



United Women in Faith
El Camino Real District Newsletter

Q1 -March 2023 Issue

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The *Mission Link* is a quarterly newsletter of El Camino Real District United Women in Faith.

Articles for Submission

Please direct items for publication in Mission Link to the [Communications Coordinator](#). If you provide photos of recognizable individuals, please be sure you have obtained permission from those individuals to publish their picture. The next issue will be published in June, 2023. The deadline for articles and photos to be submitted is June 15, 2023.

President's Message

The district team just met this morning. I am always so amazed with the women on the team. They are so full of ideas and energy for doing the work of United Women in Faith, God's work. I am really excited about our retreat in April. Jennifer Goto will be our speaker with the theme "An Awe-Filled Life". Do you have awe in your life? I do every day. I was awed this morning by my team. I hope you will join us on April 14th in Mission Springs.

Now on to another topic. I am going on a mission trip with the CA/NV Conference mission team to Kyrgyzstan. Yes – that's where I am going. It's in central Asia between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. Still don't know where that is? Well, I had to Google it. I will be visiting some UMC churches there and participating in discussion groups of medical students from India (hence speaking English) about the Christian religion. It will be a church camp retreat like Mission U.

My first task is to prepare my testimony. Have you ever given your testimony? What would you say to a non-Christian about how and why you became a Christian?

Well, I can't say that I have ever been called upon to do this before but at 69 maybe this is the time. I have written a draft of what I might say using a format I found on Google, of course. Let me know what you think.

My Testimony (Debbie Ow)

After I became an adult, I was looking for purpose and direction in my life. I wanted to feel accepted as a person of worth. I was also looking for meaning and fulfillment. These are not unusual things for a young person to seek. To find these things I went to college so I could have a “meaningful” career. I got married in hopes of finding love and acceptance. I went back to church hoping to find some direction for my life.

After many years of seeking for what I now know is Peace in my heart, I came to the realization that I couldn't find peace on my own. My way was not working. My life seemed empty even though it was filled with my family, my work and my church. Something was missing. I was unhappy in most of my relationships as they were not fulfilling. I knew that I needed to make changes but I was afraid to make them. I couldn't do it alone.

One very important part of my life became reading scripture. My favorite verse that got me through this difficult time was Philippians 4:6 and 7. “Do not be anxious about anything but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

By reading and meditating on the Bible, I became aware of the personal way that God loves me and that He has a plan for my life that will be fulfilling. God does speak to me through the scriptures but I had to be listening! It was still up to me to choose this life and to follow his will. I had to give up on my own plans and instead be open to opportunities that he would show me. I also had to wait on his timing, not mine.

After God showed me the new path he had in store, I was very afraid of losing my friends, my home and my wealth that I had built up after 38 years of marriage. I realized that my marital relationship was holding me back from fulfilling God's will in my life. I went ahead and started a new life on my own with God's guidance. I moved away and started fresh. I sought God's guidance every step of the way and I was able to find a new home, a new church and become more active in United Women in Faith where I feel God is leading me.

I am most grateful that God guided me to this new life. He has helped me through many challenges in my life including the deaths of my parents, the loss of my job, breast cancer treatment, and estrangement from my family. I know that God is working in my life today and that He gives me peace.

My challenge to you is to write your own testimony. Share it with someone you trust. If you feel comfortable, share it with your unit. I would love to read it also. We need to know each other's stories. This is your personal experience with Jesus and God. It cannot be challenged as it belongs uniquely to you.

God bless you all,

Debbie Ow

President

ECRD District United Women in Faith

Treasurer's Report

Thank you to all of the units that have sent in remittances for missions. I love hearing about all the creative ways you are raising funds for UWF missions!

