

EMPOWERED & EMPOWERING Women

Reflections on
Women in the Bible
from Eve to Mary

ADVENT 2018

WRITTEN BY
THE REVEREND
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PWRDF

The Primate's World Relief
and Development Fund

The Anglican Church of Canada



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How to read this resource

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Introduction

Stories of women are found all throughout the Bible. At first glance their stories and lives often play second fiddle to the stories of their husbands or other male characters. But perhaps surprisingly, given the patriarchal culture of Biblical times, many female characters emerge as powerful and important historical figures in their own right. Like the men of the Bible, the women featured by the Biblical writers represent a range of personalities and dispositions. From heroic to downright wicked, from serene and noble to ruthless and conniving, the women of the Bible are as diverse and complex as their male counterparts. Like men, Biblical women were political and religious leaders, parents, slaves, and simply ordinary people driven to extraordinary achievements through circumstance and God's guiding hand.

The theme of PWRDF's work in 2018 is Empowered Women, Empower Women. Any discussion of empowered women in a culture that offered most women drastically fewer rights, advantages and choices as men, may seem a fraught exercise. But in truth, many of the women PWRDF seeks to empower today live in cultures and circumstances that are not all that different than those of Biblical times. And like the women of the Bible, many are making the most of difficult situations and proving their strength and resilience in the face of daunting challenges and restrictions.

As we proceed through the days of Advent, I invite you to join me on a journey of discovering and rediscovering the women of the Bible. We will begin with Eve, the mother of all humanity, and end, on Christmas Day, with Mary, the mother of all Christians. As we spend some time each day recalling many of the women of the Bible, we will also look to the stories of women who are today empowering or being empowered by the work of PWRDF throughout the world.

I hope you enjoy this journey of learning and reflection as much as I have enjoyed preparing it.

Robert Mitchell+

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

The Reverend Robert Mitchell became the sixth Rector of St. Olave's, Swansea in the Diocese of Toronto in July 2016. Prior to coming to St. Olave's, Rob served in parishes in Peterborough, Cookstown and Churchill, and most recently, at St. Thomas's, Huron Street in Toronto. Born in Saskatoon and raised in a clergy family, Rob studied theology at Wycliffe College. He was made deacon at St. James Cathedral in 2002 by the Most Reverend Terence Finlay, and ordained a priest in the same year by the Right Reverend Douglas Blackwell. Rob is married to Caroline and they enjoy being active in the St. Olave's and Swansea communities.



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2

Eve



You can read the
whole story in
[Genesis 1.1–3.24](#)

Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness ... so God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1.26a, 27)

The Bible's first woman often gets a bad rap. As the story goes, Eve disobeyed God's command and ate some fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Adam also ate of the tree, but Eve arguably bears the larger brunt of the world's first "sin". According to Christian thinking, this first act of disobeying God unleashed a condition within humanity and the world that has plagued us ever since: what God created to be good has become flawed. The human propensity to neglect and harm, to be selfish and uncharitable, and to disregard the plight of our planet and its creatures, all stem from the first woman and first man stepping away from absolute and complete trust in God.

Perhaps nothing illustrates the disharmony affecting our planet more vividly than the situation faced by many Indigenous people here in Canada. Centuries of high-handed government policy and societal disregard have led to entire communities of the first people of this place living in poverty, on unyielding land, and without the basic amenities of a healthy and comfortable life. While the vast majority of Canadians pour clean drinking water from their taps each day without thought, many Indigenous Canadians must daily walk to fetch water, or boil the contaminated water from their taps simply to drink it or wash dishes. This is not the relationship between creation and humanity that God had in mind when the bountiful Garden of Eden and its inhabitants were nourished perpetually by the fresh and pure waters of the Earth.

But change is possible. To learn about how PWRDF is working with its partners to give the gift of water, read [Ada's story](#) on the opposite page.



Holy God, you created us to live in perfect harmony with all creation. Help us seek a better world where the rivers flow with life-giving water, and all people can thrive and prosper. Amen.



'It's so much easier now.'

TALK about an understatement. Ada Turtle, a resident of Pikangikum First Nation, a remote Northern Ontario community, used to have to carry buckets of water from the water tank metres away into her home. The mother of four is also on dialysis, so it's easy to imagine the challenge of this household chore. "Now you turn on the tap and the water is there."

Ada's children are all active in sports, especially hockey, broom ball and baseball. "The kids can use the bath or shower after each game," she says. "I really appreciate the installation."

The work at Ada's house is the culmination of five years working with the Pikangikum Band Council. In 2011, a wave of youth suicides in the community prompted a group of Toronto-based professionals to work with the Pikangikum elders and school system. Among the priorities identified by this Pikangikum Working Group

was the lack of safe, clean water.

Bishop Mark MacDonald, the National Indigenous Anglican Bishop of Canada, had also gathered representatives from churches and community groups concerned about the lack of clean water in Indigenous communities in Canada. In 2013, this Pimatisiwin Nipi or "Living Water" group, an outreach group of Trinity Aurora Church north of Toronto, joined forces with PWG. PWRDF donors and volunteers gravitated toward this cause and have raised more than \$600,000 towards clean water in Pikangikum.

To date, 20 homes have been retrofitted with the support of Frontier Canada and Habitat for Humanity Manitoba. Now, the band council is receiving funding from the federal and provincial governments and they have the training in place to implement the project themselves.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/its-so-much-easier-now



MONDAY DECEMBER 3

Sarah



You can read the
whole story in
Genesis 11.29–23.20

The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. He looked up and saw three men standing near him. They said to him, 'Where is your wife Sarah?' And he said, 'There, in the tent.' Then one said, 'I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.' (Genesis 18.1-2, 9)

Sarah, the wife of Abraham and mother of the nation of Israel, is the first woman in the Bible to miraculously conceive and bear a child. Several important women in the history of Israel and many in the lineage of Jesus were unable to conceive without some kind of miraculous intervention. This striking Biblical theme will be strongly echoed in the story of the Virgin Mary who, though not infertile, nevertheless conceived in a miraculous fashion. And so Sarah, and some other Biblical women, point, as it were, to the Christmas story.

Sarah and Abraham's encounter with the three mysterious visitors has often been seen by Christian commentators as some kind of ancient and opaque revelation of the Holy Trinity. Whether or not this was intended, the very idea has fueled the Christian imagination throughout the ages. Most famously, we think of Andrei Rublev's Trinity icon, one of the most popular and frequently reproduced icons of all time.

If it's true that Sarah was already very elderly at the time she gave birth to her son Isaac, we might safely assume that the pregnancy and birth were likely perilous for both mother and child. Like Sarah, Virginie Nizigama of Burundi is a mother who has persevered in the face of hardship and trial. Read how [Virginie is helping other mothers in her community](#) on the opposite page.



Loving God, you reveal yourself to us when we least expect it. Help us to see you in the midst of our own anxieties, fears and sorrows. Amen.



**PWRDF
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‘I want to give back.’

SO SAYS Virginie Nizigama, a community volunteer at the Village Health Works clinic in Burundi. Virginie’s second child was nursed back to health here in 2005, and her third was delivered under a tree at the clinic with the help of VHW staff.

Today she is one of the many women volunteers who devotes her time and energy to the VHW Clinic. She helps to grow crops and tend to the livestock at the clinic. She also teaches people how to diversify their diets and grow the best vegetables to stay healthy. Community volunteers like Virginie organize celebratory Health Days where the medical staff meet with parents and children to provide vaccinations, teach about malnutrition and other illnesses, all to the backdrop of traditional Burundian music and dance.

Village Health Works is one of four PWRDF partners working on the All Mothers and Children Count program, which has been made possible thanks to the support of Global Affairs Canada and donors from across Canada.

VHW provides lifesaving medical care to mothers and children across 18 communities, as well as nutrition, food security and educational programs. It fosters an environment of empowerment among the women in the community. Women meet together to talk about the design of expectant mothers homes, as well as to support each other throughout childbirth.

“It’s my passion, my hope for all of us to be healthy and educated and to help others,” says Virginie. “I love being able to share whatever I know.”

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/i-want-to-give-back/



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4

Rebekah



You can read the
whole story in
Genesis 24.1 - 27.1

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, 'If it is to be this way, why do I live?' So she went to inquire of the Lord. And the Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.' When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. (Genesis 25.21-23)

To be honest, it's challenging to paint Rebekah in a good light. Truth be told, she masterminded a complex deception of her ailing husband, Isaac, in order to ensure that her favourite son, Jacob, would receive his father's blessing instead of her eldest son, Esau. The deception – which involved dressing up Jacob to impersonate his brother – was cruel and devastating for both Isaac and Esau. By all standards of the time, Esau was entitled to inherit the divine promises given to Abraham and Isaac, and should have gone on to become the father of the great nation through which all the world would one day be blessed.

But we can say, in Rebekah's defence, that her scheming and trickery was for a greater purpose. In fact, it was God who had already declared that the younger would be greater than the older son. (Gen. 25.23) Despite our discomfort with her tactics, Rebekah truly was, as the story goes, facilitating the will of God and ensuring that the right person (Jacob) would fulfill his destiny. As a woman with limited rights and opportunities, Rebekah was using the means available to her to ensure the prosperity of her family. While we might wish she took a more honest approach, she had no other way to contravene her husband's will, and she did what was necessary to achieve God's will for her family and the Earth.

Like Rebekah, Odeta is a mother of two children who is doing what she needs to do to ensure the prosperity of her family. Despite enormous obstacles and barriers, Odeta is building an economic future for herself and her children with the help of PWRDF and its partner ARUWE in Uganda. Read more about Odeta in [Realizing Women's Full Potential in Uganda](#) on the opposite page.



Merciful God, you use our imperfectness to bring about your perfection. Make us your ready and willing partners in this world. Amen.



Realizing women's full potential in Uganda

ODETA is a 23-year-old mother of two living in the Kyankwanzi District of Uganda. She was forced to drop out of school because she was unable to pay the tuition and therefore struggled to make ends meet.

Then she was selected – among 250 rural women farmers – to learn resources and skills from Action for Rural Women's Empowerment (ARUWE). The women were given access to loans to purchase land, crops or whatever else they may need to be successful farmers. They also received quality seed input, and equipment such as packing bags to transport crops to be sold. Odeta secured a loan and purchased two acres of land, as well as rice seeds and labour. She is hoping to harvest her rice this month and reinvest part of her profits back into farming in order to create a sustainable income for her and her children.

