

The Woman's Pulpit

April-June 2025

NEWS ABOUT ORDAINED AND LAY WOMEN IN MINISTRY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

Celebrating 25 Years of Women's Ordination in the Lutheran Church in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is celebrating 25 years of ordaining women

From Lutheran World Federation article by A. Weyermuller, March 10, 2025

The first women were ordained in May 2000, and now 261 women are serving in the denomination. Present in Addis Ababa were 160 of them, March 5 and 6 for the anniversary celebrations.

The denomination's president, the Rev. Dr. Yonas Dibiza Yigesu, said "This anniversary marks a significant moment to honor the incredible leadership and contributions of female ministers at every level of our church."

It reflects our deep conviction that for the EECMY, there is no distinction between men and women in the grace and gifts of God, said Yigesu. "It is about the calling that each individual receives from the Lord."

The first initiatives to ordain women were in the 1980s; in 1997, during its 15th general assembly, the EECMY voted to include women in ordained ministry. EECMY "has now become a model for other Protestant churches in Ethiopia," said Rev. Taggesech Dagneu. She heads the EECMY women's ministry and coordinates the Lutheran World Federation's regional women's network in central and eastern Africa.

Nevertheless, Dagneu said, seven out of 43 synods have not yet implemented the policy to ordain

women. Rev. Dagneu called on the EECMY leadership, including congregation elders, to continue equipping and empowering women for this service.

She also encouraged women to follow the call into the church's ordained ministry. "We are a large church with 9,000 congregations and 8,111 pastors," she said. Currently 261 are women, but "we need more."

A blessed Holy Week and joyous Resurrection Day to all!

What Bishop Budde Said, p. 5

Jakarta for 2026 Assembly, p. 6

Now Quarterly! Zoom Gathering for Fun and Connection May 1 9-10:30 a.m. Eastern DT

Email Marian for the link: uccrev77@gmail.com

Clockwise from top left, Rev. Dr. Sheila Johnson-Hunt, Rev. Jessica McClure Archer, moderator Rev. Liddy Barlow, and Rev. Dr. Tracy Cox star in the online meeting of Western PA IAWM as women trailblazers, page 3



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Prayer Calendar

Please add to prayer calendar: New Member

Add to Oct. 15-21:

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Do You Have Anything for our Archives?

Please send to our archivist
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permanent address:
19 Church St. Apt. 2
W. Brookfield, MA 01585
USA
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Online Meetings for Connection and Conversation Continue Quarterly May 1

In 2025 they will be on:
Thursday, May 1
Friday, Aug. 1
Saturday, Nov. 1

We will vary the times to
accommodate our members'
time zones. May's meeting will
be 9 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time
(US and Canada), making it early
afternoon in Europe and early
evening in India.

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

Web Site Update

IAWM president Ella
Sonawane has agreed to take
over managing our web site,
www.womenministers.org.

She is asking for pictures to
update the front page, with
identification of who's in the
picture, where it is, and what
year.

If you have pictures from our
2024 Assembly in Puerto Rico,
or any earlier assemblies, please
send them to her at:
elnisonawane@gmail.com.

Executive Board Notes:

Your IAWM executive board
meeting March 24 welcomed
new appointees:
Mutale Kaunda, London,
England, board member at large
Jennifer McCurry, liaison from
Western PA chapter
Beverly Banyay, agreeing to
chair the trustee board
Margarethe Galbraith-Cordes,
chair of nominating committee.

Florida Ministry Approaches 25th

Anniversary

The Welcoming Table Ministries, Inc., of Kissimmee, Florida, reaches its 25th anniversary in May.

Evangelist and IAWM member **Sandra Nixon Tynes, PhD.**, reported that she began the ministry with her husband Deacon Carlton Tynes in 2000. He died in 2019, and she carried on.

In 2023 the Florida House of Representatives followed the city of Kissimmee in recognizing “the ardent, unwavering mandate to serve the hopeless, the hungry, the homeless and the helpless.”

Since its inception, Welcome Table Ministries has served tens of thousands of hot meals, and provided confidential counseling, free resumes, free tutoring in English language arts, special holiday gifts, emergency groceries and monetary crisis assistance, Tynes said.

The ministry’s motto is to “share the sweet love of Jesus Christ one hot meal and one act of kindness at a time.”

IAWM congratulates Tynes and the Welcome Table ministry on 25 years of service.

