

# TouchPoint

The North American Baptist Conference Women's Connection Newsletter

FALL 2022



## Thank You Amber

FOR BEING A PART OF THE

### Women's Connection Leadership Team

Amber joined the Women's Connection Leadership Team (then the Women's Ministry Leadership Team) 8 years ago and has been a valuable team member as we have walked through many changes. We have watched Amber dedicate herself to participating in the many activities of her 3 growing children and looked forward to updates of what they were involved in at school and in the community. Amber gave us a visual example of someone who lived missionally in her neighborhood and school environment. We looked on as she joined her husband in exciting ministry opportunities.

We are grateful for all you have contributed to Women's Connection, Amber, and know that you will be used to further the Word of God as you help develop Community Bible Studies in Folsom, California.

– Jean Ewing

Amber joined our WCLT (then called the WMLT) when she was a young Mom with a very busy life. And she made a huge difference! I realized that she thought differently than I did on many issues, and she challenged me to examine my thinking. Even the change of name was significant! I have so appreciated this, and have grown so much because of Amber. We will miss her insights and spiritual disciplines, and we will also miss her friendly way of hosting us in Roseville! She has been such a blessing to all of us.

– Heather Senges

Thank you so much for giving of your time to serve in team, It's been a pleasure working with you. I truly appreciate all your work and support for the team and the women in the conference. I pray God continue to bless you and your family in your future endeavors.

– Fabiola Campos



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Be the first to email [jhewing@roadrunner.com](mailto:jhewing@roadrunner.com) for a FREE copy of **Gentle and Lowly** by Dean Ortland

# A Consistent Calling Through Changing Seasons

## An interview with Christine Okken by Amber Dowd

**M**any of you may recognize Christine Okken as Harry Kelm's Executive Assistant. But did you know that Christine has spent 30 years working in pastoral ministry? We're so thankful to be able to share her story— and wisdom— with you!

Christine and her husband Terry have lived in Edmonton, Alberta for 25 years, attending and working at McKernan Baptist Church for most of that time. She also spent early adulthood in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where she attended Sioux Falls Seminary and worked at Hillcrest Church.

### What led you to attend Sioux Falls Seminary as a young adult?

I enrolled in response to an encouragement from Jim Schneider, who was the Dean of Students at NABC. I had a wonderful undergraduate college experience and felt God calling me to similarly serve students in a college setting. Sensing that counseling might be the route to take, Jim recognized that seminary would be a good fit for me. I ended up loving it!

### Did you end up working with students on college campuses as you had anticipated?

No! I got involved with the youth ministry at Hillcrest Church, where Harry Kelm was the senior pastor at that time. When the Youth Director stepped down, Harry approached me to take the position. This came as a surprise since I was planning on working in a college setting, not a



Christine Okken

church setting. But God confirmed through my love for the kids that this was His leading. I learned that we sometimes come into things with certain expectations, but God shows He has different plans in mind!

Harry and Cindy became invaluable mentors and my "family" away from home as I learned about the life of ministry. Although I'm a self-starter and work hard, their influence helped me better understand myself, grow closer to God, and taught me to love the church and serve with faithfulness.

Initially some were hesitant about seeing a woman in this role, but I felt God leading me to not push against them and to simply serve faithfully. It was a beautiful experience to later have people in the church affirm my consistency. I see now that God used my seven years at Hillcrest to lay a foundation for an enduring and successful youth ministry.

### After your seven years at Hillcrest Church, what happened next in your life of ministry?

Well, we were expecting our first child and had to decide what to do. Terry was willing to stay with our daughter while I worked, but I felt God leading me to stay home. We moved back to Edmonton and Terry was hired on with NABC (now Taylor). I noticed that the sense of calling to ministry remained in me even though I had stepped out of that space. God provided the opportunity to teach youth ministry classes on an adjunct basis at Taylor College and Seminary. It was just right for that season.

Then came a difficult ending at Taylor, and we were pressed to rely on God for what was next. As we prayed Terry suggested we look into youth ministry again, even though we now had three little kids. It turned out that the youth pastor at McKernan Baptist Church was leaving, and God opened the door when our Senior Pastor asked us to lead the youth ministry as a couple. We loved working together and our giftings complement each other really well. During our ten years of leading together, our children were loved and embraced by the leaders and students.

Eventually Terry was called out of youth to be the Executive Pastor of McKernan. I continued but sensed a new season coming as well. God led me to wait and allow time to raise up the next leaders. I then filled in for our Pastoral Care Pastor during her Sabbatical, which eventually became a part-time job that we shared.

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I appreciate how God worked with my personality as I stepped into this role. I like to try things out before I commit, and it was neat how God gave me a trial period before I committed to the role longer-term.

