

VOL.12 SPRING 2009

Well Springs

A Journal of United Methodist Clergywomen

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invitation

*Y*ou are invited to create a journal of clergywomen. This journal is a forum for our collective experience and emerging stories as women in ministry. Our hope is to:

- make connections with other clergywomen;
- exchange our imaginings, knowledge, and ideas;
- call forth the creative spirit that exists in each clergywoman;
- nurture creativity through worship, music, visual arts, dreams, and dance;
- share our pain and anger;
- dance our joys and laughter;
- speak grace and compassion;
- seek authentic expressions of spirituality and celebrate our diverse experiences of the divine;
- reclaim the essence of the gospel as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ;
- provide for inclusiveness and affirm our diversity;
- advocate for women and all of creation;
- engender dreams, transformations, and a vision of wholeness in the Church.

We proclaim with Bishop Leontine Kelly, “Wellsprings of hope—it may well be the women of The United Methodist Church.” This journal is dedicated to that hope.



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IN THE BEGINNING

Marion Jackson, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

Nancy Grissom Self, California-Pacific Annual Conference

In The Methodist Church, women were granted full clergy rights in 1956. However, not until 1975, nineteen years later, were clergywomen called together for the first consultation of United Methodist clergywomen. It was a significant conference because it was the first time that clergywomen had ever acted corporately and politically to address issues in the Church. It was followed by consultations each quadrennium: in 1979 in Dallas, Texas (without a specific theme); in 1983 in Glorieta, New Mexico, with the theme “Make Plain the Vision”; and in 1987 at Great Gorge Resort, McAfee, New Jersey, with the theme “Wellsprings of Hope.”

On July 4, 1987, Liz Lopez and Kathy (Nickerson) Sage recognized the need for “an instrument of some kind that could not only connect, but bond United Methodist clergywomen in a new and exciting way,” and be both “a place where our stories, ideas, creativity and skills could be shared” and “an expression of ‘Who We Are’ as United Methodist clergywomen” (vol. 1, no. 1, p. 5). Addressing that need, the *WellSprings* journal was founded in 1988, taking its title from the 1987 Consultation: *WellSprings: A Journal for United Methodist Clergywomen*. Much of the content of volume 1, number 1 reflected that extraordinary event. Its worship, music, platform speakers, and workshops provided nourishing food for



thought and fresh waters for the thirsty souls of the women who attended. This issue was sent free to each clergywoman in the General Council on Finance and Administration's list of ordained women under appointment. Even if women had been unable to attend the consultation, they were given a tempting taste of what is possible in the shared sisterhood of clergywomen.

The journal issue that followed later consultations also reflected the heart and soul of those events: 1991, "Illumination of the Holy" in St. Charles, Illinois; 1995, "Women of Spirit: Transformed and Transforming" in Atlanta, Georgia; and 2002, "Creating a Woman's Sabbath" in San Diego, California. These issues (like all the others) were free for all United Methodist clergywomen. Each issue was sent in bulk to United Methodist seminaries for its women students to read. Laity, men, non-United Methodist women, and non-United Methodist seminaries were invited to take subscriptions each year.

One of the overriding purposes of *WellSprings* has been to foster connections, which is our foundation, for we are not separated or alone since our churches are not autonomous. From the beginning, therefore, *WellSprings* has encouraged clergywomen to participate in the publication by sharing their individual and collective experiences and stories. In every issue their poetry, liturgy, theological reflection, music, and sometimes pictures or drawings were included. Also included have been statistics indicating the number of clergywomen in The United Methodist Church by jurisdictions and by annual conferences. In these ways *WellSprings* has introduced United Methodist clergywomen in the United States to the thoughts, life, and spirituality of United Methodist clergywomen around the world. Across the United States, we have also learned from and about one another.

Liz Lopez, Lynn Scott, and Susan Beehler (the latter began editing the journal in 1990) were the guiding continuity for *WellSprings* for much of its history. After a hiatus of several years (1997–2000), *WellSprings* came back to life under the leadership of Marion Jackson, who succeeded Lynn Scott and Kathy (Nickerson) Sage. At a meeting of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Lopez and Scott, former members of the editorial circle, were invited to bring a parting message as Beehler



continued to serve on the editorial circle, and as Marion Jackson and Cynthia Harvey picked up the mantle of a tradition of brave women. Beehler, as a musician and as a member of the editorial circle since its inception, continued to shape the contents of *WellSprings* during its renewal. Since United Methodist hymnody, with its thousands of hymns written by the Wesley family, is such a large part of who we are and how we express ourselves, it had become common to include lyrics and hymn tunes in *WellSprings*. A few of them are mentioned below. “The Women Must Be Gathering,” written by Beehler, became the clarion call for United Methodist clergywomen for each consultation. It was completed December 9, 1985, in preparation for the 1987 Consultation. (It is copyrighted and printed in vol. 9, no. 2, p. 15.)

In the Spring 2001 issue (vol. 9, no. 1), the editorial circle, which continued to include Marion Jackson, Susan Beehler, and Cynthia Harvey, promoted the 2002 Clergywomen’s Consultation. Women were able to register and choose workshops through forms and information provided in *WellSprings*. Thirteen hundred women attended the 2002 Clergywomen’s Consultation in San Diego, California. Beehler’s musical contribution was “Light of Lights.”

After a space of seven years, the consultation in January 2002 brought clergywomen together with the theme “Creating a Woman’s Sabbath.” “Remembrance” was the theme of the Winter 2002 issue that followed the gathering in San Diego. Four articles that were included in the section titled “Remembering the Consultation” provided remembrances and thoughts of hope and healing. Sabbath rhythms and reconnecting were results of the consultation. The other articles of rest and restoration and Susan Beehler’s “Holy Song” were reminders of the time together in sunny California.

Having started again, *WellSprings* continued to be an avenue for United Methodist clergywomen. It dealt with the religious influences and issues of our denomination, especially as they related to and impacted women. It provided United Methodist clergywomen a place to articulate their understanding of God and their relationship to their Savior through both theological reflections and creative expressions. Guest editors and writers

have varied. Bishops, PhD candidates from the United Methodist Women of Color Program, professors, and women who love the Lord and serve the Church in many capacities have made contributions. Some were established artists. These women were older and younger, conservative and liberal, and represented a wide variety of ethnic groups. Women who have written or drawn to celebrate, and those whose lamentations came from the depths of their souls, have been willing to share with their sisters.

Published twice a year from 1989 to 1995 and once a year in 1988, 2001, 2002, and 2003, the journal—until now—had eleven volumes in print, with seven having both fall and spring issues. When it was published twice a year, one issue always included the number of ordained women in each jurisdiction and each annual conference. We especially looked forward to that issue as we watched the growth, or in some cases lack of growth, in areas around the country and around the world. It has been one place that demonstrates the gains of clergywomen in numbers, in strength, and in responsibility. In this way *WellSprings* has provided a forum for women bishops to encourage and educate clergywomen in our denomination. It has enabled United Methodist clergywomen to feel connected globally.

In 2003, the theme for the one volume published that year was “Awakening.” Ironically, the article titled “Hitting the Spiritual Snooze Button,” written by Susan Buchanan, was included as *WellSprings* went into deep slumber once again because of budget constraints. But there was yet another consultation to come.

The year 2006 marked the fiftieth anniversary of full clergy rights for women in The United Methodist Church. In collaboration with others, we crafted a resolution to be taken to General Conference, which encouraged annual conferences and churches to celebrate this milestone throughout the year. A task force was formed to help the church celebrate at all levels. At the same time a committee was called together to plan the 2006 Consultation. The theme was “Courageous Past: Bold Future.” The 1956 General Conference had given women more than full clergy rights. It was then that legislation was passed requiring bishops to provide an appointment for members in full connection. That



meant once a woman had full membership, the bishop would have a hard time not finding an appointment for her.

Encouraged by the hope of a “Bold Future,” *WellSprings* is revived from its dormant state. Now a new editorial circle has begun a new journey under the leadership of HiRho Park, Emily Cheney as editor, and Anita Phillips along with the two of us. We are prepared to offer a renewed *WellSprings*, with this first issue concentrating on the subject of “Women’s Inclusive Leadership.” There is, of course, an article about the 2006 Consultation, which Anita Phillips has written.

It has been a John Wesley-sized, heart-warming experience for both of us to review all these volumes as we anticipate the renewal of *WellSprings* as a valuable resource for all women called to ordained ministry. We, as clergywomen, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all those who have made, and are once again making, this rich resource available to sustain us in our ministries, wherever we may be led.





WELLSPRINGS: REVIVED AND RENEWED

HiRbo Y. Park, Baltimore Washington Annual Conference

In 2006 The United Methodist Church celebrated fifty years of the continuous and faithful journey of clergywomen within the Methodist tradition at the 2006 International United Methodist Clergywomen's Consultation. The United Methodist clergywomen have paved the pathway with their persistent witnesses of the amazing grace of God who upholds the dignity of women and affirms their leadership in the Church in spite of the burdens of rejection, ignorance, and abuse of power. The *WellSprings* journal has played a crucial role in this journey since its first publication in 1988 as a catalyst for bonding United Methodist clergywomen. It has provided a way for clergywomen to engage in spiritual formation and has spoken to the hunger of spirituality for clergywomen by clergywomen. *WellSprings* has been a lamp carrying the flame of love for God's people for women in ministry.

