



**PLENARY DAY 2 ❖ FRIDAY PM**

*Loving our neighbors*



**1** In addition to inspiring speakers, plenary sessions included community singing. All of the hymns are included in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*, and the Gathering program book includes information on page 59 about usage.

**2** As a mission co-worker for the PC(USA) who serves as regional facilitator for women’s and children’s interests in Sub-Saharan Africa, Christi Boyd has witnessed the life-changing impact of PW’s Thank and Birthday Offering grants. Christi described more than a dozen facilities and programs that Offering grants have helped make possible. As she described the seed money and eventual outcomes, photos and videos featuring individuals whose lives have been improved by these projects played on the screens behind her. From building dorms to improving maternity services, from installing wells to promoting social safety nets, PW has been a significant force in supporting women and children in many communities in Africa.

**3** Evelyn Torres, pastor of La Iglesia Presbiteriana in Lares, Puerto Rico, delivered a keynote that focused on the Good Samaritan parable in Luke 10:25–42, asking whom we will care for and also who supports us. Evelyn said “On the one hand, my neighbor is the one who needs me, who is in a position of vulnerability, no matter where he or she comes from, what his or her beliefs are, or how much he or she resembles me. . . . I humbly invite you to think about all the people who have cared for you recently, who have listened, or have offered a shoulder to cry on or an understanding ear. Then, I think, this parable becomes uncomfortable because we want to be the Samaritans who serve and care, not the half-dead and half-naked person.” Referencing PW and PC(USA) response the 2018–2021 triennium to Hurricane María’s devastation in Puerto Rico, she noted that whether we are the helped or the helper, prayerful support “rekindles the spark of the Holy Spirit that restarts, lifts up, and gives new strength to those who are tired and have much work to do.”

**4** Clara Harper, a former dancer with the Louisville Ballet, performed a modern ballet piece set to “Amazing Grace.” Clara is assistant director of admissions and coordinator of Westminster Scholars at Austin College in Sherman, Texas.



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## Loving our neighbors



**1** During the 2021–2024 triennium, Presbyterian Women prioritized advocacy around ending violence against women. Many Gathering participants wore orange as a symbol of their support for the United Nations’ “Orange the World” campaign, which raises awareness about violence against women and girls around the world.

**2** A group of empty chairs, adorned with signs about missing or murdered Indigenous women (MMIW) were set up in hallway. Members of PW, Inc.’s Justice and Peace Committee wore red hands over their mouths—a symbol of the MMIW movement. It stands for all the missing women and girls whose voices are not heard, and the lack of conversation around the issue in public spaces.

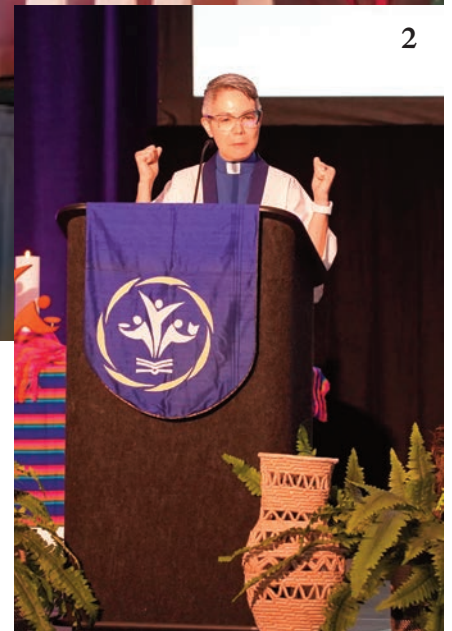
**3** Rev. Dr. Rhashell Hunter gave an overview of the 2025–2026 PW/*Horizons* Bible study she is writing, *Finding Resilience, Joy and Our Identity in Jesus Christ*. Rhashell’s reflections on identity in Christ covered several biblical figures as well as people she has encountered during her years of ministry. In her research for the study, Rhashell considered scholarship that changes what we think we think we know of biblical figures. For example, that Mary Magdalene isn’t a name that means Mary from Magdala, as Magdala is not a place referenced in sources from Jesus’ time. Rhashell reflected on the possibility raised by scholars that “Magdalene was a nickname or title from the Aramaic *magdala*, meaning ‘Mary the Tower’ or ‘Mary the Great.’ Mary the Tower is a tower of faith and a model of resilience. She was a woman, who traveled across Palestine with Jesus and the disciples. She was an important part of Christ’s ministry. And, she was charged by Jesus to “go and tell” of the resurrection (John 20:18). It takes a strong woman to be able to do this and to serve as Jesus taught her in a patriarchal society.”

