

Visions

A Closer Look at the Virginia Synodical Women's Organization



SPRING 2020



See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. (*Song of Solomon 2:11-13*)

LEADERSHIP CLOSELY MONITORING COVID-19 VIRUS AND IMPLICATIONS

by Women of the ELCA (from <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/>) 3.12.2020 | Gathering 2020, News, Triennial Convention 2020

Women of the ELCA's churchwide president Lisa Plorin and its executive director Linda Post Bushkofsky are closely monitoring the COVID-19 virus and its implications for the upcoming convention (July 14-16) and gathering (July 16-19).

"To be honest, the virus is preoccupying my thoughts these days," Bushkofsky said. "With circumstances changing rapidly and with attendant uncertainties, the considerations are many. Of course, the health and safety of our participants is a priority."

At this time, Plorin and Bushkofsky agree that the best approach is "to proceed with both events, to engage vendors and service providers in conversations about the 'what ifs,' and to consider alternate plans should they become necessary."

The churchwide executive board will discuss the issue at its April 24-25, 2020, meeting in Milwaukee, Wis.

Leadership is tracking all travel restrictions issued by the U.S. Government, information and guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the World Health Organization (WHO).

The organization will continue to provide updates as we know more. If you have any questions, please contact us using the contact form at the top of the site.

We also encourage you to sign up for Bold Connections to receive the latest updates by email.

Helpful Links:

People at Risk for Serious Illness from COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>

Share Facts About COVID-19: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/about/share-facts.html>

If you have any questions or concerns about Virginia Synodical Women's events, please contact Jody Smiley, jdsmiley29@comcast.net or any member of your board.



Just Love – 2020 Triennial Gathering

Women from across the ELCA and international guests will gather for the Eleventh Triennial Gathering in Phoenix, Arizona under the theme “Just Love” July 16-19, 2020 following the Triennial Convention. It’s an exciting event and one that we hope you’ll consider attending!

To help with the costs, the VSWO established the Betty Wilson Triennial Scholarship Fund to support attendance at the Triennial Gathering. While we initially thought this would be a one-time scholarship, contributions have continued to be donated in Betty’s memory. A decision was made to split the scholarship funds among all VSWO members who register for Triennial Gathering. If you have registered for the Gathering, please email Judy Castele at jlcasteele@rockbridge.net before July 1, 2020. VSWO participants attending the Gathering will each receive a portion of the scholarship funds to defray costs to convention.

If you don’t want or need the assistance, please still notify me of your plans to attend. We’re arranging a get-together with our Sister Synod of NW Minnesota and I’ll keep you up-to-date on the plans.

Join us in Phoenix for *Just Love!*

Judy Castele
VSWO Secretary, Triennial Gathering Promoter

Editor’s note: *As of this publication 3/22/20, Triennial is STILL A GO. If there is a change in plans, our president Jody Smiley and conference leaders will let you know.*

MEET KAREN VORIS

Executive Board Member, Women of the ELCA

Our Churchwide Representative for the
VSWO Convention



Karen Voris was elected to the executive board of Women of the ELCA for her second term in July 2017. She serves on the programs and communication committee and executive committee.

Previously, Karen served as president and vice president of the Alaska Synodical Women’s Organization (1A). As part of her work with the ASWO and the Alaska Synod council, Karen had the privilege of joining Inupiat (Eskimo) Lutherans in their ministries in the villages of Nome, Shishmaref and Brevig Mission on the Seward Peninsula.

A resident of Eagle River near Anchorage, Karen has been an active member of Central Lutheran Church in Anchorage for many years. She is working part time at her church as a financial and membership secretary.

She sings in the church choir and serves as an assisting minister and a eucharistic minister for homebound members. She worked with the high school youth group for many years, teaching Sunday school and taking teens to gatherings and on a mission trip to Guatemala. Karen has also served on her church council as a member and as president of her congregation.

Karen grew up and began her teaching career in Montana. She visited Alaska on vacation and has never left, saying that she’s “on an extended vacation.” She is now retired after teaching special education at all grade levels and working as an early interventionist for families with young children who have disabilities.

Karen and her husband, Bob, have two sons. Karen enjoys spending time with friends and family, baking, cross country skiing, hiking, exploring the outdoors and learning to knit.

MISSION TEAMS

JUSTICE MISSION TEAM

Let's End Human Trafficking

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery that occurs in every state, including Virginia. It is not limited to sexual slavery, but includes any form of forced labor. *"This crime occurs when a trafficker uses force, fraud, or coercion to control another person for the purpose of engaging in commercial sex acts or soliciting labor or services against his/her will. 'Force, fraud, or coercion' need not be present if the individual engaging in commercial sex is under 18 years of age."* The NHTH (National Human Trafficking Hotline) says that so far this year, *in Virginia alone*, there have been 98 cases of human trafficking.

