



Connections

◆ A Journal by & for Women in Ministry ◆

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Winter 2010-11

A Neighborhood Watched

By Sue Berger

The sight never ceases to intrigue me. I drive past it several times a week, my eyes roving over the landscape as if I expect something to have changed, even though nothing has in years.

The scene is a subdivision near my home. Several streets are laid out in a typical grid and cul-de-sac pattern, nicely curbed and guttered. Underground utilities with pedestals stick up at each lot. Streetlights stand straight and tall like sentries over the neighborhood. But no houses. None. Haven't been for years.

So what draws me to scour the scene every time I drive by? Granted, there's the mystery of it all. Who started the project? Why don't they sell the lots? Is the land tied up in a lawsuit? Did the developer die? Is there a toxic dump under it? I soon exhaust all my fictional musings, but still am compelled to examine the scene every time.

I've become aware of an emotional response to the empty subdivision. I'm sad so much work and expense have gone into it, that it isn't what it was intended to be. Every time I drive by, I'm hoping to see house construction. No, that's not quite true. I'm expecting to see house construction. It's the next step. There are supposed to be rows of houses, cars parked in drive-ways, kids skateboarding and riding their bikes, people mowing their grass and walking their dogs. It's obvious this is supposed to be a living, breathing neighborhood.

But it isn't. Just dry weed-filled lots. No flowers or manicured lawns. No basketball goals on the curb. No sound of swing-set laughter or barking dogs. No aroma of steaks on a backyard grill. No life.

Yet I yearn for life for this neighborhood. The intent and potential are obvious—just as obvious as my next line of reasoning. How much does God yearn over my obvious, under-

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A Neighborhood Watched

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developed potential? Much has been invested in me, the plan laid out, the power lines established. Is my life a pulsing, throbbing community or is it a barren, desolate wasteland? Granted, God loves me in whatever state I'm in, and I'm thankful for that! But what Master Planner doesn't desire his development to be all he envisions it to be?

It doesn't stop there. I question how I view others around me (including you). It's easy to see what I perceive to be wasted potential in my neighbors and be critical of how you're living your life. I may not agree with your choice of job, recreation or ministry, any more than I approve of my neighbor's house color. But so what? Together, we're a living, breathing community, with all the diversity and creativity our Developer intended. It certainly beats the alternative.

So, let's go break some new ground. Take a community college class. Volunteer. Get to know your neighbors. Explore the shops close to home. Not only can we be an active part of our own communities, but the wind of change will inevitably blow in our souls.



Sue says: "I'm scheming a grand plan for my back yard so it can live up to its potential. It'll take years to execute, but that's the fun of it!" You may email her at sueberger2000@gmail.com. Read her blog at www.onepilgrimsusings.com.

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Connections

Mission Statement

Primary: The Connections for Clergy Support Department provides intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual support and encouragement in the personal lives of GCI ministry families.

Three primary means of serving are the *Connections* journal, the Connections for a Successful Ministry and Life web pages, and the Nurturennet forum. We highlight women in ministry but are inclusive of the needs of the entire family.

Secondary: To promote respect, understanding and support for women, their personal ministries and ministries that serve them.

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• CALIFORNIA •
TAM 2 U

Season's Greedy

No kidding, I really did see this on a store window! The message is no longer subtle or unstated—'tis the season to be greedy. Retailers begin the advertising barrage earlier every year, inundating us with catalogs, email and commercials. More and more people buy gifts



for themselves while they're out shopping for others. It seems all that matters is we buy as much as possible, whether we need it or not. I want to shut it all out but it's everywhere.

No one likes the commercialism of Christmas, but it seems not many do much about it. Is the craziness unavoidable—the frenzied shopping, decorating, parties, cooking, company and all the stress?

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear." I love the line "The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing." The phrase *solemn stillness* makes me think of a universe-wide pause of all activity, everything and everyone holding their breath as Jesus is born and the angels announce his birth with their amazing song.

While I shop, cook and have company during the Christmas month, a big part of my celebration is stillness. I love to sit and look at my nativity set while listening to Josh Groban sing this song as well as my all-time favorite, "O Holy Night." I enjoy the silent glow of lights from my tree and fireplace mantle. As I

take time for solemn stillness and holy silence I feel a sense of expectation, of waiting with the whole creation for the coming of the Messiah.

The world waited for thousands of years for the One who would change the course of human history and usher in New Covenant grace. It doesn't seem much of a stretch to think a hush came over the angelic world as that moment drew near. It was a birth like no other and nothing has been the same since.