### **It seems as an Executive Assistant you are in an entirely different season yet again. How did God lead you to where you are now?**

In recent years we went through a season of personal crisis, and God showed us it was time for me to step away from formal ministry and take a leave of absence. With Terry facing serious health issues and all four of our parents passing away in a short span of time, my emotional space for pastoral ministry had diminished. I entered a season of healing and placing myself under God's care.

During this time, Harry Kelm became the Executive Director of NAB. He approached me to pray about working as his Executive Assistant. Working from home alongside a precious friend for a Conference of Churches that I love gave me peace. Thirty years after having worked with Harry at Hillcrest Church in Sioux Falls, I'm now working with Harry in Edmonton!

### **What are some key lessons you've learned on your journey in ministry thus far?**

I've lately learned that ministry doesn't always need to be a formal role. The things I'm doing now I also recognize as ministry. I feel at peace with this season of my life.

Another lesson is that God continually weaves our relationships together and mentoring is my heart. I have many

stories; for example, Jim Schneider's son Dave went through our youth ministry as a student. Dave was in turn called to the youth ministry and became the successor of my position at McKernan. This and many other ministry relationships are still interwoven by God to this day.

I've also learned a lot about working with my spouse. Terry has always made a point to champion me and my gifts. We have identified how our gifts balance each other, which helps us succeed as a team. For example, he is good at building structure and strategy, and I am good at filling in the relational aspects and carrying things forward. We are comfortable handing things off to each other and work hard on communication and honesty. As a couple we've also learned the importance of setting church topics aside to make space for other conversations and interests.

As a mother working in ministry, I learned to allow my children to have their own space for relationships within the church, independent of me. For example, if there were conflicts with specific people, we made a point to not tell our children all the details. Although they were aware of challenges, it allowed them to not have their church relationships be colored by conflicts behind the scenes.

God has also spoken to me numerous times about my personal capacity. If I run out of having enough for myself, I have nothing left to offer to anyone else. God seems more concerned with who He has called me to be than what He has called me to do. This means saying no sometimes.

Related to this, I've learned God's calling continues through the many seasons of my life. Sometimes I have had to step back and sometimes I have been led to step in. My job has been to discern: What is God's voice

to me now? The stops and starts I've experienced have been the right things to do, and God has provided what I've needed through each season.

And finally, as a woman working in ministry I've learned the importance of having good people as mentors in my life to help me navigate the unique challenges. I've also learned to set my mind on the pathway of faithfulness and surrendering to the Lord, during external struggles.

Working faithfully builds trust, and God provides what I need in terms of confirmation and perspective about my calling. With good mentors and an attitude that I'll go where God calls me to go, I've felt equipped for ministry.

### **Are there any books you'd recommended to our readers?**

I recently read *Gentle and Lowly* by Dean Ortland, which explores Christ's heart toward us. I've also always appreciated Mark Buchanan. His thoughts about Sabbath in *The Rest of God* were foundational for me; as well as *Spiritual Rhythm* as a resource for those exploring seasons of life and ministry.

### **Any final thoughts for our readers?**

My life verse has been Isaiah 58:11-12, which I personalize to describe me as a well-watered garden and has words full of promise for my life's ministry. But then verse 13 follows with a warning to keep the Sabbath. I can only fulfill God's calling if I take His offer of restoration and filling. My heart is to place my relationship with Jesus above my service so that I can serve out of the outflow of my relationship with Him. This is something I would encourage for all women called to ministry.



# Connecting in North Dakota

On September 10, 2022 members of the Women's Connection Leadership Team held its first connecting luncheon 'post covid' at Century Baptist Church in Bismarck, North Dakota.

Women from several of the North Central Association churches came to learn more about what is happening in the North American Baptist Conference and specifically in Women's Connection. The added joy was spending time with other women who share the desire to see that women in their churches are encouraged and offered opportunities to grow.

*Thank you for the opportunity to meet with other women in the Dakotas and encourage each other in our women's ministry! It was good to share endeavors with the women at our table.*

*The information that was made available to us was beneficial as well.*

*May God bless each of you Women's Connection leaders.*

– Joy Goehring Ashley, ND

As women enjoyed a delightful lunch prepared by the Century team, they shared experiences, plans and thoughts in response to a series of questions and topics about women in ministry through our 'Table Talk' time.

A highlight of our time together was hearing more about NAB White Cross program. Century Baptist has now become the distribution point to Cameroon for the United States NAB churches. Debbie Long, project manager (along with her husband, Dan) shared their vision for the work and their desire to see other NAB churches join them in a renewed interest in providing vital medical supplies to Cameroon. Women took supplies back to their churches to prepare for sending.

