



## **Introduction to the Lutheran Women's Missionary League** **By Marilyn McClure**

In this introduction to the Lutheran Women's Missionary League (LWML), we will talk about its history, its purpose, how it is organized, the products it produces, and its goals. In addition, we will also share the blessings of participating in the LWML, what it means for the church, and the role LWML has played in the lives of women leaders in our church.

### **History**

The Lutheran Women's Missionary League was officially begun on July 7–8, 1942, at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Chicago, Illinois. This year the LWML will celebrate 77 years of ministry. That's a long time and a lot of work for the Lord's kingdom!

The LWML wasn't the first missionary league to be formed. Even before 1839 when the Saxon founders of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) arrived in the U.S., women of other Christian denominations had already begun to form missionary organizations.

Although there were individual groups as early as 1852, the first attempts to organize women regionally or nationally in our church were in the 1920's. These groups were organized by the wives of the presidents of the seminaries, and their purpose was to sew, mend, wash, and iron for the seminarians who were studying to be pastors.

As early as November of 1929, a planning meeting to have a national Lutheran women's organization was held in St. Louis, and 16 women attended from Midwestern states. The Lutheran Laymen's League (LLL), which was, and still is, the officially recognized men's organization of the LCMS, sent the six men of their executive committee to attend. The LLL offered the women a loan of \$1,000 to begin, but it was not to happen. The Council of Presidents of the LCMS voted against an organization of women in the church, saying that they did not see a need for it, and they were afraid it would take women away from their duties at home. But the women did not give up. They continued to organize locally and by state, and, finally, 13 years later, in 1942, they were officially launched as the Lutheran Women's Missionary League of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

The first publication of the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly*, which is the official publication of the LWML, ran 60,000 copies to be distributed in the districts that were organized. That shows you how strong these women were even before the leaders of our church body were ready to let them be officially organized.



## Organization

Today the LWML has thousands of active members. There are 40 LWML districts (most of them are geographical) and every two years half of the districts elect new presidents, so there are 20 experienced presidents and 20 new presidents.

Each district of the LWML is organized into zones that are regional. Each zone is made up of societies, and the societies vary in size. Societies are organized in churches, but can also come from other places like universities or offices. Sometimes churches may have more than one group. For example, there may be a group of older women who prefer not to go out at night, and they meet during the day. There might be another group that meets in the evening, because they work during the daytime. In that case, there are two groups, but they are considered to be one society because they are from the same congregation. Some societies make quilts. Some are more oriented toward Bible study. Some are more service-oriented. The nice thing is that if you want to have a society, it can be however you want it to be. The LWML offers individual membership if you are in a congregation that does not have an LWML group. Every woman of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is eligible to participate!

One of the things that sets the LWML apart from most other organizations is that it is all-volunteer. People from the business world are usually very surprised to hear that LWML women raise about \$8,000,000 every two years, and it is women who volunteer their time that help all of this happen.

The exception to this is the LWML office staff that handles all of the official business of the organization.

Every time a new president is elected, she appoints, with approval of the Executive Committee, new committee members. Generally speaking, members serve on a committee for two years, and then the president names new members to the committee. This gives opportunities for new people with new ideas to serve.

## Purpose and Goals

Women that serve on national LWML committees meet once a biennium for 3 days. During that time they plan the programs, products, and activities of the LWML. Everything they do is based on the LWML mission statement that says: “The mission of the Lutheran Women's Missionary League is to assist each woman of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in affirming her relationship with the Triune God so that she is enabled to use her gifts in ministry to the people of the world.”



Every two years LWML decides on key goals or Primary Targets that support carrying out the mission statement. All of the planning the committees do has to fit under one of our Primary Targets or Goals.

In 2017-2019 the Goals were stated as follows:

### **Nurturing Faith in Christ**

By God's grace we offer each woman opportunities to be in the Word and to use her unique gifts in God's service.

### **Making our Faith Meaningful**

We equip each woman to make a significant difference in the lives of all people.

### **Sharing Encouragement**

We value each other in Christ, and we accept and encourage each woman to grow in her relationship with others.

