



AURORA SKY BEACON

A Newsletter for United Women in Faith of the Aurora Sky Area

The Purpose of United Women in Faith

United Women in Faith shall be a community of women whose Purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, to develop a creative, supportive fellowship and to expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.



United
Women
in Faith

UNITED WOMEN IN FAITH Aurora Sky Area Spring Gathering



“Sensitive Soul in Action”

Saturday, April 18, 9:30am – Noon
Via Zoom Only

Guest Speaker ~ Shawna Nelsen-Wills
Advancement Director, Emma Norton Services

Shawna will be sharing information about the upcoming Opening Doors Gala and how we can participate in and support our only National Mission Institution right here in Minnesota! Conference Superintendent, Laurie Kantonen, will join us for communion online as we celebrate her service to the Aurora Sky Area and her retirement.



- Registration Link: <https://www.uwfaithmn.com> (click on Area Connections)
- Cost: \$20.00 (checks payable to Aurora Sky Area UWF)
- Pay Online: <https://www.uwfaithmn.com> (click on Donations/Payment)
- Pay by Mail: Karen Strobel, 811 S. 6th St., Brainerd, MN 56041
- *Registration Deadline: April 15, 2026*

Zoom link will be emailed to participants shortly before the gathering!



President's Corner

*MN Conference President
Marion Hansen*

Minnesota's Conference and Area teams are actively working on plans for Spring Gatherings, Mission u, Assembly and the Conference Annual Gathering!

All women and clergy are invited to all UWFaith gatherings (member or not, you are welcome). All of our gatherings and newsletters are available for viewing and copying at uwfaithmn.com You can register for gatherings, pay registration fees, make donations and more on our website.

Our gatherings are scattered around Minnesota. Some are in person and some are online. Feel free to explore and join in where it works best for you.

If you are seeking to join a local unit but are not finding one in your location, I would love to assist you in developing an online unit. This is a newer opportunity within UWFaith to gather and share information. I would love to hear from you. Contact me at marionha@wcta.net.

Participation for woman who value spiritual growth, putting LOVE INTO ACTION and making a real difference in our world is essential to the health of the organization and the continued impact on issues influencing women, children and youth in our country and globally. Membership is free so check us out and consider joining. It's easy, just go to uwfaithmn.com.

Spring Gathering Speaker

Shawna Nelsen-Wills



We are honored to have Shawna Nelsen-Wills join us as the guest speaker at our Spring Gathering. Shawna joined Emma Norton in September 2018 as the Advancement Director to raise both revenue and visibility for the organization and promote donor and volunteer engagement. She led the Home + Healing Campaign for Restoring Waters which raised \$3.75 million. She brings more than 20 years of experience working in nonprofit communications and development. Prior to Emma Norton, she served as Marketing and Communications Officer for the Women's Foundation of Minnesota and Development and Communications Director for the Family Housing Fund—an affordable housing intermediary in the Twin Cities—for nearly 15 years.

Before moving to Minneapolis, she volunteered through the Lutheran Volunteer Corps in Baltimore, Maryland and taught English in Japan through the JET Program. She has a master's degree in journalism from Boston University and an English and Political Science degree from Augustana College in Rock Island, IL. Shawna is married with four children and lives in Apple Valley, MN. She is active in her community and church.

How to Contribute to the Spring Gathering Offering

Wondering how you can contribute to our Spring Gathering offering when it's a virtual meeting? It's easy! There are two options:

1. **Mail a check:** Make check payable to Aurora Sky UWF and mail to *Karen Strobel, 811 S. 6th St., Brainerd, MN 56041*. Put "Spring Gathering Offering" in memo line.
2. **Online giving:** Go to the MN UWFaith website at uwfaithmn.com (click on Donations/Payment).

Your offering will go to Mission Giving. Thank you!

ATTENTION!
**Mission Today Units &
 Reading Program Participants**
 Please send completed forms (attached to this mailing) to the following people by April 10 to be recognized at the Spring Gathering:
Reading Program Participants – Connie Scott, 700 Agency Trail #305, Mankato, MN 56001
Mission Today Units – Marion Hansen, 28287 Co. Rd. 23, Sebeka, MN 56477

Mission Giving & 5 Star Unit

Karen Strobel ~ Treasurer



Mission Giving Makes Mission Happen!

As I sit down to write this article I can't believe it is already the middle of March. Time seems to be flying by. I am looking forward to spring!!

The Aurora Sky Area Pledge to Mission goal is \$35,000 this year and the Emma Norton goal is \$6,800.00 for the year.

