

Mary said,

“My soul proclaims your greatness, O God,  
and my spirit rejoices in you, my Savior.

For you have looked with favor upon your lowly servant.

Surely from now on, all generations will call me blessed.” *Luke 1:46-48*

### **Unexpected Gifts**

I’ve been overwhelmed with the generosity that has been shown to me as I near retirement. (Yes it is coming; next week will be my last column.) There have been gifts to help me travel in the freedom of retirement which humble me. But there have been other kinds of gifts that have touched me as well, such as notes from people giving specific examples of how I impacted their ministry—and I’m doubly thankful that they have chosen to focus on the positive impacts.

There have even been unexpected gifts related to my post-fire life. My beloved staff colleagues surprised me with Christmas ornaments, since of course I’m starting from scratch on Christmas décor. And I find sweet gifts from the Eagle Rock neighborhood where I am now living. For instance, nearly everyone has a dog or two, so we’re always seeing each other as we walk the dogs (yes, I take two walks a day, which is new for me). I appreciate the friendliness and consideration of my neighbors, especially when my dogs act out a little. And on one of the routes I take, there is a budding ceramicist, and like all folks working with clay, they have “seconds” that this artist decides isn’t quite perfect. So they put the pieces out on the driveway with a sign inviting folks to take what they want for free. This has happened a couple times so far, that I go out walking with my dogs, and come back with lovely hand-made, beautifully glazed ceramics pieces!

Another unexpected gift has been Lisa Hansen beginning to attend meetings related to the Presbytery, and she and I have had meetings to discuss my perspective on the life of San Gabriel Presbytery, and some of the active projects and priorities that I will need to hand off to her. I’ve always been amazed at Lisa’s ability to handle multiple responsibilities at once, and she has shown great ability to grasp the complexities of this ministry, so while there needs to be room for her to make the changes she discerns, the transition will be as smooth as can be hoped for.

While we are all too familiar with the Christmas story, we have to remind ourselves that this greatest gift of all came through multiple unexpected gifts, from a baby coming to the aging couple Zechariah and Elizabeth, another baby coming to the unwed teenaged virgin Mary, and angels singing to the glory of God to shepherds tending their flocks at night. Every time, the recipients of the gifts first responded with fear (which is why I don’t feel bad that when I discern God’s will, I often feel fear). But I love Mary’s song in response to the news given to her by the angel Gabriel, because she’s pretty confident in what she’s about to do. I often think that her confidence about this awesome new call comes with her youth. But young as she is, she is aware of the historic legacy that she has been given, a blessing that will be honored for generations.

This last week I saw some unexpected gifts that I hope will come in 2026, gifts that will celebrate God’s goodness for generations. First, you may have noticed a flyer in today’s MMU that came out of a collaboration of Veronica Ota and Katherine Lee Baker, as they highlight some opportunities for young adults from across our presbytery to come together and get to know each other and learn about opportunities to make a difference in our world. Please forward the flyer to anyone you think might be interested.

Then I heard from Harlan Redmond that Dick Young, the director of Zephyr Point Presbyterian Conference Center at Lake Tahoe, came to Interwoven last Sunday, on the recommendation of Zephyr Point board member N'Yisrela Watts-Afriyie. N'Yisrela has been trying for years to make Zephyr Point more accessible to diverse members of the PC(USA), especially for young people. Dick's presentation showed the incredible beauty of Zephyr Point, which led Interwoven's worship leader to suggest a church retreat in 2026! When I heard about it, my brain exploded, in a good way, like it did when Mona Morales Recalde asked if La Casa could be a landback. I asked Harlan if they might be open to include others for a retreat, and he said yes. I told Harlan about the road trip we took to Zephyr a few years ago, and we had a blast. And the leaders of Love Community Church in Azusa (aka Filipino Community United Presbyterian Church) have fond memories of growing up at youth camps at Zephyr Point—that's how they know Bruce Reyes-Chow, who continues to have a close relationship with them, and with Zephyr Point.

I can't make this happen, but I was so happy to hear about the possibilities that some of our younger leaders like Katherine and Veronica and Harlan and others can offer, with help from leaders who have been around for a while like N'Yisrela. I have worried that we have been losing ground connecting with the younger generations (though we do have some churches like Interwoven and Live Oak and Good Shepherd Taiwanese and Knox and Love and Mideast Evangelical and New Hope, among others, who have strong intergenerational memberships), and I know that Deborah Owens, chair of our Education Equipping and Empowerment Committee, has prioritized events with the younger generations in their efforts next year. So it feels like a God moment, and I pray that the Spirit continues to move through these leaders and more to break open a new dawn of intergenerational ministry in San Gabriel Presbytery. That would be a wonderful unexpected gift for all of us!

As we continue on our Advent journey, may we have eyes to see the new life that God is bringing into our world. Our world needs it as much now as ever, and we as people of faith can be bearers of good news as much as poor shepherds, young and old parents of infants, and foreign wise men. Thanks be to God! May we enjoy all the gifts God offers us, whether we have been praying for them for years, or they come totally unexpected.

Praising Immanuel, God with us, for all generations,

*Wendy*