

# The Woman's Pulpit

January-March  
2025

NEWS ABOUT ORDAINED AND LAY WOMEN IN MINISTRY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

## 10th Conference of Asian Theologians Gathers on Nicaea Anniversary

**Rev. Romella Robinson  
among the 100 gathered by  
Christian Conference of Asia**

One doubts there were women in the first convocation of theologians and bishops who developed the Nicene Creed 1700 years ago.

But there were many among the 100-plus Asian church leaders gathered in October in Malaysia.

The Rev. Romella Robinson Sharaz, Presbyterian from Pakistan and a central committee member of the World Council of Churches, executive member of the National Council of Churches in Pakistan, and international liaison for the International Association of Women Ministers (IAWM), was among those attending.

The ecumenicity of the Council of Nicaea in 325 C. E. is a theme that connects “our Christian heritage with the pressing challenges of today, especially in the Asian context,” she said. “For me, this theme—calling us to stay rooted in our faith while working towards unity—is not just a theological reflection but a personal journey.”

Jesus’ prayer for unity in John 17 deeply resonates here, Robinson reflected. Jesus’ call for love and oneness among the disciples continues to guide us as we strive to embody these values in our relationships, churches and communities, she said. “The Nicene Creed, recited in worship across the world, connects us not only to Christ but also to each other, affirming our shared identity in him.

“As an Asian Christian, I see this theme as a call to embrace the richness of our context,” Robinson said. Living amidst diverse faith traditions, Asian Christians are uniquely positioned to engage in meaningful interfaith and interdenominational dialogues. “This is an opportunity to reflect on how our faith can foster unity without erasing individuality.”

This reflection invites us to “dive deep into theological discussions and practical steps toward ecumenism, reminding us that the Nicene Creed is not just a relic of the past but a living testimony to faith and unity,” she said. “I hope these discussions inspire us to live out this enduring faith and unity in our diverse, dynamic world.”

**Women Comment on  
Nicaea Anniversary,  
p. 5**

**p. 6**

**#####**

**Now Quarterly!  
Zoom Gathering for  
Fun and Connection**

**Feb. 1, 2025  
9-10:30 a.m. Eastern Time**

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

***Below. Asian theologians gathered for the Nicaea anniversary consultation. Notice the women present; notice that none of them seem to be in the first row!***





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(1877-1967)

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## Prayer Calendar

Look for the 2025 Prayer  
Calendar to arrive in your mail or  
email soon!

Correspondents, for two weeks  
or a month, are always needed.  
Email Carol Brown for available  
dates, [csbrown550@hotmail.com](mailto:csbrown550@hotmail.com).

### Please add to prayer calendar: New Member

Emily Chikondi Phiri, Box 30288,  
Lilongwe 3, Malawi.  
phiriemile66@gmail.com Heart of  
Christ Mission

### New Email:

Carol Dennison, [JedTEp@shaw.ca](mailto:JedTEp@shaw.ca)

## Online Meetings for Connection and Conversation Continue Quarterly: Feb. 1

The IAWM executive  
committee approved continuing  
our successful gatherings on  
Zoom.

Next Connection is:

**Saturday, Feb. 1  
9-10:30 a.m.  
Eastern Time  
(US, Canada)**

IAWM president Ella  
Sonawane and Pulpit editor  
Marian Shearer are your hosts.  
Email Marian for the Zoom link:  
[uccrev77@gmail.com](mailto:uccrev77@gmail.com).

## Archives Looking for You

Archivist Ann M. Rogers  
Brigham reminds readers that  
IAWM material may be sent to  
her for our archives at the Burke  
Library at Union Theological  
Seminary, New York City.

Programs from past  
assemblies, photos of meetings  
(with everyone identified and the  
date), anything that might give a  
future researcher some insight  
into our organization.