Just a reminder about the requirements for the 5 Star units. The five channels of giving are Pledge to Mission, Special Mission Recognition, Gift to Mission, Gift in Memory and World Thank Offering.

Special Recognition pins are a great way to recognize people in the congregation that are doing God's work in so many different ways. Send in the Special Mission Recognition form and indicate for whom the pin is needed.

Seven local units gave to all five channels of giving this past year to achieve 5 Star status. They are **Asbury-Duluth, Centennial-Roseville, Park-Brainerd, Freshwaters-Princeton, Hamline, Moose Lake and Milaca.**

If you have any questions, please contact me:
Karen Strobel, 811 South 6th Street, Brainerd, MN 56401. Call 218-829-0958(h), 218-839-7413 (c) or email me at karenstrobel6@gmail.com.



Education & Interpretation

What Our Money Funds!

United Women in Faith is trusted with pledges and donations from individual members as well as from mission partners and anonymous donors who are dedicated to mission. Here is what our money funds

- ❖ **National Mission Institutions (NMIs)** - We support nearly 90 NMIs across the United States serving the needs of marginalized and vulnerable communities.
- ❖ **Regional Missionaries** - Focusing on issues of health, gender equality, and elimination of violence among women, and support for the uprooted and marginalized.
- ❖ **Grants and Scholarships** - In 2024 we awarded grants and scholarships totaling \$4,084,488!
- ❖ **Service and Advocacy** - This includes work on peace and justice, education, the rights of children, human rights, and farm workers'. We host leadership training on our social justice priorities and have a program for consecrating deaconesses and home missionaries to a lifetime of service!

For further information on what UWFaith funds, go to [What We Fund | United Women in Faith](#).

The Legacy Endowment Fund Campaign



In 2014, the Legacy Endowment Fund Campaign was created and set a bold goal of raising \$60 million for the endowment. Through the generosity and efforts of women like you, we are confident this goal can be reached!

With every gift received in 2022 and beyond, we will secure the financial resources needed to deepen and expand our mission. Consider joining your legacy with ours and making a gift today. Go to [Legacy Fund | United Women in Faith](#) to donate.

Reading Program/Lending Library

Myrna Kuehl & Julie Jones
Reading Program Ambassadors



Hello everyone, we are your new Reading Program Ambassadors for the Aurora Sky Area. We look forward to meeting you at future Area and Conference gatherings. If you have questions regarding the Reading Program please email Myrna at myrnakuehl@comcast.net.

The November/December 2025 Response Magazine had a wonderful article discussing the United Women in Faith Reading Program which can be accessed at: [Nov./Dec. response: The 2026 United Women in Faith Reading Program | United Women in Faith](#). This program has long been a strong

foundation for UWFaith book clubs, providing education on wide-ranging topics from personal spiritual practices to justice and societal issues in our communities. The resources of the Reading Program can help us develop mission projects to meet the needs of our neighbors and encourage us to think critically about what goes on around us.

You can find information at the Minnesota UWFaith website about the Conference Lending Library. [Go to The Reading Program | UMW Minnesota](#). There you can download the following materials to support your participation in the Reading Program:

- Reading Program Catalog
- Reading Program Report Form
- Current Lending Library Book List
- Books about Native American Boarding Schools

2026 ZOOM BOOK DISCUSSIONS*

Connie: Tuesday Evenings 6:30-8 pm

1. **January 12:** The Defiant Middle: How Women Claim Life's In-Betweens To Remake the World, Kaya Oakes (2026 - Leadership Development)
2. **March 9:** What We Remember Will Be Saved: A Story of Refugees And The Things They Carry, Stephanie Saldana (2026 - Education For Mission)
3. **May 11:** Everyday Ubuntu: Living Better Together, The African Way, Mungi Ngomane (2026 - Social Action)
4. **September 14:** Sisterhood Heals: The Transformative Power of Healing in Community, Joy Harden Bradford (2026 - Nurturing For Community)
5. **November 9:** The Women of the Bible Speak: The Wisdom of 16 Women and Their Lessons For Today, Shannon Bream (2025 - Spiritual Growth)



Myrna: Sunday Afternoons 3-4:30 pm

1. **February 1:** The Women, Kristin Hannah (2026 – Nurturing For Community)
2. **April 12:** Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy During Jim Crow, Tyrone McKinley Freeman (2026 – Leadership Development)
3. **June 7:** God's Ghostwriters: Enslaved Christians And the Making of the Bible, Candida Moss (2026 – Spiritual Growth)
4. **October 4:** The Happiest Man On Earth: The Beautiful Life Of An Auschwitz Survivor, Eddie Jaku (2026 – Education For Mission)
5. **December 6:** Seventy Times Seven: A True Story of Murder and Mercy, Alex Mar (2026 – Social Action)

*Contact Connie Scott at connielulu55@msn.com for info and the Zoom link.

