



Young Women and the Church

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Young Women and the Church



Patricia Burdette

Cover: Rachel Halder is treated to a special birthday celebration with the young women in her class (see story page 4).

Courtesy photo

All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Recently, it seems I have heard many older women lament the absence of young women in their Mennonite churches. While I recognize that age is a relative concept (I once thought those over 25 were no longer young women), I think the older women were wondering why single young women out of high school and college as well as young married women and young mothers are missing. In many churches there seems to be a generation missing.

I know young women are busy—I still remember the days of caring for five children while working and going to graduate school. It can be overwhelming at times as it seems there are never enough hours in the day to care for family and to be a conscientious worker and student at the same time.

Yet, when I talk to women under 40 about church, whether they are actively involved in their church or no longer attending church, I sense there is something deeper going on in their spiritual lives. And I am concerned about the spiritual development of their children or future children. I question whether the church has missed something in passing the faith from one generation to the next.

In this issue of *timbrel*, several young women under 40 share their thoughts on this very subject. Each of them is involved and actively committed to her church, but also understands why many other young women are not. Rachel Halder's cross-cultural experiences have given her a new model of women in the church. Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg is a young mother who has served as a youth pastor; she sees the model being used in church as being off the mark for young women. In addition, Noelia Fox tells her story of sharing the gospel with young women in a different culture.

The first-ever summer intern for *timbrel* magazine, Goshen College student Mary C. Roth, writes about the Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference in "Grapevine."

Sister Question for September–October

In preparation for the next issue of *timbrel*, which will focus on Global Sisters, consider: **How do our global sisters enrich our own lives as well as enrich the life of the church?** Send your response to <PattyB@Mennonite-WomenUSA.org>. 📧

timbrel is the official publication of Mennonite Women USA, a ministry of Mennonite Church USA. *timbrel* provides a place for women to share diverse perspectives and stories and express our prophetic voice as we seek to follow Christ.

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

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Young women and the church

by *Rachel Halder*

I attended the same Mennonite church until the age of 18, then went to Goshen College, and inconsistently attended a random assortment of churches. I cannot speak for others, but I do know that I am a young woman attempting to redefine her faith and hoping to remain in the Mennonite church. However, within the church I don't always feel my beliefs, needs, or desires are actively met.

By attending a Mennonite college I was fortunate to meet wonderful young women peers who became kindred spirits. We were able to honestly voice our opinions, discouragements, and frustrations with the Christian church, while at the same time remaining open to positively explore Christianity and what it means for our personal development. It was an important step on each of our unique journeys, and through this we maintained sight of our belief and moral systems. One important issue close to my heart is that I believe the Mennonite church should mentor and call more

I wish young women were given space to tell their stories, and where older women in the church would reciprocate with their stories.

young women into leadership positions.

Through Mennonite Central Committee's SALT (Serving and Learning Together) program. I've spent the past 11 months in Indonesia volunteering at an organization called P3W (pronounced pay-teega-way), which stands for *Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Wanita* (Center for Women's Training and Development). P3W is a branch of a local Papuan church denomination called GKI TP, or *Kristen Injili di Tanah Papua* (Evangelical Christian Church in the Land of Papua), and is partially funded by the GKI Synod.

Living in Indonesia, a largely patriarchal and predominantly Muslim society, and overall more "conservative" than the United

States, I've found myself in a church that embraces and encourages women's leadership. Although I am frustrated with the way women are treated in the larger society, I find myself rejoicing at the strength of women within my church community.

I noticed the vigor of women in leadership within the first month of being in Papua, when every Sunday there was a new female pastor preaching at our church. Several months later, I started meeting with students from the GKI seminary. By forming friendships with students, I learned that the percentage of women students at the seminary is, in fact, greater than the male percentage. Part of the students' theology courses include classes on gender and the Bible, and many students have the perspective that God creates all people with gifts, and those gifts should be used in whatever capacity, regardless of gender.

My host sister, Christine Mawene, completed pastoral training and theology school. I was blessed to attend her ordination ceremony. Once again I was astounded by the fact that the ceremony was led by the Synod head of the GKI church, a woman, and not only that, but 6 of the 10 ordinands were women.