Please, continue to make remittance checks payable to "ECRD UMW"

The address for sending in remittances is:

ECRD UWF, c/o Carolyn Bircher
1663 Martin Ave.
Sunnyvale, CA 94087

PLEDGE ACCOUNT

Remittances received (Jan-Mar)	\$ 6,890.00
4 th qtr. remittances sent to conf.	<u>\$ 6,498.54</u>
March 15, 2023 balance	\$ 6,923.56

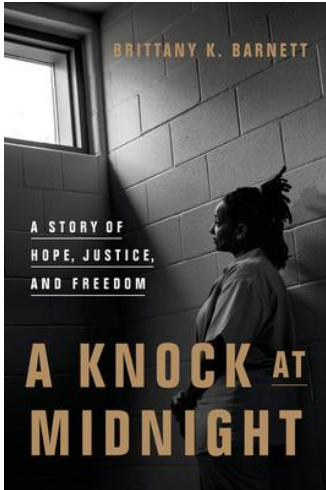
ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNT

Mission Springs reg. deposits	\$ 6,172.00
Connect & Learn expenses	\$ 100.00
Jan-Mar Communication expenses	\$ 69.00
Jan-Mar Paypal fees	<u>\$ 66.93</u>
Mar. 15, 2023 balance	\$12,048.62

The Pledge account is for contributions from the local units for missions, which are passed on to the conference (and then to National) UWF. The Administrative account is for El Camino Real District UWF events and operations.

Carolyn Bircher
ECRD Treasurer

Book Review: A Knock at Midnight



The author of [A Knock at Midnight](#) followed her passion to help people who were "buried alive" in federal penitentiaries by unfair drug laws and mandatory sentencing. I was awed by her commitment and sacrifices to help them regain their lives.

Brittany K. Barnett saw how sentences for possession of crack (more commonly used by blacks) were 100 times more severe than those for powdered cocaine (more commonly used by whites). Although this disparity was eventually corrected, the change wasn't retroactive, so people remained locked away with life sentences for relatively minor offenses. Although she trained to be a corporate lawyer, Brittany invested much of her off time in trying to find loopholes by which to free people who had already spent many years in prison.

She eventually gave up her lucrative career in corporate law to invest all of her working hours in supporting those with excessively long prison sentences. To this end, she formed several non-profits to support people both in and after prison. One of those non-profits is GEM (Girls Embracing Mothers) which several UWF units in our district are supporting by making craft kits.

This memoir is very readable and engaging. Brittany puts human faces on the problem by introducing the reader to her clients and I wanted to keep reading to find out how each of the stories ended. The title is from the parable in Luke 11:9-10 where Jesus encourages us to pray persistently for what we need. This book is on the 2023 UWF Reading Program list in the Leadership Development category and is available from most public libraries.

[Video conversation with Brittany Barnett \(30 min.\)](#)

[TED Talk by Brittany Barnett \(13 min.\)](#)

Carolyn Bircher
ECRD Secretary of Program Resources

Book Club Invitation

Have you thought about reading some of the books from the book list, but were having trouble getting started? Would it be easier to do it with a group of other women of faith? Read on for a special invitation from Almaden Hills UWF book group.

YOU ARE INVITED TO THE READING CERTIFICATE BOOK GROUP – FIVE FRIDAYS

Read "Response" magazine and five books from the United Women in Faith reading list and you will be awarded a Reading Certificate at the Annual Celebration in the fall!

To make it even more interesting, our book group (Almaden Hills UWF) has already chosen our favorite books from the list and will be meeting on five Fridays between now and July to discuss them on Zoom. *We would love to have you join us!*

SPIRITUAL GROWTH – Friday, March 31, 4 p.m.

I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness by Austin Channing Brown. Published in 2018. 185 pages. 6 copies in the San Jose Libraries.

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT (2 books) – Friday, April 21, 4 p.m.

Change Sings: A Children's Anthem by Amanda Gorman. Published in 2021. 32 pages. 40 copies in the San Jose Libraries.

A Knock at Midnight: Story of Hope, Justice & Freedom by Brittany K. Barnett. Published in 2020. 321 pages. 4 copies in the San Jose Libraries. ([see review above](#)).

NURTURING FOR COMMUNITY – Friday, May 26, 4 p.m.

Firekeeper's Daughter by Angeline Boulley. Published in 2021. 494 pages. 22 copies in the San Jose Libraries.

SOCIAL ACTION – Friday, June 30, 4 p.m.

Caste: The Origins of our Discontents by Isabel Wilkerson. Published in 2020. 476 pages. 17 copies in the San Jose Libraries. (A BONUS BOOK)

EDUCATION FOR MISSION – Friday, July 14, 4 p.m.