Though she is beginning an  
interim ministry elsewhere,  
please send snippets or weighty  
matters to her at her permanent  
address:

19 Church St. Apt 2  
W. Brookfield, MA 01585 USA  
[amrogersbrigham@gmail.com](mailto:amrogersbrigham@gmail.com)

## Correction

**St. Paul's University Joshua  
& Timothy School of  
Theology was incorrectly  
located in our last issue. The  
school is in Limuru, Kenya,  
not in Mombasa. The editor  
regrets the mistake, and  
thanks our correspondent for  
the correct information.**

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## Remembering: RC Woman Priest Victoria Marie

Canadian Bishop Jane Kryzanowski sent an obituary of the Rev. Dr. Victoria Marie, 1945-2024.

Victoria “Vikki” Marie died at home at Samaritan house on Oct. 11. She was born in Brooklyn, NY, grew up with her grandparents, and moved to Montreal in her early 20s and settled permanently in Vancouver in the 1980s.

Vikki earned degrees in sociology, anthropology, education, pastoral studies, and finally the Master of Divinity at Vancouver School of Theology. She joined a small community of Franciscan women in 1997, taking final vows in 2000; in 1998 she co-founded the Vancouver Catholic Worker community and moved into Samaritan House. She was ordained a Roman Catholic Woman Priest in 2012, called to serve the community of Our Lady of Guadalupe Tonantzin until she retired last year.

Overcoming barriers of skin color and family status, she found and connected with community everywhere she went. Her scholarly and poetic writing, her practice of healing arts, her solidarity with indigenous struggles for peace and justice, and her building of a faith community specifically meant to welcome all who felt like outsiders, all illustrate the healing and community that shaped her life.

A memorial Mass of Resurrection was celebrated at Samaritan House and on line on Dec. 12, 2024.

*From Worldwide Roman Catholic Women Priests newsletter, December 2024*

### RCWP Ordination:

Deacon Annie Girresh, Nov. 16, 2024, Madison, Wisconsin by presiding bishop Martha Sherman.

## Remembering: Baptist Trailblazers Esther Burroughs and Joy Fenner

American Southern Baptists are remembering two women in ministry who preached and led women and men, but did it outside the bounds of ordination, which was not permitted in the Southern Baptist churches then. They died within a few days of each other in November 2024.

Mark Wingfield of the weekly Baptist News Global reported that he had worked with both women, Esther at the Southern Baptist Convention Home Mission Board, and Joy at Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas. In an era when women were not to be called “preachers” in the Southern Baptist Church, they were both preachers and teachers of the first order, he said.

**Esther Burroughs** graduated from Oklahoma Baptist University and then joined her husband serving churches in Oklahoma and Texas and then landed at Samford University in Alabama. There, Esther became the first Baptist female campus minister in the state of Alabama. Then she worked in the student mission office of the Southern Baptist home mission board, and later the evangelism department, where she spoke around the country at events. Her son remembered, “Some of her fellow preachers would not hold her hand when they gathered on the stage to pray before an event.”

Eventually she left the Southern Baptist organization and launched out on her own “as an author and speaker, and dare we say it, preacher,” Wingfield said.

**Joy Fenner** attended East Texas Baptist College, and in 1959 left her job as a church secretary to become director of a program of the Woman’s Missionary Union of Texas.

Seven years later she and her husband Charlie Fenner were appointed missionaries to Japan, where they served 14 years working in student ministry. On returning to the States she was appointed executive director

-treasurer of the Women’s Missionary Union; after her retirement she was elected, in 2007, as the first woman president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Wingfield said, “They have blazed a path and set an example for scores of God-called women in generations beyond their own. And in that alone, they have opened the gates of eternal life.” *Baptist News Global, Dec. 6, 2024.*

*Editor’s note: The Southern Baptist Convention in the US still does not approve of ordaining women, and as reported in these pages last year, the SBC disfellowships churches that ordain or call ordained women as pastors. So women like Burroughs and Fenner were constrained to call their ministries by some other name.*

## Remembering: E. Anne Henning Byfield

**Bishop E. Anne Henning Byfield**, retired bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was a revered spiritual leader, educator, and tireless advocate for social justice; an author and scholar. She was a faculty affiliate at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, NY, and played an integral role in the visioning and creation of CRCDS’s Doctor of Ministry in Prophetic Proclamation, which launched in fall 2024. She was chancellor of Wilberforce University and a board member of Payne Theological Seminary. Known for mentoring in and beyond her church, she also wrote prayers and poems and the litany used at the 2005 funeral of civil rights activist Rosa Parks in Detroit.