PWRDF has partnered with ARUWE to help bring sustainable livelihoods to women in the Kyankwanzi District, where 38% of people live below the poverty line and more than half do not have access to clean water. Agriculture is the main industry in Uganda, and in rural areas it accounts for 85% of the population's income. ARUWE's vision is "a world in which communities, especially women and their children are able to realize their full social, economic and civic potential."

The project also created strong women farming

groups which will eventually turn into village Savings and Loan associations. These groups learned basic financial management, credit management as well as other relevant financial skills. More importantly, these groups allowed the women to share funds, training and empower each other.

One group formed in the Kyankwanzi district is called Agali Awamu. The group is comprised of 27 members with six women forming the group's leadership. Before the project, all the women were struggling on their own. The creation of the group, as well as the loans and training provided from ARUWE, have improved the lives of the members of Agali Awamu.

Since forming in January 2018 the group has accumulated 2,000,000 Ugandan Shillings (\$686 Cdn) and all members have at least three acres of maize, beans and cassava. Every member has enough food for their households and increased incomes from selling produce. Kate Nakiwere was able to use her income to send her seven children to school and install solar panels in her home. The group supports each other in times of need and has improved relationships among members.

PWRDF is proud of its partnership with ARUWE and is excited about the progress that has been made in empowering women farmers in Uganda. They have shown just what can be accomplished when women are given the tools to succeed.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/realizing-womens-full-potential-in-uganda/

Rachel, Leah, Zilpah & Bilhah



You can read the whole story in [Genesis 28.1–31.55](#) and [Genesis 35.16–27](#)

God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him. God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.’ God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you ... Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maid: Dan and Naphtali. The sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maid: Gad and Asher. (Genesis 35.9–11, 22b–26a)

The story of Jacob and the women in his life could be taken straight from a tabloid magazine or daytime talk show. In fact, it makes for difficult reading as just about everything that happens in the story offends and defies our values and norms. It could easily be the plotline of an episode from the recent television version of Margaret Atwood’s, *The Handmaid’s Tale*. That being said, the story is foundational for Judaism and Christianity, and needs to be read and remembered – even if it makes us feel a bit squeamish.

Jacob had two wives (sisters Rachel and Leah) and two concubines (servants Zilpah and Bilhah). We read about the women as if they were little more than property, being given away and negotiated over like inanimate objects. It’s difficult reading to be sure. And the women themselves struggle with resentments and the inevitable rivalries that would arise in such a unique family situation. But for all the hardships and inequities they faced, these strong-minded women gave birth to the 12 tribes of Israel and enshrined their place and importance within the history of salvation. Leah, as the mother of Judah, is the ancestor of King David and the royal line that would lead to the birth of Jesus.

Rachel, like many other women of the Bible, was initially unable to bear children until God enabled her to do so. (Gen. 30.22) She would, however, die while giving birth to her second son. (Gen. 35.19) Of course, many women and infants today face grave risks during birth in places that lack the resources many of us would expect in hospitals here at home. PWRDF is working with a partner organization EHALE in Mozambique to help provide the tools that make the delivery of children safer for both mother and child. Read about PWRDF’s work [installing solar suitcases in Mozambican clinics](#) on the opposite page.



Let us pray
Living God, your purposes and ways are often mysterious to us. Open our hearts to trust in you. Amen.



**PWRDF
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Nurse Latia has strong teeth.

DELIVERING an average of 198 babies a month at a birthing clinic in rural Mozambique, she often held her cell phone between her teeth so it would cast a light on her patient. Babies are more often born at night and her clinic – like many – was not equipped with electricity for proper lighting.

As part of the All Mothers and Children Count project, PWRDF and its Mozambican partner EHALE installed 30 solar suitcases at government-run health facilities in 2017. A solar suitcase is a bright yellow, hard plastic, water-proof suitcase that is mounted on the wall of a clinic and wired to a solar panel on the roof.

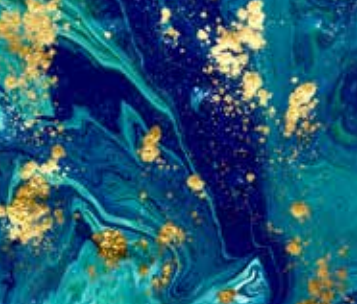
The suitcase is equipped with four lamps, one

head lamp, a Doppler, and a lithium battery that lasts five years. The suitcase can also charge cell-phones and other electronic devices such as laptop computers.

We Care Solar provided the solar suitcases and trained four EHALE staff and eight staff from the Ministry of Health electronic maintenance department in Nampula province. The training included classroom instruction and theory as well as applied learning – trainees actually installed solar suitcases at six health facilities under We Care Solar supervision.

The training has paid off. One year after installation, all 30 solar suitcase are still welcoming babies into the world at night.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/nurse-latia-has-strong-teeth/



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6

Dinah



You can read the whole story in Genesis 34.1-31

On the third day, when they were still in pain, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city unawares, and killed all the males. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went away. And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. (Genesis 34:25-28)

Along with all of Jacob's many sons, the Bible mentions only one daughter, Dinah, by name. Dinah was the daughter of Jacob's first wife, Leah. The story of Dinah is sadly one of sexual violence, deception and bloody revenge.

Dinah was sexually assaulted by a man who did not belong to the family of Abraham and Isaac. After raping her, this same man, with a twisted and grotesque notion of love, desired to make her his wife. Dinah's brothers, in their anger, calculated an almost humorous, if not so utterly vicious, retribution for the rapist and his entire town. They agreed to give Dinah to the man as his wife if he, and every male in his hometown, was circumcised. All of the men of that town complied and, while they were "still in pain", Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's brothers, attacked and plundered the city, killing all of its male inhabitants. They rescued Dinah and brought her home.

This horrific series of events would have profound consequences for the family of Jacob. While pronouncing his blessing upon his sons at his deathbed (Genesis 49.1-12), Jacob passes over Simeon and Levi because of their hotheadedness demonstrated in the case of Dinah. While their actions are understandable given the severity of the crime against their sister, the two brothers displayed a level of anger and rashness that disqualified them to continue their father's legacy. And because of their unsuitability, Jacob's blessing is transferred to the next in line, Judah, about whom he says the "ruler's staff shall not depart". Indeed, it would be from Judah that the Davidic dynasty would come, culminating in the Kingship of Jesus Christ.

The people of South Sudan have experienced and witnessed unthinkable levels of sexual and physical violence during the civil war that has ravaged that country in recent years. Often falling along ethnic lines, the violence has left few people unaffected. PWRDF is working with partners to empower local women as peacemakers and nation builders. Read about this important [peace building work](#) on the opposite page.



Let us pray Almighty God, our world is a flawed and sometimes dangerous place. Show your compassion upon all victims of sexual violence, and turn the hearts of the victimizers to repentance. Amen.



Blessed are the peacemakers

STUDIES show that peace deals have a 35% higher chance of success when women are involved. To that end, PWRDF is supporting the work of a KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiative) program to facilitate Healing and Rebuilding our Community workshops within the National Women's Program in South Sudan. PWRDF has invested \$20,000 in the program because it conducts training very efficiently at the community level.

"We are adding value to the project already being supported by KAIROS without creating another layer of partner management for the National Women's Program," says Naba Gurung, PWRDF's Humanitarian Response Coordinator. PWRDF is a member of KAIROS, whose connections to local organizations makes it an excellent partner in programming and advocacy.

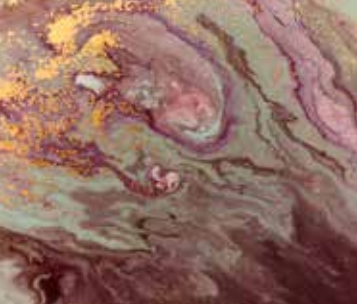
The acute nature of the South Sudan conflict necessitated quick action: training community activists who already knew the people and were able to work within community systems. These

activists are affiliated with the Justice, Peace and Reconciliation Commission (JPRC) of the Episcopal Church of South Sudan.

In 2016, PWRDF partnered with the South Sudanese diaspora in Canada to support two women activists to receive training of trainers on Healing and Rebuilding our Community in Rwanda. In 2017, PWRDF helped organize two community-based HROC workshops in Bor with the Winnipeg Women's Resource Centre (WWRCB). About 50 women from Wau in the troubled Bahr-el-Ghazal region of western South Sudan are currently being trained to engage in peacemaking activities. And most recently, PWRDF supported six South Sudanese social activists to travel to Rwanda for the HROC training of trainers.

"We've seen from other countries that training and re-energizing the local peace builders is effective," Gurung adds. "Particularly effective is intense training of trainers, a method developed by the Quakers who tested and used it in Rwanda and Burundi with great success."

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/blessed-are-the-peacemakers/



FRIDAY, DECEMBER 7

Tamar



You can read the
whole story in
Genesis 38.1-30

When the time of Tamar's delivery came, there were twins in her womb. While she was in labour, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a crimson thread, saying, "This one came out first." But just then he drew back his hand, and out came his brother; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore, he was named Perez. (Genesis 38.27-29)

Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah, is an ancestor of both Jesus and King David. Her genealogical importance in the history of Judaism and Christianity stands in stark contrast to her troubled life. Widowed before bearing Judah any grandchildren, Tamar was destined to live the vulnerable and difficult life of a childless widow in an ancient society. Judah initially promised that his youngest son, when older, would marry her and provide her status in her culture as a wife and mother. But Judah reneged on his promise, and Tamar found herself trapped in her father-in-law's house without a family of her own. After an ingenious, although troubling, bit of sexual trickery, Tamar forced Judah to acknowledge his cruelty and he declared, "She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her my son." (Gen. 38.26)

Through Tamar's deception, Judah became the unintentional father of twin sons by her. As the children were coming out of the womb, the second overcame the first, pushing his way forward in the birth canal, emerging before his brother to become the firstborn of his mother. This feisty child, Perez, would become the great (x7) grandfather of King David (Ruth 4.18-21) and the great (x34) grandfather (adoptive, through Joseph) of Jesus. (Matthew 1.3) Tamar's place as a pillar in the history of salvation is firmly secured and reminds us that God often uses those of us who are less than perfect to bring about his perfect plans.

Like Tamar, Maria is a young widow. Both she and her daughter are HIV positive. Facing many of the same hurdles as widowed Tamar, Maria was struggling both economically and with her health. She thought her life was over. But after meeting with staff from PWRDF partner CoCoSI, Maria's life is back on track. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



God our strength, give us eager hearts to do your will. Make us bold, and fill us with the confidence only you can give. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

Maria thought she would die very soon.

A WIDOWED mother of one, Maria (not her real name) and her daughter are both HIV positive, born before Maria knew she had the virus. She was struggling as a single mother with a significant health diagnosis for herself and her daughter.