The world is full of noise and clamor. It seems to me our Christmas celebrations would be much more meaningful if we celebrated with less noise and activity, rather than trying to cram in more. Get the shopping done early, decorate only a little, scale down the activities and spend the rest of your time in solemn stillness. Then when it's over, instead of being exhausted, you'll start the new year with a sense of wonder at what happened 2,000 years ago.

The Christmas message isn't one of stress, exhaustion and frenzied activity. It's a message of expectation and change, of an event so momentous the whole universe might indeed have held its breath as the Christ child made his appearance.

The last verse of the original lyrics of the hymn also looks forward to a future time, "When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing."

As we drink in the marvel of the incarnation, let's take time for some solemn stillness and then give back the angel's song in joyous celebration.

Merry Christmas!

Tammy



The Proverbs 32 Woman

By Hannah Knaack

As a young believer, I'd sit mesmerized when our pastor enthusiastically expounded on the merits of the Proverbs 31 woman, assuring us her mythical qualities were within reach. She was everything I'd dreamed of becoming. I was in awe of her apparently effortless ability to run a household, not to mention her being spoken highly of in public places. The best part would be having servants to do the chores I didn't like.

After I married, my desire to emulate this enchanting woman pushed me ever onward—for about two years. Any hopes of obtaining her larger-than-life qualities seemed utterly futile. Really now, how many women do you know who have purchased a field? Our first apartment in Louisiana was adjacent to a field. A field into which I'd seen a very large snake slither. There wasn't the slightest possibility of purchasing a field in my future.

While reading my Bible (following a milestone birthday), I discovered, quite surprisingly, the Proverbs 32 woman. While the Proverbs 31 woman is a perfect role model, I'd begun to see I might have more in common with this new woman. This woman is so real, often burdened, seeking to remain obedient to her Lord. This Proverbs 32 woman is a compilation, just as Proverbs 31 is. If you don't see yourself in this transforming sister, do find comfort in knowing there's always

the possibility of Proverbs 33.

Reading the book of Matthew with fresh eyes, something in chapter one jumped out at me. Only five women are mentioned in the lineage of Christ and not one was a Proverbs 31 clone. Hmm, this is worth checking on. Take, for instance, our sister Tamar. Her father-in-law proclaimed her more righteous than he, yet she had—pardon my whisper—slept with this very man! She was deceitful.

She may not have qualified as a Proverbs 31 woman, but amazingly, she was found worthy to be placed in the holiest of all family lines. I'm thinking she provided a bit of tenacity and resourcefulness to the gene pool.

Rahab, our sister the prostitute, is mentioned in five places in my Bible. Some may call her the antithesis of the Proverbs 31 woman, yet in James 2:25 (NIV), she is named righteous. She lived openly in sin (I'm not advocating this approach, just noting this is how we first find

her) and she brazenly lied. She was Ruth's mother-in-law. Dear Ruth, grandmother to King David—an angel of a woman, right? How many women do you know who lay down to sleep at the foot of men's beds—men they're not married to? I've not notice that listed as a Proverbs 31 qualification.

Speaking of King David, I'll digress momentarily. Though not in Jesus' lineage, our sister Abigail is described as an intelligent and beautiful woman. She called her own husband a wicked fool in front of David and was not struck by lightning. She even went so far as to hint that David (1 Samuel 25:31, 33) would be foolish to shed unnecessary



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The Proverbs 32 Woman

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blood. Again, no lightning. While I'm not condoning such behavior, I'd like to point out God blessed her and placed her in a singularly desirable home. I'm pretty sure she had lots of servants, too.

Not long after we're introduced to Abigail, we find the aptly named voluptuous Bathsheba flaunting her wares atop a roof, in clear view of at least one high-ranking neighbor. Apparently there were no indecent exposure laws at the time, just the leering eyes of a king caught in weakness, followed by sin. Alas, no bathing etiquette guidelines are mentioned in Proverbs 31, but I'd wager bathing within the home might have been wiser.

Many generations later the most revered of all women, sweet, innocent Mary, would become the scandal of all Nazareth—pregnant before her wedding. Sadly, our precious Lord's own mother was the victim of town gossip.

These Proverbs 32 sisters of faith—none of whom would have made the top 10 list of “most likely to become the next Proverbs 31 role model”—were chosen by God for a specific purpose within his marvelous plan. Being rather flawed myself, I'm immensely encouraged and uplifted just knowing their journey toward grace and glory.



Hannah says: “We're praying for good weather for our drive out to Milwaukee to attend our son's graduation from the Police Academy. We're eagerly anticipating an early Christmas with him this joyful season.” You may email Hannah at justmomhik@gmail.com.



