



Women of the ELCA

The Communicator



SWO Convention Update!! Please read!



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Sisters in Christ,

Due to continuing COVID-19 precautions and regulations, the SWO Board voted during their February 25th meeting to CANCEL the 2021 SWO Convention that was scheduled for May 1st. While we know this is disappointing news, we are trusting in the efforts to love one another by staying safe and avoiding potential virus outbreaks.

The board is discussing the possibility of having a fall convention. However, plans cannot be finalized until we know more about vaccination numbers and new gathering regulations. See the A Word From Your President letter on pages 2-3 for more information.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding. God bless.

—SWMN SWO Board

A Word from Your President

Greetings!

May your day begin with a smile on your face, love in your heart, and happiness within your soul!!

I have a question for you. Have you had an uncertain moment in your life lately? Something that maybe just came out of the blue and posed a definite concern and you had to make a wise decision at the moment on how to handle this situation that has just come up. Did you lean on God and your faith to make the right decision? Did you panic and just throw your arms up and feel very perplexed, confused, uncertain? I'm sure we've all been in these predicaments or situations, and we all know it's easy to just throw our arms up and walk away, don't we?

The recent Conference of Presidents meeting was held via ZOOM in February. For any of you former Synod President's – you will remember that flight to Chicago about the 3rd weekend in February each year to receive training and inspiration and meet up with other synod presidents that you'd gotten to know. Due to COVID this year – the COP meeting was opened up to five synod board members to attend the ZOOM event as well. In many ways it was nice to relax in my own house for the meeting this year and not have to deal with airports and delayed flights and shuttle busses!! Please look for some thoughts and comments in this issue from the five board members who were so willing to join in on the COP meetings this year.

Thursday evening was the opening of the ZOOM event where each Region met in session and there were about 25 attending the Region 3 event. This is where the presidents and board members from the 9 different synods within Region 3 got to share ideas of what is working in their synod and hear what other synods are up to and ask questions of the churchwide staff liaison and a churchwide board member who also joined us. The hour and a half session was interesting. [FYI, the 9 synods in Region 3 are: Western North Dakota; Eastern North Dakota; South Dakota; SE Minnesota; St. Paul; Minneapolis; NE Minnesota; NW Minnesota and SW Minnesota.

The Friday afternoon session went from 1 pm to 4 pm and that consisted of a wonderful Bible Study on the theme of the event given by The Rev. Dr. Wyvetta Bullock. We were divided into groups of about 5 to discuss some questions brought up in the Bible Study – a great time to connect with more Women of the ELCA! Churchwide staff brought individual reports as well. The ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton also brought greetings before the afternoon time ended.

Saturday afternoon brought us back in session from 1pm to 4 pm and we heard the State of the Ministry report from the churchwide president, Lisa Plorin from Upham, North

Dakota and we heard more reports from the churchwide staff. The day ended with a Thankoffering Service led by our chaplain, Deacon Patricia Caley. I think I counted a little over 200 ladies joining in at one time during the weekend events and it was a well-planned and fruitful event to discuss what leaders need to do as we move through and beyond the pandemic.

So, remember the questions I asked you earlier? The COP events theme was “PIVOT, DON'T PANIC!” Items discussed throughout the weekend and the main question asked of us was: “What does it mean to be a leader in these uncertain times and how do you stay connected?” “How do you define leadership?” was another question brought to small group discussions. Wyvetta's Bible study was based on Exodus 1:15-22.....I encourage you to look it up and read it! After you've read the verse, what stands out for you? How did Shiphrah and Puah pivot? It brought out good discussion in the group I was in, so I ask you the same questions and see what you come up with! We, as leaders today, are called to lead in a pandemic. We have to learn to adapt to the changes and challenges. So....therefore.....”Pivot, Don't Panic” was a very fitting theme! We need to hold God close – we need to remember that it is God who promises to lead and guide us, so we need to rely on his guidance and help! God leads us, Jesus is our hope and Jesus makes it possible for us to pivot – to make another choice and be BOLD women in our pivoting!!! Wyvetta listed 4 areas we need as we learn to pivot in our lives and I'd like to share those 4 with you to ponder on:

1. **PURPOSE**—Your call to love and serve the neighbor from the waters of your baptism – your deeper sense of vocation to a particular role or ministry.
2. **PRAYER** and 3. **PRAISE** (combined) - Your communication with God – using the scriptures and hymns that hold you – praying always.
4. **PLAN**—Consider your options – stay focused and balanced and look for opportunities right where you are.

You can all go to www.womenoftheelca.org/pivot and watch videos from the COP meetings. Check it out!!

Some other business type subjects talked about that I'll share with you regarding Women of the ELCA: Interchange – the churchwide newsletter has been discontinued. It was getting costly to publish this and was not a very timely publication in getting the word out quickly to the women, so what you used to read in the Interchange will now be included in BOLD CONNECTIONS. This is the monthly e-newsletter – free for signing up to receive it in your e-mail inbox. Check out www.womenoftheelca.org and search for publications and you'll find instructions to subscribe to it.

A Word from Your President—Cont'd

Due to decrease in the giving, Churchwide staff has been downsized for now leaving 2 full time positions and 8 part time positions. This will be active through August 2021 and then re-evaluate the financial situation at that time.

Women of the ELCA website, Boldcafe, and Gather websites are now accessible for people with a vision disability. Subscribe to Bold Connections and you can read all about it!

Make use of the many, many resources available on the WELCA website – there are so many programs that can be easily implemented into your local units, conferences or synod boards meetings or gatherings.

Triennial....hopefully most of you have been checking in with the WELCA website on the latest news regarding Triennial. Things are being POSTPONED at this point! The CONVENTION currently scheduled for Aug. 3-5, 2021 will be held virtually (or digitally) on those same dates. Of course the convention cannot meet virtually until the 2017 voting members amend the constitution to allow for virtual meetings. Any of you that were 2017 voting members from our synod should have already received a mailing from churchwide office with the proposed amendments to be voted on sometime this summer. Keep watching your mail boxes and your email inboxes for further instructions on this voting. The 11th "Just Love" GATHERING currently scheduled for Aug. 5-8, 2021, will be postponed until the 12th Triennial Convention & Gathering to be held in Phoenix AZ during the week of September 18, 2023.

If you registered for the Triennial GATHERING, here are some tips for you: If you want a refund (minus \$20 processing) call 208-502-1150 and the registration provider will assist you. Leave a message if you are unable to talk to someone with a detailed message and they'll get back to you. You can also email info@frameworkmeetings.com. **The deadline to request a refund is April 30, 2021.** Churchwide will be sending out an email with these refund instructions as well. If you already made a hotel reservation for the GATHERING – we hear that the Sheraton and Hyatt Regency (the two gathering hotels) have canceled all 2020 room reservations and will be refunding deposits. Just remember – as time goes on churchwide will do their best to keep you informed of all new items of registration and reservations that will need to come about by the time we meet again in September 2023!

I know this is getting lengthy – but just some more information for you about our own SYNOD EVENTS.....Due to the fact that churchwide has recommended that all unit, conference and synod in-person gatherings be cancelled through June of this year while monitoring all federal, state and local requirements and guidelines. Some conferences have once again cancelled their Spring Conference Gatherings. The fact the Conferences are not looked at as a legislative body there is no constitutional impediment to them meeting digitally. Churchwide does feel that ZOOM meetings for Conference Gatherings is a great way to keep

women connected. Just something for your conference boards to consider as we are living in uncertain times!