Then, when her daughter was 12, Maria met staff from PWRDF partner CoCoSI (the Committee Against AIDS). They connected with her through the HIV Clinic at the hospital in Sensuntepeque, Cabañas and began home visits, then invited them to a support group run by CoCoSI at the hospital. Through this support group Maria met José, and with their families they have made a new life together. They live in a small adobe home with a little store that sells chips and pop. José has a bit of land where he farms corn, and another patch for beans. It is enough food to somewhat sustain the family, when José is healthy.

But they have to be careful. Secrecy and isolation describe how many HIV/AIDS sufferers live in El Salvador, even today. If it were discovered that Maria, her daughter and

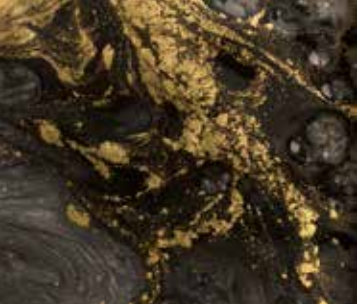
José are HIV positive, they would lose all their business. CoCoSI is working to change this.

CoCoSI was founded in 1999 by teenager Elizabeth Membreño and her friends. They were aware of the lack of HIV education and prevention in their rural communities. CoCoSI provides opportunities for youth to plan and run workshops in schools and the local prison on inequality, gender-based violence, discrimination, bullying and hate crimes against people of non-conforming genders. Team members provide transportation and food costs for people travelling so that they can get to the support group meetings. They will even help with money to get to the hospital for appointments or to get medications from the clinic at the hospital.

In 2010 CoCoSI received a Red Ribbon Award from the United Nations HIV and AIDS program.

“When I was diagnosed in 1996, it was extremely difficult for me,” says Maria. “Now it is like nothing to take care of myself. We need CoCoSI to keep helping us and we will be okay.”

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/maria-thought-she-would-die-very-soon/



SATURDAY DECEMBER 8

Hebrew Midwives



You can read the
whole story in
Exodus 1.1-22

The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, "When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.

(Exodus 1.15-17, 20)

Indigenous midwives have long struggled to earn respect and understanding within the medical establishment and in many countries they continue to be misunderstood and undervalued. But Cherylee Bourgeois, a Cree midwife from Ontario, calls midwives the "protectors of the next generation". In the case of Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives living in captivity in Egypt, the description could not be more accurate. These two very brave women defied the dictates of Pharaoh and refused to oversee the deaths of newborn Hebrew baby boys. Their commitment to the health of both mothers and babies was far too important to be compromised by the whims of a foreign tyrant. Like midwives today, these two women were dedicated to bringing vulnerable young children into the world safely and in the most nurturing and natural way possible. And like some midwives today, they did it at great personal cost.

PWRDF is supporting Indigenous midwives with programs that integrate the best western medical knowledge with the best cultural practises of Indigenous midwives, helping countless babies and mothers to have a safe, healthy and culturally appropriate birth. Read about this important work in [Protecting the Right to a Cultural Birth](#) on the opposite page.



Compassionate God, help us to still our souls and make them quiet, that we may lean in to you like a child upon its mother's breast. Amen. (Psalm 131)



Protecting the right to a cultural birth

IN THE remote Inuit community of Puvirnituq, Quebec, women in their 37th week of pregnancy used to have to fly to either Montreal or Moose Factory in order to receive care – in a foreign language and culture, and usually on their own. Not surprisingly, some women preferred to risk not travelling to the doctor so they could deliver their baby in the comfort and familiarity of their community.

But in 1986, a maternity department was opened in Puvirnituq at the Inuulitsivik Health Centre led by Indigenous midwives. Today, “the midwives’ practice is a model of integration of traditional knowledge and modern medicine,” according to the centre’s website. “Their practice and their formation have developed in order to meet the realities of families in the north, their cultural and community context, and the reality of health care in remote areas, within a multidisciplinary team.” Now, only women whose pregnancies are deemed high risk must travel to larger centres.

Indigenous midwives practise in Canada with the support of provincial or territorial midwife associations, delivering babies in women’s homes, birthing centres or hospitals, said Cheryllee Bourgeois, a Cree midwife and Director of Clinical and Professional Development at the Association of Ontario Midwives. “At Six Nations in Brantford, Ont., Indigenous midwives have been delivering babies for 20 years, and in Toronto, Seven Generations has been working for 10 years.” It is proven that when a woman gives birth within her cultural context, the outcomes for both mom and baby are better, she said.

Articles 11, 15, and 24 of the UN Declaration of

the Rights of Indigenous People state Indigenous people shall receive health care in a way that they find suitable. “With few exceptions, modern midwifery as taught in Midwifery Education Schools has mostly overlooked Indigenous knowledge,” says Jose Zarate, Indigenous Communities and Latin American-Caribbean Development Program Coordinator for PWRDF. “Many Indigenous women continue to deliver their babies assisted by traditional birth attendants. The lack of recognition of Indigenous knowledge by formal health systems continues to alienate Indigenous pregnant women and contribute to on average high maternal and child mortality rates.”

So in 2017, PWRDF invested just over \$100,000 in a new program linking Indigenous Midwives in Canada (Ryerson University’s Aboriginal Initiatives), Mexico (Kinal Antzetik) and Peru (CHIRAPAQ). The goal of the project is to use this integration and formalization of Indigenous knowledge in Canada with Western medicine as a model for Indigenous midwives in Mexico and Peru, where the “parteras” – or “she who gives life” – operate on the fringes, outside of the medical community.

“Indigenous midwives are not being used to their full potential and have skills that do not exist elsewhere in the health care system,” says Bourgeois. “Some examples include the work Indigenous midwives do to correctly position the baby throughout pregnancy and how it prevents many Cesareans; they also have the ability to reach and care for people who would otherwise receive no prenatal care – which clearly improves outcomes.”

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/protecting-the-right-to-a-cultural-birth/



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 9

Jochebed mother of Moses



You can read the whole story in Exodus 2.1-10

*Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months. When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.
(Exodus 2.1-3)*

The mother of Moses was forced to take a desperate and dangerous step to protect her son. Following the Hebrew midwives' act of resistance, Pharaoh was even more determined to see the end of all male Hebrew children. In a move reminiscent of Herod's slaughter of innocent children (Matthew 2.16-18) at the time of Jesus, Pharaoh, about 1500 years earlier, demanded that all Hebrew male children be slain to disrupt the growth in the Hebrew population within his territories. Jochebed, the mother of Moses, (Exodus 6.20) risked her own life by saving and hiding her young child for three months. We can only imagine the constant fear and horror of concealing an infant for that long, knowing how high the stakes were for both mother and child. Perhaps her entire village was implicated and would have faced retribution if the plan were discovered.

But the plan succeeded, and when she could no longer hide the child, she left the baby in a place where she hoped he would be found by a caring stranger. As is often the case with the ways of God, this horrific situation gave rise to something great. Pharaoh's daughter adopted the young boy, ensuring his safety, and called him Moses which sounds, in Hebrew, like the word meaning "draw out", because, she said, "I drew him out of the water." The adoption of Moses would uniquely situate and prepare him to become one the greatest leaders of all time.

Baby Nodi, born in Bangladesh, received her name from the water also. Nodi means 'River' in her mother's language, and she got the name because her mother was travelling to a PWRDF sponsored birthing centre in a covered boat when the child was born. Read [Nodi's story](#) and how PWRDF is supporting maternal and newborn health in Bangladesh on the opposite page.



Creating God, in our baptism you renamed us as your children. May we continually grow into our calling. Amen.



Shahana had to act fast.

HER FIRST son had died at six months and Shahana was having convulsions that could lead to eclampsia. The Dais (traditional birth attendants) knew she needed to go to a hospital immediately. But Bantiar is a remote Bangladeshi village on the bank of the river Pechakola, and Shahana and her husband Jahangir are poor farmers.

The Dais took Shahana by bicycle ambulance to the riverbank and placed her in the covered boat ambulance to a Daighor, a health centre that had been built nearby with funding from PWRDF and Global Affairs Canada. Luckily, the Dais were prepared with their kit bags. Shahana delivered a beautiful baby girl on the river. She named her Nodi, meaning 'River'.

Midwives play an important role in Bangladesh's health sector. They protect and enhance the health of women who recently gave birth or were pregnant. PWRDF provides support and training, helping them to improve their skills and capabilities, benefiting the lives of all of the women and children with whom they work.

In 2008, PWRDF and its partners implemented

a maternal health program in the country. Co-funded by Global Affairs Canada, this program helped 259 midwives increase their skills in assisting women and newborns.

In addition to helping to increase the immunization rate of pregnant women and children to 100% in the project area, the program has ensured that women visit health clinics at least twice during their pregnancies and within 48 hours of giving birth. The training increased traditional birth attendants' awareness of the problems faced by pregnant women such as problematic pregnancies, maternal and child health care, and nutrition. A referral system was developed and increased rural women's access to health care at clinics and hospitals.

The use of tricycle van ambulances and boat ambulances enhanced this system in project areas. By the end of the project in July 2013, 63,000 mothers and 94,500 children under the age of five had regular, on-site access to basic pre- and post-natal care as well as basic health care.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/shahana-had-to-act-fast/



MONDAY DECEMBER 10

Miriam, sister of Moses



You can read more
about Miriam in
Exodus 2.1-10;
Numbers 12.1-16;
and Numbers 20.1

When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea." (Exodus 15.19-21)

Miriam is the first woman to be described as a prophet in the Bible and is, in fact, the founder of the female Hebrew prophetic tradition (Exodus 15.20). Along with her brothers, Moses and Aaron, she is one of the great leaders of the Israelite's exodus from Egypt. Although often overlooked in our telling of the Exodus story, the prophet Micah affirms that Miriam, along with her brothers, is responsible for successfully leading her people out of bondage: "I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam." (Micah 6.4) Most famously, she led the women of Israel in a euphoric dance and song of praise after the crossing of the Red Sea.

Despite her prominent role, Miriam was not immune to human tendencies and she, along with Aaron, later attempted to rebel against Moses out of jealousy. But this should not take anything away from her important place in the history of Israel and the Bible. Her name is the Hebrew form of Mary and, by the time of Jesus, had become a common name for women, including his own mother.