Religion News Service reported that just before Byfield preached what would be her last sermon at the denomination’s General Conference, the choir sang an anthem written by her.

She died October 3 at age 74.

## Wallace-Padgett Heads World Methodist Council

At an August meeting in Sweden, the World Methodist Council elected the **Rev. Debra Wallace-Padgett** president. Wallace-Padgett is a bishop in the United Methodist Church, leading two conferences in northern Alabama and eastern Tennessee.

She described the World Methodist Council as a platform for dialogue, collaboration and mutual support among its member churches.

“I envision the Council continuing to promote social justice, education and leadership development during my tenure as president,” she said. The council has members from more than 80 denominations of Methodism, Wallace-Padgett said, and her job is to empower these leaders to release their gifts through World Methodist Council work.

*From article by Genevieve Charles, Religion New Service, Oct. 17, 2024*

## Gender Justice Policy is Reviewed

Lutheran World Federation (LWF) members met in Geneva in December to explore future directions for implementing the denomination’s Gender Justice Policy. Celebrating the achievements of the first decade since the adoption of the policy, they also wanted to identify new strategies for building gender-just relations, theologies and churches within the communion and in wider society.

*See more in the LWF weekly online news for Dec. 13, 2024*

## Thursdays in Black Ambassadors: Contribute to a More Safe, Just World

*The World Council of Churches has been conducting interviews with their Thursdays in Black ambassadors; in their Dec. 5 newsletter they published their talk with Rev. Dr. Dagmar Pruin, president of Bread for the World-Germany; and in the Dec. 12 letter, the Rev. Dr. Gunilla Hallonsten, Church of Sweden.*

Asked what inspired Bread for the World (BFW) to support the Thursdays in Black movement, **Pruin** replied that BFW works with 1500 partners in 67 countries toward a just world where resources are shared fairly, and every person lives in dignity and has equal rights.

“This is central to our advocacy,” Pruin said. “As the dignity and rights of so many are constantly being harmed, especially those of women, girls and LGBTQIA+, we are highlighting that they are a potent force in the commitment to a just world.” All their projects and their partners’ projects, from improving agricultural practices to promoting democracy, are aimed at narrowing and ultimately closing the gender gap, she said.

Thursdays in Black serves as a regular and timely reminder that gender-based violence occurs in BFW’s daily work in aid and service, she said. “I have recommitted to this campaign to underline that we cannot tolerate attitudes and actions that condone rape and violence,” she said.

## World Council of Churches Gender Justice Reference Group Meets in Zimbabwe

Ten participants from Europe, Africa, the Caribbean, Pacific, Asia, North America. Asia and the Middle East gathered for the first in-person meeting of the Gender Justice Reference Group in December.

Co-convenor **Tandi Soko-DeJong**, from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, shared her reflections on how the group’s work is both new and deeply rooted in the foundations of those gone before. Those gathered explored how the New Testament challenges us to recognize that the flourishing of the church requires full participation and inclusion of women and men. *From WCC weekly update, Dec. 22, 2024*

By wearing black clothes and putting up a banner on their building, they pay respect to women, trans, and gender nonconforming people who face as well as stand up to this ongoing injustice.

The **Rev. Dr. Gunilla Hallonsten** is the dean of Malmo, Church of Sweden, and chair of the board for Right Livelihood, a community for social change.

She said she is concerned about the widespread use of gender-based violence in war zones and conflicts around the world. In addition, she sees the seriousness of such violence in women’s and girls’ daily lives.

“No matter their social class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability, or religious affiliation, women and girls have a right to live our lives without violence,” she said. She said a way to address the problem is that “People must unlearn toxic masculinities that are behind violent actions. We need women’s empowerment and we need to work with men,” she said.

