Shining Through

“ONE AWESOME LIFE-CHANGING DAY IN L.A.”

Featuring: Elena Garcia-McKeen, Megan Blackwell, Robyn Williams, Chris Fuqua, Gloria Baird

Produced by Gloria Baird
Directed by Roger Lamb
Screenplay by Maryann Rose
Production Designer by Emily Bringardner

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A Kingdom Pictures Release
A Kingdom News Network Production
“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

— II Corinthians 3:18

Six thousand women shared in the glory of God! Rain clouds blanketed “sunny” Los Angeles on Saturday, March 4, but God’s light was “shining through.” In what was probably the largest gathering of women in God’s modern-day movement, lives were forever transformed into the likeness of Jesus. Women of every race, color, age and background imaginable were there, gathered in ten locations to participate in the Los Angeles Church of Christ’s fifth annual Women’s Day. Over 3,600 friends, relatives and neighbors were guests of the nearly 2,400 women disciples in the church! Last year, 1,700 women in the church hosted about 2,500 visitors. This year, visitor attendance increased by 43%.

Let us rejoice at what God is doing among us and through us. Many were baptized into Christ at the conclusion of the Saturday program and by Sunday night 50 women had been born again! At last year’s AMS Women’s Day, Sonja Pederson, a twin sisters now share not only a physical birthday but a spiritual birthday as well! Literally hundreds of women are now studying the Bible to become disciples. March should see the largest increase of women leaders in major cities around the world. The women leaders in New York City, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mexico City and Washington D.C. are now having Women’s Days and training the women around them to make disciples.

Boston continues to have powerful Women’s Days. In fact, this year their Women’s Day was also held on March 4 in seven different regions reaching more and more women in their own communities. In this issue of L.A. Story, Elena Garcia-McKean and Pat Gempel have led the way in powerfully training women to disciple other women. Their example of faithfulness, their commitment to God and his purpose, and their standard of excellence trained the future women leaders in major cities around the world. The women leaders in New York City, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mexico City and Washington D.C. are now having Women’s Days and training the women around them to make disciples.

Modern-day Esthers and Deborahs like Elena Garcia-McKean and Pat Gempel have led the way in powerfully training women to disciple other women. Their example of faithfulness, their commitment to God and his purpose, and their standard of excellence trained the future women leaders in major cities around the world. The women leaders in New York City, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Mexico City and Washington D.C. are now having Women’s Days and training the women around them to make disciples.

Boston continues to have powerful Women’s Days. In fact, this year their Women’s Day was also held on March 4 in seven different regions reaching more and more women in their own communities. In this issue of L.A. Story, Elena’s article will inspire your faith as she gives the historical background of our Women’s Days, sharing many of the lessons we have learned. As leader of the women’s ministry not only in L.A. but also throughout the world, Elena calls us higher by her faith and sets us up for success with her input and direction.

Kip and the brothers he has trained give vision and support to the women for the Women’s Days. When we were still holding on to planning one large and growing event in one city, Kip challenged us to divide in order to multiply. Kip’s visionary challenge is a godly principle which continues to work whether we are applying it to a Bible Talk or to Women’s Day.

Megan Blackwell, Chris Fuqua and Robyn Williams worked together with the Regional women leaders in choosing relevant themes as “Taking Off the Mask,” “She Holds Up Half the World,” and “Circle of Life.” They created outstanding brochures, planned and carried out powerful programs which focused on our ultimate purpose – to make disciples!

Shining Through Individuals

Nathalie Woods, Vivan Rodriguez and DeBora Jackson share on page 3 the miracle stories of God changing their lives. We always need to be reminded of the incredible ways God works by putting just the right people in our paths at just the right times.

Shining Through You!

The 1995 L.A. Women’s Day would not have been such an outstanding success without the effort, heart and faith of each disciple. It is an incredible privilege to share God’s victory together with you. The real victory, however, does not stop with the event of one day but is experienced daily as each one of us influences others for Jesus, allowing his glory to continue SHINING THROUGH.
“I LOVE THIS. I WANT THIS.”

By Marcia Lamb

WHAT SINGLE EVENT COULD POSSIBLY evoke the same response from a cool artist living the fast party life, a minister’s daughter and a single-mom of a teen age daughter? Women’s Day of course.

Shining Through Friendship

Nathalie Woods was very familiar with the fast lane of life. Her idea of an “ultimate experience” was to go to the desert, drop acid, smoke peyote and share the experience with her best buddy Tamlyn. Nathalie’s plans changed when disciples at her work place invited her to a concert by “Bottom Line,” David Graham’s band for the L.A. Church. There, instead of the catty women she had known, she met some incredible women who showed genuine interest in her. Impressed with what she saw, Nathalie eagerly studied the Bible and found the true “ultimate experience” when she was baptized into Christ in the spring of 1991.

