

# Justice Peace Links

Justice and Peace Committee – Churchwide Coordinating Team – Presbyterian Women

2018 • Issue 2



## Introduction

March is Women’s History Month; March is also when the UN holds its annual Commission on the Status of Women. With that in mind, PW’s Justice and Peace Committee decided at their fall 2017 meeting to institute another set of PW Together in Action Days, this time in March and focused around women’s empowerment. PW’s first annual Together in Action Days To Empower Women were observed March 12–23, 2018, the same two weeks of the 62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)! The main theme of CSW62 was “Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls.” Learn more about CSW and theme at [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org).

Together in Action Days were begun by the Mission Relationships and Justice and Peace Committees of the Churchwide Coordinating Team in 2013. During Together in Action Days, Presbyterian Women around the country join in taking action on an issue that is important to them. One of the issues important to Presbyterian Women is women’s empowerment, especially now that the #MeToo movement is exposing abuses of women’s basic human rights to safety and self-determination.

Participating in Together in Action Days for women’s empowerment could mean attending UNCSW. Or it might be as simple as including a bulletin insert or “Minute for Gender Justice” in worship. It could be introducing inclusive language in your worship, or holding a Sunday School discussion of gender stereotypes and how they support a culture of disempowerment. It could be a fundraiser for a shelter for abuse survivors in your community or for a mission co-worker who’s addressing the issue in another country. It might be a roundtable about the #MeToo movement or a full-blown panel event that includes social service agencies, law enforcement and survivors talking about intimate partner violence, date rape or other violence and discrimination against women. Whatever your timeline or inclination, this issue of *J&P Links* can help you take action in March or any time of year to empower women and girls.

## Caring as empowerment

Adaptation of article by Theresa Roos, pastor, First United Presbyterian Church, Farmington, Minnesota

*First published by Presbyterian News Service in July 2010*

“Finding a group of people who really care about what happens to each person is the beginning of empowerment for the Lydia Project women,” Rev. Paula Sanders, leader of the Lydia Project in Minneapolis, said of the effect the project has on the women who participate.

The Lydia Project, an outgrowth of Kwanzaa Community Church in north Minneapolis, began in 2005. It was modeled after recovery groups at Glide Memorial Church of San Francisco. The Lydia Project’s primary goal at the outset was to facilitate “the recovery of the humanity of women suffering the impact of racism, classism and sexism,” according to Sanders.

Sanders said many Lydia Project members have experienced little genuine caring in their lives, and their trust levels reflect this lack of compassion.

In the room where the women meet, there are two tables pushed together. Behind the study tables are two high-backed chairs, which often become the sacred space where one woman tells part of her story while the other woman listens. Storytelling empowers women.

The Lydia Project addresses **four aspects of women’s empowerment: spiritual, family, social and economic empowerment.**

The first, spiritual empowerment, is addressed in Saturday morning Bible study—deep, lively and en-

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lightening. Added to the Bible study is the annual summer retreat to the North Woods, labyrinth walks and the many cultural events that offer the women a lens by which to see the spirituality of creativity.

For family empowerment, the Lydia women walk with one another and talk freely about their trials and joys. Sanders says that when the women support one another, it “breaks the isolation that often is a part of intergenerational poverty.”

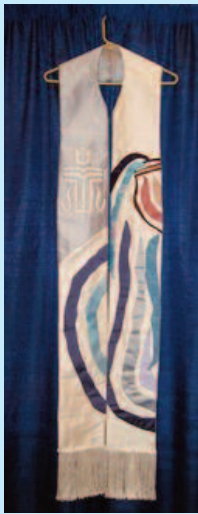
Of the third aspect of empowerment, social change, Sanders says, “We can walk and walk with women in their life situations, and all we get is sore feet.” The Lydia women are taught how to access the systems of power in their neighborhoods and in the city.

In 2010, 22 Lydia women traveled to the state’s Capitol in St. Paul to attend the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition’s “Day on the Hill.” The women were able to talk with their legislators, speaking truth to power about dangerous living conditions in certain sections of the Twin Cities. One Lydia woman told her representative, “I don’t even want to go outside my house.”

Some of the women who headed to the Capitol originally thought they were not allowed to enter. By the end of the day, many of them were strongly urging their legislators to take steps to eliminate health care disparities and stop violence.