North Carolina Pastor Organizes Flood Relief

After Hurricane Helene dumped a foot of rain, causing flooding and mudslides and killing 100, the Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church in Asheville organized to help its neighbors.

Pastor **Rev. Marcia Mount Shoop** organized volunteers and secured funding for rent relief, groceries, diapers and more, distributing \$3.5 million USD in rent assistance and about \$500,000 in electricity payments from a variety of public and private funding.

From Yonat Shimron’s article, Religion News Service Jan. 23, 2025

Western PA IAWM hosts panel of “Trailblazer” Women in Ministry

Three women ministers in western Pennsylvania, each the first woman in their positions, joined the Western PA IAWM chapter for an on-line discussion March 20.

The Rev. Jessica McClure Archer, general minister of the Pittsburgh Presbytery; **The Rev. Dr. Sheila Johnson-Hunt**, president of the Baptist Ministers’ Conference of Pittsburgh and vicinity; and **the Rev. Dr. Tracy Cox**, first woman lead pastor of First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh, spoke with IAWM members, moderated by **the Rev. Liddy Barlow**, herself the first woman executive of the ecumenical Christian Churches of Pittsburgh.

The panelists described how they had each come to their current calls, and acknowledged the women who had come before them in ministry roles. “I’m surfing this wave of grace” of those who came before her, said Cox. Several women associate pastors at First UMC paved the way, she said.

Describing her call to judicatory work in the Presbytery, Archer said she was encouraged to apply by more than two colleagues. “It must be the Spirit, right?”

She said that she sees more women in executive roles. In our Synod, she said, a majority of such positions are filled by women. “Colleagues who are already in this work give support and feedback. We can ask one another, ‘Am I crazy?’”

Trailblazers and Pioneers

Johnson-Hunt said that among her joys are the unity she sees, and growth in the number of ministers joining the conference. “I appreciate the opportunity to be a trailblazer rather than a pioneer,” she said. “Pioneers take the hard knocks; but because of the hard knocks, and heavy lifting they did, I can innovate.”

For challenges, she said, there was the pandemic. “But we met the challenges.”

Cox said that a challenge in her ministry is to choose to trust colleagues, “Because I’ve had the rug pulled out from under.” A joy is to see, in her role on the denomination’s ministry committee, the amazing women coming through for ordination.

Opening Doors for Other Women

How do you make sure you’re not the last woman in your position, Barlow asked. Johnson-Hunt reported that she nominated a woman to be the first conference pastor, and made sure that there were women preachers and leaders in top positions at revivals and meetings.

McClure said “There’s a real cultivation of young women going on in the presbytery, instead of just waiting until there’s room on the bench.” More than 50% of candidates for pastorates are women, she said, bringing a degree of normalcy to the idea of a woman in the pulpit; but it still helps call committees to get their eyes opened to women preachers when McClure herself fills the pulpit in a church that is searching.

Barlow described research differentiated the well-known glass ceiling from the glass cliff, when organizations in financial trouble and churches hard put to sustain themselves call women leaders. All three panelists agreed that they see this happening; the pandemic is an example, Johnson-Hunt said. And the disparities in women’s pay persist.

The three offered blessings: continue to be persistent and not lose heart (McClure); offer words of protection and safety like the mother hen of scripture (Cox); know that God is with you, no matter the challenge (Johnson-Hunt).

By Marian Shearer

IAWM liaison attends International Consultation in Sri Lanka

In her capacity on the Pakistan Council of Churches, Presbyterian minister **Rev. Romella Robinson** attended the international consultation in March on “Emerging Geopolitical Reconfiguration in South Asia: Challenges to People’s Security and Peace with Justice.”

Robinson, who also serves on the World Council of Churches and is international liaison for IAWM, reported she was “deeply moved by the significance of such ecumenical gatherings in fostering understanding, dialogue, and proactive engagement with pressing political concerns.”

As a church leader deeply committed to justice, peace and reconciliation, she said, she recognizes the profound impact of shifting power dynamics in South Asia, such as the competition between China and India. “Pakistan, my home country, was at the heart of several discussions, particularly regarding political instability, economic fragility, and social inequalities,” she said. “These are not abstract issues but lived realities that affect millions. In my presentation I emphasized the need for our faith communities to step up and advocate for policies that promote long-term stability rather than exacerbating existing divisions. I also shed light on the women’s perspective, highlighting how geopolitical instability and the rise of religious extremism have disproportionately affected the most marginalized group, women, in Pakistan.”

