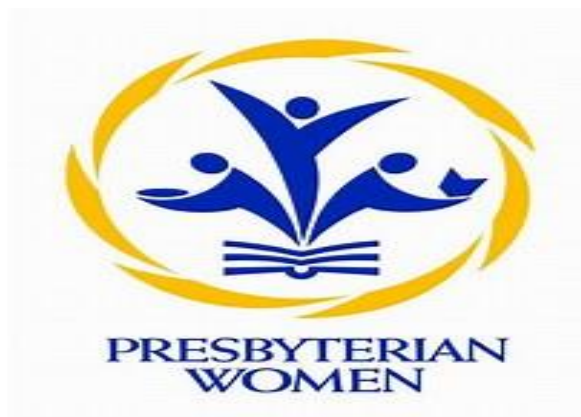


Albany Presbyterian Women's Newsletter

*Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony
Colossians 3:14*

Fall 2024



Message from the Moderator **Andrea Ralph**

In our vibrant community of Presbyterian women, we celebrate the diverse experiences and unique expressions that each individual and group brings to our collective journey. Whether we are drawn to advocacy, fellowship, mission work, or nurturing our spirituality, we recognize that each path holds its own significance and contributes meaningfully to our shared purpose.

While we are united by a common mission, the gifts of the Spirit empower us to embody this purpose in our own distinctive ways. One key role of the Albany Presbytery Coordinating Team is to serve as a resource for Presbyterian Women groups and other women's organizations seeking to engage with our activities or form new groups. Together, we cultivate a supportive environment that fosters connection and collaboration, enriching the lives of all involved.

If your congregation has a women's group interested in affiliating with Presbyterian Women, I would love to connect with you! Please reach out to me at aralph20@hotmail.com. To be recognized as a Presbyterian Women's group, all that is required is for your activities to align with any aspect of our Purpose.

Feel free to contact anyone on our team—we are here to support you!

As we move forward, let us continue to celebrate the diverse gifts and callings within our community. It is through our unique contributions that we truly embody the fullness of our Purpose together.

Presbyterian Women's Purpose

Forgiven and freed by God in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves

- **to nurture our faith through prayer and Bible study,**
- **to support the mission of the church worldwide,**
- **to work for justice and peace, and**
- **to build an inclusive, caring community of women that strengthens the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and witnesses to the promise of God's kingdom.**

Presbyterian Women's Page on Presbytery Web site.

We have a page on the Albany Presbytery Web site.

See <https://albanypresbytery.org/presbyterian-women/>

Spring Gathering 2024

The 2024 Spring Gathering of the Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of Albany was held on April 24 at Trinity Presbyterian Church, with representatives from five local churches in attendance. Pastor Kathy Gorman-Coombs opened the event with a warm welcome, followed by past moderator Charlotte Hasselbarth, who shared important announcements. Betty Dietz then provided insights on BorderLinks, our chosen recipient for the freewill offering.

Attendees enjoyed a delightful lunch, which offered a wonderful opportunity to reconnect in person. Guest speaker Marianne Montero an active member of Riverdale Presbyterian Church located in the Bronx, captivated everyone with a PowerPoint presentation on her trip to the USA Mexican border that shared her personal journey through narrated images. Her inspiring message encouraged us to love one another and support those in need.

The gathering concluded with a meaningful Communion Service. Marianne, grateful for her enriching experience on the PW USA Mission Experience Trip, continues to channel her passion for social justice into her work. Overall, the gathering left a lasting impact, reminding us of the power of community and compassion.

2024 Churchwide Gathering

The 2024 Churchwide Gathering took place in St. Louis this August, the theme *"Do Everything in Love,"* inspired by 1 Corinthians 16:14. We gathered as Presbyterian Women to celebrate, learn, sing, reflect, be inspired, connect with other PW's and deepen our engagement in the purpose of Presbyterian women.

The opening plenary session invited participants to consider the question: *"What's love got to do with it?"*—a thought-provoking exploration of the theme that set the tone for the gathering. Each plenary began with a solemn acknowledgment of the land on which we gathered, paying respect to the Indigenous peoples who originally inhabited this space, and recognizing the injustices they endured. This reflection was an important part of the opening Litany, which also honored the journeys of those who had traveled to be present, as well as the journey over the past six years since the last in-person gathering.

The lighting of the candles during the opening ceremony signified celebrating the present ability to come together in the name of Jesus Christ. It served as a moment to remember those who came before us and the paths that led us to this point. As we sang *"What's Love Got to Do with It when a heart can be broken?"* we were reminded of the need for hearts that can receive God's boundless love and grace—love that sustains us and calls us to action in the world.

Each day, I participated in two enriching workshops. One of the sessions, *Matthew 25*, delved deeply into the expectations and goals of the Matthew 25 movement, which seeks to renew and transform the work and witness of churches and their communities. The workshop emphasized the importance of churches having a meaningful presence in their neighborhoods and posed a powerful question: *"If your church were to disappear tomorrow, would there be a noticeable loss in the community?"* This challenged us to reflect on the impact our congregations have—or could have—and how we can be more intentional in our community engagement.