Briefly Speaking...

“She Ran Out of Time”

Are you a wanna-be? I am. I wanna be fluent in Spanish. I wanna be a good golfer. I wanna be 10 pounds lighter. I wanna memorize scripture. I wanna be a better artist. I remember telling a Jewish professor I would like to learn biblical Hebrew. She answered: “A lot of people *want* to know Hebrew.” I got the message.

Learning another language, losing weight, memorizing scripture, driving golf balls, painting in oils—all take time, discipline and hard work. The apostle Paul even described the Christian life as running a race, not just slowly jogging along but running to win (1 Corinthians 9:24, *NIV*). Salvation is a gift, but according to Paul, a Christian should live a disciplined life, led by the spirit, not the flesh. The Christian life is not a fearful life, but a life full of interesting challenges.

My problem is prioritizing my challenges. I have too many wannas. Do you have this problem? The writing on my tombstone could read, “She ran out of time.”

Some years ago I wrote down everything I considered important to me. Just took out a piece of paper and started writing. Then I prioritized what I had listed according to importance and figured out how much time I spent on the top ten. It's an eye-opening process. With this new year in mind, I think it's time to do it again. How about you?

—Sheila Graham

You may email Sheila at sheila.graham@gci.org.



Relationships

By Paulina Salinas

Life is relationships—relationships with loved ones, at places of employment, with friends, neighbors and classmates. We also have relationships with nature, pets and most important, relationships that nourish our spirit, our inner being—our relationship with God.

God created us to be relational and dependent. We need each other. We need our children, spouse, parents, friends and companions. To live in society is to live the most fascinating existence and at the same time the most difficult because to have good relationships is a real challenge. The truth is we don't get along well with everyone and some people we just don't like.

But if living is relationship, we have to learn to enjoy our differences and enjoy all our relationships. What could be the key to getting along with others? Philippians 4:8 (NIV) answers our question: "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Do you notice we often do precisely the opposite? We tend to see the faults, highlight mistakes, point out problems, see a black spot on a whole sheet of white paper. That is why our relationships are in such bad condition. Wives concentrate on what is missing in their husband and vice versa. Parents focus on their children's mistakes and faults. Bosses don't value employees' efforts. So go our relationships.

When we become critical and judgmental of others it is usually because we aren't grateful. When we look at the blessings we

receive from God and give him thanks, we can enjoy them. In the same way if we begin to look at others in appreciation for who they are, we begin to see them from a new perspective. This is why the scripture in Philippians tells us to focus on the good.

Each person has his or her virtues, talents and good things given by God. When we begin to look at others through the lens of gratitude, we begin to see them differently. We see others as God sees them, as his beloved children, forgiven by him, justified by the Lord's work and sanctified by the Holy Spirit's work. We see the good, the beautiful, the pure, the honorable. This leads us to give God thanks for his love and grace for all.

It's a good practice to write this scripture down and post it on a wall where you will see it every day when you get up. Learn it by heart and ask God to help you see his work in you and in others during the day. When you go to bed, read the verse again and give God thanks for the good you enjoyed, not only in yourself but also especially in others. You will see what relief and rest this brings to your life. You can enjoy relationships because relationships are made to be enjoyed!



Paulina lives in Bogota, Columbia. She says: "I enjoy the way God is teaching us about who he is. It is a new life in Christ, a new beginning. And now more than ever, it's so powerful to communicate the wonder of God's love to people he puts me in contact with. Now I see my children, husband and other people in the different way." To contact Paulina, email Carmen Fleming at carmen.fleming@gci.org.

Great Expectations

By Joyce Catherwood

As I think back to the 1960s when I was a mom-to-be, my expectations were seriously lacking in imagination. I was shockingly naïve. I felt as though pregnancy was merely a physical condition. The concept of bonding with my unborn child was foreign as I hadn't been exposed to concepts of fetal awareness and prenatal receptivity. I simply went through the motions from morning sickness to labor. I was sadly detached until my children were born.

A somewhat prudish outlook on pregnancy in the '50s and '60s also had an effect on my reaction. The prevailing overmodest, puritanical attitude was reflected in the cover-it-all-up maternity wear, implying we had something to hide. Instead, the oversized clothing made us look like blimps.

Nowadays, I find myself fascinated by the style of maternity clothes. It seems most expectant moms wear their normal clothing until they absolutely have to switch over to what would today be considered maternity fashion. They are not ashamed of their new body shape. Some have enough nerve to put

on a bikini. Not so back in my day. My maternity swim wear was made of baby blue denim. The top covered it all up, with huge plenty-of-room-to-grow red bloomers underneath. It was definitely inadvisable to get the suit wet unless you were prepared to lose the bloomers. The wet denim would have been way too heavy.

