

2024 VSWO Convention Highlights



Our Saviour’s Lutheran Church in Norge was the site for our VSWO Convention July 26-27, 2024. Fifty of our sisters in Christ came together (plus workshop leaders and other guests) for worship, celebration, joy, fellowship – and of course, business, stirring things up as our theme says **“Stir up the gift of God which is in us”**. The Reverend Jennifer Osheim-Owen, chaplain at Williamsburg Landing, served as our Convention Chaplain. She led our opening worship

service and evening prayer on Friday and led us in devotions on Saturday morning. We were honored to have the Rev. Dr. Phyllis Blair Milton, our very own Bishop, preach at our opening service and bring us greetings from the Virginia Synod Office of the Bishop. Gwen Edwards, secretary of the Women of the ELCA, brought greeting from the churchwide organization and had a very inspiring message, challenging us to be stirred up! Again, this year we closed convention with a beautiful Holden Evening Prayer service led by Alli Beck. A special thanks to Linda Hawks our accompanist. We were blessed to have these amazing women share their time and talents with us.



Our workshops this year were really informative and thought provoking. Alejandra Upton from enCircle spoke about foster care and the need for families to help immigrant children who are crossing the border by themselves. Nicole Ocheltree spoke with us about trauma and how it effects the brain. She shared her very personal story of her experience first as a foster parent and then leading to the adoption of her son. Our third workshop was given by Heidi Wallace of Latisha’s House. Free Forever-Latisha’s

House Foundation provides adult women who are survivors of sex trafficking with safe housing and services. We will be hearing more about them in the coming year. Latisha’s House is the VSWO’s 2024-



25 Love Offering project. We also heard about Grace Inside ministries from Rev. Lois Carter. She spoke on Friday evening and had a display table with lots of wonderful resources.

We had a fun art project for the non-voting members. It was led by Dawn Murray, an art teacher from Harrisonburg. She combined the art with a very personal devotion.



On Friday evening we were entertained by the Brent Hull and his daughter Jessalynne. They performed popular songs and some gospel favorites. We thank them for traveling from the Shenandoah Valley all the way to Williamsburg to just entertain us.

As always, we are amazed at our women's generosity. Below are the monetary and in-kind gifts received. Some were received after convention so the totals may differ some from what was reported at convention. **Thank you to all that donated and thank you for all that you do in your congregations and communities!!**



Convention offering - to be split between WELCA & VSWO \$988

Love offering to Micah's Ecumenical Ministries - \$1,413

Katie's Fund - \$250

Sophie Wilson Grant - \$610

Roanoke College Scholarship - \$210

Food for Our Saviour's Lunch Box Project-A bunch!

At the end of this Visions is included a full report of how generous you all were with our in-kind gifts to our Micah's Ecumenical Ministries



We did do some work during convention. We heard reports, passed our 2025-26 budget and of course had elections.

The following persons were elected:

Vice President – Pat Seelenbinder

Secretary – JoAnn Fawley

Board Members: Two-year terms – Dona Jenkins, Anne Putnam, Nicole Ocheltree, One-year term – Diane Priestley

Your 2024-2025 VSWO Board: President-Lavelva Stevens, Vice President- Pat Seelenbinder, Secretary–JoAnn Fawley, Treasurer-Jody Smiley and board members: Teresa Bowers, Dona Jenkins, Nicole Ocheltree, Diane Priestley, Anne Putnam, Ashley Saunders

LOOKING AHEAD

Janet Smoot announced that the **2025 Annual VSWO Convention** will be at Christ Lutheran Church in Fredericksburg, July 25-26, 2025. Look out for more information in Visions, on our Facebook page, and our website.

The All-Lutheran Women's Retreat will be November 7-9, 2024 and held at the Hilton Garden Inn, 4050 Cox Road, Glen Allen, VA. The theme is "A Cup of Unconditional Love". The retreat leader will be Jacqueline Bussie, author of "Love Without Limits: Jesus' Radical Vision of Love With No Exceptions". Jacqueline Bussie will also be a speaker at the 2023 Women of the ELCA Triennial Gathering in Phoenix this September. Several Women of the ELCA groups are reading and discussing this book. Registration information will be available in April, 2024.

Contact information: Facebook-All Lutheran Women's Retreat,
website- <https://sites.google.com/view/alwretreat>
email- carol.troxell@gmail.com

Ways to stay to keep current with events, news, photos, etc. from the VSWO is to friend us on Facebook: VSWO Virginia Synodical Women's Organization and to visit our website: <https://vsw.org/>

VSWO 2024 Service Project for Micah Ecumenical Ministries

My name is Teresa Bowers and it is my pleasure to report to you on the results of the VSWO 2024 Service Project. I have served on the VSWO Board this past year and I am also the coordinator of the Health Care Ministry at Micah Ecumenical Ministries or Micah, in Fredericksburg.

Over the last two years it has been my privilege to help Micah start and grow several exciting health care programs for our neighbors – those individuals who are living on the street (those under a bridge, in the woods, in an abandoned building or in their car) *and* we serve those overcoming homelessness in our community who have been able to move off the street and into a home.

Micah Ecumenical Ministries is a faith-based organization that I first came to know through my church, Christ Lutheran, in Fredericksburg. Christ Lutheran is one of the nine

collaborating churches that makes up Micah and has been serving our homeless population in Fredericksburg as a ministry and a non-profit organization since 2005. As the body of Christ in action, these nine Micah churches, our staff and our community attempt to love and care for the whole person through services that address basic needs including a hot shower, a bag lunch, a mailing address, toiletries, help with filling out applications for Medicaid, SNAP benefits, and replacing vital documents, while also addressing longer term needs of safety, hunger, health care, housing, income and spiritual care.