My wonderful host mother, Ibu Meri, is so strong and filled with limitless drive for the church that I equate her with the energizer bunny. She is a *majelis* (similar to an elder in our churches) at the local GKI church, the treasurer, in charge of Sunday school organization, and is involved in neighborhood prayer meetings daily. It appears she holds the church together, and she does many things thought of as "a man's work."

My workplace, P3W, is an organization of women working for women to strengthen the church and make Papua a better place. The GKI church knows that by educating village women—in literacy, creating crafts to sell, nutrition, and large quantity cooking—they also strengthen their church presence in the rural and somewhat isolated communities. They not only instill ideas of human rights in the lives of Papuans, but also embrace women who aren't normally encouraged, helping them to discover gifts with which God has blessed them.

How can this be? How does the GKI church in a predominately patriarchal society support young women more than the Mennonite Church in the US? In some ways it is so exciting to experience this vast presence of women in the church, yet at the



The ordination of Christine Mawene (right) at a GKI TP church in Merauke, Papua. The GKI TP Synod Head, Pdt. Jemima J. Mirino-Krey, STh, hands Christine a Bible.

Courtesy photo

same time I'm continually challenged by the pain I experience that women aren't always encouraged to become pastors or leaders of the Mennonite Church.

I wonder why we don't have something similar to P3W in the

Mennonite Church—a women's center focused on educating the church on gender issues. Why do men hold most top-level institutional church positions? Why do we have such a small percentage of female pastors? And why do some current female pastors have to justify their positions?

But this is far from a hopeless situation. Studying gender within the church context can be a scary thing for some Mennonites and some churches.

It can create conflict. Yet I think

through open and safe spaces constructed in our churches, such as educational opportunities through small group discussion or speakers, we can learn about gender together and become stronger Christians within the Mennonite church.

I wish there were open spaces similar to the way P3W is structured for women to express their frustrations, ask questions, and brainstorm ideas with openness for learning opportunities. I wish young women were given space to tell their stories and where older women in the church would reciprocate with their stories. I dream of a church where youth and young adults receive real support and affirmation, regardless of whether they espouse the Sunday school line. I wish all young people could feel comfortable in their own skin, and receive encouragement to seek out leadership roles in the church.

How do we examine the social structures that influence how the church operates and power imbalances in general, but particularly between men and women? How can we raise conscious awareness of gender inequality within our church leadership positions?

As I observe and participate in the GKI church, the opportunities for women have enriched the larger church community. The Mennonite church has the capacity to seek opportunities to improve young female leadership, and in doing so, to deepen the kingdom of God, and to bring us together as women and men with unique gifts used to serve God's mission in our world. 📌



Rachel Halder teaching a craft class to the girls who come to P3W from surrounding villages. Halder teaches once a week for about two hours. The girls have made picture frames, sun catchers, and paper flowers. In this photo they are making paper dolls and clothes for the dolls.

Courtesy photo

A one-dimensional faith in a multi-dimensional world

by Jessica Schrock-Ringenberg

Something is disjointed in the church. Now, I recognize that it is presumptuous for me to suggest that I know why young adults are leaving the church by the masses. It should be noted that I do not know how to get them back, since in my first (and most recent) pastorate I had young adult ministry responsibilities, in which I failed miserably. This being said, my credibility on the subject may land solely on the fact that, for the moment, I happen to be a young adult, and I am familiar with the stories of many young adults' experiences with the church. These experiences are not necessarily negative, but they do tend to be...disjointed.

Last month I had the opportunity to be camp pastor for a week. The theme of camp was "BIG BIG GOD" and my job was to explain how "BIG" God is and how "BIG" God's love for us is by using the stories from Genesis. As I prepared, I wanted to find more examples of God's "BIG BIG LOVE" in the lives of women in Genesis, but it quickly occurred to me how few stories of women were appropriate to share with young people at camp. In fact, I realized how few stories of women were appropriate to share with young people at church! At what age is it appropriate to tell biblical stories of concubinage, prostitution, rape, and dismemberment?

Then it occurred to me: we don't tell these stories. In fact, we try to stay as far away from the immoral, confusing stories as we possibly can, and we try to keep our children even farther away than that! Now I do not advocate using the Levite's concubine story in Judges 19 as next week's children's story, but I do want to point out the church's penchant for keeping all of our lessons G-rated.

