

# timbrel

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2010

WOMEN IN CONVERSATION TOGETHER WITH GOD



## *Living a Life of Gratitude*

### **Inside:**

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## Living a life of gratitude

Most of us like to think we are grateful for all of the blessings that God has given us; I don't know anyone who would describe themselves as "ungrateful." Yet, we struggle with gratitude when sorrows come and life is difficult. It is so much easier to be grateful when things are going well for us.

The twelve years our family served with the Mennonite Central Committee, I developed a profound sense of gratitude for the generosity of all those who made it possible for our family to serve. This sense of gratitude for the church and the generosity of the church has stayed with me, and I have seen God's blessings again and again. But it has also stayed with me when the future has been uncertain and times have been difficult or sorrowful. Living a life of gratitude is, ultimately, a choice we make, though it is easier to choose gratitude in some circumstances than in others.

Recently, my husband and I visited with a life-long friend who is dying of cancer. In these circumstances we were ministered to and blessed by the grateful attitude exemplified. Christ truly was alive in this person, and the joy and gratitude lived out were infectious.

Megan Ramer writes about questions we can ask ourselves to heighten our level of gratitude in her "long exercise." Rachel Swartzendruber Miller shares how her life choices have helped her cultivate a spirit of gratitude.

Also in this issue, Rhoda Keener shares the eulogy that she gave at her father, Stanley Shenk's funeral. Teresa Sherrill writes about her gratitude for having children after many difficulties in her journey to parenthood.

Despite our various journeys, as disciples of Jesus, we are each called upon to live a life of gratitude, no matter what the circumstances. This is part of the "good news" of the Christian life, for no matter what circumstances life hands us, God walks with us, even if we feel alone. We always have the choice to focus on the joy of our salvation and the many blessings God has showered upon us.

### Sister Question for January–February

In preparation for the next issue of *timbrel*, which will focus on Hospitality, consider: **How does my church (or how do I) practice the Christian spiritual discipline of hospitality?** Send your response to <PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>. 📧



Patricia  
Burdette

Cover: Megan Ramer leads a session of the 2010 Women In Conversation Retreats co-sponsored by Mennonite Women USA and Laurelville Mennonite Church Center.

Photo by  
Brian Paff

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

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**Ruth Lapp Guengerich**, Goshen, Indiana, attends Silverwood Mennonite Church where her husband, Ron, pastors. Ruth is president of the Mennonite Women USA board. She has been a professional clinical counselor but now works as the international personnel counselor and recruiter for Mennonite Mission Network.

**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.

**Megan M. Ramer**, Chicago, Illinois, is pastor of Chicago Community Mennonite Church, a vibrant congregation on Chicago's west side. She is grateful for the beauty of her richly diverse urban home, and is daily astounded at the many and varied faces of God she encounters. She loves going to her local farmer's market and going to the theatre to watch her actor husband, Jon Stutzman, perform.

**Teresa Sherrill**, Tokyo, Japan, and her family, Mike, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Sophia Sherrill, minister as Mennonite Mission Network Associates. Teresa is thankful to have lived and worked in Japan for 18 of the last 30 years. She enjoys reading, riding her bicycle all over creation, Facebooking with friends and family, integrating spiritual disciplines, and walking Moses, the superdog.

**Rachel Swartzendruber Miller**, Phoenix, Arizona, is director of Convention Planning for Mennonite Church USA Executive Leadership. Rachel is a graduate of Hesston College and Goshen College. She is working on her doctor of philosophy degree in leadership at Andrews University. Rachel is married to Tyson Miller. She enjoys public speaking, making people laugh, and running.

**Elizabeth Vado**, Nicaragua, is the founder and director of Getsemani Holistic Center for Children and Teenagers. She was formerly a member of the Executive Committee for Mennonite World Conference, representing Latin America and the Caribbean. She is a candidate for a Masters degree in Feminist Theology from the Evangelical University of Nicaragua and is in her fourth year studying psychology.



# A long exercise in gratitude

by Megan M. Ramer

Imagine spending an entire year eating only what you could grow or raise yourself. This is precisely what author Barbara Kingsolver and her family did on a small farm in southwestern Virginia. With the aid of her husband and oldest daughter, Kingsolver

documents their experience in the captivating book, *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life*.

If you're like me, your first response may be something like, "But what about coffee?!" [Or chocolate, or bananas, or insert your favorite non-local indulgence here.] Because Kingsolver's family was less interested in punishing themselves and more interested in trying a one-year experiment, they agreed to allow each family member one "luxury" item.

Phew. I can have coffee.

With that cleared up, now I can pay better attention.

I recently heard Kingsolver interviewed on one of my favorite radio shows, "Speaking of Faith." Host Krista Tippett asked what surprised her most about the experience of deliberately eating locally for one year.

Kingsolver's response stopped me short.

"I think what surprised me the most is that we didn't really miss anything. We went into it probably thinking too much about what we were not going to be able to have, you know? 'Oh, my goodness. No strawberries in January.' **But when we changed our thinking and started every meal with the question, 'What do we have?**



"Gratitude" by  
Gail Rein, 2001.

