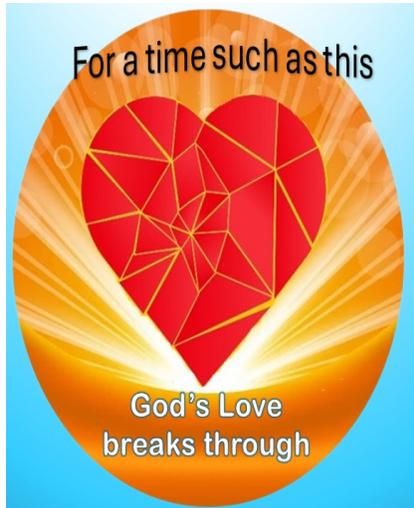


Our Purpose

“As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world.”



Happy Valentine's Day, Dear Sisters!

As I write this, I am watching my absolutely, all-time favorite love story, "Casablanca," starring the stunning Ingrid Bergman and everyone's favorite anti-hero, Humphrey Bogart. It's a heart-breaking tale of love lost, rediscovered, then sacrificed again..., all against the backdrop of World War 2.

"The Germans wore gray, you wore blue."

"Play it Sam. You played it for her. If she can stand to hear it again, so can I."

"Here's looking at you, kid."

"Louis, this could be the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

No matter how great the love story played out on the screen, we all know the ultimate story of love... and celebrate it every day. Jesus loved us from his first breath to his last and beyond. He loved us enough to suffer a horrific death in our place. NO greater love story could possibly exist.

I am borrowing this phrase from my dear friend, who I greatly miss... "Remember that Jesus loves you, and I do too."

Love you all!

Julie Arndt, Secretary, NC WELCA

The Bulletin is published monthly by the North Carolina Women of the ELCA. Submissions for photos, news stories, and other items of interest are welcome. Please limit stories to 500 words. Photos should be submitted with a brief caption that explains what is shown, date of the event, and who is shown.

Deadline for monthly submissions is the **6th of each month for publication on or about the 15th of each month.** Send submissions to Julie Arndt, Secretary and Bulletin Editor, at the following email: secretaryncwelca@gmail.com as either word documents or Google documents.



Dear Sisters,

I pray that all of you have recovered well from the snowstorm. It truly was beautiful. This is the first time I can remember the entire state of North Carolina receiving snow at the same time.

During January, a dear friend of mine, Barbara, passed away. At her funeral, I was talking with family members who shared how proud she had been of all that I have achieved. Hearing that helped me reflect on how I first met Barbara, along with Catherine, Dot, and Vera.

I joined their WELCA group in 1987. They led Bible studies each month at their meetings, and I learned so much from them. They gently guided me onto the path I continue to walk today. They encouraged me to attend conference gatherings, to participate in the annual gathering at Lenoir-Rhyne, and to consider serving on the board when I was nominated. They also supported my attendance at the 1999 Triennial Convention in St. Louis—I received a scholarship, and they helped me financially as well.

Through the years, I stayed in touch with them and often talked with them about what was happening in the church. More often than not, they were exactly right when I needed advice.

Now that my friends are gone, I feel called to pass along the encouragement they so freely gave. We have so many younger women who could benefit from a little guidance and support. Sometimes all it takes is a phone call, an invitation to attend an event, or a gentle word of encouragement.

I ask each of you to find someone to whom you can pass along encouragement.

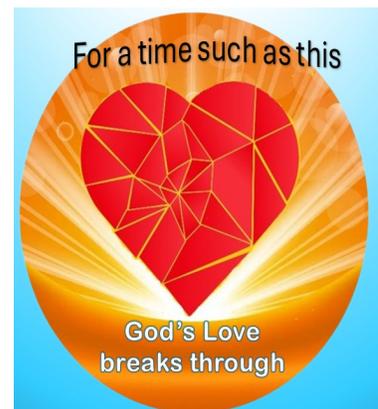
Also, if your congregational unit has done anything interesting, please email (tmbrown366@gmail.com) me and let me know what you are doing. I will be attending the Conference of Presidents on February 20 and we will be sharing ways to encourage and invigorate units in our synods.

