

The Woman's Pulpit

January-March
2024

NEWS ABOUT ORDAINED AND LAY WOMEN IN MINISTRY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

IAWM Assembly Set for Puerto Rico June 4-8, 2024 Holy Solidarity: Embracing Hope

Speakers Sonia Hinds of Barbados, Anna Kasafi Perkins of Jamaica, and Dora Arce of Cuba, will reflect from the Caribbean perspective

For its 2024 International Assembly, the International Association of Women Ministers will gather in Vieques, Puerto Rico, from June 4-8, 2024.

IAWM will meet in the air-conditioned retreat center of the Methodist church in Esperanza on Vieques. Accommodations will be in the dormitory there, four to a room, or in a nearby B and B that participants may reserve themselves from the list provided on the registration form. Catered meals will be provided on site. See the **registration form on page 7** for more details.

Presentations will be on "Spiritual Care of the Afro-Caribbean Woman," lead by Hinds and Perkins (Anna Perkins will be present virtually;) and the Cuban perspective, by Dora Arce. (See **page 6 for biographies.**) Panel and group discussions will call on our members from India, US, Canada, Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa to address "Embracing Hope from Other Contexts." Bishop Idalia Negron Caamano, bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church Caribbean Synod, has been invited to lead us in morning worship.

As always at IAWM assemblies, there will be an International Night where attendees are invited to give a presentation, song, art, poetry or

show artifacts of their native lands. The bi-annual business meeting and a focus on the future of IAWM will round out Friday. Plans are underway for a tour of Vieques and a trip to the black sand beach on Friday or Saturday.

IAWM members, prospective members, and friends are invited. Some scholarship and travel money is available; indicate your interest on the registration form. **Gifts to the Hilda Frank Seater travel fund** for participants outside North America are also welcome; email Carol Brown for details, csbrown550@hotmail.com.

A poster will be arriving in January which readers may share with others. **Registration deadline is April 15, 2024**; late registrants will be accepted if there is room.

**Remembering
LaVonne Althouse
1932-2023
See page 4**

**Now Quarterly!
Zoom Gathering for
Fun and Connection
Feb. 1
8-10 a.m. Eastern ST
Theme: When have you
had an epiphany?**

**Email Marian for the link:
uccrev77@gmail.com**

Cynthia Walton-Leavitt and Ann Rogers Brigham, IAWM secretary and archivist, on the right, visit in Geneva with Christine Housef and Nyambura Njoroge at the World Council of Churches women's human rights advocacy training. See page 3.



January-March 2024/1



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Editor Emerita
LaVonne Althouse

Editor
Marian P. Shearer
305 Pomander Ave, Reading, PA 19606
uccrev77@gmail.com

EXECUTIVE BOARD

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dorcascgordon1@gmail.com
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SWITZERLAND
IOWA: Mary K. Green
revmary@iowatelecom.net
WESTERN PA.: Kimberly Greway
kgreway@stjohnsnorthversailles.com

POSTMASTER: Send form 3579 to The Woman's
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Prayer Calendar Is On Its Way

The Annual Prayer Calendar of IAWM members is on its way to you, along with the president's annual letter, and your membership renewal.

Would you like to become a Prayer Calendar Communicator?

We are looking for a few folks to write to our IAWM members (mostly email) during the week they are on the prayer calendar.

Carol Brown has instructions and assignments; connect with her at csbrown550@hotmail.com.

Gifts Still Needed

To ensure a meaningful and hope-filled assembly, we are asking each of you, as you are able, to consider contributing either to IAWM's **Assistance Fund for non-North Americans** or to **general Assembly costs**.

Through such donations IAWM will be able to expand the number of scholarships available for our international members, and possibly reduce the overall costs for everyone, so more women with limited means can attend in person. Email Carol Brown at csbrown550@hotmail.com for PayPal access.

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Online Meetings for Connection and Conversation Will Be Quarterly

The IAWM executive committee approved continuing our successful gatherings on Zoom, by increasing from two per year to four.

