

timbrel

WOMEN IN CONVERSATION TOGETHER WITH GOD

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Disabilities and the Church

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Disabilities and the Church


My older brother was born with cerebral palsy, so I know some of the challenges of living in a household with a person with a disability. I also know how much people's acceptance and appreciation for the gifts of disabled persons is valued. As an adult, my brother found a church that accepted and used his gifts in ways that made all the difference in his life. Though he died at age 23, he was secure in his relationship with Christ and his faith community.

Ephesians tells us that the church is open to all God's children—no exceptions. This includes those with disabilities; therefore, if we are a community to be known by our love, we will need to be truly welcoming to those who are "other abled." It is not enough to simply say that we are open to receiving members with disabilities; we must accept these individuals as co-workers in the kingdom and use their gifts within the community. While this can sometimes be challenging, it is not impossible, and it is something to which the church is called. According to Ephesians, Christ has broken down every barrier that can keep some outside the community of faith; there are no longer any barriers to anyone being fully a part of the church.

Yet often those with a disability or with a disabled family member feel less than fully welcome in churches. This issue of *timbrel* looks at ways the church can be more inclusive in its relationship to those with disabilities, and why this is an important challenge for churches to respond to as they seek to faithfully follow Christ.

Barb Eiler writes about living with a disability herself, while Christine Guth writes about living with family members sharing a similar disability. Jayne Byler shares her struggle as a mother of a child with mental illness, and Esther Glotfelty writes about having adult children with developmental disabilities. Being a church that welcomes and supports such families in their struggles is a challenge, yet faithfully following the example of Christ in any area of life is equally challenging. Each of us is a child of God; may each live up to this high calling.

Sister Question for November–December

In preparation for the next issue of *timbrel*, which will focus on Gratitude, consider: **How do I cultivate the spiritual discipline of gratitude?** Send your response to <PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>. 



Patricia
Burdette

Cover: Barb Eiler stands on the step her church made so she could be seen by the congregation as she leads worship (See story p. 4).

Photo by Bob
Keener

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Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, is a proud mother of two teenage girls Yentli and Sara, and is happily married to Frank Albrecht. An ordained pastor, Elizabeth works at Lancaster Theological Seminary as co-ordinator of field education and consultant for their cross-cultural seminar trips.

Barb Eiler, Goshen, Indiana, graduated from Goshen College in 1969 with a BS degree in education. She is married to Phil and they have three children: Christiana (deceased), Jennifer, and Chad as well as two grandchildren. Barb loves to garden and quilt in her spare time.

Christine Guth, Goshen, Indiana, is a writer and speaker for Anabaptist Disabilities Network (<www.adnetonline.org>). She provides leadership for an Asperger-Autism support group in Goshen, Indiana, and for a group working to establish a certified clubhouse in Elkhart County for people with serious mental illness. She and her husband are parents of two young adults.

Heidi Martin, Strasburg, Pennsylvania, is a 2007 graduate of Bluffton University, Bluffton, Ohio with degrees in English Literature, Writing, and Wellness. Heidi is a freelance writer who enjoys baking and bicycle riding.

Sandra Milena Rincon, Colombia, is a psychologist graduated from the National University of Colombia. She did counseling at the university before joining CPT in 2003. Sandra has worked in Colombia, Kenora (Canada), was part of CPT's Women's delegation to the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2006, and led an exploratory trip to Uganda in 2007. She is currently the Support Coordinator for CPT Colombia.

Ruth Yellowhawk, Rapid City, South Dakota, was co-director of Indigenous Issues Forums, a group of Native facilitators dedicated to community-building practices working in collaboration with others, including the Mennonite Central Committee. She lived in the Black Hills with her husband and their son. With her husband, she enjoyed walking in the Black Hills, motorcycling, and traditional dancing.



Living with a disability

by Barb Eiler

My mother always reminded me that everyone has a handicap. Some may not be visible, but they are there. If you have children, teach them to respect people with handicaps, be helpful, don't feel sorry for them, and look at them as God's gifts, like all of God's children.

People often ask me what it is like to live with my handicap. My usual answer is that my handicap is part of my life, and I really don't know anything different. I was born with 16 fractures throughout my body that were not found until I was two weeks old. The name Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI) was then given to my situation. God gave me very special parents who believed that God had a special place for me in this world. They never believed the doctors who said I would never sit or crawl—let alone walk—in my lifetime. And at the age of 62, I am still walking and living a very full life. Yes, there are difficulties, and I often have pain, but I am so thankful for each day that God allows me to continue walking.

