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# The Racial Ethnic TORCH



GROW | TRANSFORM | EMPOWER | LEAD | DEVELOP



# The Racial Ethnic TORCH

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### A message from the director, **Rhashell D. Hunter**

Just as a woman in Bethany who anointed Jesus with ointment of nard was remembered by Christ, Jesus remembers the many unnamed women who serve in the church. Women of color are valuable and beautiful to Jesus Christ. The gospel of Mark 14:6, 9 reads, “She has done a beautiful thing for me. . . . Wherever the good news is preached all over the world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.”

Though some of us do not know how we would exist in this world without good, Christian women of color, we acknowledge that too often the voices and perspectives of women of color have been devalued, excluded, or silenced throughout the history of the church and society.

In this issue of the Racial Ethnic Torch, we lift up women of color and continue celebrating the “Decade of Hearing and Singing New Songs to God” to recognize and celebrate the gifts of women of color in the church.

The 221st General Assembly (2014) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reaffirmed the church’s commitment to women of color and directed the Presbyterian Mission Agency to plan a Women of Color Consultation (WoCC) that focuses on the inclusion of women of color of all ages in leadership and decision-making. In this issue, you will hear about the WoCC that will be held prior to fall 2015.

This assembly also asked that cultural competency, antiracism, and antisexism resources be made available to mid councils, that Committees on Ministry and Committees on Preparation for Ministry be provided with cultural competency, antiracism, and antisexism training, and that information on the implementation of this training be collected from mid councils.

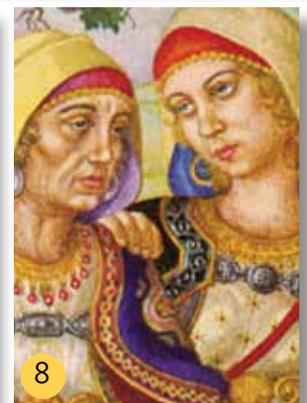
Finally, the GA directed mid councils to promote gathering opportunities for women of color within synods and presbyteries for prayer, study, fellowship, and networking by providing financial, technological, space, and other support.



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**On the cover:** Women from across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) gathered together in Louisville during the 2013 Women of Color Consultation.

## Save the Date

**April 16–19, 2015**, National Association of Presbyterian Clergywomen Triennial Meeting, Ferncliff Camp, Little Rock, Arkansas

The theme of the Triennial Meetings of the NAPC is “God Moves—Be Still.” For more information, download the conference brochure at <http://napconline.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/2015-Triennial-Conf-brochure.pdf>

**June 17–18, 2015**, African American Clergywomen Retreat, Minneapolis

The African American Clergywomen Event will be an opportunity for women to gather for spiritual renewal, development and support in a sacred environment to be encouraged and nurtured to fully live out their call in ministry. For more information contact Rev. Lonnie Oliver, associate for African American Congregational Support Lonnie.Oliver@pcusa.org.

**June 18–21, 2015**, Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women, Minneapolis

The theme of the gathering is “One Body, One Spirit.” Workshops, plenaries, worship, and mission opportunities will explore the theme in the context of a diverse, faithful sisterhood. See [presbyterianwomen.org](http://presbyterianwomen.org) for information.

**July 30–August 1, 2015**, Big Tent, Knoxville, Tennessee

Experience that deep sense of community one would expect at a national gathering of Presbyterians—a great big family reunion! Join us for a wide variety of workshops, all under one Big Tent, a conference that will inspire and equip Presbyterians to live missionally. To learn more or to register, visit [pcusa.org/bigtent](http://pcusa.org/bigtent).

**Correction for the cover of the Fall 2014 issue:** Photo by Diane Nafash, taken at the 2012 Churchwide Gathering of Presbyterian Women in Orlando, Florida. To learn more about Presbyterian Women, visit [presbyterianwomen.org](http://presbyterianwomen.org).

# Fast Facts

## Did You Know?

In 1997, there were 972 racial ethnic congregations in the PC(USA). In 2013, there were 1,930 racial ethnic congregations in the PC(USA) (an increase of almost 100% in 17 years).

Of the 10,038 PC(USA) congregations, more than 17% are racial ethnic congregations. Including New Church Developments and Bible Study Fellowships, almost 19% of Presbyterian communities of faith are racial ethnic.

**The mandate of Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Ministries** (formerly The Racial Ethnic Unit) is “to do justice . . . love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8). The mandate had two interrelated focal points: **doing justice and strengthening congregations** (see GA Minutes, 1993, A. Assigned Responsibilities 35.001, boldface added). **Women’s Leadership Development & Justice Ministries** was developed in the reunited PC(USA) to coordinate women’s programs in the church.