I Am A Man: Chief Standing Bear's Journey for Justice by Joe Starita. Published in 2009. 257 pages. 2 copies in the San Jose Libraries

To be sent the Zoom link, contact Bonnie Home at bonstance22@yahoo.com

Bonnie Home

Almaden Hills United Women in Faith

Restoring Hope: The GEM Project

Many of you attended the Connect Learn Session on Social Action and were interested to learn more about the G.E.M. project. The Wesley United Women in Faith launched their own project in support of this effort. Read more in this article by Terri Koike.

In the recent Jan/Feb 2023 issue of "Response" magazine (a United Women in Faith publication of women in mission), there is a very interesting article entitled, "Restoring Hope." It is about a non-profit organization in Dallas, Texas called G.E.M. or "Girls Embracing Mothers." This organization offers a special visitation program at a women's prison in Gatesville, Texas for inmates and their daughters. According to the article, between 1980 and 2020, the number of incarcerated women in the US has increased more than 475 percent and most of these are women of color, particularly Black and Hispanic.

Women today are the fastest growing segment of the incarcerated population. As this population increases, so, too, has the number of children growing up with a parent behind bars. Why is this? Rising rates reflect disturbing social trends: a criminal justice system that exploits the poor and vulnerable, emphasis on law enforcement and punishment over treatment for substance abuse,

throw-away attitudes towards persons with serious mental illness and misogyny. ¹ More than 58% of women in state and federal prisons and nearly 80 % of women in local jails have children who are minors. On any given day, more than 2 million children have a parent in jail or prison in this country.² Parental incarceration is a childhood trauma. There is an attached stigma and shame. Children act out with depression or aggression which can affect their learning abilities or can result in suspension from school. Many children end up following in the same paths of their incarcerated parent because they have no other role-models. *Is this what God intended?*

The solution to this problem is extremely complex, but the G.E.M. program in Texas is a good start. Their program offers mentorship, leadership development, life skills, counseling and material support. They also help train and prepare incarcerated mothers for re-entry after they are released. In 2022 the National United Women in Faith donated a generous grant to the G.E.M. organization.

G.E.M.'s work aligns closely with the UWF's core commitments in addressing mass incarceration and the criminalization of communities of color and also has a longstanding commitment to support women and girls. Recently, our Wesley UWF made a donation to the G.E.M. organization. They also sent a craft activity of 70 no sew fleece heart kits for their program's Art Therapy. They believe in the mission of the G.E.M. organization.



We need to have a better understanding of our silence, our half-heartedness, our rationalizations, and make a commitment to help others in need, even for those who are in prison.



*Terri Koike
Wesley United Women in Faith*

¹ The American Psychological Association, "Poverty, trauma, and unmet needs," April 2019

² The National Institute of Corrections, "Children of Incarcerated Parents," June 25, 2020

- Additional information: ACLU Foundation-Women's Rights Project: "Face the Facts: Women, Girls & Prisons" (Interesting article of general facts)

We Connected and We Learned!

On Saturday morning, February 4, forty women from all over El Camino Real District attended our annual “Connect & Learn” event on Zoom. The program began with the beautiful singing of “Lift Every Voice and Sing” by the a cappella quintet, “Committed.” Click on the link below to listen to it again.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngFDy52eCZY>



Our longtime friend and devoted United Woman of Faith, Jo Ann Lawson, spelled out for us the importance of the Charter for Racial Justice. As it says, “Racism is a system of inequality based on race prejudice and the belief that one race is innately superior to all other races . . . In principle, the United States has outlawed racial discrimination; but in practice, little has changed . . . a color-blind society is many years in the future . . . With respect to race, the aim of The United Methodist Church is nothing less than an inclusive church in an inclusive society . . . God is the Creator of all people and all are God’s children in one family.” People who have come from China, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, Alaska, the Philippines, Jamaica, and Haiti are specifically named in the document. Our speaker displayed the Racial Justice Time Line and she encouraged us to establish our own Racial Justice Commissions at our own churches.

The keynote presentation was followed by two 45-minute breakout rooms. The women had chosen in advance which two they preferred according to the topics to be discussed in each.

The closing music was sung by Michelle Partsch of San Jose who sang “I Asked the Lord,” composed by Jimmy Duncan and Johnny Lange.

