

## From Sylvia's Desk

*VOW Board Member Marcia Slentz-Whalen attended the 2008 General Assembly (San Jose, CA) as an observer. In that capacity, she took the opportunity to testify before the committee considering an overture to redefine marriage.*

*As this issue will again come before the General Assembly next July, Marcia's thoughts continue to be timely; they are presented here as VOW's lead article. (FYI, Sylvia Dooling will be on sabbatical until the middle of February, 2010.)*



### Testimony in Defense of Christian Marriage

Marriage is not whatever we choose to make it. Marriage is what it is and what it always has been since it was first defined in Genesis. It is a covenant relationship given to us by God, who clearly defines it for us as He intended it to be: a lifelong covenant relationship between one woman and one man. This definition was reaffirmed by Jesus in Matthew 19:4-6 when He was asked specifically to discuss the nature, meaning, and significance of marriage. Scripture is undeniably clear in defining marriage.

It is a sad illustration of our human arrogance to presume that we can make marriage something other than what God intended simply by assigning to that word a new definition. Assigning the label "marriage" to a homosexual coupling does not make it a marriage.

This issue is *not* about "Civil Rights." The civil rights of every American can be affirmed and protected by civil legislation, and that is where all civil rights must be addressed. It is about obedience to God's Word.

It is *not* about recognition for relationships. It is about the basic question of whether homosexual behavior is or is not sinful behavior. Scripture, when taken in its totality and not cited piecemeal, makes it clear beyond any possible doubt that homosexual behavior is sinful behavior.

The notion of redefining the word "marriage" to affirm this kind of behavior is yet another attempt to pull off an "end run" around God's clear Word to His people. Those who continue to push for this agenda are not

content to enjoy a position as welcome participants in the worshipping Christian community. They have that. They have always had that. They want nothing less than for homosexual behavior to be not only tolerated but affirmed and even celebrated by the church.

We all are sinners. I am a sinner. I confess it. The big difference is that I am not asking for my sisters and brothers in Christ to affirm me in my sin.

Neither should we be affirming the sin of those who choose to yield to a temptation to engage in homosexual behavior, no matter how passionately they may plead with us to do so. Doing what they ask, going along with the secular culture, is actually the easier path to follow. It is much more difficult to lovingly challenge a fellow believer's sin than it is to look the other way. It is much less work to say "I'm okay, you're okay...you do your thing and I'll do mine" than it is to do the hard work of standing gently, but firmly, upon the eternal Truth of God's clear Word to His people.

True, we are commanded by our Lord to "love one another." We do need to be compassionate. However, compromising our faith and massaging the plain language of Scripture to try to make it say something it does not say is *not* love. Bending the Truth – even if we do it out of a sincere desire to ease the pain of hurting sisters and brothers – is *not* love.

As faithful disciples of Christ, we must care enough to refuse to let those who are in the grip of sinful behavior redefine the very words that communicate to the world and to our morally-bankrupt culture who

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we are. We must be bold to affirm that, although we Christians are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world. We must continue to lift up the clear message that we are people of God's Word – not just when it's easy and comfortable for us, but even when it is hard work.

The bottom line: Marriage is marriage. God defined it. God has not revoked nor altered that definition. I pray that we will resist the incredible human arrogance that would presume to revise God's eternal Truth. I pray that we will exercise the humility to respect God's Word and to honor its clear and consistent meaning.

In its comment in response to an overture petitioning the 2008 GA for a redefinition of marriage,

### **An Odd Couple**

I have known about Una Stevenson for many years. Way back, before Voices of Orthodox Women came into being, she served on the national PW Coordinating Team. That year, the Coordinating Team held its business meeting in Denver and invited women in the area to come and to share their concerns. A group of women from Loveland took them up on their offer. Of particular concern to us was the ecumenical Re-Imagining Conference that had recently been held in Minneapolis. Some of the PW national leadership had promoted the conference, and were openly in support of its radical feminist philosophy and agenda. Una sat across the table from me that day in Denver. She was clearly defensive of PW, and it "felt" like she was also a proponent of reimagining the faith.

That meeting left many issues unresolved, and served to reinforce many of my concerns about women's ministries in the Presbyterian Church.

Years went by, and then at a regular meeting of our presbytery, Una and her husband were introduced as elder commissioners from one of our churches. The Stevensons were now going to be one of us. I, of course, was immediately apprehensive. Here was that woman again who represented the "other side." I was on my guard.

