

Such a Time as This: Advent Reflections for Racial Justice



United
Women
in Faith

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United Women in Faith

Mission

United Women in Faith seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.

Vision

Turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world.



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Opening Letter: An Invitation Into Advent

Dear Friends in Faith,

Advent blessings!

What you are holding is a collective project. We invited a diverse group of United Women in Faith members to share their reflections on Scripture, racial justice, and Advent. Their shared work is the devotional before you now. Each writer has prepared a reflection based on the Revised Common Lectionary, grounded in their own experience, and engaging with the urgent questions of racial justice in this time. We are honored by their contributions and grateful to each of them.

As you read, you will hear the collective sound of many voices. Our life experiences, identities, communities, and theology vary across our connection. We approach Scripture in different ways, and we have had different life journeys. This difference is, itself, a profound spiritual gift. We hope that you will read with attention to places of overlap and places of friction. We hope you will listen, appreciate, and investigate those similarities and differences in your journey while telling your story.

At United Women in Faith, we are deeply committed to the principles of the Charter for Racial Justice. This call is grounded in our faith in Jesus Christ, our love for one another, and our care for all God's people. We know that faithful and honest reflection on racism and racial justice remains vitally important for United Women in Faith and for the broader church. We hope that this devotional helps move forward that conversation while nourishing and strengthening all of us in this Advent season -- a time of preparation, a time of anticipation, a time of reflection, and a time of holy listening. We hope that you will find words of inspiration, comfort, and challenge, and that you will continue to engage deeply with Scripture, engage deeply with each other, and engage deeply with a pressing conversation about racial justice and our call in this time of racial animus, where so many people are living under conditions of fear, poverty, and structural oppression. May we each find our way to living more fully into our call to make a difference for "such a time as this."

With love,



Kenni Cummings
Director, SC Tenant Union
Charleston, South Carolina



Emily Jones
Executive for Racial Justice
United Women in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19;
1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

Sunday, November 29, 2026

Cynthia Morrison Holland



Cynthia Morrison Holland is a consultant for racial justice and decarceration with United Women in Faith, where she advocates for equity and systemic change. She is an active member of Ben Hill United Methodist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, serving as the vision area chair for adult Christian education.

I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

—1 Corinthians 1:4-7 (NIV)

In 2009, my daughter was given a life sentence for a crime she did not commit. In that moment, my world collapsed; I could not experience the grace and peace that Paul talks about. Instead of feeling part of a community, I felt isolated and alone.

Paul opens with a message of grace given to us by God. He offers grace and peace from God our Creator. Our connection to one another through God makes us communal, one family. Paul says God's grace has been given to you as a community, not merely individuals. Grace is not determined by our social status. Grace sees everyone through the eyes of Jesus, where we are all equal, have worth, and dignity. The justice system I met did not see us that way. It is a system that doesn't play fair, especially when it comes to the marginalized and people of color. Justice should be relational, concerned with how people treat one another and how we treat each other, especially the least of these. Winning became more important than truth, and my family became the casualty of a broken system.

We are reminded that we are "enriched" in every way and "not lacking in any spiritual gift." Resources like our gifts are to be used to build up the community and not for self-gain. Access determines outcomes, and inequity shapes the stories of those who suffer. Our identity is rooted in Christ, not in wealth, status, or education. The challenge is to dismantle systemic barriers that exclude marginalized or specific groups.

Paul says believers are “called into fellowship with [God’s] son” (1 Corinthians 1:9). Fellowship with Christ includes solidarity with the suffering, the marginalized, and the oppressed. Social justice requires fellowship, not just contact. It requires dialogue and sharing stories and bringing those who have suffered in silence into public conversation. Fellowship with Christ means standing alongside our brothers and sisters who have been harmed by injustice and working hard toward restoration.

Advent is a season of waiting. We live in the gap between the world as it is and the world when Christ will return to make things right. Waiting was the hardest part of my journey. There was work in the waiting. I had to learn to wait by serving, by loving, by using the gifts God has placed within me.

After sharing my story, the community stepped in, and a stranger paid the lawyers’ fees and other expenses for my daughter, Michelle Morrison. Her life sentence was overturned after serving 13 years in prison. She was able to come out better, not bitter. One year after her release, she received a master’s degree in Positive Psychology. There is so much more I could say, but God’s faithfulness sustained me as I waited.

Let us pray

Lord, in this Advent season, teach us to wait with courage and hope. When justice feels distant, and our hearts feel isolated, remind us that your grace gathers us into a fellowship where no one is forgotten. Strengthen us to stand with the suffering, to serve with compassion, and to trust your faithfulness as we wait for the day You make all things right. Amen.



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Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 79; Micah 4:1-5;

Revelation 15:1-8

Monday, November 30, 2026

Cindy Andrade-Johnson

For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever.

—Micah 4:5 (NRSVUE)

Advent has always been my favorite time of year. My parents made it a fun time to prepare for and learn about Jesus' coming. As a young person, I had a narrow view of the time because I was sheltered from the hardships going on around.

As an adult, after reading Scripture and being exposed to much more of life, I see Advent as so much more. Micah 4:1-5 speaks to my current context. I live among many migrants who are suffering, but this Scripture gives us hope for the future of all people around the world. As United Methodists, we believe that God is the creator of all people, and all are God's children in one family. Therefore, we must act by supporting and participating in the worldwide struggle for liberation in church and community.

Micah 4:1 says, "In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it" (NIV). The Scripture opens and reminds us that people are always migrating to a better future. Let's prepare for the good news. As the text continues, we are reminded that people from all over the world will learn to live as Jesus taught us. We will each care for and love all people. Although Micah is an Old Testament Scripture, we are reminded that our wonderful leader, Jesus, teaches us to work together and love one another. This work is laborious. This passage ends with the reminder that we will not be afraid. We have all we need to be happy. It sounds a lot like heaven on earth. Here we get to live in harmony with our God and people of all nations.



Deaconess Cindy Andrade-Johnson is a humanitarian advocate who has worked with migrants. She lives with her husband, Mike Johnson, on the US/Mexican border in Brownsville, Texas. Her home church is Travis Park United Methodist Church. Andrade-Johnson is currently working as a consultant in the following areas: education, cultural competence, migration, and missiology.

In my current context, I dedicate much of my life to supporting neighbors who are migrants. This is entirely volunteer-based labor, and I am joined by many others in this struggle. Much of my understanding of this mission was shaped by United Women in Faith. Social media and news headlines frequently present a narrow narrative that often fails to capture the daily reality and inherent dignity of these remarkable individuals. Just as our perception of the Advent season evolves, I want us to remember that our perspective on the hardships our neighbors face can also be transformed. This transformation happens when we are willing to learn, participate in the work, and listen for God's guidance.

Let us pray

God, thank you for allowing us to reflect on your teachings. We, as your followers, know and experience a lot of suffering in this world. Yet we all have faith and hope that you will guide us into a better future, as written in Scripture. Please give us courage to try to make a better world now here on earth for all who are suffering. Continue to teach us to live and love as our God and beloved Jesus taught us. Amen.



United
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Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 79; Micah 4:6-13;

Revelation 18:1-10

Tuesday, December 1, 2026

Ijumaa Jordan

Arise and thresh, O daughter Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples, and shall devote their gain to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.
—Micah 4:13 (NRSVA)



Ijumaa Jordan is a speaker, workshop presenter, and ABAR educator. She is an active lay member of First United Methodist Church North Hollywood (NoHo First) in Southern California. There, she is a Church Bestie, a Back Pew Shouter, and the Designated Cake Cutter during fellowship.

Ah, the beginning of the Christmas season! The carols, the cookies, and the Christmas movies that I've seen so many times—I can quote the characters' lines. As an adult, I look forward to wearing my cute Christmas pajamas and special holiday outfits that are usually overflowing with glitter and sparkle. I intentionally create for myself and my loved ones a joyous season full of merriment and an abundance of fun activities. This season is also a time of contemplation and reflection. There has been a lot for me to contemplate this year.

Watching the news over the past year, I noticed quick mentions of the rising unemployment rate of Black women in the United States. In 2025, the figure was 7.5 percent. When the numbers come out for 2026, it's predicted to be higher. This isn't just a statistic for me; it's my real life. As an independent early education consultant who specializes in anti-bias, anti-racist work, whose contracts are mainly with publicly funded organizations, the recent policy changes have meant canceled contracts due to lack of funding. You can imagine the hardship of having anticipated work gone, not because of my lack of expertise and skill, but because of my race and gender. There is some shame in how easily I slipped into despair and worry. The self-doubt crept in, whispering that maybe dedicating my work to the care and education of young children and the adults in their lives was not a financially wise choice.

However, Micah 4:13 reminds me that I am called to "arise and thresh." For me, that means the hard work of liberation from oppressive education systems is what God has equipped me to do. Often, harvesting the seeds of liberation requires using our strength, power, and influence. This work is not just my individual calling (Daughters of Zion) but our collective calling as women of faith. As we move through this season of Advent, joyously anticipating the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, I want us to know that we are called and equipped to co-create God's kin-dom on earth.

Let us pray

Thank you, God, for your love, grace, and mercy. Thank you for the wisdom found in your word. Open my heart to hear your call to righteousness and to do good in the world. Reveal to me my unique gifts to build your kin-dom. Provide me with the strength and courage needed for what you have called me to do. I go forward in the love and the light of Christ. For this and all things, I am grateful. Amen.

See the following articles for more information about how the current job market impacts women of color:

Jessica Mason, Katherine Gallagher Robbins, "Weak job market leaves Black women behind," National Partnership for Women and Families, February 11, 2026, nationalpartnership.org/weak-job-market-leaves-black-women-behind-jobsday-feb-2026.

