

SECOND ISSUE • SPRING 2026

FIRST LADY DOM

FIRST LADY DOM

THE MAGAZINE

THE PRIVATE WEIGHT

of Public Women

**A First Lady's Journey
to Wholeness**

**When Depression Meets Destiny:
The Weight I Carried as a First Lady**

**The Burden
No One Applauds**

**Self-care Corner:
What They Don't Tell
You about Self-care**

Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, Founder and Editor in Chief, *FirstLadyDom Magazine*

Finally, a magazine that sees YOU—not just your title.

FIRST LADY DOM

THE MAGAZINE

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- + More Powerful Articles

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About This Issue

What you are holding is more than a magazine. It is a reckoning—offered with grace, grounded in testimony, and long overdue.

In her Founder’s letter, Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber speaks directly to the cost of silence for women who stand at the intersection of calling and expectation. She names what many have only whispered and, in doing so, creates space for every voice that follows.

And what voices they are. Lady Rosetta Guns opens our feature on “The Private Weight of Public Women” with more than forty years of lived truth, tracing a journey from depletion to wholeness. Dr. Karen Anderson Hardaway extends that conversation in “The Burden No One Applauds” by speaking from her own place in ministry—not only as a pastor’s wife but also as a woman called to preach who carries the dual weight of the pulpit and the pew.

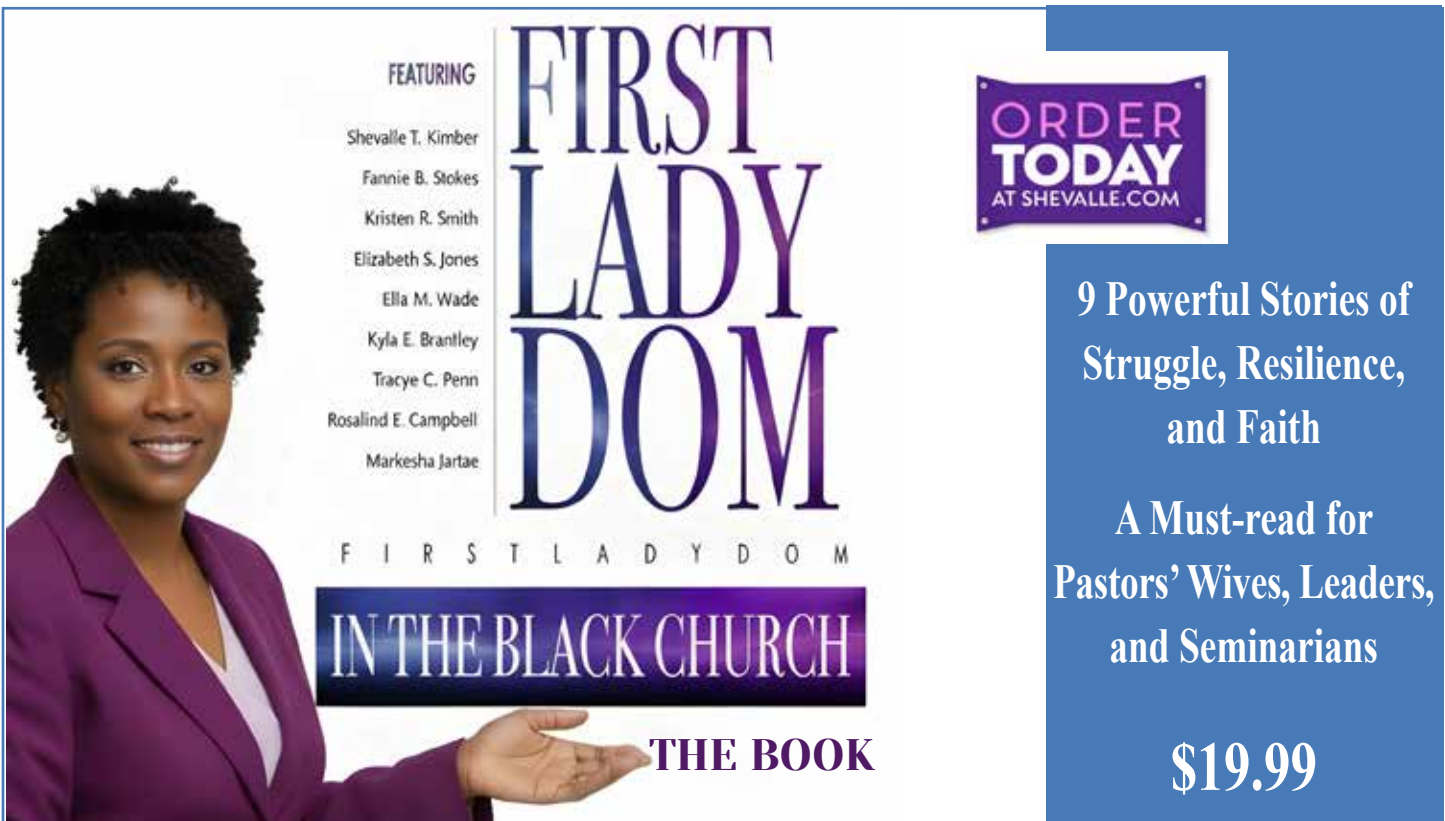
Minister Evanna Holloway tells the unvarnished story of depression, destiny, and the moment when God spoke her way through both in “When Depression Meets Destiny.” Tierra Combs picks up that thread in “It’s All Right to Not Be Okay,” walking us through a breaking point that became a turning point. First Ladies Valerie Brown Bostic and JoAnna Wingo then ask the question we all need to sit with: “Am I my sister’s keeper?”

Our “Self-care Corner” offers two distinct voices: First Lady Thursday Flint in “What They Don’t Tell You about Self-Care”; and First Lady Olivia Jones, who opens her personal toolbox and invites you inside. Designer and First Lady Kamiya Brewer rounds out our wellness conversation through the lens of faith and fashion in “KLB Couture: Dressing the Call of First Ladies.”

Lady Deborah Lawson honors this community with her poem “An Ode to the First Lady.” Our “Playlist Picks” features two powerful selections this issue: Tracye Penn reflects on Mary J. Blige’s *My Life* album and the healing it carried into her own journey, while Breanne Ward turns to the Clark Sisters’ “Instrument (Live)” —a gentle and clarifying reminder that above every role and demand, we are first called to glorify God. Our “Resource Roundup” section features a review of *101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition*, a work that serves as a powerful tool for the families and communities we serve. And First Lady Chauna Tyler closes with a reader’s letter that captures exactly why this magazine matters.

Every contributor in these pages gave something real. We are honored to carry it.

Dr. Debra Berry, *Managing Editor*



The image shows a promotional graphic for the book "FIRST LADY DOM: IN THE BLACK CHURCH THE BOOK". On the left, a woman with short dark hair, wearing a purple blazer, is smiling and gesturing towards the book cover. The book cover itself is white with purple and blue text. It lists the following contributors: Shevalle T. Kimber, Fannie B. Stokes, Kristen R. Smith, Elizabeth S. Jones, Ella M. Wade, Kyla E. Brantley, Tracye C. Penn, Rosalind E. Campbell, and Markesha Jartae. The title "FIRST LADY DOM" is in large, bold, purple letters, with "IN THE BLACK CHURCH" in smaller blue letters below it, and "THE BOOK" in purple letters at the bottom. To the right of the book cover is a purple badge that says "ORDER TODAY AT SHEVALLE.COM". Further to the right, on a blue background, is the text "9 Powerful Stories of Struggle, Resilience, and Faith" and "A Must-read for Pastors' Wives, Leaders, and Seminarians". At the bottom right, the price "\$19.99" is displayed in white.

The Private Weight of Public Women

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Reader Engagement

For reader engagement, email us at FirstLadyDom@shevalle.com and join us on our Facebook group page. FirstLadyDom | In The Black Church Podcast: FirstLadyDom

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Contributors for This Issue

Thank you to all our contributors for sharing your voices, stories, and truth with this community.



Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber, M.Div.

Editor's Message

Rev. Shevalle T. Kimber is a devoted spiritual leader, author, and First Lady of the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc.—of which her husband, Rev. Dr. Boise Kimber, serves as the nineteenth President. She empowers women through preaching, mentorship, and conferences, drawing on decades of ministry experience. With a heart for healing and purpose, she champions spiritual care, resilience, and transformative faith.



“Features” Contributors

Rosetta Guns

The Private Weight of Public Women: A First Lady's Journey to Wholeness

Lady Rosetta Guns, a Richmond native, is a retired school social worker, global missionary, and dedicated church leader. As a Norfolk State University alumna and member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., she serves her community through a host of ministries and organizations. She supports Second Calvary Baptist alongside her husband, Dr. Geoffrey Guns.



Valerie Brown Bostic

Am I My Sister's Keeper?