As a child there were times that I was “left out” of activities because my school teachers were afraid I would break a bone. I was just as willing to try new things as any “normal” child, however. One day I tried roller skating at school. I found out the hard way that roller skating would not be on my list of activities to con-



Barb Eiler pulls down the step designed and built for the podium at East Goshen Mennonite Church by Mike Greaser of Goshen, Indiana.

quer! But for the most part, I was often in the center of activities during my elementary years.

The most challenging years were during high school. I felt left out more during this time of my life than any other period. My classmates were dating and involved in things I was not a part of. I attended Bethany Christian High School, where I was often isolated

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during lunch. In those days, the cafeteria was in a building south of the main building. The eating area was upstairs, and it was not easy for me to walk up the stairs with a lunch tray. Occasionally, one of my classmates would sit downstairs with me, where the staff ate. I felt guilty asking someone to sit with me because that meant they would have to miss out on all the fun that was happening upstairs. I also had a class in that building and walking on the sidewalks in winter was often a challenge. I had to walk much more slowly, so my friends would hurry on without me. As I recall those high school days, I remember that I questioned my faith in God, but ultimately, my faith was strengthened. Since my high school years, new construction has corrected the accessibility problems I encountered while I was there.

After high school and college, I taught elementary school until I fell and broke both femurs. I was dating my future husband at that time, and he remained faithful to me during this injury, even marrying me while I was in a wheel chair! During our first year of marriage, our first daughter was born prematurely and lived only three days. That period was followed by several surgeries, until the day finally came when I was able to walk again without crutches. Our second daughter was born two years later and inherited OI from me. For me, passing on the disease was more



Phil and Barb Eiler

difficult than living with it. I often felt guilty when she would have a fracture requiring surgery or a cast. But once again, God was gracious. Jennifer accepted her handicap and has managed it in an amazing way. Rather than making me feel guilty, we are able to share our handicap together. Our son, Chad, was born two years after Jennifer and does not have OI. We are also the proud grandparents of two beautiful grandchildren.

I encourage others to look at individuals beyond their handicaps. You may be uncomfortable or unsure of what a person is capable of doing. Don't assume; rather, take the risk and ask the person if they wish to be involved.

A number of years ago, I was asked to lead worship at our congregation, East Goshen Mennonite. I did so using the standard podium for quite a few Sundays. Then someone from the congregation commented that they enjoyed my worship leading, but they were not able to see me very well, since I am only 4' 3" tall. The podium was too high for me. I was asked if I would use a small step stool when I led worship. I said that I would, and someone built a very simple stool for me to use.

Recently, East Goshen built a new sanctuary and plans for a new podium were in progress. Mike Greaser, a very gifted woodworker, was asked to make it. One day I received a call from him wanting me to come and try this new podium. To my surprise, he had put a pull-down step in the podium for me to use. He wanted to make sure it would work for me. It was wonderful! The step can be pulled down very easily when I lead worship and be replaced when a taller person is at the podium. Children can also use this step with ease. This act of helping to include me and children in our worship service has been a great gift of including shorter people in our worship service.

I encourage parents to allow their children to ask questions when they see someone who is different from them. I would prefer they ask me why I am short, or why I have a limp when I walk, rather than for them to feel I am not a real person. Adults have questions, also, and there is nothing wrong in asking the questions. If a person with a disability doesn't want to share, they can say so. My daughter is only 3' tall and drives with hand controls. She often invites children to see her sitting in her truck on a stool and will demonstrate how she can drive. Often I find people who do not have a visible disability are the ones who are embarrassed. 🗉

Horses live to run

by *Christine Guth*

Since the days of Job and the psalmists, people have been asking, “What are human beings?” I once had my own easy answer to this question—something like this description by Martha Beck: To me, being human was “the part of us that makes our brief, improbable little lives worth living: the ability to reach through our own isolation and find strength, and comfort, and warmth for and in each other. This is what human beings do. This is what we live for, the way horses live to run.” The capacity for relationship was, I thought, the most valuable aspect of human experience, and how we reflect the image of God.

My Asperger family led me to throw out all such assumptions and start over. After both our children were diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome (a condition on the autism spectrum), my husband Bob also claimed the diagnosis. Surrounded by people on the autism spectrum, I began to wonder how God’s good creation could include people with brain differences that limit ability to form relationships. What could it mean to be human when some folks cannot relate in ways that meet our expectations? I concluded in frustration that the people I love with all my heart are a completely different kind of human being, incomprehensibly “other.”

