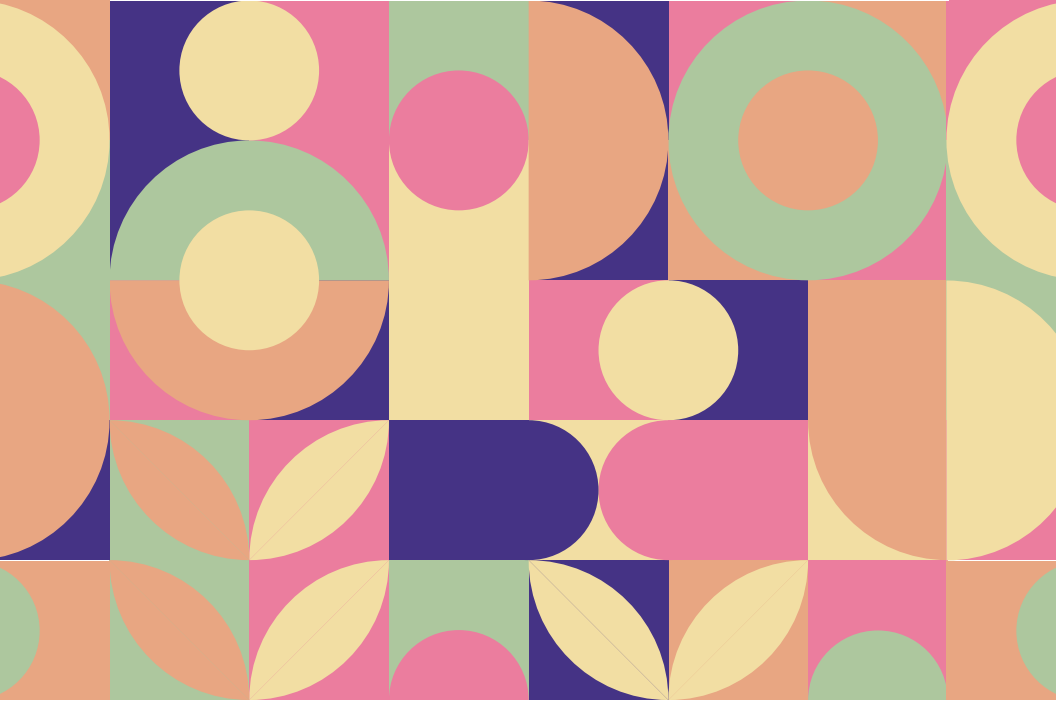


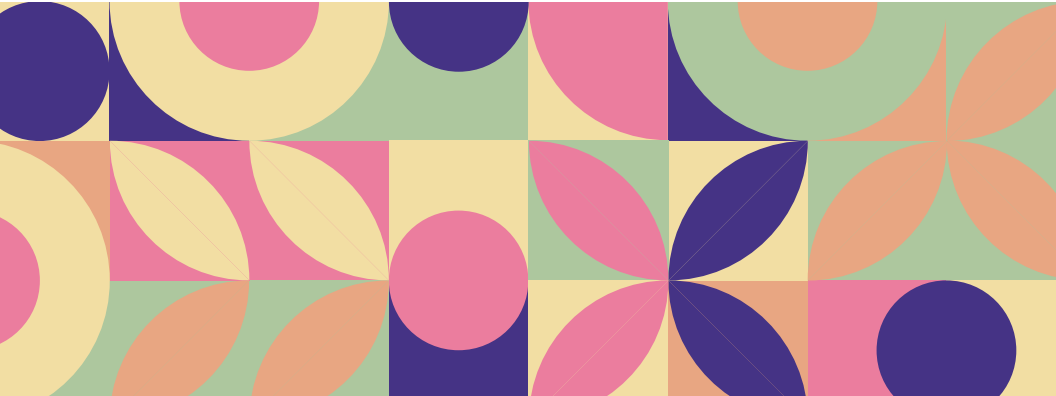



**Women in Leadership Collective**  
Celebrate, Empower, Equip



# Alliance Women of Influence

*a sampling*





We are so pleased to honour and celebrate some of the Women of Influence in our denomination through this collection of stories. Of course, we have only been able to focus on a few women—there are so many more. But we hope this will encourage you to recognize, thank God for, and in some way celebrate the women who have been influential in your life. Maybe it's a good time to write a little thank you note to one of them!

Secondly, we hope this will inspire the writing of many other stories like these. Wouldn't it be great to be able to continually update our catalogue of influential women? Maybe we'll have a book to bring to the next Assembly. Please feel free to contribute your stories. Send them to [wlc@cmacan.org](mailto:wlc@cmacan.org).

Most of the women whose stories are told here are in full-time ministry, but we also want to acknowledge the countless faithful women who have served and still serve without official title or pay: the women who wipe noses, change diapers and cuddle crying little ones in our nurseries. The women who teach our children their first theology lessons, imprinting truth on young lives through teaching and loving example. The women who make endless pots of coffee, cater meals, wash pots and pans and feed the hungry in our church kitchens. Women who pray for IWs, pastors and the church family faithfully and fervently. Women who bring meals to new moms and the sick. Women who work in church offices, keeping everything organized and supporting pastoral staff. Of course there are men who are involved in some of these tasks, but they have all primarily been the domain of women, who have served humbly without fanfare or recognition. So, we honour and celebrate these women, thousands of them! Without their love and service, 'in the background,' church as we know it could not exist. Thank you for your on-going ministries.

In this little book, you will observe how influence is spread from one generation to the next and from one circle of friendship to another. Women who are given the opportunity to teach, preach or lead are empowered to spread their impact in broader and more public circles. No less important and effective are the innumerable mentoring relationships, whether official or casual, in which women engage with others and "rub off" on another's life. Both public and one-to-one ministry are essential aspects of the "iron sharpens iron" of Proverbs 27:17 and of making disciples who make disciples.

Together we want to celebrate women who have used their place of influence to impart truth and impact lives. We hope these stories stir up thankfulness and encourage each of us to follow their example by investing our lives in those around us.

The Women in Leadership Collective Communications Team  
Ruth Shareski, Vicki Bowker, Autumn Goertz, Bekah Hagan Ahenda



## Reverend Norma Bailey Holtslander

BY VICKI BOWKER

There are those rare stars in the heavens that shine more brightly than the rest. We stare at them, studying them in awe and wonder. In the same way, there are the few, the far-between women and men, who touch our lives in ways that leave us in awe and wonder. Their beauty is as distinct as the stars, their lives a lasting imprint.