Valerie Brown Bostic is the wife of Pastor Frank Bostic of Pilgrim Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY. As a devoted servant, social worker, certified birth doula, lactation counselor, storyteller, and prayer warrior, she is passionate about encouraging women, supporting families, and honoring God through every calling placed on her life.



JoAnna L. Wingo

Am I My Sister's Keeper?

Elder JoAnna L. Wingo is a dynamic speaker with more than two decades of leadership in education. She is the First Lady of Antioch Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY, and the President of the Great Lakes Ministers' Wives in New York State. She is the wife of Pastor Ulysees O. Wingo Sr., and the mother of five and grandmother of three.



Dr. Karen Anderson Hardaway

The Burden No One Applauds

Dr. Karen Anderson Hardaway serves in pastoral leadership alongside her husband, Dr. Jimmie Hardaway Jr., in Niagara Falls, NY. She is an author and doctoral scholar whose passion lies in spiritual formation and women's empowerment. Her messages encourage public women to embrace healing and boundaries as they walk boldly in God's calling.



Evanna Holloway

When Depression Meets Destiny: The Weight I Carried as a First Lady

Minister Evanna Holloway is a servant leader, mother, grandmother, Christian life coach, and Board-Certified Christian Counselor (NACC). She studied at ECSU, CSMBC Boise Kimber Leadership School, and Hartford Seminary (BMP), and is currently enrolled at Bay Path University. She is married to Rev. Dr. Derrick C. Holloway Sr., Executive Secretary of CSMBC. Presently, she serves as President of the Connecticut State Missionary Board Conference (Women's Auxiliary).



Tierra S. Combs

It's All Right to Not Be Okay

Tierra S. Combs resides in Lincoln, Nebraska. She is a health ministry leader and a registered nurse, currently working as the health director of the New Era Baptist State Convention. She is married to Rev. Dr. Tremaine M. Combs and has five children: Michael-Eugene, Makenzie, Mary, Leah, and David.



“Self-care Corner” Contributors

Thursdays Flint

What They Don’t Tell You about Self-care

Thursdays Flint is the organizer of L.A.C.E. Women’s Ministry. She holds a BA in Business and an MBA, with twenty-four years in commercial lending and compliance. She is the owner of Glamour Wrists, a custom jewelry company. Flint is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., and is married to Rev. Dr. James Flint. She is the mother of Savannah and James III.



Olivia Jones

OJ’s Toolbox

Sis. Olivia D. Jones has been married to Rev. Willie E. Jones for fifty-one years and served thirty-seven years as First Lady of Peoples Missionary Baptist Church in Rock Island, Illinois. A retired Alcoa lab technician with nearly thirty-two years of service, she faithfully led Christian education and Women’s Ministry. She has two daughters, six grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.



Deborah Patton-Lawson

An Ode to the First Lady (a Poem)

Deborah Patton-Lawson is a native and resident of New Haven, Connecticut. She is now retired after twenty-five years as First Lady at Powerhouse Ministries in New Haven, CT. She is currently a member of the leadership team at Revival Church in Hamden, CT, under the leadership of Bishop Daniel Bland and Dr. Melonie Bland.

“Playlist Picks” Contributors



Rev. Tracye Penn

My Life—Album by Mary J. Blige

Rev. Tracye Colette Penn was born in Harlem, New York. She earned her Master of Divinity degree from Virginia Union University and currently serves as the State Director of Christian Education for the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention. She is married to Dr. David E. Penn Sr., President of the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention.



Breanne Ward

The Clark Sisters—“Instrument (Live)”

Lady Breanne Ward has been in ministry with her lovely husband, Pastor Moses A. Ward Sr., for more than fifteen years in central Iowa. With God’s grace and provision, she is a licensed mental health counselor, C.E.O. of ForWard Consulting, LLC, and an instructor for Faith Academy in Iowa.

“Resource Roundup” Contributor



Kimberley Yancy

101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition

Kimberley Nicole Yancy is a community leader, author of *Confessions of a Preacher’s Wife* (as Mikasenoja), and First Lady of New Vision Baptist Church in Dickinson, Texas. As a La Marque City Councilwoman, she advances education and social justice through New Vision Alive CDC and Edutemps Staffing Solutions, inspiring faith-based community leadership.

“Go-to Boutiques” Contributor



Kamiya Brewer

KLB Couture: Dressing the Call of First Ladies

Kamiya Brewer is the founder of KLB Couture, a fashion brand rooted in modesty, femininity, and purpose. Inspired by faith, community, and timeless elegance, Kamiya designs intentional pieces that empower women to walk confidently in every season—honoring identity, grace, strength, and inner royalty through refined style and elevated confidence.

Reader Engagement



Chauna Tyler

Chauna Tyler is the dedicated owner of Rover’s Retreat, a professional pet styling salon established in 2018. Beyond her entrepreneurial work, she holds an associate’s degree in radiology and shares her musical gifts by singing in a local quartet group and her church choirs. She is married to Rev. Preston Tyler, the pastor of Hill Street Baptist Church, in her hometown of Roanoke, Virginia.



Beloved sisters and esteemed readers,

Let me start by expressing my heartfelt gratitude to everyone who made *FirstLadyDom: The Magazine* possible. What a blessing—what a sacred, sovereign gift it is to see a vision once carried in prayer now resting in the hands of people across this nation. This publication didn't come from ambition; it was born from listening. It was shaped in the quiet spaces where First Ladies whispered truths they couldn't proclaim from pulpits. It was formed by tears shed behind closed doors and by laughter shared only among those who truly understand.

FirstLadyDom is more than a magazine. It is a sanctuary in print.

We are daughters of a powerful legacy. The Black church is a foundational, independent institution born from the need for a safe, liberating space to worship and resist oppression. From brush arbors to brick sanctuaries, from slave quarters to sanctuaries filled with choirs and cadence, the Black church has been our refuge, our organizing ground, our prophetic voice, our hope against hope. It has been the womb of civil rights movements and the cradle of spiritual endurance.

And yet, within this sacred institution founded for liberation, the pastor's wife is often the most oppressed person in the church. That statement may unsettle some. It may even cause a pause in your reading. But, Beloved, truth should never be sacrificed for comfort. Oppression doesn't always come wearing the clothes of cruelty. Sometimes, it's dressed in expectation. Sometimes, it speaks the language of tradition. Sometimes, it hides behind phrases like, "That's just how it's always been done."

We often have to bear the burden of external social and traditional expectations of the church, burdens we did not create or agree to carry. We have carried the weight of being scrutinized for what we wear, how we speak, how we parent, how we age, how we lead, and sometimes even how we breathe. We have carried the weight of unspoken comparison, the silent measuring of our gifts against those who came before us. We have carried the weight of being the emotional shock absorber for congregational conflict. We have carried the weight of protecting our husbands while suppressing our own pain.

FirstLadyDom is the medium that dares to say what has long been whispered: we are human. We are called, yes, but we are also women. We are anointed, yes, but we are also daughters, mothers, sisters, thinkers, and dreamers. We have the innate right to live our authentic selves without undue pressure to carry the weight privately.

This magazine affirms our humanity. It affirms that we are not just extensions of the pulpit; we are individuals in a covenant with God. It affirms that

submission does not mean erasing oneself. It affirms that strength does not mean silence. It affirms that loyalty does not require self-abandonment.

Beloved, guilt has been a heavy garment we have worn for far too long—feeling guilty for needing rest, wanting boundaries, desiring a purpose beyond the pew, for saying no, for feeling unseen. But guilt is not a fruit of the Spirit, and exhaustion is not a badge of holiness.

FirstLadyDom aims to encourage anyone carrying this weight and to educate the body of Christ, the ecclesia, the called-out assembly, which was never meant to oppress its own members. It was meant to reflect Christ, who said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28, KJV).

We are not here to condemn the church but to guide it toward greater wholeness. We are not here to dismiss tradition; we are here to refine it with compassion. We are not here to dismantle roles; we are here to honor the souls within them. Healing begins where honesty is welcomed.

This magazine is rooted in lived experiences—not just abstract theology, but embodied testimony. The strength of testimony isn't in perfection; it's in truth. When a First Lady writes about depression and still affirms her faith, she grants permission for another woman to seek help. When one shares how she set boundaries, she empowers others to do the same. When one admits she once lost herself and is now rediscovering her voice, she becomes a midwife to someone else's rebirth. There is sacred power in saying, "Me, too."

FirstLadyDom states, “You don’t have to face those questions alone.” To the First Lady who feels she must smile despite betrayal; to the First Lady quietly managing financial strain; to the First Lady supporting a visionary husband while her own dreams wait; to the First Lady raising children under the scrutiny of public ministry; to the First Lady who did not choose this life but chose love and found herself here—we see you. Seeing is the first step toward healing.