A few weeks after Nathalie’s baptism, the L.A. Church of Christ had its annual Women’s Day. One of Nathalie’s visitors cancelled the night before. Coleen Graham encouraged her to ask one more person who was on her heart. She prayed and called her friend Tamlyn. “I hadn’t heard from Nat for a while,” Tamlyn said, “and she sounded like a different person, a happy one. Of course I wanted to see what she was so happy about.” She, too, had been praying for God to give her some answers. Though both women were close friends in the world, neither knew the other was searching for God. But God knew.

In the middle of the program, Tamlyn grabbed Nathalie by the arm saying, “I love this. I want this.” Within two weeks she was a disciple. One year ago, Tamlyn married musician Al Berry, a disciple who is currently writing and recording another CD release. Nathalie is now the Executive Assistant for Kingdom News Network. Nathalie and Tamlyn still frequent one of their old night club haunts (The China Club). Only now it is a place where Christians gather to worship God, appropriately renamed “The UPSIDE DOWN Club.”

Shining Through Family

Vivian Rodriguez was, admittedly, one of those women least likely to be invited to “afternoon tea” with the ladies. Her strong, hard driving, self-reliant character came equipped with a tongue that could earn a black-belt in intimidation. A television producer in Puerto Rico, she had brought her teenage daughter, Vanessa, to LA to make it big in the movie industry. Vanessa was afraid to ask her to Women’s Day, but God worked his power. One day Vivian saw a brochure for the March ’93 Women’s Day on her coffee table. Turning to Vanessa she said, “What’s this? Aren’t you going to ask me to go?” “Hearing those women share their lives, especially how God protected them, really got to me,” Vivian said. She and Vanessa were baptized in July 1993 in the AMS region. Recently Vanessa studied with Jackie, a high school friend who became a disciple, and Vivian studied with her mother Debbie Snider. Debbie is Director of Security at a major TV studio in Hollywood; she was baptized on Women’s Day 1995!

Shining Through Faith

Denominational minister’s daughter, DeBora Jackson, heard Megan Blackwell speak at the very first South Central Sector Women’s Day (held at the church office). DeBora, who had also worked in modeling and acting, was impressed with the caliber and happiness of all the talented, beautiful women she met that day. Her past religious life had left an emptiness in her heart that yearned for the joy she saw first hand.

The diversity of races among the speakers and participants impressed DeBora as well. In her own church everyone was the same race. Even as a little girl DeBora was concerned about how the children in China were going to learn about Jesus if all Christians were only her own race. At Women’s Day she saw how God’s plan was for all nations to be reached here and abroad.

From the very first study with her friend Elaine Jones, DeBora was sold out for God. Baptized February 23, 1991, DeBora is now a fired up messenger of God in the South Central Region. This February, she determined that every woman at her place of work would be invited to Women’s Day 1995. She and three other disciples put this vow on paper.

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Nothing to Hide, But Something to Show.
by Elena Garcia-McKean

“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”
- Daniel 12:3

God has powerfully blessed our lives as Christian women and we want to share God’s wisdom in the Bible with as many women as possible! We are very grateful to be released from all of our heart-breaking sins and from the shallow, superficial world of pretense and confusion. The Bible’s timeless wisdom for life, even in the 90’s, will allow us to shine like stars and lead many to righteousness. This is the bottom-line purpose of our “Women’s Days.” We have taken off our masks because we realize God already knows everything we have done. God accepts us and values our worth to the incredible extent that He sent his son Jesus to die to free us from sin’s destructive impact. We have nothing to hide but something to show – a real Jesus and his true church!

Each year the month of March is observed as National Women’s History Month in the United States. Europe and Russia hold an international women’s day in March as well to recognize the contributions and accomplishments of multicultural women throughout history. We in the Los Angeles Church of Christ hosted our totally amazing, fifth annual Women’s Day on March 4, 1995.

“I dreamed of a time when women of all ages & from all races would unite for a spiritually life-changing day.”

We celebrated the honor of being women loved by God, holding up the many ways God has helped us and his intense longing for an intimate relationship with each of us. Incredibly, there were 44 women baptized at the Women’s Day; we had a record-breaking attendance of 6012 women!

In the secular world in the 1970’s, women’s rallies were very in vogue. I had attended a few looking for purpose and answers before I was a true Christian. These women’s rallies were influencing women’s thinking about moral issues and their spiritual lives, though they did not use the Scriptures for their answers. Likewise, in the religious world, women’s days were not a new concept. However, I remember going as a young minister’s wife to my first “Ladies Inspiration Day” in a traditional, mainline church. It was shocking and sickening to see the weak, insecure women who were teaching. For the most part, these gatherings of “Christian” women lacked warmth, joy, and love – especially towards newcomers. It was also sad to see that the group, made up predominantly of older white women, seemed content to keep their teachings “so spiritual” that they were not only boring but also lacking in practicality when they used the Bible.

