



Diana Eck

An “eloquent voice in the struggle for religious tolerance and understanding in America and around the globe,” Diana Eck has worked for years to open dialogue for a common understanding among people of different faiths. This Harvard University professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies works closely with churches, including The United Methodist Church and the World Council of Churches, on questions of interreligious relations and dialogue.

For more than 15 years, Eck—a Montana-born, lifelong Methodist—has headed a research team—the Pluralism Project—to explore the nature of religious diversity in the United States. Initially, the team documented the growth of Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain, and Zoroastrian communities, and religious pluralism and American civil society. The Pluralism Project now includes a network of some 60 affiliates exploring the religious dimensions of this country’s newest immigration.

What interests Eck is the strength within stories about Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists and how they find ways to express their faith in America. In each, she makes a strong case that minority faiths are being shaped and reshaped by their American experience. “We’re talking about the impact that multiple minorities have on our sense of the ‘we,’” Eck said in a seminar. “This has really changed the texture and configuration of American religious life.”

In the halls of Congress and in state houses, in public schools and at zoning boards, in offices and sporting events, U.S. Christians are bumping up against people of other faiths, she explains. “Your kids know Muslim and Hindu kids, whether you know Muslim and Hindu parents or not.” The mixture doesn’t mean that Christians are becoming less Christian or that those of other faiths are less fervent in their beliefs, she argues. But American law requires that those other faiths be accommodated in public ways.

She says finding ways to respond positively to those with other beliefs is the challenge of our society and our world. Her book, *A New Religious America*, suggests a number of interfaith forums and less formal meeting places where people of many faiths reach out to each other. That reaching out is Eck’s solution.

Diana Eck continues to reach out, moving history forward, reminding us of our valuable global connections. Her voice encourages openness and dialogue, and speaks eloquently to the need for common understanding between people of different faiths.



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Books by Diana Eck:

-  **Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras** (Beacon Press, 1993) addresses issues of Christian faith in a world of many faiths and, more broadly, religious diversity that challenges people of every faith.
-  In 1994, Professor Eck and the Pluralism Project published **World Religions in Boston, A Guide to Communities and Resources**. The Pluralism Project's interactive CD-ROM, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*, was published in September 1997, and has been revised and reissued.
-  **A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation** (Harper San Francisco, 2001) addresses the more complex religious landscape of the post-1965 period of renewed immigration.
-  Her works on India include **Banaras, City of Light, Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India** and **Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion, and Social Change**, a book that emerged from an interfaith women's conference.



March is Women's History Month!

Connecting with the National Women's History Month 2007 theme, "Generations of Women Moving History Forward," the General Commission on the Status and Role of Women celebrates generations of women who have been active in historic and current events, shaping and enhancing the quality of life for women and men in this country and around the world. Through this series of bulletin inserts, the Commission recognizes six United Methodist women whose courage, determination, and steadfastness continues to move history forward.



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Joycelyn Elders

Joycelyn Elders has boldly gone where even some angels fear to tread—into the U.S. Army, the medical field, and politics to fight for children, teens, families, women, and older adults. As the first black and first woman U.S. Surgeon General, she did not

shy away from politically sensitive subjects such as teen sexuality, abortion, and legalization of drugs. Although her high-profile political battles left her bruised, she continues her work to strengthen families, reduce risky behaviors, improve health, and enable children to become healthy, educated, and hopeful. Her goal has always been to change the way people think of health by putting prevention first.

Born Minnie Lee Jones, Elders grew up poor in the farming community of Schaal, Ark. Her father was a sharecropper, and she was the oldest of eight children. She knows the importance of providing opportunities because “The United Methodist Church helped me reach the first rung of the [education] ladder by providing a scholarship to Philander Smith College at age 15.” In college, she changed her name to Minnie Joycelyn Lee and earned her bachelor’s degree in three years while working as a maid to support herself.

After college, she enlisted in the army and became a physical therapist, treating returning wounded soldiers from the Korean War. After the army, she attended medical school on the G.I. Bill and graduated, becoming a board-certified pediatric endocrinologist.

Bill Clinton, then governor of Arkansas, called on her to become the state’s director of public health in 1987, and Elders began initiating aggressive campaigns to reduce teen pregnancy and widening the scope of HIV testing and counseling in the state. In 1993, President Clinton appointed her as the nation’s surgeon general. She advocated universal health care and comprehensive health and sex education, but some of her comments—such as her remarks about masturbation—enraged conservatives and she was forced to resign from her position after 15 months in office.