The fourth aspect of women’s empowerment that Lydia focuses on is economic empowerment. Sanders, a master seamstress, taught the women to sew. They sold their work at GA in 2010. Learning a new skill engenders confidence and provides women with a way to provide for themselves and their families. ☞

*Stories continued in blue on page 3.*



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—Theresa M. Roos, quoting Lydia Project founder Paula Sanders

## How do we empower women?

We afford them their basic human rights and ensure that they have the opportunities to develop their full potential, which all God’s people deserve.

- Access—Access to resources, opportunities, options, decision-making power, education, health care that takes the special needs of women into account, and more.
- Voice—The ability to tell stories of personal experience is important, especially for those whose stories do not get told because of oppression and disenfranchisement. Consider whose history is told in textbooks. Who is more often believed in sexual assault cases? Ensure equal access to forums and communications tools for all (see quote, below). Also see *Horizons* magazine, January/February 2011, on communications justice.
- Work in solidarity to overcome obstacles to empowerment
- Faith—A mentor saying “You can do it!”; faith in oneself; faith in God
- Inclusion—More than token presence at decision-making tables; equal presence—equal in numbers and weight of vote
- Self-determination—life choices, health choices, self-actualization
- Education and counseling—Knowledge is empowering. Diplomas and certificates open up educational and economic opportunities. Self-knowledge allows one to avoid self-defeating patterns and live more effectively.
- Economic opportunities—Occupational training, microloan programs, and other measures allow women to earn money and take charge of their lives.
- Dismantling patriarchy and replacing it with power-sharing and mutual respect—One of the Lydia women (sidebar) thought she was not allowed to enter the Minnesota Capitol building! She had internalized her oppression. Though not in this case, women *are* excluded in many arenas.
- Advocacy—Those without power may need powerful advocates to speak on their behalf and to walk with them out of oppression.
- Community—“Finding a group of people who really care about what happens to each person is the beginning of empowerment . . .” (See sidebar, pg. 1).
- Spiritual development—A relationship with a loving God empowers God’s people. As author Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes says, “Jesus spiritually empowers those whom he encounters, regardless of status or gender.”<sup>1</sup>
- Prayer—Mother Teresa said, “I used to believe that prayer changes things, but now I know that prayer changes us and we change things.”
- A bill of rights—Empowerment depends on protection of women’s human rights. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women articulates those rights and calls on all UN Member states to do just that.

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Data show that only 41 percent of women have access to information and communications technologies worldwide . . . . [T]he gender digital divide . . . exacerbates existing inequalities and has enduring effects on girls and women.<sup>2</sup>

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## What does our church say?

- The 219th General Assembly (2010) approved a resolution that the PC(USA) urge the United States to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Often called an international bill of rights for women, CEDAW has been ratified by most of the world's nations. The United States is among a handful of nations that have not ratified CEDAW.
- The church has addressed enslavement of women (and men and children) in its statement "Human Trafficking and Human Rights: Children of God, Not for Sale," approved by the 222nd General Assembly (2016).
- In 2016, the PC(USA) issued a report called *Gender and Leadership in the PC(USA)*. Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, a member of the task group that designed the study, says the study found that "Ambivalence about women's leadership is still the prevailing attitude toward women serving the PC(USA)." She adds, "Gender discrimination remains pervasive in the denomination but nearly half of members think discrimination against women in the church is no longer a problem." See <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/resource/gender-leadership-pcusa/> for the report.
- In January 2018, Presbyterian Women and the Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns issued a joint statement on sexual injustice. See [www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Joint-statement-PW\\_ACWC.pdf](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Joint-statement-PW_ACWC.pdf).



## What does the Bible say?

God's Word empowers God's people.

- John 10:10b–11—"I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
- Isaiah 43:2—"When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you."
- Romans 8:28—"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."
- Isaiah 41:10—"Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."
- Revelation 21:4—"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

**On the subject of women's empowerment, Jesus set an amazing example. Jesus' treatment of women is a clear demonstration of God's regard for women. After all, God made both women and men in God's own image.**

—Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes<sup>5</sup>

## Ending systemic violence

By Christi Boyd

*This story is excerpted from the March/April 2015 issue of Horizons magazine.*

Despite her physical ailments, Agnes Tshimbola was determined to undertake the two-day, 42-mile walk from her village, Beneleka, to Demba. The estranged wife of a polygamous, abusive husband, she has become a women's rights campaigner for her church. That day, she set out to share with me stories of success from her mission to end violence against women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bringing about those successes has become a life mission for Agnes.