As far as an SWO Convention that is digital – it would have to be after July 2021. (after the constitution amendments are voted on). The synod board met via ZOOM February 25th and these were the recommendations decided by the board:

- The May 1, 2021 SWO Convention at Celebration Lutheran, Sartell – has been CANCELLED due to implications of COVID regulations and abiding by churchwide's recommendation.
- The board discussed looking into another venue for a possible convention yet this fall. There are just so many unknowns to deal with yet, but the board is going to PIVOT, NOT PANIC and look at some possible options to hopefully hold some type of gathering yet this year. Just keep your eyes and ears open and once the board decides something definite, we will get the word out!!

A friendly reminder to ALL women who read this synod newsletter.....

We probably know of a lot of women in our own conferences or units that do not have internet access and are unable to view and read THE COMMUNICATOR like many of us that are computer savvy! We do encourage each church to assign someone to run off some copies of TC when they are published and make those copies available to women who don't access the internet. Or...if you personally know someone who does not have access to a computer – take it upon yourself to reach out and make copies of TC and then get that copy to that member so she can be kept up to date on what is happening in our synod. It is so important we take the time to reach out to ALL our women these days and keep them in the loop on what is happening in Women of the ELCA! You can also run off a copy of the monthly BOLD CONNECTIONS and distribute them too to keep women up to date!! While you are at it – why not run off a copy for your pastor or give them the website address to find our synod newsletter!

A daily prayer that is so fitting for these times.....

"Dear Lord, I will trust you in all things. I may not understand this, but I know you have a perfect plan." Amen!



Mission Action/Stewardship

"For the Lord does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty; neither is the Lord's face hidden from them; but when they cry out, the Lord hears them." Psalm 22:24

Suffering occurs when reality does not meet what we plan for and what we think should be, according to a message by Pastor Scott at First Lutheran Church, Blair, Nebraska. To put it another way, suffering happens when reality does not equal what is just, when all do not have adequate food, clean water, safe shelter and what is necessary to meet their human needs. And all of us, as part of the body of Christ, suffer with those in need. That is where Mission Action steps in.

According to the recently distributed 2021 Quilt & Kit Ministry Guide, the shelves at the Lutheran World Relief warehouses in Maryland and Minnesota are empty. In Minnesota, for the first time in 27 years, nothing came in and nothing went out in September 2020. Since the pandemic began, donations have been down 40%. There is strong concern that there will not be enough quilts and kits on hand to fulfill upcoming needs in 2021 and beyond. Those at LWR realize we are doing everything we can to continue our ministry and ask that we keep it up.

We hope the information below will give ideas and encouragement.

Quilting groups:

- Our quilting group has started up again. We are meeting once a week, wearing masks and social distancing with smiles on our faces. It is great to be back together!
- Some quilting groups are meeting in small groups, a few members at a time, or informally whenever a couple women are able to get together.
- Many are continuing to work at home.
- Remember Thrivent Action Teams: If you are a member of Thrivent Financial, you are eligible to apply twice each year for \$250 to use for mission projects or aid to those in need. Associate members are eligible each year to apply for one project. Applying for the funds (www.thrivent.com) is easy online (click on the "What we Offer" tab and then on the "Generosity" tab, scroll down to "Thrivent Action Teams" and follow the apply tabs.

Getting Quilts and Kits to the Warehouse:

In southwest Minnesota, we are fortunate to be within a few hours driving distance from one of the 2 national warehouses. Here are some tips for getting quilts and kits to the warehouse.

- LWR Ingatherings: An ingathering is a regional event where quilters and kit-makers can drop off their donations to be delivered to LWR's warehouse. Ingatherings allow many people to send their donations of quilts & kits together in a coordinated and efficient manner. Consider setting up an ingathering in your conference.
- Get together with another, or a few other churches in your area to fill and pack a trailer or truck, with volunteers to load and drive the quilts and kits to the warehouse.
- Use your church newsletter, bulletin, or word of mouth to ask for a volunteer from your congregation or town who would be willing to deliver the quilts and kits.
- The warehouses accept items year-round. If you are dropping items off, please call ahead for driving directions and hours of operation. Lutheran World Relief, 398 East Richmond Street, South St. Paul, MN 55075. Telephone number: 651-457-9009.

