at school (and some parents object to sexual health being taught in schools at all). Where are they to get this information?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the church could be a supportive place to encourage and empower women? Of course, you would need people learned in the subject matter. Now is the time to begin that learning!

There's an African proverb which states: "It takes a village to raise a child." And it does. Raising girls begins in the home, but unfortunately in some communities, children are being raised by single moms working two or three jobs in order to feed, clothe and keep a roof over their heads. Some women suffer domestic violence in their homes and have no sense of self-esteem. Many of these women are frightened to death to take an HIV test. I have walked with women and girls as they got tested. These women and girls need our help.

March 10 is National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. Learn more about World AIDS Day worldaidsday.org.

The Rev. Andrena Ingram has spent the last three years recovering from a heart condition. She is on leave without a conventional call, yet she ministers to folks in her daily walk and remains focused on heart care and being a long-term HIV thriver.

This article is excerpted from the March 2020 issue of Gather magazine. To read more like it, subscribe to Gather (gathermagazine.org).

News Briefs

Registration is open [again]!

Registration is open for the Eleventh Triennial Gathering (Gathering 2021) in Phoenix, Ariz., Aug. 5-8, 2021. Learn more and register online at welcatg.org. Full registration is \$375. Day registration is \$200. We can't wait to see you!

Thankoffering service online

The 2020 Thankoffering service in English and Spanish is available for download on the website at welca.org/thankofferings. Your generous Thankofferings help support the ongoing ministries of the churchwide women's organization, including our triennial conventions, the work of your elected churchwide board, the annual conference of synodical presidents, our communications ministries, justice and advocacy work, and so much more.

A Gather Advent devotional

In times of turmoil and uncertainty such as we've experienced this year, it can help to name these days as "liminal." The word "liminal" comes from the Latin word for threshold—a place that represents the ending of one thing and the beginning of another.

The Rev. Jordan Miller-Stubbendick wrote *Gather's* 2020 Advent devotional, "The beginning and the end," for the December issue. The devotional focuses on another liminal story: Mary's journey as she follows God's call into motherhood. While exploring Mary's story, we think about the liminal days in her life, and how she might have traveled spiritually and emotionally during her own uncertainty. As we embark on our own emotional and spiritual journeys this Advent, we'll explore four practices that can help to ground and steady us: gratitude, movement, song and honest conversation.

Subscribe to *Gather* magazine to get the devotional and other inspiring articles of faith (www.gathermagazine.org).

Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls

Application materials for the 2020–2021 Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls seed grants must be postmarked or emailed by December 15, 2020. All applications must be submitted by active units of Women of the ELCA who are familiar with the Raising Up Healthy Women

and Girls initiative and the criteria of this program. The requirements are simple. The program must:

- bring together women and girls in the congregational unit and community;
- meet the goals of the health initiative;
- be able to be replicated in other settings;
- agree to re-seed by making a financial contribution to the seed grant program; and
- agree to provide a final report.

Learn more on welca.org under Ministry and Action/Special Initiatives.

Stop gender-based violence

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign to challenge violence against women and girls. The campaign runs every year from November 25 (International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women) through December 10 (Human Rights Day).

Voting members at the 2017 triennial convention adopted a memorial requesting Women of the ELCA participants to educate themselves about the signs of domestic abuse and violence and the services available in their community by inviting shelter workers, social workers, counselors and police officers to speak at their events. The memorial requires synodical women's organization presidents to report at the 2019 Conference of Presidents what they have done to raise awareness of domestic violence. Learn more at welca.org/domesticviolence.

Executive board meets in October

Please pray for members of the Women of the ELCA executive board and staff who meet by Zoom October 24. Watch for a news story about action taken during the meeting at welca.org/news and in Bold Connections. Sign up for Bold Connections at welca.org/publications.

Try our Advent resources

Download for free Women of the ELCA's Advent resources in English and Spanish. Visit welca.org/resources and search for Advent.