At the 2014 and 2017 Women of the ELCA Triennial Conventions, voting members voted to bring awareness to and prevent human trafficking. You can find Women of the ELCA-produced resources such as "My Neighbor Is Not For Sale" by Cherish All Children, "Understanding & Responding to Human Trafficking," and "Human Trafficking 101" plus much more information by going to www.womenoftheelca.org/ministry-action/justice/human-trafficking.

If you would like to learn more about what your unit or conference can do to raise awareness of and prevent human trafficking, please contact the Justice Mission Team, Sylvia Eley, seley2005@msn.com and Shelia Sanchez, yeshuabear@aol.com.

STEWARDSHIP MISSION TEAM

This year we are supporting **New Creation** for our Love Offering. The following is taken from their web site to give you an idea of what they are about. If you would like to see more, you can visit their website at www.newcreationva.com.

"New Creation is a faith-based nonprofit creatively counteracting sex trafficking with a local heart + global approach. We offer survivor-made goods and fair trade accessories in our shops, as well as provide prevention education on the issue of human trafficking.

***What Can I Do Here, Where I Am, With What I Have?** The answer to that question for Steve and Sabrina was to turn their home office into a boutique to begin selling survivor-made Ugandan beads in order to help keep the women employed. Today, New Creation partners with over 40 organizations from around the world who work to provide ethical jobs for survivors of trafficking along with vulnerable women and men at risk of being trafficked. We also work hands-on designing and developing products directly through both our Uganda and Moldova partnerships. We wholeheartedly believe, through the evidence we have seen, that by providing a fair wage and dignified work within these partnerships, we can continue to fund rescue and restoration around the world."*

~ Edith Blake
Stewardship chair



Need Ideas for the VSWO 2021 Service Project

Each year the VSWO board recommends a service project for units and conference to emphasize during the coming year. In past these projects have been international, national, and local. A requirement we have had in the past is that the project be such that units and conferences could deliver the items easily. That could be a local group such as our request that women make blankets for the Linus Project in their areas, or if it is an international organization like Lutheran World Relief, it is easy to get those items to a central delivery point. We need your ideas on organizations and ministries that would benefit from our support. This joint effort has been a fulfilling way for our women to connect our talents and resources for a common goal. Please contact anyone on the VSWO board with your ideas. Thanks for all that you do in your congregations, communities, and the world. You make a difference!

VSWO CONVENTION NEWS

The 33rd Annual Virginia Synodical Women's Organization (VSWO) Convention will be held at Salem Lutheran Church in Mt. Sidney, Virginia on July 31 – August 1, 2020. The theme is "Justice/Love/Service" and the convention scripture verse is Micah 6:8 "...and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

The convention hymn will be "We Are Called." As planning progresses and more details are available, the convention committee will keep you informed of the latest updates through *Visions*, the VSWO website, and our Facebook page.

**All that matters is that we are all a small puzzle piece in the whole big puzzle picture and when all the pieces come together each of our little bits add up to make a big difference that's what is so wonderful about being a part if the Women of the ELCA.
Our little bits are enough.**



Hello, Lucky Ladies 😊

If you are receiving this email you are on my list for Conference Coordinators, either officially or as a good, reliable contact person!

Some of you already know your assignment for our VSWO Convention this summer, which is being hosted by the most gracious and very excited women from Salem Lutheran in Mt. Sydney. The dates for our convention are July 31 and August 1. Lots of information will be coming soon in our next *Visions* newsletter. This email is to let you know the full list:

Central Valley, Barbara Stover	Pages for Election
Germana, Carol Bailey	Ushers
Highlands, Carol Johnson	Communion Assistants (Page Conference can also help with this.)
New River, Alice Schneider	Table Decorations
Peninsula/Tidewater, Sheila Sanchez	Registration
Richmond, Jackie Casey	Lectors
Communion Assistants - Page	Service Project - Tidewater/Peninsula
Lectors - New River	Snacks - First Lutheran, Norfolk
Pages - Southern Valley	Table Decorations - Germanna
Registration - Southern/Highland	Ushers - Central Valley
Southern Valley, Doris Grant	Greeters and Communion Elements (supplied by Good Shepherd)
VSWO Board	Snacks

If you have any questions or comments or just want to bend my ear 😊 contact me by email or by phone: 540-320-3369

Thanks a bunch!!
Lavelva Stevens
VSWO Conference Coordinator

From Our VSWO President

I have a confession to make. My husband and I always do a project during my Christmas break. Virginia Tech closes from Christmas through New Year's. This year we painted our upstairs bedrooms. What is now our guest room was our son's room. We have painted a couple of times since he was a baby (thirty-two years ago) but for some reason we neglected painting the closet (my confession). I would like to think it was our very busy schedules, but I think in reality, it may lean more towards laziness. Well, this year we broke down and painted it.