Chabeli Carrazana, "Black women's unemployment is rising. Economists say it's a warning sign." The 19th, July 3, 2025, 19thnews.org/2025/07/black-women-unemployment-jobs-warning-sign.



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Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 79; Micah 5:1- 5a;

Luke 21:34-38

Wednesday, December 2, 2026

Mikaela Weimer

How long will you rage, Lord? Forever?
How long will your anger burn like fire?
Pour out your wrath on the nations
who don't know you,
on the kingdoms
that haven't called on your name.

We are, after all, your people
and the sheep of your very own pasture.
We will give you thanks forever;
we will proclaim your praises
from one generation to the next.
—Psalm 79:5-6, 13 (CEB)

This is a heavy passage, but then so are the times we are living in. Some context is needed. The “they” are the Babylonians. This is thought to have been written during the third time they attacked Jerusalem in 20 years and ultimately destroyed it under King Nebuchadnezzar II.

In every situation there is an aggressor, and there is a victim. There are those who have privilege and those who do not. We see this passage and its connection to today. In 2026, one of the biggest privileges that you can have is to be a white Christian. Unfortunately, there is a growing number of white Christians who feel that this is not a privilege but rather causes them to be oppressed. White Christian nationalism is no longer a fringe belief but rather is now its rhetoric, spewed by elected officials. Psalm 79:1 can easily be rewritten with the rhetoric that many political figures use today: The **nations immigrants** have come into your inheritance, God! They've defiled **your holy temple our way of life**. They've made **Jerusalem our country** a bunch of ruins. It's eerie!



Mikaela Weimer (she/her) is a behavior support provider working with youth in foster care. Since 2010, she has been involved with United Women in Faith via Mission u, serving as a youth study leader and dean. Her passions include faith, justice, advocacy, lifelong learning, and strengthening children, families, and communities through meaningful action.

If the passage is reviewed again, but this time flipping it so that white Christians are not the victims but rather the aggressors, it would read: The **Christian nationalists** have come into your inheritance, God! They've defiled your holy **kin-dom**. They've made **your kin-dom** a bunch of ruins. Both versions of this send Matthew 22:39, "love your neighbor as yourself," out the window.

Oppression has been around since biblical times, just as there have been people who fight oppression, i.e., Moses and Jesus. To act like Jesus can feel scary if you have privilege. It can be easier to sit and ignore what is happening in the world around you as long as it's not happening to you. That's not what Jesus did. Many disciples turned their backs on Jesus at one point or another, but they came back because they took a moment to hit pause and reevaluate. It is never too late. Jesus spoke up when he saw oppression; he didn't say, "not my problem." While I have the privilege of being white and working in places at the margin, I recognize that Jesus would want me to flip tables that it would be easier for me to sit at. Privilege has not made me a victim but rather given me more privilege to flip the table. If you read this and align with the idea that the "others" are the problem, I am challenging you to ask, what would Jesus do? Because Jesus spoke up.

Now, you may be thinking this is the start of Advent. Why are we talking about the rise of white Christian nationalism? Well, as we are in this Advent season, we are not only counting down to the birth of Christ, but also the birth of a new year. Baby Jesus was a blank canvas, just as 2027 is. Jesus is the dawn of new mercies. We are full of possibilities. We know what Jesus did with his canvas. What will we do?

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, help me to see past my blind spots and places where I have been an oppressor. Help me come to and from this season of Advent ready to fight against the systems that I may benefit from if they oppress others. Help me act like Jesus, not just today but every day going forward. In Jesus' name we pray, amen!



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Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; Hosea 6:1-6;
1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

Thursday, December 3, 2026

Darlene DiDomineck

Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.

—Psalm 85:10 (NIV)



Darlene DiDomineck is a United Methodist deaconess, appointed to serve as the State Organizer for Pennsylvania for Bread for the World. She currently serves as the Vice Chair of the National Association of Deaconesses and Home Missioners (NADHM).

I grew up poor in the midst of a privileged church community. Some people knew my family's struggles. Many didn't. Like so many families, we carried both deep faith and quiet burdens. The church did not always reflect the expansive welcome of God's kin-dom. Sometimes it missed the realities of poverty that were sitting right in the pews. Yet even in its imperfections, it introduced me to a God whose table was always bigger than the world's scarcity. That vision has shaped both my faith and my vocation. It also shapes how I read Psalm 85 during Advent.

As a deaconess, I believe that one of the holiest questions we can ask is: Who are we in community with? That question echoes through Psalm 85. Advent teaches us that faithful waiting is never passive. It calls us to wait not with folded hands but with lives open to God and our neighbors, creating spaces where love and faithfulness meet, righteousness and peace embrace, and all can flourish.

The psalm imagines more than inner peace or personal salvation. It imagines communities restored. The land yields its harvest. Love and faithfulness embrace. Righteousness and peace kiss. God's glory dwells among the people.

In Scripture, righteousness is about more than personal morality. The word carries the sense of right relationship, covenant faithfulness, and solidarity with one another. It is God's justice made visible through communities that refuse to leave anyone behind. Perhaps that is why righteousness "prepares the way," because every act of solidarity makes room for God's reign to break into our world.

If righteousness is about right relationship, then it also asks us to confront the realities that fracture those relationships. Hunger and poverty never exist in isolation. The racism woven into the very fabric of U.S. history continues to shape who has access to food, housing, healthcare, wealth, and opportunity. We cannot proclaim peace while ignoring the systems that deny some communities the opportunity to flourish. Charity is an expression of compassion, but justice asks a deeper question: What must change so that everyone has enough?

That question has become the heartbeat of my ministry. I have shared meals with neighbors, worshiped alongside communities organizing for change, and now serve as an organizer with Bread for the World, helping build the collective power that can end hunger in our lifetime. Every shared meal reflects God's abundance. Every relationship nurtured, every story honored, and every act of faithful advocacy helps prepare the way for Christ.

Advent reminds us that waiting is never passive. We prepare the way by practicing solidarity. We prepare the way by telling the truth about injustice while refusing to surrender hope. We prepare the way by believing that God's beloved community is not merely a future promise but something already breaking into the present whenever love and faithfulness meet together and righteousness and peace embrace.

Let us pray

God of restoration, open our ears to your promise of peace and our hearts to your call for justice. Teach us to move beyond charity into solidarity, binding our lives to our neighbors as Christ has bound himself to us. As we await the coming of Christ, make us people who prepare the way through love, courage, and hope. May our lives bear witness to your beloved community, where all are fed, all belong, and all can flourish. Amen.



United
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Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13; Jeremiah 1:4-10;

Acts 11:19-26

Friday, December 4, 2026

Linda Johnson Crowell

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

—Acts 11:19-21 (NIV)

What's the best news you've heard lately? Sometimes that may be hard to answer considering the negative headlines that continuously bombard us. What would have been your reaction to the prophecy of Jesus' birth from Isaiah? "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6, NIV). This prophecy of Jesus' birth is the Good News, a cornerstone of the Christian faith proclaiming the Christ who fulfills God's plan for salvation. There are no limitations on who the beneficiaries are.

As we view this prophecy of the universal Christ child alongside the passage in Acts, we see that God stamps approval upon the long-denied, often despised Gentiles. The Good News crosses cultural boundaries. This Good News Child came for all people, suffered, died, and was resurrected for all people.

The bad news of the persecution of Jews after the stoning of Stephen set the stage for the expansion of the Good News. After the Good News (Jesus) ascended into heaven, his followers scattered, sharing the Good News only with the Jews they encountered. "The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord" (Acts 11:21, NIV).



Dr. Linda Johnson Crowell, a native of Columbus, Georgia, is a dedicated member of Aldersgate United Methodist Church in Warrensville Heights, Ohio, and currently serves as president of the North Central Jurisdiction United Women in Faith and as president of the Board for the West Side Community House.

But some who went to Antioch began speaking to the Gentiles. God's grace is available to all who believe. God had welcomed Gentile believers into God's family on equal terms with believing Jews. That's Good News. Listen, bearers of the name Christian, followers of the Good News, we should be the bearers of the Good News to everyone.

We should examine our own biases, connect with communities that embrace diversity, reflect on our own barriers and prejudices—cultural, racial, or personal—that might hinder acceptance and love. We should challenge those who seek to limit diversity and acceptance of all. We should be willing to share the Good News with new groups with joy, courage, and obedience.

As I reflect on growing up in segregated Georgia, I have vivid memories of the ways society limited my options and attempted to constrain my destiny. But I also have reminders of how our teachers taught us to persevere and excel despite our limitations. I have inspiration from how the Good News assured us we were children of the Most High and how our small church taught us about the Good News who came to offer salvation to everybody. I was not aware of the distinction between Jews and Gentiles; I just cherished the thought that in our final destination there would be no segregation. All believers would get our white robes and shout for joy.

Believers are inspired and challenged to step beyond comfort zones and share God's love, the Good News, with others. I endeavor to do this in a wide range of interactions through church and society. This section of Acts reminds us of the transformative power of the gospel and the unity it brings among believers from diverse backgrounds, all under the banner of Christ—the Good News. God's plan always incorporated a united family made up of diverse backgrounds. This should inspire us to embody an inclusive approach in our own lives and communities.

Let us pray

Loving and Holy God, we thank you that you made the Good News available to everyone—Jews and Gentiles. Your gift of salvation knows no boundaries. Your love is not limited; it is expansive and inclusive. This is an example that we will strive to embody. In your early church, the barriers were broken down. Let us endeavor to include, invite, and advocate for all. Let us be inclusive in our sharing of the Good News. Let us celebrate our diversity and spread the Good News in word and deed. Amen.



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Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 85:1-2, 8-13; Ezekiel 36:24-28;

Mark 11:27-33

Saturday, December 5, 2026

Kelly Grace Loeb

**A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you;
and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give
you a heart of flesh.**

—Ezekiel 36:26 (NRSVUE)

Peru was not in my plans.