Several more years passed, and I was asked to serve on presbytery's Council. And, there she was again. She had come to present an overture on human trafficking that originated in one of presbytery's committees. I listened to her presentation and, as she spoke, I heard that "still, small voice" inside me say, "Forget your preconceptions; this is an issue that should concern the whole church."

I wrestled with myself. I wondered how I could work with someone who is so different from me theologically. But that "still, small voice" would not be

the GA Council reminds us that the *Book of Common Worship* grounds God's gift of marriage in the complementary creation of male and female, given by God, blessed by Jesus Christ, and sustained by the Holy Spirit. Any attempt to redefine marriage to include any other configuration of individuals violates that sacred concept. I respectfully request of you: Please, do not support any such attempt! †

- Marcia Slentz-Whalen  
VOW Board Member

silenced.

I contacted Una shortly after the Council meeting, and asked her if we (*i.e.*, VOW) could work with her on the overture's wording to make it more inclusive of Presbyterians all across the theological spectrum. She enthusiastically accepted my offer, and volunteered to drive the miles that separated us so that we could begin to work together.

The product of our efforts was an overture against human trafficking that was adopted by our presbytery, and eventually given unanimous support by the 218<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. (You can read some of the overture's specifics in past editions of this newsletter. They can be found on-line at [www.vow.org](http://www.vow.org).)

Because of our work together, I have had the privilege of getting to know this wonderful woman. Notwithstanding our theological differences, she and I (by grace ALONE) are sisters in Christ. We continue to engage in vigorous discussion and debate, but this we agree upon – God has called both of us as part of the body of Christ to work together against the terrible sin of human trafficking. On that issue we agree.

Una has a sensitive heart for the victims of every kind of injustice. Having helped set the church's course on the issue of human trafficking, she has turned her attention to the equally terrible problem of child pornography. And, again, I believe that it is a problem that should concern every Presbyterian. All of us should join hands vigorously to combat it and to care lovingly for its victims.

Una has told me that Church Women United and General Assembly's Advocacy Committee for Women's Concerns are all focusing on the issue. Please watch for an overture that may come through your own presbytery, and do what you can to combat this injustice that is perpetrated on the most vulnerable

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among us.

The issue of human trafficking and the events surrounding VOW's involvement in opposing it have taught me a great deal about the Church and our responsibility to work together when we are able. None of us participates in the Body of Christ because of our morality or the relative truthfulness of our theology. Any of us who are in Christ enjoys the benefits of his work and his Church solely and only because he chose, by grace alone, to include us. And that means that while we must oppose what we understand to be error within our fellowship, we must do so in love and in humility.

God has given us to each other within the Church. And, as we work out the implications of our common

life, we must remember that both theology and justice matter.

To serve the purposes of His glory, God has brought an odd couple of women together to work together in the mission of the church. So, let me ask you: are there folks in your ecclesiastical neighborhood whom you think you can do without? If there are, you had better think again. God may be calling you to stand side-by-side with those with whom you disagree on many things. I have learned a great deal from my sister, Una. And, perhaps she has learned something from me, too.



- Sylvia Dooling

**Biblical Transformation:**  
**A review of *Horizons* November/December 2009**  
**“The Transforming Church”**  
 by Viola Larson, VOW Board Member

A beautiful old hymn, *Abide with me*, offers this prayer, “change and decay in all around I see; O Thou who changest not, abide with me.” And yet both individual Christians and the universal Church are called to transformation, made new and changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ. We are changed by the changeless One.

Transformation and reformation are the main focus of the latest *Horizons*, the magazine for Presbyterian Women. The November/December 2009 edition is entitled “The Transforming Church.” The Editors begin well with their choice of articles, but lose their way as several authors confuse transformation with conformity. I will look at several articles about transformation but also include thoughts on the Bible Study Resource in this edition.

**Transformation from a biblical point of view:** The lead article, “An invitation to Transformation,” by Rita Boyer, begins with the biblical understanding of transformation. Speaking of Christian transformation in community she writes, “I want to know how lives are changed because of Christ’s presence in that particular community of faith.” She looks at the early disciples’ transformation.

In the event that would change all of their lives, and ours, death was changed to life. A frightened band of clueless and bewildered disciples were transformed into those who would give of their lives proclaiming the truth and power of the Gospel.

Boyer, in the midst of her article, switches from looking at how Christ transforms the church to how churches become transformational. She lists questions

that church leaders might ask themselves. For instance, “What if the term ‘church growth’ began to mean more than numbers?” Another question is “What if we stopped doing things just because they have become entrenched in the church’s calendar and annual report?”

Boyer’s article is a good one; it has a biblical foundation and practical, helpful questions; but Tonya Wagner’s article about an alternative church, “Wicker Park Grace,” fails in its message of transformation.