Since 1988, the number of clergywomen who serve the Church has increased tremendously. As of December 2006, nearly 9,000 United Methodist clergywomen made up about 27 percent of the Church's total active clergy.¹ That is about a 400 percent increase from 1987 when there were 2,577 clergywomen, including 2 women bishops and 38 district superintendents. Now there are more than 90 clergywomen serving churches with 1,000 members or more,



18 active women bishops, and 128 women district superintendents, and more than 1,000 of them are racial-ethnic clergywomen as of October 2008. This increase of women's leadership in the Church means that as the Church we have been intentional about gender inclusiveness. At the same time, without sacrifice and struggles of forerunners, younger generations of women would not have been able to imagine cultivating their call to ministry.

A pioneer in feminist biblical hermeneutics, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza calls the space where women come together to transform patriarchal, racial, gender, cultural, social, and religious inscriptions into radical and egalitarian visions of human community the "ekklesia of women."² The "ekklesia of women" understands the reign of God from the universal understanding that God's reign embraces all human reality that has manifested in different ways. *WellSprings* has provided this space, the "ekklesia of women," for United Methodist clergywomen, for those who are ordained and called to a "set apart" ministry.

Because of this reason, the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry decided to revive this flame that had been dimmed for a few years due to financial and administrative difficulties. This reigniting of the flame comes with the hope that younger generations of women will join their forerunners in the "ekklesia of women" for spiritual and ministerial formation through *WellSprings*. *WellSprings* set the foundation for younger generations of women to dream with the One who declares, "I am who I am" (Exod. 3:14); "I am the one who reveals mystery that former generations have not known in human history" (Col. 1:26, paraphrase). From this perspective *WellSprings* is not only about those who have been ordained and called to a "set apart" ministry within The United Methodist Church, but also about the leadership development of future generations of women.

The 2008 General Conference proposed that The United Methodist Church would be more of a worldwide Church emphasizing a regional uniqueness. In the constitution the shift of the words *central conference* to *regional conference* marks this emphasis. This shift is especially important because it indicates that there will be no boundaries based on race, ethnic origin, gender, color,



disability, marital status, or age in The United Methodist Church other than a particular geographical and regional division. The recent presidential election in the United States reflected this denominational belief by electing the first African American president in U.S. history. However, equity of women in society and the Church still requires advocacy and support as it is true to racial-ethnic issues.

We are living through tremendous economic, political, and cultural shifts. Divisions exist in every aspect of life. The Church, comprised of conservatives and liberals, women and men, heterosexuals and homosexuals, the poor and the wealthy, younger generations and older generations, techno geeks and those who are less sophisticated in technology, is not an exception—it appears that our way of life is wired to be divisive. In the midst of a polarized world, the ministries of United Methodist clergywomen are examples of an incarnation of our denominational commitment to inclusiveness. Clergywomen’s stories of journeying as disciples of Jesus Christ have been a source of power and strength to those who are marginalized eccesialogically, politically, socially, and culturally.

In this volume clergywomen are exploring how women have been accepting themselves as leaders and exercising their leadership. The meaning of inclusiveness—how we include ourselves, how we include others, and what Scripture and theology provide to guide us in understanding and expressing inclusiveness—is of the utmost importance. Once we are able to see ourselves without prejudice, we may finally be able to accept others as they are and see how our consciousness is connected to each other within one spirit. The revised *WellSprings* approaches readers with new and old faces. Four new categories have replaced some of the old categories: “Theological Reflection” will provide a woman theologian’s assessment of the current challenging issues of the day; “Women’s Leadership Style” will explore women’s unique leadership styles in dealing with various issues in the Church; “Windows to a Wider Sisterhood” will provide opportunities for clergywomen from different parts of the world to assert their perspectives on the Church and ministry; and the section “Younger Voice” is a threshold for connecting younger generations of women to the spirit of



WellSprings. We kept the sections “Spinning the Sacred Yarn,” “The Creating Spirit,” and “Highlights” in the revised edition in order to provide continuity to the *WellSprings* of the past.

The *WellSprings* journal will be published annually every spring. It will be distributed to all active and retired United Methodist clergywomen, schools, and United Methodist organizations by hard copy as well as through the United Methodist clergywomen’s Web site. The revived *WellSprings* will provide a forum for clergywomen’s collective experiences and focus on developing clergywomen’s leadership and including resources that are informative and inclusive in nature. This effort responds to one of the denominational ministerial focus areas for the next quadrennium (2008–2012), which is “leadership development.” In doing so, women may flourish and celebrate their being as they’ve been created in the image of the divine; they may discover the power of an emancipating spirit, which is the grace of God, through stories of clergywomen’s experiences in ministry. We pray that the world may get to know United Methodist clergywomen through their theological reflections of their faith journeys.

Through the ministry of *WellSprings*, may hope be ever alive in the hearts of those who are living in the margins! As Bishop Leontine Kelly proclaimed in the first issue of *WellSprings* in the summer of 1988, “Wellsprings of hope—it may well be the women of The United Methodist Church!”

I express my humble gratitude for faith in Jesus Christ, which enabled clergywomen to boldly step out and claim women’s leadership in the Church and society.

I express my deep appreciation to the editorial circle—Emily Cheney, the editor; Marion Jackson; Anita Phillips; and Nan Self—for their dedication. I also thank Henk Pieterse, Director of Scholarly Research at the General Board of Higher Education, and Nancy Terzian, the new designer of the journal, for their assistance in publishing this journal.

¹ Michelle Fugate, *Clergywomen’s Local Church Appointments: 2006* (Nashville: The General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, March 2007).

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001).





FROM LIFE TO LEADERSHIP

Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, California-Pacific Annual Conference

*S*itting at a table or in the corner of a hotel lobby, I listen to women's stories. Together, we laugh and cry. Sometimes I want to ask curiosity questions or share a story from my life, but I know better. We can discuss these another day. When a woman shares her life story, it is precious, and I need simply to listen.

I have spent the past nine years listening to women's stories in the Oral History Project of Candler's Women in Theology and Ministry.¹ The project has spread over time, creating opportunities for women to share their stories in different life moments. We privileged listeners have learned from these women most centrally that they lead from their life experiences, whether in wide public arenas, local communities, or small circles. Whatever their styles and contexts, women influence local communities and social movements as they give their lives. In so doing, they echo women in early Jewish and Christian traditions. Thus, a dialogue between contemporary and historical women can uncover charisms (gifts from God) of women's leadership. I do not claim that all women are alike; nor do I claim that the charisms I name are limited to women. I do claim that these charisms reveal colors and textures of women's leadership. They also represent the theological fabric of leadership for the future.



COURAGEOUS COMPASSION

One gift of women's leadership is *courageous compassion, often born of life trauma*. Remember the leadership of women during the traumatic time when Pharaoh had threatened all Hebrew male children with death (Exod. 1:8–22). He instructed the midwives Shiphrah and Puah to kill all male infants when they were born, but they did not do so. When called before Pharaoh to explain their actions, they cleverly responded that Hebrew women were vigorous and gave birth before the midwives reached them. The trauma continued, however. Pharaoh sent people to kill the young Hebrew boys. Fearing the inevitable, Moses' mother hid her son for three months and then built a papyrus basket to float him on the river to the bathing place of Pharaoh's daughter. When the princess found the basket, she had compassion on the child. Then Miriam, Moses' elder sister, stepped forward and offered to get one of the Hebrew women (her mother) to nurse the child for the princess. Moses' mother was in charge of Moses' care until he grew up; then she took him back to the princess to be *her* son (1:20–2:10).

The women in this story led by courageous compassion, arising from their circumstances. The midwives cleverly evaded Pharaoh's orders to murder newborn Hebrew boys. Moses' mother hid her boy child, finally taking risky action and allowing Moses to become the princess's son. The princess, recognizing the child as a Hebrew boy (ordered to death by her father), adopted the child as her own. Bold Miriam stepped forward to offer a Hebrew nurse, thus ensuring that her mother could care for him. Each woman took risks in the face of Pharaoh's orders. Each led with compassion when she could have easily turned away or abandoned hope.

Such courageous compassion marks contemporary women's leadership as well. One woman in our Oral History Project is the lay leader of her local church, where she has been an inspiration to countless pastors and laity. As a survivor of domestic violence, she acknowledges that her life experience has shaped her compassion for others. She thanks the Church for empowering her to end the destructive relationship in which she was embedded and to build a new life for herself and her children. Now, she wants to do that for other people who are struggling with traumas, large and



small, in their lives. Whether taking meals to neighbors, offering transportation to someone who needs medical care, visiting people in the hospital, counseling her pastor, teaching a Sunday school class, or speaking in church, she leads with compassion. She says she is “far from perfect,” but God gave her strength to live through a violent marriage and the deaths of two young adult children. Her strength has strengthened others to face their challenges, and she feels blessed with this ministry.

LIBERATION

Another mark of women’s leadership is *liberation, emerging from the experience of oppression*. Remember the leadership of Esther, whose concern for her people led her to risk everything to liberate them. Her story may actually have been fiction, but it was meant to encourage Jewish people in exile. As a revelation of deep truths, it has continued to provide hope to Jewish and Christian communities. The fact that the original creators chose to name a woman as heroine is all the more poignant.