I am deeply aware that the Black church has been both our refuge and our refining fire. It has nurtured our gifts and, at times, overlooked our needs. But I believe in its power to redeem. I believe that when we share our truths with grace, we do not weaken the church . . . we strengthen it—for a body that ignores pain becomes sick, but a body that acknowledges pain can heal unspoken resentment and internalized performance.

Many of us were taught who to be before we discovered who we are. Some of us were handed scripts before we found our voices. We inherited mannerisms, dress codes, and speaking tones that were less about calling and more about conformity. But, Beloved, God does not anoint caricatures. God anoints authenticity.

You were not meant to be a replica of the previous First Lady. You weren’t meant to be your husband’s quiet shadow. You weren’t meant to be everyone’s counselor while neglecting your own therapy. You were meant to be whole.

And wholeness requires courage: courage to admit when you’re tired; courage to seek professional help; courage to redefine boundaries; courage to say, “This tradition no longer serves health”; courage to love the church without losing yourself in it.

As editor and founder, I bear this responsibility with reverence. I recognize the weight of inviting women to be vulnerable. I understand the risk of publishing truths that may challenge comfortable narratives. But I also recognize the cost of silence. Silence has cost us too much—friendships, mental health, authentic joy, and our names, reducing us to titles instead of honoring our identities. *FirstLadyDom* calls you by your name. It calls you Beloved. It calls you seen. It calls you valued. It calls you free.

And to the broader body of Christ reading these pages, I offer this gentle exhortation: honor the humanity of the women who stand beside your shepherds. Do not assume that their strength negates their need. Do not confuse proximity to power with personal empowerment. Do not demand perfection where God has ordained growth.

The ecclesia must grow in its understanding of pastoral families. Ministry isn’t just about sermons; it’s built on healthy homes, supportive spouses, and emotionally strong leaders. When you care for the First Lady, you’re not just indulging a preference; you’re reinforcing the very foundation of the ministry.

Beloved sisters, I dream of a day when First Ladies no longer whisper

their struggles but openly share them with trusted circles without fear. I dream of churches that celebrate individuality rather than enforce uniformity. I dream of daughters watching their mothers serve in ministry without believing that suffering in silence is the price of faithfulness.

This magazine is a step toward that dream. We will tell the truth, honor our stories, hold space for lament and laughter, challenge and comfort, educate and empower, and remind each other that being chosen does not mean being crushed.

As we continue this journey, I invite you to engage not only as readers but also as active participants in this sacred dialogue. And as we move forward, may we remember that the One who called us is not a taskmaster but a tender Shepherd. He does not require us to bleed to prove devotion. He does not measure our faith by how much we suppress. He delights in truth in the inward parts.

May *FirstLadyDom* continue to be a space where truth is valued. May it remain a sanctuary for the soul. May it continue to affirm that we are human, sacred, and healing all at once.

Beloveds, thank you for your courage in daring to live authentically in spaces that haven’t always known how to accept authenticity. And may the God who sees in secret reward you openly.

With peace, love, and gratitude,



Rev. Sheville T. Kimber
Editor-in-Chief

THE PRIVATE WEIGHT

of Public Women

**A First Lady's Journey
to Wholeness**

By Rosetta Guns

For more than forty years, I have carried the title of First Lady. Long before hashtags, conferences, podcasts, and wellness conversations entered church culture, I simply served. There were no workshops on boundaries, no language for burnout, and certainly no permission to rest. Back then, self-care was neither discussed from pulpits nor whispered in the pastors' wives' circles. First, I didn't even know what self-care looked like. Second, I certainly could not have afforded it. There was always too much to do and too many people depending on me.

I was raising our two daughters, managing a household, attending school functions, parent-teacher meetings, and cheerleading events, serving faithfully in ministry, and completing my degrees. On many days, I felt like a single parent. My husband was traveling, preaching revivals, attending denominational meetings, serving on multiple boards, and ministering tirelessly to the saints.

Let me be clear—I am not throwing him under the bus. He acknowledges it, and over the years we have come to grips with that season of our lives. But, my God, the weight was heavy and my pain was private.

Church members never heard me complain. They never saw my tears. I showed up for worship. I smiled, served, and kept going—often depleted. Strength was expected, silence was rewarded, and endurance was praised. Matthew 11:28 declares, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (NKJV). That Scripture is Jesus' open invitation to anyone exhausted by life's struggles to find true rest for their souls by coming to Him.

In private, I prayed. I cried. Some days I did both at the same time. I poured out heart-wrenching tears before the Lord. Then I got up, washed my face, put on lipstick, and kept going—at least for another day. I refused to look like what I was going through.

First Ladies live in a unique tension. We are visible yet unseen.

I recall recently attending a prayer breakfast for the inauguration of Virginia's newly elected Governor. My husband had been invited to pray. We were warmly greeted and escorted to our table. The name card to my left read “Attorney General-Elect.” The card to my right bore my husband's name. My card simply read, “Guest.”

I chuckled, but inwardly I wondered, *couldn't someone have taken the time to learn my name?*

That small moment captured a larger truth. First Ladies are often visible yet unseen, supported yet unsupported, admired yet rarely asked, “First Lady, how are you really doing?” Over time, those moments quietly accumulate. They shape the way we see ourselves, and how we learn to either shrink or survive in public spaces.

Many of us were taught that caring for ourselves was selfish, unspiritual, or unnecessary. But years of ministry and professional service have taught me this: neglect does not make us holy, exhaustion does not make us faithful, and silence does not make us strong.

Let me say this without shame or apology: Jesus and a therapist helped me survive. Seeking professional help did not diminish my faith; it strengthened it. Therapy gave language to my pain and tools for healing, while Christ remained my source of hope, restoration, and truth.

In a recent gathering of First Ladies, Rev. Shavelle Kimber offered a powerful reminder when she said that we are “more than breath in a dress.” Our role carries deep honor and deep weight. Many First Ladies have careers, gifts, and dreams that are often hidden behind their husbands' assignments.

We did not all take the same journey into this role. Some of us married preachers, while others watched

our husbands answer the call after marriage. I once heard a First Lady say, “I didn’t sign up for this. God called my husband, not me.” Not every ministry couple views themselves as ministry partners, yet the First Lady’s support remains valuable and necessary.

Often, she becomes the pastor’s safe place, while prayerfully attempting to establish boundaries that protect both marriage and family. The constant demands of pastoral availability can create tension that affects the entire household. The pastor’s kids (PKs) are frequently expected to be examples and are not allowed the freedom to simply be children. Living faithfully in a fishbowl can be heavy for many reasons.

And, yes, many First Ladies are lonely, even while surrounded by people. Friendships can feel risky and unsafe. That is why one’s maintaining an intimate relationship with God as well as honest and open communication with one’s spouse is not optional . . . it is vital.

All of this—the silence, strength, shrinking, and survival—taught me something essential: What we often label as self-care is not separate from the First Lady’s journey; it is formed within it.

Self-care is not a luxury reserved for women with extra money or time. At its core, self-care is stewardship of your body, mind, spirit, and emotional health.

For First Ladies, self-care must be practical, sustainable, and guilt-free. It must fit real lives, real ministry demands, and real seasons. First Lady Joanna Wingo wrote insightfully in the inaugural issue of *FirstLadyDom* magazine about how easily we neglect ourselves while caring for everyone else.

First Ladies, give yourselves permission to breathe, rest, and say no. You do not owe everyone access to your energy, nor are you required to explain every boundary you set.

I am now retired after a thirty-year career as a social worker, though my husband continues to shepherd the flock. And let me be clear, I now know exactly

what self-care looks like for me. I unapologetically know how to pamper and love on myself. This is not indulgence; it is wisdom earned through years of sacrifice, prayer, and perseverance.

I am still a First Lady. I still love the Lord. I still love my church. And I still serve. But I no longer sacrifice myself on the altar of unrealistic expectations.

If I could speak to my younger self—and to you—I would say this: Do not wait forty years to learn how to balance marriage and ministry. You must define your role as a First Lady. One size does not fit all.

If playing the piano is not your ministry, don’t go near it. If wearing a hat is not your style, don’t wear one. Whether you wear flats, kitten heels, or stilettos, walk with confidence, knowing you are a Daughter of the King.

There is no manual. You are a Christian first, so let the Bible be your guide.

I want to encourage First Ladies to acknowledge your pain, including the private struggles you may feel pressured to hide. Seek professional help when needed. Do not remain in a dark place believing suffering is your spiritual assignment. You have gifts needed in your ministry, but you cannot pour from an empty cup.

Your healing matters—spiritually, emotionally, and physically. The 3 John 2 Scripture reminds us, “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (KJV).

To every First Lady walking this sacred path, I say this: Your labor is not unseen, and your sacrifices are not in vain. God honors the quiet strength it takes to pour into others while trusting Him with your own needs. When the weight feels heavy, remember that the same God who called you is the God who sustains you today, tomorrow, and in every season ahead.

“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not” (Galatians 6:9, KJV).

Be encouraged, First Ladies!