**Conformity rather than transformation:** The Wicker Park Grace community, in Chicago, whose pastor is Nanette Sawyer, is an alternative community for those who feel alienated from the traditional church. The author of the article, who attended Wicker Park Grace, relates experiences of her first visit:

During the service I spotted a loaf of sweet bread and a tall, thin glass carafe filled with grape juice on a small wooden table off to the side of the room. I presumed that at some point during the service communion would be served. To my surprise, the service ended with the provisions still at the table. Before the sending, Nanette picked up the bread and juice and set them next to the coffee, tea and doughnuts and said, ‘This is where the real church begins. Stick around, hang out, have something to drink and a snack.’

Wagner, explains that the pastor “has worked to establish a radically—welcome even divinely hospitable—space for people to commune with each other and with God.” The author further explains that

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the goal is to have a people “who share ‘a center but not a boundary.’” They find their unity in their “willingness to question.”

In a small text box, the Editors of *Horizons* invite the reader to explore the web site of Wicker Park Grace. There one finds a community that is not transformed in the manner intended by God’s word. Instead, the members are encouraged to accept themselves as they are. At Wicker Park Grace, transformation means acceptance of pluralism, atheism and the homosexual lifestyle.

As the pastor explains in her book *Hospitality—The Sacred Art Discovering the Hidden Power of Invitation and Welcome*, “when we dwell in the solitude of the soul, we tap into a deep resource and become free of deliberating neediness. In this gentle fearless space we realize our intrinsic goodness and embrace our identity as unconditionally loveable and deeply interconnected with God, the life of life and the whole of creation.” (41)

**Biblical transformation:** The biblical picture of transformation, quite different from Sawyer’s, is given by Paul in the twelfth chapter of Romans. He urges believers to present their bodies to God as “a living and holy sacrifice” for worship, commanding them to “not be conformed to this world, but [to] be transformed by the renewing of” their “mind.” In doing this they would “prove what the will of God is” that which, “is good and acceptable and perfect.”

The next two chapters of Romans explain what sacrifice and transformation mean. The text is practical, urging such actions and attitudes as turning with abhorrence from evil while holding on to the good. Devotion to prayer, empathy toward others, not paying back evil but instead caring for enemies are included in the actions of transformed believers. The last several verses of Romans 13 look toward Christ’s return and admonish:

The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, nor in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regards to its lust.

This is transformation that begins with an acknowledgement of sin rather than intrinsic goodness and finds its power and grace in the cross of Jesus Christ.

**The Unreformed descendents of John Calvin:** What is undoubtedly considered a very important article for *Horizons* is “John Calvin: Reformed and Always

Reforming” by Dr. Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York. The article is reprinted with permission from Beliefnet.com. Jones is not attempting to make a Christian or biblical statement about transformation with this article. But she does aim it toward the idea that “the Reformed tradition is always reforming.”

Jones attempts to connect Calvin to a wide assortment of religious and philosophical descendents, writing that the “sheer diversity of religious institutions and denominations held within the spectrum of traditions called ‘Reformed’ is mind-boggling.” One has to admit at least that Jones’ list of such institutions and persons *is* mind-boggling, but hardly in the reformed tradition.

Jones picks Pastor Rick Warren and Gene Robinson, the Episcopal Bishop of New Hampshire – writing of the latter that he “preaches powerfully about the need to call ourselves to collective accountability, recognizing the profound depths of our sinfulness and refusing to judge others or create new margins of exclusivity, but instead, opening up to the grand gifts of God.” She continues on with Jeremiah Wright and finally jumps to the secular humanists.

Jones looks at three “core commitments” that she believes this diverse group shares. The first is a paradox that humanity is both a reflection of the glory of God and sinful. The second is the “claim that when you engage the world you have, at one and the same time, to be an ardent realist and (again a paradox) to have utopic expectations.” The third core commitment is that as faith people (I am not sure where secular humanism fits in this), making an idol out of religion is one of the greatest dangers.

Having said all of this, Jones believes that our gift to Calvin is to go beyond the categories of right, left and secular humanism and, in our social dialogue, learn “to drink from different wells and to reflect seriously on the insights we might learn from Islamic Sharia and from Buddhist notions of silence and breath.” But one must backtrack and see what Jones has omitted that eliminates the call for biblical reform which, for a Christian, involves transformation.

