

Greetings to all my faithful sisters in Christ

It's such an honor to be standing here today speaking to you. When I was elected as your Churchwide WELCA President back in July at the Triennial Convention I was overwhelmed to say the least. If you've ever expected a baby, you may be able to relate – there was excitement, anxiousness, and big case of the 'queezies'! My friend and past President Patti Austin gave me these words of advice "just jump in with both feet and go!". Well, that roller coaster is still flying and at times my head is still spinning but I'm thankful for the mentors that have stood here before me. I'm also very thankful for each one of you – not only for your prayers and encouragement, but also for your willingness to serve as presidents of your SWO. It's women like you who are the backbone of this amazing organization. So, THANK YOU!

Each new triennium brings in a new group of women to provide a vision and direction for the Women of the ELCA. You should all be proud of the board that you elected at the convention last summer. Our board is very diverse and each woman brings a unique gift. Two of our newest board members were directly involved in some exciting projects. Joy Michalichuck was involved in the Phebe Hospital Solar Project. If you remember, Joy was the one who presented the resolution to the voting members at our 9th triennial convention in 2014. Voting members went on to support Northeastern Minnesota SWO's efforts to work with RREAL project and the National Lutheran Church Women Fellowship of Liberia to develop a proposal for providing solar power to the Phebe hospital in Liberia. The PV or Phebe initiative is part of RREAL's Skip the Grid division which restores electrical service without having to reconstruct an expensive electrical grid, which was destroyed during Liberia's 15-year civil war. We continue to support this project by forwarding offerings and lifting prayers to our sisters in Liberia. There are some women here today that traveled to Liberia in November for the ribbon cutting ceremony! Thanks be to God!

Pastor Viviane Thomas – also newly elected to the board - is a co-chair serving on the task force that worked on the social statement that will be brought before the churchwide assembly in 2019 in Milwaukee. This document was prepared by the ELCA Task Force on

Women and Justice: One in Christ. It is the task force's draft of this social statement and is an invitation to discern what this church should teach about contemporary issues related to sexism and patriarchy in our society. Again, these are women that YOU elected – so THANK YOU!

And speaking of the triennial convention, I think Linda and the entire churchwide staff need a big round of applause! (CLAPPPPP)

Just some highlights during the business sessions included the affirmation of the ELCA's repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery, encouragement to raise awareness and/or offering tangible support to the people of Flint, Michigan regarding the tainted water, support the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child by stating clearly that it condemns all forms of corporal punishment of children, support the education of the Women of the ELCA to educate themselves about the signs of domestic abuse and violence as well as the services available in their communities.

Our commitment to end Human trafficking is still high on our priority list and we continue to encourage all women to work to end human trafficking and support its victims using resources such as ELCA ministry Cherish All Children's mission model: Pray, Educate, Connect, and Act. January 11 through Feb 4, 2018 was established as a time of prayer in the congregations of the ELCA to end human trafficking.

Having had the opportunity to attend every triennial gathering since it was held in St Louis back in 1999, I have to say that the speakers, bible study leaders, and worship leaders were the best! We were so very fortunate to have Rev Alexia Salvatierra help us examine the systems we are part of that must be challenged. And what a privilege to hear Nobel Peace winner Leymah Gbowee explain to us that All Anew is a way of life, not an event!

Kelly Fryer led us in a wonderful bible study emphasizing our All Anew theme. Did you know that you can go back and read these transcripts from all presenters on the

womenoftheelca.org website? One that I would LOVE to relive again is the closing worship sermon by Rev Angela Khabeb! I can only describe this experience in one word – WOW!

So now I'd like to give you a little taste of what the new board has been up to since our election.