Another session, *Setting Boundaries in Love*, explored how we can set compassionate but firm boundaries while maintaining a spirit of love. It provided guidance on how to create spaces that are welcoming to all, while also establishing clear expectations about what behaviors and language are not acceptable. The workshop encouraged us to confront difficult behaviors with grace, ensuring that our interactions are rooted in both love and accountability.

On the second day of the gathering, the plenary theme was *Love Our World*. The keynote message, “*Did You Eat Yet?*”, introduced a profound cultural difference between American and Korean greetings. In the U.S., we often greet one another with “How are you?” as a way to check in on each other’s well-being. However, in Korea, the greeting is “*Did you eat yet?*”, a practice that originated during the Korean War, when widespread famine left many people starving. Asking “Did you eat yet?” became a term of caring and love, a way to show concern for others’ basic needs. The history behind this greeting was a powerful reminder of the kindness shown by American soldiers who, despite their own hardships, shared their rations with those who had nothing. This simple act of sharing sustenance during a time of crisis became a symbol of compassion. The message was clear: we must love our world and take care of all of God’s children, especially those in need.

The *Looking Forward: Celebrating PW Past, Present, and Future* workshop, led by Kathy Reeves and Susan Jackson Dowd, invited us to reflect on how Presbyterian Women are currently living out the PW Purpose and how we will continue to fulfill that purpose in the future. The workshop was a thoughtful exploration of how we can honor our legacy while looking ahead to the challenges and opportunities before us.

Another session, *Love Always*, examined the enduring power of love. We explored how love never ends, even in the face of adversity. The workshop introduced the acronym O.W.L.—*Only With Love*—reminding us that love should be our guiding principle in every situation. The goal is to embody love always, no matter the circumstances, and to engage with others through acts of unconditional love.

Day three’s opening plenary, *Love Our Neighbors*, featured Pastor Evelyn Torres from Puerto Rico, who shared the powerful story of how funds from the Presbytery helped rebuild her church after it was destroyed by a hurricane. Specifically, the money was used to repair the church’s kitchen, which provides meals for local schoolchildren and members of the surrounding

community. Pastor Torres' testimony reinforced the message that we are all neighbors, all children of God, and that we are called to care for and love one another, especially in times of hardship.

In the *Soul Collage* workshop, we were invited to deepen our spiritual practice through creative expression. Using pictures and collage materials, we were guided in creating art that reflected our inner emotions and spiritual growth. The process of creating a collage was an opportunity to express feelings that might be difficult to put into words, enhancing our connection to God and to each other.

The *Prayers, Litanies, and Blessings* workshop explored lectionary texts and reflected on the images and words within them, learning how to cultivate writing as a tool for worship and spiritual reflection. It was a reminder of how prayer and liturgical practices can help us connect to God, to each other, and to our own spiritual journeys.

The final banquet theme, *Loving Our Community*, centered around the spirit of generosity and support for those in need. During this event, a special gift offering was presented, which included gift cards for Bethel Hills, a residential community in Missouri that provides supportive housing and social and educational opportunities for adults with and without developmental disabilities. Additionally, contributions were made to Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services, an organization dedicated to helping vulnerable children, strengthening families, and building healthier communities. Through the collective generosity of the attendees, a total of \$18,000 was raised, demonstrating the power of love and compassion in action.

The gathering closed with a powerful service the message was *Love Always*. Together, we lifted our voices in praise, celebrating God's unfailing love for us all and reaffirming our commitment to love one another in the spirit of Christ.

This gathering was a powerful reminder of the transformative power of love—both the love that binds us together in faith and the love that empowers us to do God's work in the world.

Fall Gathering

The Fall Gathering of Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of Albany took place on Tuesday, October 29, at the West Charlton United Presbyterian Church. The event kicked off with a time

of fellowship over lunch, featuring an array of treats provided by the host church, including desserts, donuts, dates, cakes, and refreshing apple cider.

Pastor Tom Gregg warmly welcomed attendees and offered an opening prayer. The theme for the gathering was anchored in the scripture from Ephesians 4:32: “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”

Chaplain Tracey Johnson then led a thought-provoking session titled “Literacy is Power.” She engaged participants in interactive get-to-know-you activities, fostering a spirit of connection. With handouts in hand, attendees embarked on a journey exploring various components of literature and their interpretations. Chaplain Johnson read a story, encouraging everyone to dissect it and share their perspectives. The discussion highlighted the vital role educators play in shaping students' lives and the profound impact their influence can have, lasting well into adulthood.

With twenty participants in attendance, the gathering was memorable, leaving everyone enriched and inspired by the meaningful discussions and the sense of community fostered throughout the day.

Presbyterian Women in the Presbytery of Albany Helping Others

Every time Presbyterian Women hold a Spring or Fall Gathering a free will offering is taken and the money is given to a charitable organization chosen by the speaker or the coordinating team. Over the years the money has gone to a wide variety of missions including Focus Churches of Albany, the Climate Reality Project, MoonCatchers, Wizard’s Wardrobe, Westminster Presbyterian Church’s African Missions, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance for Ukraine and more recently for Israel and Palestine.

