

promise, hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit in all voices, regardless of age.

All: We celebrate and give thanks to God!

One: For women who work toward a more just world, one free of biases, discrimination, food insecurity and poverty.

For women entrepreneurs, homemakers, students and volunteers who partner and lead, who sit on decision-making boards, who head micro-enterprises, small businesses, nonprofits, corporations, churches and ecclesiastical bodies.

All: We celebrate and give thanks to God!

One: For congregations, faith-based organizations and women's rights organizations advocating for and empowering women and girls.

For those who work in refugee camps and border ministries.

For those who work in helplines and call centers, who provide healthcare and counseling, pastoral care and accompaniment to women and families.

For those who offer welcome, affirmation, safety and care.

All: We give thanks to God for your service and love in action!

One: For foremothers, trailblazers, role models, mentors, activists, educators, reformers, innovators, peacemakers, motivators, advocates, coaches and preachers.

All: We celebrate and give thanks to God!

One: We celebrate you and we celebrate the blessing of God's call! We give thanks for the gifts this rich diversity brings to building God's kin-dom. We pray in gratitude and joy, magnifying God for God's favor!

All: Alleluia! Thanks be to God.

Charge and Blessing

One: Go forth and be blessed, favored ones.

All: God is indeed with us as we live by faith, stand in hope and share love.

One: Let us witness to God's abundant grace and mercy from generation to generation.

All: Amén.

Postlude/Suggested Hymns

"The Lord Now Sends Us Forth"/*Enviada soy de Dios* (GtG, 747)

"Give Thanks" (GtG, 647) 🍎

Vilmarie Cintrón-Olivieri is regional liaison for the Caribbean with Presbyterian World Mission along with her husband José Manuel Capella-Pratts. An educator and a Presbyterian elder, she served as a co-moderator of the 223rd General Assembly (2018).

Notes

1. R.T. France, *We Proclaim the Word of Life: Preaching the New Testament Today*. Ian Paul & David Wenham, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 43.
2. Ibid.
3. GtG indicates *Glory to God! The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, KY: Geneva, 2013). HP indicates *El Hymnario Presbiteriano* (Louisville, KY: Geneva, 1999).
4. Jane D. Schaberg and Sharon H. Ringe, *Women's Bible Commentary, Third Edition: Revised and Updated*, Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, & Jacqueline E. Lapsley, eds. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 496.
5. Lynn Japinga, *From Daughters to Disciples: Women's Stories from the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2021), 10.
6. Ada María Isasi-Díaz's word to define the "interconnected community, seeing God's movement emerge from la familia, the family God makes . . ." quoted by Melissa Florer-Bixler in "The Kin-dom of Christ," *Sojourners*, Nov. 20, 2018; sojo.net/articles/kin-dom-christ.

Project Vida

Daily Care with a Long-term Vision



BY RHONDA MAWHOOD LEE



Photos courtesy of Project Vida

Project Vida Early Childhood Development Center

When Project Vida ("Project Life") was established in South Central El Paso, Texas, in 1990, the community it served faced myriad challenges. At the time, El Paso was the fourth-poorest city in the country, and the marks of poverty were particularly visible in the South Central neighborhood—overcrowded housing, a majority of adults with less than a ninth-grade education channeled into low-paying jobs, a lack of medical services, a low proportion of pregnant women receiving prenatal care and a high incidence of low-birthweight babies.¹

A coalition of community partners, including Presbyterian ministries, got together to address these needs, and a community congress voted on which projects to initiate. A family medicine clinic was an early priority, followed by English classes, citizenship courses and low-income rental housing.

Finally, in 1995, the Project Vida Demonstration Day Care (now the Project Vida Early Childhood Development Center) was established. A year

later, Presbyterian Women's Birthday Offering gave the center a grant of \$170,000.

Project Vida's day care center began as an intentional experiment in empowerment. In a neighborhood that had a 2,000-family waiting list for child care spaces, and where the people waiting for those spots faced many financial and logistical difficulties, the center was intended to show the positive effects excellent care could have. This was accomplished in three ways:

- through the day care center itself, which provided professional care for children while training volunteers to offer care in their own homes;
- educational opportunities for other adults who wished to work as home daycare providers; and
- training and support for parents to avoid abuse and neglect.

The roots of Project Vida go back a decade before the day care was established, to another recipient of a Birthday

Offering grant: a network of "serviglesias," full-service churches with daycare, clinics, community kitchens and community organizing centers, established through joint border ministries of the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico and the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). In 1986, several *serviglesias* across the U.S.-Mexican border received a total of \$487,300 from the Offering.² By the 1990s, the *serviglesia* network included Project Vida.