**What's in season? What do we have plenty of?"—it became really a long exercise in gratitude"** (emphasis mine).

The reorientation provided by Kingsolver's three guiding questions contributes to the growing food revolution that might just protect the health of future generations and the earth we're asking them to inhabit. I am grateful to her and to the many wise sisters in

*Living gratefully is built on a foundation of focusing on what we have versus what we lack.*

our own Mennonite community who are helping to re-shape our thinking about and relationship to food and the earth that gives us that food.

[A shameless interlude to give a hearty shout-out to: Mary Beth Lind, Cathleen Hockman-Wert and the many contributors to my already well-worn copy of the cookbook *Simply in Season*; to Jennifer Halteman Schrock for the inspired curriculum "Just Eating? Practicing Your Faith at the Table;" and to mother-daughter duo extraordinaire Mary Clemens Meyer and Susanna Meyer for the book I've been eying with both longing and trepidation at the commitments it will likely inspire in my life, *Saving the Seasons: How to Can, Freeze, or Dry Almost Anything*.]

But this is a piece about gratitude. And so I come back to what first rang in my ears about Kingsolver's response: that with a change in thinking, her family's experiment in local eating became an "exercise in gratitude." I begin to wonder if the wisdom born of their experience can be translated even more broadly.

How might the whole of our lives be reoriented toward gratitude by exploring these questions she invites us to ask?

### **What do we have?**

Living gratefully is built on a foundation of focusing on what we have versus what we lack. This is a profoundly counter-cultural approach and requires constant vigilance to maintain. Billboards,



*Rethinking the questions creates a long exercise in gratitude for Barbara Kingsolver. She asks, "What do we have? What's in season? What do we have plenty of?"*

commercials and family members will be shouting you down if you try this at home... especially if you try it near birthdays or Christmastime.

As I listened to the radio interview, Kingsolver went on to report on her family's shift in perspective: "It was so much fun and it was so reinforcing to the culture of our family." And so I'm reminded that focusing on what we have isn't just hard work, but can actually be fun. What if the culture of each household—whether inhabited by families of one or seventeen—was grounded in the playfulness of first assessing what we have and creatively crafting our lives from there?

### **What's in season?**

A life of gratitude doesn't look the same from month to month or year to year. We experience seasons of pleasure and deep joy. And we experience seasons of struggle and great loss. These seasons ebb and flow through the course of our lives.

Living with gratitude doesn't demand that we gloss over these seasons, put on a perky face and bear it. Rather, with courage we name the truth of our pain or our delight. We honor our seasonal companions of sorrow or joy. And when it comes time for one season to fade into another, we graciously release the receding season and greet the new. This seasonal outlook enriches an experiment in gratitude.

### **What do we have plenty of?**

Grateful living not only emerges from noticing what we have, but specifically, what we have in abundance. What are my riches? Time, enthusiasm, garden produce, dumpster-dived goodies, a critical eye, a gift with words, a spirit of levity, a passion for children or creation or human rights, an artist's eye, an uncanny ability to find interesting re-uses for discarded items. Whatever it is that you or I have in spades is the place from which we are freed to be generous.

What better way to nurture lives of gratitude than sharing from our bounty?

Three simple yet profound questions applied to our own lived exercises in gratefulness: What do I have? What's in season? What do I have plenty of? Perhaps the "miracle" comes in learning surprising and delightful answers to these questions, and day by miraculous day watching with wonder as gratitude grows. 📖



*Megan Ramer talks about living a life of gratitude at the 2010 Women in Conversation Retreats co-sponsored by MW Women USA and Laurelville Mennonite Church Center.*

*Photo by Brian Paff*

# Choosing gratitude

by *Rachel Swartzendruber Miller*

We have all been there... You have about 90 minutes before your company will be walking through the door. You have already stashed the magazines, junk mail, bills and remotes in random baskets throughout your house to create the illusion that everything is perfect and picked up. Your kitchen has risen in temperature about 20 degrees due to your gas stove, which seems to be barreling out double the usual heat. You study your checklist and happily realize all you need to do is put a few finishing touches on your prepped meal. Then it happens. You wait for a moment just to make sure it actually happened. Did you just do what you think you did? Yep, you now have a giant tablespoon of crushed mint in your fully mixed pasta sauce. You are at a crossroads. Do you allow a gut reaction to dominate, or choose to live with intention, lick your wounds and move on?

Many ask the question, "How can we possibly stay positive in such a negative world?" For me, it's all about choice and inspiration, especially through the little events of life, like ruined pasta sauce.

First, I believe we choose our lives. We choose to be happy or sad, act upset or forgiving, and we more often than not decide to create drama over a sense of calm. Why do I hold choice up on such a high pedestal? I am a realist in every sense of the word.