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON
AT A GLANCE

**“Wishing and
Hoping and Praying”**

1 Samuel 1:1-28; 2:1-11, 18-19; 3:1-18



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Am I My Sister's Keeper?

By JoAnna Wingo and Valerie Brown Bostic

What does that really look like in real life? That is the question I have been wrestling with that I can no longer ignore. I am connected to the weight of public ministry, carrying its emotional burdens while sitting in quiet turmoil in the background. At times, I yearn to cry out in anger at the insults and assumptions. I want to defend my sister and say, “You have no idea what it feels like to be the spectacle in everyone’s eyes while simply running daily errands.” There is a constant strain in suppressing raw emotions and in holding yourself together when you are depleted of basic human kindness. Keeping silent in isolation is a weight many in ministry bear, and often those closest to you carry emotional trauma as well simply because we are unsure how to reach out. But what does that really look like in real life?

I have known this First Lady for more than twenty years. She has been in the spotlight of public ministry while bearing the weight. I had the distinct honor of knowing her mother, a woman of faith who shared with me one of the most powerful Scriptures I have ever carried: Acts 27:44b—which reads, “And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land” (KJV); some had come on boards and others on broken pieces of the ship.

That Scripture is embedded in my being as a First Lady. We may not all arrive the same way—some glide in whole; others cling to broken pieces—but we arrive because someone helps us hold on.

I witnessed her marriage. I watched her grow. She trusted me with some of the most challenging moments of her life. Surely that made me a candidate to uplift her. Surely that gave me responsibility. Yet, I felt powerless because I was unable to do something. This weight of helplessness has been with me until now. I am finally able to share with my sister—and those of you reading this—that just a supportive hug and encouraging words may be enough in this moment in time.

She is the leading lady in her church, an educator, a servant of God, and the wife of a councilperson. Yet, for eight long years, negativity, misinformation, and cruel assumptions surrounded her and her family. Words spoken without empathy. Judgments formed without truth. Attacks that did not just wound her but her children as well.

“He’s a preacher, not fixing streets.”

“She thinks she’s better than everyone.”

“The church won’t even let them have a funeral there.”

Rumblings. Mumbblings. Lies.

As a political family, they were considered fair game. No grace. No restraint. No concern for the family being dragged through public opinion.

JoAnna’s private weight was this: carrying public accusations while shielding her children from their sting. Her private weight was smiling in church while her spirit felt faint. Her private weight was absorbing the residue of every public rant, the echoes settling silently in her eyes. It was the burden of silent emotional trauma and isolation, and the uncertainty of who could truly be an ally.

Her sisters in Christ carried their own weight, the helplessness of feeling powerless when a simple spiritual truth should have been enough. Psalm 46:10 reminds us to “be still, and know that [He is] God” (KJV).

When I looked at my sister, I saw that weight written across her face. The residue of the latest public rant lingered in her expression. I knew her story. I knew her struggle. I recognized the wounds that words leave behind; the pain of restraining what the lips long to shout. I knew the tension of wondering what others are thinking, and the strain of emotional trauma and spiritual conflict. Some feelings resist language. They steal your breath and wound you at your core.

And still, my sister remains silent . . . carrying what feels like dead weight.

And when someone asked, “Am I my sister’s keeper?” it stirred something deep within me because



I immediately thought about the season that I personally walked through and how much I needed someone to simply see me.

Being a First Lady in the public eye is an honor, but it is also a weight few truly understand unless they have lived it.

My husband served as a councilman in a highly residential community—one where residents were informed, engaged, and deeply aware of their rights. He is also a well-known pastor. Because of both roles, his leadership was constantly visible, discussed, affirmed, and at times intensely criticized. His name appeared in the news, across social media platforms, and in conversations that sometimes made their way directly to our faces.

What many did not consider was that behind the title stood a family.

Our children became part of a public discourse they never asked to join. They did not choose the spotlight, yet its glare reached them anyway. As a mother,

my instinct was to protect them, to filter what I could, to guard what was said around them, and to carry certain burdens so they would not have to do so.

At the same time, I watched the weight my husband carried. Public service and spiritual leadership both demand so much of a person, and I could see the responsibility pressing on him. Because of that, I often chose silence about my own feelings. I did not want to add to what was already heavy on his shoulders.

My private weight was choosing silence so that he would not have to carry more. My private weight was protecting my children while suppressing my own need to process.

My private weight was sitting in rooms where I chose not to say anything, remaining composed while inwardly wondering if anyone noticed what I was carrying.

But silence has a way of growing louder inside you. There were moments when I wanted to vent. I wanted to post the rebuttal on social media and press “send.” I wanted to yell. I wanted to cuss out the

person bold enough to say so much in her husband's face. I wanted to tell my husband, "Tell them to come find me so you won't be accused of being rude to a woman." I wanted to expose those who mixed church and politics . . . who invoked God when criticizing decisions that were civic—not spiritual.

And then came the harder question: How do you remain Christ-like when your humanity is flaring?

Where is the balance between turning the other cheek and defending your family? Between grace and raw emotion? Between silence and self-respect? I knew I could not vent to my children because I was safeguarding their hearts. I hesitated to share openly within the church because I never wanted vulnerability to be misunderstood or turned into conversation that traveled beyond its intended space. There is also an unspoken narrative surrounding women in visible positions: You prayed for this. You were called to this. Be strong. Take it to God.

And, yes, I prayed. But there is also a human side that longs to say, "This is hard." A side that wants to talk things out—to release what has been tightly held; to know without question that it is being seen.

The truth is, it can be incredibly lonely even when you are surrounded by people. I found myself understanding where everyone else was coming from in the congregation. Those who were hurting, those who were defensive, and even the critics. I worked hard not to cause harm or deepen anyone's pain. Yet, quietly, I wondered, *Will anyone see me? Will anyone recognize what I am walking through?*

I prayed for her. I covered her family. I asked God to protect them. But now, I know it should have been more—because there is a difference between praying *for* someone and praying *with* that person. Standing shoulder to shoulder before God creates a kind of strength that reminds you that you are not alone.

Her weight was public attack carried privately. My weight was private silence carried publicly.

So, when I reflect on the question "Am I my sister's keeper?" my answer is (wholeheartedly), "Yes, I am."

We keep one another by noticing.

By asking.

By showing up.

By creating safe spaces where strength is not a requirement and honesty is welcomed. Because even the strong need support. Even the faithful need covering. Even the woman everyone looks to is hoping that someone will look at her and say, "I see you."

Lady Wingo (Jodi), I salute you.

And to every woman quietly carrying more than anyone knows, you are not invisible. Even if you arrived on broken pieces, you still made it to shore.





The Burden No One Applauds

By Dr. Karen Anderson Hardaway

There is a sacred strength many public women carry quietly. Not the kind of strength that performs for applause, or the kind that needs to be seen to be validated. I mean the hidden strength. The strength it takes to show up publicly, lead well, love deeply, serve faithfully, and still maintain a private life that often feels selfish and misunderstood. This is especially true for women in ministry. For example, we are expected to be stable, sociable, and accessible. We are also expected to be inspiring and on ten. Even when we are tired. Even when we are grieving. Even when our own lives require attention and self-care. This is the private weight of public women.

Stay with me, because there is something in this article for all public women.

For many of us, there is an unspoken expectation that we will carry responsibility with grace and pressure with a smile. We learn early how to manage emotions publicly while processing privately. We learn how to encourage others while quietly needing encouragement ourselves. We suffer in silence, but we must smile to please people.

I have a question: When was the last time you looked at the woman in the mirror and smiled? Further, what happens when the public woman is overwhelmed? What happens when she is grieving? What happens when she needs support in her own marriage, her own home, and her own mental well-being?

Very few people ask. Public women are often expected to be emotionally and spiritually “open” all the time, but we are rarely asked what that openness costs. Sometimes the most spiritual thing a public woman can do is create healthy boundaries and say, “I need rest,” “I need space,” and “I need time to heal.” Boundaries do not make you selfish. Boundaries make you sustainable.

WHEN THE PRIVATE LIFE DOESN'T MATCH THE PUBLIC ROLE

Sometimes a public woman carries a strong calling and a powerful voice, but her private life is not fully supportive of that calling. Who am I talking to? Sometimes she is expected to shine publicly while being diminished privately. Sometimes she preaches freedom while quietly battling control. Sometimes she ministers with confidence but privately feels unsupported.

Leadership carries loneliness. This is true for men and women, but women often experience it differently because of the additional expectations placed on our tone, appearance, availability, and emotional regulation. Not to mention all the people pulling at your spouse, requiring his time and attention. With that said, we need his attention, private attention, so the Amens will sound good when it's his turn to preach!

Public women—especially in ministry—are expected to be many things at once: nurturing, but not “too soft.” Strong, but not “too assertive.”