This year's Service Project has made it possible for the Health Ministry at Micah to provide basic health supplies to our neighbors. You have seen some of the items that have been donated out on the table in the narthex.

Most of these items that you have donated will be distributed at our Health Screening Program which is held every Tuesday in our Hospitality Center. Basic Health Screenings, taking a full set of vitals (blood pressure, temperature, pulse, oxygen saturation, weight, pain, and respirations) and health education are provided to our neighbors in conjunction with local nursing students. These items will help improve the day to day health and wellness of our neighbors.

The larger first aid kits that were donated will be distributed to our newly housed neighbors in their "Welcome Home" baskets. They will provide access to basic first aid supplies in their home.

The quilts that your Quilting Groups have donated will provide warmth and comfort for our newly housed neighbors. They will surely feel loved by you when wrapped in a beautiful warm homemade quilt!

The LOVE Offering that you donated at this Convention will enable Micah to continue our work to provide all of our programs that help care for the needs of our neighbors. There is a brochure in your Convention folder that shares more about this organization and I invite you to take a look at when you have a few minutes.

So let's take a quick look at **what** you've donated to Micah. I have *already* received quilts and health and wellness items throughout the year of this Service Project and counting what you brought with you this weekend:

Quilts – 78

Large First Aid kits – 59

Small First Aid kits – 40

Pill cutters – 20

Large pill boxes – 35
Small pill boxes – 53
Umbrellas – 27
Vitamins – 36 bottles
Pencils and small notebooks – 40 and 36
Winter gloves – 20 for men and 20 for women
Socks – 60 for women and 50 for men
Winter hats – 12
Blessing Bags of miscellaneous toiletries – 43
Adult Coloring Books, colored pencils and sharpeners – 51 and 24 and 24
Foot Powder – 27
Foot Spray – 16
Antifungal foot gel – 24
Nail clippers – 58
Combs – 137
Puzzle books and pencils – 12 and 12
Suntan lotion – 103
Tissue packages – 81
Lip balm – 130
Hand sanitizers – 59
Rain ponchos – 40
Diabetic socks - 6
Travel wipes – 12
Tweezers – 10
Deodorant – 10
Halls inhalers – 2
Antibiotic ointment – 4

Brush – 1

Nail files – 3

And 1 box of juice pouches and 1 box of graham crackers

And **who** has been so generous and donated all of these items so far this year...the women from the churches in Virginia Synod and at the risk of leaving someone out (because some packages may have gotten delivered directly to Micah that I did not see!!) please don't be offended, if I don't name you today, but let me know later so I can include you in my report and thank you. So here's the list of who has donated:

Trinity Lutheran in Pulaski

Our Savior's in Norge

St. Paul's in Edinburg

St. Jacob's in Edinburg

Rural Retreat Lutheran Parish (Grace and St. Paul)

St. James in Fishersville

Christ Lutheran in Fredericksburg

Christ Lutheran in Richmond

Emmanuel in Virginia Beach

Salem Evangelical in Mt. Sydney

Pleasant View in Staunton

St. Michael in Blacksburg

Resurrection in Fredericksburg

St. Timothy in Norfolk

St. John in Abingdon

Lakeside in Littleton, North Carolina

Bethlehem in Waynesboro

And then there were a few individuals, friends and family members and even some community groups that contributed (but again, I risk here leaving someone out or getting a name wrong or not knowing if they were contributing for their women's group or church... so I will just simply thank you all):

I will say that there were 2 packages delivered in honor of a woman in the Virginia Synod by 2 of her children, and 1 package delivered in honor of a woman in the Virginia Synod who retired this year.

Don't worry if you or the Women's Group at your church didn't get to make a contribution to this project, there is always a need at Micah and the Amazon Wish List for the health and wellness supplies is still active. We'd welcome your donations if you still want to donate to Micah. My contact number is in the Micah brochure that you have. But let us now remember that we will turn our focus to VSWO 2025 Service Project for Latisha's House!

On behalf of the Virginia Synod and the VSWO Board, we thank you for participating and making this year's Service Project such a great success! And on behalf of Micah, I want to thank all the women in the Virginia Synod who individually or on behalf of your church's women's group or church, contributed to the VSWO 2024 Service Project. What a difference you are making in the lives of our homeless neighbors in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Thank you!

In our HealthBridge program we offer primary care to those who don't have a doctor or otherwise experience too many barriers to successfully obtain adequate health care. The HealthBridge program invites local medical and mental health providers to offer care in the Micah Hospitality Center or, in some cases, in the homes of neighbors who are struggling with health connections.

In our Health Screening program we partner with local community college nursing programs to provide health screenings to help our neighbors recognize health issues and find solutions to their health care needs.

In our Home and Personal Care program we partner with our Housing Ministry to care for the needs of our housed neighbors who are struggling with an illness or the progression of a disease process that prevents them from caring for their home or personal needs.

We also intentionally partner with local agencies and organizations to work collaboratively to meet the unique needs of our homeless community in our Partnership program. Additionally, we weave education about wellness, health issues and health care throughout all the ministries at Micah to help our neighbors learn to better care for themselves through our Health Education program. It is our goal in the Health Ministry to continue to grow and expand our health care programs and services.

I am loving the work that I feel God has called me to do and I am learning to live into the mission and values at Micah of "doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God, as things the Lord requires of us. (Micah 6:8)."