On the front cover of each *Racial Ethnic Torch*, you will see our **mantra: Grow, Transform, Empower, Lead, and Develop**. The core ministry and the purpose of our work in the Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Ministries office is :

- **Church Growth**, with a focus on new worshipping communities
- **Transformation** of existing congregations
- **Social Justice and Empowerment**
- **Leadership Development**, with a focus on developing racial ethnic, women, and young adult transformational leaders, and
- **Cross Cultural Ministries**

Thus, our mantra is: *Grow, Transform, Empower, Lead, and Develop*. The Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Ministries offices *equip, connect, and inspire* racial ethnic and new immigrant worshipping communities and develop and empower racial ethnic and new immigrant leaders. The ministry area does this through training, coaching, resource development, leadership development institutes, networking, and providing grants to congregations, racial ethnic schools and colleges, and racial ethnic and immigrant members and leaders. In Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries, we engage the church in its mission to become more diverse and inclusive of racial, ethnic, cultural, and language groups, and we equip women for leadership in all ministries of the church.

# Women of Color Consultation

This summer, the Office of Gender and Racial Justice will hold a Women of Color Consultation in which representatives of diverse and dynamic groups of women from across the U.S. will gather together.

The 2015 Consultation will be the fourth event of its kind. The first, held in 2004 in Atlanta, was the first opportunity for women of color to meet since 1993 when the Committee of Women of Color was phased out at the General Assembly Council level. A second event, which focused on enhancing the roles of women of color and embracing their leadership and full participation at all levels of the church, was held in Charlotte, North Carolina, in October 2011. In 2013, more than 40 women gathered in Louisville to focus on topics lifted up in the Women of Color Consultation report, including issues of gender lens and intersectionality and the church as a system of privilege and discrimination.

During the first meeting in 2004, the women developed their vision of how the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) might become an inclusive and beloved community. This session also generated the Consultation recommendations that addressed many facets of the church's mission and ministry. Based on the review of the report, the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns (ACWC) and the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns (ACREC) submitted a joint resolution, adopted by the 217th General Assembly (2006), and thus shaped the future work of these committees and the Women of Color Consultations.

## All of these events have aimed to:

- Affirm and celebrate gifts of racial ethnic women of all ages;
- Increase understanding and build solidarity among women of diverse



More than forty women from across the United States gathered in Louisville to participate in the two-day 2013 Women of Color Consultation.

backgrounds for mutual empowerment and collective action;

- Develop strategies for racial ethnic women's empowerment both in racial ethnic churches and the church at large; and
- Invite various PC(USA) entities into meaningful conversation with women of color.

New to this year's Consultation will be Sera Chung, the associate for Gender and Racial Justice in Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries. Her role is focused on researching, writing, and working on publishing articles on race and gender as well as anti-racism and cultural competency training. She will also share the results of recently released panels on race and gender and begin a Study on the Status of Women.

The Women of Color Consultation events are offered through the Office of Gender and Racial Justice by the Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries area of the Presbyterian

Mission Agency, in partnership with the Joint Women of Color Committee of the ACWC and the ACREC, to lift up and affirm the voices, vision, and leadership of women of color in the PC(USA) as the church celebrates the 2009–2022 season of Hearing and Singing New Songs to God. The 220th General Assembly (2012) called for the church to recommit to this season of celebration and to include and affirm women of color of all ages in leadership.

# Season of Listening: Addresses Changing Needs of Female Leadership

“While it is agreed that women’s leadership roles are expanding and evolving in the church, we still have a long way to go. Women face unique challenges in ministry, and we are here to help support them in their work and their faith journey,” says Jewel McRae, associate for Women’s Leadership Development and Young Women’s Ministries in Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries. “With that in mind, the staff in Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries has spent the past 12 months in a ‘season of listening’ aimed at learning more about the real needs of female leaders and future leaders in the church, and figuring out ways that our office can help and support them,” she adds.

As part of the Season of Listening, Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries, in collaboration with Merri Alexander, senior director for strategic partnership development at Montreat Conference Center, has hosted six Women’s Listening Visits. These events—which have been open to all current and future female leaders in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)—were held at various locations across the country and represented a variety of cultural and economic groups.

While many challenges faced by female leadership are unique to their call, several common themes emerged during each of these Women’s Listening Visits, including:

- issues of pay equality;
- the need for enhanced mentoring and support among female leadership;
- struggles with ordination, especially among those who come from nontraditional backgrounds or who seek nontraditional roles within the church; and
- feelings of loneliness in their call.