The experience of displacement continues to be the lived reality of millions of people throughout the world. Refugees face often unbearable conditions and, for many, a sense of hopelessness. Like the Israelites, Burmese refugees have crossed over the border with Thailand fleeing government oppression. Like a modern-day Miriam, Pam Rogers has sought to lift the spirits of those in refugee camps by creating programmes to avoid the pitfalls of hopelessness and addiction. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



Eternal Love, we are all refugees from our true home in you. Draw us nearer, throughout our days, that we might find our rest and peace in the Promised Land. Amen.



Pam Rogers had a hunch.

REFUGEE camps along the Thai-Burmese border were filling with displaced Burmese people, and the Toronto-based addiction counsellor knew that was a recipe for substance abuse. She had seen the impact of displacement and cultural isolation on First Nations communities, so wrote to a fellow addiction expert in Thailand asking if they needed help. Her friend wrote back quickly: "Please come."

By 2000, after six months of assessing and learning and listening, Rogers and local leaders founded a recovery program with support from PWRDF, the Burma Relief Centre and Norwegian Church Aid. By 2005, the group was renamed DARE (Drug and Alcohol Recovery and Education Network) and now operates in five camps as well as in the migrant community. In 2015, DARE expanded to villages across the border in Karen State, Burma.

One such camp is the Mae La Refugee camp. It's the last place you might expect to see a game of Ultimate Frisbee, but the sport has been a mainstay here for years. The Bangkok Soi Dawz Ultimate Frisbee team has

adopted the camp as their official charity and they regularly donate shirts, shoes and other equipment, as well as training.

"If you're angry, you throw a ball. It gets it out of you," says Rogers. The Frisbee program is just one of the many wellness initiatives in the camp that nurtures teens, in order to prevent the addictions that plague so many of the people living there. The most common substances abused are alcohol, methamphetamine, marijuana, opium, tobacco, glue and heroin.

The program has grown and changed over the years, but the real change is in the people who recover from their addiction. "The people are so happy when they recover, they didn't know they could," says Rogers, adding that many people were convinced addiction was a form of punishment. According to DARE statistics, the program (which is now published in a manual in Karen and Burmese languages), has a 61% non-relapse rate. Most Western addiction recovery programs average 25%. The success of the program, says Rogers, is that it is based in the communities and run by the people of the communities.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/pam-rogers-had-a-hunch/



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 11

The daughters of Zelophehad



You can read the whole story in Numbers 26.28-34; Number 27.1-11; and Number 36.6-12

Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, "Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers." (Numbers 27.1a, 2-4)

Some of the most arduous reading in the Old Testament are the lists of people and things. These are the bits many of us tend to skip over, assuming there is nothing of interest to be found. But sometimes buried deep within such lists lie important revelations. A perfect example of this is Numbers 26, where Moses commands that a census be taken of the Israelites who made it out of Egypt safely. The next 60 verses are little more than reams and reams of names. But if you were to have the fortitude to read this list carefully, you might notice something extraordinary. While almost all of the names listed are men (so and so, the son of so and so, etc.) five pioneering women are also on the list. The reason for their inclusion only becomes clear in the next chapter of Numbers, when we are told their astonishing story.

Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah were the daughters of a man named Zelophehad, who died without any male heirs. Rather than accept destitution, these brave and strong women demanded an audience with Moses and then again demanded that they, as women, should have the right to inherit their father's estate. Perhaps surprisingly, given the cultural norms of the time, they were heard, and Moses enshrined this basic right for women into Mosaic Law. By our standards, the provisions of this law were far from perfect (Numbers 36.6-12) but we should not underestimate how progressive it was in its time. And all thanks to the courage of these five pioneering women.

PWRDF is a partner of Ixmucane, a women's organization in Guatemala, that helps women improve their lives and claim their rights, including their right to land ownership. Read [their story](#) of perseverance and strength on the opposite page.



God of power and might, make us brave and forthright, that we may help bring about justice in our world. Amen.



Ixmucane is the goddess of maize.

KKNOWN as the first woman, Ixmucane ground all the different types of corn together – black, white, red and yellow. As corn is central to Guatemalan culture, it's a perfect name for this grass roots movement of women who have learned to work together.

Since 1993 Ixmucane has focussed on community development, promotion of gender equality, language and addressing issues of trauma caused by conflict and displacement. Women who fled the 1980s civil war in Guatemala ended up in refugee camps in neighbouring Mexico. They'd lost everything – their families, their ancestral property and their valuable connections to community.

While in exile, the women took it upon themselves to address the food crisis and malnutrition experienced by elders and children. They became proficient in agriculture production and community organizing.

Returning home to Guatemala 10 years later, these women soon realized that owning land was essential for establishing communities. But with Guatemalan law giving property rights solely to men, they knew they would

have to fight for co-ownership. Thanks to the training they had received in the camps, and the resulting confidence, they took up the legal battle. Today, women co-own land and continue to play key leadership roles in six communities across Peten in northern Guatemala.

Ixmucane, set up by the refugee women returning home to Guatemala, is responsible for many of these programs that focus on skills development, networking, advocacy, leadership and income generation. The 528 members each pay annual dues of \$2, but also serve community hours, elect a board and hire staff to run the organization.

The programs teach literacy, self-sufficiency through farming – permaculture, planting fruit and raising animals – and educate about sexual and reproductive health resulting in a decline of early age pregnancies. They teach about the laws regarding violence and discrimination, resulting in decreased violence against women.

Almost 20 years after the return to Peten, women and families continue to survive and defend the land that provides for them. They are, after all, people of the corn.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/ixmucane-is-the-goddess-of-maize/



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 12

Naomi



You can read the whole story in the Ruth 1.1-4.22

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had considered his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. (Ruth 1.1-7)

The story of Naomi is a familiar one today. Like millions of people around the world, Naomi fled her famine ravaged homeland with her family, venturing into neighbouring territories. Like the refugees of today who can spend years languishing in refugee camps, Naomi spent 10 years in exile from her home in Bethlehem, and meanwhile lost her husband and two sons.

But as in the case of Naomi, such harrowing circumstances sometime bring out the incredible strength and resilience of women refugees today. Josephine Kabanga is something of a modern day Naomi. A widow and a mother, she spent years in a refugee camp in Tanzania. After returning to her homeland in Burundi, Josephine was assisted by PWRDF partner the Anglican Diocese of Bujumbura to rebuild her life. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



God, we are wandering in search of you. Hold out your Light, that we may find our way home. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

‘My life has changed.’

FOR Josephine Kabanga, one-time refugee, a widow, and the mother of six children, it started from the ground up. After returning home from a refugee camp in Tanzania, Josephine participated in a food security program offered by PWRDF partner the Anglican Diocese of Bujumbura.

“When I came back from the refugee camp in Tanzania, I did not have anything. My husband’s family had taken back our land. I had to start from scratch. I was living in my mother’s house that had a small plot of land, but we did not use it for agriculture. In the refugee camp we didn’t have much to do. I didn’t even know how to work the land and grow vegetables and fruits.

“Through the program I learned so much. I have planted lenga-lenga [amaranth], onions and eggplant. I have also planted bananas, papayas and an avocado tree. I have a goat and my children can have milk from it every day. We don’t go hungry anymore. I sell lenga-lenga in the market and bring home 6,000 Burundian francs a day. Some days even more. Before,

I could not even make 1,000 Burundian francs a week. We had our first papayas from our trees and next year I will have my first bunch of bananas. My life has changed. And I am sure it will continue to change even more.”

While Josephine took part in this PWRDF program between August 2008 and December 2011, others just like her in Bangladesh, Mozambique and Tanzania were learning how to feed their families. Funded in conjunction with the Canadian International Development Agency (now Global Affairs Canada) and working with local partner organizations in each country, the \$4,956,000 food security program reached more than 557,000 people.

Programs focused on health care, environmental sustainability, and promoting good governance, including the construction of health clinics, working with farmers to promote chemical-free farming techniques, and a focus on enhancing the role of women in local communities.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/my-life-has-changed/



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 13

Ruth



You can read the whole story in [Ruth 1.1-4.22](#).

Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die – there will I be buried." When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her. (Ruth 1.11,14,16-18)

As we have seen over the last number of days, there is certain tenacity about the ancestors of Jesus. Ruth, perhaps more than any other, fought hard for what she knew to be right. It would have been much easier for her to stay behind in her homeland. She was young, and she could have remarried and started a new life. But something within her drove her to insist on following her mother-in-law, Naomi, back to Bethlehem. She was leaving behind the comforts of home and entering a foreign land, with foreign customs, and a foreign religion.

But precisely because of her insistence, this non-Hebrew woman would become the great grandmother of David, and the Great (x27) Grandmother (adoptive, through Joseph) of Jesus (Matthew 1.5). Those who are compelled by the Spirit of God to act often have the tenacity of Ruth. And God help those who would stand in their way!

Rasha is a young Sudanese woman who came to Egypt with her husband. He abandoned her and now she, like young Ruth, is a stranger in a foreign land. But at Refuge Egypt, a PWRDF supported ministry, she can receive love and care. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



Giver of life, give us faithfulness and passion, that we may always seek your ways and your will. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

‘I cannot get help at any other place.’

ABOUT 3.5 million refugees and asylum seekers have come to Egypt from the war-torn and drought-plagued places that have dominated our headlines for the past two years. Some will attempt the treacherous route to Europe, while others try their best to assimilate and make a new home. For many, that new home begins at Refuge Egypt, a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Egypt based in All Saints’ Cathedral in Cairo.

PWRDF has supported Refuge Egypt for more than 20 years as it administers health care, emergency food relief and other social supports.

When a family brings their child to the Well Baby and Well Child clinics at Refuge Egypt, they receive a food basket with milk, rice, cooking oil, biscuits, cheese and peanut butter. These food packages draw parents to bring in their children, as well as provide an opportunity for staff to talk about proper nutrition to ensure their child’s growth is not stunted. Good health is key to helping a family resettle or prepare for their next move.

“There is not a place like the place here,”

says Rasha, a 27-year-old Sudanese woman who has been living in Cairo for a year. She is pregnant and suffering from anemia. She came to Egypt with her husband but unfortunately, he abandoned her and now she will be a single mother. Her aunt told her to visit the health clinic at Refuge Egypt, where she received excellent care. “I can come at any time during work hours and I’m sure I will find help. I cannot get help at any other place.”

Staff at the clinics focus on monitoring the growth of the children, as well as ensuring their vaccinations are up to date, and checking them for malnutrition and disease.

One newborn baby came to the Well Baby Clinic when he was 29 days old. After weighing and measuring him, the staff determined he was underweight (under the third percentile), and then referred him to the malnutrition clinic. At the clinic, his mother learned about the importance of breast feeding and of her own diet while she is lactating.

