

# interchange

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This is the final issue of *Interchange* due to a reduction in budget. The winter issue of *Intercambio* will not be published. For monthly Women of the ELCA news, sign up for Bold Connections on our publications page: [welca.org/publications](http://welca.org/publications).

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## With giving down, organization forced into staffing changes

WITH GIVING TO THE ORGANIZATION DOWN SIGNIFICANTLY, Women of the ELCA's executive board adopted a 2021 budget that will change the staff configuration. The new staffing model was announced December 16. Eight of 10 on staff will move to part-time positions Feb. 1, and two will remain full time.

Executive Director Linda Post Bushkofsky and *Gather* Editor Elizabeth Hunter will keep their full-time jobs. The remaining eight positions will go part time, with seven of those positions guaranteed through the end of August 2021. See those positions here: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/about/staff>.

The board, in a special meeting Dec. 5, approved a 2021 budget of \$1,636,250 or \$729,750 (31 percent) less than the 2020 budget of \$2,366,000.

"We are recommending a budget best suited for our finances given the pandemic and the reduction in income we've been receiving year after year," said Sara Larson, chairman of the churchwide budget and finance committee.

"For many years, we have been trying to get by and making ways for there not to be staff cuts," she added. "However, we cannot continue to operate in this manner. We have to come up with a new plan."

**"We cannot continue to operate in this manner. We have to come up with a new plan."**

**— Sara Larson, chair of the churchwide budget and finance committee**

In announcing the new staffing model, Bushkofsky said, "I see the time between January and August as allowing focused strategic thinking about how the organization will meet its mission in the future and what staffing arrangement will best serve the organization into that future. That strategic thinking will build upon the strategic planning work already accomplished by the churchwide executive board during the 2017–2020 triennium."

"What staffing will look like come September 1, 2021, is unknown, beyond the work of the executive director, editor of *Gather* and managing editor of *Gather*," Bushkofsky said.

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*Interchange* is a quarterly e-newsletter of Women of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The e-newsletter equips and empowers leaders and participants to carry out the organization's mission and purpose. *Interchange* and *Intercambio*, the Spanish translation, are available for free download at [welca.org](http://welca.org) under the Publications tab. You may also sign up to receive *Interchange*, *Intercambio*, and *Bold Connections*, the organization's monthly e-newsletter, by email at [welca.org](http://welca.org). Scroll to the bottom of the page and fill in the "Stay in Touch" field.

Linda Post Bushkofsky, *executive director*  
Terri Lackey, *director for communication*  
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#### Editorial Office

Women of the ELCA  
8765 W. Higgins Rd.  
Chicago, IL 60631-4101  
Phone: 773-380-2730 or  
800-638-3522, ext. 2730

[Women.ELCA@elca.org](mailto:Women.ELCA@elca.org)  
[womenoftheelca.org](http://womenoftheelca.org)  
[facebook.com/womenoftheELCA](https://facebook.com/womenoftheELCA)  
[twitter.com/womenoftheELCA](https://twitter.com/womenoftheELCA)  
[instagram.com/womenoftheELCA](https://instagram.com/womenoftheELCA)

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Women of the ELCA   
**interchange**

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## Our letter-exchange project is so popular, we've extended it

"**DEAR FRIEND IN CHRIST**, our letter-exchange project, has proven so popular that it's been extended to March 5, 2021," said Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director. "Women throughout the ELCA have written letters, sharing their faith, offering advice on coping through the pandemic, even exchanging poems and recipes.



"The project's success coupled with the most challenging days ahead in the coronavirus pandemic suggested we should extend Dear Friend in Christ into the new year," she explained. "Maintaining community through Thanksgiving, Christmas and into the New Year, all at a time of physical distancing, is critically important."

Women who have already exchanged letters in the project are encouraged to exchange cards and continue writing into 2021, sustaining community, and lifting spirits. Those who are new to the project are invited to do the same.

It's easy to participate in the Dear Friend in Christ project. You simply write a letter, complete the release form, and mail it to the address provided on the form. Soon thereafter, you will receive a letter and the author of that letter will receive your letter. Visit [welca.org/dearfriend](http://welca.org/dearfriend) to learn how to send and receive a letter.

