**PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN**

**BOOK LIST**

**2022-2023**

Note: Titles with an [\*] are resources which I can personally attest to as ‘value added’ reading. Other listings have been recommended by individuals whose opinions I value highly. I’ve tried to group the books according to areas of interest but many, if not most, fall into several categories. ---- Jane Holtzclaw

**Contemplative Spirituality**

*\*Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice*. Christine Valters Paintner. Sorin Books. 2013.

Painter provides a readable introduction to the practice photography as a means of meditation and prayer and provides insights into ways of more deeply viewing the ordinary around us.

*\*The Soul of a Pilgrim: Eight Practices for the Journey Within.* Christine Valters Painter. Sorin Books. 2015.

Painter guides the reader in the practice of 8 meditative practices that can lead us to discovering the “soul within”. By integrating deep listening, meditation, and lectio divina she helps the reader experience the power of God’s presence while in embracing discomfort and the unknown.

*\*The Seven Story Mountain.* Thomas Merton. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. 1948.

A thought provoking autobiography by Thomas Merton which details his journey of faith through a difficult childhood, years of wondering if God even existed, to eventually becoming a Trappist monk.

*\*New Seeds of Contemplation.* Thomas Merton. New Directions. 1961.

A collection of short spiritual writings by Thomas Merton. An excellent resource for personal reflection and group devotions. A prolific writer on spirituality and social activism Merton was a Trappist monk, Catholic priest, theologian, and mystic. *The Seven Story Mountain*, his autobiography, is considered one his most enduring works and is another excellent read.

*\*Meditations of the Heart.* Howard Thurman. Beacon Press. 1981.

A collection of short reflective meditative writings and prayers by one of the greatest theologians, spiritual leaders, mystics, and social justice advocates of our time. The quiet beauty of his reflections on humanity and our relationship with God make this work a good resource for individual mediation and reflection as well as for group contemplation.

*\*Praying the Labyrinth.* Jill Geoffrion. The Pilgrim Press. 1999.

The author tells the story of her experience in praying the labyrinth for the first time and the impact on her journey of faith.

*\*The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence.* Henri Nouwen. Ballantine Books. 1981.

A meditative contemplative look at prayer and the value of silence in the midst of the noisiness of our lives. Written by a Dutch Catholic priest, theologian, and professor the book is an easy read – and one that sticks in your head.

**Social Justice**

*\*Meditations of the Heart.* Howard Thurman. Beacon Press. 1981.

A collection of short reflective meditative writings and prayers by one of the greatest theologians, spiritual leaders, mystics, and social justice advocates of our time. The quiet beauty of his reflections on humanity and our relationship with God make this work a good resource for individual mediation and reflection as well as for group contemplation.

*\*My Grandmother’s Hands.* Resmaa Menaken. Central Recovery Press. 2017.

Tackles the question of how our own stories subconsciously effect our behaviors especially in time of stress. Menaken focuses on how these influences become evident in clashes with those who are different from ourselves. He offers numerous (and easily doable) exercises designed to aid in refocusing and redirecting our subconscious impulses.

*\*Parable of the Sower.* Octavia E. Butler. Grand Central Publishing. 1993.

Through the diary of an 18 year old girl caught in the life and death struggle within a futuristic society where living in a sheltered walled community is the only chance for survival, a story of courage, faith, and hope evolves. Her diary details her struggles when the outside world of pyromaniacs and crazed drug users destroys her community and she enters an apocalyptic world struggling to survive. This book is a difficult read due to the graphic imagery but the message sticks with you and is worth the struggle. The audio book version is excellent – it forced me to “listen” to the difficult parts that I probably would have skipped over in the print version but which added depth to the meaning of the story – which I didn’t appreciate until completing the book.

*\*White Fragility: Why it’s so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism.* Robin Diangelo. Beacon Press. 2018.

The author takes a deep dive into the concept of “white fragility”, reactions when assumptions about race are challenged, it’s impact on racial inequity, and constructive avenues moving forward. New York Times Best Seller List. An excellent thought provoking read.

*\*Waking Up White: And Finding Myself in the Story of Race.* Debby Irving. Elephant Room Press. 2014.

The author invites the reader to join her as she tells the story of her own awakening to her previously unrecognized biases and racial constructs. She describes the emotional turmoil she experienced and in so doing gives the reader permission to dig deep as well. An eye opening read.

*\*Caste: The Origins of our Discontent.* Isabel Wilkerson. Random House. 2020.