Reverend Norma Bailey Holtslander would stand out as one of the brightest stars in recent history. She is an outstanding example of calling obeyed; gifting used; character developed; voice heard; and causes addressed and challenged. As an early advocate for both women and men to pursue their passions, Norma has helped hundreds find their voice, and their place, in an increasingly confusing and divided world.

So what propelled her to follow her passions and meet challenges head-on? What motivated her to take risks as a woman in leadership and never look back? It's been enlightening to uncover some of those answers.

### ***Her Heritage***

From birth, Norma had an up close and personal understanding of the demands and requirements for true, heart-devoted ministry. Her father, Rev. Ernest Bailey, was a pastor with the CMA, so Norma grew up immersed in “church life”. Their home was often filled with visiting evangelists, musicians, and missionaries—exposing her to many sides of ministry life. She writes: *“My father often took me to his study at the church, where I read or played as he prepared sermons, talked with people, and planned various activities of the church’s life. He also took me with him when he visited in homes, hospitals, and nursing homes.”* Ministry was in her DNA, but was that enough?

### ***Her Calling***

One day, when Norma was about 6 months old, her father was preparing his December messages. Again she writes: *“He became overwhelmed with the thought of God sending His only Son into this world, giving Him up. He thought of his only child and how giving her up would be impossible. At that time he saw himself as a Levite, committed to the work of the church. He knew that the Levites dedicated their oldest child to the work of the Temple. For some reason, he missed the point that it was their oldest son. He came and knelt by my trundle bed and committed me to the work of the Church... I wasn’t forced into slavery in the work of the church. I made a choice. I made my own commitment.”* DNA wasn’t enough. God called and gifted Norma for ministry, for the work of building up His Church, and she responded with her whole heart.

## ***Her Heart***

After receiving her initial degrees in Education and Christian Education, Norma knew she wanted to be a missionary, and the Lord graciously opened doors for her to teach at the Alliance Academy in Quito, Ecuador. Young and single, it took courage to leave the familiar and comfortable and step into the unknown, but Norma's heart was to obey God fully. For those first ten years of her vocational life, Norma invested everything she had into those boys and girls. They were not just someone else's children, they were children of God, created to be difference-makers in the world around them, and she was blessed to be a part of their circle of influence.

## ***Her Responsibility***

Norma knew that all she had been given in upbringing, experience, blessing, and gifting was not to be kept, it was to be given generously. The freedom to learn, to think, to challenge, to teach, to inspire, and to grow were gifts she had received and cherished. But now the time had come to pass them on, to help release the next generation to reach out and reach up. For many years Norma was a deeply loved Professor, Dean, and Chaplain at Canadian Bible College and Canadian Theological Seminary in Regina. How she took that place by storm, challenging faculty and students alike to always think outside the box, to pursue what they knew they had been called to do, and to never look back. That's the kind of star that never fades. The one that keeps us staring and studying, that lights our way.

## ***Her Promise***

Norma's commitment to serve Jesus authentically has followed her even into retirement. Norma has not relinquished her tenacity and longing to see women released

*Norma has not relinquished her tenacity and longing to see women released into full freedom in ministry, and she has led by her example.*

into full freedom in ministry, and she has led by her example. In 1993, Norma married, Garth Holtslander, a widower who began attending CBC in his 60's. Following his graduation in 1996 Garth was invited on staff at First Baptist Church in Regina. It was then that Norma found herself fully at home with the Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, and in May 2019, one week shy of her 80th birthday, she was ordained with them. "Ordination for me certainly was the confirmation of my church leaders and congregation. Confirmation that they believed God had ordained me for ministry. Like the church in Acts did with Paul and Barnabas."

In that moment Norma said to all of us as Christ-followers: You are never too old, you are never not gifted enough, you are never not allowed to be fully and completely and passionately full-out in service for Jesus. You just go and do it. Don't keep just thinking about it—go and simply get it done.

## **Her Advice**

*“I would stress the importance of coming to the place where being in the Presence of God and worshipping God needs to come before our service to God. Our service should flow from the ‘being.’ Ordination should not be the be-all and the end-all of our life. It is a door opener. It is a benchmark to hang on to. It’s a significant time for God to reveal His anointing on your life and for people to know it, but if it isn’t possible, work towards it while moving on in the ministry God has given to you or leads you to. Never see the process or the title of ordination to be the goal. It should always be God at front and centre.”*

Thank you, Norma, for being a joy-giver, a trailblazer, and a star that shines on and on.



## **Reverend Eunice Smith**

BY MARDI DOLFO-SMITH

Reverend Eunice Smith, (1930-2019) spent 40 years of her life as an international worker for the Alliance in Ecuador and Mexico before retiring to serve Richmond Alliance Church. Her journey began at Canadian Bible Institute (now Ambrose University), where she studied exegesis and hermeneutics alongside men preparing for missions. In this post war era, both the church and Canadian culture envisioned limited roles for women. In many circles, wife and mother was seen as the primary and highest calling for women. Eunice emerged into adulthood during this period but did not allow it to dissuade her from God’s call on her life. She had a big vision for what God was calling her to and was a devoted follower of Jesus, wife, mother, and minister of gospel.

In the early 80’s, after 25 years in South America, as Eunice approached 50, she decided to continue to develop her leadership and she headed off to what is now

*After 60 years of faithfully choosing the path of discipleship, we honor her remarkable journey paving the way for subsequent generations of women.*

Tyndale Seminary where she was the first woman to get an Masters in Divinity. This is amazing courage in an era where evangelical women just didn’t do this.

When I first met Eunice she shared a story with me about applying to be a chaplain at her local hospital (at this time she had served in

ministry for 50 years). The director asked her what church she was ordained by, and she looked down and mumbled, embarrassed: “I am not ordained, my denomination doesn’t ordain women.” The hospital Director made an exception for her and allowed her to serve.

In 2012, Eunice became the first woman to be ordained in the Alliance in Canada.

The Women in Leadership Collective acknowledges Eunice’s unparalleled dedication. After 60 years of faithfully choosing the path of discipleship, we honor her remarkable journey paving the way for subsequent generations of women.



