

## Six Presbyterian Women Values

Martha Pool, current chair of the Leadership Enhancement Committee, Churchwide Coordinating Team, wrote and presented the Six Values of Presbyterian Women at the Presbyterian Women Leadership Training, Orlando, Fla., on Sept. 24, 2010.

The following is a shorter version of her presentation. She shared what she felt to be the values of Presbyterian Women, but are not limited to only these six. Maybe you would expand the list to include other values. Here are six to get started:

### 1. **First value of PW is a commitment to God and Church.**

Presbyterian Women have always studied scripture and prayed together. Studying the scripture and engaging in prayer are our foundational spiritual practices.

Seeking God, searching for God's will and understanding our unique relationship to God continues to be important to women. Only then does the Holy Spirit move among us, linking our faith to social concerns in our communities and around the world and letting our hands be the hands of Jesus and our work honor our gracious and loving God.

PW's commitment to the Presbyterian Church remains strong. Before women were allowed to be church leaders, women organized to do mission work and thereby learned how to be leaders. Then as the church allowed women to become elders in 1930 and Ministers of Word and Sacrament in 1956, many women were well-prepared by women's organizations to step into these new church roles and excel.

Today PW still highly values leadership training and adapts it as needed for today's world. We can't keep doing the same old things and expect new things to happen.

Over the years, Presbyterian Women have had wonderful ideas that have been birthed and developed so well that the Church or other ecumenical organizations took over the program and ran it. For example: early mission programs, the Hunger program, the Peacemaking Program, the Yearbook for Prayer and Study and the Fellowship of the Least Coin.

Another example of something new springing up is that young women in the National Network of Presbyterian College Women have taught PW and the larger denomination the consensus decision-making model as an alternative to the oftentimes rigid parliamentary procedures.

### 2. **Second PW value is a group of character qualities: courage, ingenuity, determination and relentlessness.**

In the beginning when women had no voice or vote in the Church, women found ways to lift up the needs, rights and concerns of women to the larger denomination. When roadblocks came, and they did, women would try to go around, over or through them. And if those ways didn't work, they creatively came up with other plans. Year upon year, decade upon decade, we find women today in a much different place.

It will take courage, ingenuity, determination and relentlessness to keep advocating for those who have no voice, one battle at a time.

### **Statistics / Information:**

- U.S. women still earn only 77 cents on the male dollar in 2008. That number drops to 68 cents for African American women, 58 cents for Latinas.
- Women's wages have increased just half a penny on the dollar for the past four decades.
- Women make up 70% of the world's one billion poorest people.
- Women continue to be the primary objects of emotional and physical violence.
- Rape is still used as a weapon of war, and domestic violence is the greatest cause of injury and death to women globally.
- Many women lack access to adequate health care, often choosing to treat themselves or to seek traditional healers rather than pay for professional services.
- Women still lack access to seats of power and influence, averaging only 15 percent of seats in national parliaments worldwide.
- Though women and children are often the most affected by wars and armed fighting, they are seldom invited to peace negotiations or involved in reconstruction efforts.
- And women still have their voices silenced. Women still need each other.

### **3. A third PW value to highlight is the commitment to diversity, inclusivity and anti-racism.**

PW values women no matter the packaging God wrapped them in. PW loves variety when it comes to age, size, shape, color and language. PW also knows that inclusiveness takes work, intentionally adding diverse voices to the table and circle, so that all are represented, heard and affirmed. Tearing down walls of racism through active listening, sharing stories, confession, forgiveness and reconciliation will make a difference in our world.

### **4. Another PW value is generosity.**

Presbyterian Women have their fingers in a lot of wonderful projects. We have always cared about missions so whether it's supporting missionaries; making bandages, layettes, health kits, quilts; building schools or clinics; feeding the hungry; clothing the poor; rebuilding after disasters; or hundreds and thousands of other projects, Presbyterian Women have given generously of time, talent and money in doing God's work in our world.

Giving money to PW has always been over and above the support of the Church –second mile giving. **PW is the largest mission organization in the Presbyterian Church and all money we give the church is undesignated – it goes to support mission as the Church decides – without strings attached.**

Generosity also characterizes PW in what is given back to women. Financial support for leadership training at all levels, providing a churchwide gathering every three years in which women from around the world are enabled to attend, and providing resources and connections for whatever your interests are just a few of the ways generosity is evident in Presbyterian Women. We help women help themselves by supporting start up development projects such as the Palm project and the Roma project. The Birthday Offering and the Thank Offering are major grant programs that provide financial support to our partners around the world who work for betterment of lives of hundreds and thousands of people.

**5. A fifth PW value is commitment to community, connectionalism and ecumenical & interfaith relations – words that overlap in meaning.**

Involvement with Presbyterian Women stretches you and may make you likewise uncomfortable as it pushes you beyond your own individual day-to-day world. Exhortations in scripture compel us out of our homes and churches into our communities to embrace the experiences of our brothers and sisters. It's there we find our mission field of hurting people and the arena where injustices resides. It is also a place where other Christians as well as those of other faiths live. Our communities have become global neighborhoods. PW helps you navigate this new territory, bringing us first hand stories from around the world, through such things as the Global Exchange trips, the USA Mission Experiences, Horizon articles, and other mission opportunities. As we learn more about the experiences of people both near us and around the world, we cannot help but find ways to join them in their struggles and joys and be transformed along the way.

**6. The last value of PW is openness to change.**

Some might argue that PW's behind the times, slow to change and is overly structured to the point of its own demise. I would argue that what you see and what PW strives to be are two different things. Over the years there have been big changes in Presbyterian Women and most for the better. PW values openness to change to meet the needs of women today. The structure of PW is becoming more flexible and more simplified, as programs and emphases shift. PW must change. Women at all levels need to learn ways to listen to each other and implement new ways of evaluating, planning, organizing and managing.

PW is a great organization! If you need someone else's opinion, here is a quote from Hazel Fuhrmeister, Moderator of Presbyterian Women 1994-1997, she says, "PW remains the strongest, most faithful, productive, industrious, unselfish, dependable, necessary group within the PC (USA), supporting the denomination's policies, interpreting mission, preaching the gospel and giving our time and talents for no reason other than a desire to serve God and humankind. What's not to like about us?"