### Don't forget the release form

"We have encountered a dilemma with some letters," Bushkofsky said. "Some women have not included a release form, and some have not included any information about themselves, no name, not even a return mailing address. If we at least had their mailing address, we could write to them, provide a release form, and ask them to complete the form."

That explains why some women have sent in letters but not received any in return.

A signed release form is required. If a woman knows she did not include a release form, she can complete one and mail it in so that an exchange can take place.

### Project ends March 5, 2021

"We selected a new end date of March 5, 2021, so women might consider a letter writing effort when they observe Bold Women's Day on February 28. By March 5 we should also be seeing some encouraging signs of spring," said Bushkofsky.

# News briefs

## Winter Gather Bible study: Journeys with angels

The Bible features numerous encounters with angels who show up on an array of missions, from wielding a sword (Genesis 3:24), to rescuing a child (Genesis 22:11–12), to a mass choir singing, “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14).

Angels are not a major focus of holy Scripture, nor are they ever mentioned in our Christian creeds. Yet they show up with frequently and at pivotal moments in both Old and New Testaments. Church Reformer Martin Luther is quoted as saying, “If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I have shaken every one of these branches because I wanted to know what it was and what it meant.”

In Winter 2021, the Rev. Christa von Zychlin will present the four-part study “Journeys with angels” in which we will shake those biblical branches, watch for angels, and listen for God’s calls to action.

### Session topics:

**January:** Looking up—New beginnings, awe-full, awesome angels

**February:** Repentance and route-changing angels

**March:** Loneliness, abandonment and holy comfort

**April:** Feasting angels

The Rev. Christa von Zychlin has served Lutheran churches around the world through ELCA Global partnerships. She co-pastors St. Luke Lutheran Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where she also loves exploring the spirituality of mountains and deserts.

## When is New Year’s Day really?

Did you know that 2021 doesn’t really start until February 1? It’s true! For Women of the ELCA, the fiscal year starts on February 1 every year. Our treasurers and bookkeepers care about fiscal years, but what does that mean to the rest of us?

It means we can send our year-end gifts and offerings to Women of the ELCA after Christmas and they will still count toward 2020. But don’t wait too long! Please mail your gifts and offerings so that they arrive well before January 31—a wise mail date would be January 15.

## Mail gifts and offerings to:

Women of the ELCA ELCA Gift Processing Center  
P.O. Box 1809  
Merrifield VA 22116-8009

Or give online at [welca.org/donate](https://welca.org/donate). Thank you for your good stewardship!

## Dear Friend in Christ

You’ve already heard about our letter exchange project, Dear Friend in Christ. Originally scheduled to end on All Saints Day, the project has now been extended due to its popularity. The end date for sending in a letter is March 5, 2021. That date allows women to participate as part of Bold Women’s Day activities. Learn more at [welca.org/dearfriend](https://welca.org/dearfriend) and see page 2.

## Bold Women’s Day is Feb. 28

Within Women of the ELCA we celebrate bold women the fourth Sunday of February every year, on Bold Women’s Day, this year on Feb. 28.

On this day, congregational units honor or remember bold women from their community. These women may be members of the congregation, notable for acting boldly on their faith in some way. They may also be part of the larger community, notable for their boldness in helping to bring about healing and wholeness for the church, the society or the world.

To help you with your Bold Women’s Day planning, turn to our resource, “Celebrate Bold Women’s Day,” available for free download at [welca.org/bwd](https://welca.org/bwd).

## Pivot not panic is the new COP

The Conference of Presidents is getting a makeover in 2021. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the Pivot Don’t Panic event will be held via Zoom on Feb. 18–20. Our 64 synodical presidents can invite five women from their board to attend—those who can best benefit from leadership training. Information is being sent to synodical presidents. Registration is due by Feb. 1, 2021. Questions can go to the Contact Us form on [welca.org](https://welca.org).

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# What does the pandemic mean for Women of the ELCA?

**THE GLOBAL COVID-19 PANDEMIC** disrupted routines and plans for everyone, including Women of the ELCA. Schedules, budgets, conventions, and gatherings—all these and more have had to be changed quickly, sometimes more than once.