As a Thursdays in Black ambassador, she said, “I hope my leadership can inspire and that I can raise awareness of what individuals and churches are doing and must do to overcome gender based violence and sexual gender-based violence in our communities.”

## More Thoughts on the Anniversary of the Council of Nicaea

**Women Raise Questions and Lead Discussions:** The World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission met in December at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany. Moderator of the Faith and Order Commission is the **Rev. Dr. Stephanie Dietrich**, from the Church of Norway. She said, “The preparation for Nicaea 2025 and ongoing ecumenical theological discourse depends on academic expertise, such as that found at Munich University.” She also emphasized that the work is grounded in the churches’ commitment to pursue visible unity—“a commitment marked by attentive listening and a shared desire to overcome divisions.” The consultation in Munich was among the preparations for the World Conference on Faith and Order, which will mark the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea, to be held October 2025 in Alexandria, Egypt. Among those present was Dr. **Maria Munkholt Christensen**, a Danish Lutheran, who spoke of the importance of the Nicene Creed as a statement of Christian faith: “For me as a Lutheran,” she said, “it is possible to cherish the Nicene Creed and its theological heritage, while underlining the importance of critically assessing its historical context.”

**Earlier in Geneva: Women Theologians Bring New Perspectives.** The World Council of Churches had convened “Towards Nicaea 2025: Exploring the Council’s Ecumenical Significance Today,” in November at the Bossey Institute. The **Rev. Dr. Susan Durber**, WCC president from Europe and former moderator of the Commission on Faith and Order, gave the keynote address: “The deep concern at Nicaea to be faithful to the unity of God and to the unifying love of God is still a powerful and inspiring witness.” The conference gathered more than 130 participants, on line and in person. With six keynote addresses, and more than 40 papers presented, participants addressed issues such as the contribution of Nicaea to ecumenical dialogue, its relationship to interfaith dialogue, the role of women at the Council of Nicaea, reimagining the Nicene Creed from the perspective of gender justice, and the relationship between Christian faith and empire.

Not least because of the involvement of the Emperor Constantine, the Council of Nicaea marked the transition from Christians being a persecuted minority to being recognized by the Roman state. But, argued **Rev. Dr. Kathleen M. Griffin of Argentina**, the primary concern of the emperor at the Council of Nicaea was not theological but political, to establish a unified Christianity that would contribute to the unity of the empire. She said the legacy that remained for centuries within Western Christianity was that this marriage among “creed and sword and empire that occurred at the Council of Nicaea, led, particularly with reference to South America, to the peoples converted to Christianity at gunpoint.”

**Dr. Wong Wai Ching Angela** of the Chinese University of Hong Kong asked to what extent a creed developed in fourth-century Europe is able to be appropriated in different languages, histories, culture and traditions. “If Christianity is to become a ‘local’ in the non-Western world, such as Asia, it must become incarnate in the life and thought of the local context and culture,” she said.

*From World Council of Churches online news, Nov. 14 and Dec. 5. 2024*

## When’s the Next IAWM Assembly?

**Summer 2026 in Jakarta, Indonesia**, at the ecumenical seminary there. Planning committee is Dorcas Gordon (chair), who regularly visits the seminary; Kimberly Greyway, whose spouse is Indonesian; and Margaret Ernst. Dates will be announced in the next issue!

## Questioning the Morals of the Saints: New Book Examines the Cost of Sainthood

**Eileen McCaffrey DiFranco**, woman priest in the Eastern Region (North America), has published *The Cost of Sainthood: Questioning the moral, financial and spiritual cost of the historical saint’s designation within the Catholic Church*.

The book grew out of her dissatisfaction with churches’ elevation of right belief over right behavior.

After seven years of research and rewrites, DiFranco said, the book looks at the church’s traditional saints, who seem to have won their sainthood by following the rules of the Vatican; whereas people like Oscar Romero, martyr of El Salvador, was shot down at Mass because he was a champion of the people.