The core of Calvinism, which is also the core of orthodox Christianity, is that the image of God in humanity is marred, marred beyond human help, because of a fall. There is no paradox. God created what was good, human sin brought it to ruin. And there is no utopia, no hope, without the cross. If we attempt to bring hopefulness or the Kingdom of God into society without the cross of Jesus Christ, in the end we will bring ruin. Unforgiven, untransformed humanity over and over creates totalitarian utopias. There is only one

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ultimate and real gift, the gift of new life given by the death of the Lord of creation, Jesus Christ.

**A Study in unfaithfulness:** Turning from the subjects of transformation and reformation I want to write some about this particular edition of *Horizon's* Bible Study Resource. It is written by Dr. Uriah Y. Kim, professor of Hebrew Bible at Hartford Seminary. He has also written a commentary on Joshua titled *Decolonizing Josiah*. The editorial description includes these words:

In the prevailing view, the Deuteronomistic History is the first and archetypical Western history, describing the creation of an Israelite state in Palestine as the origin of civilization in the region, a hegemonic culture rendering the other inhabitants of the country homeless in their own land. That view of Davidic domination over greater Palestine, fashioned under Josiah, has been given a modern nationalist reading by contemporary scholars, a reading consistent with the vast array of covert cultural confirmations of Euro-American imperial power.

This is how a post-modern exegesis works – using the point of view of the person the post-modern scholar considers the oppressed in the text. God as subject is eliminated. This is liberation theology at its harshest, and it terribly slants Kim's views in the resource material.

The resources always cover two lessons. This time, lessons four and five of the 2009-2010 *Horizons* Bible Study, *Joshua: A Journey of Faith*, by Mary Mikhael, is covered. Kim states one point that I agree wholeheartedly with. That is, "Thanksgiving is a holiday that allows us to reflect on the generosity of the indigenous people of this land and how each subsequent generation of immigrants were welcomed by those who preceded them." But I think that several thoughts are missing in this first section which deals with Joshua 1:2-3; 10-15; 5:10-12. God is actually eliminated from this lesson. He is the one who should first of all be thanked. He is the one who supplied food both to the Native American and the newcomers, the Puritans.

But more importantly, by eliminating God from the lesson, Kim is able to write, "Just as the ancient Canaanites suffered violently under extreme mentality, Native Americans have suffered great violence and loss as well." As I have written elsewhere, the text must be addressed from the point of view of God who is the author of Holy Scripture. The text about the slaughter of the Canaanites is difficult because:

God tells Joshua and the tribes of Israel to slaughter all of the people in the cities they conquer. God not only gives the land to the

tribes of Israel; He also uses them to punish the people of Canaan. This punishment comes after God waits four-hundred years for the people of Canaan to repent.

These events are foretold in Genesis when God promises Abraham that his heirs will be like the stars of the sky. God also tells Abraham that his descendents will be slaves in Egypt but that after four-hundred years they will return to Canaan. The Word states, "Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for **the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.**" (Gen 15:16b)

In Leviticus, God pulls back the curtain, so to speak, and allows the Israelites to see why He is "casting out" the nations living in the land of Canaan. He has just listed all of the sexual sins and the sin of child sacrifice that the Jewish people are forbidden to practice. These include incest, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and the sacrifice of children to the god Molech. The Lord then tells the Israelites:

"Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants." (Leviticus 18:24-25)

The clear words of Scripture allow us to see both God's provision for His people and His judgment when they reject His words.

The second section of the lesson covers Joshua 6:1-8:28; 10:16-11:23: "Can War be Holy? Understanding 'Enemies.'" Here, also, Kim is insensitive and even unscholarly in his use of the scripture. Rather than dealing with the text from the point of view of other scripture, he writes:

Why is there such a harsh treatment of others in *Joshua*? One possible explanation is that during the time *Joshua* was written, the rhetoric of 'enemies' was used as a fear tactic to get the people of the day to support the king [the good king Josiah]. Those who were disloyal would be made examples (7:25 and 10:26) and treated like 'enemies.' To demonize others in this way can be very problematic.

Kim goes on to moralize about his own view of the text and how we should be concerned that we are not rationalizing hostile motives to others just so we can destroy them while escaping our own guilt. The real text is simply dismissed as a ploy to get others to obey.

The hard work of exegesis is not done; God's Word

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is unfaithfully misused, and Kim's questions that follow must find answers in human experience. Sinners, which we all are, need the Word of God applied to their lives. The Canaanites rejected the God of Israel and sinned against him for over four-hundred years. They gave their bodies over to sexual fertility gods and goddesses. They burned their children in the arms of Moloch. We as finite creatures cannot make the kinds of judgments that God does, and we find it hard to read the words of Joshua; but God judged and continues to do so.

