

THE PERSISTENT VOICE

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Signs of the Times

The Long Years of War

"Women have struggled during the war," said Deborah Deng Bul, a leader in women's work, who, together with her husband Daniel, a bishop in the Episcopal Church of Sudan, were guests at Wartburg Seminary Nov. 1. Softly, in her own voice, she told how during the long years of war the women were left alone at home. Great strength was needed, not only to take care of the family home and the land, but to cook meals and take them to the soldiers at the front. It was dangerous. The bishop himself was arrested and jailed many times.

Women also were imprisoned, raped and impregnated. They have struggled for years, and the suffering continues. But, she added, when the church saw their strength, they eventually decided to ordain women.



Language in Flux

Rev. Betty Thompson, WTS '81, remembers when "inclusive language" referred to efforts of the seminary's then all-male faculty to remember to refer to students using he *and* she.

Dr. Kristen Johnston Lagen, WTS 1997, and her colleagues have used the WTS policy as a resource in developing a statement on inclusive language at Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, where she is Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology.



Exegeting Identity

Dr. Gwen Saylor, professor of Hebrew Bible at WTS, presented one of her recent sabbatical projects in a lecture November 8 entitled "Yesterday's Eunuchs, Today's Homosexuals: A Biblical Case for Full Inclusion of Homosexuals."

Asserting that this insider-outsider issue is wrapped in gender ambiguity, and that faithful praxis replaces gender status in community identity, Saylor highlighted these questions: What does the Bible say? Which Biblical voice is authoritative? Which equips the Church for service?

The Global Scene

An interview with
Rev. Esther Ngomuo
By Lisa Parker, M.Div. Senior



It was a special day at the Shighatini Lutheran Parish. On this warm, February day in 1994, the first three women to serve as pastors in the Pare Diocese of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania (ELCT) were ordained. The church was packed—with friends, family and with people who wanted to see women ordained. They wondered what it would be like. How would they act? How would they dress?

Esther Ngomuo—presently pursuing her Master of Arts in Theology, Development and Evangelism (MATDE) at Wartburg—was one of the women ordained that day. In Tanzania there are approximately 2,000 pastors and just over 50 of them are women.

Esther has found acceptance as she has served as pastor in Tanzania. She says in her country men and women tend to be paid the same—based on their level of education. Pastors and other professionals are accepted in her context because there is a great respect for leaders that comes out of the tribal culture. She saw that people watched her to see if she would do the work as men do. They accepted her as their pastor right away, even more so once they experienced her gifts and ability to proclaim the gospel. She has even found that she has more influence with some people who appreciate the particular perspective she brings. For instance, in instances of marital counseling, women are more open to hearing from another woman because they don't have to worry that a man is just taking their husband's side.

Esther's research project while studying at Wartburg relates to ministry for those orphaned by the HIV/AIDS crisis. This past summer she interviewed community leaders, including pastors, teachers, doctors, social workers, and even some of the orphans. The Pare Diocese will be blessed as Esther returns with her passion, energy, and ability in community development and outreach.

20th Annual Convocation on Inclusive and Expansive Language

By Sylvia Lee-Thompson, M.Div. Senior

Each year the Wartburg Seminary community gathers to listen and speak together about the seminary's commitment to using inclusive language for human beings and expansive language for God. Sam Giere, Assistant Professor of Homiletics, and Amy Carrant, Interim Director of the Center for Youth Ministries, introduced the topic and led the discussion. Giere spoke about his experience of being required to use inclusive language in college before he fully understood why it was important. Through its use, he began to see the effects of non-inclusive language and that one's understanding of God changes as language for God expands.

Giere shared with the group some quotes from ELCA documents, including this from the ELCA Publishing Standards from 2003: "We who work so closely with language in the realm of faith are challenged to use words and metaphors that will summon all of God's children to see themselves as created in God's image, and that will invite them into a deeper, richer, more mature faith." As Giere said, "In short, the language we use for humans and for God is missional."

Current shared her personal experiences with language. As a child she questioned words like "manmade" and "mankind." In her college and seminary years, she was encouraged by the spirited dialogue about language. She also spoke about her role as pastor. Current reflected, "Language has power – and it is a gift to be prayed, pondered, and put to good deliberate use. Our intention is inclusivity. Our call as God's people is to pay attention and listen to the cries of our neighbor and to continue to find ways to meet one another along the way by the grace of God."

Current acknowledged the differing views and feelings about this issue. Each person present completed an anonymous questionnaire regarding their belief and practice. The results were announced after the table discussions (see the website for results). Conversation at the tables during the convocation was lively.

WTS began using the new *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* in Advent. The Psalms have been translated with inclusive and expansive language, and the liturgies offer alternative wordings to expand God-language. In the hymns good effort has been made to avoid male pronouns for God and deepen and enrich our images for God. We look forward to diving into this new resource as we worship the One who is abundantly far more than any words we humans use, and yet is the Word who is with us.

