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***GROWING UP LUTHERAN* AUTHORS JANET LETNES MARTIN AND
SUZANN NELSON BRING THEIR UNIQUE BRAND OF HUMOR
TO THE STAGE IN THE NEW MUSICAL COMEDY
*CHURCH BASEMENT LADIES***

Authors/humorists Janet Letnes Martin and Suzann Nelson the creators of the best-selling book *Growing Up Lutheran* and a host of other humorous writings have joined forces with Twin Cities based production company Troupe America, Inc. and its Executive Producer Curt Wollan to turn their material into a new musical comedy, ***Church Basement Ladies***. As the producer of the highly successful hit musical, *How To Talk Minnesotan The Musical* by Howard Mohr, Wollan decided it was time to take us on another delightful, fun-loving journey. It's a love affair in the making dating back almost five years, originally inspired by a conversation with Wollan's in-laws suggesting that he talk with Martin and Nelson about the idea of turning their material into a musical comedy. Wollan wanted to create a show that celebrates the women who work so hard and with such dedication in the church kitchen whether they be Lutheran, Methodist, Jewish or Catholic. Wollan explained, "I know about these "Steel Magnolias" of the church, because my mother was one of them while I was growing up." Intrigued by the idea, Martin and Nelson agreed to meet at a Perkins Restaurant in Hastings, Minnesota (home to Martin's gift shop: Scandinavian Marketplace) and the idea became reality.

This time around, Wollan has commissioned creative writing team Jim Stowell, one of Minnesota's favorite storytellers and Jessica Zuehlke, a performance arts educator and also the daughter of a Church Basement Lady, to develop the book. This husband and wife duo collaborated with composer/ songwriter Drew Jansen, well-known for his creation of the music for the popular homegrown hit musical, *How To Talk Minnesotan The Musical*, Directed by Wollan, The inspiration is found in his mother who was a well-respected church kitchen lady who's Church named their new stove in her honor. ***Church Basement Ladies*** is choreographed by Wendy Short Hays, with set design by Jared Grohs, lighting design by Scott Herbst, costume design by Beth Nistler and musical direction by Drew Jansen.

100 percent Norwegian-American Lutheran, Martin and Nelson bill themselves as authors and humorists and are in high demand as speakers throughout the upper midwest. Martin grew up on a farm near Hillsboro, N.D and now resides in Hastings, MN. and Nelson, originally from Evansville, MN, lives in Grand Rapids, MN. The two met at Augsburg College in Minneapolis and became lifetime friends and partners in writing. Together they have co-authored a number of Scandinavian-American "heartwarming humor" books over the past ten years-- six to be exact, beginning in 1994 with *Cream Peas on Toast: Comfort Food for Norwegian-Lutheran Farm Kids and Others*, and a Catholic-Lutheran lexicon called *They Glorified Mary, We Glorified Rice*. Other favorites include: *Uffda, But Those Clip-Ons Hurt, Then!*, a cartoon parody on Edvard Munch's painting, "The Scream" and a compendium of rural phrases titled *Is It Too Windy Back There, Then?* Their sixth book *Growing Up Lutheran: What Does This Mean?* became a national bestseller, and won them the 1998 Minnesota Book Award for Humor.

Church Basement Ladies, a celebration of the church basement kitchen and the women who work there, features four distinct characters and their relationships as they organize the food and the problems of a rural Minnesota church. From the elderly matriarch of the kitchen to the young bride-to-be learning the proper order of things, the book and music give us a touching, funny look at their lives as we see them handle a record breaking Christmas dinner, the funeral of a dear friend, a Hawaiian Easter Fundraiser, and a steaming hot July wedding. They stave off potential disasters, share and debate recipes, instruct the young, and keep the Pastor on due course while thoroughly enjoying, (and tolerating) each other. Funny and down to earth, audiences will recognize these ladies as they begin to see the year unfold from below the House of God. This is most certainly true!

Wollan has chosen an impressive ensemble of well-known Twin Cities actors. ***Church Basement Ladies*** stars Janet Paone(Reverend Mother in *Nonsense* at the Venetian Playhouse and *Tony 'N Tina's Wedding*) as elderly kitchen matron, "Mrs. Myles Snustad" (Vivian), Greta Grosch (*Tony 'N Tina's Wedding* alumnus) as farm wife and jack-of-all-trades, "Mrs. Gilmer Gilmerson" (Mavis), Dorian Chalmers (Plymouth Playhouse production of *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*) as "Mrs. Elroy Engelsen" (Karin), the best cook in the church, and Ruthie Baker (Patty Andrews in History Theatre's *Christmas of Swing*) as her daughter and bride-to-be, "Signe Engelsen." Tim Drake (Miller Johnson in *How To Talk Minnesotan The Musical* and Ernie the Moocher in *Guys On Ice*) plays the much put upon Pastor "E.L. Gunderson" with Kyle Nelson (*The Lovely Liebowitz Sisters* and *A Closer Walk With Patsy Cline*) as Emil Tryggestad, the church organist.

Church Basement Ladies begins a regional series of performances and workshops opening at the Reif Center in Grand Rapids, MN, The Historic Fargo Theatre, Fargo, ND, the Belle Meyhus Theatre, Bismarck, ND and completing its run at the Paramount Theatre, St. Cloud, MN. According to Wollan, “This will be our “out-of-town tryout.” We plan to continue work shopping the script after this run, grooming it for a Twin Cities premier at the Plymouth Playhouse opening September 8, 2005 for an open ended run.”

For further information go to www.plymouthplayhouse.com or troupeamerica.com.