But things were dramatically different for those with child in the first century A.D. At the onset of puberty, marriage and childbirth became the primary purpose in life for girls. No prudishness, no naivety and for sure, no bikinis. The expectations of Mary, Jesus' mother, were not lacking in imagination; rather they were quite clear. She knew what to expect.

Before adolescence, the main function of a small town country girl was to shepherd goats and sheep, so Mary had likely assisted in lambing and kidding. She learned about childbirth early, having been taken along with her mother or grandmother to participate in the birthing of village babies. In preparation, soil would have been scattered on the dirt floor to soak up blood. There would have been a fire to heat up oils and

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Nurturenet

Nurturenet is a computer forum for women in ministry. Its purpose is to help you stay connected through digest-mode communication (each day's messages compiled into one email). You may use it for requests for information, prayer requests, to share ideas and resources, to receive updates on *Connections* news or just to stay connected!



Do we
have
your
email
address?

To join or update your email address, please send Tammy a message at tammy.tkach@gci.org. Please do not reply to a post unless you want to address the entire list.

Great Expectations

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water. She would have known about a potion of mixed herbs used to speed up delivery. She would have watched as one woman sat on a stone in front of the laboring mother to facilitate, while others surrounded her to help, chanting Come, sister.

Mary knew as her own pregnancy advanced, she would become too heavy with child to scale the rocky hillside and tend her flocks. She would then be confined to the family courtyard, pounding wheat, cooking, weaving and performing other household chores. At night, she would rest on a straw pallet on the floor next to her sleeping family. Her primitive surroundings made for a rugged life. Conveniences were nonexistent. Disease and malnutrition were prevalent. Miscarriage was common. It was a place and an era where one assumed the responsibilities of motherhood early and grew old quickly.

With this as a backdrop, Mary created a cocoon for the Messiah. In the darkness, warmth and security of her womb, she carried Love personified. She must have felt that love. Talk about a pregnancy glow! I suspect hers was a little more obvious than most. Her small frame would have been unable to eclipse the splendor of the Son.

One indication of this is found in the story of the expectant Mary visiting her elderly cousin Elizabeth who had miraculously conceived. The babe in Elizabeth's womb leapt for joy at the sound of Mary's jubilant greeting. Mary then burst into her song of praise. Being musical, she likely composed lullabies, sung softly to the Christ Child within



her. It would seem impossible for her to be detached and not bond with her holy unborn baby.

Though Mary was upbeat and determined, there were moments of anxiety and danger. Remember the miserably uncomfortable, arduous trek to Bethlehem when she was already great with child? Mary might have shed tears of fatigue and abandonment when she went into labor away from home, delivering her baby under extreme circumstances, without the usual support from other women.

Yes, Mary's life was touched by the precious infant she carried. But consider this. Multisensory fetal reaction to the maternal environment is a reality, so Jesus was, in turn, affected *in utero* by all Mary went through. Out of the depths of eternity, the Most High humbly laid aside his divine rights and prerogatives and was supernaturally implanted as a minute embryo within the youthful body of his earthly mother.

There, the only begotten of the Father began to dwell among us, starting with fetal awareness of the highs and lows of a Jewish peasant girl. Amazing! The ultimate price was paid on the cross, but it all began when Jesus entered Mary's womb.

The expectations of tender young Mary would of necessity have been great. She was carrying a baby sent to save the world!



Joyce says: "Speaking of great expectations—my 8-year-old grandson told his little friend's pregnant mom he was excited because her baby was going to hatch in four weeks." You may email Joyce at joyce.catherwood@gci.org. Visit her blog at <http://i-love-to-tell-the-story.blogspot.com>.

Zorro and Me

Growing Older

By Barbara Dahlgren

Zorro and I just returned from taking care of our 3-year-old granddaughter Sophia for a week while her parents went to Cape Cod to celebrate their tenth wedding anniversary. Our daughter Shelly and her husband Dale and granddaughter Sophia live in Austin, Texas. Zorro and I live in San Jose, California. Therefore, we don't get to see Sophia as much as we would like, so this was a wonderful opportunity for us.



It was the first time they had left Sophia for any length of time so I wasn't sure how she would do. I'm talking about my daughter Shelly—Sophia did great! Of course, it helped that we were in Sophia's house and stuck to her normal schedule.