Family life was often chaotic, especially during the kids’ teen years. I felt pulled apart as sole peacemaker in a household of three people who seemed constantly in conflict and hard-wired for inability to take another’s perspective. The resulting volatile atmosphere repeatedly activated my vulnerability to depression. Two aspects of the faith community embodied God’s love to me during those tough years and inspire my ministry in the present. My studies and the faculty at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary helped me to wrestle productively with searching theological questions raised by my daily encounter with disabilities. And a few members at Eighth Street Mennonite gave tangible emotional support for getting through many a tumultuous episode. Depression



Christine and Bob Guth

Photo by Olan Mills Studio

made it hard for me to reach out for support when I needed it, so a friend coordinated a support team for me. She made sure one of the team invited me to an evening out once a week. The team was available for regular email support and carried our family in prayer.

I have had to come to terms with an absence of heartwarming moments in my marriage that match media images of being in love, but I have learned to appreciate other qualities....

This arrangement brought the presence of Christ to me in a way that was sustainable for the long haul and enabled me to share that presence with my family, however imperfectly.

Long before we had a name for it, Asperger differences were already coloring Bob's and my relationship. During our courtship, Bob and I had caused a pastoral counselor to wonder at his lack of being "in love" and to worry about our future together. For decades to follow, including the trying years I described above, I wondered too. Where was the love in this strange relationship? Now, after twenty-eight years of married life, I know that love is here, too. Though his love for me has pulverized my preconceived notions and stereotypes of love, who am I to say it does not qualify as love? Bob's version of love is marked by dogged commitment, persistence through agonizing struggles, willingness to give and take, enjoyment of companionship, and other treasured aspects of shared living.

Folks with Asperger's thrive on predictability, so their love may shine in predictable routines. Bob's commitment to spending the last half hour of every evening with me, reviewing the day's ups and downs, has, in its very reliability, breathed new life into our marriage. Likewise, I have learned that Bob values when I express my love for him predictably. When I make sure the refrigerator always holds the items he invariably carries in his lunch, he feels my care. Who says you need roses for romance? Bob finds it—and I gladly provide it each day—in romaine lettuce, unsweetened yogurt, whole wheat bread with apricot jam, and golden delicious apples.

I have had to come to terms with an absence of heartwarming moments in my marriage that match media images of being in love, but I have learned to appreciate other qualities: Bob's rock solid




Christine enjoys a relaxing moment at the ADNet office in Goshen, Ind.

Courtesy photo

commitment, unswerving integrity, and shared faith convictions and intellectual interests. I have had to give up expectations that Bob will intuitively know my needs before I can voice them. Yet as I have come to recognize and tell him what I need, Bob surprises me with how far he is willing to go to support me.

The closeness of shared emotion does emerge, albeit idiosyncratically. When I least expect it, I might catch the thrill Bob feels over weather, trains, birds, numbers, or another passionate interest. It means a lot to both of us when I can share his enthusiasm for a moment. When he calls me in to watch the news with him, we often share a tender moment as he weeps over the pain of some public figure.

What is it that people live to do, the way horses live to run? My family members on the autism spectrum show me that we dare not limit our definition of humanity to a single trait. Human beings live to share emotional closeness, yes. We also live for the thrill of learning, the comfort of daily routine, the pleasure of intellectual challenge, the joy of creating functional items and works of art, the satisfaction of analyzing and understanding systems, the pursuit of passionate interests, and more. The diversity that folks on the spectrum bring to the human race explodes our narrow “universal” pronouncements.

The richness of God’s image is greater than we understand, far greater than we imagine. These phenomenal people who think and act and love in such different ways than I do are still part of the humanity that God created, without exception, in God’s image. Our faith communities benefit when we create room for their gifts. Our world is a richer place because they share it with us. 

Resources

Books

- Carter, Erik W. *Including People with Disabilities in Faith Communities: A Guide for Service Providers, Families, and Congregations*. Baltimore: Brookes Publishing, 2007.
- Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos P, 2008.
- Vanier, Jean. *Heart of L’Arche: A Spirituality for Every Day*. Chestnut Ridge, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1995.
- Webb-Mitchell, Brett. *Dancing with Disabilities: Opening the Church to All God’s Children*. Old Hickory, TN: United Church Publishing, 1997.

Websites

- Mayo Clinic. <<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/aspersgers-syndrome/DS00551>>.

The family of God

by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht

Mark 3:31–35: Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you.” And he replied, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Imagine you are the mother or sister of Jesus as you hear these strong words from his mouth: “Who are my mother and brothers?” How would it feel to stand at the door of the house, with other people listening, as Jesus ignores your request to see him?

This text follows the earlier statement in verse 19b, “Then he went home....” Jesus has completed calling out the twelve disciples, performed several miracles, and taught around the region. Now he is in his hometown. His family is trying to be with him, to protect him from the accusations and name-calling he is already receiving. It has to be painful for Mary to hear people linking her son with Satan.