April Wahl, Middle School Director at Century, challenged us to be intentional about encouraging and supporting the younger women in our churches by making space for them in the ministries in the church.

Thank you, Century Baptist for opening your doors and your hearts to women who faithfully lead and serve in the North Central Association.

– Jean Ewing/Fabiola Campos





# Century Baptist White Cross Distribution Center

BY DEBBIE LONG

An added joy to our trip to Bismarck, ND for a regional luncheon was being able to visit the new US White Cross Distribution Center. After 10 years, Quest church in Royse, Texas, handed the baton over to Century Baptist in Bismarck, ND in November 2020.

Distribution Center Housed in For the City building



*Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially those who belong to the family of believers.*

— Galatians 6:9-10

Fabiola and I were amazed at the way God had prepared Century to graciously and excitedly take that baton and run with great determination to continue the mission to get needed medical supplies from our NAB churches to Cameroon hospitals and medical centers that we had seen during our visit to Cameroon.

Not only did God have a facility ready and waiting, but He had a team at Century ready and willing to breathe new life into this vital NAB ministry. Debbie and Dan Long are project managers and their dedication has been contagious as they work through

every detail to get the baby layettes—baby blankets, diapers, bandages, absorbent squares, sheets, pillowcases, hospital supplies, guest house supplies, and other medical supplies from our NAB churches to the distribution center in Cameroon.

Debbie Long shares: We at Century Baptist have been on a great adventure and learning curve for the past year and a half. Not only was this new to us, but we began during the challenging covid years. In order for this ministry to work, we have needed capable men, women and children to give of their time, energy, resources and talents.

One of the earliest desires that God placed on my heart, was to make the items we produced easy enough to include the next generation, our youth. Bandage rollers were redesigned to make them kid friendly and easy for anyone to roll bandages. Crystal Springs Camp in Medina, North Dakota was thrilled to have a hands-on mission-based project for all campers. The first summer, they rolled over 5,000 bandages. This past summer, they did close to that amount, but also began producing 4" squares.

At Century, kids from Kindergarten though High School participate in White Cross nights with our Middle School students, under April Wahl's direction, taking a very active roll. They are capable and they so enjoy producing needed supplies.

We have a faithful group of women who meet weekly to inspect items and process fabric and other materials into items needed as listed in the White Cross Handbook. Over 60 women have participated since February 2021. Many of these women shared how lonely, isolated and even depressed they felt during covid. Participating in White Cross was vital to their recovery.



Debbie Long sharing the vision for White Cross

I found this Middle Schooler's prayer tucked in a finished project:

*Dear God,  
our Father, Helper, and Strengtheners.*

*I thank you for caring for the people in Cameroon and places who can't afford to treat their wounds by establishing this service called The White Cross Ministry. I am so thankful for the people getting helped, cared for loved, healed, treated and receiving the little Bible verses and none of this could've happened without Your help and compassion.*

*I pray that this ministry would be more effective and just please increase the physical wounds being healed and of course (most importantly) being spiritually healed. Please be with them continually and just thank you God, for all the volunteers, employees and service. I hope people would humble themselves and have more compassion for others and a hunger for You.*

*In Your Incredible Name,  
Emma Lee Sritach*

Thank you, Century, for responding to God's nudging to be a part of this vital work, joining the efforts of White Cross Canada where the Alberta Association and Taylor / E P Wahl Centre partner to support the ministry of White Cross Canada.

# The Women of “Significant”

## **Significant – Six Ordinary Women, One Extraordinary God** **A Study of the Women in Jesus’ Genealogy**

BY HEATHER SENGES

In this issue we will look at the last two women in Rachel Risner’s list of six women significant in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Previously we looked at the lives of SARAH, a woman of beauty; LEAH, a woman of worship; TAMAR, a woman of mercy; and RAHAB, a woman of courage.

Now we will look briefly at RUTH, a woman of tenacity; and BATHSHEBA, a woman of influence. Two more women that God used in the most unexpected ways.

