

## 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Convention & Gathering

### *Elections, Support for Antiracism and Healing Work were the Features of the Convention*

More than 250 Women of the ELCA gathered as voting members at the Twelfth Triennial Convention, September 18-21, in Phoenix, Arizona. The voting body elected Myrna Wells-Ulland (Grand Canyon SWO) as president for the 2023-26 term. Other officers elected were Lori Garcia (Southwestern TX SWO), vice president; Gwen Edwards (NE SWO), secretary; and Jennifer Armstrong-Schaefer (Southwestern PA SWO), treasurer.

In other actions, voting members encouraged participation in the Truth and Healing Movement. [Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations - Evangelical Lutheran Church in America \(elca.org\)](#); recommended that participants engage in *Now is the Time: A Study Guide for ELCA Declaration to People of African Descent* [elca.org/Resources/Racial-Justice](#); rejected two attempts to reduce future convention costs; adopted a 2024 budget of \$1.9 million, and received a special 'Just Love' plaque from ELCA in Tanzania.



Central States Women Attending 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Gathering  
(Back row, L to R) Jeanie Bardy, Gloria Sharp, Rhonda Schlesselman, Janice Gerken, Vickie Donnell, Louise Ahrens, and Janice Rambo  
(Front row, L to R) Debbie Curtis, Gretchen Mueller, and Lynn Vallandingham  
Not pictured: Vicki Haugen and Kimberly Knowles-Zeller

### *Triennial Gathering Focuses on "Just Love"*

Following the convention, close to 800 Lutheran women gathered to learn, grow, worship, and serve together at the "Just Love" Triennial Gathering, September 21-24.

Workshops, Bible studies and plenary sessions covered a range of topics, including immigration, human trafficking, climate change, the Truth and Healing Movement, and allyship.

Servant events included opportunities for blood donation, making quilts for LWR, and knitting and crocheting 'knitted knockers' breast prostheses. There was also the option to participate in the 'Run, Walk, and Roll' 5K and to make donations of in-kind gifts for Phoenix-area nonprofits.

The Gathering opened with a Thankoffering service using the service published for 2023 congregational use. Following the service and first plenary session, attendees spilled to the outdoors for refreshments, music, and dancing.

Throughout the Gathering, in plenary sessions, worship messages, and workshops there was a focus on immigration and human trafficking. The Rev. Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, a Native American theologian and plenary speaker, reminded us that "Immigrants are not threats or a burden but our siblings" and "we need to have open hearts and minds and see the face of God in all."

Plenary speaker Dr. Jacqueline Busse, author of *Love Without Limits*, looked at immigration through the lens of Jesus using the story of Jesus healing the man on the Sabbath, angering religious leaders (Luke 14:1-6). She described the healing as "scandalous" and "beyond the normal boundaries of showing love"—an approach she challenged us to apply to caring for immigrants.

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## Gathering—“Just Love”

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A number of presenters enriched the messages of the plenary speakers. Krish O’Mara Vignarajah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, stated that every minute 20 people are forced to leave their homes. She reminded that the “terror of fleeing everything behind and the unknown is palpable, yet it is safer for those fleeing than the known of their living situation.”

A highlight of the Gathering was hearing from the young women from the ELCA International Women Leaders Program. They shared powerful stories about migration, immigration, and trafficking from their own experiences in their home countries of Indonesia, Liberia, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Poland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.

Vince Blackfox, director of ELCA Indigenous Ministries and Tribal Relations, led several workshops. Information shared on missing and murdered Indigenous women was disturbing. The ELCA’s Truth and Healing Movement provides the “opportunity for the church to learn how colonizing impacts Indigenous people in the past and the present.”

In the closing worship, the Rev Tiffany Chaney brought a message based on the parable of the landowner and day laborers (Matthew 20:1-6). She left worshippers with several questions to consider.

- In what ways do we grumble about God’s graciousness when others are treated the same as we are?
- In what ways do we call generous people, policies, and programs in our country unfair because we don’t think others deserve the same as us?
- In what ways do we create a hierarchy, even in our church?

Those attending from Central States were specially blessed with our own Rev. Kimberly Knowle-Zeller presiding at the closing worship.

(This summary of the 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Convention and Gathering has been captured from and you can read more at [Elections, support for anti-racism and healing work feature large](#) - Women of the ELCA and [2023 Triennial Gathering focuses on “Just Love”](#) - Women of the ELCA.