Thankofferings: Give thanks all day, every day, even when life is different

by Audrey Novak Riley

LIFE IS DIFFERENT THIS YEAR. Because of the global pandemic, every expression of our women’s organization has had to postpone or even cancel meetings and gatherings. Many of us can’t gather with our families, let alone with our friends in our circles or congregations as we have always loved to do. It’s really hard.

But as the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Rome so many years ago, “. . . neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come . . . nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38-39). And I take that “anything else in all creation” to include the coronavirus, don’t you? Not even a global pandemic can separate us from the love of God in Christ. And to that we say, “Thanks be to God, alleluia, alleluia!”

Lutheran women have a time-honored way of giving thanks for blessings received—Thankofferings. Some women keep the practice of setting aside daily Thankofferings throughout the year, and then holding a Thankoffering service near the end of the year. Joining our daily offerings with those of other women throughout our church and throughout our history—well, it’s powerful. (See welca.org/AllAboutThankofferings for more.)

In ordinary times—and some of us may be able to hold Thankoffering services just as we always have in ordinary times—our treasurer gathers up all the offerings given at the Thankoffering service and forwards the total amount to the churchwide expression of Women of the ELCA.

(Look for our 2020–2021 Thankoffering service at the end of this issue of *Interchange* and at welca.org/thankofferings.)

But for others of us, things are different this year, so we’ll be making our 2020 Thankofferings differently. Many of us will pray in private and make our Thankofferings in private, too (Jesus told

us that God hears us when we pray privately: Matthew 6:6). Others of us will pray together on the phone or via internet and make our Thankofferings that way (Jesus told us that where two or three are gathered in his name, he is there among us: Matthew 18:20. He didn’t rule out phones or the internet!)

A new free resource, “Giving Thanks All Day, Every Day,” suggests short prayers of thanksgiving to use any time during the day as we set aside our Thankofferings. Then, when it’s time, gather all those Thankofferings into one and forward the total directly to Women of the ELCA.

Here’s how:

Giving by mail

Make out your check to Women of the ELCA and write “Thankoffering” on the memo line.

Then mail it to:
Women of the ELCA
c/o ELCA Gift Processing
P.O. Box 1809
Merrifield VA 22116-8009

Giving online

Make your Thankoffering with a credit card at welca.org/give. Simply choose the amount of your gift and click “Thankoffering” in the dropdown list. After you’ve filled in all your information, scroll down to the bottom and click “I’m not a robot” before clicking “Donate now.”

Giving by phone

Call 800-638-3522 or 773-380-2700, and press zero. The operator is authorized to charge your Thankoffering to your credit card.

Thank you!



Audrey Novak Riley is director for stewardship for Women of the ELCA



WE'VE MOVED



(DATES, NOT LOCATION)

We are moving this life-changing event to **August 5-8, 2021!** Join your sisters of faith in Phoenix for the Gathering 2021. Then begin living out your faith in new and invigorating ways.

August 5-8, 2021
Phoenix, Arizona

Visit welcatg.org for details and registration.



From devastation and loss: A story of hope

by *Melanie Gibbons*

On July 29, 2020, three shipping containers of Lutheran World Relief quilts and kits arrived in the port of Beirut. The items were bound to serve more than 24,000 refugees from across the region who are sheltering in Lebanon. The containers were in port, awaiting customs clearance before LWR released them to our partner, Anera.



Children in Lebanon who have received quilts and kits from LWR via Anera

Six days later, the devastating ammonium nitrate explosion rocked the port. It killed almost 200 people, injured more than 6,000, and displaced an astonishing 300,000. In the days that followed, port authorities indicated to Anera that any containers in the port were likely a total loss.

On top of the profound human impact, the loss of quilts and kits stings.

Hours of time, investments of finances, and thousands of prayers are wrapped up in the 22,500 quilts, 3,500 school kits, 19,500 personal care kits, and 2,250 baby care kits included in those three containers.