According to the story, King Ahasuerus was arrogant with power, banning Queen Vashti early in the story for refusing to appear before his male guests. The king followed this act with a decree, declaring that every man would be master of his own house, seeking to prevent Vashti’s defiance from spreading to other women (Esther 1:10–22). Into this world of gender oppression, a plan for ethnic oppression was devised against the Jews, and Esther entered the picture. She did not seek to be a liberator, but she did agree to become an insider to the king’s court, entering the selection process for queen. After becoming queen, she gathered information and acted for her people. In the most critical of these moments, her uncle Mordecai warned Esther of ominous danger:

Do not think that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father’s family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this. (4:13–14)



At this point, Esther took charge, asking the Jews and her court to fast with her. Then she invited the king and king's advisor Haman (leader of the plot to kill the Jews) to a banquet. On the second day of the banquet, she told the king her petition, explaining that her people were marked for murder. When the king asked who was behind the plot, she named Haman. Soon afterwards, the king ordered Haman's death. That was not the end, however. Esther's goal was release for her people. Thus, Esther fell at the king's feet and pleaded with him. In response, he issued a decree *reversing* the earlier one to destroy the Jews (5:1–8:17). Esther had become a leader of liberation.

Such passion for liberation also marks the women we interviewed, the oral historians. One white woman worked incessantly for racial and gender equality in Atlanta, Georgia, during the 1950s and 1960s. She was later instrumental in forming the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women (UMC). One African American woman coached her children in nonviolence as they integrated schools in their North Carolina hometown in the 1950s. Both women saw social oppression in their world, and they gave leadership in ways that seemed most fitting to liberate people from injustice and prejudice. Like Esther, they did not predetermine what they would do. Neither did they set out to be heroic. They simply recognized their world as oppressive to some people; they were called “for just such a time as this” to be liberators.

VISION

Another gift of women's leadership is *vision, closely knit with life disappointment*. Remember again Moses' mother, who moved from anxiety for her son to visionary action. When she could no longer hide her baby, she sent Moses on the river, hoping that the princess would find and care for him. She did. This vision of Moses' mother was costly; she had to allow Moses to become the princess's son. She had, however, guaranteed his survival.

We have seen countless moments when oral historians have similarly converted life disappointments into visions. Women discouraged by unsuccessful justice efforts became more determined.



Women disappointed by an unwelcome family move re-created their vocations in a new place. They reshaped crumpled dreams into vital ministries with local churches, homeless people, social agencies, and denominational bodies. This does not mean that the loss of early dreams was benign; it was often profound. What is clear, however, is that experiences of disappointment often deepened women's visions and their determination to enact them.

HONESTY

Thus far, we have attended to active dimensions of women's leadership. Women also have qualities of leadership that arise from their ways of being. One is *honesty, a quality that often emerges from the crucible of hard challenges and the self-knowledge that emerges from them*. One form of honesty can be found in the story of Naomi after the deaths of her husband and sons in a strange land. She speaks this truth to her daughters-in-law when they seek to return with her to Bethlehem: "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband" (Ruth 1:11–12a). Naomi then calls herself "Mara" (bitter) when she arrives home (Ruth 1:20). Naomi's bitterness is complex in this story, but it reveals an honest awareness of herself, her future, and the realistic possibilities for her daughters-in-law.

Such honesty marked the stories of oral historians as well. They often surprised us with stories of difficult times — struggles with partners, times when their leadership or their mothering was inadequate, times when they stayed in an abusive relationship too long, and periods of self-doubt. Since these women were selected as shapers of their communities, and their stories will be placed in permanent archives, I expected more guarded responses, but the women were strikingly honest. They did not tell everything, but what they told was inclusive of the good and bad, the happy and sad; they told truth tales. One ordained woman described her first solo pastorate: "I was so sophisticated and I knew so much and I was so impressed with my own image of myself . . . and I was so



unsure.” Another woman looked back on early years of marriage and parenthood, wishing she had done some things differently. Another woman shared stories of her family of origin, aware that it had scarred and strengthened her. The forty women we interviewed were self-aware and honest, and they brought these gifts to leadership.

WISDOM

Another mark of women’s leadership is *wisdom, arising from daily discoveries of life’s vicissitudes*. As with other charisms, wisdom is not limited by gender, but is often found in women. Consider the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, who discovered Pharaoh’s murderous plot against Hebrew boys and became clever circumventors. Consider Moses’ mother and sister, who discovered Pharaoh’s severity and used ingenuity to save Moses. Remember Mary Magdalene, who discovered the empty tomb of Jesus and took the lead to inform other disciples (John 20:1–18). Consider Phoebe, who discovered life in Jesus Christ and became a deacon and benefactor of the early Christian community (Rom. 16:1–2). Remember medieval mystics, like Hildegard of Bingen (twelfth century), Hadewych of Antwerp (thirteenth century), and Julian of Norwich (fourteenth century), whose transformative visions inspired their explorations and expressions of theological wisdom, as well as their wise leadership with others.

Similar sparks of wisdom arise from oral historians. Drawing from their life discoveries, these women have developed inner wisdom. Their wisdom evolved from moments of knowing abuse and exclusion, accepting that one’s birth mother could not rear one, discovering a new vocational direction to replace a painful disappointment, and knowing the high and low movements of the civil rights movement. Women who have given their lives to teaching and caring have also discovered the joy of mentoring others into wisdom. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and former Deputy General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, described this process of sharing wisdom: “You are trying to



mentor, to push people, accompany them, encourage them to be the best they can be.”²

I have identified five charisms of women’s leadership, each representing a gift from God and a call to lead boldly toward the flourishing of God’s creation. Leadership arises from these gifts, is tempered in fires of life experience, and is crafted by women as they live with and follow the lead of God’s indomitable Spirit. Women are as different as snowflakes or grains of sand, but they share in charisms of God. This is the secret and challenge of their leadership.

¹ The Oral History Project, 2000–2008, is sponsored by Women in Theology and Ministry, Candler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia. It includes multiple presentations and interviews with each of forty women. The women were nominated and selected for their influence on religious communities and culture. They represent diverse ethnicities, religious affiliations, forms of ministry, and regions. Most have lived a portion of their lives in the southern United States, though they have lived substantial periods in twenty-two different states, representing every region of the United States and three other countries.

² Interview conducted January 19, 2006.



spinning the sacred yarn



YOU WANT A PIECE OF THIS?

Pamela Lightsey, South Georgia Annual Conference

You didn't see me on television, you didn't see news stories about me. The kind of role that I tried to play was to pick up pieces or put together pieces out of which I hoped organization might come. My theory is, strong people don't need strong leaders.¹

*T*he late legendary civil rights activist Ella Baker was known for her persistent effort to involve as many as possible in the fight to end segregation and resist oppression. She worked with such notable African American leaders as Martin Luther King Jr., Bayard Rustin, and Angela Davis. During this current political season, I must mention that African Americans were granted the right to sit as delegates to the Democratic National Convention because of a group she organized, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. According to Carol Mueller, her emphasis was *participatory democracy*. Her style was forming networks and empowering small groups to have enormous political power. Her work with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee had an intentional focus on including local citizens, particularly youth and



women. Often this sense of inclusive ministry put her at odds with male ministers within these groups who—as it were—made up the power elite of the African American community.

Framed and mounted in my current office is a poster titled *10 Characteristics of a Good Leader*. It came from some magazine article I read during my employ as a civil service worker for the federal government at Fort Benning, Georgia. Those days in the late 1990s were both bitter and sweet. Off the heels of a divorce, single parent to two “normal” teenagers (“normal” meaning I experienced the age-appropriate challenges that most parents faced during those years when children yearn to be adults), I had the added personal dimension of serving as the associate pastor of a growing United Methodist church. Although I had been in ministry since I was nineteen years old, those days in my mid-thirties I had become certainly more mature but also much more reflective about my life and my vocation. I happened upon the article at just the time when I was searching for answers about the traits of good leadership.

In the late 1990s, after almost seventeen years of committed service in the Church (most of that time as lay minister, the later years as ordained minister), I had seen my share of leaders from whom I could compare and contrast styles. In fact, I had made a point of developing a list of what I called *When I Become Pastor*. (Really, it was an actual list on one of the empty pages of my Bible, which I began as a twenty-something lay minister and continued until the time of my ordination.) Within a span of more than fifteen years, the list contained not only ministry ideas but also lessons I had learned as I worked with pastors, what to do and what not to do. In my mind there was always a lesson to be learned from successes as well as failures.

One trait of good leadership as given in the poster is *poise*. Poise has to do with how one interacts with others; it is a pleasant, endearing manner that exudes self-assurance yet is neither arrogant nor dominant. Poise is the ability to share space with others yet maintain one’s distinctive nature. This is how I see Ella Baker and what I have always strived for in my work. It was certainly on my list of ways to be *When I Become Pastor*.



Perhaps what I admire most about persons who demonstrate poise in their role as leaders is their ability to be gracious in a shared task. There is always a bit of humility in their demeanor. While they could possibly “get the job done” on their own, they are always looking for ways to bring in the ideas of others. These great leaders understand the importance of being inclusive, of—as Ella Baker would say—“picking up pieces or putting together pieces”² from a talented and diverse pool of volunteers.