In 2024 they will be on:
Thursday, Feb. 1, 8 a.m. EST
Wednesday, May 1
Thursday, Aug. 1
Friday, Nov. 1

We will vary the times to accommodate our members' time zones. February's meeting will be 8 to 10 a.m. Eastern Standard Time (US and Canada), making it early afternoon in Europe and early evening in India.

IAWM vice president Ella Sonawane and Pulpit editor Marian Shearer are your hosts. Email Marian for the Zoom link: uccrev77@gmail.com.

WCC 16 Days of Activism

IAWM member and partner the **Rev. Nicqui Ashwood**, programme director for the Just Community of Women and Men of the World Council of Churches, reported that the WCC has concluded the 16 Days of Activism from Nov. 25 to Dec. 16, 2023. The theme was *Ecumenical Advocacy and Activism*. It started with a webinar Nov. 25, with the National Council of Churches of India, highlighting stories of intervention achieved by faith actors across continents through the global **#Thursdays In Black** campaign.

Daily liturgies, exhibitions, book launches and other events marked the 16 days. The Pacific Conference of Churches offered Break the Silence Sunday.

American Baptists Elect Jacobs-Strain

On Nov. 4, the American Baptist Churches USA became the last of the major mainline Protestant denominations to appoint a female leader by naming the **Rev. Gina Jacobs-Strain** as its general secretary.

She was selected after an 18-month search process, and will begin her two-year tenure in February 2024.

In June, the denomination also named the **Rev. Nikita McCalister** as the new president, beginning her year-long term in January.

Jacobs-Strain will lead one of the US's most diverse denominations, with 1.3 million members and almost 5,000 churches. She will be in charge of continuing the denomination's ecumenical work and fostering partnerships with other regional ministries. She will also coordinate the Burma Refugee Commission, a joint effort by Baptist organizations to advocate for Myanmar refugees' rights.

At present Jacobs-Strain is executive director of American Baptist Women's Ministries. Her background makes a statement for a denomination in which only 13% of churches are led by women, and in which 86% of those women still report facing obstacles in their ministry because of their gender, according to a 2019 report on "The State of Women in Baptist Life."

Established early in the 17th century, the denomination known as the First Baptist Church in America split in 1845 over northern churches' increasing abolitionist beliefs. (Southern churches would later found the Southern Baptist Convention.) Forming as the Northern Baptist Convention in 1907, it became the American Baptist Churches USA in 1972.

Adapted from the article by Fiona Andre, Religion News Service 11/07/23

Rogers Brigham and Walton-Leavitt Attend WCC Human Rights Training

The Rev. Dr. Ann Rogers Brigham, IAWM archivist, and the Rev. Dr. Cynthia Walton-Leavitt, corresponding secretary, attended the annual training for women's human rights advocacy at the World Council of

Churches in Geneva, Switzerland, in October.

Ann writes:

It was a time for me to meet others, women and men from around the globe, who are working for human rights advocacy in their various settings at local and national levels.

One of the "jewels" that came out of that time in Geneva for me, was a chance to meet many women who were the "first" wave of ordained women serving churches in their respective countries and denominations. During that week, our IAWM secretary Cynthia Walton-Leavitt and I were able to host two gatherings of women who were part of IAWM or who were interested in joining us. It was delightful to meet new people who may be in our archives some day as historic leaders and "movement" makers and shakers.

One of those women was Rev. Dr. Nyambura Njoroge. She was the first woman of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa to be ordained. The ordination took place at the Bahati Martyrs Church in September 1982 in Nairobi, Kenya. Rev. Nyambura gave me a copy of her book, *In Remembrance of HER*, about this experience—what a treasure and how I hope it may be part of our IAWM archive. I was glad to give it a place in my suitcase home.

More from the Archivist

Yes, we invite IAWM members to share articles or pictures with us that may be placed in our IAWM archive at The Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, New York City. There is a process for submitting our materials and we do have to decide what may fit our criteria for submis-

sion as determined by The Burke Library staff, but please share what you have for review.