**4** Allanda Small (standing) and Philip Morgan led music at the Gathering for the second time. They led music from a variety of genres, including praise songs, gospel tunes and a mix of traditional and contemporary hymns from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*.



# PLENARY DAY 3 ❖ SATURDAY AM

*Loving ourselves*



**1** Ushers passed pink gift bags through the plenary hall on Saturday morning to receive the Gathering Offering. Inspired by the ministry of Offering recipient Frontera de Cristo (see description of photo 4 on this page), Gathering attendees gave more than \$20,500 to support the work of Frontera.

**2** Rev. Laura Cheifetz invited Gathering attendees to consider what it means to love ourselves. More than just flowers, chocolate and manicures, she declared that loving ourselves means unlearning the toxic messages about our bodies, gender expressions, heritage, culture. She said, “I am generally a joyful person, but I am also realistic. After living in this body in this society, I know that I, as a biracial, queer, Asian American of Japanese and Jewish descent, ordained woman fall into several categories that are regularly dehumanized in our society.” Laura clarified that love isn’t just a feeling, but an action. And one way to act is through voting—“in every election, not just the one every four years”—in ways that affirm that right of all people to healthcare, community, healthy food, safe outdoor and public spaces. “God is a God of life, not profit, not greed, not death. God is a God who creates. God made every single bit of creation on purpose, no mistakes.”

**3** Joca Gallegos, the Mexico coordinator for Frontera de Cristo, described the multifaceted work of Frontera in building relationships and understanding across the U.S.–Mexico border. She highlighted Frontera’s emphasis on prayer to end suffering on both sides of the border; the organization’s education and advocacy efforts around the push and pull factors that force people to leave their homes; and the importance of humanitarian aid to migrants crossing the Sonoran desert.

# PLENARY DAY 3 ❖ SATURDAY PM

*Loving our community*



**1** Saturday evening's banquet dinner included a mix of time for connection, fun and celebration of all Presbyterian Women makes possible. As dinner wrapped up, tables enjoyed lively and laughter-filled trivia and watched the new video to promote the 2024 Thank Offering. Find it at [youtube.com/@PresbyterianWomen/videos](https://youtube.com/@PresbyterianWomen/videos).

**2** Elected and installed during PW's Business Meeting, Pam Snyder (left) and Kelsey Law, new moderator and vice moderator, respectively, spoke at the Saturday evening banquet. They described their histories with Presbyterian Women, and shared their enthusiasm for what PW helps make possible, and vision for the 2024–2027 triennium.

**3** Billie Kramme (left) and Laura Fleming (middle) thanked PW Churchwide's Mission Relationships Committee Chair Susan Ingels for the gift card offering. Billie received Lowe's and Amazon gift cards for Bethel Hills, a faith-based community (and a 2024 Birthday Offering grant recipient) where adults with and without developmental abilities live life to the fullest. Laura received Wal-Mart and Target gift cards for Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services, an organization that offers a range of supports to strengthen families with the aim of preventing fractures within a family. Learn more at [bethelhills.org](https://bethelhills.org) and [pchas.org](https://pchas.org) (be sure to visit the PCHAS history tab for how Presbyterian women were part of the organization's founding). Gathering attendees brought more than \$17,000 in gift cards for these two St. Louis-area ministries.

**4** In appreciation for her service at all levels of Presbyterian Women—including her service as 2015–2018 PW Churchwide moderator—and in multiple roles at multiple PW Churchwide Gatherings, Carol Winkler received an Honorary Life Membership (HLM). Thank you, Carol, for serving as registrar for the 2024 Gathering, all you did to help everyone get to the Gathering, and for all the people you've loved into PW!



A special thank you to Michael Martin for volunteering his time and talent as our official Gathering photographer.



# PLENARY DAY 4 ❖ WORSHIP

## Loving out loud



**1** Shonda Galloway (left), Synod Representative for Mid-America on PW's Churchwide Board of Directors, and Rev. CeCe Armstrong, co-moderator of the 226th General Assembly (2024), presided at Communion. They prayed, "Holy God, as we gather at this table, we remember your faithfulness, so may we live, putting our trust in you and holding fast to the promise of your presence in the future."