When an unexpected opportunity arose to join a group of Missouri United Methodists traveling there, I recognized that my experiences as a Spanish-speaking social worker could be useful, so I asked if I could tag along. “Yes!” they said, and less than one month later, I was flying across the equator on my way to Lima. I arrived ready to contribute. What I had not anticipated was how much I would receive.

Through Ezekiel, God promises, “I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” I wrestle with this image because I don’t think of myself as having a heart of stone. What is this promise asking of me? I wonder, and I pray. My flesh—and my heart—are alive, touching and being touched. Both feel and respond, change and are changed. Perhaps a heart of flesh is one that remains alive to transformation.

As a Black woman, I know what it means to claim intentional visibility in spaces where I am hidden. Racial justice calls us to recognize people whom our communities, churches, and institutions have rendered invisible. Seeing is only a beginning. True encounter challenges the presumption that some voices belong at the center while others remain at the margins. It asks whether we are willing to listen, receive, and be changed by one another.

Alongside pastors from Peru and Missouri, I worshiped in Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, and English. Together, we shared stories, meals, dancing, and the kind of laughter that comes from racing with limes on spoons between clenched teeth. Our conference theme, “Invisible Visible,” guided my flesh-made heart to recognize that visibility includes touching and being touched, offering and receiving, changing and being changed.



Kelly Grace Loeb belongs to St. Andrew UMC in Kansas City, Missouri. As a member of the United Women in Faith Board of Directors, she chairs the Reading Program Committee and serves on the General Board of Global Ministries. Loeb is a social worker who engages communities in striving for a world in which Alzheimer’s disease is just a memory.

Advent promises that God arrives among us. God draws near in flesh, touching and being touched, entering the fullness of human life. Our flesh-made hearts are called to meet God there.

Peru was not in my plans. Neither was what it awoke in me. Perhaps that is part of Advent's invitation: to remain awake to God among us and open to the liberating work of becoming something new.

Let us pray

God of unexpected encounters, give us hearts of flesh: hearts alive to your presence and willing to see, to listen, to receive, and to be changed. Keep us responsive to one another as you draw us closer to you and make us courageous participants in your work of justice, liberation, and peace. Amen.



United
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Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13;
2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Sunday, December 6, 2026

Megan Hale

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him'."

—Mark 1:3 (NIV)

During the time of this text, the people were living under imperial occupation. Rome had taken over and was controlling the people through military force, taxation, political hierarchy, economic extraction, and corruption.

Yet at the same time, Rome provided roads, protection, trade, and stability. It is easy to ignore injustice and oppression if you aren't the one being oppressed. Those who benefit from a system may have little reason to question it.

It is significant that the voice crying out comes from the wilderness. It is not possible to prepare the way of the Lord while remaining comfortably at the center of the systems that benefit some and not others.

John chooses an ordinary place outside the societal structures to share the good news that a Savior is coming, and the entire community shows up to be baptized in the River Jordan. As a community, they enter the water together, and they confess their sins.

Imagine being met in the wilderness today by one who asks us to confess our communal sins—to confess the ways in which we as a community have perpetuated the systems and structures that continue to cause harm. Imagine being asked to acknowledge that we are part of, and may even benefit from, systems that value some people more than others.

To prepare the way of the Lord is to recognize that racism, colonialism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and the many ways in which society determines whose bodies, identities, lives, and relationships are more worthy of acceptance, protection, and belonging than others are systemic forms of injustice.



Deaconess Megan Hale (she/her) serves as an executive for the Office of Deaconess and Home Missioner, accompanying people as they discern and live into the deaconess/home missioner relationship.

To prepare the way of the Lord is to recognize the many ways in which immigrants and refugees are treated as threats rather than loved as neighbors. It is to confess the ways we have participated in or remained silent about systems that dehumanize and exclude.

To prepare the way of the Lord is to admit that we are part of an economic system that allows enormous wealth and power to accumulate in the hands of a few, while others struggle for basic housing, healthcare, food, and a living wage. To prepare the way of the Lord is to confess the ways that we benefit from these systems.

To prepare the way of the Lord is to participate in communal confession, but the work doesn't end there. Acknowledging our part in systemic sin is only the first step. It must be followed by working together to remove barriers, dismantle systems of injustice, and build a community where all people can experience the dignity, belonging, and liberation that God intends.

John calls the people of Judea into the water. Perhaps John is calling us into the water as well. Let us enter the water together, confess together, interrupt systems of injustice together, and work together to build a beloved community as we prepare the way of the Lord.

Let us pray

God of the wilderness, as we prepare the way of the Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit and guide us toward love, justice, and service. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 27; Isaiah 26:7-15;

Acts 2:37-42

Monday, December 7, 2026

Grace Okerson

**Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries,
for false witnesses have risen against me,
and they are breathing out violence.**

**I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.**

**Wait for the Lord;
be strong, and let your heart take courage;
wait for the Lord!**

—Psalm 27:12-14 (NRSVUE)

I've never been good at waiting. Waiting for a job offer, waiting for test results, waiting for justice, waiting for God to move. As a society, we have such a hard time waiting. Our sense of instant gratification stirs within us. We want it, and we want it now! Waiting becomes obsolete when the knowledge of the world feels like it's at our fingertips, when our culture dictates a go-go-go mindset, and when companies like Amazon promise you two-day and overnight shipping at the press of a button.

In the Advent season, we spend intentional time waiting and anticipating the coming of Christ into the world. Our waiting is not passive. We wait expectantly, knowing that the light is entering into the world to overcome darkness.

I was 23 years old when I first moved to Atlanta, Georgia, for grad school. I moved into a quaint duplex with a couple and their son living in the unit next to me. I hoped for a cordial living arrangement; however, it was anything but. They would leave letters in my mailbox likening me and my other Black friends to hyenas. The letters were riddled with lies about my behavior and threats of calling the police. I felt unsafe in my own home. I waited for things to get better. I hoped and prayed that keeping my head down would grant me a level of peace and safety. The letters kept coming—and I felt alone in the darkness of it all.



Grace Okerson is a provisional deacon in the Florida Conference of The United Methodist Church. Okerson is a community cultivator and social justice agitator who has committed her life to seeking justice and abundant life for all whom God has called very good.

While the waiting was difficult, I did not wait alone. I waited in community. My friends surrounded me with care. I spent the night at their houses and they at mine. They brought me meals and made me laugh. God also waited with me, cultivating a new sense of resiliency. When my landlord intervened, things began to change. The letters became more infrequent and eventually stopped. I could have broken my lease and moved, but I trusted that something would change. My landlord even refused to rent to them the next year because of the taunting and friction they caused. I finally felt like I could breathe. I finally felt as though there was a light at the end of the year-long tunnel. So many are still waiting for their darkness to be overcome. Perhaps someone is out there waiting for you. Perhaps you will be the light in someone else's darkness.

The writer of Psalm 27 is not only waiting, but they are trusting. They are trusting that God WILL show up. This psalm is noted as a triumphant song of confidence. Throughout the verses, the psalmist reiterates their trust that the Lord is going to show up. In the face of evildoers, armies, war, enemies, adversaries, and false witnesses, the Lord will be there. They are trusting that their waiting isn't wasted. Whatever this season of expectant waiting may bring, I hope you know that your waiting isn't in vain. Trust that the divine will meet you in your waiting.

Let us pray

Holy One who meets us in the waiting, calm our spirits and guide our steps. Help us to trust that you will show up in our times of trials and tribulations. Remind us that you are our light and salvation and that we will see your goodness in the land of the living. Help us to wait well, holding onto the hope that the waiting isn't wasted. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 27; Isaiah 4:2-6;

Acts 11:1-18

Tuesday, December 8, 2026

Prerna BalaEddy

**One thing I asked of the Lord;
this I seek:**

**to live in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the Lord,
and to inquire in his temple.**

**For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.
—Psalm 27:4-5 (NIV)**

I am a Sunday school teacher at my church, and one of our lessons this past summer focused on a service project, “Bags of Grace,” which were hygiene and snack bags to be handed out to unhoused neighbors in our city of Washington, DC. The Sunday school students (ranging from ages 3–11) were tasked with assembling the bags and decorating the white paper bags with pictures and messages for our neighbors.

To be honest, we did not have any specific instructions for them in terms of how to relate to our unhoused neighbors. In certain parts of DC, including where the church and my undergraduate university are located, we do not see homelessness directly on our doorstep. However, the reality is that 5,000+ individuals in DC are experiencing homelessness, based on the 2026 Point in Time Count.¹

Looking back, I also did not witness homelessness in DC on a daily basis until I started graduate school and my first job downtown. After passing unhoused persons on my post-work runs, one day, I told myself that I needed to have short conversations with five of these neighbors during my run. To hear their genuine “thank-you” for just a short conversation was a learning experience. The reality is that, in urban areas, you pass by unhoused neighbors, but society has made it so easy to count them simply as a statistic of homelessness, not as a neighbor in need of a dwelling place.



Prerna BalaEddy is a life-time member of The United Methodist Church. She recently joined the United Women in Faith Board as a Resources Coordinator at her church in Washington, DC, National United Methodist Church. In the last two years, BalaEddy has greatly enjoyed getting to know the global United Women in Faith more through their Soul Care Circle program and the UWFaith Digital platform. She is assistant director on the Middle East Project at George Washington University.

Back in the summer Sunday school class, our bag assemblers homed in on the task of decorating the bags. One young child who could not yet write covered her bag with hearts. A few of the older children wrote messages such as “May God bless you” or “May God keep you safe.” Looking back, I am struck by the children’s drawings and words; their sincerity in sharing their “hearts” or eagerness to extend wishes of safety. I cannot help but think of King David’s prayer to God in Psalm 27. He asks for both physical and spiritual shelter: that he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, that God will keep him safe in God’s dwelling, and that God will hide him in the shelter of God’s sacred tent.