I, on the other hand, was totally unprepared for how exhausting it is to take care of a 3-year-old 24/7. The opening line from

Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* comes to mind. "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." It was the best of times because Sophia was an energetic delight. It was the worst of times because I was almost too tired to enjoy it. Sophia was in bed by 8 and I was usually in bed by 8:30.

Zorro and I were so tired it was hard to believe we had actually raised three kids. There's a reason our child bearing years are limited. Abraham's wife Sarah now has my undying respect and admiration—not to mention those heroic grandmothers who have to raise their grandchildren because of unforeseen circumstances.

Shelly and Dale Skyped us three times, which Sophia loved. On one of these televised visits Shelly asked me what I wanted from Cape Cod. I replied: "Just come home safe and sound. I don't think we have the fortitude to raise Sophia on our own."

Let's face it; none of us are getting any younger. After a week with Sophia I am convinced I'm aging. I had aches and pains in parts of my body I didn't even know existed. I now know what a comedienne meant when she said, "I finally got my head together and

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Confidential Peer Listener Line

Shall we talk? We're here for you!

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Helen Jackson
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Growing Older

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now my body is falling apart;” and “If God wanted me to touch my toes, he would have put them on my knees.” The phrase “Aging is not for sissies” strikes closer to home than it ever did before.

Some scriptures help us come to terms with the aging process. Proverbs 16:31 says gray hair is a crown of glory. That’s not a worry for me. Miss Clairol can take care of that. I guess the one we all fear is Psalm 71:9: “Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth” (*KJV*). With so many of our elderly being thrust aside, most of us just want to feel happy, healthy and productive as long as we can.

Although I may not be able to move as quickly as I once did, I can still rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing and give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). The expression “growing old gracefully” comes to mind. I guess grace is really a part of every aspect of our lives—even aging. Thank God for his grace. With it we can mature as we age, not just grow older. With it we can have the strength to do whatever it is God wants us to do—even take care of a 3-year-old for a week.



Barbara says: “Zorro and I loved spending a week with granddaughter Sophia. Sophia sometimes talks about herself in the third person. She said, ‘Grandma, Sophia loves chocolate.’ I replied, ‘Most women do, sweetheart!’ In fact this grandma loves it so much she thinks she’ll go have some right now!” You can order a copy of Barbara’s book from Amazon or her blog site: www.barbdahlgren.com. You may contact her at bydahlgren@pacbell.net.

Blog Roll

Sue Berger:

www.onepilgrimsmusings.com

Joyce Catherwood:

<http://i-love-to-tell-the-story.blogspot.com>

Barbara Dahlgren:

www.barbdahlgren.com

Tammy Tkach:

www.ttkach.wordpress.com

If you have a blog, please send the URL to Tammy.

We Wish It Were True, But...

In the last issue of *Connections*, we published an article submitted by Graciela Hui about how eagles renew themselves by pulling off their beaks and talons. This story has gone around on the Internet for many years and is unfortunately not true, as verified by wikianswers and snopes.com. We are sorry for not checking the accuracy of the story before publishing. It’s easy to be fooled by stories like these, so please forgive the egg on our faces.



Little Is Much

By Hilary Buck

“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much.”
 Luke 16:10 (NKJV)

As members of the body of Jesus Christ on earth we are sent out to live the divine life of love in the world. We may have our own ideas about how that should be done. Looking for where God’s love is manifested in us, sometimes we come to the conclusion we can’t see the life of God in our lives. But the fruit of the Spirit may be manifested in ways we do not notice or recognize or in activities we don’t rate as important. Jesus’ statement in Luke surely is a pointer that his love may be revealed in small ways, in the little things that make up our daily lives.

I was reminded of this as we were about to go out one day and a north wind had turned the summer to sub-Arctic. My husband, who feels the cold, was wearing only a light sweater. He anticipated my question: “I’ve got Mrs. Watson’s Woolly Wonder on underneath.” So I knew he’d be warm enough. And before you ask, we don’t give all our clothes names, just this one.



Mrs. Watson was an elderly ailing church member, a lovable but slightly eccentric English lady who used to come to church in winter wearing hand-knitted, knee-length colored woolen socks. She would walk through the fields collecting the little bundles of wool the sheep left when they brushed up against a barbed wire fence. She’d card them, spin them on her own wheel and hand-dye and knit the rustic skeins into garments. Finding out my husband felt the cold, she made him an undyed sleeveless jumper. It was a time-consuming act of kindness and care that has outlasted her, and as you can see by the name we gave it, it does the job very well.