“Addressing issues raised during these events, and others like them held in previous



Women gathered at St. Paul Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles for a Women’s Listening event last fall.

years, will be a major focus for our work in 2015 and beyond,” says McRae. “We want to be able to provide the support, the friendship, the resources, and whatever else the women need to succeed in their call. These women are both the current and future leadership of our church,” she adds.

“For me, being a part of this Season of Listening has been a tremendous blessing. I’ve enjoyed having the opportunity to see the passion, enthusiasm, and commitment that these women bring to our church through their ministry,” notes Merri Alexander. “It has, however, been surprising to see how geographically specific some issues are, while others cross all boundaries and are shared among most women in ministry.”

According to the most recent end-of-year statistics (2012) supplied by clerks of congregations, of the 12,807 active teaching elders, a little more than one-third of them are female (35 percent). This percentage has increased slowly each year since 2002. Ten years ago, the percentage of active female

teaching elders was 27 percent.

While half of active male teaching elders serve as pastors/co-pastors, only one-fourth of female teaching elders (1,161) serve as pastors/co-pastors. Another quarter are students or those without a validated call. Although the number of active female teaching elders has increased over the last 10 years, the percentage of women serving as pastors or co-pastors has declined, although it did slightly increase from 2008 to 2010.

## LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Season of Listening and Women’s Listening Visits, contact Jewel McRae, 502-569-5848 or [jewel.mcrae@pcusa.org](mailto:jewel.mcrae@pcusa.org).

Research Services findings:  
[pcusa.org/blogs/presbyterians-by-the-numbers/2014/5/19/women-rule](http://pcusa.org/blogs/presbyterians-by-the-numbers/2014/5/19/women-rule)

# The Joys and Challenges of Being a Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Leader

By Rhashell Hunter, director of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries and Sera Chung, associate for Gender & Racial Justice

Why is there still a need for racial ethnic and new immigrant leadership development in an era that values interculturality? Unpacking the answers to this question requires some digging on our part as the answers are not simple.

First, there are cultural, racial, and language reasons for racial ethnic and new immigrants to gather with others who are of the same racial, ethnic, and new immigrant group. One of the primary reasons is to deal with the effects of racism. Unfortunately, racism is still an evil in our society, and persons of certain racial ethnic groups regularly experience prejudice.

Many racial ethnic Presbyterians have a long tradition of bonding in a community that has been a source of survival, information sharing, and emotional support.

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Connecting with sources of information is a more focused reason to gather and provide networking and leadership development. In Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, we provide networks for leaders so that they can get their questions answered, learn about opportunities, and develop in their professional ministry.

And we participate in the construction of racial ethnic and new immigrant identity by utilizing the folk culture of racial ethnic and new immigrant people. There is a

common identity, for instance, among many African Americans of various economic classes, which stems from a common history of oppression and achievement, common heritage, and common destiny. There are distinct racial ethnic and new immigrant folk cultures based on the experiences of being a racial ethnic or new immigrant person in North American society, and a collective consciousness that exists among those in a race and culture. This consciousness, or "way of knowing," does not need translation, and it is immediately accessible through phrases, symbols, and images.

Racial ethnic and new immigrants are frequently forced to "culture-switch" and mold themselves to western European-American culture in the United States and in our church. So we gather together for psychic and emotional support. And while many persons for whom English is a second language have excellent command of the English language, there are times when we wish to speak and use expressions and phrases that are communicated more effectively in our native tongues.

Even those for whom English is their only language, we want to speak in a dialect or use "short speak" that is understood by those of our race and culture but that may not always be valued in the larger North American society.

Finally, many racial ethnic churches share the gospel using a rich variety of music, witness, and styles of worship. It is the social location of the racial ethnic and new immigrant participants in these congregations that allows them to read Scripture in community and in solidarity with others who are marginalized and to experience God in the midst of struggle and oppression.

Our new immigrant sisters and brothers

often live between two worlds or spheres of culture. They occupy liminal spaces as liminal beings. As many new immigrants defy classifications, their personas may be ambiguous. New immigrant groups may be betwixt and between home and host: part of society but sometimes never fully integrated. The idea of Christ's complete victory over evil forces, principalities, and powers that keep human beings in bondage to sin and marginalization is meaningful for those who live at the margins of society.

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In Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, we want to create an environment where all can realize the full extent of their God-given talents.