I appreciate each of you and pray that you have a great month.

With gratitude and love,

Terri Brown

President, NC WELCA



Lawsuits against the Trump administration challenge executive orders

By **Tonie Neal, Justice Committee**

During President Donald Trump's second administration, hundreds of lawsuits have been filed challenging executive orders and administrative actions, including those involving the Department of Government Efficiency, the FBI, and ICE. Courts have issued injunctions in multiple cases, prompting appeals and prolonged legal proceedings that often move through district and appellate courts, potentially lasting many years.

The litigation covers a broad range of issues, including:

- Transgender and civil rights
- Trade tariffs and public data access
- Immigration and deportation

What's Shrove Tuesday?

February 17 is Shrove Tuesday or "Mardi Gras" ("Fat Tuesday"), the precursor to the arrival of the Lenten season of reflection and self-discipline, and ultimately, the coming feast of the resurrection

On one hand, "shrove" refers to the act of presenting oneself for confession and absolution in preparation for the 40-day journey of Lent, which begins tomorrow.

policies

- Federal employee protections and retaliation claims
- Education funding and state grants
- Environmental regulations
- Federal funding allocations and pardons

These cases highlight the significant financial and administrative resources devoted to implementing, defending, or reversing executive actions. For example, the renaming and subsequent reversal of military bases such as Fort Bragg involved expenditures in the millions and billions, reflecting broader budgetary and policy impacts.

Despite anticipated reductions in national debt from budgetary actions, recent figures indicate an overall increase in debt levels. The lawsuits and administrative decisions underscore ongoing debates over policy, fiscal responsibility, and federal authority.

I cannot imagine the monies that

row. And on the other hand, "Fat" refers to a time of revelry on this "Ash Wednesday Eve": for example, having one last indulgent meal of oil, butter, eggs, and sugar before the season of fasting — which is why the day is often associated with pancakes (some even call it "Pancake Tuesday").

In other countries, Shrove Tuesday has different names.

In Germany, for example, it's called 'Fastnacht' (meaning 'Eve of the Fast') and in Iceland it's called 'Sprengidagur' (meaning 'Bursting Day'). In France and

are being spent on trying to stop/ or reinforce these changes. I can't imagine the monies being spend on trying to follow or cancel these Executive Orders.

Billions of taxpayers' dollars are involved in cuts in education funds, SNAP funds, cuts that leave thousands of employees jobless, organizations being eliminated or reduced to a skeleton workforce or reassigned to a different organization.

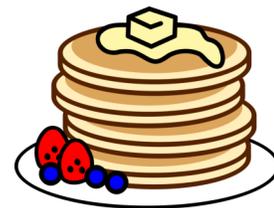
These are cuts that were expected to reduce U.S. debt by billions, however this has not proved to be reality, and the numbers in acted by the budget recently passed increased our debt by more trillions.

It took Jesus 33 years to accomplish His mission on earth, and He was perfect. Find your passion, ladies, and join hands with Jesus, as you trod your path with him in mission. We can follow His Executive Order every day.

In the meantime, prayers work wonders. And keep those paper-clips handy.

some other parts of the world, the festival is called 'Mardi Gras', from the French phrase meaning 'Fat Tuesday'. And for many people, Mardi Gras means party time!

We feast, then we fast. So, as they say in New Orleans... *Laissez les bon temps rouler!*



Red dresses: statement of more than style

By Susan Harris, Gathering Planning

The Red Dress logo is usually associated with American Heart Month. In fact, February 6 is observed as “National Wear Red Day” by the American Heart Association to raise awareness about women’s heart health. The “red dress” became the symbol for women and heart disease awareness in 2002.

But the red dress has also become symbolic among native Americans to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, or MMIW.

First conceived in 2010 by artist Jaime Black, the REDress Project has become a symbol of remembrance and justice. Empty red dresses hanging in public space are a tangible way to express grief, demand accountability, and stand in solidarity.

Christian Allaire in Vogue maga-

zine, writes “In the U.S., homicide is the third-leading cause of death among Native women ages 10 to 24, according to the Urban Indian Health Institute, and Native women are victims of murder more than 10 times the national average, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.”

