



HEARTLAND HERALD

LUTHERAN WOMEN IN MISSION CONVENTION NEWSPAPER

41ST BIENNIAL CONVENTION • OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Extended Edition!

SUNDAY, JUNE 29, 2025



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Strengthening LWML for Mission and Ministry

As President Eden began her term, she shared her desire to be both purposeful and purpose filled. One outcome of this desire was the 2024 strategic planning, developed by the LWML Board of Directors and facilitated by Dr. Kurt Senske. Through that process, we acknowledged our uniqueness as a volunteer-based organization and the desire to keep a Gospel emphasis with our mission grant support. To do this well, we will need to build volunteer and office staff with specific skill sets, streamline processes, and adapt ourselves to new technology to better serve the organization.

Implementing significant changes is a slow process in a large organization. By taking measured, thoughtful steps forward, we will continue to evaluate our structure and efficiencies, always moving closer to our goals. By streamlining processes, we will make it more pleasurable to *Serve the LORD with gladness!* (Psalm 100:2).



CLOSING WORSHIP

Growing in Grace as we go home

Rev. Cory Burma blessed us as we ended our time together in Omaha. Rev. Burma shared his trust in our Lord in the good times and those times that are more difficult. He shared favorite verses from Psalm 13. *But I have trusted in your steadfast love, I am rejoicing in your salvation, I will sing praise to you for you have dealt bountifully with me* (Psalm 13:5-6). In the midst of troubles and trials, we can still share our praises to the Lord.

The sermon included encouragement for all convention attendees to share their faith as they leave convention, knowing that their Lord is a God of grace and His steadfast love is showered on them abundantly. Lutheran Women in Mission are given the opportunity and honor to share the Gospel, the Good News of God's grace, to extend His kingdom.



Let Us Pray...

Merciful Father, You have called us to find new and everlasting life in Your dear Son, Christ Jesus. By Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may grow in His grace and knowledge and abound more and more in love and good works. Grant safe travel and a joyful homecoming to all who depart this convention. Let the joy of Christ and His Church encourage us for faithful service in our congregations; for to Him be the glory, with the Father and the same Holy Spirit, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.



Sponsor of the 2025 LWML Convention daily newspaper, *Heartland Herald*. Thanks be to God for the continued faithfulness of the LWML.

NEWLY ELECTED OFFICERS

SERVING FROM 2025-2029

Vice President of Christian Life: Shari Miller
Vice President of Communication: Linda Guteres
Vice President of Gospel Outreach: Anne Hartman
Recording Secretary: Dianna Just
Pastoral Counselor: Rev. Michael Schmidt

SERVING FROM 2025-2027

Nominating Committee:

Deaconess Raquel Rojas (Chairman),
Nicole Dowdell, Karen Drury,
Katy Gifford, Dr. Patty Peters



Convention BY THE NUMBERS

3.31:1

COW TO HUMAN RATIO IN NEBRASKA

272

SINGERS IN THE CHOIR

3,436,224

APPROXIMATE STEPS TAKEN
DURING MISSION WALK

73,680

AVERAGE HUGS GIVEN THIS WEEKEND

806

WAKE UP WITH THE WORD
BIBLE STUDY ATTENDANCE

600+

FRIDAY EVENING
BIBLE STUDY ATTENDANCE

2,439

PEOPLE USING WHOVA

\$2,622,270

NEW MISSION
GRANT GOAL



This was the largest Mission Walk in LWML convention history! More than 1,627 men, women, and children raised \$105,590.73 as they trekked across the beautiful Bob Kerry Pedestrian Bridge.

The bridge connects Nebraska and Iowa — making this a doubly historic mission walk taking place in two states! Lush gardens and green spaces, well-groomed trails, and stunning sculptures made the one-mile walk enjoyable for all.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

The next convention is lighting up Oklahoma City, July 8–11, 2027 — hosted by the Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas Districts.



Deaconess Kelly Bristow of the Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch reported that all children are encouraged to focus on their blessings even during troubled times. She closed with, "You are loved. You are enough. God's grace and mercy is here for you."



Deaconess Carol Halter and Chelsea Irwin share their experiences in Hong Kong and The Czech Republic.



Rev. Dr. John Rienke taught the convention body to share the Gospel through ASL, signing, "Jesus loves me. Jesus loves you. Jesus forgives me and you. Jesus will come to meet us and take us to heaven."