Material from IAWM events, as well as your personal accomplishments, are welcome. Send to:

The Rev. Ann Rogers Brigham
P.O. Box 345, Aquebogue, NY USA
11931
amrogersbrigham@gmail.com
508-221-8787 (Also on WhatsApp)

What the archives collect:

- ~professional papers related to your scholarship, teaching, ministry or work
- ~Original audio/visual recordings related to your career and work
- ~Photographs related to your career or work. You must label them with names of people, place date on the back of the photograph
- ~Unique materials of historical significance that document your professional life and roles.

What the archives do NOT collect:

- ~Published material including books, journals, periodicals and offprints (e.g. articles)
- ~Commercially produced materials
- ~Objects (statues, art, plaques, clothing)
- ~Duplicative materials (i.e. many copies of the same thing.)
- ~Sensitive or personal materials relating to students, such as grades or sensitive correspondence
- ~Medical, financial or otherwise sensitive personal materials

Thank you, colleagues in ministry, I'm grateful for the ways we may preserve what are truly gifts to us from the past. Grace and Peace,

Ann

Orthodox Consortium Considers Ordaining Women Deacons

(By Megan Saliashvili, *Religion News Service*, Nov. 14, 2023)

A consortium of Orthodox Christian scholars, clergy and lay supporters meeting in November outside Boston proposed guidelines for the church to revive the ancient practice of allowing women to be deacons.

The proposed guidelines are not intended simply to ignite conversation about the need for female deacons, their authors say, but to launch a pilot program for their reinstatement.

The Orthodox Church never formally banned or discontinued female deacons, but they became scarce in the Middle Ages amid an increasing emphasis on male monastic practice and a declining need for baptizing female adult converts.

Carrie Frederick Frost, an Orthodox theologian, professor and author, and chair of the St. Phoebe Center, which sponsored the symposium, said “Despite the many calls for deaconesses today, there has not yet been an effort to create a concrete process. . . .” The conference proposed a process to refer five to eight women with theological training to their bishops for evaluation and ordination.

In the African Orthodox Church, which is under the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, a woman is expected to be ordained a deacon before the end of the year.

Frost shared women’s stories of grappling with sexual abuse, miscarriages, stillbirths and other traumas particular to women, and she suggested women ordained to provide pastoral care could serve them. “Some of these gifts are already being shared with the Orthodox church here in the 21st Century,” she said, but it does not reflect the ways in which women’s gifts could truly be infused into the church.

Remembering: LaVonne Althouse

IAWM received word that our longtime member and 50-year editor of *The Woman’s Pulpit*, the Rev. Dr. LaVonne Althouse, age 91, died December 14 at her home at Luther Acres, Lititz, Pennsylvania USA.

LaVonne was born in 1932 in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, to Harvey and Arletta May (Fry) Althouse. Of their seven children, only a sister, Joan, of New York City, is still living. LaVonne attended Ephrata High School and Penn State University, graduating in 1953 with her bachelor’s in journalism.

She moved to New York City to work for nine years for the Board of National Missions of the Presbyterian church, editing their *National Mission* magazine and contributing to a book of prayers and editing the board’s missionary education materials. Then she spent 12 years writing for *Lutheran Woman* magazine and editing other Lutheran periodicals.

“I felt the call to ordained ministry in college, around 1952-ish,” she reported, “and started working for the ordination of women in the Lutheran church—a pioneering effort.”

She wanted to start seminary by going to night classes while she was working, but no night classes were offered in Philadelphia in the 1950s. (In addition, Lutherans did not admit women to the M.Div track until the 1960s.) She quit her job and moved to New York City to attend Union Seminary’s evening classes, from 1956-59, working daytimes and summers as a secretary. Most other women students in those years were Christian educators; only LaVonne and Barbara Troxell, a Methodist, were working towards ordination.

All the men students, she reported, were asked to lead worship during their senior year. Barbara did not want to, but Lavonne, not to be denied the chance, said, “I talked her into it and we shared chapel leadership our senior year.”

LaVonne Reflects on Her Benefits from IAWM Membership

“The thing I think about most is the support and validation we have given each other over the years. It’s been a beautiful gift that we shared.”