We are far too comfortable presenting young people with a one-dimensional faith, knowing full well that each of us in the church has failed and is failing at that one dimension. We begin



The Rape of Dinah (Genesis 34). A Painting by Bugiardini, 1531. This is one of many stories of Biblical women that are inappropriate for Sunday school discussion, despite the fact that sexual assault is all too common today.

teaching young children about God's "BIG BIG LOVE" and we end teaching teenagers "JUST SAY NO (or else)." Yet, just as the biblical stories of the faithful are inappropriate to share at times, so are the lives of many of our young and active "church kids."

At the Columbus Mennonite Church USA convention in 2009, I taught the "Sex and the Single Female Seminar." In that seminar I committed myself to honesty and a non-judgmental atmosphere. Following each seminar I had droves of young high school girls wanting to talk about their past sexual experiences—while at the

same time I received many complaints from adult sponsors because they felt as though I was teaching students new and inappropriate information. Yes, I taught some students new information—but there were students present who had already crossed that line long ago and didn't know that they could possibly come back. Do we as a church only speak to those who are innocent? Are the others lost forever?

We in the church have a habit of thinking that simply addressing a controversial sub-

ject is somehow condoning the subject. We need to consider what happens when young people leave for college and realize that the world does not operate in the black and white biblical narratives of God's "BIG BIG LOVE" and "JUST SAY NO (or else)." In fact, the world we live in more often mirrors the inappropriate biblical stories that we try to stay away from because they are wicked and confusing. Consequently the relevance of the church becomes disjointed from the real world young people live in.

We need to stop being afraid that we are teaching our young people something they don't already know, because they are going to find out, and it is better coming from the church than from all the sources that are eagerly waiting to inform them. We need to give young people a paradigm to deal with the immoral and confusing stories of life. We, as a church, need to stop being afraid of our own spots and wrinkles. How can we have credibility with young adults if we continue to live in denial of our imperfections



Rembrandt's painting, Judah and Tamar, ca. 1650–1660, is yet another example of a Biblical woman's story that is inappropriate for Sunday school.

and our failures? Being real is not condoning an unfaithful lifestyle; rather it is an attempt to bridge the disjointed gap between God's "BIG BIG LOVE" and the evil, confusing stories that we call life. 📖

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Resources

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Reclaim childlikeness

by Terri J. Plank Brenneman

Mark 10:13–16

In the Gospels, stories abound of women and men flocking to Jesus to be touched and healed, to be freed from demons, to be blessed and made whole. When some bring children for Jesus to touch, the disciples scold them and seek to send the children away. The ministry of Jesus is serious business, for adults only, they believe. Jesus, indignant at this action, welcomes the children, holds them, and blesses them. He tells the adults they must become like little children to receive and enter the kingdom of God.

During most of my life, I have identified with the scolding disciples in this passage more than with Jesus or the little children. Following the rules, doing what's right, not interrupting or putting others out—these were values I learned growing up. The scolding disciples' voices are alive and well in my head: "Don't interrupt," "Don't put yourself forward," "Don't cause a commotion," "Be seen but not heard." On and on the critical voices continue, especially if I'm getting too excited about anything.

As little children we are curious, open, accepting, exuberant and maybe reticent, exploring and engaging our world. Through learning how to behave in our families, school, and church, we curb much of our free-spirited nature. For women, this occurs most profoundly around the age of nine years. "Sit up straight," "Keep your legs together," "Use your 'inside' voice," "Don't romp around like a wild animal," are messages we internalize. While maturity and manners are good things, we sometimes confuse training and restraint with cutting off and extinguishing vital parts of our being. The critical voice gains strength over the free-wheeling exploration and excitement of the child.

Attending to our childlikeness grants us the ability to enter the kingdom of God. Further, it can serve to quiet the scolding, critical internal voice. From a psychological perspective, the critical voice carries the corrections, limitations, and sometimes even abuses, that we received from caregivers and others throughout our lives. The critical voice attempts to keep us from getting into trouble, from experiencing the shame or disturbance caused by our wrong-doing. That is the positive role. However,



*This Bible study is an excerpt from the Bible study guide by Terri J. Plank Brenneman, **Wonderfully Made: Women, Faith, and Self-Care**, which is available from the Mennonite Women USA office and from Mennonite Media.*

Wonderfully Made was developed by Mennonite Women USA and Mennonite Women Canada.

there is a downside. Too much criticism results in squelched energy, enthusiasm, and genuine creativity. Joy can turn into fear, curiosity into inhibition, dancing into tapping toes.