MITES IN ACTION & LUNCHEON SPEAKERS

Mission Central

Gary Thies and **Rev. Steve Schulz** shared greetings and news from Mission Central. Last year, God blessed Mission Central and its missionaries with more than \$13 million in gifts — 100% going directly to the mission field. Rev. Schulz shared, "There isn't a missionary in the world right now who has not been blessed by Lutheran Women in Mission." Rev. Schulz led guests on a whirlwind trip around the world, highlighting six regions where LCMS missionaries are serving. In every place, God's Word and Sacraments are being taught and shared. "There are 'goers' and 'senders,'" Rev. Schulz added. "Goers can't go without senders, and senders can't send without goers."

Sharing the Gospel Through Lutheran Braille Workers

Since 2023, **Rachel Potts** has been privileged to serve with Lutheran Braille Workers in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where she resides with her family. As she travels across the eastern United States, she is honored to share the message of Jesus Christ and the impactful mission of Lutheran Braille Workers, ensuring that individuals and churches are engaged in this ministry.

LCMS Missionaries

Rev. Kevin Robson, LCMS Chief Mission Officer, introduced two dedicated missionaries. **Chelsea Irwin**, a native of Lincoln, Nebraska, serves in the Eurasia region by placing and coordinating volunteers to support mission efforts across the area. Since 1981, **Deaconess Carol Halter** has faithfully ministered to the Chinese people in Hong Kong as an Evangelistic Missionary, bringing the hope of Christ through service and outreach. Both missionaries provided inspiring reflections on their work and the ways God is moving through their ministries.

Rev. Kristopher Whitby — Humor, Hospitality, and the Hope of Christ

Rev. Kristopher Whitby spoke of a number of experiences he has had blending humor and hospitality as he shares the profound message of Jesus Christ. Rev. Whitby has a deep desire to share the Gospel and encouraged all of us to, "Share, encourage, grow, and gather together," in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Expanding Support Through Lutheran Family Service

Rev. Max Phillips, Executive Director of Lutheran Family Service and a parish pastor in Iowa, shared insights about how the organization has expanded its outreach. Lutheran Family Service, a recipient of a 2023–2025 mission grant, provides critical support to LCMS church workers and their families, particularly through professional Christian counseling services.

Strengthening Spiritual Life at Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch

Serving as the Spiritual Life Coordinator at the Minot campus of Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch, **Deaconess Kelly Bristow** plays a key role in fostering faith-based guidance for youth. The Dakota Boys and Girls Ranch received a mission grant in the 2023–2025 biennium to assist in construction costs for a chapel at its Bismarck campus, furthering its mission to provide a Christ-centered environment for healing and growth.

Encouraging Deaf Ministry Through LWML Support

A longtime attendee of LWML conventions, **Pastor John Reinke** is always eager to share a sticker and an invitation to learn more about Helping Hands for the Lutheran Deaf Outreach. The LWML supported this ministry with a \$50,000 mission grant during the 2021–2023 biennium, enabling Jesus Signs Training Workshops to reach the 500,000 Americans who are deaf (98% of which are unbelievers). Through this grant, essential resources were shared, and pastors were equipped to train individuals in leading workshops, expanding outreach efforts to the deaf community.

Sunday Mites in Action Speaker

Forged by Fire Services — Nourishing Bodies and Souls

Rev. Paul Ernwein serves as the director of Forged by Fire Services, an organization committed to providing warm meals along with spiritual care to individuals and families impacted by natural disasters. Since its founding, Forged by Fire has served over 175,000 meals, embodying Christ's love through compassionate service.



FROM MITES TO MIC DROPS:

Christine Spofford Joins the Humorous Interruption Team

Christine (pictured left) comes from the Texas District where she has been joyfully involved as a Lutheran Woman in Mission since the age of 16. With a deep love for the “ladies in purple” and the powerful work accomplished each biennium, she is passionate about the mission of collecting mites to support ministry and outreach efforts around the world. From the very beginning, the heart of LWML’s mission has resonated with her spirit.

Over the years, Christine has faithfully served in various roles — holding office and participating on committees at the local, zone, and district levels. She and Abby Goehring have worked together as a humorous duo in Texas, and she brings that experience and a background in theater, to the national level.

Christine is a wife of 22 years, a teacher of 21 years, a mother of two boys, and, recently, Nana to a sweet grandson. Reflecting on her life, she shares: “The Lord has blessed me beyond measure. I want to bless others any way that I can. I’m super excited to be part of this aspect of the LWML. Being around two other humorous Lutheran women and learning from them. I know there are a lot of great stories and memories ahead!”