Such small acts of kindness are not overlooked in Scripture. Guided by the Spirit, Luke embedded into the history of the spread of the gospel the story of Dorcas, the seamstress (Acts 9:36-41). She didn’t preach to thousands. She made garments for the widows around her and helped the poor. When she died Peter was called away from what he was doing and through him she was restored to life. Not many people have been resurrected and, apart from Jesus, of those few only two are named: Lazarus and Dorcas.

Most of us won’t be remembered for anything as dramatic as being raised from the dead, but our acts of kindness will be noted and remembered by Jesus, as if we did them for him.



Hilary lives in the south of England and assists her husband Ken pastoring the Brighton church. You may email her at kenbuck@mypostoffice.co.uk. This article originally published as a devotional for www.daybyday.org.uk.



Katie's Folder

By Ruth Miller

On August 24 I lost a dear friend. Katie Lacey was a wonderful office volunteer at Saint Mark United Methodist Church. When I came to work at Saint Mark more than 12 years ago, Katie was one of the first church members I met.

Katie had been recruited years before by one of the church pastors. She took each task seriously and carried them out faithfully. Katie prepared baskets for new visitors and sent reminder postcards for the various meetings and stewardship responsibilities. She kept us supplied with postcards, printed with the church's address. She also printed the specialty cards we use for reminders.

Katie had a folder for those cards and schedules that was kept in my desk drawer. And now that Katie is gone, I find myself feeling sad when I reach for the purple folder. Just thinking of all the times she went through that folder so faithfully reminds me of how much she is missed.

For me, Katie's folder is a symbol of faithfulness. God has high regard for this marvelous attribute—this precious fruit of the Holy Spirit. In Luke 16:10, *NASB*, Jesus said, "He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much."

Isn't it wonderful to have faithful friends? You know you can count on them to follow through on whatever they do. They seem to know what's needed, how to pitch in and help at just the right moment. When things got hectic around the office, Katie always seemed to understand extra help was needed. I think one of the most important gifts of the Spirit is the gift of helps (I Corinthians 12:28), and Katie certainly excelled in this

gift. To me, Katie's folder is a symbol of a faithful, helpful person.

Katie loved to read and recommended good books. She stayed up with the times, while remaining unspoiled by the world. Katie learned to operate the office machines needed to do her work. She wasn't afraid to learn new things. She learned to work on the computer and handle email and stay in touch with her grandchildren. When one wanted a destination wedding, Katie didn't complain. She shared the joy and made the trip. (How bad could it be—having to go to Aruba!)

We sometimes grumble and complain about how it used to be—thinking only of the good old days, but not Katie. She accepted her limitations without limiting her potential. She was flexible and adaptable. She outlived two husbands and lived alone for many years. When her daughters became concerned about her being alone, she quickly agreed to move to a retirement community. She put her house on the market and accepted and adjusted to the change in her life. She brought cheer to her new home environment, inspiring and encouraging others.

Katie came to work the Monday before she died. She had not been feeling well, but as I explained to a coworker, if Katie didn't call, she'd be there. And she was. I could tell she wasn't up to her usual perky self, but she did her work. The next evening I got a call saying Katie had died.

There's a message in Katie's folder, and I love what it says. Katie's death came as a reminder of how blessed we are to be able to continue working and serving, to truly live until we die. If we have that opportunity, we should not take it for granted. Not everyone is able to exit this world as easily and gracefully

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Conversations With God

By Carmen Fleming

Raising children is a most challenging responsibility. Newborns don't come with instruction manuals and no set formulas for child rearing guarantee a good outcome. Each child is unique and has his or her own free will. We suffer the gamut of emotions as we love our children, with constant adjustments on our part.

Our relationship with our children is the ideal context for cultivating a close friendship with God. Looking back I realize high on God's agenda was the development of my relationship with him. While I was raising my children I was growing up as well. My conversations with God didn't always bring

immediate changes in circumstances, but looking back over 28 years of praying for my children one of the greatest miracles was my own transformation. Panic turned to assurance, doubt to faith and turmoil to peace. I found great comfort in his special partnership. God's Holy Spirit gives glimpses into who God really is and in his hands we become his very own masterpiece.

We also experience God's grace in prayer. We moms can be hard on ourselves. Moms take heart! God chose your child for you and chose you for your child. There are no accidents in what God does. I take great comfort that God is a redeemer. He is more than able to accomplish his purposes in spite of me.

After I was married and left home my mom called to apologize for the times she felt she was unfair to me. She had been thinking about me and felt guilty. But my mom was the best mom for me. She wasn't perfect but she was who I needed. She taught me something about God that he has used to invite me to come closer. She taught me I can bring all my troubles and concerns to him. She used the Psalms to pray, and we would often read them together at bed time. God used her in spite of her mistakes to magnify his goodness and trustworthiness.