I am someone who avoids ideals and abstractions unless they are actually attainable. I don't read fiction. I only enjoy movies portraying stories that can happen in "real life," and my goals only include accomplishments that are within the realm of possibility. In short, you will not be seeing me try out for "American Idol" anytime soon. Some may call this approach to life boring, but I call it, "choosing my life."

This realistic, deliberate approach to life has carried over into my career as well. When I was young I never dreamed of being a



*Nicole Francisco,  
Natali Francisco,  
and Rachel Swartzendruber Miller  
at the Pittsburgh  
Leaders Forum  
September, 2010.*

*Courtesy photo*

professional athlete or a movie star. Somehow I knew, even in my earliest years, that achieving these dreams was highly unlikely. Therefore, my childhood dream was much more realistic.

It began when I was seven and my aunt married a Hesston

*Creating space for God to sit with you daily, either through God's Word, through casual conversation, or through prayer, can create powerful change in your life.*

College admissions counselor. My grandparents took my sister and me to Hesston to visit my aunt once a year over the Thanksgiving holiday, a major celebration weekend at Hesston College. The high-energy atmosphere on campus drew me in as a young fourth-grader. My new uncle took us on a tour of his office and from that day on I was hooked. I told myself, and everyone else, that I was going to be a Hesston College admissions counselor when I grew up.

This dream stuck with me through high school and college. Every committee I chose to be on and every campus job I applied for, I made sure was one that would look good on a resume

for Hesston College admissions. I am happy to report that this childhood dream became a reality after I graduated with my bachelors degree in the spring of 2002.

"Choosing my life" is obviously a slogan for my vocational goals, but also for my emotional well-being. My approach to handling my emotions begins with my desire to be self-aware. I have developed a habit of analyzing emotions, my own and those of others.

One specific practice I have incorporated that seems to help me stay positive is to always ask myself, "Will getting mad help this situation?" I ask this before I react.

Some say this is impossible to do, but in actuality there is a split second of time when we can discipline ourselves to choose a



*Diane Zaerr  
Breneman and  
Rachel at the Con-  
stituency Leaders  
Council September,  
2010.*

*Courtesy photo*

response, our words and our expression. Choosing how we react in those small moments truly affects how others react to us. So, in turn, you are not only “choosing your life,” but also “choosing” reactions of those around you. I firmly believe we choose to be happy and making that choice will affect each moment of our day.

The second part to all of this is inspiration. You have to be inspired, motivated and committed to keeping gut reactions at bay. Proverbs has always been a source of inspiration for me. “A cheerful look brings joy to the heart, and good news makes for good health,” 15:30. “People with good sense restrain their anger; they earn esteem by overlooking wrongs,” 19:11. “Keep away from angry, short-tempered people, or you will learn to be like them and endanger your soul,” 22:24–25 (*Life Application Study Bible, New Living Translation*).

Gut reactions are always the easiest reaction to produce, until you train yourself to respond in a more intentional way. What might be involved in this “training?” Perhaps it is reading a Proverb a day for 30 days. Maybe it is walking one mile a morning and using that time to process your feelings with God. My favorite is having conversations out loud with God in my car, with no worry about what the other drivers are thinking.

Creating space for God to sit with you daily, either through God’s Word, through casual conversation, or through prayer, can create powerful change in your life. This time allows your mind and body to reconnect to the calm.

With God we can choose to act rather than react, live with intention rather than wait for our emotions to take over. 🙏

## Resources

### Books

- DeMoss, Nancy Leigh. *Choosing Gratitude: Your Journey to Joy*. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009.
- Emmons, Robert A. *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.
- Emmons, Robert A. and Joanna Hill. *Words of Gratitude for Mind, Body, and Soul*. Radnor, PA: Templeton Foundation P, 2001.
- Price, Catherine. *Gratitude: A Journal*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2009.

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- Ramer, Megan. “Living a Life of Gratitude.” Laurelville Women in Conversation Retreat. Apr. 2010. <[http://www.laurelville.org/women\\_in\\_conversation.html](http://www.laurelville.org/women_in_conversation.html)>.

## ¡MUJERES DEL CAMINO.....!

Por: Elizabeth Vado

Nov. 09, Nicaragua.

*Mujeres del Camino...mujeres de Dios  
Benditas y redimidas en la sangre de Jesús.*

*He aquí el que hace nuevas todas las cosas (apocalipsis 21:5)*

*Nos dice: Ven y ven....*

*Vengan y únense al canto de María, que vuestras almas y vuestras  
Vidas engrandezcan al Señor.*

*Ven y tráeme tu ser, ven y tráeme tus dones, ven, sígueme y se fiel.*

*Hoy puede ser un comienzo o bien puede ser un final....*

*Un comienzo para que empieces tus cadenas a desatar y seas libre  
al caminar.*

*Y puede ser el final de tu larga y pesada opresión,  
puedes ahora tus pies descansar.*

*Mujeres todas, teólogas, soñadoras, servidoras....*

*vengan ¡caminemos juntas en el camino con Jesús!*

*Vayamos por los senderos de justicia y equidad, llevando,  
trayendo y cumpliendo*