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A task of prophetic ministry is to bring people together to engage with their experiences of suffering. The prophets understood the possibility of change as linked to emotional extremities of life. In Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, we want to create an environment where all can realize the full extent of their God-given talents.

In our leadership development ministries, we examine the characteristics of liminality of racial ethnic and new immigrants, which calls racial ethnic and new immigrant leaders to a special vocation in ministry as proclaimers of prophetic voices that weep, critique, and seek restoration on behalf of themselves and the community.

# Seminarian Reflections: Women Share Their Thoughts on Seminarians Conference

If only for a long weekend this past fall, 28 seminarians from across the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) joined together in community with other church leaders to engage in a connectional and transformative learning event to explore the changing landscape of ministry. Two of the participants shared thoughts presented here on what it means to be a racial ethnic female leader in the church and reflected on how events like these impact their work in ministry.

Jieun Kim Han is a senior at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

Han feels that being part of such events as the conference has been transformative in her faith journey and her path to ordination. “Events like these truly show the denomination’s commitment, care, and encouragement as I prepare for a life of service and mission to Christ and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” she notes.” Han feels as though this event provided her the space she needed to celebrate and share her journey with other women and racial ethnic and new immigrants who share similar joys and challenges. “I thought informational sessions were very helpful in particular because I was able to access invaluable information for my preparation for ordained ministry as well as to engage in in-depth dialogue on critical topics that affect the mission, unity, and diversity of the church today and [in the] future as a Korean American female seminarian.”

Aida Haddad, a second-year student at Princeton Seminary, shared similar thoughts following the conference. “Attending this event in particular solidified my call to medicine and to ministry. Having the opportunity to share stories, joys, and struggles with other racial ethnic and new immigrant seminarians helped me recognize my uniqueness and revitalized my desire to



Sera Chung, associate for Gender and Racial Justice, speaks with two seminary students during the Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Seminarians Conference.

attend medical school.”

“Even as a lifelong Presbyterian, I wasn’t sure that seminary was an option for me until my senior year of college. My Ukirk pastor at United Presbyterian Church in Bloomington, Indiana, helped me see that seminary could be the next step for me and walked with me as I explored that path.”

This annual Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Seminarians Conference provides racial ethnic and new immigrant seminarians the opportunity to engage in a spiritual environment and vocational discernment. They learn more about the connectional church, receive information about preparing for ordination exams, explore paths to ordination, and hear about the rewards and challenges of being a new immigrant leader. Participants also learn how to build and sustain meaningful relationships as part of their support system during seminary and in ministry.

“Our hope each year is that this event helps seminarians feel more connected to the national church and to racial ethnic and

new immigrant leaders across the PC(USA),” says Jewel McRae, associate for Women’s Leadership Development and Young Women’s Ministries. “We want students to know that we understand the unique challenges and joys they face and that we’ll do whatever we can to inspire, equip, and connect them throughout their faith journey.”

“I was most excited about the addition of new immigrants to this year’s conference. As a first-generation student, being with new immigrants, many of whom are facing unique challenges as they explore their path to ministry, was really empowering and reminded me of what my parents did to get me to where I am today,” Haddad adds.

## LEARN MORE

To learn more about the Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Seminarians Conference and Racial Ethnic & Women’s Ministries, visit [pcusa.org/racialethnic](http://pcusa.org/racialethnic).

# Status of Women Study in Progress

By Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty

Lillian Oats, a former member of the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, introduced a church-wide study of the status of women in 2004 after having seen a study done by the Episcopal Church.

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We know relatively little about the experience of women who serve churches as ruling elders, deacons, Christian educators, candidates for ministry, those who serve extra-parish ministries, or in other roles in congregations.  
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A task force worked for about a year and a half to design the methodology for the study. Two of the main purposes of the study were to determine best practices in supporting women in ministry and to examine how intersecting dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, and age impact the experience of religious leaders. None of the data collected at this point by the PC(USA) attends to the significance of the intersecting dynamics of gender, race, ethnicity, and age.

I met on different occasions, either in person or via conference call, with several members of the PC(USA) staff. Linda Valentine, executive director of the Presbyterian Mission Agency, Rhashell Hunter, director of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries, and Deborah Coe of Research

Services played key roles in envisioning a more streamlined design for the study that could begin in 2014. These meetings resulted in the creation of a streamlined budget for the study and a coordinating team that now oversees the process of analyzing existing data concerning the status of women and creating additional surveys. Another team is being formed that will plan a theological consultation to be held in the fall of 2015. It will bring together at least 18 theologians, both academics and those within congregations, who intentionally write and reflect from women's experiences for the purpose of bettering both church and society.