In this time of Advent, I think especially of those who do not have dwellings or shelters of their own, neither physical nor spiritual/emotional. I am continually sitting with the idea that a dwelling or shelter is not only a place where someone lives, but it is also about the world we are creating for each other. From the youngest child to the oldest person, we all consciously or subconsciously desire to feel safe within a dwelling place, to feel love within our dwelling space. For those of us who have it, it is so easy to forget how precious this is. And how hard it is to remember the depths of longing for those who do not have it.

Let this Advent season be different, particularly for those of us living in cities or populous areas. As we walk or drive from place to place and pass our unhoused neighbors—keeping in mind what our own personal situation will allow—let us consider sharing our own “bag of grace,” whatever form it may take.

Let us pray

Thank you, Lord, for each dwelling place and shelter you have given us. In the form of the roof above our heads, and in the form of the family and friends who lovingly surround us. During this Advent season, we especially think of our neighbors who do not have a physical, spiritual, or emotional dwelling place. Give us the courage and capability to extend grace to these neighbors. In Jesus’ name, amen.

1. Government of the District of Columbia, 2026 Point-In-Time Results Provide Latest Snapshot of Homelessness in the District, Executive Office of the Mayor, May 12, 2026, <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/2026-point-time-results-provide-latest-snapshot-homelessness-district>.



United
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Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 27; Malachi 2:10-3:1;

Luke 1:5-17

Wednesday, December 9, 2026

Jana Jones

**Look, I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me;
suddenly the Lord whom you are seeking will come to his temple.
The messenger of the covenant in whom you take delight is coming,
says the Lord of heavenly forces.
—Malachi 3:1 (CEB)**



Jana Jones is the National President of United Women in Faith, serving from the Mountain Sky Conference. She is a member of United Women in Faith at Smoky Hill United Methodist Church in Centennial, Colorado.

In this prophetic biblical text, Malachi writes at a post-exilic time when he accuses the temple leaders of corruption, spiritual laziness, and allowing social injustice to flourish. They shrug off his accusations, saying God must be indifferent. If God cared, God would not allow the wicked people to prosper and the downtrodden to suffer. This could have been written today. Why does God allow evil people to prosper? Where is the God of Justice?

I recently attended a vigil at a detention center in the Denver area. About 150 people of faith gathered outside to sing, to pray, to listen to our bishop speak, and to hear the stories of families whose loved ones were inside. On the other side of the wall, up to 1,500 people were incarcerated, a great many whose only “crime” was to have risked great danger to reach this country to make a better life. It was heartbreaking. We were told that they could hear us. We shouted, “*¡No están solo!*” (You are not alone!) That was our goal: to let them know someone cared. God loves them. They have not been forgotten.

Where is the God of Justice? We witness people being vilified to make them seem “dangerous.” DEI programs, designed to give harmed people a “leg up,” have been eliminated because, we are told, they discriminate against the dominant race. Cuts to social benefits have only benefited billionaires. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to get wider. There are accusations of “toxic empathy,” as if compassion were a bad word. We cry, “Where is the God of Justice?” What is God doing about the evils of the world?

God’s response in Malachi 3:1 is, “I am sending my messenger who will clear the path before me.” And, “The messenger of the covenant in whom you take delight is coming.” We, as Christians, read this prophecy as the coming of John the Baptist, and the messenger of the covenant as the Messiah.

As we spend our time in Advent, preparing the way of the Lord, may we remember that the Messiah did come, as promised. We are not alone. We have not been forgotten. God has given us the instructions we need to make this world as God intends it, a world of abundance, a world where all are valued, where all know love. We know what we need to do. May we have the wisdom, the courage, and the will to do it by following Jesus.

Let us pray

Holy God, we thank you for sending us Christ, the messenger of your covenant. This Advent, may we spend time studying, listening to your word, and contemplating that through the gift of Christ, you have shown us what we must do to bring justice to a hurting world. Help us to be in relationship with one another, to listen with our hearts and care for one another. May we call out evil as we see it, may we speak the truth as Christ taught us, and may we love like Jesus. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 126; Habakkuk 2:1-5;

Philippians 3:7-11

Thursday, December 10, 2026

Darlene Alfred

I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ

—Philippians 3:7-8 (NLT)

One of my favorite gospel songs is “Graves into Gardens.” The chorus says, “Oh, there’s nothing better than You, Lord, there’s nothing better than You.” Every time I hear it, I think back to a time in my life when I thought everything I had of “value,” all the things I had worked for to bring me what I perceived as success had been taken out of reach, and the relationship with my spouse that I thought was my only path towards happiness was no more.

In a military move, all of “our” personal belongings, my most valuable things, had been shipped ahead. This was prior to my finding out that my spouse had taken steps to inform his command, but not me, that the marriage was ending. When I inquired how I was to retrieve my valuables from where they had been shipped, I was told of others who unfortunately found themselves in a similar, if not the same, situation, and advised how to proceed. There was a system in place to retrieve these “things of value.”

However, I did not have the means, nor did I meet the “criteria.” I was in a bad space, as I needed these things—clothing, furniture, transportation—to provide my children with basic needs and to establish some stability in their lives as well as mine. When I couldn’t get anything accomplished, I reached out to some of those who I knew had been successful at receiving their belongings and to those who had not been successful to see if I could ascertain what I needed to do. After I spoke to both sets of women, it was clear that those who were not successful had one thing in common: they were African American or women of color. This was in the mid-80s, when there were high poverty levels and low employment rates.



Darlene Alfred, a native of Detroit, Michigan, currently lives and serves in the newly unified Horizon Texas Conference in district leadership. She is a member of the Racial Justice Charter Support Team. She continues to organize and facilitate leadership retreats and workshops on Domestic Violence Awareness, Mass Incarceration, and Diversity and Racism in the Church.

The requirements to retrieve these valuables required access to and availability of a specific amount of funds, a certain credit rating, established residency, long-term employment, and letters of reference from certain members in the community. At the time, I was not aware of the phrase “institutional racism,” but looking back, I see it was one of my earliest experiences, as these requirements seemed excessive.

I reached out to women who found themselves in the same or a similar situation, and at first we were simply comforting one another. I was able to make some arrangements that would allow my children and me to move on; I was able to go back to my former employer, found a new church home, a United Methodist church, where they loved my children and me, and I realized that while those things were valuable, they did not compare to the love of God and peace of mind I found once I remembered the importance and the value of my relationship with Jesus Christ overall.

Later, a few of us decided we needed to do something to shine a bright light on this, not necessarily for us, but for those that would come behind us. A small group was formed to address these and other such situations that seemed to be especially designed to affect people of color with the help of the local NCO wives association. I am still in contact with many of those women today in various racial justice and social action issues involving racial or socioeconomic discrimination, knowing that there are safeguards currently in place to address what we endured over 40 years ago.

Philippians 3:7-11 means that knowing Jesus Christ is worth far more than any worldly success, human status, or good deeds. It took me some time to realize that while I had lost some things that I valued, I had so much more. I realized that these things could not compare to the peace of mind that comes when you seek and pursue a deeper relationship with God. Understanding that God knows my flaws and failures, my sins and transgressions, God loves me anyway and will still satisfy all my needs. The reality that knowing Jesus Christ is far better than anything the world could provide has a worth that is immeasurable.

Let us pray

Creator God, you call us to live in community and care for one another; you guide us through the love you revealed to us, and you invite us to seek the kingdom of your son Jesus. We pray for the spirit of grace to forgive where we have been wronged, to admit that we are imperfect beings, and we pray that all eyes are opened to see justice and mercy in our everyday lives. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 126; Habakkuk 3:2-6;

Philippians 3:12-16

Friday, December 11, 2026

Maryann Verghese

It's not that I have already reached this goal or have already been perfected, but I pursue it, so that I may grab hold of it because Christ grabbed hold of me for just this purpose.

—Philippians 3:12 (CEB)

The worst part of a half marathon is Mile Nine, from my limited experience. It's the third quarter, where you can sense the end, but there are still four miles to go. Muscles may be aching, breathing is getting harder, and discomfort is setting in. This is Paul writing to the church in Philippi as a Roman prisoner in this third quarter. If there was any time to give up hope, Paul's imprisonment in Rome would be such a time. However, Paul reminds the church that we are still in the middle of the race, and that we need to press on to the goal. The mess of the in-between.

As a biracial South Asian woman, I am familiar with the stickiness of the in-between. I have heard both the "Where are you really from?" as my skin color automatically labels me an outsider and the "I don't see you as Indian; you're my friend!" as if my relationship, familiarity, or proximity to whiteness "fixes" me. It can be easier to avoid the messiness that comes from sitting in the discomfort of the in-between.

Reflecting on what lies behind, the scope and depth of racism seem daunting. From interpersonal bias to the structural sins of mass incarceration, climate change, and poverty, racism seems so entrenched in our reality. It can be easy for some of us to turn away from the work or set it aside for a future problem. Is it worth it to question that comment? Who am I to oppose that policy? What if I do it wrong? What if we try and mess it up?

Yet, our heavenly call is to follow Jesus' teaching of building our world toward love. This includes sitting through the uncomfortable conversations, feelings, and situations that can stop us from working for justice. It's often through this discomfort that we mature and grow. As we build courage to sit through this discomfort, God reveals ways for us to mature and grow in the midst of joy and



Maryann Verghese is a consultant with United Women in Faith as the managing editor of **response** magazine and as a mobilization, advocacy, and leadership development consultant. She was born, raised, and currently lives on the traditional land of the Acjachemen people in Southern California with family roots in India and Arkansas. She is a candidate for ordination in the PC (USA).

struggle, pleasant surprises, and weary predictability. God reorients our vision to the ever-expanding vision for the kin-dom of heaven here on earth. Through it all, we hold fast to what we've collectively attained by joining all those throughout time who have been working for boundary-breaking justice.