In 1962, when Lutheran bodies joined to form the Lutheran Church in America, she was asked to edit their magazine for women, which she did until 1974. That year she was ordained, and called as pastor of Salem Lutheran Church in Frankford, a neighborhood of northeast Philadelphia, where she remained for 22 years until retirement. She was the first woman called as sole pastor of a congregation in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod.

There she was president of the Frankford Ministerium, helped organize aid organizations and community development groups, served the denomination and community on committees and boards, and joined the Philadelphia chapter of the Academy of Preachers.

LaVonne earned the Doctor of Ministry degree at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1981, and was adjunct professor of homiletics there from 1981-91.

She retired from Frankford in 1997 but continued to serve interim ministries in Lutheran and Presbyterian churches for several years. She moved to the retirement community in Lititz in 2002.

Recruited in 1971 to edit the *Pulpit* for IAWM, she reported that the headline of the first issue she edited (1972) was “Two Anglican women ordained in Hong Kong.” Two years later, she was in England at the IAWM assembly when the first irregular ordinations of Episcopal women priests happened back home in Philadelphia.

Arrangements for a memorial service had not been set at the time of publication.

By Marian Shearer, from files and a 2023 interview.

Reflecting on Gender Equality and Gender Justice in Pakistan

By Romella Robinson Sharaz, Presbyterian Church of Pakistan

(Ed. Note-Correction: in the last issue we identified Rev. Robinson as the first Presbyterian woman ordained in Pakistan. Happily, she is the second!)

About 150 theologically trained women from diverse seminary and clergy backgrounds and various organizations across Pakistan were invited to participate in the second national ecumenical workshop of the Christian Study Center in October 2023.

The primary objective of this workshop was to unite with women who have acknowledged their identity in Christ but have faced rejection in their communities, churches and denominations, preventing them from serving as equal stewards of God. It provided a platform for these women to voice their concerns and broaden their understanding of their inherent image before God, delving into the core purpose of creating humanity in (God's) image.

Keynote speaker Prof. Charles Amiad was joined by panelists Ms. Reem Sharif, deputy director of the Transgender Protection Center, Rev. Dr. Farhana, and Sr. Dr. Nassem. The participants were divided into five groups and assigned various Biblical characters such as Dinah, Joseph, Hagar, Vashti, and Tamar. Each group explored these characters through the lens of gender equality, comparing their situations then and now. Then they formulated action plans tailored to their specific areas, contexts and capacities.

The consensus was the need first to recognize others as bearers of God's image, accept them, and support their ministries in service to God. In addition, participants planned to develop further programs that would foster a more comprehensive understanding of gender issues, emphasizing collective action rather than focusing solely on marginalized and rejected women.

The goal, they said, is to raise awareness among women in our communities who are impoverished, illiterate, marginalized and unable to advocate for their identities and roles in society. All participants formulated their action plans and are eager to translate these plans into tangible results.

Reflections from 'Rev. Romella' on Gender Equality and Gender Justice: Biblical and Theological Perspectives

Gender Equality and Gender Justice are two closely interconnected principles. They are inseparable: genuine equality relies on justice and unity. These are not just abstract ideals: they form the basis of a fair and just world where every individual, regardless of gender, enjoys equal rights, opportunities and equitable treatment.

Consider, for instance, the women in Pakistan, a county where violence against women is alarmingly dominant. In Pakistan, women often find themselves treated as commodities, deeply rooted in traditions and norms of society. Gender equality challenges cultural norms, legal reforms, and socioeconomic disparities.

In Genesis 1, we encounter the profound revelation that God created humankind in the divine image, encompassing both man and woman. This principle also extends beyond a binary understanding of gender roles, recognizing the existence of diverse gender identities, including transgender individuals, persons with disabilities, and other groups, all created in the image of God.

Throughout the Bible, we find instances where transgender individuals received Jesus Christ warmly and displayed firm faith. This acceptance by the Divine challenges the human inclination to reject and denounce those who do not conform to social norms. God's love transcends the boundaries of gender roles and categories.