During a seminar on women's and children's rights Agnes found her calling. The seminar was one of seven seminars the Women and Families Department (DFF) of the Presbyterian Church in Congo (CPC) organized with help from a Thank Offering grant. Emboldened by the seminar, Agnes now offers training throughout her community and beyond to prevent other women from suffering endemic forms of violence like she endured.

Agnes, a mother of five children, had been married for 25 years when her husband, a former soldier who joined the police force, started abusing alcohol and drugs. He became promiscuous and eventually took a second wife, who lived elsewhere. Because of his lifestyle choices, Agnes and her husband fought often and he beat her. Agnes showed me the distorted and paralyzed fingers of her left hand, a permanent reminder of his abuse.

When her husband threatened to kill her, she fled with the children, settling on land the family owned roughly 90 miles away. Her husband sent his other wife to chase Agnes out and sell the property. Lacking any defense, Agnes yielded and started renting elsewhere. It was then that she decided to be-

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*This CPC fabric conveys a message of resistance to domestic violence.*

come more active in the life of the church. . . . Through her church involvement, she learned about the DFF seminar on women's and children's rights.

Agnes' ordeal is representative of thousands, if not millions, of Congolese women whose basic rights are violated routinely. Their safety and self-determination are compromised, destroyed even, by societal tolerance of domestic violence, customary practices and sexual or economic exploitation.

CPC staff members have [pointed out] how violence against some of society's most vulnerable is often rooted in economic, cultural and religious systems. Understanding these systems is essential in creating strategies to eliminate violence against women and children. . . .

In DRC and around the world, poverty, economic disparity and inequitable power structures frequently lead to human rights violations against the most vulnerable of society, which historically includes women and children. . . .

As in much of sub-Saharan Africa, Congolese cultural values preserve a patriarchal society. The resulting attitudes and practices ensure men's power and security at the expense of women and children. . . .

Customs around widowhood exacerbate a bereaved woman's grief. Married into her husband's family in exchange for a bride price or

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## Empowered women of the Bible

Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes says in "Feminism and Empowerment"<sup>1</sup> that "[Biblical women's] persuasiveness, cunning or beauty may be interpreted negatively. Yet, if we look at these traits from another angle, these women proved themselves to be influential and brave enough to outmaneuver their counterparts to get what they wanted. Esther, for example, uses her beauty to save the Jewish people from annihilation."

In a culture of oppression and limited choices, women historically have had to maneuver to get what they want. But when their rights are not denied them, they have the freedom to transform their lives and those around them. Lyttle-Forbes notes, "In a culture where women were seen as less than men, Jesus repeatedly affirms women and shows them their specific gifts and purposes."

Consider the following interpretations of women in the Bible (courtesy of Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes,<sup>1</sup> Kate Edwards,<sup>3</sup> and James Goll<sup>4</sup>):