## Equity & Equality

I teach Confirmation classes to young people in the church I serve. We’ve all enjoyed getting to know Martin Luther, especially his teachings. We’ve talked about Martin Luther’s belief that we should take care of the poor, children, and widows, and why this remains important today. It was in one of these discussions that a student asked what Luther would say about our current world. Specifically, what would he say about racism. Whoa! I wasn’t expecting that! However, in turning to the teaching of Luther the answer almost jumped off the page. Luther believed that “all people of faith were equal and didn’t need a middleman (like a priest or a pope) to interpret the Bible.”<sup>1</sup> That gives us pause. All people of faith are equal?

We were quickly into a discussion about equity and equality—concepts that remain elusive in our culture. The students were quick to ask me, “what’s the difference?”

I had heard a keynote speaker at a convention (not religious affiliated) speak about just that—equality vs. equity. The speaker defined equality as everyone in a room getting a pair of size 10 tennis shoes. Equity would be that everyone in the room would get a pair of tennis shoes, but in the size that was needed by the person receiving the shoe. Big difference! All people not only equal, but being treated equally and with dignity.

I am hooked on the PBS series, *Call the Midwife*. I identify with the midwives as they struggle to provide care to the occupants of a poor district in London. What strikes me most about the program is the absolute full acceptance of all who are in need of care regardless of circumstances—each treated with dignity and respect. No judgement, no lectures, no ‘those kind’ of looks. Nothing, but open hearts, open minds and fully giving of self to the cause. Isn’t that exactly what Christ wants of us? To love and care for one another, without judgement and with dignity and respect.

In this new year, let’s all strive to be more generous and loving and less judgmental. Let us work to be Christlike in all we do.

Submitted by: Pastor Jill Duis, Board Member

<sup>1</sup> Luther’s Works, 44:129.

### *In this issue*

Be sure to read the personal experiences of Central States Synodical Organization board members who attended the 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial events

# A Message from the President

I pray that you have had a blessed Christmas season as we celebrated the birthday of our Savior! We are now celebrating a new year in which we personally anticipate new beginnings! We, as the Central States Synodical Organization, are also looking forward to new beginnings! This is the year we will be holding our initial cluster events as we transition from annual to biennial conventions. Leadership of each of the five clusters is in the midst of planning the 2024 events. We look forward to the events which are being planned around the theme of the Triennial Gathering: “Just Love”.



It’s never too early to begin planning for our convention in 2025. The Board has an in-person meeting planned for February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> to finalize the date and location of our 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention. Be watching for that date and more information in upcoming issues of *Walking in the Word*. You will want to get that on your calendars.

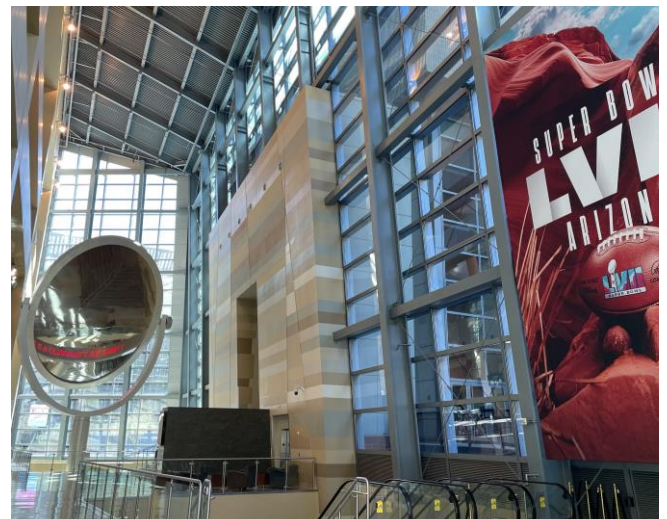
I’m eager to share with you my experience at the Triennial Convention and Gathering held in Phoenix last September. It was a blessing to join with our other voting members: Louise Ahrens, Pastor Dinah Dutta, and Rhonda Schlesselman. Jill Duis was unable to attend due to a family health issue. It was an interesting and exciting experience to be one of the over 250 voting members at the Convention. Myra Wells-Ulland of Phoenix was elected president and Lorie Garcia of Texas was selected as vice president of our Churchwide Organization. Many of you will remember Lorie, who has been the churchwide representative at our synodical conventions in 2022 and 2023. Lorie is a good friend of Central States!