Admittedly, responding to the call to ministry at such a young age comes with a certain level of immaturity and naivety. I did not know what I wanted to be when I grew up. The truth be told, I thought I was grown and knew it all. *Knowing it all* comes with the accompanying condition of *doing it all*, being all in control. I was blinded to the ministerial flatulence that seeps in when you’re young, gifted, and dumb in terms of social graces and life experiences. I saw things in a black and white, an absolute or nothing at all perspective. My theological mind-set was inflexible and centered on “thus sayeth the Lord.” I gauged everything and everyone by this myopic view of life. Consequently, I operated within a very narrow religious construct of ministry. Inclusivity meant bringing in those who attended to my monological perspective and, as a result, limited the extent of persons I was willing to include in any work where I had a leadership role.

Although I was a true sectarian early on, the beauty of a sincere heart when it bumps up against the gracious poise of dynamic leaders creates a crisis of character that initiates a season of critical reflection. That is to say, I believe God places key persons in our lives to serve as mentors grooming us for the journey ahead. The story of Ella Baker’s life was part of that process for me. Her grassroots efforts to include others in the various think tank and community organizations of the civil rights movement touched my heart. It cost Ella Baker not one drop of personal dignity to include others; it was, in fact, the secret to the creation and growth of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. Yet her commitment to inclusion and, most important, her experience of suffering discrimination—ironically at the hands of black men—resonated within me. Looking back on her work, she later



stated: “I knew from the beginning that as a woman, an older woman, in a group of ministers who are accustomed to having women largely as supporters, there was no place for me to have come into a leadership role. The competition wasn’t worth it.”³

Like Ella Baker, I have come to realize that the best of my work is made possible by my willingness to be inclusive, to treat everyone with respect and dignity, and to encourage as many as possible to share a piece of the ministerial functions. Inclusion is not the subtraction of my worth as a leader; it is the added strength of my worth as a leader.

While others struggle with debating over who should or should not be included, I have—as I have matured in my understanding of the role of the Church—sought to try to be as inclusive as possible, realizing that ultimately my work is an act of faith. When asked by critics of my theological ethics, “Where do you draw the line?” I have responded, “I don’t draw lines. I connect them.” In my mind, it is not as important where people are in their commitment to God when they offer themselves to become part of any local body where I serve as a leader, as it is a matter of how God might transform their lives as we work together in the ministry of God’s beloved *kingdom*.⁴

I realize this is a risk-taking notion. Questions have been asked about my willingness to work with criminal and deviant persons. My rejoinder has been, “How can I not?” While I am cautious and take every precaution possible to protect myself and the lives of those who work with me, I am also a student of history; practicing a Christian lifestyle has never been a “safe” vocation. Only through the eyes of faith am I willing to join hands with persons in ministry, knowing that very seldom do I really know a person’s true motive for desiring to have church membership or to work on a ministry project, but I trust that God knows the true motive and the person’s true character and that I must work as a Christian leader trusting in the providential care of a gracious and loving God. I eagerly engage in community discernment because I have come to see the value of the opinion of a circle of prayerful people. My sense of poise and humility helps me understand that I don’t have to work alone. It is a truism: *many hands make light work*. To the extent that I am regarded



as a leader who has experienced a modicum of success, the reason for it is that I have become a mature leader who has come to grips with one of the first lessons we learn as children: sharing. *You want a piece of this?* Seen paradigmatically, inclusiveness is the plumb line test of good leadership. It is the mark of all growing, vital ministries.

I am a proponent of inclusiveness because Jesus Christ was, even though it was dangerous to be so and even though it was used as witness against him in the plot to destroy him. Through Christ, the salvation of God was given to the Jew and also meant the inclusion of the Gentile. Amidst a world with a predilection toward greed, the gracious poise of the leader who practices with a *you-want-a-piece-of-this* sharing mentality is a striking testament to the visionary ministry of the One who bid unto all, "Come."

¹ Carol Mueller, "Ella Baker and the Origins of 'Participatory Democracy,'" in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 51.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 64.

⁴ The use of the word *kingdom* is an intentional contemporary approach to offer language that is more inclusive and less gender specific.



spinning the sacred yarn



THE WAY TO INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: STORYTELLING, STORY LISTENING

Soomee Kim, California-Pacific Annual Conference

Inclusive leadership starts with creating an environment where all can speak and be heard fully and accurately. For everyone to be heard, each one should be affirmed that the voice is important and that the story matters not only to oneself but also to the whole community. We remember from the book of Exodus how Moses had to listen to the Israelites when he led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. It was not always fun and easy for Moses to listen to the grumblings and complaints (Exod. 15:24; 16:1–3; 17:2–3), and after listening, he had to adjust the travel plans to accommodate the needs of the people.

In the Gospels we read how Jesus demonstrated the arts of listening and dialogue while he was on earth. When Jesus met a Samaritan woman at a well, he encouraged her to express herself fully (John 4:1–30). It must have been his words and attitudes that gave the woman the confidence to ask questions and to dare to give her comments. No questions were considered foolish, and no comments were ignored. Eventually, she was empowered to return to her community that she had tried to avoid, and shared with them her story of the marvelous encounter with Jesus. Her community listened to her, believed her, and invited Jesus to stay with them. The resurrected Jesus met with two very distraught



disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). He encouraged them to tell their version of the story and listened with interest, but he didn't stop there. He taught them: he interpreted for them, admonished them, and challenged them to have broader perspectives (Luke 24:25–27). Eventually, the two disciples were so empowered that they couldn't wait until the morning to return to their community in Jerusalem.

“Loss of voice is also about a loss of subjectivity and the loss of the ‘authentic I’ that can be brought to relationships,”¹ Brita L. Gill-Austern wrote. To reach the point where everyone can be heard, the leader has to make sure everyone is empowered to express. Gill-Austern named this type of leader a voice coach. She elaborated,

Good voice coaches know that when we are learning to speak a new language or sing a new song, our initial attempts may be rough, imprecise, and missing a clarity of expression. Voice coaches know how to begin with where people are and lead them gently into depth conversation that calls forth ever clearer articulation.²

From voice coaches, Gill-Austern further called the leaders and teachers to become storytellers and evokers of stories.

Before I could claim the authority to lead the Church as a clergywoman and enable others to tell their stories, I had to find my own voice at a time when I did not have a voice coach for guidance. I grew up in an Asian culture deeply embedded in Confucian principles. In that culture's traditions, females are expected to be quiet. The messages with which I grew up were, “If a hen [instead of a cock] crows, it brings disasters to the house,” and “A woman's voice shouldn't be heard over the fences.” Naturally introverted person that I am, I found a comfortable place in the culture that affirmed its female members to keep silent, be docile, and ultimately be voiceless. But it is not just Asian cultures that encourage voicelessness in women. Christie Cozad Neuger wrote, “Voicelessness is something that women share across class, race, and the many other categories that divide us, as we share the prevalence of sexual abuse and the fear of being raped.”³ She added,



The training for voicelessness begins in childhood. . . . The reinforcement for voicelessness continues through adulthood. The legacy of voicelessness is passed not just through the culture, but also from mother to daughter as she lives out her voicelessness as a model for her children.⁴

Then I received a call to ordained ministry. The most difficult part of the call was the role of preacher until I encountered the metaphor of a preacher as a storyteller. It was also the Storytellers who empowered me to claim my call to pastoral leadership. I had found out about them and become a collector of Storytellers the year I graduated from seminary and was ordained. Someone dear to me gave me a small painted tile with a figure of a woman surrounded by several small people, with mouth open wide and tenderly holding the smaller figures. I was intrigued by the figure and did some research, and found out it is a Storyteller.

Storytellers are on figurative potteries, in tile drawings, or in paintings of the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. Pueblos had created many pottery figurines beginning in the 1880s. The first Storyteller, created by potter Helen Cordero of Cochiti Pueblo, was a figure of a Pueblo man with five children on his lap and shoulders. She was inspired to make it in memory of her grandfather, Santiago Quintana, a Cochiti elder who told stories of their people⁵ to his grandchildren. Interestingly, even though the first Storyteller ever created was a male figure, Grandfather Quintana, all of the Storytellers I have encountered are female figures.

I found that each Storyteller has distinct characteristics and communicates special messages to me, particularly the Storyteller I found in a print of a painting. She wears layers of beaded necklaces and sits with her arms spread and palms facing up. From one palm to another, over her head, hangs a rainbow. The little people around her speak with their hands and gestures. There are many colorful butterflies flying around them. I do not even know the artist who painted it, but when I discovered it in a small print shop in Phoenix, I found the image of my call. The butterflies remind me that when I minister to people who are faced with despair and darkness, I bring hope and the message of resurrection. The small people around her assure me that those who would listen to me are



inquisitive and want to hear my message. I am a storyteller and tell stories of love and hope.

This past year, discernment led me to chaplaincy and clinical pastoral education. In this ministry setting, I do not have a lot of opportunities to tell stories, but if I am attentive, I encounter many chances to listen to other people's stories. Hidden in the illness stories are stories of hope and despair, trust and vulnerability, faith and doubt. So now, I claim the identity of a story listener and encourage others to tell me their stories. It may seem I have turned away from my original call, but, indeed, they are two sides of the same call: as the one who was voiceless and has found a voice, I know how important it is to empower and encourage others to find their own voices.