An inspiring moment, she said, was the session on Moving Beyond Conflicts, examining how religious teachings could guide peacebuilding efforts. “Faith communities have immense potential to be agents of reconciliation. This aligns with my personal mission of promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan and beyond.”

Zikmund catalogued in new book: Embracing Our Roots

In a lifetime of theological and historical work, **Barbara Brown Zikmund, BBZ** as she is familiarly known, has chronicled the United Church of Christ (USA) in “*Hidden Histories*” volumes 1 and 2, and the seven-volume *Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*. This summer the Pilgrim Press will introduce *Embracing Our Roots, A Barbara Brown Zikmund Reader*, at the denomination’s General Synod in Oklahoma City. The book is organized for conversation in a polity course or confirmation group, with discussion questions following each article. **Rachel G. Hackenberg**, publisher for The Pilgrim Press, is editor of the volume.

Zikmund was ordained in the United Church of Christ in 1964 and completed her doctorate in 1969. She was the first woman to teach at Chicago Theological Seminary, the first woman to serve as Dean of the Faculty at Pacific School of Religion, the first woman to be elected President of the Association of Theological Schools, and the first woman to become president of Hartford Seminary. IAWM is proud to claim her as a member!

69th UN Session on Status of Women gathers in New York WCC and other churches send delegations

Presbyterians, Lutherans and delegates from the World Council of Churches joined many others for the 69th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, March 10-21.

The gathering also commemorated 30 years since the Beijing Platform for Action, assessing how well the world has done improving the status of women worldwide.

The Rev. Nicole Ashwood, WCC programme executive for Just Community of Women and Men, was among the delegates. “I anticipate that the World Council of Churches will be engaging beyond the physical meeting to invite our member churches, through our delegates and partners, to engage in the Beijing Platform for Action, and to challenge the status quo,” she said.

Many of the WCC delegates are from Africa, and their engagement has been strategic in helping to examine communications, health care, reproductive rights and other issues, she said. Delegates prepared surveys with ecumenical partners, and compared them with last year’s surveys, to help other partners to identify where nations have fallen short in the promises made.

Many denominations gathered locally alongside the UN event: the stated clerk of the Presbyterian Church (USA) preached to delegates about the inclusivity of the Gospel message. **The Rev. Jihyun Oh** reminded listeners at nearby Church of the Covenant that “There is no distinction in God’s eyes, for who can participate in the expansive and inclusive reign of God.” The Presbyterians also gathered with the delegation from Cuba, with whom they have long worked.

Lutheran World Federation delegates also gathered to help the commission review obstacles to implementing the documents of previous gatherings. **Sikhonzile Ndlovu**, senior advocacy officer for gender justice, hosted in person and on line participation, and side events including the launch of a report showcasing 12 promising practices developed by member churches and country programs to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. *From LWF, PC(USA) and WCC newsletters, March 21.*

What Bishop Budde Said

Reflections from your editor

It seems the whole world was watching the prayer service that followed President Donald Trump's inauguration as president of the United States in January.

The Rt. Rev. Mariann Budde, Episcopal bishop of Washington, D.C., stood in her pulpit in the National Cathedral and spoke the words of Jesus directly to the new president.

About halfway through the interfaith service, she delivered the homily, in which she explored the difficulty of forging "a kind of unity that serves the common good."

Near the end of her sermon, Budde directed her remarks to Trump himself. As quoted in *Jack Jenkins' article in Religion News Service, Jan. 21*, she expressed concern for LGBTQ people who may feel targeted by his administration. "Millions have put their trust in you. As you told the nation yesterday, you have felt the providential hand of a loving God. In the name of our God, I ask you to have mercy upon the people in our country who are scared now. There are gay, lesbian and transgender children in both Democratic, Republican and independent families who fear for their lives."

She also made a plea for immigrants, those who pick our crops and work the night shift in hospitals, among other vital roles, of whom "the vast majority are not criminals."

This editor tuned in to the broadcast of the service in time to hear Bishop Budde say, "Have mercy. . . On those in our communities whose children fear that their parents will be taken away. Help those who are fleeing war zones and persecution in their own lands to find compassion and welcome here."

Gospel Words Draw Criticism

"Our God teaches us that we are to be merciful to the stranger, for we were once strangers in this land." Then she concluded by asking God to "grant us all strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, speak the truth in love and walk humbly with one another and with our God, for the good of all the people of this nation and the world."