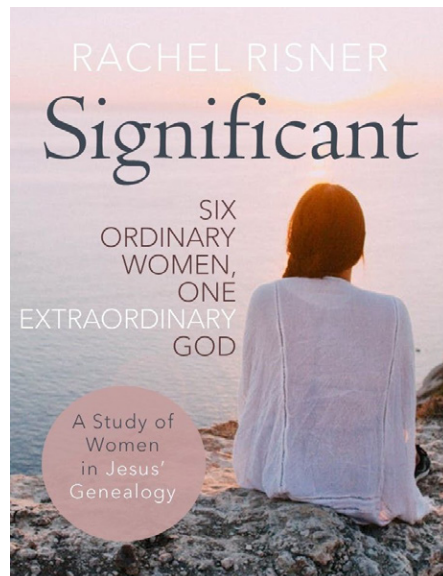
### **RUTH**

#### **From pauper to princess** **A woman of tenacity**

By following her heart, and doing what she knew was right, Ruth went from being a foreigner to being someone who was respected, blessed and honoured. She came to be known for her faithfulness, loyalty, virtue and love. The Bible talks of her as being a hard worker and one who takes care of those she loves. How did all this happen to a young girl from Moab?

Let’s look at the characters in this drama:

- Ruth, a young foreign widow without family or prospects who became an ancestor of Jesus
- Naomi, her shrewd mother-in-law who told her how to get a second husband
- Boaz, the wealthy Israelite who married Ruth and became the father of Obed
- Orpah, the second daughter-in-law of Naomi who turned her back on Naomi and left her
- The women of Bethlehem, who had their own part to play in the story



Ruth, whose name means “companion” or “friend”, was a true friend to her mother-in-law and stayed with her after the deaths of their husbands, even leaving her own land and people to go with Naomi back to her ancestral home in Bethlehem. There her hard work brought her to the attention of Boaz, and a beautiful story of love and redemption developed.

Ruth had remarkable faith. Faith that there was a purpose for her ahead; faith that God was who He said He was; faith that God would provide all she needed. And God rewarded her with healing, provision and love. God had a plan for Ruth. She followed Him with tenacity and He brought her victory and many blessings.

### **BATHSHEBA**

#### **From invisible to influential** **A woman of influence**

The story of Bathsheba, how David saw her bathing and was attracted to her; how he had her husband killed in battle so he could marry her; how she became the mother of the wise

King Solomon – all this we know well and have heard often. In fact, she is not named with her own name in the genealogy of Jesus, but merely referred to as “Uriah’s wife”.

So who was Bathsheba really? We know, first of all, that both Bathsheba’s father and husband were men of good character – strong, valiant, faithful, mighty men in King David’s army. And Bathsheba was beautiful! But we also find, as her life goes on, that she was a capable and gifted woman. She was a most beguiling person – people were fascinated by her.

When she became David’s wife, she also became Queen, and in this role she flourished. Though she lost that first child, she next bore Solomon, who was destined to become Israel’s next king. She also bore David 3 more children. This family became a powerful bond for David, though the consequences of his sin earlier would have implications for the rest of his life.

But Bathsheba became of queen of wisdom and influence. She plays a huge role in the story of the people of Israel as wife and mother as well. It is speculated that the woman of Proverbs 31 was Bathsheba – a woman of influence in her family and in her community.

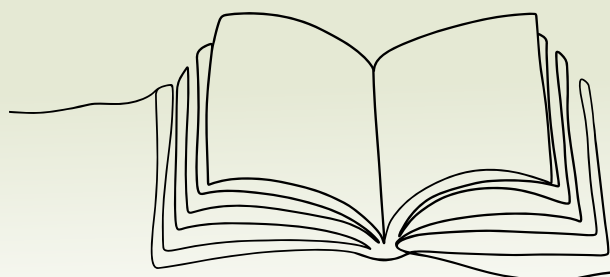
We see of Bathsheba – “A woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised.” God took a situation that first brought grief and loss and redeemed it for Bathsheba’s gain. He enabled her to become a woman of godly influence – a woman who spoke wise words humbly, embracing each opportunity put before her by the King of her heart.

We pray that we would be the same wise and humble influencers over others – true servants of our extraordinary God.

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**Rachel Risner will soon be releasing her Bible study—*Six Praying Women, One Faithful God, A Study of Praying Bible Women***





# Advent Studies & Devotionals

**T**he word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming” or “visit.” In this Advent season, we long for the coming of Christ. It gives us a chance to stop and remember how generation after generation of Israelites anticipated Christ’s birth. Imagine the uncertainty, the doubt they must have felt at times. But God was not silent in the years before Christ; He gave the Israelites prophecies of Christ’s coming.

Advent and the prophecies of Christ show us that even in the midst of our waiting, God is near. He hears us, He sees us, and He cares. Galatians 4:4 says, “When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son.” At just the right moment in time, God sent Jesus to the earth. His timing is perfect. As we hope for Christ’s return, we can rest in this truth.

Since God did not want His people to miss the coming of the Savior, He gave them insight into what He would look like and what He would do. In the same way, God reminds us of His character and truth in the middle of our own waiting. He is faithful to fulfill His promises.