As I was painting, I remembered when we had to rush to get the room done before I went into labor (again a confession of procrastination). I think we literally finished it just days before he was born. I remembered those early years when we were finding our way, and the amazing joy that he brought into our lives. Then there was the memory of the sadness we felt when he went to school in Missouri, 12 hours away from Blacksburg. I know you think I must have spent days in this closet, but it was only a few hours.

As I looked at the fresh new paint job, my mind wandered to how I could relate this to the VSWO and WELCA. If you think about our organization, just as that 32-year-old paint, the past has provided us with a great foundation and memories. But that closet really needed some fresh paint to bring out its best. I constantly hear women in Virginia and across WELCA say that we need younger women, new leaders, and not just keep "recycling" the same "old" folks. As a second time around president of the VSWO, I agree — but how do we do this?

At every board meeting and gathering of all the presidents of synodical organizations, the question of how to involve more women in WELCA is discussed. I wish I could say there is one great answer but obviously there isn't, or everyone would be doing it. The VSWO and WELCA would be thriving and growing. In my heart I feel we all can help. A big first step may be to do some inward looking like I did when I was in that closet. Are you doing the same things the same way? Are they encouraging new women to want to take part in your unit and your ministries? Are you really as welcoming to new ideas as you think you are? The honest answers to these questions could help re-innervate your unit and increase the ministry and impact you have on your congregation, the community, the VSWO, and WELCA.

Now how can the VSWO encourage and attract new women leaders? As president I am going to encourage the board to ask the same questions I have asked you. One thing is to elect fresh leaders with some new ideas. We need your help identifying and encouraging these new leaders; mentoring these younger women is an excellent form of ministry. Please encourage women in your units to run for the board. I can tell you it is a wonderful experience. You make new friends and get involved in ministries outside your own congregation.

The board is seeking names to serve on the nominating committee and also for nominees for the board and officer positions. Please let me or anyone on the board know if you are interested or have the name(s) of someone who would like to serve. WE NEED YOUR HELP!

We don't need a full remodeling. We just need a little fresh paint to supplement our great foundation.

Submitted by your "refreshed" not "recycled" president: Jody Smiley

Treasurer's Report

From the VSWO Treasurer to all of the unit treasurers in Virginia. I want to thank everyone for their time and effort in being a unit treasurer and for responding to me with changes. If there is a unit treasurer that did not receive my introduction letter, please contact me and I will get it out to you as soon as possible. If anyone has any questions, please contact me. I know that I may not hear from many of you in the near future as everything has been canceled due to this terrible virus and hope you all remain safe and healthy.

Deniese Powell
2901 Black Lick Rd.
Rural Retreat, VA 24368
PH: 603-630-5628

DURING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH, TELL YOUR STORY

by Valora Starr 3.16.2020 Posted on womenoftheelca.org

I started my Women's History Month celebration with an outing of a group of women and their granddaughters. The first activity was brunch. It was a wonderful time watching their faces as we showed them photos of ourselves, our moms and grandmothers as girls and young women. There was much laughter when one of the younger ones proclaimed, "that looks like me, Grammy," and her big squeal to learn the girl in the photo was Grammy! Establishing familial connections and time relationships was necessary for this conversation.

I was pumped when my turn came. As one of the elders in the group, I realized that we were sharing history through our stories. And, even more important was the history we were making.

With the oohs and aahs and questions about the dress my grandma was wearing (Why did it look like Harriet Tubman's?), I had the opportunity not only to tell Harriet's story, but to tell Grandma Bettye's. Each photograph brought with it her-story and the history of her contemporaries.

I am well aware of how stories get distorted, including those of women, people of color, people who struggle financially. Women do not control the narrative.

WHAT IS HISTORY?

Dictionaries offer the definition of history as a tale, story, or a chronological record of significant events. Nothing more; nothing less. History is not a controlled story told by people of notoriety. It is our on-going everyday life story told over and over again.

I love the African proverb, "*Until the story of the hunt is told by the lion, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.*"

These wise words empower me to share more stories with my new young girlfriends about Harriet Tubman and Florence Nightingale and about women whose names will never appear in books or on the lips of the hunter. And, for sure, I must always include my story and help them to begin to live and tell their own.

As you celebrate the rest of this month, think about your story. Who has shaped it, and who's telling it? Who are the women in the Bible, your family, church, and community that have shaped who you are? Celebrate them this month and include some four-year-olds. It will be quite the celebration!