John, in his first letter, talks about the breadth and depth of God's love for us, God's children. As the beloved of God, he states, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18a). Feeling loved and valued by God, by others, and by ourselves leads us to a sense of serenity and security that promotes self-worth. Self-worth, in turn, helps us approach our work, our relationships, our caregiving, and our worship with a greater sense of well-being. We are more confident. We are more joyful. We dance. Our cup is full and runs over as we engage the world. 🍷

PONDER

- 1. Jesus invites us to receive the kingdom of God as a little child. What does this mean for us? How do we reconnect with the child within?*
- 2. What messages did you hear growing up that now inhibit you as an adult? What do the scolding disciples in your head say to keep you from going after what you want?*
- 3. Describe a time you felt valued, loved, and accepted with warmth and welcoming, either by others or by God. How did this affect your outlook on life? Your actions in the world?*

Pray: *Lord, help us to become like little children in our exuberance and excitement to be blessed by you. Help us to seek you and your kingdom with wonder and awe, with the confidence of knowing we are loved, valued, and welcomed. Help us to love others and ourselves with this same freedom and abandonment, restoring joy and well-being. May it be so.*

Three Windows Three Women

Young women and the church

*Anna Yoder, 24
Asheville, North Carolina*



A giant, old metal contraption has sat in my parents' basement for years. Growing up, this "thing" remained a mystery to me. We never used it, but we never got rid of it either.

On a recent visit to my parent's house, I walked into the kitchen and found the rustic rusty thing sitting on the counter. This ancient piece of equipment actually turned out to be an old bread maker that my father inherited from his mother. She was a tiny farmer's wife who used the beast weekly to crank out multiple loaves of bread. Now, years later, none of us knew how to use it. Ambitious by nature, we all attempted to bring the old bread machine back to life; we all failed miserably.

Often, I find myself thinking about this bread machine and my deep desire to be a woman who makes her own bread, cans her produce, and generally tries to live in shalom with everything around her. Even though this may seem very "home-maker-ish," I believe it stems from the notion that Jesus came to teach us how to live. If Christ is the center of my life, then that changes everything, including how I spend my money, what food I eat, and where it comes from.

Obviously, all these things are privileges, but as I see young women all around me (and young men, too, praise God) harnessing the skills that were second nature to their grandmothers, I am encouraged to keep trying to follow Christ in this fashion.

I see this desperate desire to rediscover an authentic version of life most prevalent in my own generation. We seek a life that does not limit Christianity to just a "high church experience" but one that re-imagines what being the church truly means. More and more we are leaving the stale spiritual rituals

in the pews and trying to get back to authentic community. Faith is beginning to look different. It is constantly being reshaped by the day-to-day challenges of trying to follow Jesus, where faith lessons can be found in unlikely places, like a rusty, old bread machine. 📷

*Maria Paff, 29
Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania*

In the church where I grew up, I did not have many—if any—other girls who were my age. I didn't have a group of "church friends" who I could run around with during the coffee hour or rush to sit together with in Sunday school. During those turbulent middle school years, church failed to excite me, especially the thought of sitting through Sunday school lessons while the eight boys in my class threw pencils and decided it was their mission to be on their worst behavior.

Looking back now, I sometimes wonder why I still enjoy going back to my home congregation. Two things come to mind: 1) the members of my church created a supportive community, and 2) that community openly welcomed my participation in the church.

Despite not having a strong connection with other people my age, I realize now that my church community nurtured my musical gifts and talents. Ever since I can remember, I was able to use those gifts in the worship setting—whether it was through involvement with Vacation Bible School, worship band, Christmas plays or Sunday morning services.

Developing these gifts would not have happened without the special people in my congregation. I formed meaningful friendships with men and women representing several different generations; some were my parents' age, and some were even my grandparents' age. Now, many years later, members of my home congregation are still the people I most enjoy talking with. They are my "church friends."

As an adult, I've found meaningful ways to share my gifts in other church contexts. But the best part is that each time I visit home, these friends welcome me back. They give me a place where I feel grounded, where I know my gifts are valued and where my faith is nurtured. 📷



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>.