Jesus’ family is acting out of love. They arrive at the house as Jesus is teaching, and it sounds as if they are interrupting Jesus’ mission. Still, we are curious. It is unclear what Jesus really meant when he said, looking at the people around him, “Here are my mother and my brothers!” (v. 34).

An older couple recently shared how they adopted three “great-grandchildren,” children of a young, single mother in their community, and how much this means to them. They have been estranged from one of their own children for many years, with all efforts at healing the rifts rejected. At Christmas, their adopted great-granddaughter gave them a little wall hanging with the words, “Some families are made in the heart.”

Jesus formed a new family from his followers. Why did he seem to reject his biological family? Did he feel they limited his mission? Sometimes it is hard for parents to let go of growing-up children. I can hear my daughters telling me, “Mami, let me go!” We fear for their safety. We don’t want to see them get hurt.

Many have observed how the practices of early Christians

This Bible study is an excerpt from the Bible study guide by Elizabeth Soto Albrecht, Seek Peace and Pursue It: Women, Faith, and Family Care, which is available from Mennonite Publishing Network.

Seek Peace and Pursue It was developed by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada.

and even Jesus' words reflect an almost "anti-family" feeling. For example, the gospels refer to leaving family behind, not attending to duties in burying a father, etc. This could have been a criticism of the forms of family in Jesus' time.

Many of his followers were being rejected by their families, so they found a new family among the community of believers. What does it mean to be God's family? God's family should reflect healthy relationships.

Colossians 3:12 and 15 (NIV) say, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy, and dearly beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.... Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were

PONDER

1. *If you are in a church family, how is it a place of refuge and spiritual connection for you?*
2. *In what ways do you wish your church family would be the family of God?*
3. *Share stories of how church groups have welcomed others who are very different from them.*
4. *In a culture that places high priority on the nuclear family, are there ways we should limit our commitments to our nuclear family so we can be more faithful to our church family?*

called to peace." These are attitudes that characterize relationships among Christian believers. When our life offers these fruits, we are instilling "kin-dom" values in another person's life. Like a mustard seed, that love will spread. But this is possible only when our families have peace.

How does the church promote good, healthy families? Do we have a clear image of what that looks like? In the Mark text, Jesus defines the new alternative family: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (v. 35). The commitment toward transformation starts by obeying.

A church is not just four walls. It is the body of Christ and the family of God. 📖

Prayer: *Sheltering God, help us to make the church a place of refuge for those who are in need. Give us wisdom to build peace as we welcome those who are different from ourselves. Amen.*

Three Windows Three Women

Disabilities and the church



*Jessica Herschberger, 21
Shipshewana, Indiana*

Through various service organizations such as Mennonite Disabilities Committee's (MDC) Goldenrod, ADEC, and the Anabaptist Disabilities Network (ADNet), Mennonite churches are able to serve those with disabilities. Coming from a church in Northern Indiana, I worshipped alongside people with disabilities who came from Goldenrod and ADEC. People in the church would take responsibility to make sure that everyone had an opportunity to attend church. Sometimes this meant that people signed up and took turns providing transportation to and from church for those who lived in the ADEC and Goldenrod communities. The people of the church worked together to serve those with disabilities.

Other church-related institutions, such as schools like Bethany Christian High School in Goshen, Indiana, also help these organizations. For various service days, Bethany offers their students as labor to help Goldenrod with any items that need to be attended to. This not only helps the Goldenrod community, but also gives students a better understanding as to what Goldenrod is and its mission. It's a valuable way for middle and high school students to build connections to persons with disabilities.

Relationships are important to build and maintain, as they can help demonstrate a common theme that is shown through all of the disabilities organizations, which is that all people are valuable and worthwhile in the church community and the world. The Mennonite Church does a great job working with these organizations so that everyone has an equal chance at worship and attending various church-related events. 📌

*Jayne Byler, 51
Sugarcreek, Ohio*



Mental illness might be called the invisible disability. In the fall of 2005, my daughter Emily began to struggle with severe depression and anxiety. At first it was difficult to discern whether these were simply “normal adolescent” behaviors. Age 13 can be difficult under the best of situations. As she neared the end of eighth grade, she spiraled downward until she took an overdose of her antidepressants. I described it at the time as feeling like a train wreck in slow motion. I knew it was going to happen, but I was powerless to stop it. She was hospitalized for the first of more than six times over the next three years, along with four stays at a partial hospitalization program, numerous trips to a local crisis center, and five months in a residential treatment facility. Each time offered new hope. Each time also revealed the longer journey ahead to better emotional and mental health.

Along this journey, I struggled with where to take the stress of these days. I didn’t want to violate Emily’s need for privacy, yet I also knew that I was growing increasingly tired and frayed. Could the church offer a safe place of support? We both resist the stereotyping that happens to those with mental illness. This occurs even in the church. With mental illness, there is often a fair amount of blaming or “why doesn’t she just...” language. Sometimes it is seen as a sign of spiritual weakness, not as a disease.