In the weeks prior to the convention, I was notified by churchwide requesting that we submit to the churchwide convention several of the resolutions that were adopted at our July 2023 synodical convention. I am pleased to share that the three resolutions submitted were adopted by the churchwide body: *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Calling for Peace and Unity; and Calling for Safety and Protection of our Children* (see *Walking in the Word*, August 2023, for more information on those resolutions).

The Triennial Gathering was held following the conclusion of the Convention using the theme “Just Love”. As you can see by the photo elsewhere in this issue, we had good representation from Central States. It was special for us that The Rev. Kim Knowle-Zeller served as a workshop presenter, as well as presiding minister at the closing worship service. What an awesome experience it was to be with such a large gathering of Lutheran women—learning, growing, worshipping, and having fun together.

I’m excited for what lies ahead for Central States women in 2024. Let’s make an extra effort to invite all in our congregations, who are not currently participating, to our unit activities and upcoming cluster events. Having them attend the cluster events will be the experience they need to then have them eager to attend our 2025 convention. I look forward to working with all the women of the Central States in 2024! Blessings to all of you!

*Submitted by Gloria Sharp, President*



The Phoenix Convention Center is a beautiful facility that provided an ideal location for the 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Convention and Gathering. This a view of the outside and the inside entrance of the Center.

## Synodical Organization Financial Report

Now that the frenzy of the holidays is winding down, the decorations of the season are packed away, and resolutions have been made, it's a good time to review the finances of our organization. With the fiscal year ending on January 31, 2024, this report will closely reflect the actual outcome of the 2023 budget.

As an organization we are financially sound. The current balance of the general account is \$22,960.89. Balances in other funds are: Barbara Nelson Scholarship Fund--\$17,092.74 and the Education Scholarship Fund--\$2,202.72. This healthy financial picture can be attributed to only one thing—that is the generosity of Central States women.

A deeper dive into the year-to-date status of several areas of our current budget reflects the following.

- **Unit offerings** received--\$5,418.57. The amount budgeted was \$10,000. Thus, we have met only 54% of our budget. This is a concern. Congregational units need to be aware that 50% of these offerings are sent directly to churchwide with the remainder used for synodical activities, such as our synodical convention.
- **Education Scholarship Fund** contributions received--\$1,598.51. This amount includes 50% of the convention Sunday offering (\$524.51) and unit donations. Ninety-six percent (96%) of the budgeted \$1,600 has been received.
- **Thankofferings** received--\$2,749. This is \$249 over the budgeted amount. One hundred percent (100%) of Thankofferings are sent to the Churchwide Organization. Most units send Thankofferings directly to churchwide.
- **Katie's Fund** contributions received--\$149. We are within \$36 of the amount budgeted. With the Women of the ELCA in the midst of a campaign to raise \$1 million for this fund by 2122, our generous giving will be needed.

During 2023, contributions of \$2,640.51 designated as donations to our synodical organization were received. These donations are appreciated, particularly with the funds available for synodical activities, such as convention, diminished.

(continued next column)

## More from Triennial



Central States Voting Members at Convention  
(L to R) Louise Ahrens, Rev Dinah Dutta, Gloria Sharp, & Rhonda Schlesselman



Central States Attendees Gathered for Worship  
(L to R) Jean Bardy, Vickie Donnell, Rhonda Schlesselman, Janice Gerken, Gloria Sharp, Debbie Curtis, Lynn Vallandingham, Louise Ahrens, Janice Rambo, & Gretchen Mueller

(continued from previous column)

In 2022, Churchwide gifted each synodical organization \$1000 to be used for promotion of leadership development. The Board has designated these funds as support for the 2024 cluster events. There will be \$200 given to each cluster to offset expenses for their event.

The Board wishes to thank you for your financial support during 2023, particularly knowing that there are financial challenges personally and within our units and congregations. With God nothing is impossible! Always, God is our light, a light no darkness can overcome.

Submitted by Janice Gerken, Treasurer

## More “Just Love”...



Thank you for the generous scholarship from the Barbara Nelson Memorial Triennial Gathering Memorial Scholarship. Attending Triennial was life-changing for me with 800 Spirit-filled Lutheran women assembled for worship, learning, and sharing experiences. At the center of my experience

was worship. The music was uplifting with the selection of songs from *All Creation Sings*. What a joy to share our faith in song!