We need to hear His words and receive His mercy

## VOW Produces Bible Study

Some years ago, at an annual meeting of the VOW board, we set aside a substantial amount of time to consider producing a Bible study that could be given to the church as a gift. To be candid, the discussion arose out of our frustration with what we have found to be *Horizons'* inability to produce consistently excellent Bible studies for the women of our church.

When we decided to move ahead with the project, what quickly became clear is that producing curriculum is difficult and complicated work. So, in the spirit of humility, a small digression is in order – Kudos to all the folks throughout our denomination who write consistently biblical curriculum.

We began by appointing a team of women pastors, with one assigned to do the actual writing. This task fell to The Reverend Terrye McAnally, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, Sevierville, TN. Terrye is a past moderator of our VOW board and remains an active part of our work. Therefore, while the new study (*Straight to the Point: Do you See Him Now? A study of the Gospel of Mark*) was produced by a committee that is acknowledged in the document's introduction, Terrye is its author.

We have elected to publish *Straight to the Point* at this time in the church's calendar precisely because it is not intended to replace this year's *Horizons* study of Joshua. Rather, it is designed to be used by anyone who wants to study the Gospel of Mark. And, it is free – VOW's gift to the church.

in the compassion and love of our dying Savior Jesus Christ.

The song *Abide with Me* speaks for the sinner, "Come not in terrors, as the King of kings/ But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings/ Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—Come/ Friend of sinners, and thus bide with me." May God transform His Church and make sinners into saints.



Let me be clear. It is VOW's sincere desire that all future *Horizons* Bible studies will be biblically faithful in order that they may build up the whole Body of Christ. We earnestly hope to be able to recommend all *Horizons* studies in the future. However, should we be unable to do so at some future time, one use of *Straight to the Point* might be as an alternative.

Let me also be clear that this is a onetime project. The purpose of VOW is to pray and work for reform in women's ministries in the Presbyterian Church, encouraging and equipping Presbyterians across our denomination to each do their part. But we have discovered that curriculum writing requires more resources than are regularly available to us.

The VOW board is grateful to its task force, and in particular to "TerryeMac" for their willingness to commit to this project while remaining faithful to the work to which God has called them in the congregations which they serve and in their presbyteries.

If you believe that *Straight to the Point* could be useful in your congregation, we – as always – encourage you to submit it to your session for their review and approval.



- by Sylvia Dooling

You may access the Mark study and download it by going to [www.vow.org](http://www.vow.org) and clicking on *Free Bible Study*.

We encourage you to tell others about VOW, and to invite them to place their names and addresses on the VOW mailing list. This is a positive way for women and men to feel supported, and to learn what they can do to work for reformation in our church. Also, as we can communicate more frequently and more economically by e-mail, we really would like to have your e-mail address. Please feel free to drop me a note at [sdooling@vow.org](mailto:sdooling@vow.org) and be sure to visit our website at <http://www.vow.org>

## “The ‘Girl Preacher’ ”

--by the Rev. Tracee Hackel

There is something about the end of one year and the beginning of another that gives us the feeling of a fresh start. Over the years this led to the practice of forming New Year’s Resolutions. We resolve to rid ourselves of bad habits and cultivate new ones that will make us better, stronger, happier people. More often than not, however, our New Year’s resolutions fail. We start off with wonderful intentions to improve our work, our minds, our bodies, and even our souls—only to slide back into our old habits. Just one piece of chocolate doesn’t count. If I hang my clothes on my home gym then I am using it. I can catch up on my Bible reading after the holidays.

With broken resolutions comes guilt. Sometimes it can motivate us to make another effort around mid-March. But one slip and that weight of guilt comes crashing down like a spring avalanche, and we are trapped.

Especially when our resolutions concern our spiritual life, we set ourselves up to be crushed by a load of guilt when we fall short of doing what we set out to do to get closer to God this year. Buried in our guilt we are keenly aware of our imperfections and our desperate need for God to come and rescue us. But, at the same time, His holiness terrifies us. John Calvin calls this situation our “Dangerous Predicament,” trapped between the “Majesty of God” and our “Need of Salvation.” The ten easy steps to a shinier, happier

### In Him, I Find Joy!

Change is often an unpleasant and scary part of our lives, but it is seldom avoidable. It is nearly the only thing that we can count on.

Although we are all West Coast natives, we lived in Wheaton, Illinois, for nine years, and we loved it there. Our children did their formative growing up there, and the family lifestyle charmed us. Then, in 1994, my husband, Jim, was called to be a pastor at a church in Bellevue, Washington. I was at the dissertation stage of a Ph.D. program in linguistics, and at that time there were very few prospects of linguistics jobs in Washington. But I knew that if God had called Jim there, He was also calling me and the children; so, after prayer and discussion, we agreed to go.