*el amor y la esperanza por doquier.*

*Porque dentro del Reino de Dios ya no hay hombre, ni mujer  
Somos uno en Jesús.*

*Con gozo, con regocijo y con valentía!*

*Dispuestas a caminar*

*Dispuestas a trabajar*

*Dispuestas a vivir la vida en abundancia y plenitud*

*Unámonos, encontrémonos y caminemos siempre hacia a la  
luz de la libertad en Cristo Jesús!*

*(Inspirados en el crecimiento del Movimiento de  
mujeres Teólogas Menonitas LA)*

*Elizabeth Vado is one of the authors of The Liberating Message for Women Today, a book which contains reflections, presentations and the declaration from the first gathering of the Latin American Women Theologians from across the region. In addition, eight guides for participatory Bible studies can be used in meetings of women and men who are committed to the building of God's Reign here and now.*

## *Women of the Way*

*by Elizabeth Vado\**

*Nicaragua, November 2009*

*Women of the Way...Women of God  
Blessed and redeemed in the blood of Jesus.*

*Here is the one that makes all things new (Revelation 21:5)*

*Who says to us, Come and see...*

*Come and join in the song of Mary, so that your hearts and your  
lives may magnify the Lord.*

*Come and bring me your being, come and bring me your talents,  
come, follow me and be faithful.*

*Today can be a beginning or it can very well be an end...*

*A beginning so that you can start to loosen your  
chains and may be free to walk.*

*And it can be the end of your long and weighty oppression.*

*Now you can rest your feet.*

*All women, theologians, dreamers, servants...come. Let us walk  
together in the way with Jesus!*

*Let us go in the paths of justice and fairness, having, bringing  
and carrying out love and hope everywhere.*

*Because within the Kingdom of God there is no  
longer man or woman.*

*We are one in Jesus.*

*With joy, with rejoicing and with courage!*

*Willing to walk*

*Willing to work*

*Willing to live a full and abundant life*

*Let us unite, meet and walk together always toward the  
light of liberty in Christ Jesus!*

*(Inspired by the growth of the Latin American  
Mennonite Women Theologians Movement)*

*\*translated by Linda Shelly, Newton, Kansas*

*Elizabeth Vado  
is a recipient  
of Mennonite  
Women USA's  
International  
Women's Fund  
providing  
scholarships for  
church leader-  
ship training.*

# Three Windows Three Women

## Living a life of gratitude

*Pauline Aguilar, 60  
Reedley, California*



Gratitude has been an important part of my life journey. I am Latina, and “gracias” is a term that is expressed constantly in our language; it’s a rich part of our cultural background in native rituals and faith. There is awareness and a feeling of being indebted to God. God is seen in every aspect of our daily life. So for many years, I saw God as this supreme power that I respected and feared.

Of course, as the years have gone by, gratitude has developed into something sacred and sort of a discipline in my life. I’ve learned new meanings to this term and have recognized it as an alchemy that turns problems into blessings and can give you unexpected joy. This new awareness has come from a variety of sources: sorrow, disappointments, silence, prayer, relationships, aging, and living and serving in diverse countries.

When I think of sorrows and disappointments, these continue to be the hardest teachers in learning gratitude. Processing hurts, painful memories, and disappointments isn’t enjoyable, but I’m grateful for the gift of prayer and silence in my life that has enabled me to look at these areas of my life and be grateful. I’m not only grateful for the process of healing, but for what those losses have taught me and brought to my life.

Gratitude has also come from silence and prayer. These gifts help me see the illusion of thinking I have control of the outcomes in my daily life. Gratitude helps me stop, celebrate what has been acknowledged and trust the process.

Serving others has been another source of teaching me about gratitude. One of those learning experiences happened at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia. I worked with refugees from Central America (El Salvador and Guatemala), who sought political asylum. Many people I met had suffered due to torture and having witnessed their family being murdered by death squads or the

guerrillas. In spite of their misery and suffering, they were grateful people. They taught me that we can choose to be grateful even when there is so much hurt and tragedy in our lives. They saw all the little things around them as gifts—having something to eat, a bed to sleep, clothes, etc. They appreciated the gift of living; God had granted them life. They understood God's provision for them.

My journey continues toward gratitude. 📖

*Doris Diener, 61  
Sarasota, Florida*

As a daughter of a loving, interactive God, I desire some tangible affirmations of God's loving presence in my life. This passion nudges me on my quest to encounter God. I am finding many fingerprints that leave telltale evidence that God has been there!

I have found God's fingerprints in the beauty and variety of color and texture in our backyard. What delight when hundreds of drowned, "cooked" papaya seeds pop up from the soil in my foil pan! "What are you going to do with them?" my husband asks. "Start a papaya plantation, I guess," I excitedly exclaim.

Awe-inspiring fingerprints reveal themselves in unusually answered prayers, circumstances and encounters that seem to be designed into meaningful events. My heart swells in the certainty that God is there!