Social Action Update

Ruth Pfaller ~ Social Action Coord.



So many social justice issues to tackle these days! On March 9th I attended the JRLC's (Joint Religious Legislative Coalition) Day on the Hill. Rabbi Jill Avrin gave the keynote in the morning teaching us about Old Testament text regarding human sacredness and the obligations and limitations of human dignity. We then discussed the legislation we were promoting in detail. Buses were provided to the capital where we had a rally in the rotunda and met with the legislators from our respective areas.

The first two issues were regarding increase in funding for food security and affordable housing and homelessness. I was able to discuss my volunteer work with folks facing these issues. Both of my legislators believe churches should do more, not the government. I explained how the churches in my community work tirelessly together to meet the needs, and it is not enough.

One piece of legislation we were opposing was expanding online gambling. This affects those in need the most as they look for some way to make ends meet but end up hurting their families more.

Another piece of legislation that is being drafted is one regarding dignity for youth in foster care. It bans the use of trash bags when transferring youth in foster care from one home to another. Several other states already have these laws.

The group also advocates a ban on high-capacity magazines for guns and money to improve security measures in mosques, synagogues, historically black churches, and other non-profits under threat of violence.

I thought the day was very worthwhile and the JRLC made it easy. I have attended before and have never been disappointed. Consider attending next year. Learn more about JRLC and their legislative priorities at [Joint Religious Legislative Coalition](#).

Also, please subscribe to emails and action alerts from the UMC General Board of Church and Society regarding social justice and environmental issues. Go to [Take Legislative Action 2026 • GBCS](#) to subscribe. They make it easy to write to legislators, both national and state, and inform us of all that is happening within the United Methodist Church. I am proud to be a Methodist!

Minnesota Unit Survey 2025

Welcome to the 2025 Unit Survey! As a valued part of the UWFaith community your unit's insights help shape how United Women in Faith plans, supports, and grows our mission. The unit survey gathers information from the 2025 membership year to inform planning and resourcing for 2026–2027.



This year, the survey focuses on key areas that will help UWFaith National strengthen their collective impact, including:

- Giving and engagement patterns that support membership growth
- Leadership development within and beyond United Women in Faith
- Awareness of and participation in programs and resources

Your unit's responses will be shared by National with our Conference Leadership Team to better understand how local units are engaging and where additional support, training, or resources may be most helpful. To complete the survey, have one member from your unit go to [Minnesota Unit Survey 2025](#) and answer the questions.



Emma Norton Update

Shirley Jackson – Emma Norton Rep



Come join the fun and excitement of the Opening Doors Gala!! The Gala takes place on April 23, 2026, at the Intercontinental Riverfront in St. Paul from 4:00-8:00 p.m. Early Bird Registration is open and you will be entered into an early bird prize drawing. Tickets are \$100 each. Be sure to register by March 31 at <https://secure.ggiv.com/event/odg26> to be entered in the drawing for some fabulous Emma Norton swag.

The Opening Doors Gala is Emma Norton's largest and most critical fundraiser! With major government funding cuts on the horizon, the Gala is more important than ever.. This year's goal is \$150,000+ and you can be a part of it, by sponsoring a table for eight at \$1000. Invite your friends, co-workers, family and fill a table. Contact Shawna Nelsen-Wills at snelsen@emmanorton.org. to sponsor or table.

Another way to support the Gala is by Silent Auction Donations: Put together a local business gift basket with your church, company, book club or family and donate it to our silent auction! Contact Victoria Virasy-Ertelt at vvirasy@emmanorton.org for drop off or scheduled pickup no later than Mon., April 13.

Some donation ideas for the silent auction include: Themed baskets of high value which sell the best combining tangible goods with gift certificates. Some themes that have worked in the past include Local Experiences, Family-friendly Activities, Luxury Relaxation and Spa, and Gourmet Food or Coffee. Donate your time/skills for an activity/service such as therapeutic massage, sound bath experience or guiding a foraging walk. Local business gift cards support the auction AND the business you love! Last, but not least--HOME BAKED GOODS AND TREATS ARE VERY POPULAR EACH YEAR; a singles pie can go for as much as \$100!

The Emma Norton Gala is grateful for items you bring for the auction, but please avoid smaller items, used items, and second-hand art/textiles. Our data shows that too many items at an auction ends up lowering how much people bid overall! .