## **Reverend Doctor Penelope Ruth Hall**

BY ILANA LOBBEZOO

Reverend Doctor Penelope Ruth Hall was born in Ottawa, Ontario to Harold and Florence Jackson. Harold and Florence were regular attenders and involved in Ottawa’s Gospel Tabernacle’s church life, and so Penny was introduced to Jesus and a life devoted to service from an early age. Penny’s mom had the gift of hospitality, and so she had ample opportunity to meet and interact with many pastors, preachers and missionaries who regularly visited their home. She also had opportunity to travel with her father on work trips on several occasions growing up, and through these opportunities she was intrigued by different cultures and languages and became sensitive to God’s Spirit nudging her to explore cross-cultural ministry. With these influences in her life in her formative years, Penny went on to complete a bachelor’s degree in Anthropology and Linguistics at Carlton University in Ottawa. A young chiropractor and new believer began attending the Tabernacle, and quickly noticed this talented and intelligent young woman. John and Penny began dating and were married in May of 1964. John offered these words in response to her influence on his life down through the years. *“Many people, including myself, have benefited from her Bible-based wisdom and insight which was shared from her sound Christ-like life and judgment in answer to theological questions and life’s challenges.”*

In 1966, John and Penny began their international service as teachers at Dalat School in Malaysia. During that year at Dalat School, they were invited to join the Alliance missionary team in Vietnam. Upon beginning Vietnamese language study in Dalat, Vietnam Penny’s training in linguistics and unique gifting to understand and learn languages became evident as she mastered the difficult

Vietnamese language in half the time of the average language learner. This pattern was once again repeated when they were redeployed to Ecuador many years later, as she mastered the Spanish language in record time at the language school in Costa Rica. John and Penny served as Alliance missionaries for 8 years in Vietnam and another 8 years in Ecuador. There is no doubt that there are countless individuals whose lives were influenced for eternity by her willingness to serve at Dalat School and in Vietnam, Costa Rica, and Ecuador those many years. Her capacity to learn Vietnamese and Spanish and speak like a local offered her unique opportunities to teach, preach, connect, and impact many people in these countries, believers and non-believers alike. She was able to put her linguistic training to use in Vietnam as she worked on the development of Sunday School curriculum as well as worked with a translation team who saw the completion of the Jarai New Testament before missionaries were forced to leave the country in 1975. Decades after completing their service in Vietnam, Penny's influence continued as she was invited to return to Vietnam to assist with the establishment of Bible schools and to be an advisor in the development of their theological libraries. She has also been invited for over a decade to participate as a workshop speaker at the Synergy conference for ministry among Vietnamese held in Thailand. All of this coupled with her intelligent mind which retained many years of reading, study, teaching, and training through various seasons of her life, and her understanding of theology and practice continues to earn the respect of her friends and colleagues whether it be in local, national or international contexts.

*She has influenced our denomination down through the years, having served on many national committees, written papers and challenged our theology and practice from the General Assembly floor.*

Her passion for learning took her to Canadian Theological Seminary to complete her Master of Divinity degree after completing 4 terms of missionary service, and then on to the University of Edinburgh where a PhD was conferred on her for her doctoral thesis on The Theory and Principles of Contextualization in Mission from an Old Testament Perspective. Through those years of study abroad her influential reach continued to extend across international and church tradition borders as Penny contributed to the development and maintenance of theological libraries throughout the United Kingdom and Europe, assisting seminaries and theological faculties in universities with their curricula and theological teaching resources. In 2010, the University of Leuven in Belgium conferred a Doctor of Divinity on her, in recognition of many years of service as Secretary of the International Council of Theological Library Associations. She was offered the opportunity to interact with the leadership of the Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, and Eastern Orthodox

churches, to the extent that she was invited to give a series of lectures on the theology of women in ministry and instructing laity in theology to Roman Catholic professors of theology in Spain. In recognition of her service and contributions she has been honoured by various organizations down through the years.

There are many within our own Canadian Alliance family that will be able to recall how she has influenced our own denomination down through the years, having served on many national committees, written papers and challenged our theology and practice from the General Assembly floor. As one of the first females to be ordained in The Alliance Canada in 2013, her influence and encouragement to women across our denomination affords her this place of honour and recognition among many other women of influence within our denominational borders. Though her influence is far-reaching she has always made time to serve in her local context, and for the past 15 years as a member and staff at Emmanuel Alliance Church of Ottawa. Many at EACO would describe Penny as a faithful pastor, mentor, dear sister, and friend. One individual said this of her influence, “[It] goes beyond the gender gap. Her steadfast faith, enriched by in-depth theological understanding and many personal spiritual experiences, is highly beneficial to all who listen to her sermons and teaching. I am deeply moved by Penny’s unwavering commitment to serve when called upon.” There is no doubt that many would say that she has used her God-given talents and gifts to bless and inspire many, including those in this local church in Nepean. It is incredibly challenging to be brief in describing a long life of faithful influence, and more could be said but I will conclude with expressing gratitude for a woman I call Mom. Her example has influenced me to discover God’s call for me and to serve boldly and faithfully, regardless of any challenges that I might face due to age or gender. She taught me that with God nothing is impossible!



## **Reverend Kyla Ward and Holy Imagination**

*BY BEKAH HAGAN AHENDA*

*“I guess I just never imagined what it would be like to have a woman preacher.” - Victoria Alliance Church Congregant*

Victoria Alliance Church’s grey cement block walls are easy to miss if you don’t know what you’re looking for. The first time I walked up in July 2019, exploring a job opportunity and not sure what to expect, she was unassuming but bathed in summer sunlight. Walking through the foyer, the woody hymn-book scent of



an older church building folds over you, something a born and raised Alliance kid like me finds familiar and comforting. Little did I know the halls of this humble building would hold a story that has inspired me and our community to imagine a future we weren't able to see on our own.

After a journey of nearly fifteen years in ministry, on March 20th, 2022, Reverend Kyla Ward was installed as Lead Pastor of Victoria Alliance Church with much joy and celebration. She and Reverend Rob Olsen had been serving

*...in this image, as I was praying, God said 'Kyla, you can run unbridled. Run and pursue and offer what you have, all my gifts. Let me worry about the rest.'*

alongside each other in what Kyla calls “a beautifully ordained sibling-ship” since they were hired in 2007 and 2008, and it was time to speak the truth: they were both called to lead VAC in mutuality, side by side.

This change came three years after I first set foot in VAC's hymn book-scented halls and let me tell you: before Kyla became Lead Pastor alongside Rob it was like we were engaged in a card game where the perfect hand for each person seemed frustratingly just out of reach. It was good, but not as good as it could have been. It felt like something invisible and difficult to articulate was holding us back. We needed to imagine something we'd never seen before.