*Rachel Thalmann, 33
Haven, Kansas*

I love church. Not necessarily the physical structure itself; not “a” church, but the kind of church that happens when two or more are gathered together and Jesus is in the midst of them. The kind of church that is anytime, anyplace. “The” church.

During my last year of college, God provided a spiritual mother who taught me the necessity of putting childish ways behind me (I Corinthians 13:11). This spiritual mom has been the church on so many occasions that I no longer think of the church as a place complete with plumbing, electricity, pews, and a pulpit. It’s a place where an older woman takes the hands of a younger woman and ministers to her—in an apartment, in a restaurant, in the car, on a walk.

The church introduced me, as a young woman, to Jesus in a booth over fiesta lime chicken. In a green van on a summer day, the church taught this young woman how to pray to a heavenly father. The church provided unconditional love for this young woman to believe that God is love, just like the Bible says. The church exposed a sinful heart in the most loving way possible for this young woman to understand how God pardons that sin and casts it as far from us as the east is from the west. The church put me on a path that became life-changing and life-giving. No matter which building I happen to be worshipping in, I can find the same Jesus who joined me in a meal with a friend.

Suffice it to say, there are more young women, with wonderful birth mothers, who need wonderful spiritual mothers. Find them. Meet them. Love them. And then take them for a walk. Furthering the kingdom depends on these moments in the church. 📌

***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.

Grapevine

Two hundred meet in New Jersey at Hispanic Mennonite Women's conference

by Mary C. Roth

Hermosa a los Ojos de Dios (Beautiful in the Eyes of God) was this year's theme for the 31st Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference, held June 23–26 in Pompton Plains, New Jersey. Almost two hundred women, representing their Hispanic sisters from churches across the country, met for four days to worship, reflect, and discuss the vibrant role of Hispanic women in the Mennonite Church.

Keynote speaker Rev. Sonia Warren, from Iglesia Christiana de Jamaica in New York, provided daily devotionals, centering the weekend around Proverbs 31:11–19, 25–30. The women were encouraged to recognize the beauty in embodying lives of faith, love, and humbleness. In turn, Warren preached, these traits are the “makings of a beautiful soul, ready to take part in building the Kingdom of God.”

The conference culminated in a final banquet on Saturday night for which attendees donned silver, black, and fuchsia gowns, representing this year's Conference colors. Maria Tijerina, Mennonite Women USA board member representing the Hispanic Women's Conference, recalled a few highlights from the weekend. “We had the privilege of having Rhoda Charles, chair of MW USA, visit us on Saturday for our business meeting and banquet. She presented a prayer shawl to a young woman who had just been baptized, which was an important gesture to show support for the youth of our congregations.”

“This was such a wonderful weekend to renew our friendships and encourage our Hispanic sisters to use their spiritual gifts as speakers, workshop leaders, and administrators,” Tijerina continued. “We need to continue supporting each other to be women of excellence and faith.”



Mary C. Roth



A few of the women attending the Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference in Pompton Plains, New Jersey.

Across the Border

Jesus: an anchor for young women

by Noelia Fox

Nothing delights my heart more than to see young people commit their lives to the Lord, to see them focus their lives in God's ways again and again, listen to God talk about a specific area of their lives, find God's will, open and close doors to find the correct one, pray and cry out to God to reveal God's purposes to them, worship with all their hearts, cry out to receive from God, realize that this life is nothing without God being the center of their lives, give a testimony of what God has done in them or for them, pray for one another, care for the lost.... I could go on and on.

Many times I wonder what can I really do for many of these youth who question almost everything around them. I have been in their shoes, and I remember when I was their age how I used to question many things in my life. At that time, I felt like a small boat in the middle of a large ocean being tossed around by the waves without a clear destination. It wasn't until I decided to make Jesus my anchor that I began to have a sense of purpose in my life, a feeling of security knowing that no matter how big the waves might get, Jesus was going to hold on to me and not let me drift away.

Now as I look at our youth, I see many of them in different situations. Some are adrift with no clear destination, while others have set their anchors and are stable and growing in Christ. Whenever I see a young person setting her anchor in Jesus, looking to him for guidance and protection, I have no words to explain the satisfaction it brings to my heart. I tell myself it's all worth it, all those long talks, all those prayers and frustrations, all those times wondering, "would she make it?" God is faithful and has a special place for each person who makes Jesus her anchor.