Earth Day is April 22

The first Earth Day in 1970 mobilized millions of Americans from all walks of life to birth the modern environmental movement. Since then, Earth Day has evolved into the largest civic event on Earth, activating billions across 192 countries to safeguard our planet and fight for a brighter future.



The theme for Earth Day 2026 is *Our Power, Our Planet* which refers to the role of people and communities worldwide in sustaining environmental protections that affect the cost of living, public health, infrastructure reliability, and long-term stability. Environmental conditions influence food systems, water availability, energy access, disaster risk, and economic resilience across all regions. Learn more at [Earth Day 2026 | Theme, Activities, Events & Resources](#).

The Abundance of the Earth

The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us. Psalm 67:6

The abundance of the earth is a sign of God's blessing to all peoples and a call to the whole earth to honor the giver of that abundance. Every flower, cloud, mountain, lake, river, beach, fruit tree, and field of crops speaks of God's creativity, provision and blessing and calls us to praise God. All the peoples of the earth depend on God's goodness. Where do you see God's abundance and blessing as you look upon the earth and your life?

God the Creator, give us eyes to see the beauty and abundance of your creation. Make your face to shine upon us so that your way may be known upon the earth. Amen.



Mission u 2026

"Experiencing Immanuel"

Are you interested in deepening your faith in community? Gaining experience interpreting

Scripture? Working toward healing for yourself, your community, and all of creation? Mission u is for you!!

Mission u is one of the ways that UWFaith impacts the world. Throughout 2026, study leaders trained by the National UWFaith training group will present this year's study online and in-person.

The upcoming Minnesota Fresh Connection-Mission u Edition will have more information regarding dates, registration and scholarships. All UMC churches receive a copy of the Fresh Connection but if you can't locate it, you can sign up for your own copy at [The Fresh Connection | UMW Minnesota](#). You can also print a pdf copy of the newsletter on this same page.

A Deep Knowing: Experiencing Emmanuel Through Every Part of our Lives by Linda Louise Furtado is our Mission u adult study book this year. Of note: there are also children and youth study books available. All UWFaith study books are now available on Amazon. Amazon is now able to "copy on order" so we aren't "out of stock" or wondering what to do with extra books. When you go to <https://www.amazon.com/> search UWFaith and the materials available will be listed and available for order.

2026 Mission u options include:

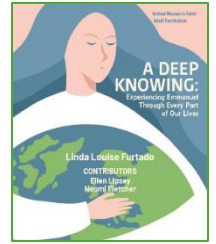
- **IN PERSON STUDY:** Our study leader is National Director Kim Harris. We will meet at Koronis Camp at Paynesville, July 24, 25 & 26
- **ONLINE STUDY:** Our study leader is North Central Jurisdiction Secretary Becky Colman. We will meet via Zoom on November 1, 8, 15 & 22 from 6-8:30pm.

Registration for both the in-person and online studies can be completed at uwfaithmn.com.

Consider attending with a friend who hasn't been to Mission u before. Hope to see you there either online or in-person!

Mission u Study Book

This year's adult curriculum, *A Deep Knowing: Experiencing Emmanuel Through Every Part of Our Lives* by Linda Furtado, invites you to encounter "God with us" in powerful, personal, and transformative ways. The study opens a path to explore how Emmanuel is revealed throughout Scripture—and how that same divine presence continues to walk with us today.



The curriculum encourages you to pause, reflect, and take a closer look at the stories of faith found in the Bible. Through thoughtful readings, meaningful discussions, and personal reflection, you'll uncover connections between those ancient stories and your own life. As you journey with others, you'll explore how God is present amid justice struggles, adversity, community heritage, and deep spiritual relationships.

Whether the stories are familiar or new, each encounter offers the opportunity to see Scripture with fresh eyes and gain a deeper understanding. This curriculum creates sacred space for spiritual =growth, shared insight, and mutual support.

SAVE THE DATE

Conference Annual Fall Gathering

Saturday, October 10, 2026

Camphor Memorial UMC



You are invited to join United Women in Faith from across the state for an enjoyable day of education, spiritual growth, fellowship and fun! The women of Aurora Sky Area will be hosting the 2026 Conference Annual Fall Gathering on Saturday, October 10, at Camphor Memorial UMC in St. Paul.

The Leadership Development Retreat (LDR) will be held the same weekend as the Annual Gathering—October 10 and 11 at Camphor Memorial UMC. Conference and Area officers will receive further information in August.