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The Racial Justice Time Line can be found at this address –

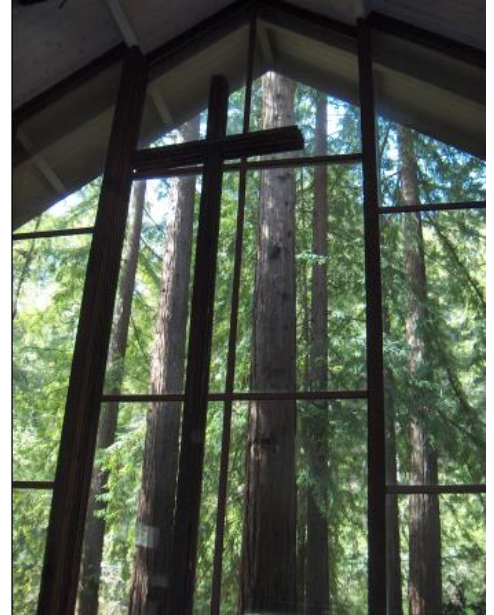
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ELARfbwP_HO5JUFpt-5gci8b4rd-WM0s/view?usp=share_link

*Bonnie Home
Almaden Hills United Women In Faith*

For all the materials that Jo Ann Lawson provided, as well as the music videos and other links, please go to [the 2023 Connect and Learn Page](#) on the ECRD Website. It can also be accessed from the ECRD Website by navigating to the “Education and Training” tab and selecting “Connect and Learn”. From there, scroll down for a link to the 2023 C&L page.

Coming Events

- **Spiritual Retreat – April 14 – 16 at Mission Springs.**
This will be our first in-person Spiritual Retreat in several years, so *save the date* and plan to spend it in worship and fellowship with our UWF sisters. The registration deadline has been extended to March 22, 2023, so please register if you have not already done so.
- **Mission U – June 2-4 at Monte Toyon.** For more information, please check out the [Conference Web Page](#)



Around the District

If you have a photo or announcement about a local unit event, feel free to submit it. We will try to publish some things in this section that may trigger ideas for other units.



Wesley United Women in Faith – A Valentine for G.E.M

Wesley United Women in Faith completed 70 kits that were sent to the G.E.M organization in Dallas, Texas on February 14th, 2023. Refer to the Article in Response Magazine and to the previous article in this issue.

Wesley United Women In Faith – Blessing Bags

Showing God's Love to our Grant School Neighbors. Giving encouragement and hope in a world that is sometimes difficult to survive in. The Wesley UWF put together 23 Blessing Bags that included things like: laundry detergent, dish soap, fabric softener, foil sheets, bar soap, toothpaste/tooth brushes, Kleenex, micro fiber towels, hand sanitizer, and God's Garden decorated treat bags, among many other things. We all agreed that we were more blessed to be able to give; more than our neighbors were blessed to received.



Communications Update

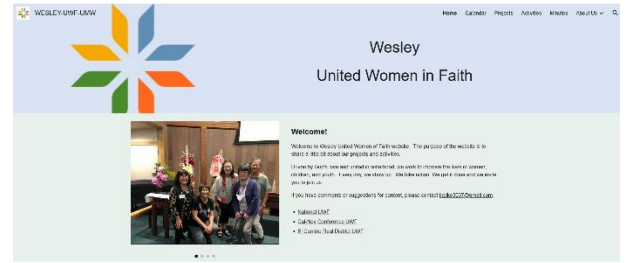
Do you have an interest in putting together the Mission Link Newsletter or learning a little bit about maintaining a Website? The ECRD District team will be looking for at least 2 people to fill these roles in 2024.

With an eye toward future handoffs, I made some changes to how we were performing these functions:

1. The Mission Link newsletter is now authored exclusively in Microsoft Word – in order to maximize the number of folks who have the technical skillset.
2. The Mission Link is archived on the ECRD website in .pdf form, so there is no problem with interactions with Mailchimp.
3. Mailchimp is only used for maintaining the email database and doing an email blast. Content development is done either in WordPress (website) or Word (Mission link).

I've tried to make tutorials to help with the training process and I'm happy to show anyone with an interest how to do these things. Please let me know if you are interested.

At the Connect and Learn event, I spoke briefly about the possibility of building unit websites, using Willow Glen UWF as an example. As of this writing, Wesley UWF have a website ready to launch. With the encouragement of their pastor, Terri Koike took up the challenge and is the webmaster for Wesley UWF. It's looking very nice!



If your unit has an interest in creating a very simple (as in low/no budget) website, please contact me and I can help you get started.

Laurie Lindsey
[Communications Coordinator](#)