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New TV Series *Studio 60*

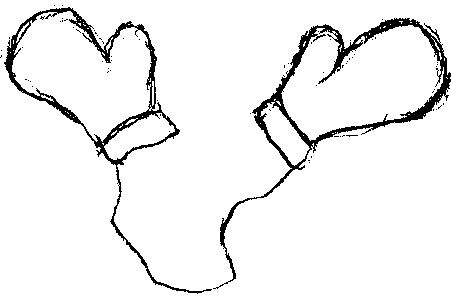
Reviewed by Chris deForest

Chris is currently taking a year off from M.Div studies at WTS, and is supporting his wife, Allison, on her internship in Colorado.

Uplifting, thought-provoking, challenging: words not usually associated with late-night television – but just right for the new NBC dramedy *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. Of course, this is not a real late-night show, but a show about a show. It is a series that looks inside a pretend *Saturday Night Live* – its cast, crew, and the network brass who harass them.

The real surprise? To find a show about this industry – especially male-writer-dominated sketch comedy – with such strong female characters, and such rich discourse on faith. Amanda Peet plays Jordan McDeere, the new president of the fictitious NBS, brought in to save the ratings-poor network in general, and the worn-out *Studio 60* in particular. She can salvage an on-air disaster while caring about those around her, and inspire people to strive for excellence. She remains real and human, ready to laugh at every twist and turn. Although she makes no profession of faith, Jordan lives as we all wish we could: not bound by fear, free to take a chance on each other and ourselves – the way God calls us to live in the gospel.

The other remarkable woman actually is overtly Christian. Harriet Hayes (Sarah Paulson) is also smart, sophisticated, and funny as hell. She is described as the greatest talent among these fictional “not-ready-for-prime-time” players, and among the most respected. The show-within-the-show dares to tweak fundamentalists. Harriet has the ability to engage in honest dialogue even when she, too, is conflicted. She has rational, yet faithful, responses and willingness to find humor and hubris on all sides, even within herself.



Mary's Son

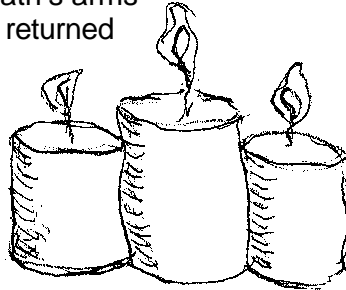
By Rev. Susan Ruehle, WTS 1981
Assistant to the Bishop,
Greater Milwaukee Synod ELCA

Open arms embrace
Seed of life held

In mother's arms
Love of God grows

Empty arms free the son
Given to the world

In death's arms
Love returned



The Persistent Voice now reaches almost 2000 people all over the world. We have been publishing this newsletter for 18 years to work toward the full partnership of women and men in the Church. Over the years, we have addressed and explored many issues related to discrimination (including racism, sexism, and classism). We are committed to continuing this important work as long as it is needed in our society. However, *The Persistent Voice* is funded solely by reader donations, and it costs approximately \$350.00 per issue to print, copy, and mail the newsletter. Please consider financially supporting this work so that these voices may continue to be heard. Thank you for your generous response.

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www.wartburgseminary.edu.

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for **The Persistent Voice**

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A New Paradigm in Ministry

By Dr. Ritva H. Williams, Lutheran Year Student

In our continuing series on paradigm shifts in ministry, *The Persistent Voice* interviewed Rev. Lynn Ronsberg and Rev. Mike Carlson who serve respectively as Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor at Zion Lutheran Church in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, a congregation of over one thousand members. Ronsberg is one of only 27 female senior pastors who, as reported in our last edition, serve ELCA congregations with a weekly attendance of more than 300 worshippers. Carlson, therefore, has the distinction of being one of a very small minority of associate male pastors working with a female senior pastor. The ministry team at Zion also includes a full-time Youth Minister and a full-time Music Minister.

Ronsberg and Carlson focus on ministry through a common theology and way of doing ministry centered in a proclamation of the gospel with social justice. Carlson says “We proclaim a message of grace with teeth to it.” What that looks like in practice is this: Zion Lutheran Church opens its doors daily from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 a.m. to house and feed homeless people. Commenting on the congregation’s commitment to this ministry, Ronsberg notes, “no one has asked ‘how much is this costing us in electricity.’”

Carlson asserts that “there is much less hierarchy” at Zion than in his previous experiences of working with a Senior Pastor. Another defining characteristic of their team ministry is the ability to come and go in leadership roles, to take turns being front and center. Ronsberg notes that “most people here would say that their child was baptized by Pastors Lynn and Mike” because both of them regularly participate in every baptismal service, and both sign the baptismal certificates.

Ronsberg asks, “Why do we need hierarchy? Let’s be a team.” Within that team each person has particular responsibilities, she for administration, he for education. Successful team ministry, according to Ronsberg, “requires trust within the team and living it out for the congregation.”

Both call into question the assumption held by many that an associate pastor position is just a stepping stone to a solo or senior pastor role. Carlson asks, “Does everyone’s goal have to be attaining the role of senior pastor? Is it possible to have a faithful call to be a long-term associate pastor?”

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