Our churchwide organization leaders are working out what the pandemic means for Women of the ELCA, now and into the future.

In its October 24, 2020, virtual meeting, the churchwide executive board proposed constitutional amendments, discussed decreased giving to Women of the ELCA, and considered the organization’s future, all in the light of the novel coronavirus.

In her report, President Lisa Plorin thanked executive board members for serving an extra year since COVID-19 required the Eleventh Triennial Convention’s postponement when their terms would have ended. The pandemic has “forced us to be flexible and ready to adapt to change at the spur of the moment,” she said.

## Constitutional changes

The executive board approved a committee recommendation to propose amending Articles XII and XIII of the churchwide constitution clarifying lengths of office terms, in answer to questions arising from the postponing of the 2020 triennial convention. The proposed constitutional amendment would provide that

the terms of churchwide officers and board members extend to “the next convention,” rather than specifying three-year terms.

The board also proposed a recommendation to amend churchwide and synodical organization constitutions and bylaws to allow for virtual conventions and board meetings, provided the number of participants constitutes a quorum.

These proposals will be sent to the voting members of the Tenth Triennial Convention (2017) for consideration. Those participants continue to function in their role as voting members until the next convention.

## Budget and finances

At the end of August, Regular Offerings, Thankofferings, SWO convention offerings, and conference/cluster offerings total about \$265,200, said Anna Sarver, churchwide treasurer. As of October 1, no Regular Offerings had been recorded for six SWOs in this fiscal year.

“We keep hoping our income will turn around, and by the end of the year, SWOs will encourage participants to remember to send in their offerings even though they are not meeting in person. The main thing we can do is pray.”

While expenses are down, revenue is down further. Income is lagging more now than it has in previous years, said Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director of Women of the ELCA.

“Our primary expenses in 2020 include the Conference of Presidents (held in February 2020), salary and benefits for staff, and our monthly payment on the service level agreement with the ELCA,” Bushkofsky said.

Sarver said, “It’s really hard to make a guesstimate of what our income will be at the end of the year.” About two-thirds of annual revenue is received in the final quarter of the fiscal year (November, December and January).

Because the year-end revenue is challenging to predict, Sara Larson, chair of the budget and finance committee, requested extra time to provide the board with a 2021 budget proposal.

“The staff has done a fabulous job of working within expectations and obligations, and yet here we are,” she said. “There is a very strong likelihood there will be a



*The executive board met by Zoom on Oct. 24*

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## What does the pandemic mean for Women of the ELCA?

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reduction in services, programming, and staff.”

Larson said the committee is waiting for more information from the ELCA before drafting a 2021 budget proposal for the board’s consideration. (See front page.)

“Things will not and cannot continue as they have because the funding is not there,” she said. “I need people to understand that very clearly.”

Bushkofsky said that she is proud of what the staff has accomplished during the seven months of the pandemic and working at home.

“To be sure, we have great challenges ahead,” she said. “Most challenging for all us is the lack of surety about what the future looks like.”

### Triennial convention and gathering

Women of the ELCA’s triennial convention and gathering are scheduled for August 2021. (See update on page 8.) Becky Shurson, executive board vice president, who works in event planning, said that the convention center and hotels in Phoenix “would likely consider it too early to negotiate any changes.”

The executive board plans to decide in late winter about the convention and gathering: whether either or both can go on as planned, be postponed or canceled, or held online.

### Leadership training event

The executive board heard plans for a virtual event for all SWO leaders on Feb. 18–19, 2021, under the theme of “Pivot, Not Panic.”

“It’s been called Conference of Presidents for a long time,” said Plorin. “Since we’re doing it via Zoom, we’re turning it into a leadership event so all [synodical women’s organization] board members can be part of this leadership training. I’m way excited about this.”

### In other action, the executive board:

- Approved a recommendation to revise the board’s investment policy regarding unrestricted bequests and gifts of \$25,000 or more with this language: “Based on the current financial situation of the organization, priority should be given to funding current expenses. Then consideration may be given to contribution to Katie’s Fund, the scholarship funds of Women of the ELCA and the reserve fund of



*Board members celebrate with ‘jazz hands’ their 100 percent giving to the organization*

Women of the ELCA.” The previous policy had a more complicated formula that was used to distribute gifts of \$25,000 or more.

