

## Rituals of Connection


One night recently when our son Steve, daughter-in-law Bethany, and two year-old grandson Tristan were visiting, I was invited to participate in Tristan's bedtime routine. As we sat beside his bed full of stuffed animal friends, Bethany said, "Do you want to say your thank you's?" Tristan smiled and his voice became hushed. He whispered, "Thank you for Mama, Dad. Thank you for Grandma, Grandpa."

Later, Bethany said, "I want him to learn to be grateful and so we've started doing thank you's at bedtime." Since then, I've thought much about the ritual of gratitude that I was part of that night. I've thought about what this small child spoke first—his family—and how his voice became quiet, almost worshipful as he thanked God for these people.

As I think about MW USA's ministry, much of what we do is about connecting women with each other. In April, Women in Conversation retreats will be held at Laurelville in western Pennsylvania (April 9–11) and at Cross Wind in Hesston, Kansas (April 30–May 2). With the theme "Living a Life of Gratitude," women are invited to share with each other what gratitude means during the difficult seasons of life as well as those times when joy springs abundant.

I think about our Sister-Care seminars focused on listening and caring skills, on sharing stories and providing settings where we can connect with one another in the church. At a recent Sister-Care, a woman commented that she arrived late and was not able to sit with the persons she had traveled with, but she said, "The women at my table were going through the same experience as I. The accidental table seating was God's way of helping me find them."

Each Sister-Care brings one topic to focus our caring. Coming May 14–15 at Kidron, Ohio, is the topic of "Loneliness." Three women will bring their stories of loneliness after losing a spouse, in illness, and in abuse—and how the church can be helpful during these times.

Just as the bedtime ritual of saying thank-you's helps to ground Tristan in love at bedtime's lonely hour, so at Mennonite Women USA, we hope our efforts at caring and conversation can help women in the church find connection rather than loneliness in community. 



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