

Three Windows Three Women

Embracing the gift of diversity



*Sarah Thompson, 25
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God can handle diversity, even if we can't. Many believe that the Biblical texts are singular in voice and authority, resulting in one Biblical ethic. However, diversity is a biblical concept, an old one. In a careful reading, you will find that multiple ethical frameworks emerge and the assemblers of the canonical texts took great pains to preserve multiple voices on many issues. For example, laying the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy side by side, it becomes obvious that God's people changed and innovated over time—see their views on women and the death penalty (I would much rather have been a woman in Deuteronomy than in Leviticus). The Israelites benefited from the incorporation of diverse voices and experiences.

From the Old Testament we learn that Israelites were always in negotiation with the world around them; sometimes the Israelites copied the practices of their Ancient Near East neighbors and sometimes they critiqued them.

As our churches listen deeply to the perspectives of people of different cultural backgrounds, genders, ages, orientations, and vocations on today's important topics, we are faithfully continuing in the tradition of God's people over time. 📖

Editor's note: This column is a forum for women to share perspectives on the current issue's theme. It introduces women spanning their 20s–30s, 40s–50s, and 60s and above. If you are interested in writing for this column, please contact editor, Patricia Burdette, at PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org.

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How did we become a nation that grows inedible corn? Stripped of its basic purpose, most farmers don't eat the bulk of their corn harvest. As I write these thoughts alongside two other women I've yet to meet, I can't help but think about the beauty and resilience of the three sisters: corn, beans, and squash. Grown together, they thrive. The beans climb the corn stalks, stabilizing both while the squash transforms into living mulch, holding the water and protecting the other sisters from predators. So few of us plant this way any more.

Our practices must change if we are to thrive together. Singular subsidized crops yield singular results. Indigenous plants contain whole foods that nourish us, and the preparation and enjoyment that comes from such foods could allow us to flourish!

We are all collectively stripped of nutrients when our belief systems, our thinking processes and lifeways are homogenized. When the same homogenous faces reflecting singular belief systems fill our meeting places and pews, we risk forgetting the great banquet once offered by the people of the land. We risk forgetting our own collective and interdependent paths to the places where our homes are built. Together, we must remember the diversity that once was.

Diversity is as important to our culture as it is to our ecology. In order to bud and blossom we must risk testing the boundaries of our perceptions. We must talk to all of our neighbors, unearth our histories, compare and contrast our journeys, and hear what is in one another's hearts. We must change our convenient habits and forego the safe limits of talking to the same people. We must welcome one another in and go to where others are. We must cultivate interdependence.

As Clayton Brascoupe of the Traditional Native American Farmers' Association points out, the nature of interdependence is more than physical. "A relationship with the land, plants, animals, rain, thunder, and lightning makes one's religion more meaningful than simply going through the motions," he writes.

Let the green tendrils unfurl from the brown earth and feed us together. Let us discover our diversity and our interdependence by digging together, by seeing the purpose of our roots. Then, with our children and with our elders, let us share Creator's abundance, and once more begin singing to the plants. ▣





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Throughout this very long political season I arrived at a new belief on diversity: I believe that diversity of political opinions and preferences is important in the church. I'm not saying it's important that we talk about them (though that is fine), but the very presence of this diversity propels us to recognize that the political kingdoms of this world are not where God's kingdom lives and works.

Jesus called disciples from the political extremes of his culture and church (Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector), and while they likely had some fascinating conversations about their political views, Jesus called them to focus their energy on loving their neighbors, as they loved God. This was Kingdom work.

Likewise, Jesus calls us today to focus our energy not on the hopes and dreams of any politician, but on the centrality of Jesus' call to love and serve others both near and far. I value the diversity of political opinions held by my brothers and sisters in my congregation, my denomination, and in the larger church, believing that they are based on personal Christian convictions, every one of them. I hope we can recognize this diversity and then set it properly aside as we embrace Christ's call for unity in serving and loving those around us. This is Kingdom work.

Yet, I still must ask myself, "Why is Sunday morning the most segregated time of the week?" I have never come up with an answer, but I do believe that ethnic diversity offers us a more complete understanding of God if we will take the time to explore it.

God, as our creator, can be more fully known as we learn to know the other—God's creations. It is together, corporately, that we reflect the image of God. Our differing cultures, languages, and values are a reflection of God speaking to and through humankind. Those of us in the church should seek to know each other more intimately so as to learn to recognize God at work in the world.

It is in the process of seeking to know others that we can experience the fullness of God. So, I encourage us as churches to get involved with people of differing cultures and ethnicities. Come to these relationships with the expectation of finding God within and at work among all people. I think we will find much to celebrate, and in this diversity we will experience God in new and surprising ways. 📌