We long for a world where racism does not exist. Where the glorious diversity of God's creation is celebrated. Where the kin-dom of God is fully realized. However, for now, we "press on to the goal" of living out the loving vision of Jesus. And that means sitting in the discomfort of the in-between.

Out of all times, Advent is a season of waiting and sitting in the discomfort of the in-between; we sit in the hopeful arrival of Christmas with the murky uncertainty of a world in which a delicate baby will enter as a savior. This Advent, I'm working to strain forward into the discomfort and make brave choices to continue the work for justice. I invite you to join me to see where God is working in the in-between.

Let us pray

God of the in-between, give us strength to hold fast to what lies ahead. As we hold fast to what we have attained, invigorate our spiritual muscles to press on in the discomfort of our world. Grant us clarity, resilience, and vision as we strive toward your goal of loving justice for all. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 126; Habakkuk 3:13-19;
Matthew 21:28-32

Saturday, December 12, 2026

Amanda Robbins

**May those who sow in tears
reap with shouts of joy.
Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy,
carrying their sheaves.
—Psalm 126:5-6 (NRSVUE)**



Amanda Robbins has a B.A. in Sociology and Religion, a certificate in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and is currently in the Master of Divinity program at Union Theological Seminary in New York. Robbins has also served as a seminarian intern for United Women in Faith in the Office of Racial Justice. She is passionate about social change, community partnership, and supporting those most harmed by oppressive systems. Robbins lives in Philadelphia.

During Advent season, I am hyper-aware of the deep and varying emotions that join us throughout our lives. Feelings of sadness, joy, longing, excitement, passion, and peace flood my system as November rolls into December. We are called to live in the present moment, spending time with our loved ones while also remembering those who are no longer with us.

Many of us sit around tables full of food after participating in food drives or providing meals for those without. The season itself calls us to celebrate and honor the birth of our Savior, holding the duality of joy in birth and pain in a death to come. Psalm 126 invites us into a holy dance with the breadth of emotions and experiences that accompany us in life. We read of the mouths full of laughter that filled the Israelites after decades of enslavement and displacement. The Lord restores shouts of joy to those who sow in tears, reminding us that restoration does not come from sorrow or joy alone, but grows out of their companionship.

The struggle for justice in our world begs us to enter into this same holy dance. We can't look away from the injustices that cause deep suffering, and we can't forget to find joy. Our faith must reflect both. In recent years, I have felt the hope and joy draining from my spirit as I organize against systems of oppression. We are witnessing overturned policies and funding cuts that harm our communities, our families, and our collective spirit. In this pain, we must not only remember that the Lord restores, but that our ability to hold onto hope, joy, and love is crucial to our forward movement. Our call to liberation requires us to inhabit a radical joy that loves all of God's children in the face of hatred and suffering. Certainly, a Savior of joyous birth and unjust death on the cross can teach us this.

Let us pray

Lord of all, we come to you with hearts full. We are full of love for others and unending grief, with a passion for justice and disheartened spirits at the injustice plaguing our world, with pain and with hope. Remind us that all of our feelings are sacred, and in our faithful pursuit of justice we must continue to love and laugh in the face of hate. Like the barren and deserted riverbeds of the Negeb coursing with water, you remind us that restoration is always possible. Lord, we ask for your continued grace and mercy as our sowing in tears leads to seeds of liberation for all of your beloved children. May our hearts hold all of this and may we hold one another this Advent season. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Luke 1:46b-55;

1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28

Sunday, December 13, 2026

Glory Dharmaraj

**And Mary said,
"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,"
—Luke 1:46-47 (NRSVUE)**

Mary's Song of Praise, known as the Magnificat, is a sung response to Angel Gabriel's announcement that she will bear Jesus. Alone and in haste, Mary journeys from her hometown Nazareth to the Judean hill country to visit Elizabeth, her older cousin. At Elizabeth's welcome blessing, Mary bursts into a Song of Praise (Luke 1:46-55).

The company of her foremothers' visions

On this difficult journey, Mary may have reflected on her foremothers' stories and songs. Mary's Magnificat echoes the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:20-21) on the banks of the Red Sea in praise of the Lord who liberated her people from race-inflected slavery by the ruthless pharaohs. Earlier, as a child, her courageous actions help preserve Moses' life when the Pharaoh implements a racially based, genocidal healthcare policy that every newborn Hebrew male child should be killed. Miriam and her family thwart this scheme to save the baby. Remarkably, the Pharaoh's daughter becomes an ally in protecting the child (Exodus 2:5-10). Now Moses and his sister live to sing a song of liberation on the banks of the Red Sea. With a tambourine in her hand, Miriam leads her fellow women in the first-ever praise-and-worship service.

Then, there was another foremother, Hannah, a woman who experienced pain and social devaluation due to her childlessness. After pouring out her anguish before God, she receives hope and eventually gives birth to Samuel, offers him to the service of the Lord, and bursts into a song of joy (1 Samuel 2:1-10). Standing in the company of her foremothers, Mary sings aloud her Magnificat. A song aligned with God's vision of justice, peace, and shalom.



Glory E. Dharmaraj, Ph.D., is retired Director of Spiritual Formation and Mission Theology for United Women in Faith. She has authored several books, including *Concepts of Mission*, *Keyhole Missiology: Glimpses into the History of Mission Study Texts, 1901-2026*, *Transformative Mission and Evangelism in the Era of Artificial Intelligence and Diaspora*, *Difference*, and *Women Weaving at God's Loom: Selected Writings from Asian American and Pacific-Islander United Methodist Clergywomen*.

Shalom, wholeness, and healing

Throughout Scripture, shalom represents God's vision for the flourishing and wholeness of humanity and creation. Mary's Song celebrates the God who enters history, lifts the lowly, feeds the hungry, and challenges systems of power that perpetuate oppression and injustice.

Mary's "yes" to God, therefore, is more than a personal act of faith. By consenting to bear Christ in her own body, she becomes a participant in God's mission of salvation and healing. Her song invites us to imagine and embody a world reordered according to God's shalom.

Outsider and allyship

Luke, the gospel writer who preserves Mary's Song, is an outsider and a Gentile. His gospel repeatedly highlights Jesus' ministry among the outsiders, the poor, women, foreigners, and others whose voices are overlooked. Luke's sequel, the Acts of the Apostles, is a testament to his allyship with Paul, and offers another astounding birth story: the beginning of Christian mission.

Advent, therefore, calls us not only to celebrate Christ's coming but also to become allies in God's mission, standing with those whose dignity, voice, and well-being are threatened. God invites us to realize God's vision of a world where the lowly are lifted, the hungry fed, and all people flourish.

Let us pray

Gracious God, we are your Advent people, hopeful, expectant, and attentive to your coming among us. Give us courage to recognize injustice, humility, and to listen to those on the margins, and to become faithful partners and allies in your mission. In Jesus' name, amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 125; 1 Kings 18:1-18;

Ephesians 6:10-17

Monday, December 14, 2026

Heidi Careaga

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power.

—Ephesians 6:10 (NRSVUE)

Advent is a season of waiting, but some of us know waiting not as a gentle spiritual practice, but as a lifelong reality. I was born in Guatemala and brought to the United States when I was 10 years old, separated from my family and without a legal path to citizenship. I waited 26 years to share my story openly. For more than two decades, I lived in the shadows of a broken immigration system, carrying both the fear of being unseen and the longing to belong. My story was shaped by silence, caution, and the quiet hope that one day I could speak freely about where I come from and who I am.

Ephesians 6:10-17 speaks into that kind of waiting. Paul's call to "put on the whole armor of God" is not a call to aggression, but to endurance, to stand in truth when truth feels risky, to stand in righteousness when systems fail our communities, to stand in peace when fear threatens to swallow hope. For years, I stood quietly, without the ability to name my own experience. Yet even in the shadows, God was clothing me with courage and hope.

United Women in Faith became the community where that courage finally found breath. Through its racial justice work and leadership development, I discovered a place where my story was not only welcomed but honored. United Women in Faith gave me a voice, and in that sacred space, I learned that my story is part of a larger movement of women who rise for justice and liberation. Through United Women in Faith, I was able to wait and discern my call; 15 years was another season of holy waiting. Today, I stand as a deaconess and a leader in this movement, roles I never imagined I could claim while living in silence.

And now, as I wait in this second Advent, the expectant hope of Christ's coming again, I trust that God continues to clothe us with strength. In this in-between time, God gives us the courage to dismantle racism, to amplify the stories of those pushed to the margins, and to protect the dignity of every person. Our waiting is not passive; it is active, faithful, and rooted in God's liberating love.



Deaconess Heidi J. Careaga belongs to the Wisconsin Annual Conference, where she served as a district administrator for 11 years. Heidi is a lifelong United Women in Faith member and has served at every level of the organization. She currently serves as the executive assistant to the United Women in Faith CEO and CFO.

Advent reminds us that God enters the world through the margins, through a brown-skinned child born under empire, through a family seeking refuge, through people whose lives are shaped by waiting. My waiting, like so many others', has become a testimony to God's unfolding work. And now, clothed with the armor of God, I stand with a community committed to justice, truth, and hope.

Let us pray

God of hope and justice, thank you for the stories that shape us and the courage that sustains us. Clothe us with your armor so we may stand with all who wait for freedom, safety, and dignity. Bless the work of United Women in Faith and all who labor for racial justice. May our voices rise with truth, compassion, and holy boldness. Come, Lord Jesus, and teach us to be bearers of your liberating light. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 125; 2 Kings 2:9-22;

Acts 3:17-4:4

Tuesday, December 15, 2026

Sarah B. Harlow



Sarah B. Harlow is a writer and dreamer from Kentucky, currently living in Saint Louis. She loves nature, making music, and her kitchen.

Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

—Acts 3:19-21 (NIV)

This passage from Acts finds Peter and John, fishermen-turned-apostles, preaching to a large gathering, assembled in part because the apostles were performing miracles. Peter speaks with such conviction about Jesus' resurrection that he and John end up spending the night in jail. Despite the legal repercussions, the author makes sure to let us know that many in the crowd of five thousand believed Peter's words.

The crowd's awe and excitement most likely didn't help their case. Peter addresses his fellow Jews directly, reminding them of the covenant between Abraham and God and what the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah. He says, "I know you acted in ignorance, as did your rulers." He is pleading with his community to face the reality that Jesus' death was part of something bigger. But for that to be true, the priests and Sadducees had to admit that they were wrong about Jesus.

It doesn't feel good to be told that you made a wrong choice. We learn as children to push back against the impulse to lie or hide our shame. In that giant crowd, the church leaders had nowhere to hide, and Peter had Scripture at the ready. Their fear of losing control of the status quo (and the embarrassment of knowing Peter might be right) was overwhelming. They chose to shut Peter up instead of admitting they made a mistake.

Peter knew better than anyone what it feels like to make a choice because you are afraid and then to live with the consequences. He knew Jesus was the Messiah, and he also knew he had crumbled under pressure after Jesus' arrest, denying Jesus three times. It's no miracle or coincidence that Peter takes the time here to remind his peers of what can be lost when we choose fear over truth. There's no way Peter didn't feel shame that he denied knowing Jesus. We know he did. But he didn't let his shame stop him. Peter knew the only way forward was through God's forgiveness.

I am a white woman from the South. I was taught that there were bad, racist white people, and then there were good Christians like us. Over and over, I have been mortified in my realization of systemic racism, of the actual nature of whiteness and colonialism and oppression, of the racial stereotypes that so insidiously make up even my own family members' worldviews despite their faith. I spent years reacting to my guilt with anger and sadness, too ashamed to speak up like Peter. Eventually I realized that I couldn't live with myself if I hid behind my white privilege and stayed silent.

It's easier in the moment to let shame be the driver. Speaking up is scary, too. But Peter is reminding us that we don't get an easy out as Christians. When we are faced with injustice or oppression, we know the Bible tells us to choose truth. To be humble. To be a helper. We can admit we were wrong. We can ask for forgiveness. We can move forward in faith. The story isn't over; it is still unfolding in holy love.

Let us pray

As we await the Christ child, may we remove our shroud of shame. May we fully see the grief and pain in our community without turning away. Grant us your love and forgiveness that cast out fear so that we can be brave like Jesus. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 125; Malachi 3:16-4:6;

Mark 9:9-13

Wednesday, December 16, 2026

Olivia DiAgostino

**As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the Lord surrounds his people
from this time on and forevermore.
—Psalm 125:2 (NRSVUE)**

Nature images in Scripture are always striking to me. So often we are anthropocentric, caught up in the human experience, and forget the wisdom that comes from paying attention to the world around us.

In this psalm, God surrounds God's people, "as the mountains surround Jerusalem." Sit with that image for a moment: imagine how tall, how secure, how enclosed our protection is when we are focused on doing good and being upright in heart.

I recently acquired a small flock of chickens: four small, vulnerable Buff Orpington pullets who cheep and chirp all day long. When you hold them, you can feel their tiny hearts beating against your palms.

We are diligent in closing the chickens into their coop each night; our suburban backyard suddenly becomes a world of lurking threats when I look at it through the chickens' eyes, watching for vulnerabilities that would allow a fox or raccoon to find them. When a dog barks or a hawk flies overhead, they rush to shelter together. This experience of nature has made me wonder about how God sees us; perhaps as vulnerable chicks to be gathered under the wing (as we see elsewhere in Scripture) or so precious as to be protected by mountains.

I imagine that the psalmist knew well the threat of the wicked, and I know that we, too, here in the 21st century, sometimes feel that we are facing tremendous evils. Racism and other forms of oppression pervade our society. The effects of climate change are becoming more apparent each season. Simply turning on the news brings my awareness to a dozen new ways in which the world is hurting.



Olivia DiAgostino serves as the Executive for UWFaith Digital, where she finds deep joy in work that allows her to build connections with and among women of faith. She holds an M.Div. from Drew Theological School and was a recipient of the Technology, Innovation, and Digital Engagement Lab fellowship for faith leaders in 2024-2025. She tends her chickens, garden, and children in a multigenerational home in New Jersey.

I find some small hope in the words of the psalmist. With confidence that the Lord is on their side, God's people are secured, protected. We face great evil—and yet! Dire threats—and yet! Our help remains in the name of the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. This Advent, may it be enough.

Let us pray

Dear God, maker of heaven and earth, may you truly be our help in times of trouble. Surround us like mountains, snug in the palms of your hands. Give us the strength and courage to work for your peace. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:1-11;

Hebrews 1:1-4

Thursday, December 17, 2026

Dyanne Cunningham

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

—Hebrews 1:1-4 (NIV)

As I reflect on the traditional themes of Advent, it becomes clear that they offer a powerful framework for confronting racial injustice by shifting our focus from passive waiting to an active, disruptive pursuit of God's kin-dom on earth. Advent transforms waiting into resistance against racial injustice through Christ, whose arrival brings a stubborn hope, revolutionary love, disruptive peace, and defiant joy to dismantle systemic oppression.

During my 33-year career with a major corporation, I experienced and witnessed inequality, adversity, and systemic barriers. The discrimination I encountered affected me so deeply that it became the focus of my master's thesis. Initially, my research centered on the oppression experienced by African American women professionals at the intersection of race, class, and gender.

But as I studied the lives of these women, something began to change in me. I stopped looking only at the barriers they faced and began to see the strength, wisdom, courage, and faith they demonstrated in overcoming those barriers. The story of these resilient women therefore became more than a story of struggle. It became a testimony of God-given strength operating in the midst of adversity.

My research revealed four powerful empowerment strategies employed by these African American women: developing and using voice, becoming self-defined and self-determined, building community, and seeking spirituality and transformation. These were not simply academic themes; they reflected a historical legacy of resistance and resilience that stretched from slavery and emancipation through the suffrage movement and the modern civil rights era.



Dyanne Cunningham is a dedicated member of Ben Hill UMC in Atlanta, Georgia, where she has served in numerous capacities for 34 years. She currently serves as her church's Lay Leader and Associate Conference Lay Leader for the Georgia Conference of The United Methodist Church. Cunningham is a celebratory Christian communicator whose spiritual gifts include teaching and discernment. She enjoys facilitating Christian studies, writing devotions, and delivering celebratory messages. In her leisure time, she enjoys tennis, long walks, and family time.

The women I studied were not simply victims of oppression; they were women of remarkable resilience. In the midst of systems designed to limit them, they found ways to use their voices, define themselves, support one another, and draw strength from spirituality.

Hebrews 1:1-4 acts as a profound manifesto of spiritual and psychological resistance against racial oppression by dismantling the very lies that systems of supremacy rely upon. It reclaims the collective heritage of God's people by declaring Jesus as the "heir of all things."

There were forces that attempted to diminish their worth. Yet Hebrews declares that the Son is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." When we understand who Christ is, we can begin to understand something about who we are in him: we are not defined by the labels placed upon us by society. We are defined by the God who created and redeemed us.

As I look back at this time in my life and the truths about my identity that emerged, I reveal that God was teaching me to look beyond marginalization. The women whose stories I encountered taught me that empowerment can emerge through finding my voice, claiming my identity, building community, and nurturing my spiritual life. That change in perspective was transformative for me, and I believe it can be for marginalized people in whatever context they may find themselves.

Let us pray

Gracious and Almighty God,

Thank You for speaking to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us confidence to be self-defined and self-determined according to the purpose You have placed within us. Give us the wisdom to build communities where others can find belonging, encouragement, and strength. And when we are weary, restore our spirits and renew our faith. Amen.



United
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in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalms 89:1-4, 19-26; 2 Samuel 6:12-19;

Hebrews 1:5-14

Friday, December 18, 2026

Emily Jones



Emily Jones is the executive for racial justice at United Women in Faith. She lives in New York City and is the grateful mom of two young children.

David danced before the Lord with all his might ...

—2 Samuel 6:14a (NRSVUE)

As the ark was brought up, David let his spirit soar and moved his body to the rhythm of praise. He leapt and danced, part of the gathered community. His dancing was not uniformly beloved—see Michal’s despising gaze—but David danced anyway. He held nothing back. He danced before the Lord with all his might.

Friends, try as I might, I am not that kind of dancer. I spent the first dance at my wedding reception frantically eye-pleading with friends and relatives to get out on the dance floor ASAP and save me from the strain of being watched. Please, just let me disappear back into a dancing crowd, my face implored, burning red with introvert embarrassment and feeling foolish. To be like David, to dance with all my might in public, unreservedly, with friends and enemies alike watching, this is a spiritual horizon I have not yet touched. But I long for it—not because I care about dancing but because I yearn for the courage and inner freedom to praise and protest with all my might, without tempering my zeal in anticipation of other people’s reactions, without self-censoring for fear of looking foolish. It is a spiritual skill sorely needed in times such as these—and it’s not easy.