LWR staff shared this news on social media and in calls to the 315 congregations with items in that shipment. Your reactions inspired us. As we shared our collective grief over the situation, compounded by the loss of quilts and kits, we also heard from you: We will keep going. One quilter said, “Good thing I just oiled my sewing machine.”

Your response—borne out of your faithfulness and fueled by your love—is a light in the darkness.

On the morning of August 26, LWR staff received an urgent communication from Anera staff on the ground in Beirut: They finally got access to the port. It appeared that our three containers were in the one place in the port that provided some protection from the blast. The containers were damaged—but not completely destroyed, as first believed.

This incredible news is evolving. Anera still must sort through each carton of kits and each bale of quilts to assess damage. Chemical testing must be conducted to measure any ammonium nitrate contamination. As we learn more, we will continue to keep our quilt and kit community updated.

We are grateful for the creative and determined ways you are refreshing your quilting and kit-making efforts in these isolating times.

We are grateful for the creative and determined ways you are refreshing your quilting and kit-making efforts in these isolating times. In Beirut and around the world, our neighbors are facing challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. As we hold on to hope that many of your gifts in Beirut can be salvaged, we continue to work on ways to gather your quilts and kits this fall.

Because we need you, and your quilts and kits, to ensure that your love can reach every neighbor.

To receive timely information about quilt and kit collections in your area, please sign up for email updates at lwr.org/quilts.



Melanie Gibbons is deputy director of outreach and engagement for Lutheran World Relief.

Light the Way for Justice, Light the Way for Love

A Thankoffering Service for Women of the ELCA 2020–2021

GATHERING

Entrance Song

Christ, Be Our Light (*ELW* 715)

THANKSGIVING FOR BAPTISM

Blessed be the holy Trinity, + one God,
the fountain of living water,
the rock who gave us birth,
our light and our salvation.

Amen.

Joined to Christ in the waters of baptism,
we are clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness.
Let us give thanks for the gracious gift of baptism.

Blessed are you, O God, maker and ruler of all things.
Your voice thundered over the waters at creation.
You water the mountains and send springs
into the valleys
to refresh and satisfy all living things.

Through the waters of the flood
you carried those in the ark to safety.
Through the sea you led your people Israel
from slavery to freedom.
In the wilderness you nourished them
with water from the rock,
and you brought them across the river Jordan
to the promised land.

By the baptism of his death and resurrection,
your Son Jesus has carried us to safety and freedom.
The floods shall not overwhelm us,
and the deep shall not swallow us up,
for Christ has brought us over to the land of promise.
He sends us to make disciples,
baptizing in the name of the Father,
and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Pour out your Holy Spirit;
wash away sin in this cleansing water;
clothe the baptized with Christ;
and claim your daughters and sons,
no longer slave and free,
no longer male and female,
but one with all the baptized in Christ Jesus,
who lives and reigns with you
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever.

Amen.

Sprinkling Song

Heaven Is Singing for Joy/El cielo canta alegría (*ELW* 664)

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God of justice and love,
you light our way through life
with the words of your Son.
Give us the light we need,
and awaken us to the needs of others,
through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Looking for an alternative to a full worship service? Consider using a Thankoffering devotion during your circle meeting or other gathering where you collect the Thankoffering. Include prayers from this service or use "All About Thankofferings," a free online resource about the history of Thankofferings.

*WORD

First Reading

Micah 6:1-8

The offering of justice, kindness, humility

Psalm

Psalm 15

Second Reading

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Christ crucified, the wisdom and power of God

Gospel

Matthew 5:1-12

The teaching of Christ: Beatitudes

Hymn of the Day

When the Poor Ones/Cuando el pobre (ELW 725)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Prayers are crafted locally for each occasion. The following examples may be adapted as appropriate.

Called together in the Spirit's embrace, let us pray for the renewal of the church, for those in need, and for all of God's creation.