**2** The Churchwide Gathering choir, comprised of volunteer songbirds from across the country, sang Elaine Hagenberg's arrangement of "O Love." The opening verse—"O Love that will not let me go, I rest my weary soul in thee; I give thee back the life I owe, that in thine ocean depths its flow may richer, fuller be"—reflected on the Gathering themes of receiving and giving love.

**3** In-person Gathering attendees passed bread to their neighbors, while online participants were invited to join with their own Communion elements. In the prayer following Communion, Janet Riley (PW moderator in the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy) said, "Holy God, may we remember this moment and these beloveds gathered around your table. You transform us into the very people you call us to be, all because we have shared the living bread and cannot remain the same."

**4** In a sermon that prompted affirming nods, laughs and "Amen's!" Rev. CeCe Armstrong urged attendees to consider what an active, vibrant love looks like. Stressing that love isn't just white wedding dresses or a church body that doesn't argue, CeCe drew a parallel between language development and learning what it means to live embodying Christ's love: "'Love is patient.' Does anybody learn that by watching you? 'Love is kind.' Have you taught that lately?" She finished, "When you come to PW events, you get this warm feeling when you see everyone. It's so good. Our congregations should feel like that too, welcoming, affirming, allowing folks to just be loved, because love rejoices in the truth and love bears all things and believes all things and hopes all things and endures all things."

## Members-at-large: What do they do?

By Louise Van Poll

We are a diverse group of women, but let's call it like it is: Presbyterian Women is still mostly white women. Declaring that we are committed to diversity is a first step, but one that needs to be followed with policies and invitations that embody inclusion.

To that end, PW, Inc.'s bylaws outline in section 1.2 (that's immediately following the PW Purpose!) that the organization "intentionally seeks the membership of women inclusive of all ages, races, ethnicities and geographic locations so that it may reflect the rich diversity of the Church." The bylaws also outline that the PW, Inc. Board include six Members-at-large Representing Communities of Color—Indigenous/Native American, Black/African American/African, Hispanic/Latina/Latino/Latinx, Asian/Asian American, Middle Eastern/North African and Korean/Korean American.

So, what do these Members-at-large do? The short answer is that they strive to keep women from their respective communities connected to the PW Churchwide Board, but also to each other.

During the Business Meeting, as voting representatives discussed streamlining the size of the PW, Inc. Board,

a substitute motion was submitted that proposed to cut these positions from the Board and replace them with a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion representative. While this model has been successful in synods and other bodies, voting reps preserved the six at-large positions for PW at the churchwide level.

I was graciously extended an invitation to attend the Native American dinner at the Churchwide Gathering. As the PW Moderator of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies, which includes the non-geographic Native American Presbytery of Dakota, I wanted to attend as a show of respect for my sisters in Christ.

I was overwhelmed by my acceptance, and I thank my Native sisters for their invitation, kind words and gifts. Beyond that, at the dinner I witnessed the way the women have been connected to PW through the Member-at-large representative.

All these different tribes are connected. They know each other. They see each other. They share family events. They discussed the next Native American PW Gathering. Our Native American community in PW is thriving, in part because of our commitment to our Members-at-large representation.



The Friday dinner organized by Sally Cuaresma provided a space for Native American Presbyterian women to connect with one another. The incoming and outgoing Native American Members-at-large both attended: Judy Wellington (left) and Gina Enos (right).

Perhaps you joined National Asian Presbyterian Women to make peace cranes in the Exhibit Hall? Or have you enjoyed reading in *Horizons* about or attended Hispanic Latina Presbyterian Women's Encuentro? These events wouldn't be possible without Members-at-large. Our organization, at all levels of the church, has been strengthened and blessed by individuals whose leadership skills have been nurtured in their communities.

Louise Van Poll is the PW Moderator for the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.



# JOYFUL MOMENTS



We hope you enjoyed this recap of the Gathering, and are grateful you were part of this event! You're welcome to reprint or share these photos (please credit Gathering photographer Michael Martin) or text (crediting quoted speakers), noting they're from Presbyterian Women's 2024 Churchwide Gathering.