Several years later, when I was just about done with my dissertation, I ended up getting a linguistics job at Microsoft. This position had just been created; it did not exist when we moved to Washington. But

spiritual life are no good to someone trapped in an avalanche. We need a rescue dog. We can depend on keeping our resolutions and trying harder, or we can depend on God and His resolution to save us.

God is not looking for us to come up with a way we can be closer to Him this year and then resolve to do it. He knows we cannot do it. We are setting ourselves up for a massive guilt avalanche if we try. The Gospel, the Good News, is that God has made a way to bring us close to Himself.

It is God’s own love, not our great devotion or our evident worthiness, that prompts God to send His one and only Son, Jesus, on a rescue mission. God’s resolution, to love the world, to bring men and women and children from every corner of the earth into His kingdom through Jesus Christ, unlike our New Year’s resolutions, does not ever fail.

When we are crushed under a load of guilt and buried in our failures, we need to remember the cross and know that by the work of His Holy Spirit, God has already brought us close to Himself—as close as we can get—so close that the Bible describes us as literally “in Christ” and “members of his body.”

And we need to remember that there is only one resolution that gets us this close to God—and that is not our resolution to read our Bible every day, not our resolution to pray more, not our resolution to contribute more to missions this year. It is God’s own resolution to love us so much that He gave His only Son for us, so that believing in Him, we might not perish but have an eternal life to enjoy being with Him in all these other ways.



God knew all along that it would be there for me when the time came. He was indeed trustworthy, as I had expected; the call to Washington was not just for Jim, but also for me. It just took time for me to find out what God had in mind for me.

Meanwhile, the church in Bellevue had also turned out to be wonderful for me. Soon after we moved in 1994, I joined the large Chancel Choir (125 voices), because I dearly love to sing. It was a great experience for me, doing master works as well as weekly anthems and with a director who viewed music within the ministry of the church.

Then, in the fall of 2005, I was diagnosed with cancer and underwent surgery, chemo, and radiation. I have since had two heart problems: in 2007 I had to have a pacemaker, and just this past June I had open-heart surgery. Through it all, the Bellevue church was a wonderful support. For example, because I wanted to stay in choir during my cancer, when I was weak

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during the months of my chemo, the director let me stay seated instead of standing at choir practice. And one month, a group of children at the church all wrote me touching notes.

During that time, this church also helped in other ways. In choir, we sang pieces with words that really struck home, such as "whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill, we'll triumph through our sorrows and rise to praise him still."\* I got to sing that over and over as we rehearsed, and it became engraved in my heart and shaped my attitude during serious illness. And there were so many little kindnesses from so many church members!

During my cancer, I went to a deeper level in my relationship with God, and it was so thrilling that I would never want it to change, not even if I could erase the cancer. God showed me His care and love in the midst of serious illness. He showed me that He was all that I needed. And He showed me I could have joy in Him no matter what the circumstances, real joy that I wouldn't trade for anything. He did this through little gestures of support from church members and through little circumstances that He placed in my way or Bible verses that I happened to read, and so on.

But now Jim and I have again come to a new era in our lives. Jim has just recently been called to pastor

a very small church in Seattle, with only about 45 in worship, and hardly any budget. There are wonderful faithful people, but no choir, and the organ is not used. Since I have been in church choirs for 34 years, this is very hard for me.

But, because of my past experiences moving from Wheaton to Bellevue and at the Bellevue church during my illnesses, I know that following God's will cannot be wrong, no matter what it feels like. God knows what I like and what I need. Just as when we moved to Bellevue, God didn't call Jim to the new church without thinking of me. He has something for me there, too. Even better, he has a way for me to serve him there. This is the same God who gave me such wonderful love and comfort during my illnesses. I owe Him everything. I can follow Him anywhere, and where He is, I will find joy! ♥

- Deborah M. Berkley  
VOW Board Member

\* *O God, Beyond All Praising,* words by Michael Perry; tune *Thaxted*, by Gustav Holst.

## What is FACES OF CHILDREN?

- by The Rev. Dr. Jerry M. Hilton

I remember well the afternoon several years ago - 1999 to be exact - when Margaret Purvis came into the Pastor's Study at First Presbyterian Church, Midland, Texas, and shared her burden for children at risk. That meeting led to a gathering of folks from several churches throughout the community to plan a strategy for highlighting the needs of children locally and throughout the world. It soon became clear that the mission of this ministry would be: 1) **to learn** what is happening with children at risk throughout the world; 2) **to establish networks** with folks and ministries who were working to reach out to children; and 3) **to encourage prayer groups** in churches, neighborhoods, and wherever there was opportunity.