The REDress display helps to give a voice to these women and girls who are missing or have been murdered. The color red has become the official MMIW campaign color and May 5th is observed as Red Dress Day.

Prairie Rose Seminole, the former Program Director of the American Indian Alaska Native Ministries with the ELCA, wrote, “The red dress has become a powerful symbol of remembrance, resilience, and justice for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR). Across North America, Indigenous communities and allies gather to wear red, hang red dresses in public spaces, and speak the names of those who have been taken. This act of remembrance is more than symbolic; it is a call to action, a way to honor the lives



lost, and a means to amplify the voices of those fighting for justice.”

More information and the article, “The Power of the Red Dress: Honoring Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR),” can be found on the Women of the ELCA Churchwide website (www.welca.org).

This year, during our Annual Gathering, we would like to display red dresses as a reminder; and you can be a part of this project. If you have red dress in your closet, whether it still fits or not, we would love for you to bring it to the Annual Gathering. Bring your red dress on a hanger when you come to Lenoir-Rhyne in June for the display.

Wonder Watcher photos sought for Triennial Banner

Remember the Wonder Watchers program from last year’s Spring Conference Gatherings and Fall Gathering (Northern Conference)? It is the program where we exchanged names to become conference prayer sisters and wore those funny glasses.

Karen Birkedal has been invited to present at the Triennial Gathering for the organization Adults Saving Kids. Adult Saving kids would like to highlight North Carolina Synod and its work with prayer partners across the Synod.

A banner will be displayed showcasing Wonder Watchers participants in those goofy glasses.

If you have any photos that you would like to submit for this banner, please contact Karen

Birkedal at pkbirke@gmail.com

Thank you for your help with this project. It is going to be great fun and will potentially connect women across the entire church in prayer.



“I will give you rest: Come.”
World Day of Prayer theme is invitation to a weary world

By Susan Harris

World Day of Prayer is an ecumenical movement of Christian women, from all faiths and denominations, who come together to observe a common day of prayer and action on the first Friday in March. Each year a different country serves as the writer of the World Day of Prayer worship service, interpreting the Bible in their own context, and lifting up issues of mission, justice, and peace.

“Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return...”

February 18 is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the 40 days of Lent.

Many churches will mark the start of Lent with services featuring Imposition of Ashes. Christians receive ashes on Ash Wednesday as a powerful, ancient symbol signifying their identity as followers of Christ. They are also a symbol of repentance, mortality, and a commitment to spiritual renewal for the season of Lent.

The practice of using ashes for

This year the program has been prepared by the WDP Committee of Nigeria with the theme, “I Will Give You Rest: Come.” The scriptural basis is Matthew 11:28-30. Oftentimes, we find ourselves carrying too much – too much work, too much worry, too many burdens – and there comes a time we must all lay aside what we are carrying in order to rest. We can find rest for in Jesus, as he invites us in those verses.

Neethi Prasad, Chair of World Day of Prayer – USA, wrote, “As we prepare for WDP 2026, may we learn to embody Jesus’ invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary.”

If your community has not planned to host a service, there is still time. All the material you need to lead a service is available online, and most of it is free! You

public penance has roots in the Old Testament, with the modern Ash Wednesday tradition dating back to around the 11th century.

Many churches will read a passage from Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount” in which Jesus challenges us to reflect on what we’re truly living for, what’s really driving our actions. As we pray, give, refrain, or are we trying to impress others, gain status, or acquire things, in effect attempting to store up “treasures on earth”? Or are we instead living with genuine humility and grace, putting our hearts in the right place?