One month later, his weight had improved, and his mother was happy to see her baby growing and being more active.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/i-cannot-get-help-at-any-other-place/



FRIDAY DECEMBER 14

Deborah



You can read the
whole story in
Judges 4.1-5.31

*At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.
(Judges 4.4)*

The story of Deborah is perhaps the most surprising story of a woman in the entire Bible. In the highly patriarchal culture of ancient Israel, this remarkable woman somehow emerged as a national leader. The period of the judges, of course, preceded the establishment of a monarchy in Israel. Among a succession of entirely male judges, Deborah is quite suddenly announced to have judged Israel and, in fact, to have led the nation into war. Most surprising of all, the Biblical story gives no hint that there is anything unusual about a woman having risen to such influence and power.

Like most of the men who judged or ruled over Israel, Deborah was at least as strong and ruthless. She led her people in a successful military campaign against the Canaanites and sang a victory song reminiscing over the gory details of the battle. Any thought that, as a woman, she might have been gentler or timid in her leadership is entirely misplaced.

Bishop Griselda Delgado del Carpio of Cuba has led her diocese since 2010 and has been a strong partner for PWRDF. Together, they have sought to increase self-reliance and prosperity for the people of her diocese. Read about [their work](#) on the opposite page.



God of our salvation, sometimes you call us to follow, and sometimes you call us lead. Give us discerning minds, that we may know the difference. Amen.



Bishop Griselda leads by example

“**P**EOPLE in Cuba used to look for help from outside,” says Bishop Griselda Delgado. “Now, they have learned what they can do with their own two hands.” She says Cubans who benefited from PWRDF-funded programs have transformed the lives of their friends and neighbours throughout the towns where they live. “It is not about receiving, but about sharing.”

When Bishop Griselda was consecrated a bishop in 2010, she started to explore a closer partnership between ECC and PWRDF. She was aware of the partnership between PWRDF and the Cuban Council of Churches in training church leaders in Cuba, but she was keen on developing projects in partnership.

Community vegetable gardens have increased knowledge, skills and capacity in food production. Community members have also learned how to raise small animals organically and ecologically. This has led to greater self-sufficiency in the bishop’s constituency, mainly in poor rural communities. It’s also provided work, income and improved nutrition levels for mothers and children.

PWRDF is now working with the ECC to train leaders in community development, including

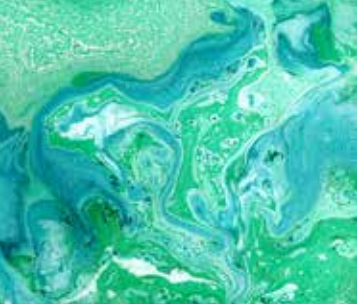
gender issues, farming techniques and nutrition. These leaders will in turn train 2,000 people in their communities, leading to better access to healthy food, increased income through the sale of surplus food and a decrease in gender-based violence through improved understanding and communication between men and women.

As part of Fred Says, PWRDF’s food security campaign, a delegation visited Cuba in 2015.

“Our surroundings tell the story of unused land being transformed into raised vegetable beds, flowers, fruit trees, seed generation, chickens, turkeys, rabbits, beehives,” delegates wrote. “Adjoining land, now owned by the church is a productive, chemical-free farm. We harvested guavas – a wheelbarrow full. ... The water filtration system provides potable water. A tiled area just inside the property provides a public access tap for the community. This church has intentionally reached out beyond its walls. This approach has been taken up by individuals and parishes. Networks and possibilities abound.”

Learning to do for themselves, rather than to wait for someone to do for them, has led people to be more confident, creative and hopeful.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/bishop-griselda-leads-by-example/



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 15

Jael



You can read the whole story in Judges 4.17-24

"Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed. He asked water and she gave him milk, she brought him curds in a lordly bowl. She put her hand to the tent peg and her right hand to the workmen's mallet; she struck Sisera a blow, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple. He sank, he fell, he lay still at her feet; at her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell dead." (Judges 5.24-27)

It can be a little hard for us to share the Israelites' enthusiasm for Jael. She was a non-Israelite woman who became a hero in Jewish tradition for brutally killing the commander of the Canaanite army, and her methods were truly merciless and vicious. Under the pretext of providing the Canaanite commander safe haven under a rug in her home, she "softly" and calmly picked up a tent peg and a hammer, walked over to the hiding man, and drove the peg through his temple with such force that it penetrated the ground beneath his skull. Such a gruesome scene could hardly be imagined by the most creative minds in Hollywood.

While the whole story, and especially the praise of her as "most blessed", (5.24) is rather distasteful to our sensibilities, we might perhaps recall that her act of support for the Israelites was a great encouragement and help in a time of vulnerability and fear. And she, in some ways, might be said to point toward a time when, as Isaiah would say, the "gentiles shall come to (Israel's) light", (Isaiah 60.3) a time fulfilled with the birth of Jesus, "a light to lighten the Gentiles, and to be the glory of ... Israel." (Luke 2.32) Jael also, along with Deborah, exerted an enormous influence on the political affairs of her time, making her a rare exception in a male dominated society.

Women in Bangladesh are peacefully and with determination reclaiming their economic and social power through the help of PWRDF partner UBINIG. Read [their story](#) on the opposite page.



Ruler of the universe, we are called to serve one another. Help us to give help when needed, and receive help when offered. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

Sisters, keep the seeds in your hands!

THIS IS the rallying cry of a Bangladeshi farmer at a rally for Nayakrishi Andolon, the New Agricultural Movement led by communities practising biodiversity-based ecological agriculture.

At one point Bangladesh boasted more than 15,000 varieties of rice. Yet thousands of those varieties were lost when a limited number of 'higher yielding varieties' were offered to Bangladeshi farmers. It was this so-called Green Revolution, coupled with the devastating floods of 1987 and 1988, that brought farmers in the Tangail region of Bangladesh to PWRDF partner UBINIG to ask for help.

Farida Akhter, founder and director of UBINIG (Policy Research for Development Alternative), says it became clear that the effects of the floods were more devastating because of the farmers' dependence on a reduced diversity of rice seeds. "They could not afford to bear the additional costs of fertilizers and pesticides," she says.

Another casualty of the Green Revolution was the role of women as seed bearers. Central to the movement is the Nayakrishi Seed Network (NSN) – a web of household, community and regional seed huts and 'wealth centres'. Their goal is to keep seeds in farmers' hands because "control over seed is the lifeline of the farming community and ensures the command of the farmers over the agrarian production cycle," says Akhter. "Strengthening farmers' seed system is essential for innovation and knowledge generation."

Nayakrishi Andolon is enabling women to reclaim the role of seed bearer, and thus, return to them a certain measure of social and economic power. According to Akhter there are now 300,000 farming households in Bangladesh practising Nayakrishi. More than 3,000 varieties of rice seeds are now collected and catalogued by the NSN, along with a host of fruit, vegetable, cereal, pulse and plant varieties.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/sisters-keep-the-seeds-in-your-hands/



SUNDAY DECEMBER 16

The mother of Samson



You can read the
whole story in
Judges 13.1-25

There was a certain man of Zorah, of the tribe of the Danites, whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren, having borne no children. And the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Although you are barren, having borne no children, you shall conceive and bear a son. Now be careful not to drink wine or strong drink, or to eat anything unclean, for you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor is to come on his head, for the boy shall be a Nazirite to God from birth. It is he who shall begin to deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13.2-5)

The story of the angel's visit to Samson's mother is strongly reminiscent of the stories of the angel Gabriel's visits to Elizabeth and Mary. In a lot of ways, Old Testament women like Samson's mother were the forerunners or precursors to these two holy women of the New Testament, and foreshadow their own experiences of miraculous conception, birth and motherhood. Interestingly, the angel visits her twice, without her husband present. Manoah only sees the angel when his wife runs out to get him.

The child she would bear would, of course, have very little in common with John the Baptist or Jesus. While John the Baptist lived an ascetic life, similar to that of a Nazirite, the personalities of these three men could not have been more different. Samson proved himself a very different kind of leader. He was impulsive, was driven by strong appetites, and was vindictive and cruel. But despite all of this, the Biblical story assures us that God can use even a very imperfect person to fulfill God's greater purposes for the world.

Like the unnamed mother of Samson and the women of her time, bearing children and becoming a mother are important cultural rites of passage in many Mexican Indigenous communities. A woman becomes an adult when she gives birth to her first child. A childless woman, no matter her age, does not enjoy the same standing in her community as a woman with children. Thus, support for traditional midwives, in the form of training and safe, clean clinics with sufficient medication, is vital to ensuring the birth of healthy babies and the journey to healthy motherhood of Indigenous women.

K'inál Antzetik works to support the training and recognition of Indigenous midwives in southern Mexico. Read about [the work of this PWRDF partner](#) on the opposite page.



God of peace, you have chosen us and called us to fulfill your purposes in our lives. Help us to know your will, that we may be worthy vessels of your love. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

Midwives have much to offer

IN 2011, the maternal mortality rate in Mexico was 67 per 100,000, compared to 8 per 100,000 in Canada. PWRDF partner Kinal Antzetik is a non-profit health organization working with Indigenous people in Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas states. Kinal developed a training program for community health practitioners and traditional midwives known as parteras. The goal was to contribute to a reduction in the country's overall maternal mortality rate by reducing the maternal mortality rate in these marginalized communities.

Through this initiative midwives and others learn both the traditional and technical aspects of women's health and safety. Many midwives in Mexico, including Adelaida Leonides, are illiterate. To accommodate this, Kinal uses illustrations and symbols in its teaching materials rather than written texts. By 2015, the maternal death rate had dropped to 38 per 100,000.

With support from PWRDF and the National Commission for Development of Indigenous Communities in Mexico, Kinal's program

also teaches about gender issues and the importance of working with local health authorities.

Leonides' daughter accompanied her to the training to help her with reading and writing. She puts her training to work at the Indigenous Women's House (CAMI) in San Luis Acatlan, Guerrero State. CAMI serves as a delivery centre, teaching site, health clinic and social hub for Indigenous women in the region. It offers advice and checkups throughout pregnancy, and if the delivery is high risk, Leonides encourages the mother to visit the local hospital, and volunteers to accompany her on the journey.

Leonides learned to be a midwife from her mother, but has had that traditional knowledge enhanced by the training provided by Kinal.

"Now I'm very careful to wear gloves during delivery," she said. "The training has also helped me in teaching the community how to avoid maternal mortality."

