

2008 Triennial Insight

by Debbie Selland, Triennial Promoter

As the sun began to set behind the mountains west of Salt Lake City on Thursday, July 10, more than 2,000 Lutheran women from all over the United States and several other countries came together for the Seventh Triennial Gathering of the Women of the ELCA. Come to the Waters was the theme for the Triennial and the overall focus for the weekend was baptism and its importance in our lives as Christians. The evening began with lively uplifting music, provided throughout the weekend by a group of very talented young men and women, and a procession of women bearing tall poles topped with long streamers of blues and aqua's -- representing water -- waved over and between the women in attendance. Water was poured into a large font and Gathering chaplains and international guests splashed the assembly with water from the font during a service of Affirmation of Baptism.

The newly elected officers and executive board of churchwide organization were introduced by the new President-elect Beth Wrenn from Kill Devil Hills, North Carolina. Linda Post Bushkofsky introduced the Women of the ELCA churchwide staff.

The evening ended with gathering participants attending an open rehearsal of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Their singing and the organ music was beautiful.

Friday morning's Plunge into the Waters Plenary #2 featured Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. speaking a powerful address on "Women, Power, and Peace." Among many thought provoking points, she described how research of the U.N. shows that the percentage of civilians killed during wars has increased from WWI to the Iraq war where 90 percent of casualties are civilians and of those most are children, women and old men. Sister Joan's address moved many to tears and gave all a new perspective in the true and terrible cost all wars have on women and children throughout the world. Sister Joan serves as co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, a partner organization of the United Nations, working for peace building particularly in Palestine and Israel. She is the author of more than 35 books including her most recent *The Gift of Years*. She also brought to our attention U.N. Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. To find out more about Resolution 1325 visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/wps>. Sister Joan writes a weekly Column, "From Where I Stand" at <http://www.ncrcafe.org>.

Friday and Saturday were busy participating in many activities. Opening each day at 11 a.m., the Gather at the River Exhibit Hall was a buzz with excitement. Included in the exhibit hall were the very popular servant opportunities, in-kind gifts-which were given to eight different Salt-Lake area charities, 38 exhibitors and vendors, and busy Augsburg Fortress Bookstore. Also in the Exhibit hall, participants could take part in an interactive Healthy Hearts Fair and at the Landing, topics such as World Day of Prayer, Women and the Lutheran World Federation, Your Faith Will Make You Whole, Knitting for Peace Trunk Show, Can Buying Chocolate Feed a Family and Bridging the Generational Gap were presented by various speakers. Many 'Meet at the Well' Workshops were offered these two days. The 23 workshops included topics such as, Anti-racism. Boldly growing where your organization has not gone before!, Many Ways to Pray, Sing Out Loud (choir), Women building global community, Worship Matters, B.Y.O. Bible. It was great to see many young women and girls attending the Gathering. Some attended on their own and some attended with their mothers and grandmothers. There were events and workshops, such as From Child of God to Woman of God, Bold Girls: Why would you wannabe?, and Yes, your church? Ministry with young adults. These young women and girls are the future of the W of the ELCA and we

must take bold steps out of our comfortable routine to make all women feel wanted and welcome in our organization.

After a full afternoon of learning and fellowship we again took a Plunge into the Living Waters at Plenary 3. Friday evening began with Bible study led by Rev. Karen Bockelman, the author of the Lutheran Women Today 2008 Summer Bible Study--Come to the Waters. She took us back to the biblical roots of baptism and brought us up to the daily remembrance of the sacrament that unites us with and in Jesus Christ. She called the women of the Convention not only to remember their baptism, but to act on it – to “walk wet”. The Thankoffering Service began with Holy Communion with Bishop of the ELCA Mark Hanson presiding. The offering brought by women from their home units totaled \$31,617. The Rev. Marysol Diaz of St. Marks Lutheran Church, Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, preached on the building blocks of God’s good creation: water, Spirit, and Word.