The “Just Love” theme focused on the awareness of human trafficking, particularly in the Indigenous population, and was carried out in worship, plenary sessions, and workshops. Dr. Kelly Sherman-Conroy, Native theologian, led several Bible studies based on parables as told by Christ in which she shared her story and that of her ancestors. We were blest to hear presentations from young women in the ELCA International Women Leaders Program who spoke about human trafficking in their native countries of Singapore, Zambia, Poland, Nigeria, and Tanzania. All of the speakers were inspirational often bringing tears to my eyes.

Jacqueline Bussie, award winning author, professor, and theologian shared her life story as told in her book, *Love Without Limits*. Her story was very moving and compelling and she stretched my thinking about what it means to love and keep on loving.

The workshops I attended were thoughtful and insightful. One addressed how congregations can be prepared for leaders of color and another was Dr. Bussie’s discussion of ‘love without limits’. Both of these provided meaningful information for me to bring back to share with those in my unit.

The Gathering would not have been complete without servant events. There were several to participate in—contributing in-kind gifts, working on Lutheran World Relief quilts, and crocheting or knitting ‘knitted knockers’ breast prostheses. The bookstore was a huge draw where several of the authors could personally autograph your purchase.

The Gathering was a marvelous experience. I encourage each of you to attend the next one that will be in Des Moines in July 2026. If you are a first-time attender, you might consider applying for the scholarship. The event will change your life!

*Submitted by Louise Ahrens, Board Member*



## Words from Rev. Dutta

Happy New Year, dear Sisters in Christ. It has been a while since I’ve had an opportunity to share thoughts with you. I would like to start with a THANK YOU for electing me to attend the 12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Convention. The highlight of the



convention for me is the privilege to vote in the election of the Churchwide Organization president and board members. Several constitutional changes were made during the last Triennial Convention in regard to elections. One of them was to reduce the number of executive board members. This decision, though beneficial in some ways, created a lot of confusion, pain, chaos, and disappointments during the elections.

In spite of this, we had wonderful worship and praise time. I was given the opportunity to serve as assisting minister during the opening worship. I suggest you go to the WELCA website to read the resolutions approved and other decisions made.

I continue to reflect on what it means for me to be the true disciple of Christ—how can I witness Him through my daily living? I want to encourage you, as I encourage myself, since our lives are extended to enter another year, to pause, introspect, and rededicate our lives to serve Him with all our heart, soul, and mind.

*“...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16*

*Submitted by Rev Dinah Dutta, Board Member*

# Lutheran World Relief Ingatherings Missouri 2023

“It only takes a spark to get a fire going” are the words from a familiar song about God’s love and the joy of sharing it. In July 2022 there were no Lutheran World Relief (LWR) collection events scheduled in Missouri. Conversation among women gathered at the Central States Synodical Organization’s “Rejoice in Hope” convention sparked the desire to provide more convenient drop-off sites. Sisters worked together with LWR representatives to organize collections at two locations using a shared semi tractor-trailer. Since then, Our Savior’s in Jefferson City and St. Mark’s/Shepherd of the Hills in Greater St. Louis have hosted LWR ingatherings in 2022 and 2023.

We praise God for another successful year sharing love by providing quilts and other much-needed kits to our brothers and sisters across the world. The word is spreading in Missouri about these accessible ingathering sites with eight more organizations participating this year, including Once We Were Refugees. Totals are listed here for the Missouri ingathering locations that were held on October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

- Jefferson City—271 boxes which contained 729 quilts, 427 school kits, 376 personal care kits, 174 baby care kits, 15 fabric kits and \$2,732.55 in shipping offering.
- St. Louis (including several organizations from southern Illinois)—249 boxes which contained 682 quilts, 452 school kits, 293 personal care kits, 54 baby care kits, 76 fabric kits and \$750 in shipping offering.

Great things happen when sisters in Christ gather to share stories, hopes, and dreams. “That’s how it is with God’s love, once you’ve experienced it. You spread His love to ev’ryone. You want to pass it on.” Plans for ingatherings in 2024 are underway. Check the LWR website for Central States ingathering dates [Lutheran World Relief \(lwr.org\)](http://LutheranWorldRelief(lwr.org)).