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/midwives-have-much-to-offer/



MONDAY, DECEMBER 17

Hannah



You can read the
whole story in
1 Samuel 1.1–2.11

Hannah prayed and said, “My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God ... The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry are fat with spoil ... The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low, he also exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.” (1 Samuel 2, 1, 4-5, 7-8a)

Hannah's song shares a number of similarities with the Song of Mary: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant ... He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1.46-55) Like Mary, and many of the other women we have discussed so far, Hannah became pregnant under miraculous circumstances. Rather than by the visit of an angel, Hannah's infertility was addressed through earnest prayer, demonstrating her deep faith and trust in God. Her song, like Mary's, is an expression of her heartfelt joy and demonstrates an understanding of the special vocation that both she and her child had been called to fulfill.

Samuel, the son that Hannah would bear, would be one of the last of Israel's Judges, and would oversee the most important political and social transformation of God's people as the nation developed into a Monarchy, beginning with King Saul.

But the journey that would lead Hannah to becoming one of the most important and lauded women in the Bible began in shame and sorrow. Her infertility left her bereft of status and the victim of verbal abuse. But God raised Hannah up and released her from the prison of her situation.

Like Hannah, Ruth is a young woman who found herself feeling like a prisoner. Because of the work of PWRDF and Send a Cow Uganda, Ruth has been raised out of her prison into the light of a new life. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



God of new life, you raise up the fallen. Bring us up when we are low, fill us with your Bread, and make us ever mindful of the riches of your grace. Amen.



Ruth felt like she was in prison.

SHE AND her husband Vincent live in Mitwizi village in Uganda. They are members of the Tukwatirewamu Orphan's group, whose 30 members are all caregivers of orphans. They have six children ranging from seven to 17, and care for them as if they were their own.

Ruth used to do all the chores without the support of her husband. She had no friends because Vincent would not allow her to attend any community gathering or training. "He used to tell me that a woman who gets friends around the village gets bad manners and will get other men. So he kept me in the home without allowing me to go out of our home. In fact, I was a prisoner."

In 2017 PWRDF partnered with Send a Cow Uganda with a grant of \$21,000 to support an ongoing gender empowerment and livelihood development program in the central district of Rakai. The area has the highest proportion of children under 18 who have been double

orphaned (both parents are dead), mostly from HIV and AIDS-related causes; 92% of households consider themselves moderately or severely food insecure according to an August 2016 SACU survey.

Ruth was selected as one of the group's Community Resource Persons (CRPs) and it has transformed her life. She received training in social development, sustainable organic agriculture and animal management and Ruth's family never misses a training.

SACU staff got husbands from neighbouring communities who had allowed their wives to join the group to persuade Vincent to relent. "That is why I love Send a Cow – it got me out of this prison."

"My relationship with my husband and children is very good," says Ruth. "My husband reminds me when the group meeting is or even takes me to the meeting venue. I can go for the meeting and he remains at home caring for the children including cooking for them."

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/ruth-felt-like-she-was-in-prison/



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18

The Mother of Ichabod



You can read the
whole story in
1 Samuel 4.1-22

When she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth; for her labour pains overwhelmed her. As she was about to die, the women attending her said to her, "Do not be afraid, for you have borne a son." But she did not answer or give heed. She named the child Ichabod, meaning, "The glory has departed from Israel." (1 Samuel 4.19b-21a)

In the years leading up to the establishment of a monarchy, Israel was in an on-going conflict with their neighbours, the Philistines. The Philistines managed to capture the Ark of the Covenant (See Exodus 25.10-22 for a description of the ark) which housed the two stone tablets given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The ark was, in many ways, the spiritual centre of Israelite religion and culture. It was a visible sign of God's presence and protection. Losing the ark to their enemies was a devastating blow to morale.

Upon hearing the news that her husband, Phinehas, and her brother-in-law, Hophni, had been killed in the battle, and that her father-in-law, Eli, had died an accidental death, and that the ark had been captured, an unnamed young woman went into shock and immediately began her labour. The shock and the complications of labour resulted in the death of this woman, who had already endured unspeakable loss. She lived just long enough to name her child Ichabod, which means, "where is the glory?" The glory of Israel had been taken away.

The story of young mothers dying at childbirth is sadly still a common one throughout some parts of the world. In 2008, PWRDF built a health centre in Tanzania. Since that time, the centre has expanded and developed into an impressive hospital for young pregnant women, helping ensure that they can give birth in a safe and healthy environment, and that the medical needs of both mother and child are professionally attended. Read about [this amazing progression](#) on the opposite page.



God of light, our lives can be filled with darkness. Shine your glory into the dark spaces of this world, that we may always behold the brightness of your face. Amen.



This is how a hospital is born

IN 2008, PWRDF built an HIV/AIDS counselling and testing centre with partners in the Diocese of Masasi. The project was a special intervention to supplement Tanzanian government services in education on HIV/AIDS prevention and provision of counselling, testing and treatment services. An environmental study was successfully conducted and one building with eight rooms was built and used as a base to provide mobile voluntary counselling and testing services to 16,000 people in surrounding communities.

The design of the centre encouraged people to get tested because they could discreetly enter without people knowing that's what they were doing.

In 2010, with support from Global Affairs Canada, the centre added a reproductive and child health care services building. The Tanzanian Ministry of Health provided health professionals and expanded the services. Soon it became necessary to build living quarters for a nurse, a trained midwife and a doctor. With health care providers on site, delivery of newborns at night became a reality and the decent residential housing buoyed the working morale of health professionals.

Between 2012 and 2016, the clinic added a delivery room and maternity ward to provide a comfortable space for women to deliver their

babies and recover afterwards. Other rooms were arranged to give immunizations and carry out antenatal and postnatal check-ups.

In 2016, the partners connected the buildings with concrete walkways then covered the walkways with roofing to protect people from sun and rain as they moved from one building to the next. The leaky roof on the reproductive and child health care building was repaired and new lighting systems were added to both using solar roof panels.

In less than 10 years, the clinic grew from one centre to a collection of efficient, clean and connected buildings. The Ministry of Health was so impressed that in September 2016, it upgraded the clinic to a hospital. "It is quite an achievement when MOH seeks to expand and upgrade on the efforts of the Diocese of Masasi, PWRDF, Global Affairs Canada and local authorities to transform the Mtandi Health Centre from voluntary counselling and testing to a MNCH clinic and then to a hospital," says Zaida Bastos, Director of Development Partnership Program for PWRDF.

"This is a case where access to a greater variety, quantity and quality of health services on an increasingly more systemic level achieved the gold standard in impact and sustainability."

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/this-is-how-a-hospital-is-born/



WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 19

Abigail



You can read the
whole story in
1 Samuel 25.1-42

David said to Abigail, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me today from bloodguilt and from avenging myself by my own hand! Then David received from her hand what she had brought him; he said to her, "Go up to your house in peace; see, I have heeded your voice, and I have granted your petition." (1 Samuel 25.32-33, 35)

Abigail was a wise and courageous woman who demonstrated her political savvy in her dealings with David who was still, at the time, an outlaw bandit. When he requested assistance from Nabal, a wealthy landowner, he was rebuffed, and so he plotted revenge upon Nabal's household. Abigail, Nabal's wife, learning of her husband's foolish decision, took matters into her own hands and prepared a generous offering of food and wine for David and his followers. Her gift and heartfelt pledge of allegiance moved David's heart and he agreed to call off his vengeful plans.

Given the limited role for women at the time, Abigail demonstrated an extraordinary degree of initiative and proved herself to be remarkably wise and effective. All of this makes the next part of the story difficult for us to read. Despite her strength of character, she unquestionably agrees to become David's wife after the death of Nabal. It is strikingly heartbreaking to read how a woman of grace and passion and ingenuity must still, in the end, because of the culture in which she lived, adopt the role of a passive wife. But of course, it is a story that has been repeated countless times throughout history.

PWRDF has many projects focused on empowering women to realize their full potential. Maria Julio Moreira is one such woman who is benefitting from the investments and support of PWRDF partner CCM Pemba as she continues to successfully develop her business. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



Source of all goodness, in your almighty wisdom you lead and guide our lives. Help us trust you most when we understand the least. Amen.



Everyone deserves an opportunity to succeed

IN THE town of Pemba in the province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique, Maria Júlio Moreira operates a small restaurant out of her home, providing delicious food to her community. Moreira was looking to diversify her business by offering new food items and increasing the volume and profit of her business, but getting a loan was no easy task. Mozambique banks charge interest rates in the range of about 36%, making it nearly impossible for her to secure a loan and expand her business.

Moreira heard about CCM Pemba, a credit cooperative for women in Mozambique that provides them with low interest loans in order to grow small businesses. The cooperative helps to empower women within the community to participate more fully and develop literacy and financial skills.

Like many other women who are part of the cooperative, Moreira was able to grow her business with the loan from CCM. With the increased profits she was able to hire two female employees, increase the business volume and pay for her children to attend college.

PWRDF is proud to support women through CCM as they reach their full potential and become participating members of their community. The cooperative has a membership of 600 women who are running small businesses like food stands, hair salons and tailor shops.

In 2017, CCM Pemba was the beneficiary of the annual Ride for Refuge. Participants raised \$30,000 which was matched 1:1 by an anonymous donor.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/everyone-deserves-an-opportunity-to-succeed/



THURSDAY, DECEMBER 20

Huldah



You can read the whole story in [2 Kings 22.1-20](#)

So the priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah ... She declared to them, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel ... I will indeed bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants – all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. Because they have abandoned me and have made offerings to other gods, so that they have provoked me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched." ... They took the message back to the king. (2 Kings 22.14a, 15-17, 20b)

There are only a couple of female prophets mentioned in the Old Testament, which makes the story of Huldah all the more significant. Huldah was a prophet during the reign of King Josiah, whose reign coincided with an extremely important period in the history of the kingdom of Judah. Josiah reigned for 31 years and is considered a righteous king who "walked in all the way of David". (2 Kings 22.2) He is also, according to Matthew 1.11, an ancestor (adoptive) of Jesus. Josiah restored temple worship and called the people back to faithful living after years of seeking out other gods. During his reign, the "Book of the Law" (possibly some form of the Biblical book, Deuteronomy) was rediscovered after apparently having been lost.

It was, in fact, this rediscovery that led the high priest, Hilkiah, to seek out the prophet Huldah. Josiah was concerned that the long-standing apostasy of the people, as made clear to him from the Book of the Law, may lead to harsh divine judgement. Interestingly, both Jeremiah and Zephaniah were prophesying at the same time, but for unknown reasons the counsel of this female prophet was preferred. Huldah's prophecy was anything but comforting – she predicted that the kingdom would indeed face judgment and desolation. And her predictions would soon be proved when, in a few decades, the people of Judah would be sent into exile in Babylon. It's hard not to wonder how the Bible might be different if more of the prophecies of Huldah had been preserved in writing, like those of her male counterparts.