These dismal circumstances motivated me to want to “change” Women’s Days. When God’s work was initiated in Boston in 1979, I began to pray for and plan Women’s Days where the glory and power of God would radiate from women teaching the Bible. I dreamed of a time when women of all ages and from all races would unite for a spiritually life-changing day. However, a price had to be paid. I still remember being criticized by some of the traditional church women for being too open in my speech about my sins before I was a Christian and for being too challenging on reaching out and bringing many non-Christian women to the “Ladies’ Inspiration Day.” However, with the changes in openness and outreach, remarkable
miracles began to occur. Hundreds and now thousands of women have found their true purpose in life - to glorify and live for God in some 69 countries around the world!

I deeply appreciate my wonderful husband Kip for his support and vision in helping Pat Gempel and me develop our Women's Days in Boston into high-impact events, surpassing the women's seminars in the world. We received very practical training on public speaking from our more experienced evangelists like Kip, Steve Johnson, Doug Arthur, Randy McKean . . . and training in song leading from Sherwin MacIntosh and Bob Tranchell . . . and even financial planning from Bob Gempel. We learned to work and pray together to organize classes and large gatherings of women. Through the women's day preparations, God surfaced and developed much hidden, dormant talent among his daughters to shine for his glory.

In June of 1991, we held our first Women's Day in Los Angeles at the Bonaventure Hotel in downtown L.A. Pat Gempel was our guest speaker. The Holy Spirit moved powerfully through Pat. All the women of the L.A. Church and their guests enjoyed being together for an all day 9 a.m. - 8 p.m. discipleship conference, ending with terrific entertainment.

We received helpful feedback to shorten the day for the following year so that more women outside of our church would be able to attend. We also decided to move our Women's Day to March in order to better accommodate all of our college students' schedules and to capitalize on March 7th being “International Women's Day.” We met at the Bonaventure Hotel again in March of 1992.

In 1995 the number of women disciples numbered 2,360 in the L.A. church. After much prayer and discussion with the other women leaders, I decided it would be best for this year's Sisters Night Out to be held by Super Regions. This change was simply reapplying God’s plan of dividing the responsibility, thus multiplying the opportunities. I especially want to commend our Super Regional Women Leaders, Chris Fuqua, Robyn Williams and Megan Blackwell, for all their hard work, their inspiring leadership, and their creative ideas. They are truly great spiritual friends and wise women who shine like the stars forever and ever! These three women, empowered by God's Spirit, led our sisters to the greatest Women's Day yet - 6,012 women listening to the Word of God.

I believe this is just the beginning! I thank God for his blessings and harvest in 1995, and I cannot wait till 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 because the Bible teaches that God will give us even more than we ask or imagine! To God be the glory!
March 4, 1995:

ONE LIFECANGING DAY FOR WOMEN IN L.A.

The words spoken on this day and the decisions made in response will reach to eternity.

“As women, we want to pick the Bible apart, but in actuality, the Bible picks us apart. The thing that will change this world is not political reform, but the individual reform of our personal characters and morals.” – Megan Blackwell, “She Is Worth Far More Than Rubies,” South Bay

“I want to challenge you today to quit blending in. Get a relationship with God and make a difference in our world.” – Chris Fuqua, “Don’t Blend In,” West

“It’s okay to be ambitious, successful, to look for a ‘sharper image,’ but if it’s not for God, it’s nothing.” – Robyn Williams, “The Sharper Image,” Orange County

“We’ve gotta appreciate God’s broken heart – broken because of our sin.” – Cathy Martinez, “You Gotta Be . . .” Inland Empire

“We all need God in our lives – no matter how old we are, what language we speak, or what position we are in.” – Louisa Kostenko, St. Petersburg, Russia, West

“The fact is God loves us. We have to quit covering up and deal with what is really going on inside.” – Kim Sapp, “Interior Design,” Ventura (Kim is the Women’s Leader of the Atlanta Church)
What is your good confession?
“Jesus is Lord!”

“Because of your confession, I can now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of your sins...”

Guest responses:
“An incredible, lifechanging afternoon.” - Christine ★ “Please help me know God and the Bible.” - Stacie ★ “Awesome. I feel a change is coming.” - Michelle ★ “What an uplifting program of hope. I enjoyed it and am taking with me the courage to take off the mask. thank you!” - Barbara ★ “It was very powerful!” - Diana ★ “Excellent! Everything really hit home.” - Ferol

“My God is big enough to heal all my hurts.”
Coleen Graham
“Everything Can Change”
- AMS

“His eye is on the sparrow.”
Laurissa Martinez sings during baptisms.

Clockwise from top left (page 6):
Families come together – Katrina Gibson of South Central pictured with niece, Katrina also.
Hiromi Sawamura, who leads in Osaka, Japan, with her husband, Michitaka, is guest speaker for the Central region. Inset: Irene Gurganus, now from San Diego, has contributed to many Women’s Days through the years in the U.S. and in Japan.
Sherri Curtis’ performance stirred hearts in AMS.
Sherri is currently performing in the L.A. production of “Beauty and the Beast.”
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Published by the International Churches of Christ.
L.A. CHURCH OF CHRIST
Los Angeles, CA 90010
Phone (213) 385-5434
Fax (213) 251-4123
Volume 2, Issue 5 ■ March 26, 1995

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Published by the International Churches of Christ.