

Health in the church



by *Yvonne Diaz*

I have always considered myself to be healthy. Although I have tried to make the best choices to live a healthy life, there is one aspect that I have not tended to as needed. I have lived with back pain for a number of years due to a diving accident as a teen. The pain has been intense at times and sometimes almost intolerable.

After many years of living in this state of hurt, it has become such a part of me that I have “learned” to put it aside, ignore it, forget about it, and in every way I could think of, put it out of my mind. Just because I have done all these things—it has not made the pain go away. The pain remains. Although I have tried many different things, lately I have become more proactive in finding a remedy to alleviate the pain. It has actually helped tremendously.

So what does my healthiness (or lack thereof) have to do with a healthy congregation? My personal experience with back pain is what came to mind when I thought about comparing the two.

Think about it. As a person of color, I am your “back pain.” I will always be there. You have to live with me. You can’t put me aside. You can’t ignore me. You can’t forget about me. And you can’t put me out of your mind. I am always going to be here.

In a state of unhealthiness, churches have “learned” to put aside, ignore, forget, or put out of their mind the “back pain” that exists. In this case, the “back pain” I am talking about is people of color—the “other.”

When churches and their congregants do not embrace fully the “other,” they are putting aside that person. They are forgetting about that person, and putting that person out of their

thoughts. Maybe the “other” will go away if the churches do that long enough. The sad part is that many churches and their members think their congregations are healthy as they are putting aside their “back pain.”

So how can we heal and make healthy churches together? One suggestion is to acknowledge me and get to know me. Make me your friend—not your acquaintance—your friend. That means an intimate relationship—such as you have with God. It means spending time with me. Share your victories, your burdens, and your stories with me as I will with you. Isn't that what God is calling us to be—healthy people and healthy churches?

Another suggestion is to meet me where I am. I am already out of my comfort zone—in unfamiliar territory—a new setting, a new country, using a new language. It means stepping out of your comfort zone and putting yourself somewhere you normally wouldn't be. It means it is not your routine. It means it is out of your way. It means it will need to be intentionally done!

These are just a couple of suggestions to begin the healing process towards becoming a healthy church. There will still be much more to do in order to heal completely. But it is a beginning. Let me know how it feels. I hope it will feel better. 📧

Save the date

- Women in Conversation 2010 denominational women's retreats will be in two locations.
- April 9–11, 2010 at Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.
- April 30–May 2, 2010 at Crossroads Retreat Center, Hesston, Kan.
“Living a Life of Gratitude” is the theme for keynote speaker Megan Ramer (see her Bible Study pp.10–11).
- Registration information will be available summer 2009. All women are invited. Women in Conversation retreats are jointly sponsored by Mennonite Women USA and Laurelville Mennonite Retreat Center.



MW USA Mission and Vision:

Our mission is to resource women's groups and individuals as we nurture our life in Christ, study the Bible, utilize our gifts, hear each other, and engage in mission and service.

Our vision is to facilitate woman-to-woman links locally and globally, through mission and fellowship within our diverse church, embracing women of different backgrounds, and encouraging mutual support, discussion, partnership, and worship.