

At the 10:30 am service on March 7, 2010, Suellen Barnett delivered the following talk based on 1 Corinthians 12:4-11.

“Celebrating the Gifts of Women”

Today we are celebrating the gifts of women. This celebration came about by action of the Presbyterian Church (USA) General Assembly in Orlando, 1993. It appears in the Presbyterian Planning Calendar each year on the Sunday closest to March, International Women’s Day.

This day is set aside to celebrate and honor individual women who contribute their gifts to the church and community, and to lift up issues of women’s rights, nationally and internationally. Women of Faith awards are presented annually at the General Assembly, which is in July this year in Minneapolis – honoring outstanding Presbyterian women who are an inspiration to others and who actively live their faith through service.

This year the Presbyterian Church is celebrating the 80th anniversary of the ordination of women elders. The General Assembly voted to ordain women as elders in 1930 and women as pastors much later – in 1956!

International Women’s Day dates back some 90 years. Shortly after the turn of the last century, women in this country and in Europe established an annual day focusing attention on the movement for women’s rights and universal suffrage. March 8 commemorates the first demonstrations by women workers in the needle trades in New York in 1906 that helped to bring about improved working conditions and the right of women to vote in the United States.

Today we will honor women in eight areas of endeavor who come from different faith and philosophic positions, and all women who have used their individual gifts to serve others.

They will be honored with roses which traditionally mean deep gratitude and appreciation to those who receive them.

Will the women who are presenting the roses come forward at this time?

This rose represents those women who have given themselves in the areas of religion and philosophy: Nelle Morton (1905 – 1987) Theologian, professor, author, ecumenist who has had far-reaching influence on churches and international women’s movement. Born in the hill country of eastern Tennessee, from Presbyterians from the Scottish Highlands, she was a church activist for racial justice, teacher of Christian and leader in women’s spirituality and feminist theology. One of her most popular books is “The Journey is Home,” in which she says, “Maybe ‘journey’ is not so much a journey ahead, or a journey into space, but a journey into presence.”

This rose represents those women who have chosen to work in advocacy and social reform: Marian Wright Edelman (1939 – present) Attorney, civil rights advocate and author who founded the Children’s Defense Fund, the nation’s strongest advocacy group for children. Of Baptist tradition, she was the first African American admitted to the

Mississippi Bar and advocates for a myriad of people and issues – poor, minorities, disabled children, homeless, those in foster care, teen pregnancy prevention, competent parenting skills, and many more.

This rose represents those women in the field of education – teachers, tutors, professors, students: Mary McLeod Bethune (1875 – 1955) Teacher who began a school in Florida to help educate young black women with only \$1.50 and developed it into Bethune-Cookman College. An educator, writer and organizer, she was born in South Carolina and the daughter of former slaves. She attended a mission school and later went on to graduate from college. Bethune-Cookman continues to prosper today. In 1945 she was sent to San Francisco to help found the United Nations.

This rose represents those women who offer their gifts in all the many and various sports: Babe Didrikson Zaharias (1911 – 1956) Generally considered the greatest woman athlete in sports history; she was born in Port Arthur, Texas, where she excelled in baseball as a child. She gained her most enduring fame in golf and track and field, but she also competed in basketball, baseball, billiards, tennis, diving and swimming. In the 1932 World Olympics, she set four world records in track and field. She transformed the sport of golf for women and won many tournaments, including the 1954 women's open, a year after she had cancer surgery. She was one of the founders of the Ladies Professional Golf Association.

This rose represents those women in the sciences and medicine – physicians, researchers, nurses, physical and occupational therapists, and all who serve in these areas: Gertrude Belle Elion (1918 – 1999) Nobel Prize winner and distinguished research scientist who spent a lifetime creating drugs to combat leukemia, gout, malaria, herpes and other auto-immune diseases. Born in New York City to Lithuanian immigrant parents, she graduated from Hunter College and New York University and unable to obtain graduate research positions because of her gender, first worked as a lab assistant and went on to achieve greatness in her profession.

This rose represents those women who serve in politics: Lynn Woolsey (1937 – present) An American politician and educator from Petaluma, CA. A member of the Democratic Party and U.S. Representative from the 6th District, all of Marin County and most of Sonoma. She has served as a representative since 1993. She was born in Seattle, Washington, and attended the University of Washington and the University of San Francisco. An active Presbyterian and former college teacher, and former member of the Petaluma City Council, she is Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus and member of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues.

This rose represents those women who have given themselves in literature – novels, poetry, journalism, and other kinds of writing: Pearl S. Buck (1892 – 1973) Novelist daughter of Presbyterian missionaries to China whose writing evoked two different cultures, American and Asian. She spent the majority of her life in China and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for her best-selling book "The Good Earth" and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She is the author of many books, many novels dealing with the differences between the East and the West, helping to create understanding between

these cultures. She was active in many welfare organizations and set up an agency for the adoption of Asian-American children.

This rose represents those women who have served in many different areas with disabilities: Helen Keller (1880 – 1968) A writer, advocate for social justice causes, and activist for people with disabilities, Helen Keller was taken ill as an infant. This illness destroyed her sight and hearing. With the help of family and her assistant Anne Sullivan, she was able to attend school and college. She wrote many books and articles, appeared before legislatures, gave lectures, traveled widely. She became especially interested in bettering conditions for the blind in developing and war-ravaged countries. She lectured on behalf of the blind in over 25 nations and received many awards of great distinction including the Chevalier's ribbon of the French Legion of Honor.

FINAL ROSE STATEMENT

This rose represents all those who have gifts in the fields not mentioned – music, construction, business, art, the environment, and many more. It represents all of us using all of our gifts to enrich and help our friends, community and the world.