Another way to help others in need is through Lutheran Disaster Response to help survivors of severe storms in Texas.

Lutheran Disaster Response is communicating with and standing ready to support the Texas-Louisiana Gulf Coast Synod, the Southwestern Texas Synod, the Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod, and Lutheran Social Services Disaster Response. Congregations are already conducting relief efforts such as supplying water, food and generators to those in need and opening their doors to serve as shelters. With such extensive damage, long-term recovery may include repairing water-damaged homes, disaster case management and supporting vulnerable populations.

Gifts to "U.S. Severe Storms" will be used in full (100%) to assist those affected by severe storms. You can specifically designate your gift for U.S. Severe Storms. To give, please go to: <https://elca.org/disaster>

Noreen Beranek, Katherine Claussen, Karla Conrad



Mission Growth/Discipleship

Spiritual Gifts

I attended the Pivot Don't Panic Leadership Event last weekend. One of the topics that were discussed was Spiritual Gifts, what gifts do we possess and how do we use them. The Holy Spirit installed spiritual gifts in everyone but not everyone received the same spiritual gifts. The purpose of spiritual Gifts is to unify the body of Christ/Christians in their faith and to produce growth within the church. It is God's plan to use us and our spiritual gifts to build up God's church as identified in our WELCA purpose statement. "As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship by Jesus Christ and empowered by the Spirit; we commit ourselves to grow in faith, to affirm our gifts, and support each other in our callings. We shall engage in ministry and action and promote healing and wholeness in the Church, the society and the World."

The pandemic has restricted some of our activities when we have been "home bound" over the last few months. How can we use our spiritual gifts to pivot from what "Was" to what "Is" when changes are thrust upon us? The Holy Spirit has given each of us Spiritual Gifts. Some of which are: Leadership, giving, hospitality, music, service, teaching, writing, artistry administration, discernment, evangelism, faith, intercession, knowledge, mercy, musical instrumental, pastoring, skilled craft and/or wisdom. The Spiritual Gifts enable and guide us to conduct some of our existing tasks in new ways.

Some ways that you may use these Spiritual Gifts may include; purchase materials for personal care or Health kits to assemble at home or in a small socially distant group. Use the welca.org website to learn of writing letters to others that may need some encouragement, and adding a favorite Bible verse. These letters will be sent out to others and you may get a letter in exchange. Assemble a small gift and mail off to girls in your church that have gone on to college; tell them their church is thinking of them. Purchase gift subscriptions to Gather magazine for older ladies or ladies with a limited income in your church or community. Help at a Food Shelf or other distribution centers. Volunteer for Criminal Justice programs. Make lap quilts for nursing homes, hospitals and treatment centers. Those of you who have musical Spiritual gifts, the opportunities are endless to share your music and your faith throughout the community. Also needed are Speakers for meetings, conventions, school activities. All SHARE, SHARE, SHARE YOUR GIFTS.

All of these gifts are needed in our communities. As disciples, we each hold our gifts in trust for use in the community. Picture our bodies as gift boxes, entrusted to our care to bring forth when the community has need.

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.

Dianne Doscher, Betty Brandt, Janet Hagen

Pivot Don't Panic Leadership Event



On February 18, 19, 20, over 200 synodical presidents and synodical board members came together for a ZOOM meeting to learn how to be leaders and stay connected during these uncertain times. [This event took the place of the yearly Conference of Presidents Meeting – normally held in Chicago IL.]

Those attending the virtual meeting from SW MN Synod, along with President, Joan, were: Vice-President Linda Magnuson and fellow synodical Board Members: Janet Hagen, Louise Ferry, Noreen Beranek and Katherine Claussen. (Joan's comments can be found in her President's Report in this issue) Read on to find out their views and comments of the event!