## What Will the Study Involve?

The theological basis for the study is the model of church as a community that shared Jesus' healing of the bent-over woman from Luke 13 remains a powerful metaphor calling the church to be concerned about women who are undervalued, underpaid, and overburdened by responsibilities for caregiving:

*Now Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And just then there appeared a woman with a spirit that had crippled her for eighteen years. She was bent over and was quite unable to stand up straight. When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." — Luke 13:10-12*

The study will be comprehensive and conducted in two main research areas—sociological and theological.

The sociological aspect of the study will focus on interpreting existing data concerning the status of women gathered by Research Services in the Presbyterian Mission

Agency, as well as information gathered in the past during Women's Listening Visits, which bring together women in small groups in different presbyteries.

In addition to analyzing existing data, a comprehensive survey of women in leadership roles in the church will be conducted and a Presbyterian Panel survey will be created to investigate how perceptions of leadership in the church are shaped by the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, and age.

## Why We Need a Church-wide Study of the Status of Women on All Levels of the PC(USA)

We know relatively little about the status of women leaders in the church because we have primarily limited our definition of leadership to women clergy. We also know relatively little about the experience of women who serve churches as ruling elders, deacons, Christian educators, candidates for ministry, in extra-parish ministries, or in other roles in congregations.

Gaining access to ordination does not guarantee equal treatment of women—and access for all women to serve as full partners in the church has been gained slowly over time. New patterns for women's leadership are emerging continually, and, in many cases, women are defining ministries for themselves. Women's creativity and innovation in ministry are worth the church's attention as we continue to challenge ourselves to be a "church in the round."

We need **your** help  
to carry out **God's plan**



for **Presbyterian leaders.**

Imagine wanting to deepen your faith and develop your leadership skills and finding the door locked. Now, imagine you're the key that people need.

Would you open the door for others?

Help others work to deepen their faith and develop the leadership skills they'll need to respond to God's call to lead and serve in the church.

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has committed itself to inspire, equip, and connect racial ethnic leaders within the church. Funds collected for this effort will be used to identify, develop, nurture, and sustain diverse leaders for Christ's mission.

Your support helps us build programs and provide leadership training for racial ethnic women and men



**To make a donation**, visit  
[presbyterianmission.org/donate/E051484](https://presbyterianmission.org/donate/E051484)

**To learn more** about racial ethnic leadership development, visit [pcusa.org/racialethnic](https://pcusa.org/racialethnic) or contact Jewel McRae, [jewel.mcrae@pcusa.org](mailto:jewel.mcrae@pcusa.org), 502-569-5848



# CELEBRATING THE BOND BETWEEN YOUNG AND SENIOR WOMEN

By Rhashell D. Hunter



Ruth and Naomi on the Road to Bethlehem, Arthur Szyk. Reproduced with the cooperation of The Arthur Szyk Society, Burlingame, CA; [www.szyk.org](http://www.szyk.org)

## CELEBRATE THE GIFTS OF WOMEN SUNDAY SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2015

In 2015, Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday lifts up the bond between young and senior women in God's household. Though Celebrate the Gifts of Women Sunday is March 8, 2015, your congregation or women's groups may use this resource on any day that you choose.

Order additional copies of this resource, item 27501-15-001, through Presbyterian Distribution Service, 800/524-2612, or download from [www.pcusa.org/women](http://www.pcusa.org/women). A limited number of bulletin covers are available from PDS while supplies last, item 27501-15-002, \$5 for a pack of 25. The bulletin cover also may be downloaded free from [www.pcusa.org/women](http://www.pcusa.org/women).

The story of Ruth and Naomi is a favorite for many, largely because of the bond between these two women. Who can forget when Ruth said to Naomi, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16–17).

The devotion that Ruth shows her mother-in-law is inspiring. The bond between this young woman and her older relative is both spoken and unspoken. Ruth 1:18 reads, “When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.” There was nothing more she needed to say.

I remember my grandmother and aunts preparing meals together in the kitchen in my grandmother’s home in Longview, Texas. Not one of them asked, “Is there something that I can help you with?” They just picked up pots, pans, bowls and spoons and seamlessly cooked together. Then, they placed on the dining room table the best food I have ever tasted in my life.

There are some people with whom we can share space and communicate without needing to talk. There is a connection—a bond—when we are cooking together, reading in the same room, or walking together to the land of Judah, like Naomi, Ruth and Orpah.