A DAY OF SUNSHINE, FELLOWSHIP, AND GOLF

The Tee Up for Mites golf outing held on June 25 at Bent Tree Golf Club in Council Bluffs was nothing short of divine in its orchestration and execution. After days of unpredictable storms, participants were greeted with a clear, sunlit morning — a welcomed gift that allowed the event to unfold beautifully.

Highlights of the Day

- **80 Golfers** Participated, marking the second-highest turnout after Milwaukee.
- **14 Volunteers** offered their time and talents to ensure smooth operations.
- **Over 32 Sponsors** came together to support the event generously.
- **Net Proceeds** Estimated at \$10,000 for mites, supporting LWML’s mission work.

Competition Meets Camaraderie: Golfers were divided into two flights, with prizes awarded to the top three teams in each. Additional pin prizes recognized standout performances for both men and women. Each golfer received a swag bag loaded with snacks, a bottle of water, and fun LWML-branded goodies. To top it off, every team received a photo keepsake — a token to remember the joyful day.

A Providential Path: The choice of Bent Tree Golf Club was no coincidence. From divine weather to an unexpected network of connections — from a board member’s mention of the outing to a custom-putter maker who happened to be a course member and whose wife has deep LWML ties — it was evident that God’s hand guided each step.

Community & Gratitude: The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, a testament to the joy and fellowship shared. The outing wasn’t just a fundraising success; it was a celebration of faith, friendship, and the power of community coming together for a greater purpose.





THANK YOU FOR THE INTERRUPTIONS:

With deep gratitude, we celebrate Jan Struck — our beloved humorous interrupter who brought wisdom, wit, and joy to countless conventions. As she officially retires from this cherished role, we thank her for her years of spirited service and her remarkable gift for capturing the heart and soul of what it means to be a Lutheran Woman in Mission.

Celebrating Jan's Comic Grace



**Sioux Falls
2007**

When she visited Sioux Falls in 2007, 'Aunt Jane' stated that "Lutefisk is the piece of cod that passes all understanding."



**Portland
2009**

As 'Ruby' she gave a different perspective on words that begin with "P," saying that "I'm usually the triple-P person when it comes to missions: pew, pray, and pay!"



**Des Moines
2015**

'Elfrieda' shared her wisdom: "I knew you could polka to most Lutheran hymns. It's a doctrinal truth! Last night (at the block party) I found out you can also play them on the kazoo."



**Albuquerque
2017**

Jan, aka 'Katie,' traveled to Albuquerque and asked God a question, "Lord, is there such a thing as a five-minute vow of silence?"



**Mobile
2019**

'Glory Mae' in Mobile, came up with a brilliant idea, a choir titled, "Sing Alleluia Southern Senior Youth." However, she regretted her decision when it was pointed out that the acronym for the choir's name would spell, S.A.S.S.Y., which really would make quite a statement when done in glittery letters on t-shirts!



**Lexington
2021**

Abby entered as her friend and 'Gertie' learned several new phrases, which brought hilarious new questions. She asked, "What is twittered? Snapped chats? (Is that) having time in each other's faces?"



**Milwaukee
2023**

Two years ago in Milwaukee, Jan interacted with several guests who joined her on stage while sharing her wisdom as Laverne to Abby's Shirley.

Jan, Lutheran Women in Mission has been richly blessed by your quick wit, the laughter you brought to so many conventions, and the love for our Lord you shared through being an integral part of these special gatherings.

THANK YOU, JAN! We love you!



GROWING IN GRACE: A CELEBRATION OF SISTERHOOD

The theme “Growing in God’s Grace” was a perfect fit for the Heart to Heart Sisters of all Nations (H2H) at this convention. In 2001, then-President Virginia VonSeggern and the Gospel Outreach Committee began planning how to welcome more women from ethnic and cross-cultural ministries into LWML. With strong support from members experienced in multicultural ministries, this vision took root.

Supported by mite offerings and a gift from LCMS World Mission, the first H2H Sister Gathering was held in 2003 in Oklahoma City, welcoming 23 women from Black and Latino Ministries. Each subsequent convention expanded outreach to include Hmong, African Immigrant, Native American, Middle Eastern, Asian, and other cultures.