An Amazon review of the book said “This book is a counter-narrative to the church’s idea of holiness. The faithful deserve to know that there were saintly people in every age who lived virtuous and holy lives but fell outside of traditional church hagiography.”

The book can be found at <https://emergenceeducation.com/books/the-cost-of-sainthood>.

### **Attendees connect on Whats-App with greetings, prayers**

Many of those who attended the June International Assembly in Puerto Rico have remained in touch electronically on the Whats-App “channel.” They share greetings, jokes, prayer requests, blessings, and weather reports when hurricanes come near. Is there a group you would like to connect on Whats-App? Ask if you need directions: [ucce77@gmail.com](mailto:ucce77@gmail.com) and I will refer you.

Your editor lacked photographs for this quarter’s issue, so I put news-bits into the boxes. Do you have pictures of your local meetings or you doing something noteworthy? Send to [ucce77@gmail.com](mailto:ucce77@gmail.com)

### **Regional IAWM Groups Meet**

Five IAWM members in **eastern Pennsylvania** met for a brown-bag lunch Oct. 30 at Immanuel United Church of Christ in Shillington, where two of the members are pastors. We had no particular agenda except getting better acquainted. We ate and prayed together and promised to meet again. A few weeks later, as IAWM treasurer Carol Brown was moving to a new house and needed new storage for an IAWM file cabinet, Immanuel was asked if they could provide room. They could!

Recruit your nearest IAWM neighbors for a simple lunch or something more organized. The **Western Pennsylvania chapter** meets monthly, and in December they included a spa day with massages.

*Dear readers:*

*Submit poetry, hymn lyrics,  
spiritual stories, travelogues,  
women’s milestones.*

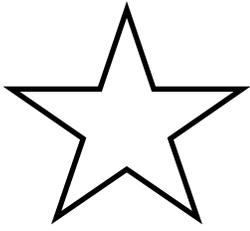
*[ucce77@gmail.com](mailto:ucce77@gmail.com)*

### **Third Round of Graduates completes Ralivao-Honoring Program for Gender-Just Leadership**

Program director for Gender Justice and Women’s Empowerment in the Lutheran World Federation, the Rev. Dr. Marcia Blasi says, “We are called to continue learning, unlearn, learn again and let ourselves be transformed by the love of God and the love for one another.”

She was greeting the 18 graduates of this year’s TGLE, the third year-long training on theology, gender justice and leadership education, drawing on participants from 14 African countries. The program has been offered since 2022 by the LST in partnership with the Tumaini Makumire University and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania. It is funded through the Helene Ralivao Fund, established in 2021 to honor the Malagasy Lutheran Church theologian.

# **Help Me Fill This Space**



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## The Attitude of Jesus Toward Woman

*A reprint of the 1927 work on Women in Ministry by our founder, the Rev. M. Madeline Southard, is available.*

*Offered by the International Association of Women Ministers*

**The Rev. M. Madeline Southard (1877-1967)**, minister, activist, missionary and "militant suffragette," published her 1919 thesis in 1927 as *The Attitude of Jesus Toward Woman*. Today Southard's vision for women's equality is still a paradigm for feminist thinking. She founded the **International Association of Women Ministers** in 1919, and it continues to promote equal ecclesiastical rights for women. Southard's activism in a variety of social issues spanned 72 years as recorded in her journals now housed at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Today IAWM is a non-profit ecumenical and international organization of women ministers, that encourages women entering or currently serving in the Christian ministry. IAWM still promotes equal ecclesiastical rights for women around the world through its work and this journal, *The Woman's Pulpit*, ISSN 0043-7297, which can be viewed at our web site, [www.womenministers.org](http://www.womenministers.org).

**Libraries:** Every theological institution committed to women in ministry and to preserving women's scholarship should have a copy. Replace your old one if it's deteriorating.