- Exodus 1—The pharaoh commanded the two Hebrew midwives Shiphrah and Puah to kill all the Hebrew boys when they were born. The midwives feared God and did not do what the pharaoh commanded. Instead they lied and said the babies were born before they arrived. This early act of civil disobedience saved many children's lives.
- Exodus 15:20—Miriam, the prophetess, stood alongside Moses and Aaron as one of the three main leaders of the Israelite nation as they left Egypt.
- Joshua 2—Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. When two spies for the Israelites came to her house, she kept them safe and let them stay overnight. When the King of Jericho ordered her to hand them over, she lied to him and said they had already left, but she had hidden them on her roof.
- Judges 4:4—Deborah stood as judge before God on behalf of Israel and came alongside Barak, a military authority, to lead the Israelite army to victory against the Canaanites.
- Judges 4:21—Jael drove a tent peg into Sisera's head and delivered him into the hands of Barak. Deborah had prophesied that the Lord would give Sisera to Barak. And God did it through the hands of a woman!
- Ruth—Ruth and Naomi were the epitome of fortitude and commitment to family.
- 1 Samuel 25—Abigail advocated for mercy on behalf of her wicked husband.
- 2 Kings 22:14—Huldah was visited by the high priest, the scribe and a servant of the king so they could obtain the word of the Lord on behalf of young King Josiah.
- Esther—Esther was the godly queen who saved the entire Jewish race through her bold intercession and fasting.
- Proverbs 31—The woman was skillful in household and business issues, bought and sold real estate, ministered to the poor and much more.
- Matthew 15:22–28—Jesus initially ignored the Canaanite woman, as he did not see Canaanites, the traditional enemy of the Israelites, as part of his mission. But the woman had such faith that he delivered her daughter from demon-possession.
- Matthew 28:1–10—Mary Magdalene was one of the women who was first at the tomb, first to hear that "He is risen" and first to announce the resurrection.
- Mark 5:25–34—Jesus encountered the woman who suffered 12 years of menstrual bleeding. He ignored the purity codes that would have him avoid her, and cured her, saying her faith made her well.
- Luke 1:41–42, 46–47—This interchange between Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, resulted in exuberant praise and prophesying concerning the destiny of Mary's Child within.

- Luke 2:36-38—Anna was the praying prophetess present with Simeon the seer at the dedication of Jesus by His parents on His eighth day of life.
- Luke 7:37—Jesus affirmed the woman “who had a low reputation,” who washed Jesus’ feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. He told her, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”
- John 4—Many see the woman at the well as the first evangelist, as she went forth proclaiming the Good News of the Christ.
- Acts 16:14–15—Lydia, a wealthy businesswoman, is noted as the first convert in all of Europe.
- Acts 21:8–9—Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied. Four in one family!
- Romans 16:1—Phoebe was a deaconess who washed the feet of the saints and came highly recommended by Paul.
- Romans 16:3–5—Priscilla and Aquila were probably a husband and wife teaching team explaining the Word of God with accuracy.
- Romans 16—Other women who assumed leadership positions in the early Christian church include Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, Persis, Julia, the sister of Nereus, Prisca and Junia.

## For discussion

1. Why do we see so few empowered women in the Bible?
2. What is God’s beloved community and where are women in this vision?
3. What are some obstacles to women’s full participation in society today?

## What you can do

- Listen to women’s stories. Believe them when they share stories of trauma and abuse. Support them. Provide a safe space. Refer them to professional services.
- Support ministries and organizations—community centers, shelters, counseling centers—that empower women through education, healing, training, etc.
- Mentor young women who might be vulnerable to unhealthy attention and risky situations. Work with literacy programs and adult education.
- Hire women and pay them a fair wage. Offer them opportunities for advancement and put them at decision-making tables.
- Learn about gender biases, gender binaries and the ways rigid gender role expectations support a culture of oppression and violence toward women and girls (and others!).
- Join women’s organizations and encourage others to do so.
- Lobby your leaders in Congress to ratify CEDAW, the international bill of rights for women.
- Speak up and speak out. Learn what it means to be an active bystander and witness for justice.
- Tell your stories. Create safe spaces for others to tell their stories.
- Join public demonstrations of support for women and other marginalized groups. Advocate for those whose voices are silenced.
- Hold roundtables or host speakers in your congregation, PW group or community on women’s issues.
- Work for an end to the enslavement and exploitation of women, children and men. See the *Human Trafficking Toolkit* from the PC(USA)’s Human Trafficking Roundtable to learn more. Learn what “safe harbor” laws are and how to get them through your legislature. Lobby Congress to end criminalization of trafficking victims. Learn to identify potential human trafficking situations and where to report such crimes. Visit [www.presbyterianwomen.org/justice](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org/justice) and [www.polaris.org](http://www.polaris.org) to learn more. Download the *Trafficking in Persons Report* from the Department of State.

dowry, the goods they once shared are considered the property of her in-laws once he passes away. A widow is often expelled from the home and dispossessed of all belongings, even losing access to the land. . . . Typically, church women rally to address the direct needs of widows and their families. But this does not address the culturally acceptable systemic violation of their basic human rights. . . .

The CPC’s seminars on women’s rights equipped participants with a vision of security for women and children, and tools to make that a reality.