Ash Wednesday is an opportunity to step back and take stock of these essential questions, remembering that life is too short

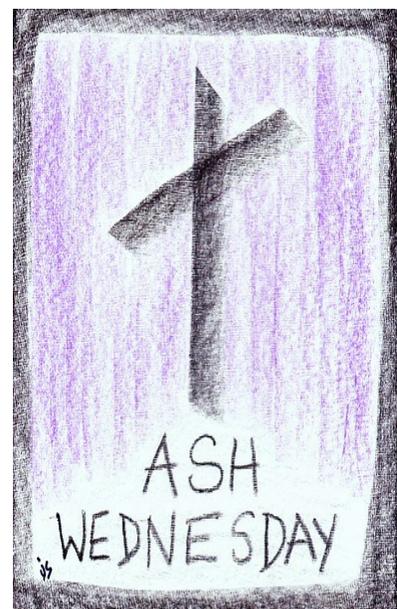
can download a bulletin insert, poster, and worship service bulletin at no cost. A downloadable leader’s guide is available for purchase online (\$4).

Every year there is artwork depicting the theme and this year the painting is of women from Nigeria carrying their burden – their harvest and their children.

This is a perfect time to invite women from other congregations and denominations in your area to join you. And if you are not able to schedule the event on the first Friday in March, that is not a problem. It can be held on any day you choose.

For those who would like more information about World Day of Prayer-USA, download copies of the materials, or to make a donation, visit the website (www.wdp-usa.org).

and too fragile to waste it on trifles and misplaced priorities



Love is all you need...

By Alecia Harrison, Discipleship Committee

13 If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate.

2 If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing.

3-7 If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut, Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first," Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything, Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end."

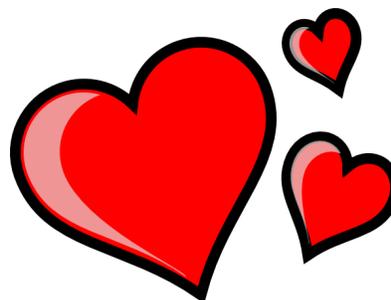
The Message 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

This passage is a reminder that if we have love, then we have everything. When we do not love, everything we have means nothing. I have often said that

children just need to know that they are loved. God is telling us the same thing. Even if the Holy Spirit gives us the power to heal like the disciples, we are nothing without love.

Even if we donate everything we own or become a martyr, without love it means nothing. These are selfless acts, very good for the community. But we have a jealous God. He does not want to share us with any other "gods". This is where our RELATIONSHIP with God matters. We hear God's still small voice, guiding us to do His will, not mine.

Are you listening to God? If not, why not? God wants the best for you always. He is all around us. Stop for a moment. Be aware of God's presence. And listen.



Notes from our treasurer

By Nena Babb, Treasurer, NC WELCA



- Check your mailboxes! Your congregational unit (CU) yearly giving statement will be sent out in February. Our fiscal year goes from February 1 to January 31. You will receive a statement of your Regular offerings, Supporting Our Sisters (SOS) offerings, and Pennies offerings. There may not be an amount shown for Pennies or SOS as most churches contribute at the fall and spring gatherings. Those are marked as Conference offerings. If you have sent in offerings marked for Pennies or SOS, those will be on your statement. Please reach out to Nena Babb if you have questions or there are any discrepancies.
- Need financial support for a project your congregational unit is considering? We have money! A \$250 Grant can be obtained by applying for an SOS grant. The application form is on the website. Look under "Our Ministries" for the SOS description and application link. Send your completed form to Debra Weinel. SOS grants can support existing ministries or new ones.
- Do you know someone in your church who is studying to be a lay minister or a SAM? They can apply for a scholarship from the Christine Bohr Anderson scholarship fund. We have changed the qualifications for that scholarship. It is available to women in North Carolina who are studying to become a rostered minister at an accredited seminary, a lay minister, or a SAM. Also, an ordained woman pastor who wants to further their leadership education may also apply.

One more thing...

Please make sure that all checks are sent to current treasurer Nena Babb, not former treasurer Debra Weinel.

Offerings should be sent to:

Nena Babb

6130 Heavner Road
Vale, NC, 28168

A few facts about women and heart disease...

Protect your hearts, ladies! February is American heart Month. Here's what you need to know to take care of yours!

Fact: Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 killer of women, causing 1 in 3 deaths each year. It's a third of our mothers, sisters, friends, neighbors, coworkers and more. It's a third of the women we can't bear to live without.