Ingathering Day at Our Savior’s in Jefferson City  
 Below left  
 Debbie Curtis & Lynn Vallandingham with support from men of Our Savior’s congregation  
 Below right  
 (L to R) Judy Linsenbardt, Gloria Sharp, Debbie Curtis & Lynn Vallandingham



Submitted by Kathy Steinke, Vice President

## Kansas 2023

Ingatherings were held in Wichita, Salina, and Hays and each location’s success was celebrated. Further information was not available at the time of publication.

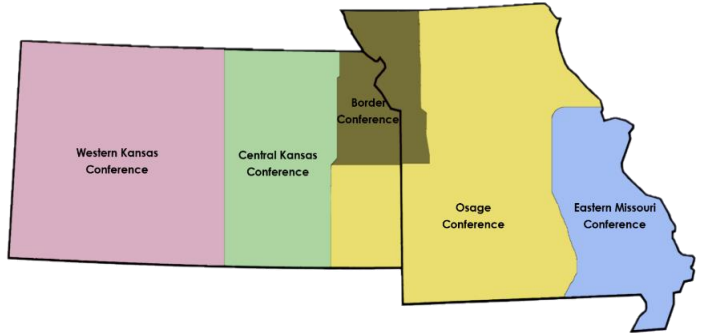


LUTHERAN WORLD RELIEF

## Cluster Events Coming in 2024

With 2024 well underway, planning for upcoming cluster events has become a priority for the Board and cluster leaders across our five clusters. We are thankful for the dedicated women who have stepped forward to be cluster coordinators this year.

Included here are the plans that have been made thus far. More information will be coming your way through mailings to congregations via church mailing addresses, individual and group e-mail messages, and future issues of *Walking in the Word*.



Eastern Missouri Cluster

DATE: April 27, 2024  
 LOCATION: Good Shepherd Lutheran  
 Manchester, MO  
 The Rev. Kimberly Knowle-Zeller will be the key speaker and celebrant  
 COORDINATOR(S): Wilma Prifti  
 Bonnie Rieffer

Submitted by: Pat Dunavan, Board Member

Osage Cluster

DATE: June 1, 2024  
 LOCATION: St. Paul's Lutheran  
 Cole Camp, MO  
 The event will begin at 9:00 a.m.  
 COORDINATOR(S): Leania Carter  
 Mick Friberg  
 Becky Verslues

Central Kansas Cluster

DATE: October 2024  
 LOCATION: Lindsborg, Kansas  
 COORDINATOR(S): Anna Prockish  
 Ruth Ann Zenger

Border Cluster

DATE: April 27, 2024  
 LOCATION: St. Mark's Lutheran  
 Atchison, KS  
 COORDINATOR(S): Louise Ahrens  
 Carol Bunge  
 Ruth Hanshaw

Western Kansas Cluster

No plans in place at this time  
 COORDINATOR(S): Carolyn Mott  
 Sue Schonhaler  
 Rhonda Templing

### Seeking Walking in the Word Editor

Do you or do you know someone who has an interest in serving as editor of this newsletter, *Walking in the Word*? As we endeavor to maintain ongoing contact with women across the Central States Synod, we view this publication as the most critical mode of communication. If you are interested or know of someone, please contact Gloria Sharp, President, at 573-462-9758 or [gjsharp@aol.com](mailto:gjsharp@aol.com).

### Education Scholarship Application in This Issue

Even though there will not be a Synodical Organization convention this year, scholarships will continue to be awarded. This scholarship is for female members of an ELCA congregation who are enrolled in or seeking post-secondary education. The application deadline is March 15, with the scholarship being awarded in April 2024. Remember to encourage young women in your congregation to apply.