Original conferences held in Midland brought together speakers and leaders who were involved directly in various efforts designed to minister to children. Stellar personalities such as Dr. Phyllis Kilbourn, founder of Rainbows of Hope; John Robb, author and Chair of International Prayer Council; and Hedda Sharapan, associate producer of Mister

Roger's Neighborhood, spoke at the conferences. Eventually, the opportunity was given to hold FACES OF CHILDREN Conferences in Washington D.C., and leading governmental figures were able to share their knowledge and perspectives. One of the keynote speakers was the Hon. John Miller, Ambassador, Office of Monitoring and Combating Human Trafficking, U.S. State Department. Other outstanding speakers included Gary Haugen, founder of International Justice Mission; Baroness Caroline Cox, House of Lords U.K.; and Richard Stearns, President, World Vision. People from around the world came together to focus on ways in which knowledge, care, and advocacy could be shared for the benefit of children. It has been amazing to see how God has blessed this ministry which continues to grow and expand.

Margaret Purvis and others representing Faces of Children have participated in world gatherings and visited children's ministries in the U.S. and in foreign lands. Today, Chris Laufer serves as Program Coordinator for the FACES OF CHILDREN ministry housed at the First Presbyterian Church in Midland. She sends out weekly prayer concerns to over 1,000 intercessors and travels to share the opportunities Christians have to tell the story of what is happening

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with our children and the need to pray. It has always been the position of FACES that prayer is the best thing we can do. Prayer is the heart of this ministry, and FACES believes wholeheartedly that it is prayer that opens doors, empowers people, and breaks the chains that hold children in bondage.

As this article is being written, John King, the host of CNN's "State of the Union," tells of the increasing number of homeless teenagers in Seattle. One agency tells of seeing more than 150 new young people per month. These are our kids. They come from our communities, our schools, our churches. Who will

learn the reasons for their homelessness? Who will work with ministries and agencies seeking to reach these youth and advocate for them? And who will go to their knees in passionate prayer for these homeless teens who feel they have no hope? FACES OF CHILDREN seeks to answer these questions. ♥

For additional information go to [www.facesofchildren.net](http://www.facesofchildren.net) or contact Chris Laufer at [claufer@facesofchildren.net](mailto:claufer@facesofchildren.net) to request our weekly Prayer Concerns for Children.

## God Has a Plan to Bless You

It's Christmas. These two words spark images of warm winter nights highlighted by celebrations with friends and family. We take time to decorate our homes with colorful lights and festive ornaments. We prepare our favorite recipes. We buy gifts to bless those we know and those in need. We mingle with family, friends, and associates at parties to catch up on personal news and the year's events. It is a time to connect and be with family.

As Christmas draws closer I also make plans. I put thought into the gifts I want to give. I take time to organize and create a welcoming home that can receive family and friends with grace and joy. I pay attention to every detail to ensure that everything is perfect. And when Christmas morning finally arrives I look around and smile and tell myself, "Yes, this is good. My family will love this."

That is what God did when He formed the world. He put much thought into each creative act, and He did not stop until it was just right. When He was finished, He stepped back and pronounced it *good*. God is never random, and He is never off-course. And when it comes to mankind, He has a very precise plan for each of our lives to bring about a rich and satisfying result. His plan was developed before the foundation of the world – a plan that He calls *good*.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13) What did God have in mind when He promised a plan that would secure a future and a hope for each of us? It was His invitation to join His family so He can be our God and we can be

His people. That plan involved Him giving us the most priceless Christmas present of all time - the gift of His precious Son. Through faith in His Son we enter into God's family and enjoy the rich inheritance reserved for His sons and daughters. This is the greatest gift of all.

In my work with Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship, I have the honor of being involved in a move of God called the Frontier Mission Movement. It is the place where people from various cultures and tribes experience, for the first time, the hope that Jesus brings when they invite him into their life. In one recent account, a Christian living in a Middle Eastern country ran inside a bookstore to make a purchase and noticed a Muslim cleric sitting at the store's entrance. As he was exiting the store, he felt God prompting him to give the Muslim man a copy of the New Testament. At great personal risk, the Christian turned and graciously offered the Scriptures to the cleric. To his surprise, the man replied, "Something told me I needed to come here and I would receive the Book of Life. I don't even know what that is, but now I know, and I will read it with great joy."