- Approved a request from the South-Central Wisconsin SWO to introduce constitutional amendments to require notice to voting members six months before either annual or biennial conventions, thus bringing Articles X.2.2. and X.2.4 of the model SWO constitution into congruence.
- Approved a recommendation that SWOs with questions about officer terms of service seek guidance from the churchwide executive director, with the further recommendation that “those who are in office remain in office until another is elected to that office.”
- Approved a resolution “in loving memory of Nancy Giddings,” a former churchwide executive board member (2014 through 2017) who died on March 28, 2020.
- Approved a recommendation to stay connected with each other virtually in various ways, including texts, virtual get-togethers, and through private Facebook conversations.
- Learned that all 21 members of the executive board have made at least one gift of record to the organization in the current term. As of October 12, board members and officers’ total giving since the end of the 2017 convention is \$37,672.
- Heard reports from the Office of the Presiding Bishop, Conference of Bishops, Lutheran Men in Mission, and staff.

# Put your dollars to work to support important ministries

**DOES YOUR WOMEN OF THE ELCA GROUP** have money sitting unused in a bank account? Consider how you can put those dollars to work supporting the ministries of Women of the ELCA.

When you give to the churchwide women's organization, you are making an investment in your future. Your giving comes back to you in the form of resources, publications, events, and support that enable you and the women of your congregation to live out our shared mission of mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.

For the entire life of this organization—now spanning more than 30 years—the churchwide executive board has encouraged congregational units (CUs) and synodical women's organizations (SWOs) to spend down their excess reserves each year and direct the money to ministry, especially the ongoing ministries of Women of the ELCA.

CUs and SWOs are encouraged to spend down their monetary reserves in a way that reflects the interdependent relationships between the units, the synodical organizations, and the churchwide women's organization.

With fiscal year 2020 coming to a close on January 31, 2021, it's now time to make those decisions.

## Sufficient reserves

In most cases, reserves of \$1,000 or less are sufficient. For instance, your CU may need money to place a down payment on a retreat facility in the future or to respond to emergency needs that arise early in the next fiscal year. It is up to each CU and SWO to annually decide how much to keep in reserves for the next year, while recognizing that every dollar saved is a dollar that does not support ministry today.

The churchwide executive board has consistently encouraged spending the dollars in a way that reflects the interdependence between congregational units, the synodical organizations, and the churchwide women's organization. Interdependence is an important word for Women of the ELCA. Our founders used it many times in our constitutions, especially pertaining to finances.



*Gifts collected at the Tenth Triennial Gathering Thankoffering service in Minneapolis. Photo by Jim Veneman*

Interdependence means that all expressions of Women of the ELCA (unit, SWO, and churchwide) should consider the needs of the others when making financial decisions.

Women of the ELCA is organized so that the SWOs and CUs do not need to keep large reserves from year to year. Neither CUs nor SWOs maintain staff, property, or ongoing liabilities for which significant reserves are necessary.

Instead, units are called to be communities of women that support each other and act to bring about healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world. SWOs connect units in mission with the churchwide organization. These purposes are best lived out by putting dollars to ministry, not storing those dollars away in a savings account.

Give to Women of the ELCA ([welca.org/give](https://welca.org/give)) Where Needed Most, and support our ongoing ministries of advocacy, leadership development, discipleship and program resources, *Gather* magazine, *Café* e-zine and podcast, racial justice education, Bible studies, and more. Become a Faithful Friend of the organization by giving monthly through automatic withdrawal from your checking account or automatic charge to your credit card. Learn more at [welca.org/faithfulfriends](https://welca.org/faithfulfriends).

Visit [womenoftheelca.org/give](https://womenoftheelca.org/give) to learn more.

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Staffing decisions will be informed by the strategic thinking of board and staff, she said. Over the next several months, additional information will also become available to assist in making those staffing decisions, such as 1) actual revenue received in FY2020, 2) the pandemic trajectory and 3) revenue received in quarters one and two of FY2021.