We pray, holy God, for the unity of the church universal: Draw your people together into one great company of disciples, together following our teacher Jesus Christ to carry out his holy mission, together sharing the good news of your justice and love wherever we are sent.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

We pray, omnipotent God, for the well-being of creation: We give you thanks for transforming the chaotic waters of creation into the saving waters that nourish and sustain all the earth. Renew us every day by your water and your word.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

We pray, righteous God, for peace and justice in the world: Lead the nations of the world away from the stony wilderness of sin, and toward the holy light of love, justice, and peace.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

We pray, compassionate God, for all in need: For those who hunger and thirst for peace, for belonging, for love, for righteousness, shine your light of justice. For those who mourn or suffer in any way, shine your light of comfort.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

We pray, faithful God, for the renewal of all life: Refresh us with your living water and anoint us with your Holy Spirit. Embolden us with your promise and your presence.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

Receive our thanksgiving, eternal God, for all who have died in the faith. May we know the fullness of the new life that you prepare for us in your kingdom.

Christ, be our light.

(sing) Shine in your church gathered today.

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your care through Jesus Christ.

Amen.

SHARING OF THE PEACE

THANKOFFERING

You may introduce the offering with these words: As we make our Thankofferings today, we share in a tradition that goes back to the 1800s or even earlier. Then, when it seemed that there was not enough money to carry out the work of the church, the women would act together as “cent” or “mite” societies. Each woman would set aside offerings at home throughout the year in thanksgiving for blessings received. And on occasion, the women would come together as we do today, joining their offerings together to support ministry of many kinds.

When Women of the ELCA was formed in 1987, we committed to continue this tradition of giving in gratitude for blessings. Each year, in thousands of congregations, Thankofferings are given to support the life-changing ministries of Women of the ELCA. Together, we do more than we could ever do apart. In gratitude for all God has given to us, and with hope for all that is to come, let us now give our thankoffering.

Offering Song

To God Our Thanks We Give/Reamo leboga (ELW 682)

OFFERING PRAYER

God of grace, you have showered us with gifts of grace and abundance, entrusting to us the ministries of Women of the ELCA. Help us 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. Accept these gifts and our prayer that, nurtured by your Word, filled with your Spirit, and fed at your table, we may share with gladness all that you have shared with us, until all creation is satisfied.
Amen.

**GREAT THANKSGIVING

THE LORD’S PRAYER

**COMMUNION

Communion Songs

Let Justice Flow like Streams (ELW 717)
Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us with Your Love (ELW 708)

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We thank you, gracious God, for loving all your family with a mother’s care, and feeding us in a way our hearts and souls can understand, with the saving body and blood of Jesus Christ. Renew and enliven us by your presence in this meal, that we may be your presence in the world, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

SENDING

Our God calls us to do justice. May you find strength in God’s grace.

Amen.

Christ Jesus calls us to love kindness. May you find comfort in Christ’s gentleness.

Amen.

The Holy Spirit calls us to walk humbly with our triune God. May you always find joy in God’s love and justice.

Amen.

Holy Trinity + One God, bless you now and forever.

Amen.

Sending Song

To Be Your Presence (ELW 546)

Rejoice and be glad in the light of God’s love!
Let us go forth in peace to share the good news.

Thanks be to God.

* Scripture readings may be selected from the Revised Common Lectionary for the day of the Thankoffering service.

** Omit if Thankoffering service does not include communion.

Tips for planning your Thankoffering service

Planning and carrying out your Thankoffering service might look different this year, depending on local circumstances. But with flexibility and creativity, even a completely online Thankoffering service can be as satisfying as any in-person service.

Form a planning team

Invite women who are regular participants in Women of the ELCA activities and women who are less involved. Invite women and girls of all ages, including young adults, teens and children. Work with the leaders of your congregation, including your pastor, audiovisual team and music director.

Choose a date, time, and place

The service can be held any time of year. Some congregations and women's units work together and hold the Thankoffering service during Sunday worship. Some host the service at another time. And you can have more than one Thankoffering service per year. Consider online alternatives to accommodate those who will be participating at home or elsewhere. Your congregation's audiovisual team — whether staff or volunteer — will be very helpful with the technicalities.