Sometimes, the ways of our families are misunderstood. While our love is obvious to us, it is not always easily understood by others. We may say things that appear harsh, like when Naomi says to Ruth and Orpah, “Turn back . . . why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back . . . go your way” (1:11–12).

One of Naomi’s daughters-in-law, Orpah, listens to her. She kisses Naomi, and then goes back to Moab. But Ruth refuses to leave Naomi. When Naomi sees Ruth’s determination, she says no more to her. “So the two of them went on . . .” (1:19).

Many complex factors often make it difficult for us to just “go on.” As women, some of us work in positions that were traditionally held by males, and we have had to navigate the sentiments that we should “turn back.” Many clergywomen and church leaders have shared with me stories of discrimination, where they

were discounted or placed in subordinate roles. While men also experience unjust affronts, the stories by both young and senior women have many layers, because in them are threads of sexism, racism, classism, homophobia, xenophobia and ageism—sometimes all at the same time. And, often, it’s other women who perpetuate these offenses.

Some of us walk along paths that no one like us has walked before and because of double, triple or quadruple jeopardy (entering situations as a woman, a racial ethnic person, from the margins of society, an immigrant, etc.), we have had to fight for everything we have. Some of us who are younger were not prepared for the challenges that we have encountered. We have experienced pain and wounds in our souls that have yet to be healed.

That Naomi, Orpah and Ruth had to leave Moab because the men in the family had died placed them in a marginalized position almost from the start of the book. They travelled courageously, looking for opportunities in Moab. But Naomi realized, at a certain point, that the journey would be too hard for her daughters-in-law. “No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of [God] has turned against me” (1:13).

This monologue of lament is in sharp contrast to Mary’s song of praise—the Magnificat—in Luke 1:46–55. Mary greets Elizabeth, and her older relative exclaims, “Blessed are you among women . . .” (v. 42). And Mary says, “My soul magnifies [God] . . .” (v. 46). Though at times, there is conflict between women, some of the most beautiful and memorable words in the Bible are spoken by women to other women. And, when we are our best selves, our devotion and love are evident.

Ruth is one of the only two books in the Bible named after a woman and the only book named after a person who is not Jewish. In Ruth, we see an example of a young woman and a senior woman, who have bonds woven by life and faith, and we are reminded that God cares for us and has given us others with whom to share life’s journeys. In gratitude to God, we acknowledge the gifts of young and senior women, who are dear members of our family in the household of God.

## Service of Worship to God

### Call to Worship

Based on Luke 1:46–49

One: Our souls magnify God, and our spirits rejoice in our Savior,

**All: for the mighty One has done great things for us. Holy is God's name.**

One: God has looked upon me with favor. From now on, all generations will call me blessed,

**All: for the mighty One has done great things for me. Holy is God's name.**

One: Blessed are you among women, and blessed is she who believes,

**All: for the mighty One has done great things for us. Holy is God's name.**

### Suggested Hymns\*

“For All the Faithful Women”  
(GtG 324)

“Will You Come and Follow Me:  
The Summons” (GtG 726)

“The Church of Christ Cannot  
Be Bound” (GtG 766)

“Somos el cuerpo de Cristo”/  
“We Are the Body of Christ”  
(GtG 768)

“I Want Jesus to Walk with Me”  
(GtG 775)

### Call to Confession

Sisters and brothers, God offers us the gift of forgiveness and the opportunity to let go of wounds that we carry around like unpacked luggage. In faithful witness to God's grace and love, we confess our sins before God and each other.

### Prayer of Confession (unison)

**Loving God, we confess that we criticize and pass judgment upon others. We seek to control the way others live their lives of service to you. Forgive us for our short-sightedness and sin. Help us to appreciate and love our sisters and brothers in Christ, both younger and older, for we are all valued members in the household of God.**

### Assurance of Pardon

Based on Ruth 1:16

One: “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you!”

**All: “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”**

One: Likewise, God will not leave us. God, who forgives us, frees us and gives us peace.

**All: Thanks be to God.**

### Scripture Readings

Ruth 1:7–22

Psalm 139:1–14

Luke 1:39–56

### Sermon Starter

As you begin to design your sermon, start with your questions about the scripture passage in Ruth. For example, why did Naomi leave Moab to go to the land of Judah? Why did Naomi's daughters-in-law travel with her? Why didn't Ruth turn back and leave with Orpah? Consider using a storytelling or narrative style—this passage easily yields itself to this sermonic style.