## The God Who Restores Love God Greatly

Advent is a season of waiting, remembering, and rejoicing. We wait for Christ’s return, celebrating His first coming even as we wait and long for His return. We remember the brokenness of our world and how He will bring restoration and wholeness when He comes. And we praise Him, remembering the joy we have as we place our hope in Christ.

*The God Who Restores* Bible study journal leads us through the season of Advent, a season of waiting and great expectation of the coming back of our eternal King. This study journal includes daily readings and SOAP verses,



devotions to aid in understanding, as well as reflection questions and highlights from a global Love God Greatly branch. Perfect for personal or small group study, *The God Who Restores* will offer you encouragement in your walk of faith.

## IF: EMMANUEL Sixteen Encounters with Jesus



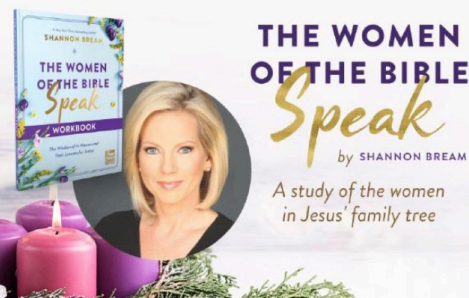
Emmanuel. God with us. Jesus, the one who saves us from sin. For the Advent season, this is what we celebrate, what we meditate on, why we worship the Lord. In the midst of the busy season of Christmas—

parties, gifts, family, friends, traveling, shopping—we want to invite you to have an encounter with Jesus. To experience Jesus as Emmanuel—who is with us, with you.

The God of the universe so near that He is with you at all times. Through this 4-week study, we pray that you will experience Jesus, that you will have an encounter with Him, that you will experience the beautiful, life changing meaning of Emmanuel—God with you.

## The Women of the Bible Speak Online Bible Study by Shannon Bream

*You're Invited!*  
FREE ADVENT BIBLE STUDY



**JOIN TODAY**  
[faithgateway.com/obs](http://faithgateway.com/obs)

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## Emmanuel

by Ruth Chou Simons

### Let Your Christmas Hope Last All Year Long

If there's one name for Jesus that captures the whole heart of God, it is Emmanuel—God with

us. No other name similarly expresses the fullness of God's eternal desire for His image-bearers. He's always wanted us to be with Him.

From the bestselling author and artist behind *GraceLaced* and *Beholding and Becoming* comes this gorgeously illustrated Advent exploration of what it means to intimately experience God's presence in our daily lives. Ruth Chou Simons welcomes you and your family to partake in a season of surrender as you discover the true miracle behind Christmas: that while we journey to grow in our relationships with Jesus, He has already come so He can be with us forever.

Christmas Day is not the end of our celebrations, but the beginning! *Emmanuel* is an invitation to rejoice in the everlasting fellowship and hope God extended to us on the day of His Son's birth, guiding us to realize that having God with us all year long is Christmas's most incredible gift.

## THE WONDER OF ADVENT

### *Delighting in the hope, joy, peace, and love of Christmas*

Delight in the wondrous arrival of Christ using this 4-week study! Weave your way through the virtues of hope, joy, peace, and love—beginning with the Old Testament prophets and tracing the theme through the Christmas story, Jesus' ministry, and the final promises in Revelation. Features colorful interior pages, leader helps, activities, and access to devotional videos.



[www.lifeway.com](http://www.lifeway.com)



## A Weekend Mini-Conference

BY HEATHER SENGES

Women's Ministries at Bethany Baptist Church in Richmond, BC, wanted to hold a retreat for their ladies, but one that would not take too much work! So, we found the IF:Gathering. We realized that we could purchase the videos of speakers, worship music and breakout sessions as a Host Church for about CAN\$ 400 – perfect! We could hear fantastic women – Jennie Allan, Sadie Robertson Huff, Christine Caine, Jackie Hill Perry, and many more. We could join in worship with a great band and vocalists. We could use their advertising and graphics. It was just what we wanted.

So, we held an IF:Gathering mini-conference on a Friday evening and Saturday morning. We served goodies on Friday night, breakfast on Saturday morning, and ended with Saturday lunch. We gave each lady a goodie bag. We charged \$25/each so the registrants were committed to coming. And we had a wonderful time together.

A word of caution: you need to preview the speakers and make sure their content is suitable for your audience. Out of the 15 speakers available, we chose 5. And you need to set aside some time after each speaker for table discussion to digest what you just heard (each speaker is about 20 minutes long). We also chose worship where we knew most of the songs! AND you need a good techie person.

We held this mini-conference in September, and it was a good kick-off for the fall activities. It was a great blessing and joy to the ladies that attended.