



2016 State of the Organization

Patti Austin

President of the Women of the ELCA

Good Morning, and welcome to your Conference of Presidents.

It's not only a pleasure but an honor to be here with each of you this weekend.

I want to thank you for serving as a synodical president, and let you know that you are -in -a unique place for service and leadership.

The Congregational Units and the Synodical Organizational expressions of Women of the ELCA are the heartbeat of this organization; without your ministries and faithfulness, our purpose could never be accomplished. You and your synodical board are the key communicators to the congregations in your synod; you have both the ability, and responsibility to share our story. Let's look at the state of our organization.

We are standing at the half way mark in this Triennium,

In Charlotte we received a clear mandate, from the reading of Isaiah 58:12 and our memorials that were passed. Together, we have made great headway at restoring streets to dwell in by addressing some of the problems that make our streets unsafe.

Things like, poverty, hunger, human trafficking, child nutrition, violence against women and violence in our schools, just to name a few.

The past two years I have been involved in advocacy work for Human Trafficking in Southeastern Synod and, I look forward to reading the reports on Human Trafficking from each of your synods.

But looking ahead, we have more work to do. We must continue to Re-build the Foundation, and repair the breach by renewing and re-developing our relationships with God and one another.

These new relationships will allow us to address more of the issues that threaten safe streets to dwell in. Over the last 30 years, women have gone from housewives to Chief Executive Officers

And are now serving in Congress and running for president. Now that is a huge transition!

Our staff has made great advances in technology moving us into the 21st century,

connecting us to more women than ever before. But what have we done in our units and on our synodical boards to address the major changes in the responsibilities and schedules of today's women? What have we done to meet women where they are? These are questions I most often ask myself.

For the last 29 years, we have been supporting each other and women and children around the world.

We have been an integral part of preparing women to move into new positions in our church, positions that were once only dreamed of.

But at the same time, we have lost some of the personal connections with the women in our congregations, as they continue to move into these new leadership positions. Ladies, while our organization is currently facing some challenges, we are living into a whole new future, one filled with God's blessings. As women continue to move into leadership positions across America and around the world, the potential for our ministry continues to grow exponentially.

But we need a plan; as leaders, I ask you, during this weekend and after you return home, to think about three questions:

How did you come to be involved in Women of the ELCA?

What do you think is God's purpose for the ministry of the women in your synod?

What vision do you have for the future of your synod and for Women of the ELCA?

Now I want you to think about your purpose, your passion, and your connection.

God has a purpose for everything and for each of us, and He has given us everything we need to accomplish His purpose. Take a look at where your ripples are leading you, how can you best serve your purpose? Focus is critical to fulfilling that purpose; it doesn't just happen.

Prayer is also critical in discovering our purpose; we must be consistently listening and watching for God's guidance. It's that small voice; it's all of those signs pointing the way. Through focus and prayer, God will complete the work He has begun in you. Next comes Passion; it is the driving force in everything we do. God has given us passion to help point the way. This is where we are most effective as leaders. This is where we find ourselves dead in the middle of what God is doing.

Embrace your passion; it's a gift from God. Acting on our passion is like skipping stones across the water and watching for the ripples. Remember, throwing those stones as a child, anticipating how many jumps each would make, how many ripples would be created.

Our passion creates ripples just like those stones; so we wait with great anticipation to see what God might do. The last piece of this organic process is my favorite, connection. Connection is the key to growth; connection is the fruit of our passion and purpose, connection to God, connection to His purpose, connection to women in your units and your synods, connection to women and girls around the world.

This connection became very clear to me in November, on my trip to Tanzania, with Women Building Global Community. This was not a sight-seeing trip, and not a mission trip.

Instead it was the opportunity to walk, work and share with Lutheran women from our country and the women of Tanzania.

Women Building Global Community is designed to reveal our individual and collective power as women of faith in community, and our ability to make a difference. It was about community and communication and most of all "accompaniment." I learned that "Accompaniment" is a mutual relationship, walking together for the sake of the gospel. That's real connection, bonded together in Christ, walking side by side. Are we walking with the women in our synods, and in our units?

I ask this because, if we are to be successful leaders, we must become better communicators; we must learn the art of accompaniment, walking together for the sake of the gospel.

If you read our Purpose Statement, then you know, we are a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

During the past 29 years we have supported, sustained, and connected more than 7,000 active congregational units

We have won well over 150 awards for excellence, content and programing for our resources and publications.

We have provided over \$500,000 dollars in scholarships for Lutheran women.

We have given over 3.5 million dollars in grants here at home and internationally. As a self-funded and totally independent organization we have contributed well over 16 million dollars to the ongoing ministries of the "ELCA." With God's help and guidance, we have changed lives of women and children all around the world.

That's our story; that's our connection. We do more together than we ever do alone. If we are to rebuild the foundation, this work in Christ is the cornerstone.

If we are to repair the breach, we will have to redevelop the relationships with our women in the congregations.

We will have to figure out how to reconnect to those women who have moved into leadership positions with their busy schedules. Ladies, this is where I believe God is guiding us; you are the right person at the right time. You have been called for this special purpose; and God has gifted you with everything you need.

Now let's talk about the hard part; our finances Over the last 18 years annual offerings to Women of the ELCA Church-Wide, that includes "regular offerings and Thank-offerings" have dropped by more than 50% . Because of this reduction of support over the years our organization has had to cut programs, communications and some resources. And if you remember, our staff has been diminished by more than half as well. Ladies this is the financial state of our organization; and it really doesn't seem logical. While women continue to move into new leadership positions and new levels of income,

our offerings continue to decline. This is the challenge that we face. We must rebuild the foundation, and reconnect with these women. We must go and tell our story one congregation at a time.

This will be a challenge, and it will take each and every one of us, but together we can work to be the solution.

Be the change you want to see. The Executive Board started taking some action in 2010 or 2011.

By adopting a policy that encourages each executive board member to commit to and engage in a number of stewardship goals.

The policy asks each board member to contribute what she considers to be significant while being a national representative of this organization, understanding that significant is different to each woman.

The policy also encourages board members to continue to support their congregational units and synodical organizations. I ask each of you, to have this discussion with your board and with your cluster leaders. The executive board also asks each synodical board to spend down your reserves each year.

While I realize this is a short-term fix, it's a start on reframing our thinking about Mission and Money. Increased giving is the only way we can continue to grow our ministry together. I look to each of you, as leaders, to help the board and staff find ways we can improve our outreach, improve our connection, and grow our ministry. I like to dream, it is imperative for the human spirit to have dreams, visions and passion. Dreams are a guiding beacon that shapes our thoughts, our actions and our future. Dream with me, dream, as we grow in service and ministry. Let's fulfill our purpose, act on our passion and grow our connections by accompanying the women in our congregations and around the world. There is a song by Matthew West titled "Do Something" I just couldn't bear the thought of people living in poverty, children sold into slavery. The thought disgusted me,

So I shook my fist at Heaven and said "God, why don't you do something? He said, "I did, I created you"

Thank you, thank you for your service, your passion, and your commitment to Women of the ELCA.