Plan the service

The Thankoffering order of service printed here is entirely optional. You may use all or part of it. For Scripture readings, planners may choose to create a Thankoffering service using the Revised Common Lectionary (the weekly cycle of texts commended for use in the ELCA) or may choose other Bible texts that evoke discipleship or stewardship. Lectionary citations can be found in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* (pp. 18–63) or on the ELCA website, www.elca.org/lectionary. Decide together with your congregation's pastor whether to include communion.

Choose a preacher

Consider inviting a woman, lay or ordained, to preach.

Invite participation by all

It is appropriate to invite the entire congregation to participate in this service. You might invite the youth group to serve as ushers or tech support. Through their involvement, they will learn more about Women of the ELCA. Consider inviting women from other ELCA congregations, too.

Use our special envelopes and bulletin covers

Thankoffering envelopes are available in packets of 100 for just the cost of shipping. Packets of 50 bulletin covers are \$4.95 plus shipping. Both (and much more) may be ordered online at welca.org/shop or by phone at 800-638-3522.

Celebrate Women of the ELCA

The Thankoffering service is a perfect time to celebrate Women of the ELCA and tell about your commitment to the churchwide women's organization. You might display mementos and photos of women's ministries, or add personal testimonies to the sermon. During the weeks leading up to the service, invite women to speak about Women of the ELCA during worship or at an adult forum. Display *Gather* magazine, program resources, and other items that exemplify the many ministries of Women of the ELCA.

Make Thankoffering containers

Traditionally, women set aside their offerings throughout the year, using containers dedicated to Thankofferings. Encourage women to gather supplies (empty jars, boxes, envelopes, labels, decorations) to make home Thankoffering containers before or after the service.

Tips for planning your Thankoffering service

Plan how to receive the offering

Think creatively about how to receive the offering. For instance, if you are gathering in person, you might invite people to place their Thankoffering envelopes or containers on the altar. This visually highlights an important part of the Thankoffering tradition—the daily practice of giving in gratitude for blessings and bringing those gifts together for the Thankoffering service. Or, if you are gathering online, you might display the Women of the ELCA website, including the Thankoffering page at welca.org/thankofferings and the online giving page at welca.org/give.

Provide food and fellowship

If gathering in person, you might host breakfast before worship or a special coffee hour after. You might include a table for making Thankoffering containers and a display area for photos and other materials about Women of the ELCA. If you are gathering online, you might consider a virtual coffee hour — your audiovisual team will be helpful with that. What other ways can you offer hospitality and companionship?

Promote the service thoroughly

Write a bulletin insert or an article for the church's newsletter telling about Thankofferings and how they support women's ministry today. Send invitations and make announcements starting a few weeks in advance. Make sure to promote the service online and through social media, too.

Wrapping up

Afterward, use the same channels to thank everyone and tell them how well your Thankoffering service went. Write an article telling about how you planned and carried out your successful Thankoffering service and send it to your church newsletter, to your synodical women's organization, and to the churchwide women's organization. Other women will want to know all about how you did it!

Sending in your Thankofferings

Many people will make their Thankofferings online at welca.org/give, but others will also give by check or cash during the service. Ask your treasurer to deposit all the Thankoffering checks or cash into the congregational unit's bank account and then write one check for the total amount to Women of the ELCA. (This is so that the churchwide organization can report out how many congregational and special units sent in Thankofferings.)

Write "Thankoffering" on the memo line and mail it to the address below. (Mailing it to any other address, even one you've used before, will delay your Thankoffering.)

**Women of the ELCA
c/o ELCA Gift Processing
P.O. Box 1809
Merrifield VA 22116**

And then congratulate yourself! It feels good to act on gratitude, doesn't it? Thank you for all you do for Women of the ELCA. You really do make a difference in people's lives.