*“A big switch flipped for me right before I became lead pastor,” Kyla shared with me recently. “In 2020 I was given an image in prayer: I've always felt I was a horse running with a bridle—I always held my own reins or held myself back. But in this image, as I was praying, God said, 'Kyla, you can run unbridled. Run and pursue and offer what you have, all my gifts. Let me worry about the rest.’”*

Upon Kyla's appointment, it was like things clicked into place. Kyla and Rob reshuffled the hands dealt to them and I witnessed the Spirit release them both to lead as they were made to lead.

I saw Kyla set free to dream, envision, and get things moving. Where previously she would have spent her time lending her gifts to other staff or leaders and leading up, she was free to run. She dreams dreams, moves big projects forward, and guides our preaching team. She gathers our processes, our Board, our committees, and all the structural aspects that lend themselves to developing the culture that is VAC. She sees leadership potential in people and empowers them to step forward. She asks well-crafted questions that carve thoughtfulness out of chaos and bring our community closer together and farther forward.

Rob too thrived with this change. In Kyla's words, *“I was instigating a lot of change, asking questions and casting vision and trying to form culture, but having an upfront leader*

*be confronted with new ideas and be willing to make radical changes - we must not undersell how valuable that was...[After I was Installed] I got to see Rob start to love the lane he was in. That was fun to watch."*

While this piece is about Kyla and her journey of influence on me, I cannot tell this story without pausing to honour Rob for his part in championing both Kyla and myself. Rob, thank you for how you lead with humility and open hands. Your willingness to be confronted with new information and change how you live your life and how you lead is compelling and inspiring in a world that often values certainty over curiosity. Thank you.

*"A lot of what was fun from 2008 to 2022 was moving a community of people towards imagining something like this happening," Kyla reminisced to me when I asked her what this journey was like for her. "Looking out today and seeing young women and young men who don't have to imagine this, but who already know what it looks like is fun. Imagination is great, but it's limited. People can see it now and it's not some scary thing, it's good and it's beautiful."*

Today, five years since being hired at VAC, I now pastor alongside Kyla and Rob in my own lane that I love, and I don't know that I'd be here if Kyla hadn't seen me and empowered me forward.

So thank you, Kyla, for taking off your bridle. Thank you for trusting God. Thank you for not being afraid to ask questions (or ask questions even when you were afraid)—well-crafted, space-creating, thought-provoking questions. Thank you for holding peace and progress hand in hand, and guiding us forward in wisdom. Thank you for obeying Jesus' call to lead, in all the forms that's taken over the past decade.

Thank you for seeing my gifts and encouraging me to lean into them. Thank you for showing me what it looks like to serve unbridled. I don't have to imagine that anymore, and because of that I am experiencing a freedom to lead like my 2019 self never could have thought possible. I no longer hold fear of rejection for the ways I wonder, prophesy (a word you have given me permission to use about myself), and hyper-fixate on the latest church organizational nerdiness. No, instead you have shown me that the love of Christ is over me and releases me to try stuff, make mistakes, learn from them, and grow without allowing shame to take hold. Because of you, I can call myself Pastor.

Kyla, you turned around and wedged your heel in the door so leaders like me can imagine the Kingdom Come in ways we previously thought were not possible, and you're not even finished yet. There's only one thing left to say: thank you and let's do this.



## Three Generations of Women of Influence

BY RUTH SHARESKI

My life has been enriched by 3 generations of influential women in one family. The Draper family have been friends of our family since I was a child. Irene Draper's deeper influence began as I was asked by her husband, Lloyd, to join the staff of the church in Kelowna where he had recently taken the role of lead pastor. I'm pretty sure he did that as a way to encourage and equip me. Lloyd and Irene mentored me and Irene taught me so much, simply by example, about being in ministry, caring for people, hospitality, loving people as they are, the importance of laughter and celebration in tending to our own souls and those of others. Lloyd and Irene were a beautiful team, and that example also equipped me for entering into a team ministry with Ralph. We got engaged at their kitchen table and married from their home, and have always been thankful for the influence, example and love we received from them both.

*One generation commends your works to another;  
they tell of your mighty acts.*

*They speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty—  
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.[b]*

*They tell of the power of your awesome works—  
and I will proclaim your great deeds.*

*They celebrate your abundant goodness  
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.*

*Psalm 145: 4-7*

When Lloyd was on the staff of the Western Canadian District, Irene traveled with him to visit churches and sought to always have a word of encouragement especially for young leaders. She recently told me how God had laid 3 young men on her heart to consistently pray for. Today all these men have significant leadership roles in the Alliance Canada and lead with integrity.

After they retired from church leadership, Lloyd and Irene ventured out to serve as grandparents in the dorm at Quito Academy, allowing them the joy of being there for their own dearly-loved grandchildren, as well as the many who were not able to be near their parents.

Since Lloyd went to be with Jesus, Irene continues to influence and bless others with her love and prayer, her acceptance of those who are struggling, her joy and laughter. She has cared for neighbours and friends around her, for her own family, and for immigrant families. She joins in prayer for peoples and International Workers around the globe. Now 88, she is known as a lover of people and a prayer warrior as she continues using her gifts to shower everyone around her with the love of God.

Irene's daughter, Reverend Ruth-Anne Gilberston and her husband Ric were our first interns and lived in a trailer in our backyard for a summer. Ruth-Anne patiently helped me care for a toddler and a baby while we all worked together learning to shepherd a small congregation. She went on to influence many more people, as an International Worker in Venezuela, together with Ric as Regional Developers, and later in a role where they recruited and cared for new International Workers. So many were inspired to take the courageous steps of entering overseas ministry through her influence and mentoring.

She later took training to become a Spiritual Director, and in that role has continued her life themes of caring for and inspiring others, helping women move into places of freedom and growth.

Ruth-Anne's daughter, Karissa Delamont, joined us in Heidelberg, Germany, where she served for 7 years, first as an apprentice and then as an IW. As we lived and worked together, we got to watch first-hand how well she loves people, welcoming them into community with warmth and acceptance, how she is able to clearly identify what is necessary in a situation; and how courageously she steps up as a leader to give needed direction. Many young women were transformed by her love for them as she led them into a walk of freedom and grace through her teaching, discipling, and the vulnerable sharing of her life. Her influence in these women's lives continues although she now lives in Canada.