Katie's Folder

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as Katie.

Katie was my model for growing old. She would have been 85 her next birthday. She spent her life serving and caring for others. She was a virtuous woman. She made a difference in her multifaceted world and in her church.



Ruth lives outside Birmingham, Alabama. She hosts a yearly women's retreat every October. You may email her at secruth@bellsouth.net.

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If you're a woman and have been ordained for ministry, we'd like to hear from you. Please consider writing a 500 to 750 word article for submission to *Connections*. We'd like to know your experience as a pioneer in this exciting new world of women elders. Please send your article, photo and bio to Tammy Tkach at tammy.tkach@gci.org.

As I reflect back on my own childrearing practices I also have regrets. One day I was in prayer with God for my children. I told him if only I could go back and do it over again. If only I could have another chance and correct my mistakes maybe they would be better off. This is what God impressed on my heart: Carmen, even if you could do it all over again, you might not make this particular mistake but you will make others. That is OK. Trust me with your children.

Zephaniah 3:16-17 often comes to mind when I allow regrets to overshadow God's grace and power to save. Although it was written for Israel, it is an accurate reflection of God's love for us. God is telling us not to fear. He is on our side. He is mighty to save.

This scripture tells me to bring my children to God in prayer but let God be God. It tells me to confidently join him in what he is doing in my children's lives by loving them the best I know how, and leave the rest in his capable hands. God has a way of quieting us with his love, and we have the chance to hear him rejoice over us in song.



Carmen says: "I am enjoying decorative painting as my new hobby, which gives me a lot of fulfillment. Once a month on Friday morning I join a group of friends and together we work on a project. Also, I am teaching a beginner's level English class for immigrants in our community. It's a wonderful opportunity to make new friends." You may email Carmen at carmen.fleming@gci.org.

Just Say Yes!

By Keysha Taylor

God had a plan in his heart to create the universe. The universe contains numerous planets, galaxies, wormholes and dimensions. He planned and created the sun, and planets that would be affected by its heat. He thought of Earth and chose this planet to bring about eternal peace and hope. Satan, before our world existed, also had a plan. He looked into himself and lusted for power and supreme rulership. His plan was thwarted by the Everlasting Mighty God.

God the Father, in his heart and with the Word, agreed to seal his plan with saving grace. But grace would come at a cost. The cost was death on a cross. So the Word said "Yes" and became flesh. He came to us a baby, born in lowly estate yet his nature was that of God himself.

Satan thought Yes. He thought this was another chance for him to become supreme because God became flesh. He tried everything he could to kill him, but all his plans failed. In living life on earth, Christ's answer to our pain, suffering, misunderstanding, ignorance and unbelief was "Yes."

He said,

Yes, I know pain.

Yes, I know suffering.

Yes, I've been misunderstood.

Yes, I have been perceived as ignorant.

Yes, I bled because of unbelief.

Christ gave himself and agreed to take all sin and nail it to the cross. On the third day, Christ arose and said "Yes" to life and victory.

So in his victory, God said yes to us be-

Just Say Yes!

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love everlasting. So, Just—say—yes! to God’s Yes!

cause we are his and he loves us. He created the universe to bring about the human race, to send his Son for death then life and to receive us into his heavenly realm.

We can only marvel at the power of God and can never unravel all the mysteries of eternity. Yet we can have an intimate relationship with Supreme God by agreeing, as the Word did before the world began, and thus participating in the wonder and awesome plan God, our Father, has for human-kind. Life eternal, victory unmeasured and



Keysha serves as worship leader and lead musician at the Family Worship Center, a congregation of the Worldwide Church of God, Miramar, Florida. She is a full time mother of three, Chakeyra, Kiana and Caleb. In her spare time, Keysha enjoys playing the piano, composing songs of praise and worship, dancing, sewing, entertaining friends and spending quiet time with her family. You may email her at tenomkt@yahoo.com.

Being a Light...has a lighter side!

A Sunday school teacher was teaching her class about the difference between right and wrong. “Alright children, let’s take another example,” she said. “If I were to get into a man’s pocket and take his billfold with all his money, what would I be?”

Little Johnny raises his hand, and with a confident smile he blurts out, “You’d be his wife!”

Lee, A seven-year-old boy, was asked to say thanks for the Christmas dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. Lee began his prayer, thanking God for his mommy, daddy, brothers, sister, grandma and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food.