Today, Elders, 73, lives with her husband, Oliver, in Little Rock, Ark. and is professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas College of Medicine. She continues to move history forward, speaking around the country on public health and sex education. She says, “We all know that the health and wealth of a nation is directly related to the health and education of its women.... If I could make any changes at all to the current health care system, I would start with education, education, education.”



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Quiz >>>

- 1] What does the Surgeon General of the United States do?
- 2] When Joycelyn Elders stepped down as U.S. Surgeon General, who succeeded her?
- 3] Who is the current U.S. Surgeon General?

- 1] The U.S. Surgeon General is the head of the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps and is the leading spokesperson on matters of public health in the government of the United States.
- 2] Dr. Audrey Forbes Manley, a graduate of United Methodist-related Meharry Medical School. After serving at that post (1995–97), Manley became president of Spelman College in Atlanta.
- 3] Rear Admiral Kenneth P. Moritsugu, M.D., M.P.H., is currently the acting United States Surgeon General. The former Surgeon General, Richard Carmona, appointed by President George W. Bush in 2002, left office after his term expired July 31, 2006.

Answers:

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*Generations of Women
Moving History Forward*



Doris O. Matsui

Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui is a United Methodist woman whose vocation has been to listen, to educate, and to work for change. For 38 years she worked alongside her husband, the late U.S. Rep. Robert T. Matsui (D-Calif.), paving the way for the work she does today. Matsui's husband died from complications of a rare blood disorder on New Year's Day 2005. She was elected as his replacement in a special election and took the oath on March 10, 2005.

Doris Matsui was born in a Japanese internment camp at Poston, Ariz., and grew up in California's Central Valley. While attending the University of California, Berkeley, where she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology, she met her husband, Robert. A former Japanese-American prisoner of World War II, he was baptized in 1980 at Sacramento Japanese United Methodist Church. They had one child, Brian.

The Matsuis were active in California politics. Robert served on the Sacramento City Council before entering Congress in 1979. She was an early supporter of Bill Clinton's presidential campaign and later served in the White House from 1993 to 1998. The policies and initiatives Matsui worked on during her tenure at the White House include expanding access to health insurance for children, increasing the number of public school teachers, and an anti-crime law that included funding for 100,000 more police on the street and the toughest gun-control provisions ever enacted.

Doris Matsui also made her mark in local, national, and international affairs, serving as president and board chair of Sacramento's public television station, and participating in civic and philanthropic organizations, including the Junior League and the University of California Women's Club of Sacramento. Matsui is a member of the Meridian International Center Board of Trustees, an organization that works to conduct professional international exchange programs between the United States and 140 nations.

One of Con. Matsui's first accomplishments of 2007 was co-sponsoring the Safe Climate Act to combat greenhouse gases that cause global warming. Moving history forward, she is focused on expanding access to health insurance, protecting Social Security, lowering the skyrocketing costs of prescription drugs, and restoring balance to the federal government's approach to stem cell research.



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Did you know?

- In 1917, three years before the ratification of the 19th Amendment (granting voting rights to women), Jeannette Rankin became the first woman to serve in Congress.
- Congresswoman Matsui joins Republican Mary Bono of Palm Springs and Democrat Lois Capps of Santa Barbara as the third member of California's congressional delegation to take office after her husband's death. Since 1923, a total of 36 widows have followed their husbands to the House and eight to the Senate.
- In 2007, women hold **87**, or **16.3%**, of the 535 seats in the 109th U.S. Congress; **16**, or **16.0%**, of the 100 seats in the Senate; and **71**, or **16.3%**, of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. In addition, three women serve as delegates to the House from Guam, the Virgin Islands and Washington, D.C.
- The **16** women currently serving in the Senate are: **Barbara Boxer** (D-Calif.), **Maria Cantwell** (D-Wash.), **Hillary Rodham Clinton** (D-N.Y.), **Susan Collins** (R-Maine), **Elizabeth Dole** (R-N.C.), **Dianne Feinstein** (D-Calif.), **Kay Bailey Hutchison** (R-Texas), **Amy Klobuchar** (D-Minn.), **Mary Landrieu** (D-La.), **Blanche Lincoln** (D-Ark.), **Claire McCaskill** (D-Mo.), **Barbara Mikulski** (D-Md.), **Lisa Murkowski** (R-Alaska), **Patty Murray** (D-Wash.), **Olympia Snowe** (R-Maine), and **Debbie Stabenow** (D-Mich.). Hillary Clinton, Elizabeth Dole, and Debbie Stabenow are United Methodists.
- **Shirley Chisholm** (1924–2005), the first black woman elected to Congress and one of the first women to run for U.S. president, was also a devoted United Methodist who cared deeply for children. Chisholm had been a member of Janes United Methodist Church in Brooklyn, N.Y., since 1962.