Fact: Cardiovascular disease impacts some women at higher rates than others, but the simple truth is that most cardiovascular diseases can still be prevented with education and healthy lifestyle changes.

Fact: Heart disease and stroke can affect a woman at any age, making it vital for all women to understand their personal risk factors and family history. Women can also experience unique life events that can impact their risk, including pregnancy and menopause. Furthermore, research shows that stress may impact health, making it important for women to understand the mind-body connection and how to focus on improving both their physical health and mental well-being.

Fact: Losing even one woman to cardiovascular disease is too many.

Mt. Olive women share history

By Debbie Carmack

Women of the Lutheran Church in the United States have been meeting since the 1800's.

At Mt. Olive, Hickory, in the year 1922, 103 years ago, the group known as Lutheran Church Women was organized. In 1937, 15 years later, the Women's Missionary Society was formed here. In 1987, 50 years later, three groups of women came together across the synod to form the Women of the ELCA, also known as WELCA. Today this organization is active in 7,000 of the 9,200 ELCA congregations.

At one time saving Sunday egg money to donate to Mt. Olive and

buying brooms to sweep the church were activities of our women's group. Over the years we have met in the morning, afternoon, and evening. We have met in homes, conference rooms, Heritage Hall, the Olive Chapel, restaurants, the parking lot, by zoom, with masks, and finally unmasked. We support food drives, Micah's Cupboard, Tying and Tacking, and the prayer shawl ministry. We have Bible studies, we send cards, we make Chrismons, and we pack kits. We celebrate Rachel's Day, Lutheran World Relief Day, and WELCA Sunday. We stay in touch with others by e-mail, the *Bulletin*, our *Gather* magazine, and women's gatherings.

At this time we have two circles actively meeting. Martha Circle meets the first Tuesday of each month at 10:30 am. Esther Circle meets the third Thursday of

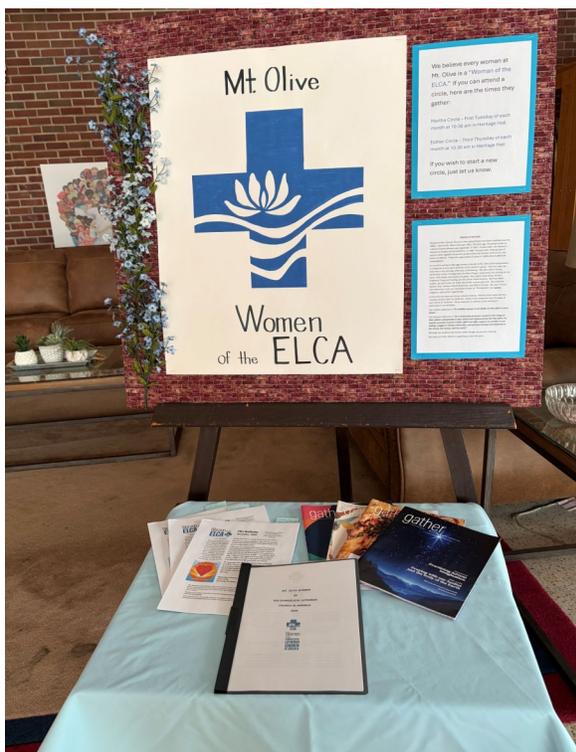
each month at 10:30 am. All are welcome to attend a circle meeting or participate in our activities.

Our mission statement is "To mobilize women to act boldly on their faith in Jesus Christ."

Our purpose statement is "As a community of women created in the image of God, called to discipleship in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we commit ourselves to grow in faith, affirm our gifts, support one another in our callings, engage in ministry and action, and promote healing and wholeness in the church, the society, and the world."

Although our purpose and mission never change, we are ever evolving.

We thank all of Mt. Olive for supporting us over the years.



The display pictured was prepared by Debbie Carmack of Mt. Olive Lutheran Church, Hickory to commemorate the legacy of service, boldness, and faithfulness of Mt. Olive's Women of the ELCA.

The BULLETIN invites you to tell us your story!

Share the history of your Women of the ELCA congregational unit. Highlight the many ways your group lives out our mission in your church and community.