Saturday dawned as a warm sunny day with 8% humidity (can you believe it!). Dry heat is so much nicer than our humid sticky heat!). The day started earlier for some as nearly 400 women, girls, and men boarded buses at 5:45 am and took part in the second Run, Walk ‘n’ roll at Liberty Park in Salt Lake City. The first runner crossed the finish line at 28.4108 minutes. One of the youngest runners was Zoë Ziester of Green Bay, Wisconsin raised \$500 in pledges! At the time of the event has raised more than \$25,000 to support Women of the ELCA’s ongoing health comment to women and girls.

Plenary 4 on Saturday morning opened with song and Morning Prayer. Speaking at morning service was Rev. Heidi Neumark, pastor of Trinity Lutheran of Manhattan, New York, and author of the highly acclaimed book, Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx. Pastor Neumark preached on the book of Numbers, chapter 27 (the five daughters of Zelophehad) and the debt of gratitude women of today owe to bold women who have fought against injustice and paved the way for others to join. “We are all here thanks to many women who listened to us, guided us, and prayed for us.” When women get together, they can make a difference in the world. Look around, sisters. If God can change the world with five women, let’s not underestimate what that same God can do in, with, and through all of us.”

Melissa and I, spent Saturday afternoon attending workshops, shopping in the exhibit hall and I tried my hand at crocheting a newborn baby cap. It has been a long while since I have crocheted and I ended tearing it out. I did get a pattern for the cap and a prayer shawl and I have already bought new yarn to give it another try.

Plunge into the Living Waters, Plenary 5 began with continued the second half of the bible study “Come to the Waters” with Rev. Karen Bockelman.

We saw a film about the Augusta Victoria Hospital in Jerusalem and hear an update on the Stand with Africa Water Project. Each received a check for \$25,000 from the 20th Anniversary offering. We heard a 10-year report and information on the relaunch of Katie’s Fund. An update was given on the first three years of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls.

Chris Grumm, President and CEO of the Women’s Funding Network, told us about an exciting new way to engage in consumer advocacy through the Good Deed Foundation. This can be done by sending in used cell phone in post-paid envelopes. More information can be found at www.GoodDeedFoundation.org. We were given information about new program of individual partnerships. For only \$20.00 a year, you can give other women in your life a one-year subscription to Lutheran Women Today and Café. They will also have access to Bible Studies, global networks, advocacy

efforts and other resources. The legacy of your gift can provide a way for the recipient to deepen her faith and continue the work of the Women of the ELCA for generations to come.

Last, but certainly not least, A wonderful brand-new video was premiered about the Women of the ELCA. It gave a complete story of the Women of the ELCA, who we are, what we do and who we stand for. I know you will enjoy it and find many ways to use it in your churches.

Our last day spent in Salt Lake City began bright and early at choir practice with over 300 other women. Plenary 6 began with the announcement that the Eighth Triennial Convention and Gathering would be in Spokane Washington July 14-17, 2011. A short video was shown of the beautiful area, and a spokeswoman spoke on behalf of the city. Worship began with a Thanksgiving of Baptism, Holy Communion and we were all sent forth with the Affirmation of Christian Vocation. Rev. Elizabeth Eaton, bishop of the Northeastern Ohio gave a wonderful sermon with humor and insight on the Gospel. The Gathering choir sang four selections and was directed by Bishop April Larson from the Lacrosse Ohio Synod.

This was a trip of firsts for me, the first Triennial for me and my daughter Melissa, 24, my first ever big vacation and the first time my daughter and husband, Stanley, had flown in a plane and seen mountains. Also it was the first time I had ridden in a ski lift up the side of a mountain, I am scared of heights but the scenery and ride was beautiful. We had a wonderful time together and I hope to attend more Triennials with both my daughters. My family and I had a great time at the Triennial and I am very thankful that I was able to go as the Central States Synod's Triennial promoter. I hope that this is just the first of many triennial gatherings I will attend.