Wish you could have attended the event? You can watch the main session videos on the WELCA website! Click the link here to check it out: <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/pivot>

Pivot Don't Panic Participation Comments

When President Joan sent out the word that one more board member needed to volunteer to participate in the leadership event, I dragged my feet until the last minute to respond. And I am thankful I didn't let the opportunity pass by.

It was good to be surrounded remotely by WELCA women from across the country. We were divided into small groups to make discussions and sharing possible. In my group women were from the Chicago area, the upper peninsula off Michigan, northeastern U.S. and southeastern Minnesota.

The sharing of the theme "Pivot, Don't Panic" and other ideas seemed to spring some hope and excitement that we will once again be gathering together...let's look forward!

Highlights for me: Bible study by Rev. Dr. Wyvetta Bullock – Jesus makes it possible to pivot. To turn and look at opportunities and make another choice. Bishop Eaton stated the church is rooted in tradition, but radically relevant. Each of us should be activated so more people know the way of Jesus and discover community, justice and love.

As we travel through Lent and await springtime, I'll share a line from a favorite hymn that was shared...."Ponder anew what the Almighty can do".

Linda Magnuson

I was greatly motivated by attending the "Pivot, Don't Panic" meetings. It was very interesting to hear how other states and groups had pivoted and made changes in how they approach their purpose in the WELCA. I felt somewhat guilty that I had not done more in our area. I feel as if I and perhaps many others have been at a standstill over the past year. I know that this is not the case for everyone, and this is wonderful if your units and groups have continued the work of the church in different ways.

I came out of these meetings with a goal to motivate others in our synod, conference, and in my own church to come back to our work for the Lord. We may need to pivot to alternative methods such as with the capability of Zoom meetings for boards and Bible studies. I am deeply grateful for this opportunity to have attended and found it to be very motivational as I am sure was the plan. Let's get back to our work for the Lord and pivot in a way that continues to provide support for the WELCA organization! Thank you.

Louise Ferry

Thank you for the opportunity to be a participant in Pivot-Don't Panic. The packet of information that we got to prepare us was excellent. Seeing participants from all over the United States and the enthusiasm they shared with us was great. I hope that I can share that with our local group. You are a gifted child of God.

Noreen Beranek

The theme for the conference of Presidents was "Pivot: Don't Panic." A definition of pivot is the central point, pin, or shaft on which a mechanism turns or oscillates. The Bible study pointed out that God as our pivot we are grounded and centered and able to adjust to changes in our world. We were reminded of women in the Bible who pivoted. The familiar story of baby Moses whose mother, sister and even Pharaoh's daughter played a part in saving Moses' life. But the story that fascinated me was the story of the Hebrew midwives who were instructed by Pharaoh to kill male newborns of Hebrew women. Read Exodus 1:15-22 to learn how they pivoted.

The small group discussions were good to learn what women are doing in other parts of the country to stay connected with COVID restrictions in place.

Information on resources available through Women of the ELCA was a good update and made me aware of unfamiliar resources.

The closing service was excellent – the readings, message, hymns, responsive readings tied the conference together well.

Katherine Claussen

The initial information on the homework that was expected to be completed prior to the first session sparked my interest. The making of the Thankoffering containers, the Zoom etiquette, and the assessment of our Spiritual Gifts, all led to how these meetings were all being tied together. The assessment led to show us which gifts, that the Holy Spirit gave to us and were unique to each of us. No two people have the exact same Spiritual Gifts. Now that we know of our special gifts, it is crucial to God's plan that we use them.

I really enjoyed the Bible studies on the Biblical leaders who did show the PIVOT instead of PANIC situations. The breakout sessions were awesome, dividing over 200 people into groups of five people that we probably had never met before. A very good discussion was on going in each session.

We closed the meeting with the Thankoffering Service. The inspirational service consisted of hymns, prayers, and readings and left us with the message of Rejoice and be glad in the light of God's love! Let us go forth in peace to share the good news.