I learned much from praying, planning and ministering alongside her. Her deep love for Jesus and for people is a joy to see. In June 2023 she married Daniel Delamont, and we, as their friends, are excited to see where God will lead them together.

I am so thankful for the opportunities I have had to be connected with these wonderful women, and for the profound influence each of them continues to have in my life. I'm thankful for three generations of women who are not afraid to step into new places, to let Holy Spirit speak through them, to lead people into the freedom Jesus bought for them, to encourage others to also follow Jesus and use their gifts wherever He calls them.



## Glendyne Gerrard: Influence Beyond Imagining

BY RUTH SHARESKI

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. Ephesians 3:20*

Glendyne Gerrard and I met as 16-year-olds in the women's washroom of my home church in Hamilton when her father, Melvin Sylvester, became our pastor. Although we have not lived close to each other for many years, she continues to inspire me.

Over the years she influenced many women in her roles as pastor's wife through her teaching, mentoring, organizing gatherings, and the gracious hospitality she learned from her lovely mother, Marion. She served alongside her husband, Doug in Sparwood, B. C., Linden, AB, Kingston, ON, and Morden, MB. She describes these years this way: *"In all of these locations, I loved serving alongside Doug, opening our home to people, always gravitating towards working with women and jumping in wherever I could since I believed that God had called me to ministry too."*

Then, in a time when it was rare for a woman to be hired on the church staff, she served on the staff of Morden Alliance Church giving oversight to women's, adult and children's ministries.

*"While on staff in Morden, God began to do a work in my heart during my quiet times with Him. In the late 90's I had a growing awakening to God's heart for the vulnerable and marginalized. It was a steady journey of recognition that my heart didn't reflect God's heart when it came to caring for the poor and defenseless among us. Micah 6:8 came to hold a significant place in my heart and mind and I started to pray that verse regularly asking God to show me exactly who He wanted me to show justice and mercy to. I also started reading lots of books related to justice and mercy which expanded my understanding and served to make me more passionate about these issues."*

When Doug became the DS of the Midwest Canadian district, Glendyne stepped into the role of District Women's Ministry Leadership and also began volunteering at the Food Bank in Regina.

She says of that season, *"It was here that I met a prostituted woman for the first time; it was here that I began to learn about colonialism and the outcomes of residential schools and was confronted with the hardships of so many in my city."*

In 2006 Glendyne became the National Women's Ministry Director. Through all these Women's Ministry Leadership roles, Glendyne had the

privilege of inspiring and equipping many hundreds of women all across Canada to walk in their calling, use their gifts and support our International Ministries through prayer, education and finances.

It was while she was serving in this role that God led her into a new and significant sphere of influence, as the Holy Spirit built on the work He had already been doing in her heart. Franklin Pyles, the President of the Canadian CMA at the time, encouraged her and her team to consider addressing a justice issue affecting women and children in Canada.

She reached out to a female pastor in Vancouver who was involved in inner city ministries and she introduced her to Trisha Baptie\*. This is how Glendyne describes what happened next:

*“Trisha’s agreement to meet with the National Women’s Leadership team came with the condition that I read and watch everything she would send me first, knowing that this sheltered church woman would need some information to digest before she came. So for 2 solid weeks I immersed myself in the world of prostitution, missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, colonialism, patriarchy and staggering statistics and government reports. I was moved to tears many times over that 2 week period and found myself asking ‘Where have I been while all of this has gone on around me? And where has the church been? How is it that I’ve never once heard any of these tragedies addressed in a local church?’ God had captured and broken my heart before I had even met Trisha face to face. Then the 8 hours with Trisha changed the trajectory of my life. God used her challenge to me to solidify the work that He had begun those years ago when I started to pray Micah 6:8. In fact some weeks after our meeting with Trisha in Vancouver, God said to me one day, ‘This is the group, these are the women that you’ve been praying about all this time. This is who I want you to show justice and mercy to.’”*

*I was moved to tears many times and found myself asking “Where have I been while all of this has gone on around me? And where has the church been?”*

As Glendyne stepped out in faith and obedience, God brought connections and surrounded her with just the right women and men to support and help carry the vision for what became Defend Dignity (dD), a ministry arm of the CMA Canada addressing issues of human trafficking, prostitution, pornography and related issues.

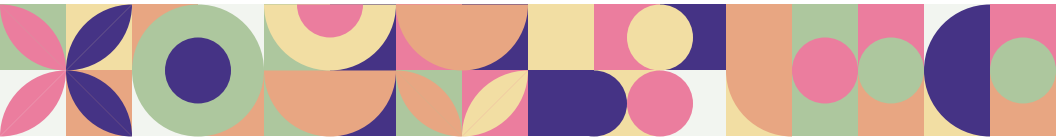
It is miraculous how this ministry has been able to join with other organizations who share the same concerns, educate the church and MPs on these important issues, influence government policies, and bring change. For, example, they were able to convince companies to tighten online security, making pornographic websites less accessible to youth. They have created a number of effective resources for churches or other groups. A survivor support fund

helps women leaving the sex trade get started in their new life. They have been influential, along with other groups, in changing the laws in Canada that relate to prostitution, and continue the fight to keep those better laws in place for the protection of women and children.

Glendyne once said to me, *“If someone had told me I would be doing all this, I would not have believed it.”* By *“all this”*, she meant meeting with MPs, testifying in important court decisions, working together with many other anti-Human Trafficking group leaders, being interviewed listening to the heartbreaking stories of survivors of sexual abuse and prostitution and being able to make a very real difference.

She continues to be a woman of influence in “retirement” and I am so thankful that she was willing to listen to the call of God and move forward in faith. God’s work in and through her life continues to be “beyond imagining.”

If you want to know more about Defend Dignity and how you can be involved, their website is [www.defenddignity.ca](http://www.defenddignity.ca).



**Trisha Baptie**  
*BY GLENDYNE GERRARD*

Trisha Baptie has bravely shared her truth and provided valuable information about sexual exploitation in numerous Alliance Churches since 2010 when she first partnered with Defend Dignity. Trisha has been an expert consultant to Reverend Glendyne Gerrard, founder and retired Director of Defend Dignity and its team from the first time she met them. She carries on in that role to this day.

Trisha has a beautiful story of meeting Jesus through the persistence of a friend who embodied love in action. The trajectory of Trisha’s life went from being sexually exploited as a young teen in a group home to knowing she was a beloved child of God. She was surrounded by a loving church community and began her healing journey. Along the way God called her to be an advocate for the sexually exploited first in her city and then nationally and internationally.