In spite of the physical pain and increasing disability of the last years, relationships have taken on new, deeper dimensions. Fingerprints of affirmations, friendships, and working on collaborative projects nurture inexpressible thankfulness. I know that God walks with me because, as days go by, another unexpected fingerprint becomes visible. Seeing these have kept God's presence fresh and real. I am so grateful!

Fingerprints of God's presence in others are emerging. Sometimes the finger imprints have been covered with denial, unbelief or grief, but underneath they are there, silently unmoved. God's fingerprints on dear friends who struggle with cancer, sexual identity, addictions, depression, and abuse are unmistakably imprinted in unexpected moments. I am perplexed and filled with wonder!

Each fingerprint I find washes me with fresh appreciation for an awesome God and leaves a subtle fragrance of humility and love deep within my heart. Its intangibility inhibits human expression or description but I think I am experiencing a visitation of gratitude—one of God's priceless treasures. 📖



*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>.*

*Jo Miller, 67  
Bigfork, Montana*



"I owe the Lord a morning song, of gratitude and praise." This focus has changed me, affecting my perspective on life. Gratitude and praise have changed my negativity and fear to positive anticipation of the day. The more I learn to know God, the greater my love for God. The more I "see" God in people and in creation the more grateful I've become. The more grateful I am, the more I "see" God as God opens my eyes to displays of power and splendor. They are evident in the majestic mountains, water on the beach, sunrises and sunsets, hummingbirds at our feeders. I treasure the gifts of sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste to experience God's beautiful creation. Each experience fills me with gratitude, wonder and awe of Creator God.

I'm grateful for God's faithfulness, unfailing love, grace and forgiveness. What a privilege to know God as Savior and LORD!

God has blessed me with a godly heritage and a loving family as well as sisters and brothers in Christ. Their love and support, their very lives encourage me and spur me on to love and good deeds.

God hears and answers my prayers in miraculous ways. A brother-in-law who accepted Christ this spring, and the birth of our grandson, Gabriel, are testimonies to God's miraculous power and grace.

I'm grateful God has a purpose and plan for my life, that in serving God, others may be encouraged and blessed. Knitting prayer shawls for others brings joy and gratefulness for the mysterious ways God uses this ordinary activity to bless others and me. What an awesome, loving God! Gratitude to God fills me and in turn has transformed my life to one of praise. 📖

# Grapevine

## True gratitude

by *Twila Yoder, East Coast Representative, Mennonite Women USA*

What does it mean to be truly grateful? It was difficult for me as an 18-year-old to accept the death of my grandmother, Viola Miller, when a single-car accident took her life at the age of 73. In addition to my own grief, I worried about my grandfather who was driving the car. How would he cope with the loss of his wife of over 50 years, and the guilt he must surely feel? How would my mother cope with the loss of her mother? I knew how much I missed Grandma!

Weeks later, my mother shared with me how grateful she and Grandpa were that Grandma died quickly and didn't suffer or linger long. That's what they were choosing to focus on. You see, my grandma feared growing old and becoming a burden to others.

I learned years later that when she was young, my grandmother was the one chosen to quit school and care for her ailing mother. The excruciating disappointment of not being able to finish high school with her friends was only discovered after she died. As my mother and her sister sorted through her things they found poignant reminders of the sacrifice my grandmother had made.

My grandmother lived her life in such a way that no one could possibly have known, not even her own children, of the loss and disappointment she bore as a young teenager. My grandmother had the sweetest, most tender disposition of anyone I knew.

I am grateful for my grandmother whose life continues to be a reminder of grace and gratitude after all these years. Regardless of the disappointments and losses we may face, we can choose an attitude of gratitude. We can find comfort in memories, joy in the simple pleasures, and peace in knowing that we are never beyond the reach of God's love and care. Gratitude is a choice that ultimately becomes a way of being. Gratitude means opening your heart to God's divine providence, making the choice each and every day...to be grateful. ☑



*Twila Yoder*

*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

## A life of gratitude

*by Teresa Sherrill*

This summer I officially entered my first of the next 10 years of parenting a teen. This fosters feelings of gratitude that outweigh the legitimate challenges that come with parenting. Indeed, simply getting the chance to be a parent is cause for profound gratitude. In our case, just getting to this point has felt like nothing less than a miracle.

After a miscarriage in 1993, finally in 1995, while Mike was a student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, there was a positive pregnancy test. After a very healthy pregnancy, at our 40th week, the ultrasound technician said, "There's no heartbeat." Our little boy was gone. The next day they induced labor and I gave birth to Micah. He had a sweet face and beautiful red hair.

Over 160 people from our community grieved with us at Micah's memorial service. It was not only a time for them to share our pain, but also to release pain from losses in their own lives. Before the service we were floating in an ocean of grief, our heads just above the water, gasping for breath. After the service, our heads were lifted above the water. Arms of warmth were now keeping us afloat. God was in that ocean of grief with us.