Assembly 2026 May 15-17, 2026



The United Women in Faith Assembly 2026 will take place from May 15-17, 2026, in Indianapolis, Indiana. This event is a gathering of women committed to faith and empowerment, and registration is currently open. The assembly will feature various activities aimed at nurturing and equipping participants.

There has never been a more important time for women of faith to come together, tap into our strength, and unite to change the world. Assembly 2026 is that moment—a once-every-four-years gathering of women committed to faith, empowerment, and making a difference. Picture a weekend that uplifts your soul, strengthens your faith, and brings you together with an unstoppable sisterhood. At United Women in Faith's 2026 Assembly, you can DREAM IT! BELIEVE IT! DO IT!

There is still time to register. Go to [Home](#) for further information. For assistance with lodging contact Marion Hansen at marionhas@wcta.net.

THIS SPACE IS FOR YOU!!

Minnesota United Women in Faith is seeking a person to serve in the role of Area President for the Aurora Sky Area. The Aurora Sky team is prepared to appoint a person to this role. It is an excellent time to utilize your leadership skills with guidance available from our team advisor, Myrna Kuehl, through 2026.

Other open positions in Aurora Sky Area include:

1. Chair Committee on Nominations
2. Program Coordinator
3. Spiritual Growth Coordinator
4. Education & Interpretation Coordinator
5. Communications Coordinator

For more information, contact Marion Hansen, MN Conference President at marionha@wcta.net.

Aurora Sky Area Leadership Contact Information

Karen Strobel – Treasurer

karenstrobel6@gmail.com, 218-829-0958 (h) or 218-839-7413 (c)

Karen can help with your Mission Giving Pledge, Emma Norton Goal contributions, World Thank Offering contributions and other monetary donations, Mission Recognition Pin orders, 5 Star Unit recognition, “where the money goes” and how to manage your unit account.

Mary Wiegand – Secretary

mwiegand@isd577.org, 218-460-6618

Mary records our meeting minutes. She also receives your “fallen member” information for our Area Memorial Service this fall.

Priscilla Lutjens - Membership Nurture and Outreach Coordinator

prl055281@yahoo.com, 248-613-4108

Feel free to connect with Priscilla regarding membership ideas for recruitment and how to join as an individual member of UWFaith Minnesota at UWFaithmn.com

Ruth Pfaller - Social Action Coordinator

ruthpfaller@gmail.com, 218-213-1841

Connect with Ruth regarding UWFaith social action initiatives and how your unit can participate.

Myrna Kuehl- Past President, Team Advisor & Reading Program Ambassador

myrnakuehl@comcast.net, 763-567-8892

Myrna can help you with Reading Program certificate questions and online book club offerings as well as how to access the Conference Lending Library.

Shirley Jackson – Emma Norton Rep

sicksn007@gmail.com, 651-230-8167

Shirley is available for all things Emma Norton!

Aurora Sky 2026 Calendar of Events

April 5	Happy Easter!	
April 17	AS Area Executive Team Meeting	Virtual
April 18	AS Area Spring Gathering	Virtual
April 23	Emma Norton Opening Doors Gala	InterContinental St. Paul Riverfront
June 13	AS Area Executive Team Meeting	Virtual
July 24-26	Mission u – In-person	Camp Koronis, Paynesville
September 18	AS Area Executive Team Meeting	Park UMC, Brainerd
September 19	AS Area Fall Gathering	Park UMC, Brainerd
October 10	Conference Annual Fall Gathering	Camphor Memorial UMC
October 10-11	Leadership Development Retreat	Camphor Memorial UMC
November 1, 8, 15, 22	Mission u - Online	Virtual

Find United Women in Faith Online

United Women in Faith Website:

uwfaith.org

This is our primary website. Here you will find the latest news and information about United Women in Faith programs, initiatives, and events. It's where you connect with other members and get involved.

Facebook:

facebook.com/uwwomenfaith

If you're on Facebook, be sure to "like" United Women in Faith. Follow the link and sign up so that our regular posts will appear on your home page.

Twitter:

twitter.com/uwwomenfaith

Do you tweet? So does United Women in Faith! Use the link to find our Twitter account@uwwomenfaith. Follow us, tweet with us, and become a part of the continuing conversation around faith, hope, and love.

Minnesota United Women in Faith Website:

uwfaithmn.com

This is our Minnesota UWF website. Here you will find information on upcoming event, event registration forms, district newsletters and the Fresh Connection. You can even donate and make payments.

Minnesota UWF Facebook Group:

facebook.com/groups/127497622121/

This group is for members of Minnesota United Women in Faith and all who is interested in UWF. Follow the link and press "join the group" and posts will appear on your home page.



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