A few months ago, I received an urgent message on a neighborhood group chat asking us to turn out for a rapid response action for a cause about which I care deeply. I jog-walked the few blocks right away. I suppose I expected to find a crowd I could join. But when I arrived, I found just two young people standing in front of an unmarked government vehicle calling out to passersby. I was the third. And in that moment, I felt my cheeks redden, and I experienced the temptation to just flee—to keep walking and pretend I was headed somewhere else, to avoid being part of this silly-looking three-person protest on my street corner. I didn’t. I girded up my courage, and I joined them. But the whole time, I felt ridiculous. Not wrong—I was confident that we were speaking up for an urgent matter of racial justice—but I nonetheless felt self-conscious about making a scene, embarrassed to be watched. I was startled by my own reaction. I have spent decades in organizing. I have gone to hundreds of protests. I have clearly held values. I think of myself as a woman who “knows better.” And I do—in my head. But in my body, I still feel the shame and stigma of sticking out in a crowd.

In times when racism and state violence are both increasingly normalized, it can feel especially embarrassing or awkward to speak out. For those of us with the privilege of opting out, silence can feel incredibly tempting. I wish I could be just like the dancing David, but my personality may be hardwired differently. Maybe I will always cringe a bit to be watched publicly and always need to coach myself to get louder when standing on a street corner. And maybe that's okay, as long as I do it anyway. Going along with the status quo may make me feel a little less foolish in the moment, but it also, ultimately, makes us all much less safe.

Let us pray

Dear God, grant us the courage to praise and protest with all our might. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26;

Judges 13:2-24; John 7:40-52

Saturday, December 19, 2026

Sharon Scott

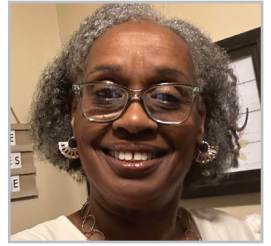
I will sing of the Lord's loyal love forever.

I will proclaim your faithfulness

with my own mouth

from one generation to the next.

—Psalm 89:1 (CEB)



Sharon Scott has worked for over 30 years for a community action agency where she serves the low-income population within a 13-county service area in Georgia. She has held several positions and currently serves as a special events coordinator.

Every day I can come across the needs of so many people through the work we do. In addition to the needs of those we serve, my office is near a homeless shelter, and from Monday through Friday I see firsthand the effects on those in need. On any given day, I can drive into the parking lot and see someone sitting on the curb because they are not allowed to stay at the shelter during the day. My coworkers and I try to share what we have. Sometimes we can bring something extra to work to offer those we see. We also try to share an encouraging word, prayer, or just a listening ear. Oftentimes, they won't take what we try to offer. Many of them just want to know they are seen, heard, valued, and respected.

As we think about the Advent season, we think about the coming of Jesus as we also prepare to celebrate the Christmas season. So often, we get wrapped up in the commercialized version of how we celebrate by shopping and buying presents, attending holiday parties and gatherings, and the list goes on. While we do give to those less fortunate than us, sometimes we can still get overworked in our festivities.

My hope is built on the Lord's loyal love. It is what prompts me and my coworkers to share that love with those who live in the margins. It feels hard to understand all the challenges people are facing; however, I am reminded of the faithfulness generations before me experienced.

During the Advent season (and always), we should try to give people hope. Hope that things will turn around for them. Hope that God has not abandoned them. We should also help people make peace with others and with themselves. In addition, we need joy. True joy comes from within and not from the external things we have. Another area that can be lacking in our lives is love. We must show others the unconditional love that God shows us. So, whether the person is homeless, a neighbor, coworker, family member, or church member, let's remember to show the same hope, peace, joy, and love we would like to have shown to us.

Let us pray

Lord, we thank you so much for caring for us, loving, and protecting us. We thank you for your son, Jesus, and for all the ways you have provided for us. We thank you for blessing us to be a blessing to others. We don't want to ever take your goodness, mercy, and kindness for granted. We thank you and sing praises to your name. In Jesus' name, amen!



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Luke 1:46b-55;

Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38

Sunday, December 20, 2026

Allyssa McNeal

**"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,"
—Luke 1:47-48 (NRSVUE)**



Allyssa McNeal, M.A., is a consultant and qualified developmental disabilities professional who supports individuals with disabilities and helps congregations become inclusive and accessible. She has served on the former United Methodist Committee on Disabilities and as a leader in a number of United Women in Faith events, including Mission u and National Seminar.

The first chapter of the Gospel of Luke opens with Mary's praises to God. She is rejoicing despite her status, saying that all generations will call her blessed. Mary is often depicted as a model believer. In this season of waiting, how do we as believers follow Mary's example? Do we offer praise despite what we may be going through? Do we press on no matter how long the wait may last? Do we continue to labor and follow what God has called each of us to do even in the midst of uncertainty and the unknown? Although Mary was aware that God had a plan for her, she still managed to give her best.

This passage reminds me of women who have come before me who, despite the unknown, still marched and spoke up because that is what we are called to do. I am reminded of my experience attending a National Seminar when some of our group made signs and spoke up on behalf of others.

We had just found out about the likelihood of a children's hospital closing, possibly leaving many mothers and caregivers without access to healthcare. In this season of waiting, I ask: How will you speak up and keep going despite the unknown?

We can speak up in small ways by protesting. We can speak up in small ways by sharing a devotional reflection. But we must all find ways to speak up.

Let us pray

Gracious and most loving God, thank you for courage, peace, and empowerment. Be with us as we wait. In Christ's name we pray, amen.

Lectionary Readings:

Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:1-18;

Hebrews 9:1-14

Monday, December 21, 2026

Pattie E. Gordon

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

—Hebrews 9:11-14 (NRSVUE)

Advent reminds us that God entered a world divided by power, privilege, race, gender, and status. Christ came into that world, and Christ still confronts the barriers that separate us today.

Hebrews 9 describes worship shaped by boundaries. There were curtains and restricted spaces; not everyone could enter the holiest place. But Jesus came as our great high priest, opening a new way into the presence of God.

As an African American woman and an elder in the church, my journey has taught me something about barriers. I have experienced moments when race and gender affected how my voice, leadership, and calling were received. Yet those experiences have strengthened a truth within me: barriers erected by people cannot cancel a calling ordained by God.

That is why Advent gives me hope.

Hebrews 9:14 declares that Christ cleanses our consciences from “dead works to worship the living God.” If Christ changes our conscience, Christ should also change how we see and treat one another.

As United Women in Faith members, we prepare the way of the Lord whenever we confront racism and discrimination, amplify unheard voices, and make room at the table.



The Rev. Dr. Pattie E. Gordon, a native of Wal-terboro, South Carolina, is an ordained elder in the South Carolina Annual Conference. She serves as pastor of The Johns Island Parish. She received her Doctor of Ministry from United Theological Seminary. She is married to Michael Gordon and is blessed with a blended family of three children and three grandchildren.

This Advent, I am Rev. Dr. Pattie E. Gordon, still called, still serving, and still believing that Christ can tear down barriers. May we not simply wait for Christ. May we work while we wait.

Let us pray

God of justice, cleanse our hearts and open our eyes. Give us courage to confront racism, sexism, and every barrier that diminishes your children. Use our voices, faith, and actions to make room for justice. May we work while we wait and prepare the way for Christ. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 1:19-28;

Hebrews 8:1-13

Tuesday, December 22, 2026

Anita Cummings

**He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty-handed.**

—Luke 1:53 (CEB)



Anita Cummings is a longtime United Women in Faith member. She attends Transformation United Methodist Church in Augusta, Georgia. She serves as the director of the Food Pantry Ministry and worship leader and liturgist for the church.

I am the mother of three adult children. They are all college-educated, with two pursuing their master's degrees. They all confess to love the Lord. And they have all experienced economic turmoil in the last several years. My son was laid off by a company where he had worked for more than 10 years with little notice. My middle child got divorced and was left holding a mountain of debt. The youngest was fired for standing up for what she believed in and spent months working to find gainful employment. We are living in times when the economic pressure and shifting landscape are impacting people of all walks of life.

I envisioned a world where my children would not have to endure financial stresses. Their father and I both grew up in public housing. We both got our education and were afforded the opportunity to travel the world while serving in The United Methodist Church. We were committed to providing a solid foundation for our children to thrive. However, despite our planning, support, and prayers, financial stress has defined parts of their adulthood in ways I would have never predicted. Some of these stressors are recession, climbing unemployment rates, high cost of housing, and financial abuse.

It was enough to make me scream out loud. My children were in need. There was hunger to have stability, to be able to provide, and to participate fully in society. Although they had access to housing and food, there was still a big hunger and need. But I am reminded as I read Mary's Song that God is committed to the vulnerable. My children were not abandoned. The children and people still facing economic uncertainty are not abandoned. God will fill the hungry with good things. My children's struggles were not unique. Millions of Americans are struggling under the weight of financial pressure. These financial pressures disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and people of color. It could be easy for us to forget Mary's Song and fall into despair. But I choose to put my hands to work. I stepped up to direct our food pantry. It is a place that reminds the hungry to be fed.

This work has been challenging and has afforded a lot of space for reflection. I am reminded twice a month on pantry dates that God is a provider and that this love and work have happened through all generations. The God who provided for my mother and me is also providing for my children. This provision has not always been perfect by most standards, but it has endured. It is a work where we have been looked upon with favor, and it is a reminder that God calls me to participate in this work and bring good things to the hungry.

Let us pray

Lord, help us to hear Mary's song with new ears. Help us to be reminded of how your love compels us into action and interrogation of our beliefs. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Lectionary Readings:

Luke 1:46b-55; 1 Samuel 2:1-10;

Mark 11:1-11

Wednesday, December 23, 2026

Clara Ester (in memoriam)

**"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.
Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name;
indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away empty."**

—Luke 1:46b-53 (NRSVUE)



Deaconess Clara Jean Ester was a prominent civil rights advocate, United Methodist Church deaconess, and former national vice president of the board of directors for United Women in Faith

In 2026, we mourned the loss of Deaconess Clara Ester (1948-2026), a longtime leader in the movement for racial justice in United Women in Faith and in The United Methodist Church. Clara knew intimately the God known by Hannah and Mary, whose praise songs we read in today's lectionary. She shared their deep faith, and she shared their vision of a world radically transformed to more closely align with the kin-dom of God. She knew the God who was always working to make a way out of no way. Clara regularly lifted the name of Jesus, the one who rode into Jerusalem to the celebratory welcome of everyday people who merged into a crowd—or, I dare say, a march?—of Hosannas. As we honor her extraordinary and faithful life and reflect on how we may continue to live and serve in ways worthy of her witness, we are reprinting here an excerpt of some autobiographical reflections she shared in **response** magazine in 2016. A woman of unrelenting faith, an exemplar of servant leadership, and a United Women in Faith saint living amongst us, we offer her words as an extended reflection, a testimony to love in action, on this last official day of the Advent season.