Conventions are an important part of the LWML. Every two years (odd-numbered) there is a national convention that takes place in a different region of the country. The LWML plans that event very carefully to give as many opportunities as possible for women from all over the country to participate in a national convention. On the off year there are district conventions, with the exception of a few districts that have a convention every year. For each convention delegates are chosen to do the voting. They elect officers and decide which mission grants will receive funding.

During this Heart to Heart Sisters Program, we will review the convention schedule, the convention manual, and explain how delegates are chosen and voting takes place.

Where does the LWML get its money to operate? Women use Mite Boxes. You know the story of the widow who gave her last mites in the temple and how Jesus pointed out her giving as an example to the Pharisees who were giving large amounts so that people would think they were important. That's where the idea of a Mite Box comes from. It serves as a concrete reminder to us of the need for money to do missions. People — men, women and children — can use them. During each month, we collect coins and bills in our Mite Boxes, always offering a prayer each time for the mission work of the church. In many congregations they collect the funds on a certain Sunday that has been designated each month. Sometimes congregations have a time when people come forward during the service to place their offerings in a large Mite Box, or sometimes people put in their offerings as they leave church.

Over time the LWML has experienced changes. Several years ago the LWML formed a task force to reach out to younger women. Now there is a committee that does that. You will see Young Woman Representatives here who come from each district. The idea is to expose them to what the LWML does and let them know that



they can be a part of it, too. Since 2003, LWML has sponsored a similar program, Heart to Heart Sisters, to do the same for ethnic women of our church. Not only does the LWML grow, but the gifts of young women and ethnic women make the organization stronger and more alive. LWML wants to hear your ideas as ethnic women and wants you to take part in LWML as you bring a new vision for the future.

### **Blessings**

To those of us who have had experience in the LWML, also known as Lutheran Women in Mission, we can tell you that those letters represent a lot of things.

**"Good News"** – The LWML has published hundreds of Bible studies. Every *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* usually has three Bible studies (one of them translated into Spanish) and there are others you can order from the catalog or you can access them online at [www.lwml.org](http://www.lwml.org). There are a few in other languages that are found in the LWML catalog. Women grow in the Word by studying it together.

**"Evangelism"** – The LWML has sponsored numerous projects to help prepare women to reach out to others with the Gospel. They have also supported missions throughout the world. LWML challenges women of the LWML to go on mission trips, experience other cultures, and actively participate in missions of the church. Many women make quilts or do other projects to help people in need.

Over the years, LWML has helped missions worldwide. In many places you can find buildings (schools, hospitals, dormitories, and more) that have been constructed with funds from the LWML. You can speak with missionaries from our church, and they will tell you how much LWML has helped their mission work.

**"Hospitality"** – Not just at your church, but also as you travel around the country, you can visit your LWML sisters in other places. Marlys Taeye Moberg, who has written the history of the LWML, tells about LWML women who have taken in other women's children who were in the area to study or work or they found them places to live. Marlys says that as she and her husband traveled on vacations, she would say, "Oh, so and so lives in this town, we ought to stop and see her." Her husband would tell her, "We can't just stop in on people unexpectedly." She says after they did it a few times and he saw the warmth and hospitality of her LWML friends, when they were on trips he would say to her, "Okay, who do you know in this town?"

**"Sharing"** – We, Melissa and Marilyn, have both been involved with Hispanic ministry for a long time. However, it was here in LWML that we met and became dear friends. We have formed friendships with many people because of our work in LWML. We know we will continue to be friends because we are Heart to Heart Sisters united in Christ.



**"Leadership training"** – This has been a strong emphasis of the LWML. It has prepared women to use their leadership abilities, not only in the organization itself, but also for the church-at-large. Our LWML women serve on synodical boards, boards of our Lutheran colleges, and many committees of the church. They make a difference in our church as they use their skills and ideas to further the work of our church.

**"Togetherness"** – Women of the LWML meet together. They often travel together and room together as you are doing during this convention. We grow in our friendships and build each other up in the faith.

**Compassion, dedication, great clergy relationships, mission trips, and many more words** could be used to describe this organization which is the official women's auxiliary of our church.

All in all, **LWML stands for fun, fellowship, and unforgettable experiences**. We are glad you are a part of it and can be with us here. We hope you will make new friends while you are here and that you will be dedicated to serving the Lord. We also hope this is the beginning of a life-long experience for you with the LWML!