Almost three decades later, Project Vida's day care initiative has had a tremendous impact. Project Vida's Early Childhood Development Center offers day care and Pre-K services for newborns to five-year-olds, whose parents pay fees on a sliding scale according to their income. All their teachers have at least an associate's degree in the field of child development; children are immersed in both English and Spanish; and breakfast, lunch and snacks are provided.³

In the years since receiving the Birthday Offering gift, Project Vida has

Additional Resources and Suggestions



Flyaway Books' *The Night of His Birth*, written by Katherine Paterson and illustrated by Lisa Aisato, is an award-winning children's book presenting an interpretation of the story of the birth of Jesus imagining the thoughts Mary could have had that night. Beautifully illustrated with engaging words, a

reading of the book could be included in the sermon or children's sermon. Learn more at flyawaybooks.com/book/the-night-of-his-birth.



Mary is the focus of Lessons 7 and 8 of the PW/Horizons Bible Study, *What My Grandmothers Taught Me: Learning from the Women in Matthew's Genealogy of Jesus* by Merryl Blair, with suggestions for leaders by Magdalena I. García. Use these lessons to complement the liturgy and as preparation for your sermon.

Activities could be planned using the resources at presbyterianwomen.org/matthew.

added after-school enrichment for children and youth, ages 6 to 18. Participants receive assistance with homework, and participate in enrichment activities like internet instruction, structured play, arts and crafts, and field trips. In response to community-identified needs, a college readiness program has been established to prepare first-generation students for post-secondary education, and microenterprise technical assistance and support is available for budding entrepreneurs among youth participants. Project Vida youth also have the opportunity to participate in community service projects. These enrichment services are offered at no cost, and just as importantly, without regard to immigration status. In this way, Project Vida provides a safe space in a border area where their families' lack of documents can be a source of tremendous stress for children and youth.⁴

Looking back on Project Vida 20 years after it received the Birthday Offering, co-founder and Presbyterian pastor Bill Schlesinger noted, "Kids who started with us in the neighborhood . . . have gotten their master's degrees and . . . are now executives in other non-profits. It's

amazing watching people see a different world and be able to take responsibility for it."

Alba Lopez is one example of the impact Project Vida can have on a life and the world. Alba received after-school tutoring at Project Vida. She said, "I would do the after-school reading programs when I was a child. They incentivized you to further your reading and better your English skills. One of the things they used as an incentive was during Christmas they would give reading units and with those units you could choose gifts for your family members. As a child, to be able to give something to your mom, your dad, to your sisters, that was amazing for me to do."

After graduating from high school, Alba volunteered at Project Vida. She eventually earned a master's degree from the University of Texas at El Paso, and served as Project Vida's business manager. Of her commitment to working in the non-profit sector Alba said, "It's all in the sense of serving and of wanting to help others and providing opportunities for others like . . . Project Vida did for me."⁵

Alba values the Project Vida Early Childhood Development Center so much, she enrolled her own children there.⁶ Already, at least two generations of El Paso residents have been blessed by this Birthday Offering, with more surely to follow.

Rhonda Mawhood Lee is an Episcopal priest and the author of *Seek and You Will Find: Discovering a Practice of Prayer* (Forward Movement, 2021).

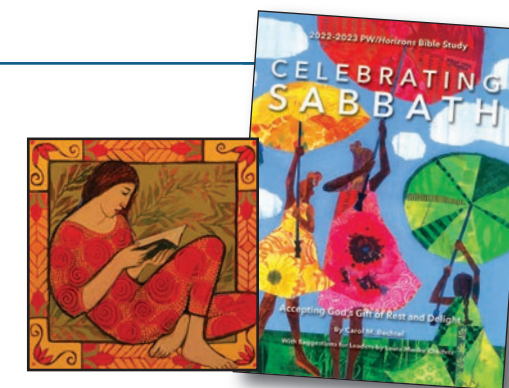
Notes

1. Catherine Stewart Vaughn, *Messages of Reconciliation and Hope: 75 Years of Birthday Offerings 1922–1997* (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1997), 207.
2. Vaughn, 140–142.
3. "Early Childhood Development Center," Project Vida; pvida.net/early-childhood-development.
4. "After-school Enrichment & Youth Development Program," Project Vida; pvida.net/after-school-enrichment-1.
5. Victor R. Martinez, "Project Vida: 25 years and going strong," *El Paso Times*, September 25, 2016; elpasotimes.com/story/news/local/2016/09/25/project-vida-25-years-and-going-strong/90747150/.
6. Ibid.