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Meg Munn

She has her ear pressed to the heart of European culture; her finger on the pulse of women and children. Margaret "Meg" Patricia Munn, born in 1959, is a politician in the United Kingdom. In 2001 she was elected Member of Parliament (MP) for Sheffield Heeley, South Yorkshire. Munn grew up in the constituency she now represents, studying at York University and Nottingham University. She was previously a city counselor, a social worker, and assistant director for children's

services at the City of York Council. She has been a member of the Labor Party for over 30 years.

Munn's interests embrace social enterprise, education, children and young people, social welfare, HIV/AIDS, and Europe. In May 2005, she was appointed Deputy Minister for Women and Equality by Tony Blair in his third Labor government. Munn introduced civil partnerships in the U.K., was responsible for the Equality Act 2006, and involved in the Work and Families Act 2006.

Munn has worked to gain monetary support for the U.K. Resource Center for Women in Science, Engineering and Technology, blocking the barriers that discourage women from working in these sectors.

At one of the largest annual gatherings of racial-ethnic minority women organized by British government, she encouraged women to seek higher-skilled, higher-paid jobs that would help to reduce the current skill shortages and ensure that women had the opportunity to reach their potential. "The feeling of being in control, of managing your own life—these feelings may not appear on a balance sheet," she explained, "but they have a huge impact on the individual and in the world at large."

She believes working and maintaining a relationship with local community groups, business organizations, and faith groups, including churches and mosques, enhances educational opportunities and social activities. Munn has been an active member of the Methodist Church for over 25 years and also speaks fluent French and German and conversational Italian. She lives with her husband, Dennis Bates, and their three cats.

People like Meg Munn push forward at a time when there are still relatively few women in politics. By listening, caring, and responding—ear pressed, finger on pulse—generations of women in various pockets of the world are moving history forward.



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Quotes from Meg Munn:

- > “Female entrepreneurship in the U.S. stands at 89% of the level of male entrepreneurship; in this country that figure is only 46%. If we had the same rate of female-owned start-ups as in the USA, we would have 750,000 more businesses. This would have a major impact on productivity, employment, and prosperity.”
- > “Before I arrived at the House, I was described by one commentator as ‘strapping with a pleasant toothy smile.’”
- > “[By] listening to women, listening to each other, responding to the problems and difficulties of women’s everyday lives, we can learn what is needed to help women’s lives get better—we can do the right thing—and continue as the party of government. Sounds a winning combination to me!”

Mary Ellen (Spear) Smith (1861–1933) was the first woman to be elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly and the first woman in the British Empire to be appointed a Minister and to serve as Acting Speaker of the Legislature. Her contribution was as a social reformer and her cause was improving conditions for women and children, including women’s suffrage.

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Mary Ellen (Spear) Smith (1861–1933) was the first woman to be elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly and the first woman in the British Empire to be appointed a Minister and to serve as Acting Speaker of the Legislature. Her contribution was as a social reformer and her cause was improving conditions for women and children, including women’s suffrage.

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*Generations of Women
Moving History Forward*

Casimira Rodríguez Romero



In Spanish, the term *mujeres valientes* means valiant, lion-hearted, fearless women. That definition combined with dignity, wisdom, and respect is the stuff of Casimira Rodríguez Romero, a woman who started at the bottom of what life has to offer and is now Bolivia's new justice minister. Moving history forward, she is intent on overhauling one of Latin America's most overburdened, corrupt, and inefficient judicial systems.

Most of Rodríguez's life has been spent as a domestic worker. In 1979, when she was 13, she was essentially kidnapped from her rural village and brought to the city of Cochabamba to work, with the promise that she would be given in return the schooling and care her parents could not provide.

Instead, her supposed employers held Rodríguez in abusive servitude, forcing her to work long hours with no pay, a common experience among many Bolivian girls and women from indigenous mountain communities. Poverty draws them from rural areas to cities, where racial and economic discrimination relegates them to domestic work. Barely an adolescent herself, Rodríguez cooked, cleaned, and looked after the children for an extended family of 14 people, until she finally escaped two years later.

She immediately starting working to change this common injustice in her country, to address the problem of poor Indians being victimized by the wealthy elite, and to confront the indifference of the executive, legislative, and judicial powers about implementing equality principles already established in the Bolivian Constitution.