John Savage claimed that we use stories to describe what is going on at the moment, but with some sense of guarding and protection. "Storytelling is a form of self-disclosure," and hidden in the stories people tell are "the deep truths of the unconscious,"⁶ for "language is a representational system of the unconscious."⁷ The story, therefore, is "a type of container that holds deep meaning" and "expressions of the [person's] own inner mysteries."⁸ Through the themes of the stories that people tell, it is possible for us to discern the deeper truth each person tries to convey subconsciously if we listen carefully. Savage declared, "A good story listener often will know more about the storytellers than the storytellers know about themselves."⁹ In the art of story listening a good leader can help others to come to know themselves more thoroughly.

Henri Nouwen pointed to the spiritual dimension of storytelling and story listening: "Listening in the spiritual life is much more than a psychological strategy to help others discover themselves. In the spiritual life the listener is not the ego, which would like to speak but is trained to restrain itself, but the Spirit of God within us."¹⁰

A careful listener reveals the Spirit of God within us! What better metaphor is there, then, to describe a spiritual leader than a vigilant listener? Nouwen further emphasized:

Listening is paying full attention to others and welcoming them into our very being. The beauty of listening is that those who are



listened to start feeling accepted, start taking their words more seriously and discovering their true selves. Listening is a form of spiritual hospitality by which you invite strangers to become friends, to get to know their inner selves more fully, and even to dare to be silent with you.¹¹

Can you imagine what could have happened if Moses had not listened to his people? What if the Israelites had not been able to express their needs and had been forced to be silent? Can you imagine their frustrations being acted out in passive-aggressive behaviors? How would the Samaritan woman have responded if Jesus had silenced her to comply? If she had been a woman of submission, she would not have gotten rid of five husbands! How about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Would they have been able recognize the Master if in the beginning they had not been encouraged to tell their version of the story?

A good leader is a voice coach, storyteller, and evoker of stories. Most of all, a conscious leader should have an open heart and open ears so that the Spirit can move freely while all who have gathered tell their own stories with openness. A true inclusive leadership can be perfected by honest telling and sincere listening.

¹ Brita L. Gill-Austern, "Pedagogy Under the Influence of Feminism and Womanism," in *Feminist and Womanist Pastoral Theology*, ed. Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 153.

² *Ibid.*, 154.

³ Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 81–82.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵ For further details, read *Pueblo Stories and Story Tellers* by Mark Bahti (Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 1996).

⁶ John Savage, *Listening and Caring Skills* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 77.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), March 12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, March 11.





ENGAGING CONFLICT WELL:
REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP AND
CONFLICT IN THE CHURCH

Stephanie Anna Hixon, Central Pennsylvania Annual Conference

*W*ivid in my memory is that first seminar on conflict management. The presenter picked up a stack of papers and tossed them into the room. The room erupted with participants scurrying to pick up pages and others nervously waiting to see what would happen next. Catching glances from colleagues, I sensed that many of us were praying and yearning for some intervention—perhaps divine—to bring order to this chaos. That moment was instructive. It has confirmed for me a keen sense of common human experiences: the longing for calm in the midst of anxious moments and the search for order in the midst of chaos. In the wisdom of that time and context, *managing* conflict was a goal for church leaders. The seminar focused on skills such as listening, speaking, seeking “win-win” strategies, using humor, setting ground rules for rational conversation, and clarifying roles and responsibilities among congregational leaders and staff. When we encountered conflict, we would then be adept enough with this skill set to keep the chaos “in order.”

Equipped with good management skills, I felt empowered to deal with most conflicts and emboldened to assist others. Nevertheless, in ministry settings as a pastor and church leader, I found my skill set wanting as I journeyed with persons whose pain



and anguish can best be described as “sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). In one early ministerial setting, for instance, I was rather ill-prepared to engage in effective ministry when my supervisor was informed that the community would be willing to work with any ministerial leader as long as the person was not a woman. The depth of pain and struggle I sensed in persons in my presence as a woman given authority to preach prompted much spiritual work. How could I be faithful to that clarion call to love God’s beloved, the very same with whom I experienced conflict? Somehow some of our best non-anxious, well-differentiated selves were summoned forth, and by God’s grace we forged relationships. We shared meals, music, laughter, tears, prayers, and moments of passage—death and proclamation of the resurrection, vigils in hospital waiting rooms, cries of delight as baptismal water splashed young foreheads, the promise and power of love and renewed commitments with exchanges of marriage vows, the redemptive power of Christ’s Table, open to sinner and saint. It was a communal effort, for no one leader was charged with or capable of “fixing it.”

How does one navigate the tumultuous waters and deep divisions that people of faith experience when they meet hostility, brokenness, and seemingly intractable differences? How does one conduct conversation among persons for whom “the other” calls into question one’s own deeply held tenets of faith? What about justice in the midst of these struggles? Those questions remain at the heart of my journey to explore conflict within ministry settings. Since that first seminar, I have learned that engaging conflict well requires more than a management skill set. In fact, most conflicted situations have led me beyond core analyses, problem solving, and specific communication skills to consider more fully those questions of meaning, faith, and identity. It has involved careful consideration of engaging conflict and even the nomenclature for it. Today, I embrace the term *conflict transformation*, which involves potential promises and opportunities when engaging conflict. The goal of conflict transformation “is not only to *end* or *prevent* something bad but also to begin something new and good,” for “transformation asserts the belief that conflict can be a catalyst for



deep-rooted, enduring, positive change in individuals, relationships, and the structures of the human community.”¹

As a musician, an educator, a pastor, a denominational leader involved in advocacy for women, and now a practitioner in ministry with the JUSTPEACE Center for Mediation and Conflict Transformation, my journey has continued to challenge my early assumptions about conflict management and resolution. Through deep spiritual reflection rooted in our biblical faith, nurtured by prayer, and informed by the wisdom of those experiencing conflict and wise practitioners of conflict transformation, I have come to affirm that engaging conflict well has four understandings. First, conflict and chaos are neither positive nor negative; both can be sources of creative possibilities and new life. By the Spirit’s power, the generative and transforming act of Genesis continues throughout God’s creation through God’s time (2 Cor. 5:17–18a).

Second, God has created us as relational beings. This can be untidy and marked by conflict, but also delightful, awe inspiring, and invigoratingly creative. Recent multidisciplinary studies informed by quantum physics reveal that the very nature of God’s world—even the smallest atom—is relational. Created life is so complex and interconnected that insight into healthy communities and institutions has much more to do with understanding adaptive and maladaptive capacities in living organisms than with a universal “right” way of doing things. Faith leads me to seek understanding and be mindful of choices and their potential impact on persons, communities, and systems. Engaging conflict means respecting the power of relationships and the capacity of beings to adapt to change (1 Cor. 12:26).

Third, human beings in all their diversity and complexity are created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27). Faith compels me to know and be known by others and to embrace a humble curiosity about that which stirs others’ souls. Being created in God’s image also calls me to nurture the divine image in others. In conflict transformation, this nudges me toward sacred regard for the possibilities and resources that exist within and among each of us to meet struggles and differences, and toward hope in the capacity to be open and move to a better way of being together.



Fourth, expressions of faith give liveliness to how communities and individuals experience God and involve their minds, bodies, and souls. The biblical narrative is rich and mundane, stormy and tender, and marked by varied approaches to name who God was, is, and continues to be. As an artist and a musician, I have resonated with the myriad expressions of knowing God expressed in the Psalms. The power of worship, prayer breakfasts, and church suppers, with their rituals, storytelling, laments, trumpet-laced proclamations, and reverent movements, all illumine the imagination, summon the holy within and among us, and speak to those deepest yearnings and aspirations.

Marcia McFee, worship leader and educator, invites us to consider what we expect of our liturgies:

Do we invite our communities of worship to speak about the “deepest things?” Do we invite dialogue at all? Do we truly believe that God invites us to speak honestly, in the context of our rituals of worship?²

Writing about ritual formation and peace building, she tells about working with a regional body that had merged the year prior to her presence as worship leader. Sensing that conflict and angered feelings still lingered in their liminal state of being, she guided the members in rituals that expressed their hopes and deep pains, during the Prayers of the People in preparation for communion. “The statements were read by someone recognized in the conference as a healing presence, along with improvised music by a jazz musician and improvised movement—idioms that, when allowed the full range of expression, can often speak what words cannot.”³

Conflict transformation calls me to seek practices and processes that welcome and nurture diverse and creative expressions of faith, identity, and meaning, while also fostering an environment that is comfortable and relatively safe for those gathered. That is where ongoing skill building and training are vital. Tom Porter, my JUSTPEACE colleague, and I often speak about conflict transformation as improvisational—open to the power of the Holy Spirit and the resources and imaginations of those gathered together. As a musician, I know that learning the fundamentals of



one's instrument, art, or craft in order to freely improvise is crucial. So it is important to have conflict fluency⁴ to avail oneself of training and skill building in a variety of conflict practices, processes, and theories. Let us prepare ourselves well and prepare to engage others in order to reach a better place through good choices and processes.

