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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHARES 30 LOVES AND HOPES

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Women of the ELCA will celebrate a milestone in June—30 years of ministry, Linda Post Bushkofsky, executive director of the organization, told synodical women's organization presidents gathering in Chicago Feb. 16-19.

"It will have been 30 years since women gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to create our organization," she said, giving 15 reasons she loves Women of the ELCA and 15 hopes she has for the organization.

After providing a bit of 1987 nostalgia—gas cost 89 cents, stamps were 24 cents, average monthly rent was \$395, and a Ford Escort was \$6,895—she offered encouragement for the future.

Of 64 synods, 63 presidents or their representatives were in Chicago for an annual Conference of Presidents' meeting. Six representatives from Women of the ELCA's executive board also attended.

Participants attended workshops on leadership, stewardship and writing memorials. They heard from ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton. They learned how to hold conversations about a proposed ELCA social statement on women and justice. They participated in a [Café event](#). And they made [labyrinths for the Tenth Triennial Gathering](#).



Presidents gave \$7,490 in offerings that were split three ways: Katie's fund (\$1,800); [Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative](#) (\$1,800); and Women of the ELCA's General Fund (\$3,770). They also collected \$4,540 in gift cards and cash that will go to Beacon, an interfaith collaborative of congregations ending homelessness through housing, shelter and advocacy based in Saint Paul, Minn.

Of Women of the ELCA, Bushkofsky said, "Like many of you, I've been involved in [the organization] since the beginning. And, for the last 15 years, I've had the privilege of serving as the executive director. I've built up a whole lot of love for this organization, and in the spirit of our impending anniversary, I thought I'd share a bit of that love with you."

Bushkofsky said, in no particular order, what she loves about Women of the ELCA is that:

1. You can sit down with a participant in Women of the ELCA anywhere—at a synodical convention, in a congregation, at the airport—and immediately strike up a meaningful conversation that describes your faith.
2. Those who wrote and then adopted our constitutional documents created a flexible governance structure.
3. Together we have accomplished much more than we could have ever imagined as individuals.
4. Women of all ages study and serve side-by-side, from teens to octogenarians, and then beyond octogenarians.
5. Our participants engage in Bible study and are among the most biblically literate members of the ELCA. “And that’s extraordinary,” she said. “We have women who have gathered monthly for decades to study the Word and apply it to their lives.”
6. Our women are not afraid to dream big and have tackled huge projects, locally, synodically and internationally.
7. Service is synonymous with our name, and people across the world and close at home are helped through the service of our women.
8. We have led the church with several initiatives. “Three in particular being our focus on those living in poverty, our racial justice work and for the last 12 years, our work to end human trafficking. We have led the church in all those things. Sometimes we show the church how to do it.”
9. Our foremothers helped to make women’s ordination a reality. “And we’ve continued to support and work side-by-side with women on the roster,” she said.
10. Participants generously support our ministries and rise to the occasion when a special call for financial support goes out for our financial need.
11. We’ve embraced Katharina von Bora Luther, made her a role model and created an endowment in her name that exceeds a million dollars at this point. “Who knows what’s going to happen on the other side,” Bushkofsky said, “but if we get a chance to talk to Katie I can’t wait!”
12. We know how to throw a great weekend party filled with worship, study, fellowship, service and inspiration. “And I’m thinking about our triennial gatherings, [the next one coming up this July](#).”
13. We’ve embraced social media and have a lively presence there. When combined with our websites, they create a great electronic community. “We were the first in this church to have a podcast—we started that in 2006—and a smartphone app—we created that in 2011,” she said.
14. Right next to those high-tech ministries, we have high touch-ministries, such as making relief quilts and prayer shawls. “Remember, we helped Lutheran World Relief achieve its goal of making 500,000 quilts in one year.”
15. We’ve helped hundreds of women travel globally and learn from and with their global sisters.

Also in no particular order, Bushkofsky said her 15 hopes for the organization include:

1. I’d love to see our organization grow and involve more women “because I believe there is a unique need for women to gather with other women to talk about and support each other in their faith journeys.”
2. I want our participants to realize the power that is theirs. “We are more than half of the church, and we should act upon that power, shaping and leading the church.”
3. I want us to drop the scarcity mentality and live in and give from the abundance which is ours. “We could do so much more!”
4. I hope we embrace the flexibility given to us in our governing documents and begin organizing ourselves in new and different ways—both in congregations and synodically—ways that work for this time and place.
5. I hope we’ll drop old models that no longer serve their purpose, thankful for how they assisted us in the past, “but saying, ‘We’re done with that.’”
6. I want old stereotypes of our organization to fall away, and people throughout the church begin to know us for who we are “in all our glory and variation. There is no one way of being Women of the ELCA.”
7. I hope that our giving grows—both in the here and now and in our estate giving—so that our financial situation is more secure, so that we can focus on growth and not just getting by. “We have a unique opportunity for our older members to change the future of our organization through planned giving.”

8. I hope we continue to embrace new technology, spreading the Gospel in new and relevant ways, reaching more and more women.

9. At the same time, I hope we never lose the "high-touch" elements of our organization, the hands-on work of quilting and knitting, cooking for the bereaved, praying together.

10. I hope we throw away those seven deadly words, "But we've never done it that way."

11. I want us to become more comfortable with risk and take more risks on account of the Gospel. "We're done being safe; we need to be risk takers."

12. I hope that our health initiative, [Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls](#), brings about significant change in the health of all Lutheran women.

13. I hope we do more collaboratively with other women of faith—not just the "safe" groups we've worked with before. "I want our interfaith cooperation to grow."

14. I want us to work with secular women's groups who share similar concerns and goals. "Think of what could happen when we join our anti-trafficking work with the anti-trafficking work of secular women's groups," Bushkofsky said. "So many groups are doing such fabulous work today, and there is no reason we shouldn't work together and expand what we can accomplish."

15. I hope we grow ever more into the vision of those who gathered in Milwaukee in 1987. "For that I commend to you our [churchwide constitution](#), Article III, that sets out the principles of organization. There you'll find a vision of who we are and who we can be," she said. "And we've only begun in this first 30 years to tap that."

Quoting Franciscan author Richard Rohr, Bushkofsky said that "yearning for a new way will not produce it. Only ending the old way can do that."

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Photos by Sarah Carson: Linda Post Bushkofsky speaks at Conference of Presidents 2017; Roxanne Montague, 6B, North/West Lower Michigan SWO sews a labyrinth

OUR PURPOSE STATEMENT

As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world. [GET INVOLVED »](#)

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