In *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988), Renita Weems observes, “Ruth and Naomi's story is one of the oldest testimonies in the Old Testament to female bonding. Their relationship typifies the special friendship that can often develop between women, despite differences in age, nationality and religion. Ruth and Naomi's legacy is that of a seasoned friendship between two women, a friendship which survived the test of time despite the odds against women as individuals, as friends, as women living without men. . . . To care passionately about the quality of another woman's life, to respect each other's choices and to allow for each other's differences: these are the lessons embedded in the Book of Ruth” (24–25, 34).

Ruth says to Naomi, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16). How does Naomi respond to these words? How do we respond?

## A Litany for All the Faithful Women

One: Creator God, we thank you for women who are filled with your life-giving Spirit,

**All: for women with words from the divine;**

One: for women who advocate for justice;

**All: for women who speak truth;**

One: for women called by God to serve in the Church of Jesus Christ.

**All: We lift our voices in gratitude for women who give the gift of knowledge, proclaiming your saving grace, in pulpits and women's groups, session tables and kitchen tables, boardrooms and family rooms, Sunday schools and quilting circles.**

One: We lift our voices in gratitude for named and unnamed women who lead us in God's way. For Ruth and Naomi, whose destinies were intertwined,

**All: we thank you, God.**

One: for Mary and Elizabeth, who blessed each other,

**All: we thank you, God.**

One: We are grateful, Loving Creator, for these women and their witness and love.

**All: We are grateful, Loving Creator, for all the faithful women, walking together, serving Christ in the world.**

## Charge and Benediction

Based on Luke 24

One: After Jesus rose from the tomb in which he was laid, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. She went out and told the disciples that she had seen the Christ, but when they heard that he was alive, they would not believe it.

**All: Then Jesus said to them, "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation."**

One: And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere.

**All: So, go out and spread the good news everywhere, just as the women and men before you. And celebrate, young and old, the message of our God.**

## Program Suggestions

### Sharing Our Stories as Young and Senior Women

Consider including this activity toward generational appreciation and cultural competency. A diversity of age, race, culture, and so on will enhance this activity.

### Activity

1. Gather a group of women and divide the group into pairs.
2. Discuss with a partner a time when an older woman enhanced your life (through words and/or actions). Next, discuss when a young woman encouraged you.
3. Discuss a time when you did or said something that was hurtful to a younger or older woman. What could you have said or done differently?
4. Role-play the experiences—first, the hurtful experience, then the transformed one, showing what you could have done differently.
5. Discuss the transformation and answer the question, "How can I learn from this experience today?"
6. Reconvene the large group and invite individuals to share their experiences and learnings. Be sure to tell your own story using "I" statements, and not other's experiences. Ask participants to answer:
  - How can I seek to understand younger or older women and those who are different from me?
  - How can I become a good sister in God's household?

Rhashell D. Hunter is the director of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries in the Presbyterian Mission Agency of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

### Sharing Our Stories as Young and Senior Women

*The Bible: New Revised Standard Version.* New York, N.Y.: National Council of Churches, 1989.  
*Priests for Equality, The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation.* Lanham, Md.; Sheed & Ward, Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.

Renita Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible.* San Diego, Calif.: LuraMedia, 1988.

# Vice Moderator urges us to ‘move through pain’, believe ‘that resurrection is possible’

By Jerry Van Marter

The days when divided and conflicted Presbyterians could gloss over or ignore their differences are over, General Assembly Vice-moderator Larissa Kwong Abazia said during a sermon at the annual Moderators Conference in November. “This day, we are called to move through the pain and suffering, to have the tough conversations, to face one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, and take the hard together.”

Preaching from John 20:19–29, she said the church faces the same temptation as those disciples: “to hunker down and hit preservation mode. If we can’t save what’s inside, then we surely can’t save anyone outside. It’s time to focus on us.”

But even with their doubts and fears, their seeming loss of identity and community, the disciples experienced “that [Jesus] was still there and among them,” she continued.

“There are real, deep scars out there in our churches, mourning and vulnerabilities torn open from our denomination’s decisions,” Kwong Abazia said. “But you don’t need me to tell you that, do you?”

The church’s procedures—with up and down votes, winners and losers—“have failed us,” she said. We’ve pitted our communities against one another. We’ve allowed the debates of our presbyteries through the General Assembly to define who we are and what we stand for, forgetting that, embodied, we are the church.”

On the General Assembly’s recent vote to permit same-sex marriages in the church, there are those who are celebrating and those who are mourning, Kwong Abazia acknowledged. More than 220 churches have left the PC(USA). “And those who stay are faced with the ongoing pressure that they have conformed, giving up their long-held



General Assembly Vice-moderator Larissa Kwong Abazia delivers a sermon during the annual Moderators Conference in November.

beliefs together as a denomination,” she said.