Webs of relationships are connected with the soulful journeys of individuals and communities, and these journeys unfold within specific contexts. Being mindful of context helps us to know one another and to be known more fully. When engaging conflict well, we do well to give attention to cultural competency or fluency. To be fluent, we begin with knowing who we are and what threads of culture and experience have shaped us and formed us, and we seek to learn how to receive and appreciate how others have been shaped and formed. Michelle LeBaron speaks of seeking ways to communicate respectfully and authentically by opening ourselves to "create synergy from our experiences of difference."⁵ Something as simple as understanding different experiences with the practices and meaning of eye contact with one's elders or authority figures can contribute to cultural fluency and inform choices we make from our repertoire of conflict and communication skills and practices. Similarly, awareness that some people are formed by cultures that value individualism while others are formed in cultures whose meaning and identity reside in community contributes to cultural fluency. A high communal value contributes to our cultural fluency. Understanding these rich textures will enable us to make choices that seek to "do no harm" and mutually explore a new experience.

When relationships are conflicted and fractured, there may be systems of oppression, inequities, and injustices that contribute to conflict or perpetuate harm to individuals and communities. John Paul Lederach, an internationally known peace builder, speaks of "Micah's dilemma: the paradox of justice & mercy . . . [to] pursue justice in ways that respect people and to achieve restoration of relationships based on recognizing and amending injustices."⁶ My ministerial roles have led me through interactions with individuals and communities experiencing trauma, betrayal of trust, open



hostility, bigotry, harm, and negative conflict. I have found that engaging conflict is personal, communal, and systemic, for it occurs within a larger context of compassion, activism, and advocacy for a just and whole world—God’s shalom. Engaging conflict well has no universal approach, and leadership requires responses specific to the situations gripping individuals or communities. But healing and restoration are possible, can come from the most unlikely sources and surprising experiences, and typically unfold in their own time. We can become trapped, dehumanized, and diminished by dualities and tendencies to see the world as good vs. evil, us vs. them, right vs. wrong.

In conflict transformation, we are called to cast a wider vision, embrace complexity, and foster an environment where imaginations may flourish and surprises may greet us. According to John Paul Lederach,

The gift of paradox provides an intriguing capacity: It holds together seemingly contradictory truths in order to locate a greater truth. *Curiosity* suggests attentiveness and continuous inquiry about things and their meaning . . . a quality of careful inquiry that reaches beyond accepted meaning. It wishes to go deeper and in fact is excited by those things that are not immediately understood.⁷

Embracing paradox, curiosity, and complexity may enable us to glimpse “new angles, opportunities, and unexpected potentialities that surpass, replace, and break the shackles of historic and current relational patterns of repeated violence.”⁸

My colleague, Tom Porter, often quotes Longfellow: “If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each [person’s] life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.”⁹ Porter believes that providing places where we can hear and understand the journey and suffering of the other, particularly our enemies, is one of the most important lessons of peace building. This posture requires much soul work, and I have been honored to experience moments of sacred transformation when persons sought to open the heart to “the other” in such a way. When I am about to engage conflict, I often summon the image of a strong, wise, and tender God, which encourages me that God’s



embrace is strong, wise, and tender enough to hold and carry all involved as they seek to be faithful and move to a better, more hopeful place. May it be so as we seek to share the well, engage well, and be well in our common life.

- ¹ R. Kraybill, R. A. Evans, and A. F. Evans, *Peace Skills: Manual for Community Mediators* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 5.
- ² Marcia McFee, "Ritual Formation: Liturgical Practices and the Practice of Peacebuilding," in *Conflict and Communion: Reconciliation and Restorative Justice at Christ's Table*, ed. T. W. Porter (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2006), 75.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 70.
- ⁴ Michelle LeBaron, *Bridging Cultural Conflicts: A New Approach for a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 110–36.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.
- ⁶ J. P. Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 19–23.
- ⁷ J. P. Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 36.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.
- ⁹ H. W. Longfellow, quote from "Drift-Wood," in *The Prose Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, with Bibliographical and Critical Notes in Two Volumes* (Cambridge: Houghton, Mifflin, 1890), 1:405.



the creating spirit



CREATIVITY AND LEADERSHIP

Bobbie Rambach, Greater New Jersey Annual Conference

As I sit at the computer, I am listening to music that is reflective and meditative, setting the mood for me to write. The soaring line of voice rising over the accompanying instruments draws me away from the mundane of my workday. My office is decorated with sculpture and visuals that speak to me through the artists' color and interpretation. I am moved to a place of imagination and hope.

We are all naturally creative, and we all have something inside us that is authentically ours and wants to be expressed. Whether this "something" is written, sung, painted, spoken, danced, or manifested through growing a business, raising a family, designing a home, gardening, cooking, or bringing an idea into the world, our creativity is one of the most unique and precious aspects of who we are.

It is very important to discover our unique creativity as a means of deepening our spirituality. We often put aside this aspect of our lives in our need to be responsive to the needs of others. Sometimes it seems that daily life is a conspiracy to overwhelm us with its details. We don't take the time to nurture and develop our creative nature. But when we take the journey of discovery, we come to know both God and ourselves better.



I often ask myself, *What gift can I bring to God?* I especially ask this when I prepare for worship. At first I try to appraise my talents, examine my worth. I see no special qualities, no exceptional abilities—not much to offer. But worship is so much bigger than I am because it is the combined experience of all those worshipping and because of the stirring presence of God in that worship. The gift is in the willingness to step out in a little hope, in a little faith, in a word of witness, in a line of song as I lead, as we lead.

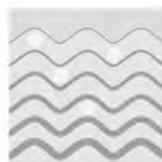
Creativity is expressed in some form of art, and creativity in worship finds expression in visuals, sounds, music, and drama, the written and heard word. Just as I set the mood for a time to write, we as leaders are setting the mood for a time of worship—providing a way for those who worship with us to enter that place of imagination and hope. Creativity is also giving permission for others to be creative: to the woman who sculpted an angel out of chicken wire and flew it over the chancel, to the parishioner who decorated the entire sanctuary for Pentecost with Post-it Notes, to the teenager who brought her shells and sea glass to adorn the altar, to the musician who dared to bring his first composition to worship, and to the playwright and director who offer a different perspective on Bible stories and the actors who give that script voice. We are creating in that worship setting a work of art. The work needs to be interactive, seeking to generate a connection with the viewer, the worship participant, and asking her or him to play a role in completing the work of art. Meaning is constructed of the elements in the artwork but also out of the values and ambitions, the hopes and fears the viewers bring into the work. Those who worship with us may or may not see or hear the same things we see or hear or even wanted them to see or hear, but they are included as the music either quiets them or energizes them and as the visuals capture their attention. They are encouraged in personal reflection.

There is a mysterious presence in images that move people. We use music and lighting, combined with the visual, to elicit a response, to create drama. We use images of suffering to stir a compassionate response. We share beauty with one another, experiencing the depths of what it is to be human. People are touched by the shared experience.



Clearly, we face an immense challenge, both to reach new generations with the gospel and to re-vision the richness of our heritage. How we express our creativity in worship and in our ministries is unique to each of us. And there is no greater gift as church leaders than to create a community of worship that allows for something brought from beyond us, the creating movement of the Spirit who draws us closer to God.





SACRED CIRCLES

Carol Lakota Eastin, Illinois Great River Annual Conference

A traditional game called “Toss the Ball” is still played among some Lakota. In this sacred game, everyone stands in a circle. A young girl stands in the middle to represent the Mother Earth, and a small ball is tossed from the center to each person in turn and then back to the center again.

While the ball is being tossed, a teacher talks about the circle: “Who is more likely to receive the ball that is being passed in this circle? Who is closest to the center?”

“No one,” the participants say. “Everyone is equally close to the center.”

“Imagine that the ball is the gift of life,” the teacher continues. “The people around the circle include not only the two-legged human beings, but also the animals and the plants of the earth.”

“All are part of the circle and are included in the Circle of Life.”

The teacher inquires, “What happens if one of the players puts her hands behind her back and refuses to catch or return the ball?”

“The ball stops and the gifts that the earth provides are not available to others,” the participants reply.

This game reminds me of the saying “what goes around comes around.” How often have we seen this to be true? When we stand in the circle with our hands open to receive and ready to return the gift to others, we all have enough.



When I was in seminary at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, I took a class in Christology. I remember Professor Ron Williams talking about that well-memorized verse of my childhood, the one that earned me stickers on my memory chart: “For God so loved the world that God gave . . .” (John 3:16).

What I remember is that Professor Williams focused on the first part—“For God so loved the world”—and asked us this question: “Whom or what did Jesus come to save?”

“The answer is ‘the world,’” we said.

Then Professor Williams asked, “Where do we draw a line and say which part of the world Jesus came to save? Only the Jews? Only the men? Only the human beings? What about the rest of the world . . . the earth herself and all the living things upon her?”

Yes! John 3:16 says that God is all-inclusive and sent Jesus for the Whole Circle of the World. All Creation groans. How inclusive is that!

There is an image of another circle: it is a circle of buffalo standing tightly together on the cold winter plains of America. The buffalo stayed together in a circle and protected one another with their body heat. The most fragile were kept in the center, and the rest were constantly in motion, moving in a pattern that led every buffalo to the center for a while to warm up and to the edge for a while to protect the others.