After an introduction to Glendyne in 2009, thanks to Mardi Dolfo-Smith, her partnership with the Alliance began and continues to this day. Trisha has shared her expertise with audiences in Alliance churches across Canada, presented to MPs and Senators on Parliament Hill and is a much sought after and trusted

speaker internationally.

Trisha chose Jesus all those years ago; she chose a better way for her children and God has used her past to bring His Kingdom to earth. Trisha's in-depth and personal knowledge of how patriarchy affects women and children and our entire society has given her fresh insights into how Jesus came to turn

*Trisha chose Jesus all those years ago; she chose a better way for her children and God has used her past to bring his Kingdom to earth.*

that thinking upside down. She helps us look at sexual exploitation through a different lens than one of only seeing the prostituted woman we assume is there by choice. She exposes the lies around this and asks us

to examine the whys behind prostitution. What are the root causes that lure and keep a woman in that place? Who drives prostitution and how can we bring Jesus' truth to bear on this issue? What is Jesus asking each of us to do based on this knowledge? It was these probing questions that ultimately motivated Glendyne and others to start Defend Dignity. Trisha has provided us with the tools to address these issues inside and outside the church.

Trisha has helped our churches understand not just the realities and truths of sexual exploitation in our world, but also how we can embrace Jesus' vision for shalom in our world, where women and men live together in equality, harmony and with dignity for all.



## Mizuho's Story

BY CAROL WOON

*We also want to celebrate the women who serve internationally, investing in the lives of people in other cultures with love and perseverance, in ways that move them from "unreached" to "reached", to moving out to reach others. Here is a story passed on to us by Carol Woon, who has served alongside her husband, Doug, in Tokyo, Japan for over 35 years.*

Usually Mizuho looked forward to Thursdays, the day when a few women gather around Carol's table, drinking cups of fragrant tea, reading the Bible together and sharing what God is doing in their lives. Even though they look very different, and have different backgrounds, she and Carol have become like sisters as they both love and follow Jesus.



But recently Mizuho felt like there was a tug-of-war going on in her heart. A month before, a young Canadian woman apprenticing in their church shared her story. She expressed God's faithfulness in showing her specifically how each of her fears of serving overseas was unfounded and that He was caring for her. This should have been encouraging, but Mizuho knew that her husband was sensing God calling him into ministry and she was struggling. So many questions and fears were chasing each other around in her mind.

*What would people think if they made this drastic change ?  
Would their children face criticism and stigma?  
What about the loss of financial stability?  
What would her life look like? Certainly not the life she  
expected!*

This Thursday she was very quiet as they sat around the table and Carol read the parable of the talents from Matthew 25:14-30. A Master left a certain number of talents to each of his three servants. He was pleased with the first two who invested theirs and earned a return, but disappointed in the one who hid his out of fear.

The final reflection question was *“Our view of God is so important to our walk with Him. Are we trusting that He loves us and wants the best for us or are we fearful? If we trust Him, we'll want to obey, but if we are fearful, we'll be afraid to do what He asks of us.”*

That question hit home, and Mizuho realized that she was not trusting the God who loves her so much and knows her so well that he had given her and her husband wonderful gifts to use for His glory. In a fearful, distrusting response, she was burying those gifts, resisting God's call, both on her husband's and her life and she was miserable.

She sought a conversation with Carol and another woman. They gently led her into releasing her fears to God and committing her life and future to Him, trusting in His love and faithfulness.

Peace flooded her heart, in spite of the remaining questions. In a moving testimony to the Bible Study group and then before the whole church in the weeks that followed, she proclaimed that she is trusting God for her family's future and that they are prayerfully moving forward in researching how they can serve the Lord together.



## **Angela Hiebert: A New Brand of Influencer**

BY SHAROLYN HALL

*Another story of one of our International Workers, Angela Hiebert. Chris and Angela lead the team of Canadian IWs in Mexico City.*

### ***Like. Dislike. Follow. Follow. Follow.***

Today, the merit of an influencer is measured by their followers. The more traffic that travels from an influencer's posts to online purchases, the greater their value and imprint on both the digital world and the kingdom of commerce. Despite this booming trend, a person of influence with eternal impact depends on who you follow, not your follower count. Committing to a life spent getting to know Jesus, rather than peddling knowledge about a new product, will produce treasures that go beyond our world. Follow Jesus and He will influence others through you.

### ***Like Jesus. Dislike sin. Follow. Follow. Follow.***

Angela Hiebert is one of my most treasured friends. She might have a negligible digital footprint, but her eternal footprint literally spans the globe. The extent of her influence can be measured by changed lives. She lives intentionally so that Jesus is at the centre of everything and cultivates a life that bears fruit for His Kingdom. Her friendship with God started when she was a young child. From a very early age she understood that Jesus invites us into a vibrant, daily relationship with Him. This continued into adulthood, where she went on to train for ministry at Bricrest Bible College. There she met Chris Hiebert, a deep-thinking, Jesus-loving, musician. They fell in love, joined hands in marriage and moved on to serve together at Summerland Alliance Church. Their family doubled in size, adding two boys in tow, and they packed their lives into a suitcase and moved to be International Workers in Venezuela. From there, another treasured addition came along, a girl this time! She made the Hiebert family five as they transitioned to Mexico city, where they serve now as Team Leaders.

In a world where influencers are measured by clicks and sales, Angela leaves her mark in quite the opposite way, through radical giving. During their time in Venezuela, they faced political instability and corruption that resulted in danger to their daily lives, food shortages, and countless challenges to simply meet basic needs. Angela would wait in line for hours to access the grocery store for her weekly allotted time slot. She never knew what the shelves would hold to take home and feed her family. Scarcity was rampant and demanded creativity

to work with whatever was available that day and in small portion. I remember one time she was able to get sugar. SUGAR! It was a rare and coveted item. Custom was to tuck away such a precious commodity and ration it over months to come. Instead, she portioned it out to share with others who had none. She lived with bold generosity when instinct would be to hoard, and many times the Lord would multiply as she shared. The circumstances they faced would lead many to self protection, stockpiling, cynicism and fear. However, Angela remained soft-hearted to the stirring of the Lord and responded obediently. How blessed to have a neighbour like this in such a time! I continue to see her impact the world around her as she gives generously, not from extra and overflow, but in response to God's prompting and trust in His provision.