As a founder of the domestic workers union she worked for reform of the law governing salaried work in the home. She and a team of companions reminded legislators, ministers, and employees that indigenous women and domestic workers have rights and are also people.

In February 2006, Rodríguez was named Bolivia's Minister of Justice. Her presence in Bolivia's new government reflects the country's recent economic and political history, and her experience is uniquely different from those who previously held this position. She says she hopes to humanize and build trust in the judiciary. She'll fight to boost spending for the judiciary and make it work for the poor, who account for more than 60 percent of Bolivians.

Rodríguez, 40, is single and lives in a modest part of La Paz, in a room in the local office of Bolivia's National Federation of Domestic Workers, which she spent years building up. She remains president of the federation of Domestic Workers of Latin America and the Caribbean and attends Emmanuel Methodist Church in Cochabamba.



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Did you know?

- Francis M. Harrington, a Methodist missionary led the Methodist witness to Bolivia in 1906. She explained, "I have put faith into my work, and I know it will bear good fruit." A hundred years later, on the Aug. 20 anniversary of the initiation of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia, 6,500 Methodists, representing the 10,000-member denomination, marched through the center of the capital city of La Paz, to celebrate and savor the abundant fruits of gospel witness that Harrington had envisioned.
- During the Bolivia's centennial celebration, the president, vice president and cabinet members expressed gratitude for the impact and service of Methodists, and the national leaders bestowed the Order of the Condor upon the Evangelical Methodist Church—the highest honor the nation can bestow.
- Casimira Rodríguez Romero won the World Methodist Council Peace Prize in 2003. Previous recipients are Nelson Mandela, Kofi Annan, and the grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In accepting the peace award, Rodríguez gave God the credit for providing the strength she needs to follow the course of peace and justice. "When I met the Lord," she said, "my life started to be filled with hope and faith, because I realized God was with the poor, denouncing injustice and healing the sick."
- Bolivia is the poorest country in South America; more than half of its 8 million residents live in severe, disheartening poverty.

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Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf



“When I was a small girl in the countryside, swimming and fishing with twine made from palm trees, no one would have picked me out as the future president of our country.”

Ellen Johnson was born in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. From 1948–55 she studied accounts and economics at the College of West Africa (Monrovia), a United Methodist high school. After

graduating, she married James Sirleaf; later, they both traveled to the United States to continue their studies. Johnson-Sirleaf earned a degree from the University of Colorado and waited tables while studying economics at Harvard, earning a master's degree in public administration.

Returning home after Harvard, Johnson-Sirleaf became assistant minister of finance of the government of Liberia, in President William Tolbert's administration. In 1980, Tolbert was overthrown and killed by army sergeant Samuel Doe, ending decades of relative stability. Johnson-Sirleaf went into exile in Nairobi, Kenya, where she worked for Citibank.

She returned to Liberia to run for Senate in 1985, but when she spoke out against Doe's military regime, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison. After a short period, she was released and moved to Washington, D.C. She returned to Liberia again in 1997 as an economist for the World Bank.

During this time she was a founding member of the International Institute for Women in Political Leadership, worked with the Modern Africa Growth and Investment Company, raised four sons, and was active in her local United Methodist church.

She continued to play an active role in the transitional government. After an intense 2005 presidential election, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became the 23rd president of Liberia. Her inauguration took place on January 16, 2006; U.S. First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended the ceremony.

Acknowledging the suffering that Liberians have endured over the past 15 years, she pledges to “create the social and economic opportunities” that restore dignity and self-worth. She said Liberia would not have survived without the churches and nongovernmental organizations that played a key role throughout the crisis. Johnson-Sirleaf attends First United Methodist Church in Monrovia; she is a divorced mother of four and grandmother to six children.

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Year after year, that young girl swimming and fishing in the Liberian countryside continued to move women and history forward. Today thousands of Liberians benefit from the steadfast will of a woman, and now the country works toward a peaceful, stable economy. As their president says, "We are good, we are kind, we are forgiving, and we are God's. We have a future of promise and hope, and we will not fail."

Did you know?

- Liberia is Africa's oldest republic, founded by freed U.S. slaves in 1847.
- Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, 68, is the first elected female president and the first elected female leader on the African continent.
- The *World Federation of Methodist Women* works toward peace among nations and elimination of discrimination against women in all countries. The organization engages in healing ministries and educational and social services; organizes literacy and translation programs; consults with families on family planning, food production, hygiene, and health care; has initiated legislation against child abuse; and provides child care services.

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