What if our church were like the circle game where everyone always catches the ball and passes it on? What if our church were like the buffalo that are constantly moving in order to protect one another? What if we spent our time making sacred circles rather than drawing lines? What if we were constantly changing positions and sharing resources?

A Hopi elder has said that there is a river that is running very fast. It is the river of change. Those who hold on to the shore will be beaten against the rocks. Jump in and go with the flow of the river. Look around you, and see who is in there with you. You may be surprised at who your swim partners will be because they could be anyone at anytime, in the Sacred Circle of the World.



We stood in a circle around her.
She was the youngest among us, the innocent, the pure.
 She held the ball.
 In that ball was all the power,
All the energy of the whole world.
 Only she was holding the ball.
 Then the game began.
 Creation took its first breath.
 On your mark, get set . . .
 The sacred game begins.
 The ball is tossed
 Each person catches
 Each person tosses
 Each person . . .
Be they human or animal or even tree
 Each person catches
 Each person tosses
 The ball.
 The sacred ball of Life.

They stood in a circle around them
The young ones and weak, in the middle.
 Their breath rose like smoke signals
 Proclaiming to anyone who could see:
 It is cold! It is cold!
 The buffalo stay in the circle.
 To stray from the circle meant death.
 The circle is in motion . . .
The buffalo are dancing a winter dance
 A circle that keeps turning . . .
So that each has a turn at being warm
 And being cold.
 Each has a turn at being protected
 And being protector.
The buffalo know how sacred, circles are.
 They know how it is to change places
 With their sisters and brothers.
 They walk in each other's hoof prints.
 They walk in sacred circles.



windows to a
wider sisterhood



SECOND EUROPEAN CLERGYWOMEN
CONSULTATION, FEBRUARY 25–28, 2007,
IN BRAUNFELS, GERMANY

Bishop Rosemarie Wenner, Germany Episcopal Area, Central Conference

About fifty clergywomen from twelve European countries, representing all European Central Conferences of the UMC as well as the Methodist Church in Great Britain and the Waldensian/Methodist Church in Italy, came together in the Methodist Retreat Center Haus Hoehenblick in Braunfels, Germany. The theme was “True Nourishment—Spirituality in Our Daily Living.” Three days of worship, fellowship, and learning were a short time, but all the participants were thankful for the possibility to gather and share their experiences. Many of the clergywomen serve in countries where they do not have female role models as pastors. In some countries the Methodists are the only denomination that ordains women. Meeting other clergywomen and speaking to those who have served for a long time or who have leadership experiences as a bishop or as a district superintendent were encouraging and inspiring.

We listened to two lectures on spiritual nourishment and to reports from each of the twelve countries. The reports opened our eyes and hearts for challenges in Europe, and we learned that Methodists, indeed, are bringing evangelism and social work together. In addition to the reports from Europe, we got a report about the International Clergywomen Consultation in August



2006 at Chicago and the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of full clergy rights for women.

Here are some quotations from the participants:

We appreciated the presence of pastors in all ages and from different kinds of ministry (serving in local congregations, as superintendents, in hospitals, as military chaplains . . .). The conversations in small groups were very helpful.

We were inspired by the different kinds of worship services and devotions offered by clergywomen of different countries and cultures.

We were encouraged to network with each other.

The aim of providing a platform for encounter, fellowship, and mutual sharing and learning was more than fulfilled. The times for worship and prayer were sources of encouragement. The willingness of all participants to contribute by reporting, sharing, and listening to the sisters was overwhelming.

With the funding provided by GBHEM we were able to invite and finance four clergywomen from Eurasia (only two were able to come due to visa problems, however), three from the Baltics, and three from the former Communist countries of the Central Conference of Central and Southern Europe. We gave financial assistance to the Italian representatives and to one clergywoman coming on her own from the Baltics.

All participants expressed the need to have a follow-up consultation as soon as possible.

Those who came from areas where only a few were able to travel to Braunfels because of a lack of finances and because of their language skills are asking if it would be possible to invite the clergywomen in their central conferences to come together for a time of learning and sharing and spiritual nourishment. As the only female bishop outside the United States, I would be happy to support the sisters in the different areas in organizing and leading such meetings.

We say thanks to GBHEM for funding and sending two members of the staff.





THE INCLUSIVENESS OF AGE, GENDER, AND RACE AMONG WOMEN LEADERS

Teresa Cook, North Carolina Annual Conference

*A*s a clergywoman under the age of thirty, I can attest to the fact that young clergywomen face two dynamics as leaders in the church: age and gender. Congregations are amazed at our youthfulness as ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and see our commitment to church leadership as a bold and brave step into a male-dominated field. Both dynamics—age and gender—are aspects of the inclusiveness in our leadership styles as women in ministry. To me, inclusiveness means accepting people of all backgrounds regardless of their age, gender, and race, so in today's language in the Church, inclusiveness means wanting to receive and give the same respect that older clergywomen receive and give. It also means wanting to be valued as much as male clergy. Last, inclusiveness means accepting and valuing people of all races and cultures within the Church.

First, let us look at the relationship between Naomi and Ruth as an example of how the relationship of an older and a younger woman displays inclusiveness. Naomi, an older woman, is unaware of her strong impression on Ruth, a younger woman, until they almost part (Ruth 1:16–17). Often as a younger clergywoman, I am very observant of older clergywomen and learn lessons from their experience in ministry. For example, an African



American clergywoman in my annual conference warned me that my different ethnic background would bring attention to me in my cross-racial and cross-cultural appointment and that the older white majority clergy would envy me. She taught me how to remain stable while I experienced opposition because of my high profile and popularity. She brought those warnings to my attention, and they actually occurred this past year.

In the case of Naomi and Ruth, Ruth notices the strength of Naomi's God, which gives her a desire to follow Naomi and adopt Naomi's God as her Lord (Ruth 1:16). I noticed that same strength in my mother's life as I watched her go through a divorce and survive much unjust opposition, but remain calm in every problem she faced. Because I saw God gave her the power to overcome every opposition, I wanted that same strength from God in my life. Watching my mother go through a difficult divorce especially gave me the strength to face challenges in completing my seminary degree at Duke University Divinity School.

Naomi, on the other hand, adopts Ruth as her daughter and gives her advice concerning where to work and whom to marry. Similarly, I have experienced inclusiveness as some older female and male clergy see me, a young clergywoman, as their own daughter or granddaughter. Older female and male clergy have warned me about problems that I will face in the ministry because of my gender. Older female clergy have given me advice to help me cope with problems they have already faced. I have also learned lessons in leadership skills from observing older clergy. For example, in my summer internship at Duke Divinity School, I watched an older clergyman with a blue-collar background use his skills to help people in his community and church, with mostly a white-collar background. He won over his congregation by keeping his integrity and relating to them in his blue-collar language. I learned from him that keeping your integrity and being consistent as a pastor can win your congregation over.

Several women who are not in clergy leadership positions have influenced me and taught me skills that shape my leadership as a clergywoman. These women are my fiery maternal grandmother, my mother, and my aunts. All are outspoken and forceful and have



taught me to speak out when necessary. I use this leadership skill as a clergywoman by encouraging women in the Church who are timid and unwilling to express their opinions. I also see women in pastoral positions who do not give their frank opinion regarding issues in the Church, and go along with decisions, even though they disagree. I find it difficult to use them as examples for what I would like to be as a pastor. I think that you should express your opinion even if you are the only one who believes the way you believe. They appear to me to go along because they do not want to rock the boat. However, in the long run, I watch them compromise their integrity and see that few take their authority seriously. I also find this to be true among some male clergy in the Church.

A second characteristic of female leadership is flexibility, for female leaders often multitask. One example of a flexible female leader in our church is our youth choir director. She brings her children to choir rehearsals, who take part in the choir that she directs. She is with her family, and she is conducting practice for the church choir at the same time. Her involvement with a choir of her children's age gives her flexibility since she can lead the choir and not neglect her family.

Third, women of different ethnicities bring a whole new aspect to ministry. In Christ Jesus we are no longer Jew or Greek (Gal. 3:28). Instead of being this race or that race, we become a new, inclusive race: the Christian race. True inclusiveness is accepting persons for who they are, regardless of their race or cultural background. Naomi accepts Ruth as her own daughter, even though she is a Jew and Ruth is a Moabite (Ruth 1:4). In fact, the more races that are welcomed within the Church, the more fruitful and full the Church becomes. It is the same in leadership roles—especially among women. People of different ethnicities add different views of how a church should be led. Great fruitfulness results from the inclusiveness of the different races. Because female church leaders of nonwhite races share a perspective that differs from the perspective of women who share the same race and background in leadership, the diversity produces more fruit.

As an African American young woman, I can testify from having served a white congregation that my culture brings a new



aspect to serving all-white congregations. First, although people of different ethnicities came to church for various reasons, many felt welcomed because they saw a young African American associate pastor at an all-white church, and knew that they would be welcomed. Second, my Caucasian brothers and sisters in Christ told me that they had learned a lot about African American culture by interacting with me. As a result, they said that they had become more open to interacting with other races in other situations since we had ministered together. This experience confirms that we cannot lose anything from racial inclusiveness. Instead, we gain so much more as a church—especially among female leaders. With the dynamic of a different race, we women of color can share an unusual aspect of our culture along with the ability to be sensitive to others through gentle influence.