Confident, but not “too bold.” Gifted, but not “too visible.” Spiritual, but not “too direct.” This balancing act becomes exhausting over time, and we look crazy trying to balance all of that in four-inch heels or kitten heels (if that is your thing).

Sometimes, public women are surrounded by people yet still feel alone. Sometimes we are admired but not truly known. Sometimes we are celebrated but not cared for. In quiet moments, many public women ask, *Do people love me, or do they love what I can do?*

THE HIDDEN BURDEN OF BEING NEEDED

There is a particular heaviness that comes with being needed by many. People need your encouragement, presence, listening ear, prayers, counsel, and availability. But very few people consider what happens when the pastor’s wife is tired. Let me be honest here: Some Sundays, I want to stay home and sip coffee with Jesus while still in my pajamas. The thought of putting on everything we must wear—including preaching attire (if that’s called for)—can be exhausting.

Additionally, if you let your spouse know that you want to stay home, you’re often met with the side eye—so on go the stockings and lashes. On that Sunday, you can guarantee that the Amens will be real low no matter how many times he belts out, “I can’t get no help in the building!” Some people forget that even Jesus withdrew, rested, wept, and needed solitude.

THE GIFT OF RETREAT

Public women must learn to retreat—not as avoidance, but as protection. Retreat is how we remain healthy, focused, and tender. There are some conversations you do not need; and there are some arguments you do not need. There are some people you do not need to convince. There

are some environments in which you do not need to remain. Let’s be real here: We must maintain healthy boundaries, so our spaces are free of negativity and negative people.

Let me pause here to share some of my testimony. I married my husband in 2006, which led to my stepping into public ministry at a level I could not have fully prepared for as a pastor’s wife. He was a pastor at one of the largest churches in Westchester County, New York. Almost immediately, I learned that being a pastor’s wife comes with invisible expectations and visible resistance. Because he did not choose a wife from within the church, I became a target. Months after our wedding, anonymous hate mail arrived at our home. Another message on MySpace declared that I was “not royalty” and that “I needed to be seen, not heard.” Even my daughter’s having won an Easter basket one year stirred resentment.

Then there were women who joined the church, claiming they were “called to preach”—not for ministry, but for proximity. Some still attempt to reach my husband today, bypassing me entirely.

What others called insecurity became weight. I questioned God: Did I hear You clearly? My husband and I share the same birthday. We were licensed and ordained in the same months—different years, of course. Our ministries mirror each other, and some sought to destroy that divine alignment. But as Matthew emphasizes, “What God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:6b, NKJV). And even with all that, I stood to minister while bleeding. That is the weight: guarding your marriage, your calling, and your voice, while smiling in public and fighting in private.

Public ministry is holy work, but it is not light work. And no one gets to write my narrative. Don’t expect for me to wear hats, sit in a specific seat, or be silent. I am who God called me to be—bold, courageous, and anointed!

A WORD TO PUBLIC WOMEN

You are allowed to have needs. You are allowed to take breaks. You are allowed to be “off,” protect your peace, say “no,” evolve, and prioritize your healing. Most importantly, you are allowed to be a public woman without being a public possession.

I feel strongly that a woman needed to hear that. If that’s you, then know that God did not call you to be anyone’s possession. Nor did God create you to be an object. Furthermore, God did not anoint you to be crushed or appoint you to be depleted. God did not call you to be consumed. He called you to be fruitful and whole. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, NKJV). God is not just concerned with your calling—He is concerned with your condition as well. He is concerned not just with your ministry but your mind . . . not just with your assignment but your soul.

CONCLUSION: WHEN THE WEIGHT BECOMES WITNESS

Public women carry private weight, but we also carry private oil. We carry tears that never make it

to the pulpit. We carry lonely seasons that produce deep spiritual authority. We carry prayer lives no one sees, and private battles that no one applauds. Sometimes, the bravest act is one’s choosing oneself over the demands of the ministry. It is one’s allowing oneself to be seen without performing, rest without guilt, and receive without guilt. It is one’s trusting God with one’s private vulnerability—believing that healing is holy and remembering that her worth was established before her workload increased for this season.

The private weight becomes a witness. The hidden burden becomes preparation. The lonely process becomes empowerment. And in time, the woman who has carried so much privately will also see God honor her publicly—not with performance, but with peace. Because God is faithful. So, public woman, get ready for God to honor you. I know I do, because you are worth it!

Love ya!



WHEN DEPRESSION Meets Destiny

The Weight I Carried as a First Lady

By Evanna Holloway

My Story, My God, His Ministry (*Psalm 23:4*)

There is a weight that I have carried long before titles, ministry, or anyone called me First Lady. It is the weight of trauma, silence, and expectation. And I name it now.

I remember being very sad as a child due to being physically abused by a man that was presumed innocent by the one person I thought truly loved me. I was confused and scared. There were multiple times that I had to recount the incident verbally and visually to detectives and therapists.

I was verbally abused. He told me that I was not good enough, smart enough, and that my facial features were too big. I was physically abused. I've been slapped before school and have had a knife pulled out on me. I wrote a letter to God in high school because I was contemplating suicide. When I was in college, I attempted suicide. I was admitted into a facility and placed on suicide watch.

But God!

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11, NIV).

When the angel that God sent to watch over me transitioned, I felt lost beyond measure. Even though I

was married with children, depression and grief took a hold of my body and mind that felt like someone was standing on my back. That was the weight of grief, responsibility, and ministry pressing down.

*Can I get up?
I don't want to get up.
But I must get up.*

As a First Lady, getting up is not optional. There is a husband to support. There are children to nurture. There is a church watching. There are expectations that do not pause for pain.

Days were dark and nights were darker. I did not want to get up, yet I knew that if I did not then nothing would get done for my family and I would not move forward. Even though it was tough, I reluctantly got back up.

I got up carrying the weight of trauma, neglect, abuse, two miscarriages, grief, and racial harassment.

I was depressed when told all I had to do was pray. If only you knew the prayers I prayed. The number of tears that soaked my pillow at night and during the day. If only you knew the posture of my heart, and my body lying prostrate crying out to God to remove this bitter cup.

*You see me show up.
You see me smile.
You see the title.
But you do not always see the weight.*

You don't know that because I am smiling doesn't mean I wasn't in tears an hour ago. You don't know the past trauma that I have carried in my heart and on my back.

Can I be depressed *and* destined for greatness from God?

I wrestled with that question during my second year at the Boise Kimber Christian Leadership School when the Lord spoke: Hartford Seminary. I prepared the application and never submitted it. The third year, He spoke again. I submitted it and was accepted into the Black Ministries Program.

During my study, I was confused as to why I was there. Yes, God called me to it, but I did not understand the purpose. There were many times when I cried on the way to, during, and after class.

“For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7, NKJV).

After presenting a class assignment one day, the Lord spoke to me as I was driving. Not only was He audible, but He was also visual. He spoke, “When depression meets destiny.”

And He showed me an image of a fist demolishing depression because where He is taking me, depression can't go.

Still driving, I wept.

As I approached my house, the Lord continued to speak: “My story, my God, His ministry.”

My story to convey. My God to glorify. His ministry to serve.

My initial sermon was from Luke 13:10-13. I began ministering in my local church and surrounding churches, telling my story and the goodness of God.

I can't imagine if I had succumbed to my suicide attempt in college. I see clearly now the plan that God has for my life. I am here today because God kept me. I'm alive today only because of His grace.

Some may ask, why would I share something so personal? But, why not?

As a First Lady, I know the weight of appearing strong. As a Black Christian woman, it is expected that I have it all together by the standards of the world and church. I have to wear the smile, while hiding behind the mask.

But what is hidden does not get healed. And what does not heal may have a death sentence.

There are many Christians suffering in silence because of stigma, shame, and theological misunderstanding. We worry about what people may say if we seek help for our mental health,

but not what they may say if we seek treatment for high blood pressure, cancer, or heart disease. Our mental health is just as vital as our physical health.

Many are walking a tight rope with no protective barrier. They are in a dark place and cannot see a speck of light. Some are on the verge of suicide, and others cannot emotionally, spiritually, or physically hear hope. However, it is my hope and prayer that I can be that speck of light by sharing a glimpse of my story. Psalm 23 reminds us not to be afraid; even as we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (verse 4a, KJV), the Lord is with us.

Who knew that the deacon from my home church who spoke into existence that he would marry me

would become my husband of twenty-eight years? Who knew that we would have three children and a grandson? Who knew that a family member’s denial would come around thirty-four years later? God knew.

Who knew that I would be both a minister of the Gospel and the president of the Connecticut State Missionary Baptist Convention Women’s Auxiliary? God knew.

The weight did not cancel my destiny, nor did the depression disqualify my calling.

My life is in the hands of the Creator. It is a choice I made to give it away to Him and to be used by Him, for His Glory.



Dr. Derrick Jackson
President

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A close-up photograph of a woman with curly hair, looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. She is giving a thumbs-down gesture with her right hand, which has a ring on the ring finger. The background is a solid blue color.