In February 1996, just five months after our loss our hearts were lifted with another positive pregnancy test, but our joy was snuffed out eight weeks later as that pregnancy abruptly ended. This loss made our recovery from pain even slower, but with God's presence and the prayers of many, recovery finally did emerge.

In September 1996, we were pregnant for the fourth time. Needless to say we guarded our excitement carefully. At six and a half weeks, we feared the worst. We begged God to save our baby. By God's mercy the pregnancy continued. Isaiah was born May 5, 1997.

Through our difficult experience we not only developed a new sense of gratitude for God's mercy, but we also realized that

*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.*

# Across the Ocean

many people have been through similar experiences of miscarriage or stillbirth. Other parents lose their children when they are grown adults and that is also crushing. We also have friends who have never been able to conceive. This is another deep sorrow. For any that have walked this path we pray the peace, mercy and true comfort of God will be with you.

Through this experience my world was turned upside down and then right side up again. Theologian Walter Brueggemann describes a process of orientation, dis-orientation and reorientation we learn from the Psalms. I went from a time of joy and anticipation to a season of tremendous pain and questioning God. I moved from a world of order and goodness into a world of chaos and darkness. It was during that time of disorientation when the psalms of complaint and lament spoke to me about how very honest I could be with God and those around me. I could call out to God with raw and honest language during times of pain, suffering and loss.

Our years of miscarriages, stillbirth and finally healthy births lasted from 1993 to 2002. Isaiah was baby #4, Jeremiah was baby #5 and Sophia was baby #8. There was no quick fix for us. Rather, we discovered that God was walking with us, in every disappointment and in every joy. God, as Immanuel, is the gift of reorientation that I bring to my Christian walk each day since those traumatic times. Psalm 30:11–12 speaks to me to this day:

You did it; you changed wild lament into whirling dance;  
You ripped off my black mourning band and decked me  
with wildflowers. I'm about to burst with song; I can't  
keep quiet about you. God, my God, I can't thank you  
enough (*The Message*).

Now that my kids are 13, 11, and 8, I would do well to carry this attitude into the teenage years. Having to go through such arduousness to bring my wild and crazy kids into this world, not a day goes by without me looking at them with a grateful heart. 📷



*Mike, Teresa,  
Sophia, Isaiah, and  
Jeremiah Sherrill.*

*Courtesy photo*

## Gratitude for ministry

by Ruth Lapp Guengerich

As a young child I was exposed to the women's organization of the "Old" Mennonite Church at the women's sewing circle at Plains Mennonite Church, Lansdale, Pennsylvania (which later became part of the Mennonite Church Women's Missionary and Service Auxiliary and then Women's Missionary and Service Commission (WMSC). My participation in the work of WMSC, now Mennonite Women USA (MW USA), has varied over the years based on my family and work commitments, where we were living, and the opportunities available at the particular church we were attending.



I was privileged to serve as vice president of WMSC in the early 1990's, and participated in the decision-making process to change the name to MW USA as the two denominations were coming together. During that crucial time we questioned the possibility of a women's organization surviving. Women's groups were dwindling in size and numbers as more and more women were entering the work force.

I moved across the country and worked at getting my credentials as a professional counselor, taking a break from Mennonite Women for about 14 years, except for periodic attendance at my congregation's women's group. I am now the president of the board for MW USA, the new organization formed out of Women in Mission of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the WMSC of the Mennonite Church.

Ron and I taught English in Japan for three years under Mennonite Board of Missions and were thrilled to receive a copy of the just-released *Mennonite Hymnal* as a Christmas gift from the Plains WMSC in 1969. Earlier that same year, the WMSC blessed us with a beautiful flannel baby quilt for our firstborn child. Our newborn grandson, Henry, was swaddled with that lovely quilt just last December.

Both Women in Mission and WMSC were interested in understanding missions as well as being of service to our mission workers. Because sewing was a skill that most women developed for their families, sewing was a logical act of service these wom-

en could do for their sisters (and brothers) who were called to serve God in other countries. They read and discussed books on missions or about missionaries and conducted Bible studies at their weekly or monthly meetings. From the earliest women's meetings they gave offerings of money, a few pennies from their egg money, from their garden produce, or from raising poultry. They gave what they could, which may not seem much, but the dollar amounts were significant to the denomination and to the mission workers.

Both women's organizations experienced disapproval from the leadership of their denomination, discouraging the efforts of the women to become integrally involved in the church structures. The women's organizations themselves seemed to be a threat to the leadership of the denominations. The (male) leadership attempted to swallow up the women's organizations or take over their work, which was disheartening. Nevertheless the women did not give up. They advocated for women's perspective and presence on all committees within the denominations, and for recognition of women pastors. Today women's involvement in practically all areas of church life within Mennonite Church USA is the result of the persistence of women to use their gifts of leadership.

I am grateful for all the women of the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church who took the initiative to lead the denominations in faithfully supporting missionaries in the US, in Canada, and around the world.

I am grateful for the women who spoke up in defense of all women, advocating for respect, understanding, and recognition of women's capabilities, despite opposition and misunderstandings, to serve in the many positions of leadership within the Mennonite and General Conference Mennonite churches.