Friends and family inside and outside the church offered words of encouragement, but it is difficult to know how to sustain the support over a long period of time. As pastor of the congregation, I was given the flexibility to give the time I needed to my daughter while often working out of waiting rooms and at home. Emily also found support in other young adults in other church communities who remain close to her today.

As of now, Emily has completed her 10th and 11th grade classwork all in one year and is ready to enter her senior year of high school. Her goal is to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner to help others who struggle.

Mental illness may be harder to see and understand, but it is no less a disability in need of the church’s grace and love than are any physical disabilities. 📌

Editor’s note: This column is a forum for women to share perspectives on the current timbrel theme. It introduces women spanning their 20’s–30’s, 40’s–50’s, and 60’s and above. If you are interested in writing for this column, please contact editor, Patricia Burdette, at <PattyB@MenoniteWomenUSA.org>.

*Esther Glotfelty, 53
Oakland, Maryland*



Many of us find it a little scary to get involved with persons who are mentally handicapped because we are not sure how they will respond. Many who are mentally handicapped cannot talk and seldom hold our cultural concept of personal space and good manners. Sometimes they seem rude and often, a little gross.

My personal involvement with people who are handicapped began about eight years ago with my growing friendship with a widower who was caring for his two adult children who are handicapped. After much prayer and soul searching, I concluded that God was calling me to become wife and mother in this special home. As an Amish woman, "marrying out" was also a significant concern for me. Tom and I have been married for seven years, and we have been very happy despite the difficulties and frustrations that go with caring for people who are handicapped. Tommy, 43, is profoundly autistic and nonverbal. He is a very gentle and private little guy. Becky, 40, suffered brain damage from arrested hydrocephalus when she was about 18 months old. This left her without speech and impaired her hearing and coordination, but her sunny disposition shines through. We hire staff to help with their care, but the main responsibility and burden is ours.

Having family members with disabilities tends to isolate us, and keeps us from participating in many church activities. But do we tend to be too protective of our children? Perhaps we are too quick to shield others from our children's disconcerting behaviors. Our feelings of isolation may be caused more by our own attitude than by that of other people. But the weariness that comes with the day-to-day challenges of living with people who are handicapped often makes it easier to just stay home.

Our greatest concern is for Tommy and Becky's future. If they outlive us, will they end up in the secular system to be cared for? Our constant prayer is for God to provide a way for them to be able to stay here in their home with caregivers who will maintain the Christian environment to which they are accustomed. For now, we are stymied by the "separation of church and state" attitude of the Maryland state system and their lack of sufficient funding. 📌

Grapevine

Finding ways to include

by Carol Roth, Native Mennonite Ministries Representative,
Mennonite Women USA

“Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue” (*The Message* Luke 15:4–7).

As the mother of a child with spina bifida, I like to think about this scripture from a disabilities-and-the-church perspective. Suppose a church welcomes and includes all people—except the disabled. Would such a church change to include the disabled, giving the disabled an active role in worship or other roles in the congregation? Would they seek out the disabled and truly make them welcomed and fully accepted in the congregation?

It is important for *timbrel* to address the issue of disabilities and the church because disabilities are commonly seen in our congregations today, and it is important for our churches to be inclusive and welcoming to all God’s children. Perhaps this issue of *timbrel* can encourage others to advocate for ways to be more welcoming in their congregations, or to be more supportive of those having disabilities. ☑

Fall Sister Care Seminar Dates

October 8–9 Evergreen Heights Mennonite Church, Caldwell, Idaho

October 15–16 Salem Mennonite Church, Salem, Oregon

October 22–23 Menno Mennonite Church, Ritzville, Washington

November 5–6 East Union Mennonite Church, Kalona, Iowa

For registration information e-mail office@mennonitewomenusa.org



Carol Roth

MW USA Mission and Vision:

Our mission at Mennonite Women USA is to empower women and women's groups as we nurture our life in Christ through studying the Bible, using our gifts, hearing each other, and engaging in mission and service.

Mennonite Women USA invites women across generations, cultures, and places to share and honor our stories, care for each other, and express our prophetic voice boldly as we seek to follow Christ.

Across the Border

“Is there somebody who can help me?”

by *Sandra Milena Rincon*

Some weeks ago while I was trying to sleep, I heard a loud noise outside my house, the voice of a woman pleading to her partner—a man—to leave her alone. Although I could not understand the details or the cause of their discussion, I noted the fear and the anger in her voice. She only wanted to be alone. However, every moment she repeated her request he pushed her against the fence outside my house, restraining her movement. She cried out in a loud voice, “Is there somebody who can help me?” Her partner replied, “No. Nobody will help you, because you are my wife and what is happening here is only our business.”