We had our first board meeting last October and it was a wonderful time filled with fellowship, prayer, and thoughtful conversations. We spent some time getting to know each other through ice breakers and establishing prayer partners for the upcoming triennium. We also had the privilege of hearing from Chris Grumm from the Chris Grumm Consulting Group and Consuela Gutierrez-Crosby from the InFaith Foundation. You would remember Chris from her participation in the panel discussions held on the main stage of the gathering in Minneapolis. Chris and Consuela led a workshop called 'Women, Faith and Philanthropy' which gave us tips on story telling which in turn will help us as board members to promote the campaign to raise \$3 million dollars for Katie's Fund. You'll hear more about this on Saturday morning. We also completed the Executive Director 360 review and offered another 4-year contract to Linda Post Bushkofsky. Committees met to discuss matters pertaining the constitution, programs and communications as well as the budget. Our executive committee was elected and joining the 4 officers on this committee are board members: Joy Michalicek, Karen Voris, and Liz Burgess. As you know, some tough decisions had to be made. The 2018 budget allows for a full-time staff of 11, which is a reduction of two – this budget also sets aside adequate funds for the 2020 triennial convention and allows for salary adjustments and raises. It also provides funding for the vacated director of justice position. Yes, a lot was accomplished during our first board meeting, but we still have a lot of work to do!

When I stood in front of you prior to my election I shared with you what this organization means to me. I wholeheartedly believe that the Women of the ELCA has shaped me in to the woman standing in front of you today. I'm passionate about what we stand for, and I can see so much potential for growth within this organization. Our mission statement asks us to act boldly on our faith in Jesus Christ. What does this mean to you? I'd like us to look at the word

“Boldly”. Webster’s dictionary describes ‘boldly’ as ‘fearless and daring; courageous; requiring or exhibiting courage’. Does this describe you? I believe we sometimes take comfort and become rooted in our church basements. When we fail to look outside of those four walls we risk missing out on what our great big world has to offer, and what we can offer to our great big world! This brings to mind the sermon that Reverend Angela preached at the closing worship in Minneapolis. She was so dynamic! I still get goosebumps – her words spoke to my heart. Remember when she said, “Christianity is not comfortable!” “If you are comfortable in Jesus, you are doing it wrong.” I’m not saying that what we do in the confines of our church basement is not important. I know that there is more involved than making quilts and other kits for LWR, but we need to step outside of those walls and get ‘uncomfortable’.

What does that mean? It means we need to step back and evaluate what’s in front of us. We are a blessed community of women created in the image of God. Sisters in Christ, you have been chosen for leadership responsibilities and we can all rejoice in the gifts God has given you and your willingness to offer them for service. When you were installed as leaders in this organization you were asked to encourage others to offer their talents and skills in faithful service. When you look out in to your communities, what do see? Is there that one woman yearning to be invited to participate? Could this be a future leader in your unit? Be bold! Ask! Invite!

Think about your daughters, your grand daughters and great granddaughters. Can you see them sitting in this very room someday as leaders in their church, society, world?

Also, during your installation, you were asked to accept responsibility for the financial and constitutional order of the Women of the ELCA. Have you signed up for Faithful Friends? How about given consistently to Katie’s Fund? I’m proud to tell you that your elected churchwide board is 100% involved in giving offerings. When one of my representatives comes to your convention she will share with you the state of our finances and encourage your participation to give financially, both individually (now or through estate planning) and as a SWO. You will hear about our plans to grow Katie’s fund by another 3 million dollars by our 2020 triennial

gathering in Phoenix making the total in that fund 5 million dollars! YES! 5 MILLION! I believe we can do it!

More women, more giving, two tasks – and it takes each of us to accomplish these two tasks. When you leave here this weekend my prayer is that you all have ignited a spark that will in turn light a fire within your unit and synodical organization. Go out and spread the word about who we are and what have to offer! Let's set a goal to invite one or two new women each time you get together for a gathering or convention. God has a purpose for each of us and he has given us everything we need to accomplish His purpose.

Welcome to the Lutheran Center and this Conference of Presidents. Our planning team has put together a wonderful few days of fellowship, bible study, and information to equip you with the tools you'll need over this next year. I thank you for your time and your prayers, for me, the executive board and the churchwide staff – and I thank God for each of you!

-Message from Churchwide Board President Lisa Plorin to the attendees of the 2018 Conference of Presidents, Feb. 23-25, Chicago, IL