At our Spring Gathering we collected \$215 in gift cards for Lowe’s, Target, and Walmart. Attendees of the June Presbytery meeting contributed \$200 toward cards and an additional \$90 was donated by individuals for a total of \$505. The cards were taken to the Churchwide

Gathering by our moderator Andrea Ralph and will be given to Bethel Hills residential community in Missouri and Presbyterian Children's Homes and Services operating in Texas, Missouri, and Louisiana.

Our Fall Gathering donation of \$357 went to Circle of Sisters to buy Walmart gift cards to help newly immigrant women and their children purchase winter clothes and other necessities.

Over the years we have helped organizations working with immigrants, migrants, orphans, the homeless, and especially women and children. In the last five years \$8980 has been given By Presbyterian Women in Albany Presbytery and this does not include our annual \$150 donation to the Presbyterian Women in the Synod of the Northeast or financial aid of \$225 to the PWSNE mission trips. This demonstrates the impact our giving has on the lives of those in need and doesn't include all the work done by individual groups and churches in their own communities. Keep up the good work!

Rosalie Hemingway

Racial, Equity, Diversity (RED)

Join us as Magdalene Lewis and Donna Wasik lead a discussion on the Racial Equity and Diversity (RED) program they attended at the Churchwide Gathering in St. Louis this August. Magdalene, who spoke at the 2013 PW Fall Gathering about her experiences as the PWSNE representative on a USA Mission Experience Trip to the Caribbean Islands, currently serves as the Diversity Coordinator on the PWSNE Coordinating Team.

Mark your calendars for the PWSNE Sharing and Caring Zoom program on Diversity, taking place on Sunday, November 17, from 8-9 PM. A Zoom invitation will be sent via email a few days before the event. We hope to see you there!

Lisa Gray's Churchwide Zoom Book Club

In the summer of the pandemic when we were all going stir crazy, the live event at Stony Point Conference Center to hear the author of the new Presbyterian Women's Bible Study was cancelled. It seemed like a lot of the same women return each year and we missed each other. One had an idea we should do "Zoom" and I had an account. The rest is history.

The first book I chose was my favorite subject, (the shore as we say in NJ) Beach Calling a devotional journal for the middle years and beyond by Missy Buchanan. It was highlighted to use in an issue of Horizons, the PW magazine. They recommend good books, so you should keep your eyes open for suggestions in the issues. The Bible Study is in addition to the five issues produced annually. You do have a subscription, right? Presbyterianwomen.org-Horizons-subscribe.

We decided to meet at noon and keep it strictly to one hour. This is for any woman who was/is still working. We usually work with a book that does not need you to be there every week. Yes, you miss that week's topic but it's not dependent on the week before. Dropping in is encouraged. The makeup went beyond the SP Bible Study group when I placed an article about it in Horizons. All women are welcome, even if outside the Synod of the Northeast.

Our current study is The Beatitudes for Today by James C Howell. Google it and you can find used ones at a discount price. We will be celebrating the Season of Advent (which begins 12/1 and goes on for four weeks) by putting the Beatitudes on hold and use The Carols of Christmas by Alan Vermilye.

If you'd like an invite, email me or text me 973-476-4720.

By Lisa Gray

Honoring and Remembering Ardelle Stewart

On Aug 11, Ardelle Stewart passed away after having had a stroke a week prior. Most of us don't remember a time when Ardelle wasn't active at the congregation, Presbytery and Synod levels of PW. She provided music at many events and saw to it that the PW Purpose was the cornerstone of our programs.

She was a member of PW in The First Presbyterian Church of Valatie. Her group provided a "Gifts of Women Sunday" program every year. Ardelle insisted that the PW Purpose be read each year at that event. In 1987, Ardelle was one of a small group of women at the church who advocated for starting a PW group. A PW "Enabler" came to speak to them about how to start a group. Besides her PW activities, Ardelle was the organist at her church and played in the morning of the day she had the stroke.

She was a long-time leader of the PW in the Presbytery of Albany Coordinating Team and was Moderator from 2004-2007. We had a PWA Coordinating Team meeting on the Friday before her stroke. She was full of ideas, as always.

Ardelle held several positions on the PWSNE Coordinating Team. She was present at most PWSNE events and many Churchwide Gatherings.

Ardelle's passionately expressed her desire to initiate a prayer group, emphasizing the deep longing among the women of the Presbytery to support one another through prayer. She highlighted that, even if a woman is unable to attend meetings in person or participate via Zoom, she can always engage in prayer. Ardelle reminded everyone that God hears the heartfelt prayers of God's people and has the power to work mightily in every situation.

With this in mind, she encouraged all to actively pray for others and to seek out faithful sisters who will stand in prayer with them. Ardelle's heartfelt message resonated with the group, inspiring a collective commitment to lift each other up in prayer and strengthen their bonds as a community of faith.



New Name for the Newsletter

The Albany Presbyterian Women's Newsletter is looking for a new name! If you have a suggestion that inspires you, we'd love to hear it. Your ideas will be thoughtfully considered by the coordinating team, and a new name will be chosen. We look forward to your submissions!

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Ephesians 6:18

Editor

Elder Andrea Ralph