As a young clergywoman, I have a perspective of leadership that is fresh and different, which is positive. Because I have been a pastor for only a brief time, I do not have a sense of “this is the way it has always been done.” Instead, I am willing to try new things, to take a chance with doing a project that has never been done before in the Church. So I have many advantages as a young clergywoman. I can learn from older male and female clergy while developing my leadership skills. I learn from older clergy who share their experiences with me. I respect them because they have lasted in the ministry for a long period of time. I especially appreciate older clergywomen sharing their experiences with me as women in ministry. Their advice is valuable and gives me encouragement to survive the ministry as a young African American female pastor. I also appreciate the influence of the older women in my family who encourage me to speak out for what is right, regardless of the consequences. Therefore, I am quite blessed to have a combination of influential skills learned from older clergy, male and female, along with my willingness to take risks as a new young pastor.

However, as a young African American female clergyperson, I have often run into opposition because of my race, gender, and age. Nevertheless, the opposition I face strengthens me to withstand and be consistent and steadfast to do what God is calling me



to do (1 Cor. 15:58), for as a young clergywoman, I am commanded by God to be an example to all believers in my conduct, love, faith, and purity (1 Tim. 4:12). So, just as I, a young clergywoman, observe older clergy and learn from them, older clergy can observe my leadership style and learn from me. Withstanding opposition is normal in any leadership role because there will always be some people who will not go in the leader's direction. Learning this reality and the skills of how to cope with it early in my life is very beneficial to me as a young clergywoman. With God on my side, I cannot lose: "For God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26).





RACIAL ETHNIC CLERGYWOMEN'S CONSULTATION, JANUARY 3–5, 2008

Anita Phillips, Oklahoma Indian Missionary Annual Conference

A unique sense of cosmic community flowed simply from the presence of all of us being in the same place and breathing the same air at the same time. We were living within our skins of many colors—marveling at God's call multiplied and incarnate in the flesh of three hundred beautiful women. We were connected through the common electric current of the Holy Spirit. That was the experience of the Racial Ethnic Clergywomen's Consultation in Los Angeles last year, and while we were there, we did truly know it was the City of Angels.

"Seeking Common Ground" was both our theme and our reason for celebration as the opening worship introduced a profusion of swirling colors and dancing feet. Drums, both large and small, turtle shell shakers, bright maracas, and rhythmically circling ribbons set the driving beat. Hispanic Latina, African American, Native American, Korean American, Asian American, and Pacific Islander clergywomen filled the ballroom, with voices lifting to sing "Christ Has Called Us to a New Vision" and "Daughters Arise." Our eyes, ears, hearts, and souls lifted up to witness our sister and our bishop, Minerva Carcaño, speak in the voice of us all about little girls who grow up to be prophets and priests as she expounded on Isaiah 43:19 in her sermon, which was also titled "Seeking Common Ground."



“Who among us is God calling to be a bishop?” we asked one another. In hallway conversations of twos and threes, in annual conference impromptu meetings, and in jurisdictional gatherings, we asked this question. Because we do surely believe that God is calling clergywomen of color among us to be bishops of the Church, and because God’s Church does most desperately need the bishops we can offer from our numbers, we talked of strategies, plans, and obstacles. We looked with hope and resolve toward jurisdictional conferences.

We heard from Dr. Rosetta Ross, who, along with Dr. Jung Ha Kim, authored *The Status of Racial-Ethnic Minority Clergywomen in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: GBHEM, 2004), a study that chronicles the hardship of our journeys as racial ethnic clergywomen. We discussed this monumental study detailing salary discrepancies, isolation, lack of support from church structures, and the sense that the United Methodist denomination is not recognizing one of its greatest assets, clergywomen of color. We clergywomen of color grew up in the margins, we can minister in the margins, and we can teach this United Methodist Church (that we love) how to minister effectively in the margins, exactly where God calls this Church to be.

Together, we looked to the future. We encouraged one another as we contemplated the continued challenges. We wept for one another as we considered all that we had been through for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We laughed with one another as we transformed sorrowful experiences into humorous anecdotes. We touched one another with tender pats and gentle hugs, knowing we sent each other out as sheep among wolves. And we vowed we would be together again.





BOOK REVIEW: GOD'S SPIRIT

Anne Broyles, California-Pacific Annual Conference

Because I believe God is in and of all things, it is no great leap for me to find God in my work as a writer. Whether I am writing curriculum for The United Methodist Publishing House, or focused on a novel or picture book, I clearly feel God working in me. Also, because I believe that the reign of God includes all people, I understand that my role as writer or pastor includes and represents God's diverse people.

As a pastor, I often felt God's Spirit as I prepared a sermon, wrote newsletter articles, and wondered what I could say to the grieving mother, the relapsed alcoholic man, the elder facing death. I have always known that my best ideas came from God, not from me, and that there were times I needed to get my ego out of the way so that God could speak the right words, figure out creative solutions, minister to someone in need. I also knew that God called me to reach out and include a wide variety of people in my ministry. That is why I officiated at Spanish-speaking weddings, performed car blessings for Tongans, encouraged a church to become a Reconciling Congregation, and worked to create places where diverse peoples could feel at home.

Now that I write books full-time, I am even more reliant on God's Spirit. I find myself drawn to tell the stories of people who



are often not represented in mainstream fiction. My first children's book, *Shy Mama's Halloween*, explored how through Halloween, one Russian immigrant family in New York's Lower East Side began to feel at home in their new country. The recently published *Priscilla and the Hollyhocks* fleshes out a little-known moment in history when a slave girl's courage was matched by a white man's refusal to accept discrimination against African Americans.

In Priscilla's case, I learned about her story while researching a young adult historical novel on the Trail of Tears. I spent a few hours creating a file on Priscilla, a slave girl who walked the Trail of Tears with her Cherokee master before she reunited with Basil Silkwood, the white man who bought her freedom and adopted her into his family. Then I returned to other writing projects. Years later, however, despite what I had planned to do, Priscilla's voice came to me clearly. She threw open the door in my mind where she had lived for eighteen years and demanded that I tell her story. Priscilla's words came to me as first person in a slave child's dialect of phrases I had read in books, yet never used. I felt electrically charged and energized by her words. Within two hours, the first draft of *Priscilla and the Hollyhocks* (Charlesbridge, 2008) was complete. Some people call this process channeling. Others name it their muse, but to me, it is clearly the Spirit of God working in me.

My other works-in-progress feature a wide variety of characters. Because I write for children and young adults, I feel a responsibility to lead by example. My books are not religious in the traditional sense and may not mention God, but the world they portray shows glimpses of God's reign. Diverse peoples live and work together. My protagonists learn from people of a variety of cultures.

For instance, I am currently writing a road trip novel about a twenty-year-old woman whose fifty-two-year-old father dies of cardiac arrest. Jacey Potts is bereft without her father — mentor and track coach. She gives up her passion for running, and because of an enigmatic note her father left, she begins a journey that will change her life. Her physical journey takes her through Southern California, Arizona, and the Four Corners area, so she naturally interacts with Hopis, Navajos, a Hispanic family, and others whose



cultures are unlike her own. I use the classic hero's/heroine's journey: Jacey must leave home and live away from her primary community in order to find "home" in more than a physical sense. The wide variety of characters she meets expands her understanding of what it means to belong to a people and a place.

If I were to sum up my twenty-odd book projects in one theme, I would say, *transformation*. Just as what I loved most about my ministry was participating in the transformation of individual and community lives, so I focus in writing on the moments when lives change.

Every day, I sit at a computer, and words flow both from my conscious brain and from a deep, unconscious place inside me. Characters speak. Plots develop. Book ideas become real.

Each of us needs human support for our work as pastors, preachers, teachers, writers, chaplains. Most of all, we need to fall into God's loving arms again and again, trusting the Spirit to undergird us.

The last words of *Priscilla and the Hollyhocks* sum up how I feel about my partnership with God's Spirit:

Grow, I sang to the seeds.

Bloom, I commanded the plants.

Safe, I told myself.

Home.





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About the Next Issue

*T*he articles for this issue have pertained to the theme of “Women’s Inclusive Leadership.” Plans are already under way toward putting together the next volume, with the theme “Voicing the Truth with Grace.” This theme includes addressing sensitive issues where there is or has been conflict, and which raise a strong emotional response for us as clergywomen, while addressing these issues from the perspective of grace. The perspective of grace, among other things, means speaking the hard truth in caring ways in situations such as racial conflicts, the economic situation, and the impact of Barack Obama’s presidency on society.

The journal will usually feature the following columns:

Editorial Circle (articles provided by members of the editorial circle)

Theological Reflection (reflections on the designated theme)

Spinning the Sacred Yarn (sermons and speeches)

Women’s Leadership Style (articles on conflict management and various leadership styles)

The Creating Spirit (poetry, music, black-and-white photography, other art forms)

Windows to a Wider Sisterhood (articles pertaining to ministry outside the United States)

Younger Voice (articles submitted by younger clergywomen on the designated theme)

Highlights (short book and media reviews, notices of resources, continuing education resources)



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