This December, millions of people from around the world will celebrate Christmas for the first time. They will be rejoicing over their newfound discovery that Jesus came to fulfill God's plan for their lives - a plan that is full of hope. As you celebrate Christmas this year, remember God's people from around the world who are joining you in the symphony of joy over the Baby born in a manger. **Merry Christmas!**



by Kathy Giske, Associate Director,  
Presbyterian Frontier Fellowship,  
Seattle, WA.

## Hark! the herald angels sing...

...And the angel said unto them, "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

Luke 2: 10-13

*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, a beloved Christmas hymn sung round the world is the result of the efforts of four men: Charles Wesley, George Whitfield, Felix Mendelssohn, and W.H. Cummings.

Charles Wesley authored this Christmas Day hymn, which was first published in 1739, as 10 four-line verses. Wesley wrote over 6,000 hymns during his life, and was "temperamental" about all his work and insisting that no one change what he had written - to the point of prefacing one of his hymnals with a warning that others not emend the sense or the verse... "to let them stand just as they are, to take things for better or worse, or to add the true reading in the margin, or at the bottom of the page, that we may no longer be accountable for the nonsense or for the doggerel of other men."<sup>1</sup>

However, his friend George Whitfield ignored Wesley's warning. Wesley's original hymn began "Hark, how the welkin rings, Glory to the King of kings" - *welkin* meaning "the vault of heaven." Whitfield changed the lines to "Hark, the herald angels sing, glory to the newborn King." And with this, Whitfield "changed the angels' emphasis: 'Glory to the newborn King' means something slightly but significantly different from 'Glory to the King of kings.'" This source also points out that "in the Gospel account, the angels praise God, whereas in 'Hark! the herald angels sing,' they are inaccurately

described as praising Jesus. Furthermore, Luke does not say that the angels 'sing,' and so it may well be that this reinterpretation by Whitfield has emphasized the popular but unscriptural picture of angels singing the Gloria."<sup>2</sup>

The melody for this hymn is an adaptation by organist W.H. Cummings of the music written by Felix Mendelssohn to commemorate Gutenberg's invention of the printing press.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, Mendelssohn commented that he did not believe this music would be suitable for a hymn or for use in a church. Likewise, Wesley had suggested that a "slow, solemn tune would fit [the words] best."<sup>2</sup>

Another bit of history of this hymn: Of all the hymns written by Charles Wesley, only one appeared in the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer. "An eighteenth-century printer didn't know that the 'established Church' of England frowned with disapproval on Wesley's hymns. He needed to fill an empty space in the Book of Common Prayer and took it upon himself to insert a Christian poem called 'Hark, How All the Welkin Rings!' by an Anglican clergyman named Charles Wesley." Attempts were made to have it removed. However, it was so popular that it was allowed to remain.<sup>3</sup>

Originally written in 1738, the final version of this hymn was published in 1856. *Glory to the King of Kings!*

♥ Tamra Keller  
Copy Editor, VOW

1. *Then Sings my Soul: 150 of the Worlds' Greatest Hymn Stories*, Robert J. Morgan. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003.
2. *O Come Emmanuel: A Musical Tour of Daily Readings for Advent and Christmas*, Gordon Giles, 2006. Paraclete Press [www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com)
3. *Stories of the Christian Hymns*, Helen Ssaalem Rizk. Abingdon Press, 1983.

The editors, writers, Board members, and volunteers of Voices of Orthodox Women pray that you will experience all the joys and blessings of Christmas throughout the year.  
May your witness be true.

Merry Christmas!

Sylvia Dooling



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**THE PURPOSE AND WORK OF VOW**

Voices of Orthodox Women is a nationwide network of women and men committed to the renewal of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) through the promotion of the doctrines and practices of historic, biblical and confessional orthodoxy against those of an encroaching culture.

The work of the VOW network will include:

- ◆ Purposeful and specific prayer for our church and its ministries
- ◆ The encouragement of like-minded individuals and groups
- ◆ The political empowerment of orthodox women
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Calls for accountability
- ◆ A faithful and gently assertive presence

We encourage you to tell others about VOW and to invite them to place their names and addresses on the VOW mailing list. Also, as we can communicate more frequently and more economically by e-mail, we really would like to have your e-mail address. Please feel free to drop me a note at [sdooling@vow.org](mailto:sdooling@vow.org), and be sure to visit our website at <http://www.vow.org>



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*Mild, he lays his glory by,  
Born that man no more may die,  
Born to raise the sons of earth,  
Born to give them second birth:  
Hark! the herald angels sing  
Glory to the newborn King!*