After centuries of suppression, some Indigenous languages are being rediscovered by the communities to whom they belong. Irene Robinson is an Indigenous woman in British Columbia who is seeking to bring her own language out of obscurity into the light of day. Read how [Irene made a difference](#) on the opposite page.



God of mercy, we often fall short and fail to do your will. Have compassion for our weakness, and create in us clean hearts. Amen.



**PWRDF
CONNECTS**

Irene Robinson could see it clearly.

AMONG the 14 tribes of the Nuu-Chah-Nulth indigenous peoples in British Columbia only about 200 fluent speakers of the language are left, many over 65 years old. The language is slowly dying.

So in 2012, the local author wrote a children's book about the ceremonies celebrated within the Nuu-Chah-Nulth. The book features an "easy speak" way of writing, where the names of the ceremonies are written in both the Nuu-Chah-Nulth alphabet as well as in the Roman alphabet to help readers learn the language.

"I like the easy speak," said Jackie Wells, the Family and Health Services Team Leader at the Port Alberni Friendship Centre. "It lets me learn along with my child."

The residential schools' policy of prohibiting Indigenous language has made it difficult for many languages to survive. One elder rarely speaks the language even today. "Every time he speaks [Nuu-chah-nulth], his stomach clenches

because of the memories of the beatings he received at residential school for speaking his language," said Robinson.

The Nuu-chah-nulth Economic Development Corporation (NEDC) works to preserve and revitalize the language and culture. Without the technology or financial resources to develop teaching tools to promote and teach the language, it is challenging. PWRDF has partnered with NEDC to address some of those funding gaps, such as the cost of distributing Robinson's book among the community.

The book has been shared with local parents, as well as the local schools and libraries. It has created an opportunity for elders to pass on their knowledge of language and culture to a younger generation.

"I see kids who go to school on the reserve to learn their culture, singing, and dancing. They feel good about themselves," said Robinson. "It makes me proud."

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/irene-robinson-could-see-it-clearly/



FRIDAY DECEMBER 21

Susanna



You can read the
whole story in
[Susanna 1-63](#)

Then Susanna cried out with a loud voice, and said, "O eternal God, you know what is secret and are aware of all things before they come to be; you know that these men have given false evidence against me. And now I am to die, though I have done none of the wicked things that they have charged against me!" The Lord heard her cry. Just as she was being led off to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young lad named Daniel, and he shouted with a loud voice, "I want no part in shedding this woman's blood!" (Susanna 42-46)

To read about Susanna, you need to either have a Bible with the Apocrypha included or a Catholic Bible (where her story is included as Chapter 13 of the book Daniel). It's a disturbing but also fascinating story of a woman falsely accused.

Susanna's plight takes place during the Babylonian exile in the 6th Century BC, when many of the Jews of Judah were forced to live in a foreign land. Susanna is portrayed as a wealthy Jewish woman, living with her husband in a rather grand house. While we usually think of the exile as a time of longing and displacement, it's revealing to also see that some of the exiles built successful lives for themselves in their new homes. Falsely accused of adultery, and the victim of attempted rape, Susanna's life hangs in the balance. Throughout her ordeal, she demonstrates a deep faith in God.

Perhaps most importantly, from a historical point of view, her awful predicament leads to the emergence of the Old Testament hero Daniel. Witnessing a grave injustice in the making, a very young Daniel's heart was "stirred up" by God, and he could not help but speak out in defence of Susanna. This act of courage, and the wisdom and efficiency he demonstrated in adjudicating the situation, no doubt led to the rise of his stature amongst the exiles.

Women in war-torn Democratic Republic of Congo have suffered from the physical and psychological trauma of rape. Like Daniel, PWRDF partner Dr. Denis Mukwege, co-winner of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, works to heal these women and restore their dignity through the Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas in South Kivu province. Read about [this inspiring work](#) on the opposite page.



*God of justice, stir up our wills to speak with boldness, that your will only be done.
Amen.*



Restoring women's bodies – and souls

THE co-winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for 2018, Dr. Denis Mukwege, is the founder of Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas, a project supported by PWRDF. When Dr. Mukwege created the Panzi Foundation in 2008, the goal was to support the work of the Panzi Hospital and improve outreach to people in hard-to-reach rural communities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But the foundation has done so much more, becoming a voice for gender equality, helping women rebuild their lives after rape and other forms of assault.

"As PWRDF doubles its efforts to address gender inequality and empower women, working with partners whose mandate is to eliminate gender-based violence has become our priority," says Zaida Bastos, Director of Development Partnership Program. "The silent war waged on women in the DRC, away from the limelight, is a tragedy that PWRDF couldn't ignore. Supporting the Panzi Foundation and Maison Dorcas was the right thing to do."

Panzi Hospital is known as the place where women who survive gruesome sexual violence go to be treated, and Dr. Mukwege is known as the "Doctor that repairs women."

"For a woman victim of sexual assault and violence, the medical care is the first step in a

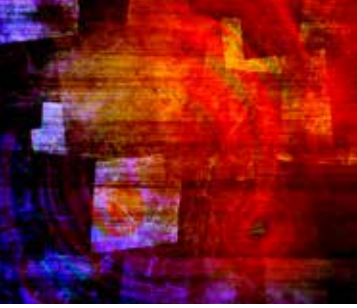
long road to recovery," Dr. Mukwege told Bastos and Richard Librock, External Funding Program Manager on a recent visit to the DRC. "We can, and should do better by accompanying her until she can stand on her own."

After discharge from the Panzi Hospital, women are brought to Maison Dorcas where they can openly speak about their experiences with other women who have faced similar violence and help to build up the self-esteem and earn skills they need to return home.

At Maison Dorcas, women are provided with psychosocial support, legal assistance, literacy training and education as well as re-integration services to help the women readjust into their communities, as smoothly as possible.

Maison Dorcas is located in the South Kivu province of the DRC, the third worst province in the country in terms of gender-based violence. Victims rarely report these crimes because of fear of repercussions or because of the shame and stigma. Violence is inflicted on women by armed rebel groups, soldiers and also civilians, and after the women are raped they are often expelled from their homes and their communities. The perpetrators of these crimes rarely face justice and continue to offend as the women suffer in silence.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/pwrdf-proud-to-partner-with-nobel-prize-winner-dr-denis-mukwege/



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22

Judith



You can read the
whole story in
[Judith 1.1-16.25](#)

Judith came close to Holofernes' bed, took hold of the hair of his head, and said, "Give me strength today, O Lord God of Israel!" Then she struck his neck twice with all her might, and cut off his head. Next she rolled his body off the bed and pulled down the canopy from the posts. Soon afterward she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, who placed it in her food bag.
(Judith 13.7-10)

Whoever said the Bible is boring? The story of Judith is as gory and gruesome and action packed as any Hollywood film today. In order to read her story, you will need a Bible with the Apocrypha.

Although she emerges only halfway through the book bearing her name, she is shown to be an intelligent and heroic figure who pulls off an extraordinary feat of courage against the commander of an enemy army. The story is too long and complex to summarize here, but is well worth reading on your own.

Like Miriam, Deborah and Hannah before her, and Mary who would come after her, Judith has her own song, preserved in chapter 16. In it, she delights in the victory of God against the enemies of her people. And she takes great joy in the fact that God "foiled them by the hand of a woman", rather than "by the hands of young men." (16.5-6)

Joyce Mtauca is something of a local legend in the Lindi Region of southern Tanzania. A farmer, Joyce is a deft hand with a machete – on her crops! Like Judith, she is a strong and powerful woman who forges her own pathways to success. Read how [PWRDF has supported Joyce](#) on the opposite page.



*God our defender, you call us to contemplation, and you call us to action.
Make us ready to listen and willing to speak. Amen.*



Sometimes big does mean better

JOYCE Mtauka, a farmer in the Lindi Region of southern Tanzania, has gone from growing food to feed her family (subsistence farming), to running a commercial operation that employs 10 people. She is an example of how education, resources and training for one person benefits more than just that one person.

Mtauka's journey began in 2012 when PWRDF's local partner, the Diocese of Masasi, embarked on a five-year nutrition and food security program.

"[Hunger] was a major problem before the program, because food insecurity was common in most of the households," Mtauka recalls, speaking through an interpreter. Many families only had enough food for one meal a day, but she notes, "nowadays, at least it is between two to three meals a day."

Mtauka received better seeds to improve her operation, but the more significant component for her was education about better farming practices. She learned how to use those

improved seeds more effectively, and also the importance of crop rotation and diversification.

In year three of the program, Mtauka travelled to Canada with the Rev. Geoffrey Monjesa, development officer for the Diocese of Masasi, to participate in PWRDF's Sharing Bread Learning Exchange, a week-long course developed in collaboration with the Sorrento Centre in British Columbia. There she shared with PWRDF volunteers and interested Anglicans her knowledge of farming in southern Tanzania, and learned from Canadian farmers and food producers about their own agricultural practices.

The training helped her start growing maize and cassava commercially. She reinvested her profits into the farm, purchased more land, and now employs many of her male relatives to work the fields alongside her. She has also taken an active role in caring for the women and children in her extended family. In 2017, Mtauka welcomed a PWRDF delegation to her farm.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/sometimes-big-does-mean-better/



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23

Esther



You can read the
whole story in
Esther 1.1-10.3

Esther said, "If it pleases the king, and if I have won his favour, and if the thing seems right before the king, and I have his approval, let an order be written to revoke the letters devised by Haman son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote giving orders to destroy the Jews who are in all the provinces of the king. For how can I bear to see the calamity that is coming on my people? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred?" (Esther 8.5-6)

The same Babylonians who had sent the leading lights of Judah into exile in 586 BC would eventually find themselves, almost 50 years later, being conquered by a foreign power. In 539 BC, Cyrus, King of Persia, overtook the Babylonian Empire. Babylon's former territories, including Palestine, became his. Cyrus is praised by Jewish sources for allowing the Jewish exiles to return home.

Some 60 years later, a Jewish woman named Esther was living within Persian territory. She became the wife of the Persian King, Xerxes I, and, according to the story, eventually delivered her people from a terrible fate. She was a woman of remarkable wisdom, and her story is exciting and well worth reading. The Jewish holiday Purim, celebrated annually all around the world, recalls the events of the book Esther and how she helped save her people from slaughter.