#1 New York Times Best Seller. Wilkerson, a Pulitzer Prize winning author, does a masterful job of digging deep into America’s history to show how our history and our present time has been shaped by a hidden caste system. And—how that caste system has been used as a model for frightening events on the world stage including Natzi Germany. A bit of a technical read but truly eye opening into a history that never made it into the history books (at least those from my years in school).

*\*How to Be an Antiracist.* Ibram X. Kendi. One World. 2019.

The author takes a deep look at racial biases through the lens of his own experience in coming to terms with his own ‘blackness’ during his youth and young adult hood. A bit more technical than those by Diangelo and Irving but well worth the effort as he brings forth additional insights.

*God of the Oppressed.* James H. Cone. Orbis Book. 1997.

An American theologian well known for his black theology and black liberation theology. Technical but a worthwhile read.

*Fire Keeper’s Daughter.* Angeline Boulley. Farber Et Farber. 2022

The story’s plot centers around an 18 year old girl (Daunie) whose mother is French and whose father is Ojibwe (Chippewa) – the largest tribal population among Native Americans in the United States (primarily Northern Midwest and Northern Plains) and second largest in Canada . After witnessing a murder and working undercover for the FBI, Daunie encounters the challenges of navigating ancestry, embracing community, maintaining her own sense of identity, and living into the complexity of her own cultural heritage. Angeline Boulley is a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Ojibwe located between the Great Lakes of Northern Michigan. Her career has spanned Indian education at the tribal, state, and national levels including serving as Director for the Office of Indian Education (OIE) at the U.S. Department of Education.

**Mid-West / Nebraska**

*\*In Plains Sight. Bonnie Larson Staiger. North Dakota State University* Press. 2021.

Poetry written by a North Dakota native describing the mystery and the majesty of the Mid-Western plains

*\*My Antonia.* Willa Cather. Random House Inc. 1994.

One of Willa Cather’s best loved books. An engaging depiction of early pioneer life in Nebraska.

*The Four Winds.* Kristin Hannah. Pan (Main Market Edition). 2022

The story unfolds on a farm in the Great Plains where a mother struggles to raise her two children during the Dust Bowl years following the Great Depression. To stay and fight for survival through the hopelessness that can break one’s spirit in the increasingly parched and barren landscape? Or leave for uncertain and unfamiliar lands in the West? The story is one of survival, resilience, love, family, courage, and the American Dream.

**Faith**

*\*The Last Week: What the Gospels Really Teach About Jesus’s Final Days in Jerusalem.* Marcus Borg & John Dominic Crossan. Harper One. 2006.

A readable and thought provoking look at what scripture reveals about Jesus’ last week.

*\*You Are What You Love: The spiritual power of habit.* James AK Smith. Brazoz Press. 2016.

The author explores the ways in which what we worship and love shapes who we are, our relationships with others, and our relationship with God. He identifies ways by which we are unknowingly shaped by the culture that we live in and addresses the ways in which worship and faith can be transformative.

*\*A Bigger Table: Building Messy, Authentic, and Hopefully Spiritual Community.* John Pavlovitz. Westminster John Knox Press. 2020.

The author explores ways in which the church has become self-selective by sharing his own stories from years of pastoring. He provides insights into ways that the church of today can interface with the issues at the heart of Christian community including gender equality, racial disparities, global concerns, and changing theological perspectives and thereby build a “bigger table” – the table that Jesus intended.

*If God is Love, Don’t Be a Jerk: Finding a Faith that Makes Us Better Humans.* John Pavlovitz. Westminster John Knox Press. 2020.

The author looks at bed-rock aspects of our Christian beliefs and challenges the reader to consider how our lives do or do not live out these principles. In so doing he provides fodder for thought as to how we can live into our beliefs to more fully develop our relationship with God and with each other.

*\*Grateful: The Transformative Power of Giving Thanks.* Diana Butler Bass. Harper One. 2018.

Butler explores the power of gratefulness and the challenges of making gratitude a part of our lives, and particularly a part of our relationship with God.

**Leadership**

*\*Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory.* Tod Bolsinger. Intervarsity Press. 2015.

The authors use the explorations of the Lewis & Clark expedition to explore the challenges of leadership. Parallels are drawn between the struggles and unexpected barriers which the expedition encountered with the challenges of leadership today. Technically a fun and easy read with some great messages. Actually one of the best leadership books that I’ve read.

*\*Daring Greatly: How the Courage to be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Lead, and Parent.* Brene Brown. Penguin Random House. 2012.