Janet Hagen

SCENIC VALLEY UPDATE

Due to COVID concerns, Scenic Valley Conference has decided to cancel both spring and fall gatherings for 2021. If you have an update for your conference, please send information to swmnwelca@gmail.com one month before the next publication.

Mission Community/Justice

This is a difficult time in our world and society for the issues related to social and racial justice and inequality. Since the death of George Floyd, our world has become quite aware of the social inequalities that are apparent. According to Galatians 3:28, "So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free men, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus." This has become somewhat of a political agenda and it should not be seen in this way unless this is the way that we might be making change. As Lutherans, there is more that we can do.

Some of us would rather sit back and reply that it does not affect those of us in the rural area where diversity is not so much of a problem. But I would encourage all of us to think differently in that not talking about the concept of social and racial injustice is in fact encouraging it to continue. And is this what we as Christians are taught to do? According to Proverbs 31: 8-9, "Speak up for people who cannot speak for themselves. Protect the rights of all who are helpless. Speak for them and be a righteous judge. Protect the rights of the poor and needy." But how can we in the rural areas do this?

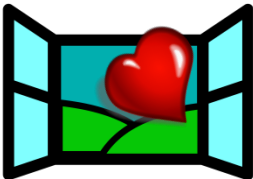
We are encouraged to first learn more about the topic of racism and injustice. There are several books at the current time that can be a learning experience for us as well as forums and book clubs. Our SW MN Synod has a group, the SW MN Synod Racial Justice Network which meets by Zoom

the 3rd Tuesday of each month to talk about these issues. WELCA also has a Facebook group called the Racial Justice Advocacy Network which offers many discussions and information on this topic. You are invited to request membership in this group. On the WELCA website, it states the following: "Living into our baptismal call we are a network of bold women working towards systemic change through racial justice education and advocacy." These are just a few of the ways that we can do this.

We often want to hear those of color talk to us about their experiences which is fine, but it is important to also reach out on our own to learn more and that is the challenge for each of you in the SW MN Synod. Learn as much as you can about this subject and become involved with conversations on the subject. If you hear words that do not reflect our mission, perhaps it is necessary to be bold and say something. We are called upon to pivot in our actions to be bold as called upon. Blessing to all of us on this journey of working to make change as the Lord would want us to do!! I pray that God will continue to work through our groups in order to move towards racial and social justice and equity in our communities and in the world. Prayer is powerful and can also bring about change!

Louise Ferry, Kim Christianson, Jane Tongen

Looking Out My Window by Joan



"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take." Proverbs 3:5-6

COVID-19 has affected us all to some degree – some more than others and some of us may feel we haven't been that greatly impacted by it, but none the less – we are in this together!! What a fitting verse I read the other day during a morning devotion time. As we look forward to living a "new-normal" life again, many of us can honestly say that some days we really don't know where we are headed.....but as long as we are focused on the ONE who does, we can trust that we are headed in the right direction!!

Scripture reminds us to trust in the Lord with all of our hearts. Our feelings reside in our hearts, but our faith must take precedence over our feelings. We must hand our hearts over to Him and put our hope and confidence in God. Acknowledging God in all our ways simply means to bring Him into our life choices before we try to figure it all out!

We process and store a large amount of information in our minds, and it is here that the enemy fires away, so we need God – we need not lean on our own understanding. So much of what is happening in this world of ours both locally and globally is hard for us to understand. It can be so easy to trust our own instincts which can lead us astray. Instead we need to acknowledge God and remember to rely on His guidance in every path we take. If we listen to His words than we will be directed to the choices we need to make.

God is faithful and trustworthy even when we aren't. We can choose to trust Him in daily life or go it alone in our own strength. Trust is active faith. It requires acknowledging God for who He is and our need for Him. When we become His child, we learn this step by step!

Daily read the reminders of God's faithfulness in His Word to help direct our prayers and to remember throughout the day as we trust in Him!