Immediately criticism began to arrive, including by the president himself, that Bishop Budde's homily was political, and that it was inappropriate to use a prayer service to speak directly in criticism of the president. And that the bishop ought to be fired. But the Episcopal church stood by her. When asked if she had felt threatened, she said, "The people who are in danger (LGBT people and immigrants) are the people who fear for their lives and their livelihoods. That's where the focus should be."

A fellow bishop said, "Her heartfelt appeal to President Trump to show mercy toward the stranger and the vulnerable is not partisan politics, but the genuine witness of a pastor for her people. Our people. The people."

IAWM salutes Bishop Mariann Budde, who spoke the truth to power. *Religion News Service Jan. 22 and 24, 2025*

Argentina Lutherans Spotlight Theologian M. Garcia Bachmann

In a recent Lutheran World Information feature *Voices from the Communion*, **Rev. Dr. Mercedes Garcia Bachmann** shared some milestones on her journey.

Hailed as one of Latin America's foremost feminist theologians, Bachmann was among the first women ordained in the United Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELU) of Argentina and Uruguay in 1986, though she had felt a call to pastoral ministry since high school.

She specialized in feminist theology, earning her Ph.D. at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago with a thesis on women workers in Deuteronomistic history. "Basically," she said, "I think it is a matter of justice, in the same way that there are other issues related to race or class and I think it is important to help everyone find their place in the church."

She attended worldwide Lutheran assemblies, including as a youth delegate and then Council member. She was asked to preach at the closing worship at the 1990 Curitiba assembly, then she attended the 9th assembly in Hong Kong, and was living in Germany to practice her German in 2010 when she was asked to help with translations at the assembly in Stuttgart.

"I think it is important to be part of the global family and I feel privileged to have studied and experienced so much of the life of the Lutheran World Federation," she said.

Reaching for justice is very difficult in Argentina today, she said. "There is a lot of backlash and a lot of violence against women. We have femicides on a daily basis." But, she said, like the prophet Jeremiah who could not stop shouting or preaching, "We have to be stubborn and keep on resisting or countering what is happening. I draw hope when we achieve some little progress, but it is certainly not easy at the present time." *From LWF Jan. 24, 2025, article by P. Hitchen*

IAWM Board Member Starts New Project with Widows

The Rev. Lydia Mwaniki, finishing up her ministry with the All Africa Council of Churches, wrote:

"I am excited to inform you that God has enabled me to register a Community Based Organization (CBO) to offer psychosocial, humanitarian and economic support to vulnerable widows in arid and semi-arid areas of Kenya." The project launched Dec. 31 with more than 200 widows gathered for support, lunch and take-home hampers. She says partners and other support would be welcome; email her at lydiamuthonimwaniki@gmail.com

Diversity in Kenya

Where do we live out the best reality of diversity, equity and inclusion in our church life? **The Rev. Dr. Phyllis Byrd**, who serves with the Organization of Africa Instituted Churches (OAIC) in Kenya, reported on the worship that St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church of East Africa celebrated for the culmination of Disability Week.

It was a week of events led by St. Andrew's Disabilities Ministry, and the Sunday worship breathed life into the slogan of the global disability rights movement: "Nothing about us without us."

Byrd said they invited a member of Parliament who has been an outspoken advocate, and who herself lives with a disability. In addition they worked hard to insure the Sunday service included a spectrum of people living with disabilities, many serving in professional positions in Kenya.

"The worship service breathed a fresh breath of life into the hearts and minds of the congregation," Byrd said. It was not just one more Sunday observance to check off on the calendar.

Glimpse of Heaven

Instead, "The service was a glimpse of heaven, as the body of Christ in its multiplicity of forms came together," she said.

The entire worship service challenged us to be expansive and welcoming as stewards and children in communion with Christ and each other, she said, and in every circumstance of life to live out and embrace the living reality of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

The congregation grew that Sunday, Byrd said, but not in the way many measure growth. They shed the cataracts of pity, and no longer saw these siblings in Christ as people who "need us."

Phyllis Byrd is appointed to the Organization of Africa Instituted Churches by the Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

Assembly in Jakarta in July 2026!

The next International Assembly of the International Association of Women Ministers will be held in Jakarta, Indonesia in July 2026, reports the planning committee headed by the Rev. Dr. J. Dorcas Gordon.