At a time where popularity is the barometer for influence, Angela leads with a compelling humility that seeks to act for God's glory alone. In the face of adversity, the path of least resistance is paved by popular opinion. However, during affliction and conflict, countless times I have seen Angela first go to the Lord to seek His wisdom and perspective. It is out of time with Him and in His word that she speaks and responds. She approaches her day intentionally, taking time apart to be shaped into His likeness by remaining constantly open to the pruning of the Lord. She has a quiet confidence in how God has designed her with deep reliance on Him, aware that apart from the Lord we can do nothing.

Today, friend count can fluctuate depending on the latest social media purge or fad. It can create a false sense of intimacy and leave people with an abundance

*She might have a negligible digital footprint, but her eternal footprint literally spans the globe.*

of 'friends', but more lonely than ever. In this relationally deprived time, Angela makes an impact by taking time to hear a person's story and introducing them to

Jesus, the friend of sinners. She is known to share about how Jesus invites us to feast at the table with Him, a table that is always accessible and waiting. Since I have known Angela, she has invited others to sit at the table too. She has a deep passion for others to experience the joy of following God. This willingness to open her home and heart has led to countless stories of God speaking into the lives of people. Because of the transient nature of the communities she has served in, people often come and go. Many have had a chapter of their story written at the Hiebert table, and then relocated to other parts of the world to testify to others. In this way, Angela has global impact of a whole other kind.

In the world today, turning to the buzzing rectangle in your pocket for connection, self-promotion and wisdom is a temptation few can resist. However, Angela braves a path as an influencer of the ancient ways. Rather than taking time to curate content to amass followers, she orients her everyday life around following Jesus. She has a powerful voice in the community around her

out of a quiet dependence on the Spirit and time taken to listen to Him. Rather than seeking an impactful digital identity, she looks to her identity in Christ, who authors lasting influence. She pursues authentic intimacy by taking time to listen to people's story and help them recognize the fingerprints of Jesus; and then helps others to learn how to do the same. Her influence springs from the One she follows, not the size of her following.

***Like Jesus. Dislike sin. Follow. Follow. Follow.***



## **Susan Levert : New Venture – Church @ The Table**

BY VICKI BOWKER

*New Ventures. There are many women in leadership in our New Ventures, using their influence to see new communities of Jesus followers birthed.*

Susan Levert's days are full of the busyness, noise, and chaos that comes with doing life with two preschoolers. There are always little hands reaching out for her, home tasks to be cared for, tears to be wiped, hide and seek to be played. Yet, into the typical messiness of living, she finds herself called into the sacred space of hospitality, of bringing the beauty of Jesus to her table.

This calling to hands-on community had been stirring in Susan and Brant's hearts for quite some time. Through their ministry experience in both North America and overseas they knew people were hungry for God but uncomfortable with "church", but when they sat around their dining table conversations would flow with ease and vulnerability. After three years of praying with other couples, and in God's perfect time, the door opened for a move to the small town of Renfrew, Ontario—and the [Church @ the Table](#) was born.

Whether serving tea for two, or a feast for fifty, Susan finds herself partnering with Jesus. Like the young boy who offered his five loaves and two fish, she has learned that when you give even the simplest of what you have, Jesus multiplies it into relationships of heart value. When the steamy kitchen is filled with the comforting fragrance of a home-cooked meal, and the noises of happy guests fill their home, Susan knows without question why this is her calling. Her place. Or when another young Mom from down the street sits across the table with a cup of tea and a freshly baked muffin and begins talking about her journey to

faith, Susan sees her loaves and fishes feeding hungry hearts. As conversations begin to flow about the big things in life, like faith and Jesus, Susan quietly gives thanks.

*The church of Jesus does not have to look as it has for decades...Hearts are what is necessary—and time.*

The church of Jesus does not have to look as it has for decades: a big building, big programs, big budget. Hearts are what

is necessary, and time, and this is what Susan offers to God as her “sacrifice of praise.” Her heart, her hands, and her time.

Would you pray for Susan as she offers their family table as a safe space to those who are seeking. Each day she watches for Jesus-moments to love on a friend; every other Saturday she prepares a meal to feed plenty; and each alternate Friday evening she joins her husband in a more public gathering for those who would prefer that setting. Her life is busy. Pray for rest and strength and quiet moments to be nourished herself by the Holy Spirit. Finally, please pray that God would expand their dream to see many homes opened, many more tables filled with good food and deep conversations.



## **Christina McBean at Butterfly Way, New Ventures**

*BY VICKI BOWKER*

As followers of Jesus, we sometimes find ourselves caught between the practices of “you shall not” and the belief of “you are saved by grace.” How do we reconcile these things? How do we stop hearing the accusations of “what have you done?” And instead begin hearing the joyful affirmation of “you are of greater value than the sparrows”?

Christina MacBean has wrestled hard with all of this for years, and she has done so honestly, thoughtfully, and with her feet planted firmly on the ground. Emerging out of that wrestling has come a naked authenticity, a raw attempt to provide safety and understanding for fellow sufferers of trauma, and the phoenix that has risen out of her personal ashes is a safe retreat called [\*Butterfly Way\*](#). It doesn’t matter what the trauma source has been, or the private space someone is caught in, this place offers a respite from the dark.

What do you do with the dark, messy, traumatic, not-what-this-was-supposed-to-be parts of life? The inner places of our souls where we can't reconcile words and actions, beliefs and practices, especially within the sanctity of what was supposed to be safe places? How do we honestly and compassionately deal with the realities of abuse and control in our lives, and lives around us, both inside and outside the church?

In 2020 Christina and her husband, Mike, purchased eleven acres just outside of Huntsville, Ontario, and moved onto this beautiful pristine land with their two daughters. Together they have built a space for quiet, reflection, and healing. Whether you want to stay overnight in their brand new Bunkie (which can sleep up to 4 people), spend a day in their artist's studio, hike the trails, walk the short way to Skeleton Lake, feed the chickens and ducks, or just sit by the outdoor fire reading, this space has been lovingly developed to calm the nervous system, allowing healing to begin. Sometimes that's the first important step: peace, quiet, the song of birds, and the whisper of the wind.

Christina's own deep, personal experiences, augmented with her years of study (BA in Law and Justice; Masters in Theology, focused on Counselling and Spiritual Care) have equipped her well to offer support to those who long for it and are ready to receive it. As well, she has made some professional connections with counselors in Huntsville.