*12<sup>th</sup> Triennial Gathering ~ Phoenix ~ September 2023*



**Entrance to Exhibit Hall and Servant Events  
Vickie Donnell & Jean Bardy  
Messiah Lutheran, Springfield, MO**



**Our Churchwide Organization Leader  
Linda Post Bushkofsky, Executive Director  
Women of the ELCA**



**Good friends enjoy a meal and time to relax  
Rhonda Schesselman & Janice Gerken  
St. Paul's Lutheran, Cole Camp, MO**



**Enjoy This!  
We were patient in our effort to  
capture our electronic welcome**

**Mark Your Calendars Now  
You Won't Want to Miss This**

**13<sup>th</sup> Triennial Gathering  
July 16-19, 2026  
Des Moines, Iowa**



**Our President and Plenary Speaker  
Gloria Sharp & Jacqueline Bussie**





**Closing Worship Presider**  
**The Rev. Kimberly Knowle-Zeller**  
 Cole Camp, MO



**Opening Worship Preacher**  
**Rev. Irma Banales, Director for Evangelical Mission**  
 Northern Texas-Northern Louisiana Synod



**Women of the ELCA Churchwide Staff**

**Gathering Plenary Session Litany**

**LEADER:** In this space, we remove the armor of privilege, and expose our hearts to the harsh realities of racism...

**RESPONSE:** *We open ourselves to uncomfortable truths, to difficult conversations. We are ready to learn, to grow.*

**LEADER:** Our skin color may differ, but our humanity is shared. We are more alike than we are unlike...

**RESPONSE:** *We celebrate diversity, honor each other's experiences, and learn from our shared stories.*

**LEADER:** Yes, you have been part of the problem. But today, you choose to be part of the solution...

**RESPONSE:** *We pledge to use our privilege to challenge injustice, to amplify marginalized voices, to effect change.*

**LEADER:** Today, we release the burdens of guilt, shame, and complacency...

**RESPONSE:** *We let go of our past mistakes, and embrace the opportunity for growth, change, and progress.*

**LEADER:** Today we acknowledge many of us carry pain within our bodies. Pain within our bodies, pain that people cannot see. Take a moment to acknowledge that pain. Call it out if you want to or just breathe out your silent prayer.

**MOMENT OF SILENCE**

**RESPONSE:** *Together, we rise. Together, we build. Together, we heal. Amen.*



**2023-2026 Churchwide Executive Board**  
**Women of the ELCA**  
 (Front Row L to R) Myrna Wells-Ulland (president), Lorie Garcia (vice president), Gwen Edwards (secretary), and Jennifer Armstrong-Schaefer (treasurer).  
 (Back Row L to R) Maria Lokensgard, Anna Jetson, Sheena Foster, Yma Mulero, Tracy Williams and Jennifer Ackerman. Not pictured: Jean Pishaw, Julia Sabella, Ginger Cutrell, Joyce Brooks, and Merrily Burmeister.

## CENTRAL STATE SYNODICAL ORGANIZATION WOMEN OF THE ELCA

### OFFICERS/BOARD MEMEBERS

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**Keep up to date with news from Central States Synodical Organization of Women of the ELCA** Subscriptions to this newsletter, *Walking in the Word*, are free of charge and available via USPS or e-mail. Please notify Vickie Donnell at the contacts above.

#### **Our Mission**

*Mobilizing women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ.*

#### **Our Purpose**

*As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.*

**Central States Synodical Organization  
Women of the ELCA  
Education Scholarship Application  
2024 Award**

**Please write legibly**

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip Code** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell phone** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Church** \_\_\_\_\_ **City** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_

**College Attending (if known)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Applicant** \_\_\_\_\_

**Recommended by** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guidelines:**

1. Scholarships are awarded to female members of an ELCA congregation seeking post high school education.
2. Priority is given to female members of Central States Synod congregations.
3. Award is a 1-year non-renewable scholarship.
4. Scholarship monies are written to and sent directly to the educational institution you are attending.
5. Must include with this application a written recommendation and signature from your Pastor, mentor, unit president or unit representative. Recommendation cannot come from a current or previous board member (within last four years).
6. Must include an essay of approximately 500 words describing your participation in church, school, and community activities.
7. Award recipients will be notified in April 2024.
8. Award recipients will be asked to forward a photo electronically that will be used in synodical organization publications.
9. Individual awards will not exceed \$1,000. Multiple awards may be given in a year.
10. In the event that your college is undecided at the time the award is announced, it will be your responsibility to keep the CSS Board Treasurer, Janice Gerken, informed of your selection at [janicegerken@aol.com](mailto:janicegerken@aol.com).
11. **Application must be postmarked by March 15, 2024.**

**Send application to:**

**Gaye Mizell**

**11870 Spruce Haven Drive**

**St. Louis, MO 63146**

**314-606-9567**

**[Lovetoknit50@gmail.com](mailto:Lovetoknit50@gmail.com)**