That answer went deep into my heart. “Nobody, Nobody...” I was reminded of the vulnerable situation all of us women are in. How many times have you experienced or heard tell of this type of situation? I’m guessing a number of times.

When the woman’s partner asserted he had the power and control over her, my heart and body trembled. The police came to check out the situation; finding she was okay, they left. But the entire neighborhood heard the fight continue, heard a child crying, and then two terrible sounds, that led us to think she was shot. Silence. Next day, I was able to see her. Her body was fine; I do not know about her soul. Nobody talked about that terrible night—maybe one of many—and life goes on.

We are affected by violence in many ways, not only physical, but also economical, social-political, emotional, sexual, psychological, etc. These types of violence are perpetuated by the patriarchal systems that control education, culture, religion, politics and armed violence. This violence lives in the bodies of women and men.

I could share with you experiences of how women are victims of sexual violence. Sexual violence destroys society, but it is dif-

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the official position of Mennonite Women USA or the board for Mennonite Women USA.

Across the Ocean

difficult to control because this invades “the man’s territory.” I have heard the same stories in Colombia, Uganda, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, and many more places. You have also read these stories in newspapers, and women and human rights organizations report on them often through alternative media. Often, you hear about the high level of domestic violence where women are victims and, at times, are killed. You can read statistics everywhere. Violence is closer than you can imagine. It is not something that only happens in countries in conflict like Colombia; domestic violence happens in your own small communities. Violence against women, whatever the type and wherever the region, is common and considered “normal.”

For how long will we women continue in silence? Speaking out makes a difference, even if it is risky. For example, a group of women named Popular Women’s Organization, with a grassroots network of 3,000 women around Colombia, talks against war, poverty, and violence and in favor of peace, dignity, solidarity, and women’s rights. Women from churches are also engaged in supporting women and are challenging the church to become a safe space for women. Also, I have seen the work of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian women struggling to have a better life with better conditions for themselves and their families—challenging the racism in the system.

Women rise every day with energy to continue their lives in the midst of difficult conditions everywhere in the world, including your neighborhood and mine. I do not have any doubt in our strength to make a difference, but I think it is important we don’t do this work alone.

Very recently I heard that the husband of a woman who attends church almost killed her; she was trying to run away from many years of emotional and psychological abuse. Fearing what could happen, I need to move from my comfort zone. I want to let her know she is not alone; there is somebody who can help her. 📌



An Indigenous woman from Democratic Republic of Congo gives her testimony to Christian Peacemaker Teams' Women's Delegation in 2006.

Courtesy photo

Letters

From Ruth

Dearest friends, I have asked my son to write this. Your love, compassion, friendship, and focus mean everything to our family. We are walking together. I've been diagnosed with stage IV metastatic lung cancer which has spread to my brain, adrenals, back....This is my first day off from hospitals, tests, surgery, etc. and so—the big email. I'll be able to return emails and calls soon.



My spirit is soaring with that beautiful whoosh of love and compassion that the universe sends when you are ready to receive. Each one of your cards, green energy, music benefits, fundraisers, letters, gifts of music, art, poetry, healing songs, ceremony, and prayer has meant more than words have the ability to express. Thank you! Thank you! Mitakuye Oyasin! Ske:non! Much love, your friend, Ruth. *Ruth Yellowhawk, Rapid City, South Dakota, June 19, 2010.*

Editor's note: Ruth passed away at home surrounded by her loved ones on August 7, 2010. Cards and letters to Ruth's husband, Jim, and son, Gabe, can be sent to 23213 Black Forest Place, Rapid City, SD 57702-6055.

Ways we are invitational

Here are some actions taken by our congregation, Lititz Mennonite, to accommodate persons with disabilities:

- A child was born with a physical handicap, so the congregation installed an elevator. Senior attendees and others now have access to three levels of the building.
- To accommodate persons with diabetes we make an effort to have sugarless desserts available (and label them) at fellowship meals and social functions.
- To accommodate persons who are vegetarians we provide meatless soups along with the regular chili and soups.
- When celebrating communion we have some cups filled with water along with the others filled with grape juice.