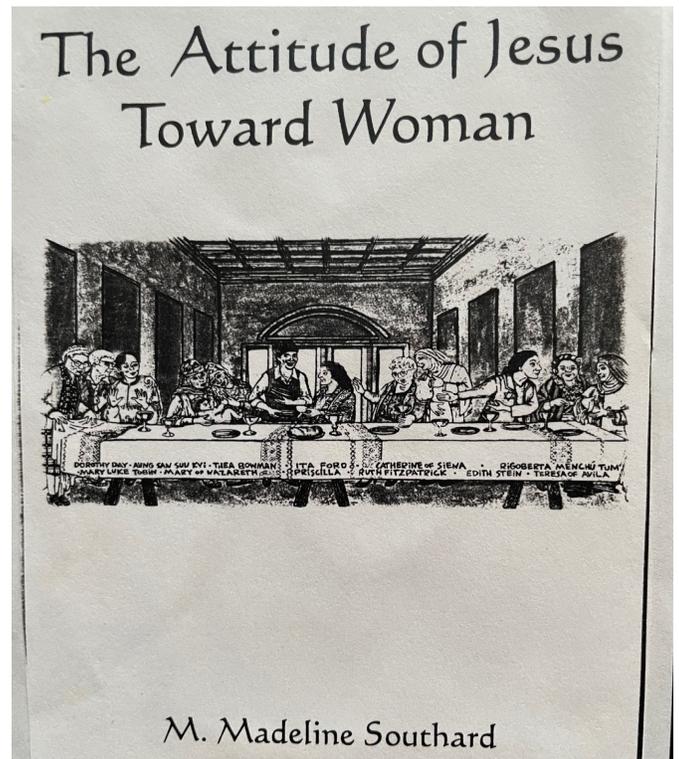
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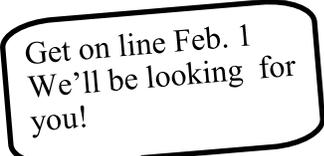
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Get on line Feb. 1  
We'll be looking for  
you!

It's  
con-  
fun

our next online  
versation for  
and connection

Saturday, Feb. 1

9 a.m. Eastern (US and  
Canada)

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

## In the News

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, Rochester, NY USA, celebrates the election of their president, **Rev. Dr. Angela D. Sims**, as vice president of the American Academy of Religion (AAR). The Academy, the largest scholarly society dedicated to the academic study of religion, represents more than 6000 members worldwide. Members span various religious traditions, endorsing no single belief or practice.

Lutheran World Federation's Women's Network in Central Western Europe has elected a new coordinator for a three-year term. She is **Helen Nagelhout**, 28, from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Nagelhout is completing a master's degree from the University of Humanistic Studies, Utrecht, and has begun studying at Protestant Theological University. She succeeds **Kathrin Wallrabe** from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saxony, Germany, who served since 2018.

The Rev. Carolyn Cavaness has been appointed the first woman pastor of **Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church** in Philadelphia, the historically Black denomination's founding congregation. A fourth-generation preacher, Cavaness, 41, said she "had a preacher's license before I had a driver's license." She previously served Bethel AME Church of Ardmore, Pennsylvania, where she had helped 2,000 people get COVID vaccinations during the pandemic and organized a food distribution of 800 meals. Of her new appointment, she said, "Who would have ever thought? It's such a victory on so many different levels."

The World Council of Churches congratulated **Bishop Kirsten Fehrs**, on her position as new chair of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD). Fehrs is noted for upholding the church's

mission, tackling pressing issues such as sexual abuse and violence, and embracing reforms to strengthen the church community.

The Ecumenical Diakonia Reference Group of the World Council of Churches had its inaugural meeting in Yerevan, Armenia Sept. 30 to Oct. 2, 2024. The group is co-chaired by two women ministers, the **Rev. Paulina Parhiala** of the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission, and **Rebecca Teiko Sabah**, Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The group named three priorities: climate justice and diakonia, diaconal collaboration and decolonization, and capacity sharing for diaconal formation. They discussed the displacement of 115,000 ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh and expressed deep solidarity with the Armenian people.

*(From Religion News Service, World Council of Churches and denominational newsletters, social media and correspondence)*