Send story and pictures to secretaryncwelca@gmail.com. Be sure to credit writers and photographers!

Your story is part of our story!

Celebrate Black History Month with WELCA resources

February is Black History Month, officially recognized by former President Gerald Ford in 1976. He called upon the public to “seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history.”

Because Women of the ELCA also celebrates Bold Women’s Day on the fourth Sunday in February (Feb. 28 this year), here are four our bold African American women in our history.

Valora K Starr, director of discipleship, offers these four stories about bold African American women in our history.

- **Harriet Tubman** was born into slavery, Araminta “Minty” Ross (c. 1815-March 10, 1913) led between 13 and 19 missions to rescue approximately 340 enslaved people, family, and friends. She used the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. Famously known as “the Moses of her people,” she relied on her unerring

faith as an essential resource on her repeated forays into Maryland. She spoke of “consulting with God,” and she trusted that God would keep her safe.

- “Stagecoach Mary,” **Mary Fields** (c. 1832–1914) was hired as a mail carrier at age 60 because she was the fastest at hitching a team of six horses. She delivered U.S. mail from Cascade, Montana, to Saint Peter’s Mission (unclaimed territory) in 1885.
- **Mary McLeod Bethune** was born July 10, 1875 (d. May 18, 1955), in Mayesville, South Carolina. She was best known for starting a private school for “colored students” in Daytona Beach, Florida. She attracted donations of time and money and developed the academic school as a college later known as Bethune-Cookman College. President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed her as a national advisor to what was known as his Black Cabinet. Because of her commitment to better African American lives, she was known as “The First Lady of the Struggle.”
- **Oseola McCarty** (March 7, 1908 – September 26, 1999) was born in Wayne



County, Mississippi. She worked hard as a washer-woman and learned to save her money and tithe. In 1995, the University of Southern Mississippi learned that, upon her death, McCarty gave \$150,000 to the university to provide scholarships for African American students in need of financial assistance. This gift represented approximately 60 percent of her estate. On her first trip ever to a college campus, a student asked her, “Why aren’t you spending this (money) on yourself? She replied, “I am.” In 1998, the University of Southern Mississippi awarded her an honorary degree.

WELCA.org has links to articles, as well as other websites, to help you join the celebration and share information with your congregation and community.

On God and Love

Love is divine only and difficult always.

If you think it is easy you are a fool.

If you think it is natural you are blind.

It is a learned application without reason or motive except that it is God.

You do not deserve love regardless of the suffering you have endured.

You do not deserve love because somebody did you wrong.

You do not deserve love just because you want it.

You can only earn — by practice and careful contemplations — the right to express it and you have to learn how to accept it.

Which is to say you have to earn God.

You have to practice God.

You have to think God-carefully.

And if you are a good and diligent student

you may secure the right to show love.

Love is not a gift.

It is a diploma.

Toni Morrison

About the poet...

February 18 is the birthday of American novelist Toni Morrison, born Chloe Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, in 1931.

After a stint teaching at Howard University, she worked as an editor at Random House, raising her two sons as a single parent in New York. And then she began a project: while her boys were asleep late at night or in the early morning, she would work on a novel about a black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who desperately wanted blue eyes. After many rejections, *The Bluest Eye* was finally accepted for publication in 1970; Morrison was 39 years old.

Still working as an editor, she helped compile *The Black Book*, an anthology of archival materials documenting the African-American experience. Among those materials was a short article about Margaret Garner, a young mother who escaped enslavement in 1856 — and when the enslavers caught up with her, she killed her two-year-old daughter in order to spare her from slavery. Morrison was inspired to write her novel *Beloved* because there were then no memorials to the millions of victims of enslavement. “There’s no small bench by the road,” she said. “And because such a place doesn’t exist... the book had to.” *Beloved* won the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, and Morrison received the Nobel Prize in literature in 1993.

At right is an excerpt from *Paradise*, which challenges us to read and think with care: the idea here isn’t that we don’t “deserve” to be loved, but rather that love isn’t a matter of “deserving” or “not deserving.”