I am grateful for women who continue to be faithful parents, wives and teachers within the home in addition to using their skills in so many amazing, exciting, and awesome ways.

I am grateful for the men who risked listening to the women who felt called to ministry and leadership, and supported those women as they ventured into new fields of service.

I am grateful for my parents, John E. and Edith R. Lapp, who encouraged me and all my siblings to respond to God's call, each of us in our unique ways.

Most of all I am grateful that God has given me opportunities to serve in a variety of roles within the church, and for my husband, Ron, who has valiantly shared in many tasks so that I could pursue work that brings more satisfaction than monetary rewards. 📖

*Ruth Lapp Guengerich, Mennonite Women USA board president, received the alumna Distinguished Service Award on October 15, 2010, from Christopher Dock Mennonite High School in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.*

*The award honored Ruth's long-time interest and work in women's issues. She has studied, written, spoken, and led workshops on a variety of topics including women's development, changing roles of women, biblical views of male and female roles, family/domestic and sexual violence, modern day slavery, and the roles of pastors' wives.*

*Ruth assisted in the integration of the Mennonite Church Women's Mission and Service Commission and Women in Mission into Mennonite Women which later became Mennonite Women USA.*

# Grateful for music

by Heidi Martin



My cousin has rules about Christmas music. She doesn't have rules about *what* is played. She likes the jingles and upbeat rhythms. She likes the sweet, serious and silly. No, she has rules about *when* to play Christmas music. For her, Christmas music is only enjoyable beginning the day after Thanksgiving until the day after Christmas. Pre-Thanksgiving and post-Christmas is out of the question—even for Alvin, Simon and Theodore.

I, too, like all kinds of Christmas music, but unlike my cousin, no rules apply. In fact, I keep Christmas CD's in my car year-round. My favorite carols are the hymns. I admire the skill of poets and musicians who capture the story of Jesus' birth in lyrical form. They are words of peace, of hope, of joy.

But, for some, the holiday season is not a joyful time of year. For some, it is a reminder of loss and a rekindling of grief. For others, it is a season of loneliness.

The most beautiful and most remembered hymns are those that were written out of searing pain and great loss. Like the Psalms, the verses speak of fear, doubt, unquenchable thirst, confusion and questions. Yet there is also a theme of great faith, strength and trust.

I'm sure many of us are familiar with the story behind "Amazing Grace," written by John Newton, who was involved in the slave trade before his conversion. Seven years later, he left the sea due to illness and eventually pursued a pastoral

vocation. People traveled far and wide to attend the services and listen to his words. He wrote "Amazing Grace" for one such service.

The story of "Peace Like a River" is also often told. Horatio Gates Spafford, a prominent lawyer, lost most of his investments in the Chicago fire of 1871. He lost a son about the same time. Two years later, all four of his daughters drowned at sea while on a voy-



age to England. His grief led him to write, “Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, ‘It is well, it is well with my soul.’”

There are more stories. Louisa M. R. Stead wrote “’Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus” after watching her beloved husband drown while trying to rescue a boy struggling in the ocean. Annie Hawks penned the lyrics of “I Need Thee Every Hour” during a quiet moment of calm and serenity, but clung to the truth of the words several years later after the loss of her husband. Joseph Mendlicott Scriven also knew the depth of grief as, not one, but two fiancées died just before he was to marry. He penned “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” to comfort his aging mother thousands of miles away, but surely the consoling words are derived from his own familiarity with tragedy.



The experiences of each of these writers are tragic. What loss. What anguish. What magnificent sadness.

Out of their distress, they offer words of consolation and, upon closer reading, gratitude. They are grateful for a friend in Jesus, for a God to trust, for One who meets them every hour.

I do not have words to describe the relationship between sorrow and gratitude that is evident in these hymns, but I cannot deny the fact that there is one—mysterious and delicate, yes, but divine as well. And the relationship is not only for the days of yesterday.

Recently, a friend walking a long road of grief affirmed the correlation. He said that when we try to numb the depth of pain and hurt, we also numb the delightful bliss of joy. However, when we enter into the trouble, wholly and healthily, we also open ourselves to unimagined gratitude and joy. It is gratitude that does not make sense. It is gratitude that goes beyond knowing. Perhaps this is another reason I enjoy Christmas hymns and hymns in general.

This holiday season, whether you have rules about music or not, whether you turn on Christmas music after Thanksgiving or listen to it year-round, whether your heart is full of peace or relentless pain, come. Come all ye faithful to the little town of Bethlehem—to the midnight clear on a silent night—to adore him, Christ the Lord. 📖

# Stirrings

# Response to Sister Question:

**Editor's note:** Each issue, we print responses to our Sister Question. The question for November–December was: How do I cultivate the spiritual discipline of gratitude?

## **Cindy Weidman, Chambersburg, Pennsylvania responded:**

The cup is always half-full. I always have something more than some other people I can think of.