Mirsa Araceli Chinchilla Godoy is a courageous and strong woman who knows what it means to be a vulnerable person living in exile. Read [her story](#) on the opposite page.



Eternal One, protect and save your people wherever they live. Hide us in the shadow of your wings, and deliver us. Amen.



From surviving to thriving

MIRSA Araceli Chinchilla Godoy was born in Josefinos, Guatemala in 1981. Just three months later as the civil war emerged, “the massacre of Josefinos” forced her family to escape under cover of night. To prevent being discovered by soldiers, her mother covered her mouth to stop her from making any noise.

Mirsa’s family survived the massacre – executed by the military and the Kaibiles, a Guatemalan special elite force – by fleeing to Campeche, Mexico. She spent her childhood in a refugee camp in poverty, living for years in a nylon tent. Only when the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid and the UN High Commission for Refugees granted them refugee status were they given food assistance, a parcel of land for a house and work permits. They all managed to survive.

At 13, she met her husband with whom she would have three daughters, her first born one year later. Mirsa joined Ixmucane, a group of Guatemalan women who reunited to defend their rights while in exile, and women’s rights during the return process that was negotiated with the Guatemalan government. The return in 1995 was difficult. They had no home and lived in overcrowded places until land for a house and agriculture was given.

In 1998 Mirsa separated from her husband. A single mom at 17 with three children, she moved to her father’s community, becoming a member of the community co-op and taking all the responsibilities of a male head of family. This entailed doing labour

for the community and working the land for corn and beans – a situation many widows and single mothers faced to demonstrate they were able and fit to become direct members of the co-op.

Upon return, Ixmucane received support from groups such as the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, PWRDF and the Guatemalan organization COMADEP. Conditions for women and their families were improved through education to get better stoves, raise animals, and plant fruits and vegetables. PWRDF funds contributed to leadership training, to the group having its own location in St. Elena and to supporting the organization’s grass roots structure. Ixmucane was able to fight for and obtain co-ownership of the land when titles were given to families; it preserved the right of women to own land.

In 2002, Mirsa became the Ixmucane board treasurer and held the position for two years. There she lost her fear of public speaking and learned how to work with the community. She gained the skills and confidence to become the school parents’ association coordinator, the treasurer of the community coop and the assistant to the Municipal Council.

In 2015-16 Mirsa became vice-president of the co-op where she lives. “Perhaps Ixmucane never gave me huge financial resources but it gave me knowledge,” says Mirsa. “Without it, I would be another person. ... What I achieved was thanks to the strength the organization gave me, to know that I have rights and that I was capable of doing things.”



MONDAY, DECEMBER 24

Elizabeth



You can read the
whole story in
Luke 1.5-80.

In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” (Luke 1.39-42)

Like several Biblical women before her, Elizabeth was unable to conceive. And like Sarah, she was already “advanced in years”, and was probably well past the normal age of child-bearing. Elizabeth emerges as a model of faithful and willing participation in God’s plan of redemption. Her miraculous conception is the culmination of all the Old Testament’s other miraculous conceptions, and foreshadows the most miraculous conception of them all, still to come.

Elizabeth is six months pregnant when the baby “leaped in her womb” at the sound of Mary’s voice. “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!” Elizabeth tells her. Such affirmation would have surely eased Mary’s mind, and she praises God whole-heartedly. (Luke 1.46-55) When John is born, it is Elizabeth who pronounces with defiance that his name will be John, bucking the tradition of naming a boy after a member of the family. She persists and is eventually supported by Zechariah, whose voice is restored.

The Church celebrates the birth of Elizabeth’s miracle child, John the Baptist, on the 24th of June, six months before the birth of Jesus. (Luke 1.26) For those of us living in the Northern Hemisphere, there is a beautiful connection between the celebrations of the births of these two children and the natural rhythms of the Sun and Earth. Just as Jesus’ birth coincides roughly with the beginning of the season of increasing light (the Winter Solstice usually occurs on or around December 21), our celebration of the birth of John coincides closely with the beginning of the season of decreasing light (the Summer Solstice usually falls on or around June 21). John himself once said that he must decrease and that Christ must increase, (John 3.30) and so the birthdays of John and Jesus at the turning of the seasons are beautiful reminders of the role both men play in the salvation of the world.

Child and maternal health are at the core of PWRDF’s mission. By assisting local partners, PWRDF is helping children – especially those born in difficult places or circumstance – and their mothers come through the travails of childbirth healthier and happier. Read about one such life-saving initiative, [bicycle ambulances](#), on the opposite page.



Decrease in us, O Lord, pride and selfishness and jealousy and anger, that only the love and joy of Christ may increase in our hearts. Amen.



They say imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.

IF THAT'S true, then PWRDF's former partner in Mozambique should feel pretty chuffed. In 2010, SALAMA created bicycle ambulances to make health care more accessible. Bangladesh partner UBINIG like the idea so much that in 2012, they built their own bicycle ambulances. Both projects were part of maternal, newborn, and child health programs funded by PWRDF and Global Affairs Canada.

"UBINIG staff really liked the idea of bicycle ambulances," said Zaida Bastos, PWRDF's Director of Development Program, who oversees both projects. "So they made it work in their own context."

UBINIG determined tricycle ambulances were a better solution for hilly, disaster prone areas. As well, rivers need to be crossed and this inspired the construction of boat ambulances, complete with stable tricycle ambulances. Each river has its own challenges, and each ambulance is unique. Five tricycle ambulances and two boats were built in 2012, and another four ambulances and one more boat were built in 2013.

The Outreach Team at the Church of the Epiphany in Sudbury began supporting bicycle

ambulances as its International Project in 2012. They raised \$3,000 that year and \$5,465 in 2013.

"Given the extreme remoteness of many villages and the impossible costs of purchasing and maintaining modern ambulances, our parishioners are excited to help out with the provision of something so concrete, practical, innovative and adaptable as bicycle ambulances," said Mary Donato, a PWRDF volunteer in the Diocese of Algoma. "We are pleased that PWRDF has given us the opportunity to help out in this way and we hope to continue our support."

The bicycle ambulances also spread to Burundi, and in 2014, PWRDF received a Civil Society Effectiveness Award from the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, who praised PWRDF for connecting with hard to reach rural areas. Thanks to the availability of bicycle ambulances, the number of babies delivered in health care facilities has increased by 9% in Bangladesh, 29% in Mozambique and 59% in Burundi. As well, villages in Mozambique that have access to bicycle ambulances reported a 14% drop in maternal deaths compared to villages without bicycle ambulances.

Read this story online at pwrdf.org/60-stories/they-say-imitation-is-the-sincerest-form-of-flattery/



TUESDAY, DECEMBER 25

Mary



You can read
the whole story in
Luke 1.26-2.21

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, O favoured one, the Lord is with you!" But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1. 26-33)

This series of reflections began on the 2nd of December with Eve and we now conclude with Mary. The moment something shifted in Eve's heart (and Adam's too) from complete and unshakable trust in God to a desire to be independent from God, the world began its painful exile. "The serpent deceived me, and I ate," she would later tell God ashamedly. (Genesis 3.13) But a bridge from that exile back to our spiritual home was opened the moment Mary made her own internal shift from doubt (Luke 1.34) to full and complete trust in God. (Luke 1.38) In her simple words, "let it be to me according to your word," Mary established a bridge home that remains open to this day, a pathway all of us may tread if we so chose.

As we recalled in our reflection yesterday, the role of John the Baptist was, ultimately, to decrease, as Jesus increased. (John 3.30) Today we raise our voice with the shepherds and the angels, and we give glory to God for the birth of Mary's son, the Light of the World, whose light shines in the darkness.

Our final story today is from Rwanda. Baby Shining is, from her parents' point of view, a miracle child in her own right. And she is a shining symbol for all of us of the effect that PWRDF is having in the lives of countless men, children and women throughout the world. Read [A Bright Future for Baby Shining](#) on the opposite page.

May God bless you this Christmas season, and may God bless the work of PWRDF and the lives of all those who need their help.



Light of the World, shine upon us and upon the whole world, that we may always know the warmth of your love. Amen.



A bright future for Baby Shining

IT'S BEEN quite a year for new parents Ingabire Ruth and Miringa Innocent. For Christmas 2016, they received a surprising early gift. The 23-year-old's pregnancy had been uneventful until early December when a slight scare late in her second trimester brought her to the maternity clinic at Rwinkwavu District Hospital, in Eastern Rwanda. She thought the problem was resolved, but then on December 24, at the start of her third trimester, she went into labour. She returned to Rwinkwavu District Hospital and was taken to the operating room. Her daughter Shining was born at 27 weeks, weighing a mere 750 grams.

Ruth was the second born in a family of five children. She grew up on the outskirts of Rwanda's capital of Kigali in a town called Kabuga and completed secondary school. Prior to giving birth to a premature infant, she never had any experience with low birth weight or premature infants. She didn't know anyone who had ever had a baby that small.

Shining was taken to the neonatal unit of the hospital. For weeks she lived in an incubator, with her mother sitting attentively at her side. She received support to help her breathe through a CPAP machine. The nurses in the neonatal unit taught Ruth how to feed her tiny baby using a feeding tube that went through her nose into her stomach. She learned how to watch the equipment the baby was connected to, and how to adjust the oxygen when it became disconnected or out of place.

At first people from the community told Ruth the baby was too little to survive. But Ruth received support and encouragement from her husband, who visited the hospital every day to see his tiny daughter and his

wife. She also received support from the nurses and doctors working in the hospital. With the support of the All Mothers and Children Count program funded by The Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, the staff had been well trained in caring for infants born prematurely and with low birth weight. They helped educate the family about what the baby needed.

As Shining grew, the nurses taught Ruth how to perform Kangaroo Mother Care, or KMC, by placing the infant on her chest to help keep her warm. Shining graduated from the incubator and moved into the ward. She progressed from using the tiny feeding tube to taking her mother's breastmilk from a cup. Eventually she was strong enough to try and breastfeed on her own.

For more than two months, Shining and Ruth stayed in the neonatal unit at the hospital. Every day she was weighed. Finally, in early March she was allowed to go home. A plan was made for her to attend Rwinkwavu's Pediatric Development Clinic, a follow-up clinic for infants with special medical, nutritional and developmental needs. Shining continues to be monitored there for complications related to prematurity, but she is thriving and weighed 6.2 kg at eight months.

Ruth and her husband credit the care they received at the hospital for Shining's condition. They fear that if she had been born at a health centre further from the hospital, Shining may not have received the immediate respiratory support she needed. But now they have a little girl who is healthy. She smiles and laughs. Both Ruth and her husband are optimistic for Shining's bright future.