


Diversity and the church

Diversity is more than the visually discernable. It also encompasses our life experience: economic and educational background, experiences among other cultures, family configurations, social class, religious upbringing (or not), gender, and so forth. When diverse groups come together, there is often conflict because different life experiences cause each of us to develop ways of seeing issues differently. And yet, it is precisely the various viewpoints that diversity brings to discussions that allow us to experience God's presence, power, and creativity in completely new (and often surprising) ways.

Research has shown that the more diverse the management of an institution is, the more creative the institution becomes. This seems like a no-brainer, but it has had to be documented repeatedly by researchers. If we take the time to look at the world God created for us to learn from, we can easily see this principle in action. God seems to be trying to teach us that without diversity we cannot survive. Diverse weather patterns allow us to grow a diversity of foods, which allow diverse life forms to exist. Ecosystems thrive on diversity. Yet, human beings in their arrogance often seem to think homogeneity is superior to diversity. Perhaps this is why racism has existed since its invention hundreds of years ago. Perhaps we have missed what God is actively attempting to teach us. Perhaps this is why the Sunday morning worship hour is still the most segregated hour in our nation.

Diversity in the church, especially ethnic/cultural diversity, is one of the most significant challenges for Mennonite churches in our time according to Conrad Kanagy in *Road Signs for the Journey: A Profile of Mennonite Church USA*. Writers in this issue of *timbrel* express some of the reasons they think diversity is so important for the Mennonite church.

Sister Question for March–April

In preparation for the next theme of “**betrayal and forgiveness,**” consider: **In our human experience, most of us have experienced some form of betrayal, whether from friend, family, or social injustice. What scripture, book, or other resource has helped you move toward forgiveness?** Send answers to PattyB@MennoniteWomenUSA.org. We print a sampling of replies that include name, city and state. 



**Patricia
Burdette**

Cover: Rebecca Osiro and Sylvia Shirk Charles embrace (see story pp. 4-6). Sylvia is working on her dissertation: Liberating Interdependence: North American Sisters in Partnership with African Anabaptist Theologians.

*Photo by
Steve Keener*