What I enjoy most about being young and finding my place

Across the Ocean

at church is that I can fit in many different places and ministries. I'm still young enough to relate to some of the youth, especially the girls. We spend a lot of time together so we get to know each other well. I'm also the mother of two little girls, so of course, I also fit in with other young mothers. I spend a good deal of my time with them talking about the joys and the frustrations of being a mother.

God has blessed me with many wonderful relationships, both in the church and outside the church, from 14-year-old girls who spend their days studying for exams and talking about boys, to mothers in their thirties whose only break during the week from work and the kids is when we get together for coffee.

I am always amazed at how God gives me the words to say as I relate to so many different women who are going through very different experiences. Many of the young girls I relate to are looking for examples in their lives, looking for people who have set their anchor in Jesus many years ago and are still doing it daily.

I never imagined how all my decisions, my mistakes, my difficult times would come to me again in so many conversations as examples to share with others. I never thought that my struggles or those difficulties could be a blessing to young women as they are facing similar situations. I never imagined I would be thanking God for all those difficult times in my life when I couldn't find "a secure place for my anchor," yet, God helped me to find it in Jesus.

About a week ago I was sharing with some of the youth how faithful God is when we fix our eyes on Jesus, how he can carry you and whisper into your ear, "my son/daughter, be strong and courageous. Fix your eyes on me and I will be with you." Many of the youth came to me later and told me how what I had shared touched them because they knew that what I had been going through was a really difficult experience.

My prayer is that they, too, will be able to see Jesus as their anchor when the storms of life come. 📌



Young mothers and teenage women are an integral part of Noelia Fox's ministry in Spain.

My neighbor and me

by *Christina Kraybill*

When I lived in York, Pennsylvania, a dream developed inside me that a fair trade shop should open in the city. I made several contacts seeking out the interest of experienced people. I took a free class promoting small businesses offered by the city. During this time, I was introduced to Mennonite Women USA's Sister-Link program, Threads of Hope, through my aunt, Rhoda Keener, and saw a beautiful hand woven basket liner. A vision was developing in my heart and head to find a way for small fair trade groups to find an outlet for their handcrafted items.

But as often happens, my life took an unexpected detour. My husband, Eugene, and I decided in the summer of 2008 to relocate to Herndon, Virginia, next to the Washington Dulles airport so that we could have a better quality of life together. Eugene is an airline pilot based at Washington Dulles airport. Now rather than having several days pass in between seeing one another, we see each other every day.

After the move to Virginia, I started to save money from a part-time job in order to start my own business. I was introduced to another Sister-Link with Mennonite Women USA, My Sister's Company. In the spring of 2010, I began to formulate my business plan and ideas. Being in an airline household, a "normal" schedule is very rare for me. Therefore, I initially wanted to start an on-line business as a way to assist Threads of Hope and My Sister's Company. Both groups were interested in the idea, but My Sister's Company strongly encouraged me to find a way to sell face-to-face in order to share the stories of the products and their creators.

Upon investigating our local area, I found an outdoor craft market in Reston, Virginia, in May 2010 that coincides with the Reston Farmer's Market. Both markets are open on Saturdays, May through October. I applied as owner of "My Neighbor and Me," and was accepted as a craft vendor. I picked out the business name based on Jesus' teaching to "love your neighbor as yourself." I also wanted to convey my desire to see this market stand as a partnership.

Representatives of both groups met with me and I picked out a selection of items for my first day of market. I also chose to sell Mennonite cookbooks that I had grown up with and use. My first day of market on June 6, 2010 was an encouraging day of many new contacts. The first item that I sold that day was an apron from My Sister's Company to an African immigrant who was excited to see the African prints being offered at the market.

Throughout the course of last season, I added three more small fair trade groups: a Peruvian group and two different Kenyan groups. These groups came about because of word of mouth contacts. If you come to my stand on market day, you will find textiles from Guatemala, Gambia, Peru, and Kenya, as well as



jewelry from Gambia and Kenya, and also Mennonite cookbooks. In addition, this year I started to sell fair trade coffee that is roasted regionally in Spring Grove, Pennsylvania.