He gave thanks for the turkey, the stuffing, the Christmas pudding, even the cranberry sauce. Then Lee paused, and everyone waited... and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, “If I thank God for the Brussels sprouts, won’t he know that I’m lying?”

What did the reindeer say before launching into his comedy routine? This will sleigh you.

Mike walks into a bar with a newt on his shoulder. The barmaid looks at the creature and asks the man what he calls it.

“Tiny,” answers Mike. “Why’s that?” enquires the barmaid. Mike looks her in the eye and says, “Because he’s my newt.”

Connecting & Bonding Conference

Dear Sisters in Ministry,

What a great year it's been for our family! Watching our first grandchild Jaden grow and change and start walking has been exciting. Grandchildren are such a joy.

Connecting & Bonding (C&B) had an exciting year as well with two wonderful conferences—one in Lexington, Kentucky, and another in Ontario, California. Conference surveys revealed many felt these were the best conferences ever. I was moved by those comments. Each year we are blessed with wonderful speakers.

As we plan for our 14th year we would like to invite you to come and be a part of the weekend. As one woman shared: "Each year it gets better. I feel like I've reached a new level of understanding."

The Lexington conference will take place March 11 to 13. Mary Southerland (www.marysoutherland.com) was so popular in Ontario we've asked her to speak in Lexington. She spoke about loving the "Sandpaper People" in our lives and "Habits of Highly Successful Ministers' Wives."

God's Unending Mercies

Through all eternity to thee
A joyful song I'll raise;
But oh! Eternity's too short
To utter all thy praise.

Joseph Addison
1672-1719

Mary is considered the Stress-Buster, a leader in helping women manage stress and achieve peace. She is the author of several books, and is also co-founder of *Girlfriends in God* (www.girlfriendsingod.com), a devotion and conference ministry.

The Ontario conference is scheduled for Labor Day weekend, September 2 to 5. Our guest speakers will be Judy Hampton (<http://judyhampton.wordpress.com>) and Deborah Lovett (www.deborahlovett.com). Both women spoke at our Lexington conference last year. Deborah spoke about "God's Redemption" and Judy spoke about the "Waiting Room of Life." Many felt these sessions were life changing.

Please mark your calendars with the conference dates for 2011. I know you will truly be blessed if you are able to attend. Our theme comes from John 4:13: "Come and Drink of the Living Waters and Be Refreshed." See the last page of *Connections* for an application form, which you may print and mail if you choose to register by mail.

You may register on our website at www.connectingandbonding.org and pay with credit card or mail the form:

Connecting & Bonding
300 South Highland Springs Avenue
Suite 6-C #156
Banning, CA 92220

Please keep *C&B* in your prayers. Our mission is to build up and edify one another by connecting and bonding in the presence of God. We all face daily challenges so my prayers are with each one of you. I look forward to seeing you at one of the 2011 conferences. Come drink of the living waters and be refreshed.

Jannice May
conbond@acninc.net



C&B Ministers' Wives Conferences 2011

Registration Information

Last Name _____ First Name _____ MI _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Email _____

Please circle the conference(s) you wish to attend and mark which type of room you need.

Lexington, Kentucky

Embassy Suites
March 11-13, 2011
Triple (\$303/person) or 3 payments* of \$101
Double (\$351/person) or 3 payments* of \$117
Single (\$492/person) or 3 payments* of \$164
If you should cancel, the registration fee of \$150 is not refundable.

*If you are making 3 payments the due dates are:
1st payment—January 22, 2011
2nd payment—February 12, 2011
3rd payment—March 1, 2011
If final payment is not received by March 1, there will be an additional charge of \$50.

Ontario, California

Hilton Ontario Airport
September 2-5, 2011
Double (\$417/person) or 3 payments* of \$139
Single (\$555/person) or 3 payments* of \$185
If you should cancel, the registration fee of \$150 is not refundable.

*If you are making 3 payments the due dates are:
1st payment—March 26, 2011
2nd payment—May 28, 2011
3rd payment—August 13, 2011
If final payment is not received by August 13, there will be an additional charge of \$50.

The following prices are for accommodations, meals and registration fees.

Please indicate if you have any physical limitations that would require wheelchair accessibility or limit your stair use:

No Yes If yes, please explain:

Please indicate if you have any dietary needs:

No Yes If yes, please explain:

I plan to share accommodations with the following person/people:

(No need to send forms together.)

- 1.
- 2.

If you have questions, contact Jannice May at 626-379-0505 or conbond@acninc.net.

Please send completed form to:

Connecting and Bonding, 300 S. Highland Springs Ave, Suite 6-C #156, Banning CA 92220, or register online at www.connectingandbonding.org.