- For those with allergies or who have fragrance sensitivities we provided pamphlets to make others aware of problems caused by scented sprays, colognes and other scented body lotions. When displaying floral arrangements, we eliminate flowers that send off a strong fragrance. At Christmas, we use permanent greens in the decorations.
- Instead of natural candles, we use battery-powered ones. These do not burn oxygen from the air. *Rhoda Oberholtzer, Lititz, Pennsylvania.*

Using everyone's gifts

I'm new at First Mennonite Church in Lincoln (two months), so this is a work in progress. Here's a small congregation (maybe a hundred for Sunday worship) that has done something right. I count:

- at least three with visual disabilities, one of whom is in church leadership;
- a rotation of people who offer rides to the five-or-so folks who don't drive;
- an accessible building—except that the main entrance doors are so, so heavy (but I guess that can be worked on);
- the children's story given by an artist, a person with developmentally disabled hands, emphasizing "use your gifts."



Some days I'm helped by using a cane, and at First Mennonite I feel completely at ease. *Muriel T. Stackley, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

Where are those with disabilities?

One response I have to how the church affirms those with disabilities is that I am always disappointed when I don't see folks with disabilities present, welcomed, and engaged in congregations. Their absence should be noted and wondered about by church leadership.

A second "best practice" I have seen is when my husband used to print out and make available his sermons prior to worship on Sunday morning so that a deaf youth was able to read along. Of course, now, that would be even easier with email, podcasts, web access, and more. *Marlene Bogard, North Newton, Kansas.* 🗣️



We welcome your letters about our content or about issues facing women in the church. Please keep letters brief. We reserve the right to edit for length and clarity. Publication is subject to space limitations. Send to <PattyB@mennonitewomenUSA.org> or mail to timbrel Editorial Office at 17827 Carson Road Butler, OH 44822-9427.

A book for all

by Heidi Martin



Most likely, we all agree that the church is not perfect. Without a doubt, limitations exist within our congregations. This is only natural, as each individual who makes up the church is also limited and imperfect. Though difficult to admit both our individual and common weaknesses, I am thankful that *timbrel's* readers are open to these healthy, though sometimes thorny, conversations.

But let us also remember the beautiful gifts that our churches offer. I am often amazed by the stewardship of the Mennonite Church in particular. Individuals and families pay close attention to how they use resources, time and money. Caring for homes and families is also a priority. As an outgrowth of this ability, people within the Mennonite community are quick to open their doors to friends and strangers alike. A Sunday afternoon is not complete without a phone call or visitor. Of course, the visit is not complete without a shared meal or snack. Yes, hearty, satisfying food is another gift within the Mennonite Church.

Mary Clemens Meyer and Susanna Meyer, a mother-daughter team, compiled a book honoring the tradition of food. *Saving the Seasons: How to Can, Freeze, or Dry Almost Anything* is colorful, informative, well-organized, inspirational, and nestles comfortably on the kitchen shelf beside *Simply in Season: A World Community Cookbook*.

I found it easy to open the cover of *Saving the Seasons* and was surprised how quickly an hour passed. The book invites one to sit down and read in a variety of ways. For example, the book might be read from cover to cover like a novel or as a sequel to *Simply in Season*. It could be read like a magazine on travel or gardening, where people pick and choose

the topics that interest them. Flipping through the book to read the points of interest in the margins is like reading a series of vignettes.

Susanna and
Mary Meyer

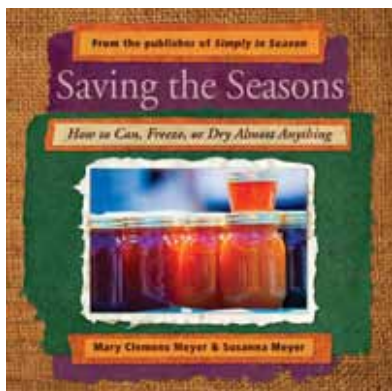


The pictures, too, are alluring and allow one to enjoy the book as a favorite childhood picture book.

The 208 pages are divided into three sections, one each for canning, freezing, and drying. Each section introduces the topic, describes the process and gives recipes for various fruits, vegetables, herbs, and meats. My favorite section is the "Guide to the Harvest" which lists fruits and vegetables in alphabetical order, gives a description of the food, time of harvest, and recommended preserving method.

Another reason the book is so pleasurable is that it appeals to all ages and applies to all levels of abilities.

Whether you are a pupil or professional in the kitchen, this book has much to offer. Step-by-step instructions, practical advice, old traditions and new recipes combine within the pages of this book to enhance our abilities in the kitchen. This book is a gift which encourages us to use our gifts, whether food-related or otherwise, within our homes, the church, and the world. 📖



New from Herald Press



Saving the Seasons

How to Can, Freeze, or Dry Almost Anything
Written by **Mary Clemens Meyer** and
Susanna Meyer, *Saving The Seasons* will help
you enjoy the season's bounty all year long!

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www.mpn.net/savingtheseasons

Stirrings

Response to Sister Question:

Editor's note: Each issue, we print responses to our Sister Question. The question for July–August was: How does my church affirm those with disabilities?