Ahead of Her Time: WCC Publishes Stories of Pan-African Women of Faith

IAWM member Rev. Dr. **Angeline Keturah Walker-Smith**, elected last year as North America president for the World Council of Churches, has gathered the untold stories of pan-African women of faith from Africa, North America, the Caribbean and Europe who provided local, national and global ecumenical leadership during formative periods of the modern-day ecumenical movement.

Ahead of Her Time: Pan-African Women of Faith and the Vision of Christian Unity, Mission and Justice was published in 2023 by the World Council of Churches.

Walker-Smith tells of her own personal experiences with these women, and offers an important re-writing of the ecumenical narrative through a woman's lens. Her aim is to "strengthen the ecumenical agenda of a more inclusive community that embraces the objectives of the pilgrimage of justice and peace, as it embraces the experiences of these women who have historically been marginalized and affected by racism and gender discrimination," according to the WCC description.

Walker-Smith, executive of Bread for the World, introduced the book on All Saints Day, Nov. 1, 2023, at a reception at Bread for the World in Washington, D.C.

The book may be ordered and downloaded from the WCC web site at orders@wcc-coe.org.

Assembly Speakers

“Solidarity in the Caribbean Context” will be addressed by these scholars:

The Rev. Canon Dr. Sonia Hinds is rector of St. Leonard’s Anglican Church, St. Michael, Barbados and the Rural Dean for St. Michael with responsibility for ten parishes in the diocese. Besides her B.A. in theology from Codrington College, the oldest Anglican theological seminary in the Caribbean, she earned degrees at the University of the West Indies, the General Theological Seminary (NY), George Brown College (Toronto) and Trinity College, U. of Toronto. Her thesis at General was *The Spiritual Care of the Sexually Abused Young Woman in the Caribbean*, informed by her nine years as a supervisor at the Government’s correctional institution for girls.

The Rev. Dr. Anna Kasafi Perkins is a Senior Programme Officer with the Quality Assurance Unit for undergraduate studies, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica. Her doctorate is in theological ethics from Boston College. She teaches and researches in ethics, justice, popular culture, sexuality, theology, scripture, and quality assurance. Her many public service roles include the Broadcasting Commission of Jamaica, the Jamaica National Bioethics Committee and the Jamaica Council of Churches. She is co-author of *Ethics Amidst COVID-19: A Brief Ethics Handbook for Caribbean Policymakers and Leaders*.

The Rev. Dora Arce-Valentin has been moderator of the Presbyterian-Reformed Church in Cuba. She worked for

Sonia Hinds



Anna Perkins



Dora Arce-Valentin



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More Information about Assembly

It is suggested that attendees arrange to fly to San Juan (SJU), and add the connecting flight to Vieques (VQS) for an additional cost. There may be ground transportation from San Juan airport if someone rents a car or van, but that has not been determined; in that case, the driver will need to reserve a place on the ferry over to Vieques well in advance.

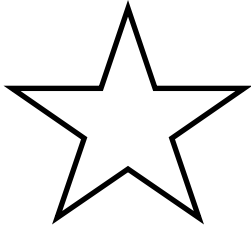
Our schedule will include the usual worship, meals, program and discussion, and business meeting—and our traditional International Night, when attendees sign up to share a story or music or talent or craft from their homeland. There will also be an option of an afternoon at the beach, and opportunity to stroll the shops and boardwalk of Esperanza.

The Executive Board will meet June 3, and the main meeting will begin June 4. You may stay an extra night if arranged in advance, and worship with our Methodist hosts.

All this and more will be updated in the April-June issue of the Woman’s Pulpit.

Arce Biography, Continued

A number of years for the World Council of Reformed Churches in Geneva and then Germany. She is a professor of New Testament at the Evangelical Seminary of Theology at Matanzas, and in a testimonial for SET’s 75th anniversary, said the seminary “...(H)as formed many generations of pastors, denominational leaders marked by an ecumenism not of words but . . . of coexistence and awakening to the wisdom of encounter.”