It's All Right to **NOT** Be Okay

By Tierra Combs

Being thrust into the public view can be a jarring experience as a First Lady. Your family, decisions, and life are laid bare for all to see. You are a walking glass house that so many have access to look upon but overlook the innermost room of the house. This room is so deeply hidden that I have lost it at times—a room for us that is found only to store away, but rarely sought out to sift through. It's like grocery bag storage. You may go in to get a few bags, but never enough to clear the clutter. Then one day you open the door and there is no more room. This room holds frustration, love, joy, resentment, sharing, and many areas of ourselves that we tuck away from the public's view . . . and sometimes for good reason. We tell ourselves that we are “all right,” but I will be the first to say that there have been times when I have not been. The following is just one of many stories of my not being “all right” in my private weight as a public woman.

I have had many challenging shifts as a nurse, but there was just something different about this one. I called my husband to let him know that I would have to stay for a while and finish up some charting. As my husband pulled into the driveway after picking me up from my twelve-hour night shift, I felt different. I was trying to get out of the car, but my body would not move. My mind was trying to make me get up, but my body felt like it had sunken into the center of the earth. Looking back, I had checked out. I looked at my husband and said, “I can't move.” Naturally, he walked around to my side of the car to help me out. I was trying with all my might to move, but nothing happened. But what did happen next scared both my husband and me. I started shaking and convulsing, and was unable to speak.

My first panic attack was ensuing. My husband scooped me out of the car and proceeded into the house to help me. After I had calmed down, I just

lay there in bed . . . looking off into some space for hours—unable to communicate or move. Eventually my body gave way to exhaustion and I slept for hours. When I woke up, I knew I had reached a breaking point. Reaching over for my phone, I called my doctor and said, “I am not doing well mentally. I need to come in soon.” My next call was to my job informing them that I would not be coming in for my next shift. Usually, I would have felt guilty for this, but I was in no condition to take care of anyone at this time.

After my visit with the doctor, I was diagnosed with postpartum depression. I had experienced a few of the hallmark signs: crying, fatigue, mood swings, poor concentration, panic attacks, and anxiety. We just had our third child three months earlier, and I was secretly falling apart at the seams. There was so much going on simultaneously. This was our fifth year in marriage and at our first church. We had three children under the age of five, and work was treacherous. I worried about if people would understand, if I was a good wife and mother, or if I was losing it. I wondered how the world would view me. These were just my immediate worries, but as many of you are aware, there is much more than what we unload. And to be honest, I believe that I struggled with postpartum depression after my second childbirth. I was just too scared to call it out in fear of being ignored.

The navigation in this time of my life was rocky at best. I was figuring it out, but at the expense of my sanity. Instead of going deeper into God's ability to sustain and cover me, I leaned heavily into my own understanding. This brought more shame because how can I—the First Lady—be in this place: knowing that all of your hope and trust is rooted in God, but you haven't arrived fully in that trust? You are looked at as what a God-fearing woman should model, but never as what it takes to stand tall in that role. Your life is expected to shine all the time with

miraculous signs of faithfulness while nothing ever goes wrong. However, they often do. It reminds me of how Job felt when his friends were determined to find fault in Job for his misfortune. Instead of lifting him up and supporting him, they let their minds wander in the field of accusations. And like Job, we must face God and proclaim to Him that we are not all right and need Him desperately.

So, I had to go into the innermost room and open the door. There was so much stuff in there, but I was determined to find what I needed to get through this moment. I was in that room searching around with a flashlight that had no batteries. I was in pure survival mode. I was looking for anything to explain away this feeling that I had and remove this weight—the weight of feeling weak, sad, tired, unengaged, lack of community, and judgment for my choices. Like most, there is a certain pride in believing that you can weather the storms. We look inward for strength to endure, but we rarely lean solely on God to be the captain in our storms.

Instead of continuing my search alone, I was humbled to have God take full control. He supplied the batteries for my flashlight, held it, walked with me, and illuminated dark areas that hindered me from experiencing the fullness of His love for me. I found that the weight of expectations was heavy on me. I was trying to meet everyone's expectations of me except that of the God who fashioned me to be a showcase of His glory for all the world. I was figuring out church

relationships while navigating being a wife, mother, sister, and nurse all at once. I was not allowing development of these roles gradually due to treating them as a notch to check off a list. In a rush to accomplish, I left many areas dysfunctional, shattered, and in ill repair. If I wanted to be better, I needed to be more intentional. I saw shame in asking for help and expressing that I was not okay. God helped me verbalize out loud how I felt different and to feel less shame for taking medication to help me cope, and He gave me rest in knowing that this storm would pass.

And soon, the storm had finally passed!

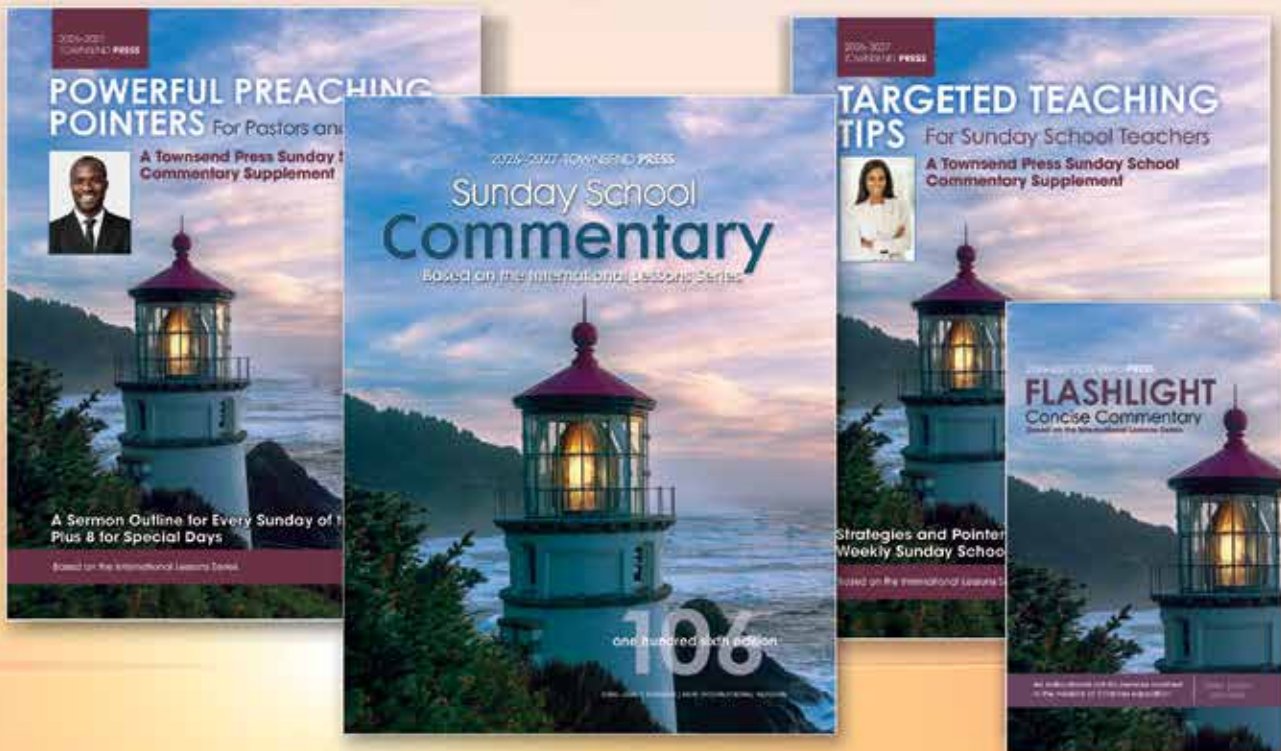
God brought me through it, but not without a few lessons to share. If you aren't feeling like your normal self, don't ignore it. It's all right to not be all right. Let's not live there. There are some places where we hide from ourselves to avoid the immediate impact. Rest assured that they will surface . . . whether you are ready or not. Take time to learn your triggers and ways to manage those feelings through worship, prayer, and Scripture. Ask God to bring fellow believers into your life who will labor with you in those moments. They will seek to hear you, even with unspoken words. God sent some amazing people to help me bear my burdens, while gently pruning areas I could not see. And, most importantly, remember that God sees and knows all about every trial you experience. I am still finding ways to show my trust in God from this experience, though I know the weight can be heavy.

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What They Don't Tell You about Self-care

By Thursday Flint

If there is one term that has catapulted into the forefront over the past six-plus years, it is self-care. As we all know by now, self-care is important for everyone. As First Ladies, we are encouraged now more than ever to take care of ourselves. Back in the day, the mantra was strictly to take care of our husbands. There wasn't much concern about taking care of ourselves, either. Thank God that times have changed.