One of the unexpected outcomes of this venture has been the faith conversations that have taken place as a result of people noticing the Mennonite cookbooks for sale. I hear stories of growing up Mennonite or encounters with the Mennonites. I am a young, evangelical Anabaptist, so I am always looking for opportunities to point others to Jesus. The combination of being a person of faith and caring about the “least of these” has brought much interest. I have also met many Christian missionaries and Peace Corps volunteers who recognize the fabrics and designs. It is fun to provide a listening ear and hear their stories.

I am now in my second season at the market. Some faith conversations that began last year with customers or other vendors have continued. I still hold to my dream that someday I will open a fair trade shop, permanently housed, that serves as an outlet for the small fair trade producers. 📷

My Neighbor and Me has a booth to sell fair trade items from small producers and a table display with Mennonite cookbooks .

Courtesy photo

Lee Snyder's spiritual memoir

by Heidi Martin



Do you know someone you would like to follow for a day to see how they “do life”—how they get it all done, how they stay balanced, how they live calmly and graciously?

Lee Snyder is one such woman for me. I’ve wanted to follow her for a day ever since my sophomore year at Bluffton University when I walked into a class called “Spiritual Memoir” and saw her sitting quietly, humbly, and pleasantly near the back of the room. She continued to come to class each week, writing assignment in tow, even though she had a “to do” list as high as the ceiling, even though she spent all day sitting in meetings, even though she was the college president.

Perhaps this desire to follow Snyder is why I devoured her recently published book, *At Powerline & Diamond Hill: Unexpected Intersections of Life and Work*. Since I could not follow her for a day, at least I could read her story in the book that shared her thoughts and wisdom, that even held pieces from her personal journal.

The book is divided into six parts and an epilogue: Place, Fortuities, The Large Questions, Finding the Way, Seasons of the Presidency, and Life Work. I lingered with the table of contents since even the headings and chapter titles listed here intrigued me. I savored the moment, knowing I was only beginning a book that I was planning to treasure.

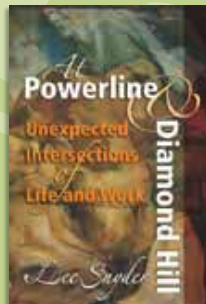
The theme of “Young Women and the Church” begins in Part One of this book as Snyder describes the place in which she grew up. Reflecting on her childhood, Snyder found herself caught between two worlds: the strict world of church and the extraordinary world of farming. But just when you begin to believe her childhood was (mostly) carefree, Part Two begins and she describes spending her teenage years in California and three years as a young wife in Nigeria. But she considers these rough roads fortuities, or those pieces of life that pushed her onward toward higher ground.

Perhaps her love for the large questions in Part Three began

as a child living in the tension of two worlds. Those questions, and how she should answer, continued in the impossibly difficult years of graduate studies (Would she make it through?) and as she considered the position for president at Bluffton (Could she say “no” to the church?). My favorite question is found in the chapter Fate, Destiny, and Calling: “[My father-in-law] demonstrated unwavering loyalty to the Mennonite church with its set of rules and regulations. He was strict. He was also stubborn, his son would say. One day in a conversation about some finer point of church doctrine and his own beliefs, he asked, ‘What if I am wrong?’ Suddenly the world seemed a finer and more compassionate place” (75).

The world turns soft and gray in light of questions like these. At the same time, ordinary, everyday occurrences become extraordinary. In Part Four, Snyder does not give one overarching answer to “finding the way,” much as I had hoped. Instead, she describes the importance of everyday routines—cooking and laundry and household tasks—and their role in her decision-making. Snyder was in the middle of doing laundry when she received a call to consider becoming the first woman president at Bluffton and, while serving there, she often turned to the comfort of the kitchen when working through difficult situations. Snyder says, “It is difficult to fathom how rich is such a grounding in the ordinary...” (116). Even so, she gratefully welcomes the pleasant surprises that also spring into our lives.

The final two sections of the book blend naturally and beautifully in my mind. In one, she describes the challenge and joy of serving as college president, including her struggle to find a clear vision for her term. In the other, she describes the tensions of life, not forgetting that our vocation is simply part of our larger life. ☑



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Response to Sister Question:

Editor's note: Each issue, we print responses to our Sister Question. The question for **Sept.–Oct.** was: How has your faith been transferred from one generation to the next?