The final piece of Christina's unique and wonderful gifting is her love for art. The Artist's Studio at Butterfly Way is not an accident, it's very strategic and purposeful. As an artist, Christina knows the balm that can come through brush touching canvas. The Artist's Bunkie is available for those who find healing in this way, and Christina herself is available for those who would love some instructions to develop their own inner artist.

*...the phoenix that has risen out of her personal ashes is a safe retreat called Butterfly Way.*

So much more can be said about this New Venture. So much good can and will happen on these acres that have been given to God to heal and restore. So many need to hear that there is a hand extended to us from God through other broken humans around us. This is the gift of grace we all need.



## **Reverend Susanna Tan**

*BY WAYNE KERR\**

On April 7, 2024 Susanna Tan celebrated her “retirement” after nearly 26 years pastoring the Rexdale Alliance Chinese Church in Toronto.

On April 20th, she married Herman Tang with whom she graduated from Hong Kong Alliance Seminary over 50 years ago (along with Herman’s first wife who died 4 years ago).

In March (a month before their wedding), Herman traveled to Hong Kong Alliance Seminary and taught a course to over 125 young seminarians, while Susanna traveled to Prague to train Chinese leaders there. On the way back from Hong Kong, Herman joined Susanna in Prague and they both taught together.

Their wedding was April 20, 2024 at Bayview Glen Church, with over 500 attending. Over 70 pastors and spouses were present as well as a large contingent of Hong Kong Alliance Seminary Alumni.

Susanna is the first female Lead Pastor to be ordained in the Canadian Alliance and is also the longest serving female Lead Pastor, having served 26 years.

She has served in the ECD but has always lived in the CCD. She & Herman will continue their ministry of equipping the next generation and reside in the CCD.



## **Reverend Doctor Miriam Charter: Fear, Faith, and Friendship**

*BY KARISSA DELAMONT*

Growing up in the Alliance, I had heard the name Miriam Charter. Single missionary serving in Romania back before the iron curtain fell. But it wasn’t until I had Reverend Doctor Miriam Charter as my professor for a World

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\*Taken from the *Power Team Connector*, Wayne Kerr, Editor

Religions course that legend morphed into reality, and a sweet friendship unfolded between Miriam and me that has now traced over 10 years.

For those of you who don't know Miriam, let me quickly introduce her: Miriam was born in China to missionary parents. At the age of two her parents fled China and relocated to Three Hills, Alberta where Miriam grew up. Miriam is one of 6 siblings. At the young age of 7 she sensed a call of God on her life, specifically to missions. After completing university, Miriam was sent out by the Alliance as an international worker, where she spent a decade serving the underground church in communist Romania. There, she implemented a seminary for women fashioned after the 2 Timothy 2:2 model of discipleship. Miriam completed a PhD in Education and after a brief stint in Russia, landed as a professor at Canadian Theological Seminary in Toronto and later moved to Chicago to lead a PhD program at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. In 2013 Miriam moved back to Calgary to teach at Ambrose University College until she retired in 2016.

*And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.*

*2 Timothy 2:2*

Miriam's heart beats for missions, for the nations, and for the next generation. She is an impressive woman. It made zero sense to go into communist Romania,

especially as a young single woman which, in most settings, would disqualify her from being able to lead or teach. It was lonely and risky. And yet, there are crazy stories of God showing up. Miriam pivoted to train the pastor's wives. She started with a group of 10 core women and by the 25th anniversary, it is estimated about 2,000 women were fully trained through this program. Fast forward to 2004, where things come full circle and the Romanian church sends one of these women to Toronto to help train the Canadian-Romanian church to start women's ministries. How beautiful. How powerful.

It's largely because of Miriam that I went into missions myself. Back in 2013, Miriam and I met almost weekly at the most European Café we could find in Calgary, The Ladybug Cafe. It was Miriam who, when I was trying to figure out next steps, challenged me to go out with the Alliance under the Global Ministry Apprenticeship Program. I wasn't too thrilled about the prospect at the time. Miriam challenged me, "If you want to learn, you have to commit to the process of learning." It was Miriam who championed me in the licensing and fundraising and allowing God to "push me out of the nest" of my own comforts. I left for Germany in 2015. Miriam faithfully prayed for me. In 2018 I had the joy of having her come visit me and the ministry I was helping lead. For the next 6 years, Miriam journeyed with me in the ups and downs. We talked



about the reality of fears and hardships. About singleness. About how we were experiencing God. We shared the realities of being a woman in ministry and in leadership and its unique challenges and privileges. She has been a leading voice in my life telling me to not give up.

I have had the joy of getting to know Miriam up close. Hear her journey, her stories, her joys, and pains, and struggles. Share my own. Be inspired, challenged, comforted. Many of these meetups over the years have ended in our hands clasped together as we prayed. Often there were tears.

Who Miriam is has shaped me. She deeply loves the Alliance, and the Church. She has emulated a healthy dependency on the Church to step up and be the Body of Christ. Miriam has been faithful to go and do what God said. Whether it made sense or not. And she continues to do so.

When I think of Miriam I think of tenacity and perseverance. Yet I have always been struck by the combination of both fierceness as well as vulnerability. It is not without fear that Miriam followed the hand of God. And isn't that just so with most of us? Our wrestles with our own sense of insecurities, limitations, doubts... And yet I have been blown away by the stories Miriam shares, of how God has taken care of her. He opened impossible doors.

*“But God I am a woman.” “But God I am single.” “But God I’m not brave.” “But God I don’t have...”* Fill in the blank. In Miriam I see someone who has felt all these real things, and yet carries the joy of a life saying, *“Yes God, I will go where you lead.”* It is a life well lived and she carries testimony of seeing God show up, again and again, to take her small “yes” to create ripple effects beyond what she knows. And sometimes that influence is as little as clasping hands over a table and praying with a friend, or as large as a movement affecting thousands of lives. So, dear reader, may you too be encouraged to give your “yes” to God’s invitations to you, despite what you think may disqualify you. You never know the ripple effect.

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If you are interested in knowing more of Miriam’s stories, I encourage you to read her book, *ReGeneration: Stories of Resilient Faith in Communist Romania*.



## **Women in Leadership Collective**

Celebrate, Empower, Equip

The Women in Leadership Collective celebrates, empowers, and equips aspiring and current female leaders within The Alliance Canada. We create spaces for women to share their stories, expand their networks, and find pathways for growth.

Sign up for our newsletter to stay in touch!