*We are all living stones in this world. We are surrounded by the light of Christ!
When we run alone, it's called RACE
When God runs with us, it's called GRACE*

SYNODICAL BOARD 2020-2021

President:

Joan Iverson*

23308 County Road 54, Lamberton, MN 56152
507-445-3388 507-227-8670 (Cell)
jackjoan73@gmail.com
Congregation: Old Westbrook Lutheran, Westbrook
Conference: Shetek (1st term expires 2020)

Vice-President:

Linda Magnuson

PO Box 105, Cottonwood, MN 56229
507-423-5243 507-828-7544 (Cell)
lindamag@charter.net
Congregation: Christ Lutheran, Cottonwood
Conference: Prairie (2nd term expires 2021)

Secretary:

Jill Duncan

PO Box 745, Lester Prairie, MN 55354
320-395-2960 320-420-6284(Cell)
jillyd58@hotmail.com
Congregation: Bethel Lutheran, Lester Prairie
Conference: Crow River (1st term expires 2021)

Treasurer:

Maria Lokensgard*

37980 State Highway 22, St Peter, MN 56082
507-246-5828 507-317-0365 (Cell)
mandem.loke@gmail.com
Congregation: Scandian Grove, St Peter
Conference: MN Valley (2nd term expires Jan 2021)

Board Members At Large:

Noreen Beranek**

PO Box 83, Gibbon, MN 55335
507-834-6817
naberanek@gmail.com
Congregation: Augustana Lutheran, Gibbon
Conference: MN Valley (1yr expires 2021)

Betty Brandt*

1259 Bradford St SE, Hutchinson, MN 55350
320-587-9655 218-244-5219 (Cell)
cookingbetty@gmail.com
Congregation: River of Hope, Hutchinson
Conference: Crow River (2nd term expires 2020)

Kim Christianson*

1300 Englewood Rd, Marshall, MN 56258
507-530-2301 (Cell)
christianson.kim@gmail.com
Congregation: First Lutheran, Marshall
Conference: Prairie (2nd term expires 2020)

Katherine Claussen**

1030 70th St NE, Montevideo, MN 56265
320-894-8441
stanclau@meekercoop.net
Congregation: Buffalo Lake Lutheran, DeGraff
Conference: Lakeland (1yr expires 2021)

Karla Conrad

175 30th Ave, Jasper, MN 56144
507-215-1624 605-331-1287 (work)
conradkarla@gmail.com
Congregation: Jasper Lutheran, Jasper
Conference: Shetek (2nd term expires 2021)

Dianne Doscher

208 11th St So, Benson, MN 56215
320-368-0479(Cell)
e.ddoscher@charter.net
Congregation: Our Redeemer's, Benson
Conference: Glacial Ridge (1st term expires 2021)

Louise Ferry*

920 70th St NE, Benson, MN 56215
320-843-2477 320-766-3554 (Cell)
lferry56215@yahoo.com
Congregation: Shepherd of the Hills, Benson
Conference: Glacial Ridge (1st term expires 2020)

Janet Hagen

1212 Parkside Dr, Marshall, MN 56258
507-829-9916
hagen_janet@yahoo.com
Congregation: Rock Valle Lutheran, Echo
Conference: Scenic Valley (1st term expires 2021)

Jane Tongen

1442 Division St E, Brownton, MN 55312
320-328-4176 320-510-1710 (work)
jt3205101726@gmail.com
Congregation: Grace Lutheran, Brownton
Conference: MN Valley (2nd term expires 2021)

SW MN Synod Staff Liaison:

Pastor Kathryn Skoglund

PO Box 499, Redwood Falls, MN 56283
507-627-9047 (work)
kathryn.skoglund@swmnelca.org

Communicator Editor:

Christina Nelson

905 Meadow Ln, Willmar, MN 56201
320-412-0510 (Cell)
swmnwelca@gmail.com