Connie Lapp, Akron, Pennsylvania responded: My husband and I are members of Akron Mennonite Church in Akron, Pennsylvania. The physical church building meets standards for disabilities with handicap parking, ramps, railings, etc. Anyone with a disability would feel welcomed into this church family. The pastoral team visited with me and family members regularly while I recuperated in the hospital and at home. A whole brigade of volunteers was organized to provide meals, transportation to appointments, and therapy for several weeks. I know the congregation held me in their thoughts and prayers during my hospitalization and continued recuperation at home. (See also p. 23).

Mabel V. Brunk, Goshen, Indiana, responded: College Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana, provides transportation for several members who live in Merimna Homes, group housing for disabled persons. They come on the 7:30 AM bus in order to practice with the bell-ringers group. Some attend their own Sunday school class. Others are welcomed as members of one of the adult classes and participate in their socials.

An expansion to the church building included an elevator for access by a wheelchair-user needing to get to the basement youth rooms. In addition, members fluent in sign language assist during the children's time in worship and in the Sunday school classes for two who are hearing-impaired. ☑



Mabel V. Brunk

Cup of Water

"And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward"
(Matthew 10:42).

Help for Haitians. "I cry a lot more now. My husband is dead; and without legs, I can't do anything to support my family." This woman and many others present at a recent gathering in Port-au-Prince told their stories to both TV and radio stations. Christian Development Movement (CDM) organized this event with help from Mennonite Central Committee. The need for prostheses and financial help to start businesses was a common theme.

The director of CDM described this as "a little drop in the ocean, but we know God is with us and will change our efforts into a source of blessing." **To donate to MCC in support of this project send checks to MCC Haiti, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.** ☑

ON THE ROAD WITH RHODA

A gift of story— “The only thing holding me back is me”

A year ago I visited with Connie Lapp at the Mennonite Central Committee Material Resource Center in Ephrata, Pennsylvania. As I shared with her about the ministry of Mennonite Women USA, she told me how her life radically changed after experiencing unexpected acute sepsis. Connie offered to share her story with timbrel readers, and how the church responded to her sudden disability (See Sister Question, p. 22). Thank you, Connie.—Rhoda

Connie writes: “I went to bed on a Friday night in February 2005 after a busy week in the Quilt Room, with no idea of what would transpire in the next few hours. Sometime during the night, I woke up with severe stomach upset. As time passed, I kept getting sicker and weaker; at some point the sickness took over.

“The next thing I remember was my son’s voice, ‘Help is on the way. Hang in there, Mom.’ Since my husband travels for his job and my children live on their own, I was alone that weekend. I always pick up my mother-in-law for church, and when I didn’t show up on Sunday morning or answer the phone, her intuition told her something was wrong. She and my son found me in an unresponsive state, barely alive. At the hospital I was diagnosed with acute sepsis.

“Sepsis is an aggressive and potentially life-threatening bacterial infection in the blood stream. It can lead to septic shock, which eventually causes multi-organ failure and loss of blood pressure. The diminished blood flow leads to tissue death or gangrene. After 11 weeks in the hospital, I recovered from the sepsis and from the surgeries to amputate both legs below the knee and four fingers from my right hand. How I contracted sepsis is still a mystery.

“My illness and amputations were traumatic and life-changing, to say the least. My surgeon assured me that I would be amazed at how far prosthetic technology has come and that I would be able to do most everything I did before. The physical therapist told me, ‘The only thing holding you back will be you.’ I now work full time, drive a car, and ride a tandem bike with my husband.” 📷

—Connie Lapp



Rhoda Keener is executive director of Mennonite Women USA. Contact her at 5207 Heisey Road, Shippensburg, PA 17257-9242; 717-532-9723; <RhodaK@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>.



Connie Lapp



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New MW USA Board Member



Rhoda Charles

Rhoda Charles, MW USA board vice president, and her husband, Jonathan, live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where they attend Habecker Mennonite Church. Rhoda has served as president of Lancaster Conference Mennonite Women for six years. Rhoda and Jonathan have three sons, all married, and one granddaughter. Together they own and operate a home-based photography studio. Rhoda enjoys baking bread, walking, biking tandem with her husband, and knitting prayer shawls.

Mennonite Women USA currently has a board opening for Central States Representative. Upcoming openings in 2011 will be for Editorial Advisory Council Representative, West Coast Representative, and Secretary. Please send recommendations (or nominate yourself) before Nov. 1, 2010, by sending contact information to Rhoda Charles, 3033 Marietta Ave., Lancaster, PA 17601-1321 or email the information to <jorhcharles@gmail.com>. 📧

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