I was a junior in college when the Black sanitation workers began their strike for fair treatment and the right to become unionized. On rainy days, Black sanitation workers would report to work and then be told to go home because the weather was too bad to collect garbage. Meanwhile, white sanitation workers came in, stayed the day, and were paid. But what kicked off the strike was two Black workers being killed on the job. A bad thunderstorm started during a route and the Black workers asked to sit in the cab of the truck. The white driver said no, so they sat in the back of the truck. Lightning struck the truck and set off the motor in the trash receptacle. They couldn't get out, and they lost their lives. Their families were offered \$250 for their lives.

The sanitation workers were willing to make sacrifices to become unionized. They stayed off work with no benefits. Their lights were being cut off.

I worked as an organizer, building relationships with sanitation workers, marching and picketing, while my pastor preached from the pulpit, saying that if he saw anyone crossing the sanitation workers' strike line, "I'm going to call you out and preach about you the next Sunday!"

The Rev. Lawson invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to come and speak to the sanitation workers and lead a march. At the time, Dr. King was working on the second march to Washington for the Poor People's Campaign. Andrew Young and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) staff didn't want Dr. King to come to Memphis; they wanted him to focus on the march. They were going through the South and were picking up Native Americans and poor whites to support the Poor People's Campaign. It was becoming a movement that wasn't just about Black people.

The first time Dr. King came to be with the sanitation workers, Black people were on TV saying everyone would be staying home from work and school the day of the march, while Mayor Henry Loeb was saying, "You better go to work." The day before the march, it snowed, so no one could go to work. Black people were on TV saying, "God has spoken! Let the church say, 'Amen!'" Mayor Loeb was on TV saying, "This was an act of God because God didn't want y'all to lose your jobs."

The first march turned violent. There was a group that was nonviolent during the day, and at night, another group was throwing Molotov cocktails. A man came to me and said, "We'll be marshals on the outside of the march. When it starts to go down, follow suit. You'll see." Before the march, I went to the Rev. Lawson and said, "Something is going to go down." I don't know who he talked to, but he came back and said, "There're too many people out there expected to march. If we call it off, there'll be a riot." So, the march went forward. And as soon as they turned the corner, glass started flying, and police started beating people.

Back at the hotel, the Rev. Lawson introduced me to Dr. King. He said, "This is the young lady who said we needed to stop the march." No sooner had he said that than the news came on saying Dr. King could no longer lead nonviolent marches. Dr. King promised to come back to Memphis and prove that wasn't true.

Finally, the second march happened. Dr. King came into the city early, April 3, 1968, and he met with ministers. It was thundering and lightning. The Rev. Ralph Abernathy was asked to go to Mason Temple, Church of God in Christ, which would seat thousands of folks. They called Dr. King at the hotel to come. Before he got there, a minister from Chicago got up and talked about how Dr. King had affected his life. He pretty much eulogized him. Then Abernathy got up and he pretty much eulogized Dr. King. When Dr. King got up there, he said, "If I had been given a choice of which century to be born in, it would be this one." He said being born in his day allowed him, among other things, to be with the sanitation workers. He talked about the bomb threat on the plane that he came out on. He said, "I come into the city hearing about the threat on my life, but that doesn't matter anymore because I've been to the mountain top, and God's allowed me to see the Promised Land.... I may not get there with you, but we as a people will get to the Promised Land!"

You could have heard a pin drop.

As a college student organizer, I recruited students to participate in the mass marches. There was a young man named Montreal who had been hanging out with us as we strategized. We noticed the police were always following us. So, one day, we strategized to walk the wrong way up a one-way street so that the police couldn't follow us in cars. The day we did this, the police were on motorbikes, which can go any way on this street. Someone said, "Somebody in here is a snitch."

Dr. King was at the hotel, and they were having a fish fry, so we decided to go to the hotel.

We pulled up into the parking lot. Dr. King was telling Ben Branch to play "Precious Lord," his favorite song, at the rally later. Branch told Dr. King that it was cold and he might want to go back inside to get a jacket. Dr. King turned to go in to get his coat, and Abernathy said he would get it. Just then, we heard a blast like a truck backfiring. It was a gunshot. I saw Dr. King thrown up in the air and then back down, hitting the pavement. My friend Mary Hunter and I took off running up the stairs toward him. He was breathing but very slowly. I unbuckled his belt to help. His eyes were open. On the side of his head and neck was a pool of blood. I guess because he'd just been involved in such pleasant conversation, there was a most comfortable, relaxed expression on his face. I remember hearing the ambulances. I remember seeing Jesse Jackson and Mary Hunter.

We came off the balcony so that the ambulance workers could come up. I didn't see anyone taking pictures. We just stood there, and they took our names and numbers. And I cussed them out. We asked, "Why are y'all questioning us? We didn't do it. Y'all did!"

I called the Rev. Lawson. His wife answered the phone. She said, "Are you okay?" I said, "They shot Dr. King." The Rev. Lawson got on the phone and said, "How bad is it?" I replied, "It doesn't look good." He asked where they took Dr. King, but I didn't know. "Turn on the TV and see," I told him.

Most of the staff went to the hospital, even in the operating room. They wanted to make sure the doctors did everything.

We were trapped in the hotel. It was about 1:30 in the morning before they would allow us to leave. The National Guard had come, and the city was on lockdown. It was a dark and stormy night. It was almost like Good Friday. Dr. King was our hero. He was our hope. Thanks be to God; he was a leader who stood up for righteousness. Those leaders were not wealthy; they were not in the forefront to get money.

I know that I was no longer the same person I had been. I didn't care if I ever finished school. I went to Mississippi to organize people there. I did graduate from college and went to D.C. Today, there's no kind of injustice—gay rights, immigrant rights, whatever—that I don't feel obligated to address. We have to learn how to love one another and live together."

Let us pray

May Clara rest in peace and rest in power. And may we, who are still here, recommit ourselves to her charge to work for justice, love, and transformation without ceasing. God, make us worthy of the call and unflagging in the effort. Amen.



United
Women
in Faith

Thursday, December 24, 2026 & Friday, December 25, 2026

Lectionary Readings:

The Revised Common Lectionary offers us three readings for December 24 and December 25, which open the season of Christmas. These three readings are called the Nativity of the Lord, and together they tell the story of the birth of Jesus and its meaning for all of us. While the busyness of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day can easily pull us into a variety of important and time-consuming tasks and to-dos—from preparing the church to welcome visitors to preparing our homes for neighbors, friends, and family—we encourage you to find a few quiet moments in these holy days to sit with all three sets of readings and soak in the power of the Word.

Our Christmas devotion is offered by United Women in Faith General Secretary and CEO Sally Vonner.

December 24:

- Nativity of the Lord Proper I: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14, (15-20)

December 25:

- Nativity of the Lord Proper II: Isaiah 62:6-12; Psalm 97; Titus 3:4-7; Luke 2:(1-7), 8-20
- Nativity of the Lord Proper III: Isaiah 52:7-10; Psalm 98; Hebrews 1:1-4, (5-12); John 1:1-14

Friday, December 25, 2026

Sally Vonner



Sally Vonner is the General Secretary and CEO of United Women in Faith. Vonner has served in many areas of The United Methodist Church — leading women's retreats, as a jurisdictional conference delegate or alternate for three quadrennia, and in immigration assistance and reform, community development, and dismantling racism initiatives at jurisdiction and conference levels.

Now in that same region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid, for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people.”

—Luke 2:8-10 (CEB)

Merry Christmas! The wait is over. Good news has come to all people. Glory to God!

Have you ever been in a rural setting late at night, with no streetlights; you can barely see in front of you, almost complete darkness? It is a beautiful scene under the moon and stars, serene and still, or it may be an overwhelming or frightening setting. The shepherds' terror is understandable when the angel appears with God's glory shining.

The angel speaks, and interestingly their fear doesn't cause them to flee. Does the angel's good news cause their pause? What unfolds next is a promise that their Savior, Christ the Lord, has been born in David's city, Bethlehem, and an instruction to go and see. Shepherds were considered on the margins of society. Were they honored to be the ones receiving such good news? Mary, mother of Jesus, a servant girl chosen to give birth to Jesus, was from the margins, too. Unlikely characters unfold in this biblical story we celebrate year after year.

The angel tells them where to behold the birth of their Savior. Does this news resonate because they have heard the words of the prophet Micah proclaiming that the Savior of Israel will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)? Or was it enough witnessing the grandeur of the moment when forces of heaven joined the angel in singing praises to God? They were the chosen ones, shown God's favor, to go and see; they made haste.

After they go, see, and report their encounter with the angel, they return home glorifying and praising God for everything being as they were told. They believed and became messengers of the good news—our Savior was born.

Let us pray

This Christmas, let us glorify God, pray for peace, and rejoice that God can and does choose/invite anyone—the ordinary, the vulnerable, the neglected, those deemed unworthy—to proclaim the signs and wonders of God's power. Like the shepherds, may we always choose to be listeners and messengers of the good news that Jesus Christ, the Savior, is born for all people. Joy to the world! Amen.