Over time, LWML Districts began selecting and funding their own H2H Leaders who are trained to support H2H Sisters of all Nations in their districts. Many H2H Sisters now serve on LWML boards and committees at every level and have become influential leaders.

The biennial H2H luncheon is always a joyful reunion. This year, 17 newly-trained District Reps and alumni from past programs, including one from 2003, gathered to celebrate the unity and sisterhood they share in Christ.

Convention Offering #1 LWML Mission Goal 2025-2027

\$61,056.85 was received and contributed to the 2025–2027 LWML Mission Goal.

Convention Offering #2 Camp Linn Haven/Mountainside Lutheran Church, Newland, North Carolina

\$45,934.92 has been received to support Camp Linn Haven and Mountainside Lutheran Church in repairing the catastrophic damage inflicted by Hurricane Helene, with infrastructure damage estimated at over \$2 million.

Convention Offering #3 Grace Point Institute for Relational Help, Lincoln, Omaha and Columbus, Nebraska

\$35,251.15 has been received to support Grace Point Institute for Relational Help to provide pastoral care and counseling for pastors and church workers.

Convention Offering #4 Lutheran Early Response Team (LERT), Oklahoma District

\$36,866.88 has been received to support LERT in their disaster relief efforts throughout Oklahoma and the nation by funding the purchase of large equipment for debris removal to reduce the manual work of the volunteers.

GIVING THAT GROWS: DONATIONS POUR IN ACROSS PLATFORMS

Most donation tallies for our mission initiatives have been finalized, with a few offerings still receiving contributions. As of this publication, here are the current amounts for each:

The Mission Walk: \$105,590.73

(The largest Mission Walk in LWML history)

Round Up for Mites: \$1,313.29

(Thanks to everyone who rounded up their LWML Shop purchase!)

Miles for Mites: \$4,000

(LWML Ladies biking from St. Louis to Omaha. See article on page 3 of the Saturday *Heartland Herald*.)

Gifts From the Heart

Women generously gave through monetary donations, gift cards, and Amazon orders — so much so that many items were quickly purchased and the team had to restock the list! While Amazon purchases for the organizations below are still being finalized, here’s the breakdown of monetary donations as of publication.

Entity	Gift Cards	Checks & Cash	Total
Camp Luther	\$6,205	\$679	\$6,884
LFS-NE	\$6,482	\$762	\$7,244
UNL Chapel	\$6,462	\$769	\$7,231
Total	\$19,149	\$2,210	\$21,359



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SHUTTERBUGS!



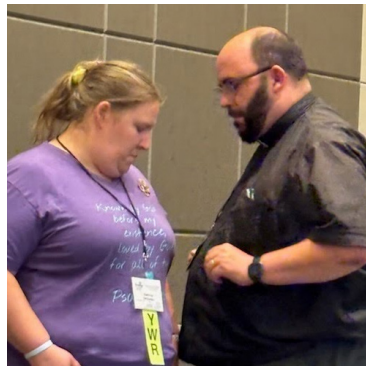
Friends from Austin (LWML Texas District) gathered on the bridge to straddle both Iowa and Nebraska! From left: Betsy Martino, Karen Sue Murdy, Andrea Sellers, Suzanne Socha Mueller, and Deaconess Sharon Teague.



Brian and Pam (LWML Washington-Alaska District) are excited to be at convention!



On Friday night, some of the YWRs headed to the Lutheran Ladies Lounge to refresh after karaoke singing and dancing.



First-timer Katrina Drinnon receives her YWR pin from her husband, LMWL Northern Illinois District Pastoral Counselor Rev. Roger Drinnon.



It's a family celebration at the Omaha Convention! Sara Vossler (YWR), her grandmother Jeanne Van Steen, and her mom Lyn represent three generations of LWML women from the New Jersey District.

Diane Falin (LWML South Dakota District), Melissa Sutton (LWML North Dakota District), and Charity Baker (LWML Nebraska South District) are enjoying their Mother Daughter Trip to the convention.



Although Arlene Solyom couldn't attend due to hospitalization, first-timer Carrie Howard (far right) joined in her place — nearly completing a four-generation legacy with Lori, Rachel, and Auden LaMontagna. Pictured from the left: Linda Arnold, Auden, Rachel, Heather Fiala, Lori, and Carrie.

Three generations from LWML Iowa West District at Omaha Convention: Elizabeth Graham, Ada Graham (teenager), Trisha Easton, Scarlett Graham (pre-teen).

