"VISIONS"

A Closer Look at the Virginia Synodical Women's Organization

Women of the ELCA

Convention 2026

2026 VSWO Convention Highlights

St. John Lutheran Church in Abingdon was the site for the annual VSWO Convention/Gathering June 11-13, 2026. Over Fifty of our sisters in Christ came together (plus workshop leaders and other guests) for worship, learning, fellowship, fun – and of course, business.



We introduced a new model for this year's event. You will notice that we met over three days instead of the usual two for convention. This allowed us to add more workshops and have "Convention Without Walls" service projects.

Our theme was **"Boots of Faith: Walking Through WELCA's History."** During our time together we were asked trivia questions about not only the history of Women of the ELCA but women in the Lutheran faith. The Reverend Elise Anderson, pastor at St. John, served as our Convention Chaplain. She led our opening worship service on Friday and lead an amazing Bible study on Saturday morning. We learned things we never knew about Mary Magdalene. We were honored to have Bishop Phyllis Milton preach at our opening service and hosted a "fire side chat". Ginger Cutrell, Executive Board Member of the Women of the ELCA, brought greetings from the churchwide organization and also led a discover session. Again, this year we closed convention with a beautiful Holden Evening Prayer service led by Pastor Elise. Linda Hawks was our wonderful accompanist. We were blessed to have these amazing folks share their time and talents with us.





A special thanks to Dona Jenkins, Sue Croghan and all the St. John women on the hospitality team. Your hard work was greatly appreciated and made all that attended feel at home.

This year had lots of fun and informative "Discovery Sessions". Bishop Milton had a "Fireside chat" where she shared her journey of faith, leadership, and calling, reflecting on the challenges, milestones, and joys that have shaped her ministry. Participants discovered the art of Japanese fabric dying. Ginger Cutrell shared with us the "Transgender Experience". Ginger helped explain and clarify some of the common myths and misconceptions of the transgender community. She was very open to answering questions and provided clarity on what and why. Jennie Settle, MS, RD, CSO, led a session on "Trail Mix and Tips. She provided us with practical tools and ideas to help us feel our best, no matter our age or stage. Nicole Ocheltree facilitated a session called "Riding Together: Building Strong Unit Health. The participants explored ways to keep their circles thriving and moving forward. "Chair Yoga: Gentle Movement for Every Body" was led by Kim Dove. The participants left feeling more relaxed, centered, and energized.

Our "Convention Without Walls" provided service opportunities to our attendees. These included: Creeper Trail Cleanup at Taylors Shelter, Faith in Action Thrift Store sorting and clean up, Faith in Action Food Pantry sorting, bagging, etc., Quilt Idea Sharing, and Thrivent Cause Kit assembly of Water Purifiers or Solar Lights. For those that didn't take part in these projects there was a table for Puzzle working. Had to make sure all the pieces were there before the puzzles were donated to the thrift store!

If this wasn't fun enough on Thursday evening, we had a "cookout" hosted by the St. John hospitality crew and a couple of guys that did the grilling. We had a few rounds of bingo with prizes of course. On Friday we had a catered Italian dinner with some really good music that followed. The evening ended with a fun (and very loud) ice cream social and PJ party at our hotel.

On Thursday evening we learned about Isaiah 117 House from Jenny Butcher, Rockingham County Location Leader. Their purpose (from their website): ***"When children are removed from their homes out of concern for their safety, they are usually brought to a child welfare services office to await placement. This wait can be a few hours to several days. These children often have nothing with them and are scared, lonely, hungry, and in dirty clothing.***

Isaiah 117 provides a comforting home where these children instead can be brought to wait – a place that is safe with friendly and loving volunteers who provide clean clothes, smiles, toys, and snuggly blankets. This space allows children to receive the comfort and care they need while child welfare staff can do the necessary paperwork and identify a good placement."

Isaiah 117 is our 2026-27 Love Offering and Service Project. In the coming months you will hear about ways you and your units can support this worthy organization.

On Saturday before the close of convention the monetary Love Offering and the in-kind gifts were presented to Mended Women, our 2025-26 Love offering recipient.

As always, we are amazed at our women's generosity. Below are the monetary and in-kind gifts received.

The in-kind gifts brought to the convention for Mended Women: 37 quilts, 7 blankets, sheets, mattress pads, towels/washcloths, pajamas, underwear, Bras, T-shirts, socks, gloves, bars of soap and lotion, period products, books and notebooks. Prior to convention items were also purchased from their Amazon Wish List and shipped directly to Mended Women in Abingdon.

Convention offering - to be split between WELCA & VSWO - $565.27
Love offering to Mended Women- $1,288

We did do some work during the convention. We heard reports, passed our 2026-27 budget and of course had elections.

The following persons were elected:
Vice President – Pat Seelenbinder
Secretary– Jody Smiley
Board Members: Two-year terms – Dona Jenkins, Nicole Ocheltree, Lois Voss

Your 2026-2027 VSWO Board: President-Lavelva Stevens, Vice President-Pat Seelenbinder, Secretary-Jody Smiley, Treasurer-Anne Putnam and board members: Sylvia Eley, Dona Jenkins, Nicole Ocheltree, Diane Priestley, Ashley Saunders, and Lois Voss.

Mark Your Calendars!!!

Looking ahead to 2027: Christ Lutheran in Staunton will host the 2027 convention. The convention dates are June 24-26, 2027.