**Editor’s Note:** Read the full story in the March/April 2015 issue of *Horizons* magazine. ☞

## Technology empowers women

The [American Association of University Women] supports participation in and access of women to information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of girls in women. We believe that advancement is possible for women and girls through our proven programs, and we will continue to push for improved gender equality in information and communications technologies. Access to equipment and acquiring the relevant skills that are rapidly becoming the most in demand in the world is vitally important but girls and women are being left behind. Stereotypes, gender bias, and the hostile climate of academic departments and workplaces continue to block participation and progress.

We [AAUW] applaud the [UN Member states’] commitment to achieving sustainable development in its three dimensions—economic, social, and environmental—and recognize that **sustainable development cannot be achieved without gender equality** and that all Member states and entities must take significant and decisive action to end the persistent global gender gaps and reach gender equality by 2030.

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We reaffirm the accomplishments of the Millennium Development Goals to ensure the promotion of gender equality and girls' and women's development and uphold the importance of addressing the critical unmet solutions.

In order to fully realize the participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women, the Association calls for full implementation of the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Therefore, we urge Member States to:

- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women (Sustainable Development Goal 5);
- Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university (Sustainable Development Goal 4);
- Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship (Sustainable Development Goal 4);
- Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and children in vulnerable situations (Sustainable Development Goal 4). ↻



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## Notes

1. Sadekie Lyttle-Forbes, "Feminism and Empowerment," *Horizons*, March/April 2015, 5.
2. AAUW, "Statement submitted by American Association of University Women, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council," March 2018.
3. James W. Goll, "Like These Secure Women of the Bible, God Wants To Empower You," on *A Voice Calling Out* blog, *Charisma Magazine*, August 8, 2016.
4. Kate Edwards, "Ten Women in the Bible Who Exceeded Expectations," <https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/bible-study/10-women-in-the-bible-that-broke-stereotypes.html>

## Resources

1. March/April 2015 issue of *Horizons* magazine on women's empowerment
2. *God's Promise: I Am with You* by Amy Poling Sutherlun (PW's 2018–2019 *Horizons* Bible study), reminds us of God's empowering, oft-repeated promise. Item HZN18100 from [www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop) or 800.533.4371.
3. *The Face is Familiar: Remembering Unnamed Women in Scripture* by Louise, Mary and Sue Westfall—This PW/*Horizons* Bible study examines biblical women's spiritual experiences and relationship with God. The authors reflect on God's hopes for each of us, keeping in mind that the biblical narratives took place in social, political and religious spheres that were dominated by men. Call 800.533.4371 to order item HZN03100.
4. *What She Said: Quotable Women in Scripture* by Dale Lindsay Morgan—This PW/*Horizons* Bible study shows us not only what women *did* in scripture, but what women *said* in scripture. Learn more about Deborah, Martha, Mary and others. Item HZN04100 at [www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop).
5. *Well Chosen Words*—Inclusive language allows all God's children to experience a sense of belonging. This guide was developed by Racial Ethnic and Women's Ministries/PW in consultation with the Advocacy Committee on Women's Concerns. Use it to promote a vision of full community. Free download at [www.pcusa.org/resource/well-chosen-words](http://www.pcusa.org/resource/well-chosen-words) or call 800.533.4371 to order item 2752112001; free but shipping charges may apply.
6. OikoCredit—Empowering women with investment, Oikocredit invests in women in 63 countries around the world. For more information, see [www.oikocreditusa.org](http://www.oikocreditusa.org).
7. The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)—See [www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm) and [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org).
8. *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* by Priests for Equality (Sheed & Ward, 2009). Priests for Equality is a grassroots organization committed to creating a culture where sexism and exclusion are left behind and equality and full participation are the order of the day.
9. *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated* edited by Carol A. Newsome, Sharon H. Ringe and Jacqueline E. Lapsley (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012).
10. *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (New York: Knopf, 2009).
11. *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (New York: Anchor, 2015). This book is adapted from a TED Talk, but goes deeper.
12. Joint statement on sexual injustice from PW and ACWC: [https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Joint-statement-PW\\_ACWC.pdf](https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Joint-statement-PW_ACWC.pdf).
13. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action—The Beijing Platform came out of the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. Learn more at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>.