In other actions, the board

- Amended an investment policy adopted at its regularly scheduled meeting on Oct. 24, 2020, that will allow the entire executive board to decide where gifts over \$25,000 are distributed.

- Approved a recently received bequest of \$152,000 to be distributed “where needed most.”
- Authorized the executive director and board treasurer to open a bank account at BMOHarris for general operating purposes and an account at Edward Jones for the recent \$152,000 bequest.
- Heard an informational update on the status of the triennial convention and gathering, currently postponed until August 2021 as in-person events in Phoenix, Arizona. (See page 8 for an updated decision about dates for the convention and gathering.)

## News briefs

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### Let’s meet a goal of 1,000 Faithful Friends

About 175 Faithful Friends are supporting Women of the ELCA through our monthly automatic giving program. And we have a goal to increase that number to 1,000 by the time of our Gathering 2021 next August! Won’t that be wonderful to celebrate? So let’s all talk with our circles of in-person faithful friends and join WELCA’s Faithful Friends automatic giving program. It’s so easy to get started.

### World Day of Prayer is March 5

“Build on a Strong Foundation.” This invitation written by our sisters in Vanuatu is the foundation for the 2021 World Day of Prayer (WDP) on Friday, March 5. Held on the first Friday in March, WDP is “a worldwide ecumenical movement of Christian women of many traditions who come together to observe a common day of prayer each year.”

Celebrated by thousands of women and women’s groups, including Women of the ELCA, in more than 170

countries, the World Day of Prayer seeks to facilitate “informed prayer and prayerful action” by gathering “women of different races, cultures, and traditions together in fellowship, understanding and action throughout the year.”

Learn more about World Day of Prayer, officially celebrated since 1927, at [wdp-usa.org](http://wdp-usa.org).

### Celebrate National Quilting Day

National Quilting Day (NQD) is observed annually on the third Saturday in March. This year, it’s on March 20. NQD is celebrated around the country with special quilting shows, classes, open museums and much more. Spend this day recognizing and appreciating quilt makers, along with their long labor, love and skill that goes into the making of each quilt.

“For nearly 70 years, compassionate people just like you have put their faith into action and made quilts for people in need around the world,” said Melanie Gibbons of Lutheran World Relief ([lwr.org/quilts](http://lwr.org/quilts)).

# Executive board decides on convention, gathering dates

**IN A SPECIALLY CALLED MEETING DECEMBER 23,** Women of the ELCA's executive board decided how and when to hold the organization's convention and gathering.

The meeting and Just Love Gathering were initially scheduled for July 14–16, 2020. When the coronavirus pandemic hit, the board, in its April 2020 meeting, rescheduled the convention and gathering for early August 2021.

“Since the April board meeting, the coronavirus has spread in ways that few would have imagined,” said Linda Post Bushkofsky, churchwide executive director.

As of December 23, more than 350,000 people have died in the United States due to the coronavirus, she said. More than 21 million people have been infected to date in the U.S. Leading epidemiologists describe the current trajectory of the virus as a “surge upon surge upon surge.”

Therefore, believing that in-person meetings will be unsafe into 2021, the executive board approved three recommendations:

- That the Eleventh Triennial Convention, currently scheduled for August 3–5, 2021, be held virtually (or digitally) on those same dates.

“The triennial convention cannot meet virtually until the 2017 voting members amend the constitution to allow for virtual meetings,” said Bushkofsky.

Before the organization can hold a virtual convention, she said, voting members of the Tenth Triennial Convention (2017) must approve it. “So, the staff will take steps necessary to be in touch with the voting members regarding proposed changes to the constitution.” Those proposed changes were made by the executive board at its October 2020 meeting.



- That the Just Love Gathering, currently scheduled for August 5–8, 2021, be postponed and registration refunds be offered. Staff will then find other ways to build community and bring women together virtually in 2021 and 2022.
- That the Twelfth Triennial Convention and a Gathering be held in Phoenix, Arizona, during the week of September 18, 2023.

“The executive board recognizes that the recommendations carry with them several other implications,” Bushkofsky said. “Despite the challenges, we feel that these are the best options at the current time.”