**Third Zoom gathering for IAWM members
 Thursday, February 1
 8 a. m. Eastern Daylight Time
 Join the fun and conversation!
 Email Marian for the Zoom link: uccrev77@gmail.com**

+++++

**2024 International Assembly Registration Form
 June 4-8, 2024
 Vieques, Puerto Rico USA Holy Solidarity: Embracing Hope**

___Rev. ___Ms. ___Dr. Last Name _____

First _____ Middle _____

and Street _____

City _____

State/Prov. _____ Zip/PC _____

Country _____

Office Phone _____ Home Phone _____

Cell Phone _____ Email _____

Special Needs or diet concerns _____

Registration fee: Full time, US \$175 _____

Single day registration, US \$100 _____ which day(s)? _____

Housing (June 3-8)
 _____ 4 people per room (single beds) \$20/night which nights? June 3 4 5 6 7
 amount enclosed _____

Requested roommates: _____

_____ I will find my own housing – suggested: Casa de Tortuga, Lazy Guest House, Esperanza Inn, The Blok, Blue Horizon

Meals \$125 entire time _____
 \$25/day _____ June 3 4 5 6 7 8 amount enclosed _____

Transportation roundtrip: Vieques airport – Esperanza village– airport will be approximately \$20-40 and details will be provided later.

NOTE: If renting a car in San Juan airport and driving to Vieques, the last ferry leaves Ceiba at 8 p.m. Recommend arriving at San Juan airport by 4 p.m.

Send check or money order for registration, housing, and meals, made payable to IAWM, with this form to: Carol Brown, 1921 Palm St. Reading, PA 19604 USA
 or email this form to csbrown550@hotmail.com and pay with Paypal.com using the same email address.

Any questions, contact Carol at csbrown550@hotmail.com or 484-926-2429.

Registration deadline is April 15, 2024. Late registrations may be accepted if space is still available.

Get on line Feb. 1!
We're looking for
you!

It's
con-
and
our third online
versation for fun
connection:

Thurs Feb. 1

8 a.m. Eastern ST

Email Marian for the Zoom
code: uccrev77@gmail.com

In the News

Pope Francis, speaking to members of the International Theological Commission at the Vatican on Nov. 30, asked theologians to “demasculinize” the church, in an unscripted remark. Noting that there were only five women among the 30-plus theologians, he said, “We need to move forward on this. Women have a way of reflecting on theology that is different from us men.” Bishops and lay people, including an unprecedented number of women, took part in October’s Synod on Synodality at the Vatican. It concluded that the Roman Catholic church needed to reflect on the role of women in the church, and consider the possibility of women becoming deacons. (*Religion News Service*)

In reply, **Roman Catholic women priests**, who had gathered at the synod to further their work toward women’s ordination within the Roman Catholic church, invited the Vatican hierarchy to consider “the overwhelming case to restore women

to ordained ministry alongside men as their equals,” as quoted in a November article in *The Tablet*, referred to on RCWP’s Facebook page. But the topic of women priests was banned at the Synod, and the summary paragraph on female diaconate, said author Miriam Duignan, was a “watered down, vague statement about the need for further study.” If one were taken up, it would be the third in seven years to examine the case to restore the women’s diaconate.

“**The Philadelphia Eleven**,” a new documentary being shown in Episcopal churches across the country, depicts the buildup toward the so-called irregular ordination in 1974 at which three bishops, with a fourth observing, ordained 11 women as Episcopal priests without the denomination’s approval. Episcopal News Service said the film, released anticipating the ordination’s 50th anniversary in

2024, casts a fresh light on that momentous time, and on how the women were vilified in personal and media attacks, but also paved a path toward the full embrace of women priests by the denomination in 1976.

Karen Jobes, emeritus professor of New Testament and Exegesis at Wheaton College (USA), has been chosen president of the Evangelical Theological Society, as reported in *Christianity Today*. She is the first woman president in the professional society’s 75-year history. She said that after years of feeling marginalized at the society’s meetings, she decided to put her attention to making its meetings more welcoming to women. This year 75 women presented papers, and two of the three plenary speakers were female, which has happened only once before.

(From Religion News Service, denominational newsletters, social media and correspondence)