Grandma Bettye, left, and Harriet, right (The

TUESDAY PRAYER

Our Purpose Statement begins by acknowledging that we are a **community of women**. As we live into this new reality of a pandemic, efforts to reduce physical community contacts abound (also known as "community mitigation strategies"), and for good reason. But thanks to our faith grounding and modern communication methods, we can remain in community even as we practice physical (social) distancing, for we know that there is no social distancing in God's love and grace.

You are invited to join Lutheran women across the church in prayer every Tuesday at noon (in your time zone). Use the simple approach offered here, reflecting on God's word, offering prayers and reflecting on your self-care and the care of others. [Download the prayer sheet here](#) and distribute widely among the women in your congregation, your circles, even your friends and family. We will pray in community through this pandemic, resting sure in the knowledge that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (*Romans 8:38-39*). <https://www.womenoftheelca.org/blog/news/pray-with-lutheran-women-across-the-church-every-tuesday-at-noon>

Waiting

© Edith Blake

Waiting for you Lord during this Lenten season
May we be open to your guidance and wisdom
Reflecting on our lives as we grow in grace

Let our light so shine that others will see you
Upholding one another in prayer
Strengthen our love for you
May we abide in your peace
Awaiting your resurrection

Years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture. The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones.

But no. Mead said that the first sign of civilization in an ancient culture was a femur (thighbone) that had been broken and then healed. Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die. You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts. No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery. Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilization starts, Mead said."

We are at our best when we serve others.
Be civilized.

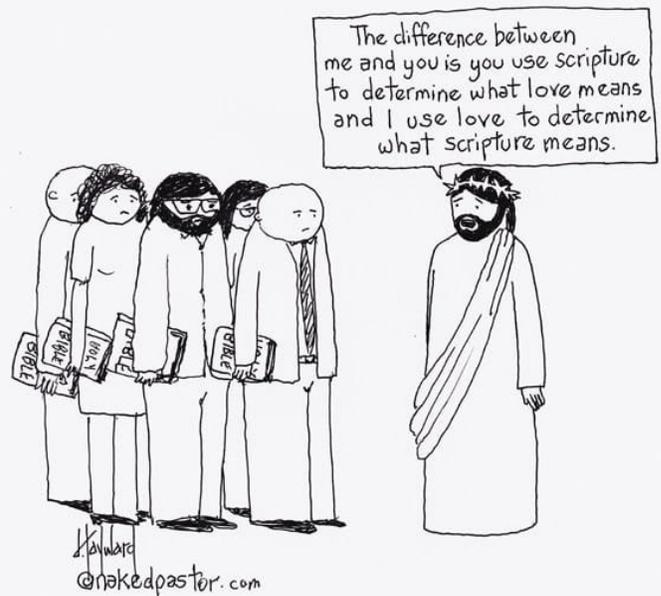
[Ira Byock, in his book *The Best Care Possible: A Physician's Quest to Transform Care Through the End of Life*]

NOTICE: In the near future, a new VSWO Virginia Synodical Women's Organization Facebook PAGE will be established. We are presently a group, but a page will allow us to feature our website. A message will be posted to the group when the new page is available.

Note to self...
Trust that allows us to
embrace uncertainty has
three aspects:

Belief in the provision of God
Belief in the promises of God
Belief in the power of God
Pete Wilson

©Write to self Daily Reminders For The Broken Hearted by Debbie Kay



Where can we go to find God if
we cannot see Him in our own
hearts and in every living being.

Swami Vivekananda

Virginia Synodical Women's Organization
Genie Brown
Visions Circulation Manager
5517 South Village Drive
Roanoke, VA 24018

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit# 212
Roanoke VA



There's an old saying: "May you live in interesting times." To say that we live in "interesting times" is a profound understatement! The economic, political, social, and physical norms around which we plan our lives have been upended in a matter of weeks. Every day brings new information, new causes for more stress, new accusations of one faction against another – and new protocols for protecting ourselves and others. That adage is actually a translation of an old Chinese curse! We can begin to see its meaning.

But God gives us a promise in Isaiah 43:19. "*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland!*" This "new thing" for us, now, manifests in creative ways of managing "social distancing": online worship, more telephone and email contact with each other, a plethora of activities posted online for parents whose children are now at home. Our pastor conducted Bible Study this week using Zoom, which allowed us to interact face-to-face but "distanced." God is making for us "a way through this wilderness" of uncertainty and "streams" [of kindness and creativity] in what some would call a "wasteland" of economic upheaval.

God knows where all of this is headed. God will see us through our "interesting times."



Women of the
ELCA 