

Servant Leadership: Putting on the Apron

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From Building the City of God: One Body, One Spirit
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Regrettably, the symbol of the apron remains problematic for many women. While this program strives to reclaim this symbol, it may not be appropriate for every group. Sensitivity is suggested as you decide whether to use it.

Advance Preparation

You will need a barbecue-style apron for each new leader. These could be decorated with symbols of the office. For example: president—a presidential seal incorporating the name of your group with the visual symbol of Mennonite Women (patterns available from the MW office); secretary—big pockets filled with notebooks and pens; treasurer—decorations of numbers and dollar signs. Group members could sign their names in indelible ink on the apron. A display might feature a variety of aprons: a carpenter apron, butcher apron, painter’s smock, surgical scrubs.

Program

Leader: Dear God, today we are recognizing the special women you have given to our group who are willing to organize us, inspire us, and keep the books balanced. Be with us and them through this year so that we can accomplish your work on earth. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Sing HWB 389 “Take my life and let it be.”

Leader: The symbol of leadership we are going to use today is an apron. For women the apron has usually symbolized the drudgery of housework. It evokes images of dishpan hands and sore knees from scrubbing floors. It is a symbol we would rather leave behind. Let us redeem the apron from these connotations and learn how to wear our aprons as Jesus wore his.

John 13 describes how Jesus took a towel and water and washed his disciples’ dirty feet. In this simple deed Jesus demonstrated how a Christian leader should act. In Matthew 20 Jesus says, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . . but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant . . . just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (vv. 25-28). Both by his acts and his teachings Jesus gave us a new model of leadership.

Servant-leadership involves the same skills as worldly leadership. Doing God’s work requires vision, organization, and perseverance. A servant-leader is not a wimp. She puts on her apron, rolls up her sleeves, and gets down to the business of guiding others by word and example.

Mennonite women have proven themselves as the type of leader Jesus exemplifies. For years we have strengthened our spiritual lives with prayer and Bible study. We have served our congregations, not only by providing quilts and potluck meals, but with teaching, music, and pastoring. We have reached out to the world by supporting missionaries. Today Mennonite Women is in the forefront of experiencing the joys and fruits of integration which await the rest of the church. Putting aside our prejudices we are welcoming each other as sisters in Christ.

For the future we need leaders who can help us include more working women, single mothers, and people of color. What sacrifices will we make so that Mennonite Women will meet the needs of all women in our churches?

Sing HWB 420 “Heart with loving heart united.” The leader invites the new leaders to come forward and ties an apron around each woman’s waist. The worship leader directs the following litany of dedication.

Group: We thank you for being willing to guide us in the coming year.

New leaders: We accept the challenge that these aprons represent and ask for your support as we, like Jesus, become servant-leaders.

Group: When we complain that there is too much work to do and too few women to do it, remember that even Moses had to listen to the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness.

New leaders: If we become over-demanding, remind us of our servant role.

Group: When we are sad and disheartened, comfort us. When we triumph, lead us like Miriam in singing praises to God.

New leaders: We will lead you with timbrels and dance, shouting, “The Lord has triumphed gloriously!”

All: We ask you, God, to give us vision and courage for this coming year.

Leader: Dear Jesus, thank you for the symbol you have left for us. Let us never forget how you put an apron around your waist and washed your disciples’ feet. We too want you to wash our feet so that we can be clean and forgiven, ready to go into the world to serve others in your name. Amen.