She said President Dinsar of the *Sekolah Tinggi Filsafat Theologi*, the ecumenical theological school in Jakarta, has given approval to host the assembly the **week of July 20, 2026**. Their web site: <https://stftjakarta.ac.id>.

It's likely the schedule will be similar to other assembly weeks. Tentatively:

Monday: travel for board members and others

Tuesday: Board meeting; travel for other attendees

Wednesday through Saturday: assembly events, including meeting with local women ministers

Sunday: worship in local churches

Sunday and beyond: extra excursions such as Bali; travel home.

A local contact has agreed to help organize local arrangements and travel from the airport.

As always, **travel assistance** is available from IAWM dedicated funds: the Hilda Frank Seater fund for attendees from outside North America, and the travel assistance fund for North Americans.

Donations to both funds are also cheerfully accepted! Email Carol Brown, treasurer, for details, csbrown550@hotmail.com.

Your planning committee:

Dorcas Gordon, dorcasgordon1@gmail.com

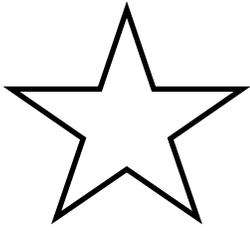
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Travel note:

Members are encouraged to find out whether Indonesia requires a visa from citizens of your country. It will be wise to investigate now, in case it is a long process.



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

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Calendar Prompts for 2025

- May 1** Zoom gathering for fun and conversation, see above
- June 15** Deadline for submissions to July-Sept Woman's Pulpit
- June:** start now applying for a visa to visit Indonesia for our 2026 assembly
- August 1** Zoom gathering; conversation starter Christine House on Artificial Intelligence: thinking theologically about AI.
- September 15** Deadline for Pulpit submissions for Oct-Dec
- November 1** All Saints' Day Zoom gathering
- December 15** Deadline for Pulpit for Jan-March 2026

Below is the collection of smiling faces from our Feb. 1 Zoom gathering. Join the smiles on May 1!



Get on line May 1!
We're looking for
you!

It's our next online
fun conversation for
and connection:

Thursday May 1

9 a.m. Eastern DT

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

In the News

The **Lambeth Cross for Ecumenism** was awarded in January to **Rev. Dr. Angela Berlis**, a member of the World Council of Churches' Commission on Faith and Order. She was recognized for her outstanding contribution to Anglican-Old Catholic relations, and to the ecumenical movement more widely, as a theologian and historian. She was one of the first women ordained in the Old Catholic Churches of the Union of Utrecht, and holds a chair in ancient Catholic church structures, including the history and doctrine of the Old Catholic Churches, at Utrecht University.

The **Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin, Bishop of Dover**, the UK's first black female bishop, published a memoir in February. *The Guardian* profiled her this winter, saying she has always "been a fearless defender of people's rights, from Montego Bay to the streets of Dover." The memoir is "The Girl from Montego Bay." She was ordained in 1994, within weeks of the Church of England admitting women into the

clergy. "We must not think that because we now have some black bishops, (racism) is all fixed. It still exists. You have to ask, why doesn't this institution reflect the people that I've just traveled on the bus with?"

"This church was founded on the principle that we will become a tree of life," said the **Rev. Sarah Lane**, pastor of the **Zo Presbyterian Church**, a new worshipping community within the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. It serves refugees and immigrants from Myanmar. The church was founded by Lane's father, who left Myanmar where ethnic cleansing was happening to the Zo people, and came to the Atlanta Presbytery to found a church to serve the immigrants and refugees from Myanmar who were then being settled. When Taithul died in an auto accident, Lane felt called to serve the new church as its pastor even though no women were ordained in Zo Presbyterian churches

at the time. She entered Columbia Theological Seminary and was later ordained as a teaching elder in the Presbytery, where she also works in health care chaplaincy. Her hope is that a "tree of life church" serves Zo refugees in the United States and abroad.

"Blessed Minds: Breaking the Silence about Neurodiversity" is the fifth book from **Sarah Griffith Lund**, pastor in the United Church of Christ and longtime public advocate for mental health ministries. The book will be published March 24, exploring what it means to welcome neurodivergent individuals into faith communities and how churches can expand their definition of inclusion. Her book incorporates some of the things that help: haikus written by neurodivergent people, parables inspired by stories of Jesus, lists of key words from the chapter, illustrations and reflection questions. *From Religion News Service, Presbyterian News,, World Council of Churches News*