As we are encouraged to take care of ourselves, we receive plenty of advice regarding what to do: Get some rest, go to a spa, treat yourself, etc. However, there are some things that you rarely hear about when it comes to self-care. I wish someone would have told me a few of them.

First, you may have to set boundaries. Some people won't like it. Realizing that you can't attend every event or volunteer for every project means that you must utilize that little yet powerful word—"no." I remember declining to organize a community event. My plate was already beyond capacity. I said "no," which was rare for me. It felt uncomfortable, and left me wondering what people would assume.

The word "no" seems to stop people in their tracks, especially when they're used to you always saying yes. It may be a little difficult dealing with others' feelings and assumptions in the beginning, but as human beings, we quickly adapt. What they don't tell you is that self-care may cost you your being perceived as "the bad guy" by some people—but it gives you peace.

Second, to get the most out of self-care, we are required to be real with ourselves. Sometimes, a spa day or retail therapy won't fix the issue. These are merely distractions from reality. Self-care might involve a shift in your life—a reset, purging, or breaking of old patterns and habits. For me, it was all of the above. I simply ran out of gas, was unhappy with the results, and wanted change. It's not always defined as fun, but deep reflection and self-evaluation make a lasting impact on your life moving forward.

However self-care translates for you, don't put it off. Your body, mind, and spirit will thank you!

OJ's Toolbox

By Olivia Jones

As a pastor's wife, I have learned that taking care of myself is not a luxury, downtime, or a getaway. It's a necessity for physical and spiritual survival.

First Timothy 4:8 states, "Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promised of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (NKJV).

When I'm running on almost on empty, I can't pour into others. That's why I've developed a "toolbox for self-care" that helps me stay grounded and focused, and helps keep my tools sharpened.

In this space, I'll share with you some of my self-care strategies from my Olivia Jones Toolbox (aka, "OJ's Toolbox"). My hope is that you'll find inspiration and practical tips to help you prioritize your own self-care, so that you can thrive in the role of pastor's wife and serve others with joy and love.

The tools I use include the following:

1. ***Hammer of Encouragement:*** I gently tap my heart with the Word of Wisdom to build my faith and keep me motivated.
2. ***Screwdriver of Support:*** This provides me with the right amount of support to help grip others and guide them on the right path.
3. ***Pliers of Prayer:*** This tool is calming and detangles any concerns that come with this life journey.
4. ***Tape Measurer:*** My measurements are very important because I want to feel secure in myself. As a Christian woman in this non-perfect world, measurements help me navigate life challenges and remind me that God's grace is unmeasurable.
5. ***Leveler of Compassion:*** I have learned to embrace myself with a hug of compassion daily because I am a human being, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, a great grandmother, and a pastor's wife. When you feel good, you can spotlight yourself.

An Ode to the First Lady

By Deborah Patton-Lawson

6. **Closet:** This is really my best self-care area. I sit in my comfortable wingback chair to have the best talk with God, as I undress my heart and soul to Him. I release everything to God.

7. **Tool Sharpener:** This my spiritual refreshment. I dive into my quiet time and let God recharge my battery, while I talk to myself over a good cup of hot coffee with a taste of amaretto coffee creamer. I confront all my problems and personal conflicts at my favorite restaurant while sitting at a table or booth all alone.

With this tool I am spiritually refreshed, physically renewed, emotionally charged, and ready for life's next challenge.

Taking care of yourself is not a luxury; it's a necessity. By prioritizing your physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, you'll be better equipped to serve others and fulfill your responsibilities.

Remember that you are not alone. As a pastor's wife, I've learned that self-care is not selfish; it's essential. By implementing these tools and strategies, you'll be well on your way to maintaining a healthy balance in your life.

You awaken each day clothed with automated class and sass,
Head held high no matter the task,
Ready to take on whatever comes in your path.
“Oh, I’m the First Lady, didn’t you know?
There’s no need to wonder, no need to ask.”

Here you are today,
With yet another list and challenge.
A prayer and a “Thank You, God” for starting you on your way.
You cry out for strength to stay kind and stand correct,
As you tackle the household demands, the church’s plans—
Oh, and your partner’s requests.
No problem, because “I’m the First Lady, didn’t you know?
No need to wonder, no need to even ask.”

But there seems to be a new stirring, creeping up in your soul.
It creates an itching that provokes attention.
It’s a call long overdue,
A request that incites your vigor, and disrupts your activities.
A yearning that requires you to take a real good look inside of you.
*“Have I attended to my own self-needs?
What about MY temple? MY heart? MY soul? MY mind?”*

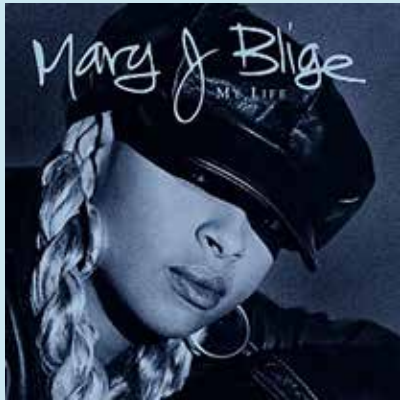
Have you made time to pamper you?
Read a new book?
Or try that new look?
You deserve to take some time to relax,
And bask in the things that matter.
You can recharge yourself with a lot of ammunition
That will help YOU to last and be steadfast.

Take time for yourself; it’s required of you;
It’s a mandated assignment to keep you healthy and whole.
For, indeed, you are the First Lady, didn’t you know?
Well-rounded and complete.
There’s NO question to be asked,
For everyone will know and be able to see.

***My Life*—Album by Mary J. Blige**

By Tracye Penn

Released on November 29, 1994, Mary J. Blige's sophomore album, *My Life*, is an album that serves as a message of reflection and healing. Although this is a hip hop/R&B musical offering, it has deep spiritual undertones.



The title track, “My Life,” provides listeners an autobiographical look into her own journey of overcoming adversity and personal turmoil. It is a song that encourages the ideas

of self-love and self-acceptance. This entire album, particularly this song, was a healing balm in my life.

This song encouraged my life at a time when—like Mary—I was on my own journey of self-reflection and discovery. It came into my life at a time when I also struggled with my own sense of worth and value.

As I listened to Mary's words, they encouraged my soul. She states, “Life can be only what you make it. When you're feeling down, you should never fake it. Say what's on your mind and you'll find in time . . . that all the negative energy, it will all decrease. And you'll be at peace with yourself. You won't really need no one else. Except for the Man up above, yeah, because He'll give you love.”

Here is the message: Life is beautiful, but every day it's a choice. We are going to always hear the noise of who we are and who we are not. We can't ignore it, but we also don't have to believe it. Be at peace with who God created you to be—because He loves you. This song helps us understand that when we allow God's love to be our center, we can then love ourselves fully and be at peace.



The Clark Sisters— “Instrument (Live)”

By Breanne Ward

The world can be loud, but the church culture can be louder. There are many roles that are echoed toward the First Lady: mentor, event planner, women's department director—and the list can go on.

The Clark Sisters use simple, gentle lyrics to remind us of our primary role, which is to be an instrument of praise. We are “sculpted and folded” into our true purpose, which is to glorify God with the totality of our bodies. We were not made to hustle, grind, or shuffle around to complete the demands and commands of others. We are to be in harmony with our Christian sisters and brothers, aligned in the heavenly gift given to us to enhance His kingdom.

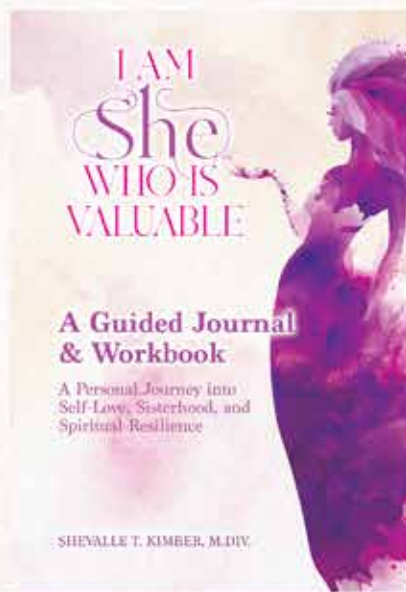
Our infinite God trusted us with His love to give to others while completing His will on Earth. The Clark Sisters harmonized the words “who am I . . .,” which can be viewed as a point of reflection. To the First Lady, when tasks and deadlines are swirling around you, think of the Great I Am . . . and, just like the Clark Sisters, you can declare that you are an instrument of praise.

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101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition

By Gwen Richardson

Review by Kimberley N. Yancy

In an era when student loan debt continues to shape the futures of young people and adult learners alike, *101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition: What It Takes to Obtain a Debt-Free College Education* by Gwen Richardson arrives as both a practical roadmap and powerful call to action. This book does more than list scholarships; it equips families, educators, churches, and community leaders with a repeatable strategy for transforming access to higher education.