God is good. If you dwell on that, “God is good to me in these ways...,” then it completely changes the hues of the present moment. For example, it feels like everyone’s irritated and unappreciative right now, but I do have a home to go to and my legs walk well. Or I don’t feel well physically, but I know this is temporary, so I’ll just calmly go with the flow for now, and lower my usual expectations of myself for a while until I get past this rough time.

Counting blessings is such a useful way to start and end any day, praising God continually.

“Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6–7).

**Diana Hershberger, Goshen, Indiana responded:** I wake up each day with a prayer of gratitude for a new day and all the wonderful gifts it holds. I ask that God be with me in all I do and say. I find that this helps me see with “new eyes” things I might otherwise overlook or not be grateful for. I find that gratitude begets more gratitude...my life indeed starts to flow as a prayer. ☑



*Diana Hershberger*

## 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.*

**Give in Gratitude.** One way to show your gratitude for someone who has been a blessing to you is to give a gift in honor or in memory of that person to Mennonite Women USA. Memorial and honoring gifts are used to support the many ministries of MW USA such as Sister Care seminars, “Postcard & Prayer” e-newsletter, Sister-Link projects, annual Bible study guide, International Women’s Fund scholarships, and *timbrel* magazine.

**To make a memorial gift or give a gift in honor of someone, send your check and the person’s name to MW USA, 722 N. Main St., Newton, KS 67114-0347.** (Please indicate if you would like your name with the name of the person you are honoring or remembering listed in “Postcard & Prayer.”) ☑

## ON THE ROAD WITH RHODA

# Grateful for a Thursday with my father

*Excerpts from Rhoda's eulogy at the funeral of her father, Stanley Shenk, on Sept. 6, speaking both as daughter and representative of Mennonite Church USA*

I have a distinct memory of an evening during my dad's teaching years at Goshen College when I wanted to talk with him. He had his coat and hat on and was about to leave for late-night study at his college office. Yet I persisted in talking. Finally, sensing my need, Dad took off his hat and coat, sat down on his orange chair, and we talked.

As the family recently packed Dad's belongings at Greencroft, we found one of his hats that looked very much like the hat I remember from my teen years—grey felt with a black ribbon—and the same style I remember as a child. I treasure a photo (right) of me as a three-year-old wearing "that hat" on a vacation at Yosemite.

In some ways my work with Mennonite Women USA has enabled me to share one of my father's hats: his commitment to the Mennonite Church. As a family we remember and honor Dad's work as a pastor, speaker, counselor, and writer—mostly within the circles of the Mennonite denomination.

What means the most to me, however, is not the number of sermons Dad preached or articles he wrote. It's that he was willing to take off his hat and change his course that evening. I mattered more than papers or lectures.

A week before Dad died I was on my way to the Harrisburg airport for several important MW USA meetings in Nebraska and Kansas. Halfway to the airport, with boarding passes printed, I turned around, and Bob and I instead drove to Goshen, Indiana. We spent a very special Thursday with Dad in ICU and blessed him as a good father. Then, I flew to Omaha the next day. We certainly didn't realize he had only one more week to live.

While I thank Dad for his service to the church, I thank him even more for giving me the example that it's OK to turn around and take off your hat—and that those we love are more important than anything else. Thanks, Dad. 📷



*Rhoda Keener is executive director of Mennonite Women USA.*



*Stanley Shenk  
Mar. 30, 1919–  
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Editorial Office: 17827 Carson Road, Butler, OH 44822-9427; 740-694-1759.

Editor: Patricia Burdette <Pat-tyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>.

Contributing editors: Marcella Hershberger, Bristol, Ind., Heidi Martin, Strasburg, Pa., Mary Meyer, Fresno, Oh.

Graphic designer: Nancy Miller, Newton, Kan.

Copy editor: Rosalie Thiessen Grove, Elkhart, Ind.

Circulation: Berni Kaufman, Newton, Kan.

Mennonite Women USA office, 722 N. Main Street, Newton, KS 67114-0347; 316-281-4396, or 866-866-2872; <office@MennoniteWomenUSA.org>; <www.mennonitewomenusa.org>.

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## Zion Mennonite Church women's group

Meet some of the women at Zion Mennonite Church, Hubbard, Oregon, at the monthly women's ministry meeting. Please send us photos of your women's group for *timbrel*, "Postcard & Prayer," or the Mennonite Women USA website. 📷



**Left to right: Margaret Shetler, Chris Keady, Mabel Powell**



**Left to right: Gloria Gingerich, Louise Gingerich, Carolyn Gingerich, Dorothy Breneman**

*Photos by Rhoda Keener*

**Subscription rates:** One year, six issues, \$15; two years, \$28; and three years, \$39. **Group rates of 10 or more (copies sent to individual home addresses):** One year, \$13; two years, \$24; and three years, \$33. **Add \$3 for subscriptions outside the USA.** Subscribe to *timbrel* by sending the appropriate funds to MW USA, PO Box 347, Newton, KS 67114-0347. To order online: <www.mennonitewomenusa.org>.