Sharon Outlaw, Thomasville, Georgia, responded: For years I lived a nomadic life as the daughter of an army officer. We went to church, but each Sunday the service was different—one Sunday might be taught by a Baptist chaplain and the next by a Lutheran pastor. My view of God was eclectic at best.

When I found the man I wanted to marry, one of the things that drew me to him was his faith. How I wanted the same serene confidence that God was in control of my life!

After 25 years of marriage, I have found that wonderful peace at our local Mennonite church. Together my husband and I have raised our son in God's embrace. He, too, has an abiding sense of peace, even in college where daily his faith is challenged.

When our son was born my husband and I made the commitment to send him to a Christian school, even when it meant sacrifice on our part.

It worked. Our son is a wonderful, God-loving young man who is engaged to a beautiful Christian woman I call my daughter.

God is so good! ❏

Cup of Water

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).

In honor of co-executive director Rhoda Keener's 60th birthday and her 10 years of extraordinary service to Mennonite Women USA, Rhoda was surprised at the MW USA dinner in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with a check for over \$12,000 to begin MW USA's operating endowment (see page 23).

The operating endowment is a restricted fund that uses only the interest generated by the principle of the fund. In this way, MW USA will be able to serve young women in the church in future generations.

If you are interested in talking to MW USA about an endowment gift, or if you would like to include MW USA in your estate plan or will, contact the office at **MW USA, 718 N. Main, Newton, KS 67114-1819**, or call **316-281-4396** or **866-866-2872**. You can also email the office at <office@mennonitewomenusa.org>. ❏

ON THE ROAD WITH RUTH AND RHODA

Are you ready for this?

by Ruth Lapp Guengerich

It was with some anxiety and doubt that I deposited 200 letters into the mailbox in Goshen, Indiana on April 1, 2011. Two hundred letters to current and former MW USA leaders, conference Mennonite Women leaders, and close friends of Rhoda Keener.

Recipients of the letter were invited to “make a monetary donation to MW USA in some multiple of 60, as small as 60 nickels, and as large as...well, the sky is the limit! Our goal is to present her with a check for at least \$6,000, to be used towards MW USA endowment”—seed money for Rhoda’s development work.

It felt so huge to put this goal in writing, but I was prepared to be thankful for whatever amount was received. As Berni Kaufman sent me regular updates I was humbled, grateful, and amazed. We passed the \$6000 mark in mid-May; at the end of May the total was \$7,000. My heart soared. Berni and I had our own celebration.

On Friday, June 10 the total was \$9,726.20. When the total reached \$10,000 Berni wrote, “Are you ready for this?” On Friday, June 30, Berni asked, “Are you sitting down?” The total was \$12,097.20.

God is good, gracious, and generous. God doubled our vision. I believe God is challenging Mennonite Women USA to dream big dreams. Mennonite Women USA has been blessed over many years with strong, gifted, and committed leaders. We have an awesome legacy from which to learn, and upon which we are grounded. Women share when their hearts are moved in compassion, and when their hearts are warmed with love, respect, and gratitude.

God took this small dream and doubled it. Where else is God longing to double our vision? Are you ready for God to take your vision and multiply it two, three, four times? What can MW USA accomplish with God’s way of working with us, through us, and in us? Are you ready? ☑



Ruth Lapp Guengerich and Rhoda Keener are co-executive directors of Mennonite Women USA.

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Guengerich and Rhoda Keener present Charles with check.



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Two women join MW USA board

Two women accepted positions on the Mennonite Women USA board with terms beginning August 1, 2011. Kathy Bilderback, West Coast representative, lives in Boise, Idaho with her husband, Scott, and two teenage sons. She works part-time as bookkeeper for several small non-profit companies in Boise. As an ordained Mennonite minister, Kathy shares her gifts of pastoral care, preaching, and teaching as a lay leader at Evergreen Heights Mennonite Church. She also serves as leader of Mennonite Women for Pacific Northwest Mennonite Conference. "I'm truly excited to be joining the Mennonite Women board," says Kathy.



Kathy Bilderback



Marie Harnish

Marie Harnish, board secretary, lives in Indianapolis, Indiana, with her husband, Ned Geiser, and three children, twins, Nathan and Hannah, who are juniors at Goshen College, and Luke, in 7th grade. Marie serves on several committees at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, including the Women's Committee. She is an artist and makes pottery at her home studio. 📧

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