Richardson demystifies the scholarship process with clarity and precision. Rather than overwhelming readers with vague encouragement or inaccessible jargon, she provides concrete tools: timelines, application strategies, documentation checklists, essay guidance, and accountability practices. The result is a guide that feels less like a reference manual and more like a coach walking alongside the reader step-by-step.

One of the book's greatest strengths is its adaptability across age groups and educational pathways. While the title speaks directly to college-bound students, the content is equally relevant for nontraditional learners, returning adults, first-generation students, and families navigating the process for the first time. Richardson repeatedly reinforces the idea that scholarships are not reserved for a select few; they are attainable for those who prepare intentionally and persist consistently.

Importantly, *101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition* is uniquely suited for workshop and group-based instruction, making it an invaluable resource for churches, nonprofit organizations, schools, and community development programs. The structure of the book naturally lends itself to a multi-session workshop model. Chapters can be broken up into weekly modules such as "Scholarship Readiness," "Building a Winning Application Packet," and "Essay Development Labs."

This allows facilitators to guide participants through the process in manageable stages.

In a church or faith-based setting, the book can support college-prep ministries or youth empowerment initiatives by pairing scholarship training with mentorship and accountability. In community workshops, facilitators can use Richardson's framework to host hands-on application days, parent-student sessions, or essay-writing boot camps. For educators and counselors, the book functions as a ready-made curriculum supplement that aligns well with college and career readiness goals.

Another notable contribution is Richardson's emphasis on "systems over luck." She reframes scholarship success as a numbers game rooted in organization, discipline, and follow-through. By encouraging students to apply broadly and consistently, she replaces fear and intimidation with confidence and momentum. This mindset shift alone has the potential to change outcomes for students who might otherwise self-select out of opportunity.

Ultimately, *101 Scholarship Applications—2026 Edition* is more than a book; it is a scalable tool for economic empowerment. Gwen Richardson has created a resource that not only informs but mobilizes. From families seeking relief from the burden of student debt to leaders committed to expanding access to education, this book is both timely and transformative. The book's first edition, published in 2015, was nominated for an NAACP Image Award.

Readers of *FirstLadydom Magazine* who serve, lead, teach, or mentor will find this guide especially valuable—not just for individual use, but as a foundation for workshops that can change lives one scholarship at a time.


Author Gwen Richardson can be reached at gwen-richardson123@gmail.com.



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Dressing the Call of First Ladies

By Kamiya L. Brewer

As a First Lady myself, I understand the nuances of the role. There is a delicate balance between visibility and humility, leadership and support, as well as tradition and individuality. We as First Ladies often navigate unspoken expectations while remaining true to ourselves. We as First Ladies are called to be approachable yet dignified, fashionable yet appropriate, and expressive yet respectful. These realities inform every design choice I make. True style, particularly for women in ministry leadership, is not rooted in trends. It is rooted in confidence and clarity. It is not about blending into the background or standing out for spectacle. It is about standing firmly in who you are and allowing that assurance to speak naturally.

When a First Lady is confident in her identity and secure in her calling, her style becomes an extension of her peace. Having served three years as First Lady at both the local and jurisdictional levels within the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), I came to the realization that my choice in dressing refined more than my leadership role. It clarified “Kamiya’s identity.” Dressing for the call became more of an

intentional act, not a performance. During my tenure as First Lady, I learned through a journey that style is not about fitting a mold, age, title, position, or expectation. It’s about alignment and purpose. Serving as a First Lady and seeing my journey through the lens of *FirstLadyDom* helped me clarify my purpose and how I want to inspire First Ladies across generations through faith and fashion.

Today, I have made a commitment to myself that I will forever be an example for all young First Ladies discovering who they are and mid-age First Ladies rediscovering themselves, showing that their confidence, faith, elegance, and inner and outer beauty can evolve without compromising who we are or how the world often holds a traditional perception of what a First Lady should look like.

Within ministry leadership, the role of a First Lady is both visible and deeply layered. We are often the emotional anchor of the house, the steady presence beside vision, and the quiet standard-bearer for excellence. Before we speak, our presence is felt in how we enter a room. Our confidence, composure, and presentation help shape the atmosphere

that others experience. For First Ladies, style is never superficial. It is intentional and purposeful. It reflects stewardship, respect, and an understanding of the sacred responsibility attached to the role. What we wear does not compete for attention, yet it communicates clarity, dignity, and assurance. Our presentation becomes an extension of our leadership—which is balanced, thoughtful, and aligned with our calling.

Throughout history, women of influence have shaped culture not by force, but by consistency and authenticity. As First Ladies, we do the same within our churches and communities. Our influence may not always be loud, but it is everlasting. We lead through example, presence, and the standards we uphold. Excellence, in this space, is not about perfection. It's about intention. Fashion—when approached with purpose—becomes a language of its own. I have always seen it as a visual expression . . . one that speaks identity, creativity, and confidence without the need for words. Clothing has the power to support how a woman feels as she steps into her responsibilities. When a woman feels aligned in her presentation, she moves differently. She stands taller. She leads with greater ease.

This understanding is the foundation of KLB Couture. KLB Couture is a faith-inspired fashion brand founded and designed by me. Created with First Ladies and women of leadership in mind, the brand is rooted in intentional design, refined elegance, and purpose-driven craftsmanship. Each piece is thoughtfully created to reflect strength, femininity, and grace while honoring the responsibilities of ministry leadership. KLB Couture believes that fashion and faith are not opposing forces, but complementary expressions of identity and calling. The brand is committed to creating garments that support confidence, presence, and individuality, allowing women to lead boldly, serve faithfully, and show up fully in every space we are called to occupy.

Each piece is created with intention, prayerful consideration, and respect for the women who will wear it. Designs are thoughtfully structured to complement movement, leadership, and presence. From tailored silhouettes to refined details, every element is chosen to support the wearer—not distract from her purpose. Couture celebrates women who lead with grace, conviction, and authenticity. The pieces are bold without

being overpowered, and refined without being restrictive. They are designed to honor femininity while supporting strength. They also allow First Ladies to show up confidently in services, conferences, celebrations, and everyday moments of leadership.

In a culture that often equates visibility with value, First Ladies continue to model a different standard. Our impact is measured not by applause, but by atmosphere. When we as First Ladies enter a room, things shift. They shift not because of what we demand, but because of who we are and what we represent. KLB Couture exists to honor that presence by dressing the calling with excellence, reverence, and intention. Through KLB Couture, I create with intention by designing original garments and custom tailoring to meet each woman's individual vision and needs for every season of her life.

For inquiries or collaborations, or to explore the collection, contact me at Ladyklbcouture@gmail.com. KLB Couture can be found at Ladyklbcouture.com.

Thank you for your support!



Reader Engagement



Dear *FirstLadyDom*,

First, I'd like to say how excited I am to be able to write to you all! I want to sincerely thank all the wonderful ladies from *FirstLadyDom: The Magazine* for being transparent and willing to open up your hearts and pour out to fellow First Ladies and other readers by writing your stories.

In reading the first issue of this magazine, I enjoyed every article in it. One article in particular resonated with me: "The Power of No," by Rev. Fannie B. Stokes. I struggle with saying no. I'm a new First Lady—only one year into my journey. This year, I've learned a lot—one of the most important lessons being that I can't do everything and be everywhere. It sounds simple to say, but when you have a strong desire to support your husband and the church while running a business, it's not always that simple.

Rev. Stokes said in her article that "learning who you are includes establishing who you are NOT." This really stood out to me. A lot of churches ask us First Ladies to introduce our husbands. I'm not great at public speaking, so my supportive husband, Preston, allows one of our deacons to do his introduction. That allows me to have my focus on directing the choir or singing a solo (which I enjoy greatly). And when I can not attend a service or ministry outing due to having to work or just being tired, it's okay. I don't have to feel guilty about my *NO*. My *NO* allows me to be who I am supposed to be in the ministry that God placed me in.

Reading *FirstLadyDom: The Magazine* gave me more of a sisterhood and took away some of the guilt for me. Some of the guilt attached to my *no* was hard, but when I can open this magazine and read that other experienced First Ladies have the same struggle, it makes me feel like I can breathe a little easier.

The contributing writers to this magazine are sharing their situations to give voice to the many First Ladies that feel like they don't have anyone with whom to share their struggle. I am looking forward to learning more, being inspired, and drawing strength from the writers of and contributors to this magazine.

We would love to hear your feedback on how this magazine has impacted you. If you have any comments, well wishes, or concerns regarding anything in this magazine, please don't hesitate to email us. Maybe you have a topic that you want to have discussed or desire to have more insight on. Let us know!

We can be reached by email at FirstLadyDom@sheville.com. Along with your comments, please leave your NAME, CHURCH, CITY, and STATE.

We can't wait to hear from you!

First Lady Chauna Tyler
Hill Street Baptist Church
Roanoke, VA



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