

## WOMEN OF THE ELCA



So much of being part of Women of the ELCA revolves around the relationships formed as we gather around tables for Bible study, to work on Lutheran World Relief projects, projects for local organizations, and for fellowship. Doing this in our Congregational Units, within our Conferences, and within our Synodical Women's Organization came to a stop because of COVID19. When that happened, no one knew what would happen.

In 2020 and in 2021, only one Conference was able to hold our traditional Spring Gathering. Thanks to Pr. Joan Holden at St. Timothy's in Crystal River for her technical support that allowed Pinelands to hold a combined virtual and in-person Spring Gathering in 2021 that I attended via

Zoom.

Congregational Units were also unable to meet in person, but the Holy Spirit raised up women who were willing to either share their technological experience or were willing to learn how to host a Zoom meeting so groups could meet for Bible study and fellowship. Countless ladies across the Synod, took time to make phone calls to check in with each other, especially those who could not, for whatever reason, join a Zoom meeting.

The Synodical Women's Board and Fall Gathering Planning Committee, after prayer and discussion, decided that attempting to hold the 2020 Fall Gathering in-person was not in the best interests of our ladies. Instead, we held a mini-virtual Gathering with a few workshops, Bible Study led by Pr. Joan Holden, and an inspiring and uplifting worship service led by Pr. Nicole Eastwood.

This year's Fall Gathering theme is "Faith Can Move Mountains" and will be at Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center in Leesburg November 12-14. Pr. Nicole Eastwood will be our pastor for the weekend. We will be following the CDC guidelines in effect at the time of the Gathering.

Because so much of what we do revolves around in-person meetings, communication was a huge concern. Our webmaster, Cheryl Semmel, has done an amazing job of sending out email blasts to get information to our ladies. Of course, that only reaches those ladies who have given us an email address. With that in mind, earlier this year, I mailed over three hundred letters to ladies who had attended a Fall Gathering recently.

One of the traditional outreach projects for WELCA is making mission quilts and assembling various kits for Lutheran World Relief (LWR). Our 2021 LWR Ingathering was a time of stress and anxiety for everyone due to COVID-19. The pandemic even effected our ability to finalize the truck pick up schedule until December of 2020. Nevertheless, we had 71 Church units participating. Because of the pandemic, some units were not able to meet in person, but still contributed 5,060 quilts, 256 baby care kits, 928 personal care kits, 31 fabric kits, and 1,086 school kits. A special thank you to all our coordinators: Mary Bollingberg at Trinity Lutheran in Jacksonville; Donna Person at Christ Lutheran in Fort Lauderdale; Samantha Schnittker at Emmanuel Lutheran in Venice; Pat Zwick at Good Shepherd in Tampa; and Shirley Bow at our newest pick-up site, Holy Trinity in Fort Walton Beach.

Reflecting on the past 16 months or so, I am grateful and blessed to be a part of this organization. My Sisters in Christ across the Synod refused to let a virus keep them from meeting. They stepped up to the challenge, learned new skills, and worked around the obstacles. They were flexible and adaptable, stepping away from “we’ve always done it this way” to embrace new ways of doing things.

Respectfully submitted,  
Phyllis Wade  
President, Florida-Bahamas Synodical Women’s Organization