Powerful Testimonies

BY DANELLE CRAWFORD MCKINNEY

For use with Lesson Five of the 2022–2023 PW/Horizons Bible study, *Celebrating Sabbath: Accepting God's Gift of Rest and Delight*, by Carol M. Bechtel



Scripture: Genesis 2:15 and 3:17–19; Exodus 31:12–18, 35:1–29 and 36:1–7

Since 2016, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has been taking steps to raise awareness about the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and to dismantle its impact. Written in the late 1400s by Popes Nicholas V and Alexander VI, the Doctrine of Discovery authorized Christian explorers to stake claim on lands throughout the world in the name of Christianity. The document labeled any non-Christian people or communities "heathens" in need of conversion to Christianity, but also proclaimed that non-Christian people could not stake claim to land.

In those times, Indigenous peoples in what is now known as the United States had no understanding of land ownership. The people belonged to the land, not the other way around. But because of that papal decree, many Indigenous peoples were killed for or forcibly moved off the lands they inhabited. This was genocide—all based on a paper that authorized Christians to take action against anyone who was not labeled a Christian.

The connection between Sabbath and the experience of generations of Indigenous people who encountered colonial Christianity will become clearer in this resource. But for now, let's start with Carol Bechtel's statement that ". . . all forms of slavery/servitude are serious and real. They violate the beautiful freedom for which we were all created" (p. 48). Reading the words "beautiful freedom," I cannot help but think of the Indigenous people who were killed or forced from their traditional homes, forced to convert to Christianity and generally dehumanized—all in the name of Christianity.

Nearly all tribal people had an organized religion, deeply embedded into their everyday life. These communities had a belief system with similarities to Christianity—care for the community, gratitude and love for Creator and creation—without claiming Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Some tribes sent out members of their communities to look for a deeper connection with the Creator. Similarities to Christianity aside, the

Church's policies denied Indigenous people the freedom to live and worship in traditional ways.

In the United States, the Presbyterian Mission Board was one of the first denominations to send missionaries to Indigenous people. Many of the congregations established by missionaries continue to worship God today. Sometimes the Presbyterian presence was brutal, but other times Presbyterians supported Indigenous people in their efforts for sovereignty and recognition of their basic human rights.¹ Christianity has functioned both as a "sore spot" and a "saving grace" for Indigenous people. While varying viewpoints describe this relationship today, many Indigenous people still cling to the Good News of Jesus Christ.

The largest mass execution in United States history targeted Dakota men. More than 300 Dakota men were declared guilty and were set to be sentenced for participating the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862—fighting that erupted after the U.S. government changed terms of land treaties and would not send payments to starving tribes. Missionaries appealed to President Lincoln to pardon most of the Dakota men, but President Lincoln still ordered 38 Dakota men to be hanged.

Oral history tells us that the 38 men were walked to a large platform in Mankato, Minnesota, on December 26, 1862, (the day after Christmas was celebrated by the Christians of that town). As the Dakota men made their way, there was great wailing from the women. The men stopped them, saying, "Today is not a day of defeat. It is a day of victory, for we have made our peace with Creator, and we will now go to be with Him forever."²

Even in that terrifying moment, the men thought of the Creator. As they were executed, the Dakota sang a song known today as "Many and Great, O God are Thy Things." This song is an original Dakota Air that we still sing at our Dakota Presbytery meetings. It is a sacred song, and when we sing it, we remember those who made sacrifices for us.

This information shared is not a story to make people feel bad about the plight of our people. It is a testimony. It is a statement that tells the world that there is Sabbath

Birthday Offering of Presbyterian Women Ofrenda del Cumpleaños de mujeres presbiterianas 년 장로교 여성 생일 헌금



100 for 100

Celebrating a Century of Giving and Receiving

In 1922, Hallie Paxton Winsborough challenged each member of the Women's Auxiliary of the Presbyterian Church in the United States to give a penny for each year of her life as a "birthday gift" and the offering benefitted Miss Dowd's School for Girls in Japan and construction of the Montreat Gate in North Carolina. A century later, Presbyterian women have contributed more than \$37 million to the Birthday Offering and helped improve lives at home and around the world.

In celebration of God's gifts for our lives—the gift of community, the gift of care, the gift of Presbyterian Women—let's celebrate 100 years of Presbyterian Women's Birthday Offering! Consider responding with a modern twist to Hallie Paxton Winsborough's challenge by giving \$100 for 100 years* to the Birthday Offering!

Give at presbyterianwomen.org/give

*\$100 for 100 encourages all Presbyterian women to give as they are able. Using 100 as a benchmark, consider giving a quarter for every year or even a dime or perhaps even \$50. All gifts, no matter the amount, are gratefully received and lovingly shared. Every level of support for PW's many ministries matters to PW, your church and your world community.