

Temple Daily Telegram

Saturday,  
December 30, 2006

# Religion Today

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*We need a much less narrow view of the Bible. Christianity is not the only source of truth. Christianity has much in common with a variety of faiths, even minor faiths. Narrow views are a harmful influence today. We are seeing it right now with Islam.*

*~ Barbara Wendland*

# Daring to share



Barbara Wendland sorts through the 4,500 copies of the January 2007 edition of *Connections*, her monthly newsletter that contains religious commentary. She works out of her Temple home on Cherokee Drive. (Photos by Shaina Sullivan)

## *Woman's controversial newsletter in 14th year of publication*

**By TOMIE LUNSFORD**

It's yellow. It's monthly. And it's not a phone book.

Some, outraged by its message, tear the strip of paper into shreds and call it junk mail.

Others are intrigued. They study every edition and enjoy discussing its contents.

To the Temple woman who writes it, "Connections: A Monthly Newsletter Calling the Church to Faithful New Life" is a tool for her to express her thoughts about church and religion.

Schooled in philosophy and history, newsletter author Barbara Wendland said she seeks to eradicate the narrow

views of the Christian church. The unofficial reformer holds a master's degree in theology from the United Methodist Seminary at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

The newsletter is a one-person project. Mrs. Wendland writes all the copy in the newsletter, designs it on a computer and finances the costs of printing and postage. At intermittent occasions, she said some of her readers voluntarily con-

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# Newsletter

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tribute money for production costs.

This January as the newsletter is in its 14th year of publication, Mrs. Wendland said the hard-copy circulation averages at 4,500.

"I send an additional 1,500 via e-mail," Mrs. Wendland said. "Some of the recipients represent bigger groups, so when they get the newsletter, they make more copies to distribute."

So her total readership, which encompasses both in-state and out-of-state recipients, outnumbers the 6,000 she identified.

When Mrs. Wendland start-

## want to know more?

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Barbara Wendland of Temple co-authored "Spiritual Family Trees: Finding Your Faith Community's Roots" with Larry W. Easterling in 2001.

The 112-page, soft-back book is available online at [www.alban.org](http://www.alban.org). It sells for \$10. With the advertised 40 percent discount, the cost is the cost \$6.

Based in both their own small group experiences and in years of workshop leadership, the authors demonstrate a broad understanding of how knowing and sharing our spiritual roots can contribute to a more dynamic congregational life. Employing a lively variety of personal stories, they provide clues and immediately useful tools to uncover your faith heritage and gift churches with a powerful instrument for building more intimate communities.

**ON THE WEB:** For all editions of Barbara Wendland's newsletter "Connections," see [www.connectionsonline.org](http://www.connectionsonline.org).

Mrs. Wendland does believe in Jesus and God. She is a member of the First United

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ents, outnumbers the 6,000 she identified.

When Mrs. Wendland started writing her newsletter, she said she only had about 1,000 readers.

"But as the months went by, my readers mushroomed," Mrs. Wendland said. "People kept on wanting to know more and asked if their mother or friend could be put on the mailing list. And so I kept on adding. Even, the Delegates of the United Methodist Church General Conference are on my mailing list."

Her newsletter has created a forum for people who dare to share their unspoken thoughts about Christianity.

"People have doubts, questions and disagreements with their faith and the Bible, but churches aren't hospitable in listening," Mrs. Wendland said. "So the people keep quiet. They think they're alone, but they aren't."

Some of the doubts that she referenced stem from what she called the Bible's "outdated perspectives."

"The Bible was written at a time when people believed the world was flat and that God was a man in heaven which was in the clouds," Mrs. Wendland said. "Science tells us the universe is not like that."

Humans have learned how and why disease strikes them, she continued, implying that every ailment is not an angry act of God.

"More and more findings are saying that sexual orientation is innate, not a choice," Mrs. Wendland said. "Yet in church, we act as if that kind of knowledge does not exist."

The Bible's verbatim language of Christianity needs to accommodate modernity, she said.

"There's no way that truth comes from the Bible alone," Mrs. Wendland said. "Look at all the other things we now know about the world."

Despite her disagreements with the Christian church,

Mrs. Wendland does believe in Jesus and God. She is a member of the First United Methodist Church in Temple. She said her controversial newsletter is her attempt to change what needs to be changed.

"We need a much less narrow view of the Bible. Christianity is not the only source of truth. Christianity has much in common with a variety of faiths, even minor faiths," Mrs. Wendland said. "Narrow views are a harmful influence today. We are seeing it right now with Islam."

An avid reader, Mrs. Wendland said church leaders need to modify the way the Bible reads in addition to what it says.

"All the verbiage is masculine. It's an offense against women, making us look invisible," she said. "Women need to be recognized."

Mrs. Wendland said her readers have thanked her for finally giving them the opportunity to discuss this seemingly unchristian subject matter.

"I get so many responses to my newsletter. There are questions, harsh arguments and strong supporters," Mrs. Wendland said. "That's what I find so interesting — the dialogue that has been created."

Before Mrs. Wendland started her "Connections" newsletter and before her marriage, she had a brief career as a mathematician in the geophysical department of a Houston oil company. She earned her bachelor's degree in math from Southern Methodist University.

"But then I got married and was a full-time wife and mom," she said. Her husband is Erroll Wendland of Temple, a former winner of the Frank Mayborn Humanitarian of the Year Award. They have one daughter.

"I volunteered in the community, thinking I had fulfilled my role as an adult

woman," Mrs. Wendland said. "I thought I was done. But then my daughter grew up and didn't need daily mothering. I was starved for intellectual activity and didn't know what to do."

That empty feeling in her life initiated Mrs. Wendland's trek down the path that led her to "Connections."

"I went back to school to study theology, I guess, about 25 years ago," Mrs. Wendland said. "I was reading lots of things and interested in a variety of subjects, including theology and the church and the purpose of religion."

She said she desired to explore these interests and meet others who thought the same way she did.

"I had a desperate need to find kindred spirits," Mrs. Wendland said. "I knew I couldn't have been alone, and I wasn't."

She started the Connections newsletter in November of 1992 after she earned her master's degree in theology. The topics she discusses fall in a broad range.

"Sometimes, it's a reaction to something I've read or something I've observed," Mrs. Wendland said. "But I always try to introduce an angle or subject we need to explore to get the whole understanding of God, not a limited one."