Conversations around the Belhar Confession—the South African anti-apartheid inspired creed currently being debated and voted on by the presbyteries—are prompting “individuals and communities of color . . . to wonder if the denomination is capable of wrestling with the call to racial reconciliation,” Kwong Abazia said, noting that “we are a 90 percent white denomination in a country that is becoming increasingly more diverse.”

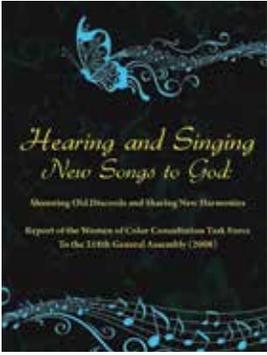
The good news in the sermon text from John 20, Kwong Abazia said, is that “the disciples know it was Jesus because they saw his hands and his sides. The scars and wounds didn’t disappear from his resurrected body—they were still right there as an acknowledgment of everything he had endured.”

She challenged her fellow Presbyterian leaders “to be like Thomas. Go out in the

midst of the crowds, and, even without answers, meet people where they are. Go to touch and experience the broken body of the church, and then believe for yourself that resurrection is possible.”

Over the course of their weekend together, the moderators heard from the six national agencies of the PC(USA)—the Presbyterian Mission Agency, the Office of the General Assembly, the Board of Pensions, the Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, the Presbyterian Foundation, and the Presbyterian Investment and Loan Program—and engaged in workshops on such topics and skills as meeting management, parliamentary procedure, worship leadership, the responsibilities of presbyteries and synods in relationship to the General Assembly, and policies and procedures for dismissing congregations to other denominations.

## Featured Resource



### Featured Resource: Hearing and Singing New Songs to God

Approved by the 218th General Assembly (2008), *Hearing & Singing New Songs to God: Shunning Old Discords and Sharing New Harmonies* is the report of the 2008 Women of Color Consultation. The report outlines:

- calling for transformation of the church, focusing on the intersections of gender, race and class;
- directing the Presbyterian Mission Agency (formerly the General Assembly Mission Council), in consultation with the Advocacy Committee for Racial Ethnic Concerns and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns, to expand on basic antiracism training to include modules on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class and provide focused training on internalized oppression and privilege;
- seeking inclusivity with equity, moving beyond tokenism in the participation of women of color of all ages to valuing and embracing the gifts they bring to the life of the whole church; and
- adopting an understanding of shared power as a fundamental element of community.

Together, the **Women's Leadership Development and Justice Ministries Team** works to provide leadership development opportunities for all women, conducts cultural competency training and assists the church in its commitment to become an open, inclusive and racially just church.



The Women's Leadership Development and Justice Ministries team of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries gathered last fall in Louisville. Left to right: Rashell Hunter, Sera Chung, Jackie Spycher, and Jewel McRae.

## Who We Are

### The Ministries of Racial Ethnic & Women's Ministries:

#### Racial Ethnic & New Immigrant Congregational Support Offices

- African American Congregational Support
- African Emerging Ministries
- Asian Congregational Support
- Hispanic/Latino—a Congregational Support, including Portuguese-Language Congregational Support
- Intercultural Ministries
- Korean Emerging Ministries, Including Middle Eastern Ministries
- Native American Congregational Support

#### Racial Ethnic Leadership Development

- Racial Ethnic Leadership Development
- Racial Ethnic Schools and Colleges

#### Women's Leadership Development & Justice Ministries

- Gender & Racial Justice
- Women's Leadership Development & Young Women's Ministries

And, in covenant relationship with:

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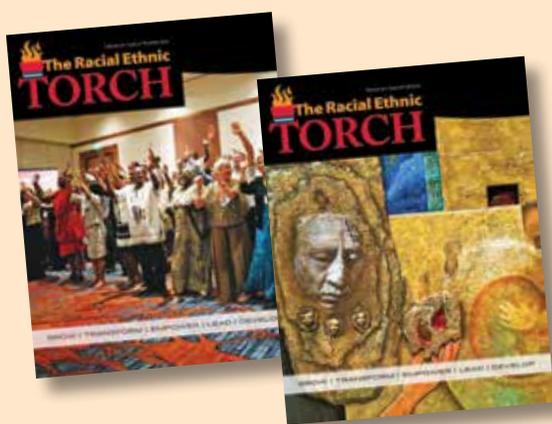
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