The author focuses on the unseen challenges and rewards when we allow ourselves to become vulnerable – to ourselves and with others. A New York Times best seller. Brene Brown has several Ted Talks which are also worth the time.

**Miscellaneous Fiction**

*Kitchens of the Midwest: A Novel.* J. Ryan Stradal. Pamela Dorman Books. 2015.

A connected set of eight short stories, each focused on a single dish, the novel is funny, satirical, and deeply concerned with the sensory elements of great food – whether the product of a $5,000/dinner restaurant or a recipe passed down through the generations of Midwesterners. Not only is Stradal interested in the rise of the foodie culture, he explores the way in which food shapes culture and community.

*The Lager Queen of Minnesota: A Novel.* J. Ryan Stradal. Penguin Books. 2020.

A family drama of two sisters, estranged since their father died and left the family farm to only one of them. The sag of the lives of the two sisters as it transpires into the next generation and as each plays the mind game of “what if” is engaging, witty and portrays the attributes of mid-western values --- to resolution.

*The Book of Troublesome Creek.* Kim Michele Richardson. Sourcebooks Landmark. 2019.

Cussy Mary, a packhorse librarian, is on a quest to bring books to the Appalachian community, a project supported by Roosevelt’s Kentucky Pack Horse Library Project. However, some in the community dislike Cussy, her family, and the Library Project. Inspired by the true blue-skinned people of Kentucky (of which Cussy is one) and the brave and dedicated Kentucky Pack Horse Library service of the 1930s, this novel is a story of raw courage, fierce strength, and one woman’s belief that books can carry us anywhere – even back home.

*Things You Save in a Fire.* Katherine Center. St Martin’s Griffin. 2020.

Cassie Hanwell was born for emergencies. As one of the only female firefighters in her Texas firehouse, she’s seen her fair share of them, and she’s excellent at dealing with other people’s tragedies. But when her estranged and ailing mother asks her to uproot and move to Boston it’s an emergency of a kind Cassie never anticipated. Following Cassie as she navigates a strange new world of relationships, vulnerability, and discrimination, Center’s novel *Things You Save in a Fire* is a heartfelt novel about life, love, and the true meaning of courage.

*Doctors and Friends.* Kimmery Martin. Berkley. 2021.

Written by an Emergency physician, The book’s primary characters are three physicians who suddenly find themselves battling a world-wide contagious virus. Although the book has a copy right of Nov 2021, it is described as being written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Martin, an Emergency room physician, provides an insider look into the life of medical professionals when the chips are down and the stakes are high.

*Fire Keeper’s Daughter.* Angeline Boulley. Farber Et Farber. 2022

The story’s plot centers around an 18 year old girl (Daunie) whose mother is French and whose father is Ojibwe (Chippewa) – the largest tribal population among Native Americans in the United States (primarily Northern Midwest and Northern Plains) and second largest in Canada . After witnessing a murder and working undercover for the FBI, Daunie encounters the challenges of navigating ancestry, embracing community, maintaining her own sense of identity, and living into the complexity of her own cultural heritage. Angeline Boulley is a member of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Ojibwe located between the Great Lakes of Northern Michigan. Her career has spanned Indian education at the tribal, state, and national levels including serving as Director for the Office of Indian Education (OIE) at the U.S. Department of Education.

*West with Giraffes: A Novel.* Lynda Rutledge. Lake Union Publishing. 2021.

This novel is based upon the true life adventure of two giraffes who survived their journey across the Atlantic in a cargo ship caught in the disastrous hurricane of 1938 while enroute to the San Diego Zoo. Once on dry land they encounter a twelve-day road trip in a custom truck to become the San Diego Zoo’s first giraffes. The author weaves historical events and characters with fictional ones including the world’s first female zoo director, a crusty old man with a past, and a young female photographer with a secret to explore what it means to be changed by animals, the kindness of strangers, and the passing of time.

*When We Were Young and Brave: A Novel*. Hazel Gaynor. William Morrow Paperbacks. 2020

A teacher (from England) serving at a missionary school in northern China in December 1941 suddenly finds herself responsible for the unity and safety of her young students when Japanese forces take control of the school after declaring war on Britain and America. The situation worsens when they are sent to a distant internment camp and encounter greater uncertainty and danger. Set in China before and during WWII and inspired by true events, the novel exposes the challenges of impossible choices and unimaginable hardship along with the wonders of life-changing bonds formed in times of adversity.

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