

Femailings



Womaen's Caucus, Church of the Brethren

@wcaucus follow

One Woman, All Women

December 2018

Save the Date

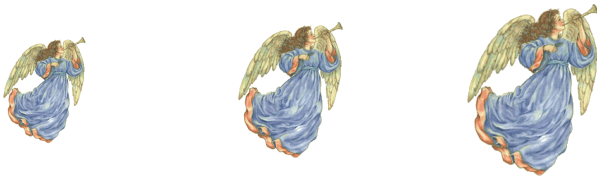
The next Church of the Brethren Clergy Women's Retreat will be held January 6—9, 2020, at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Rev. Mandy Smith, originally from Australia and currently serving as the lead pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, will be key presenter.

Rev. Smith is a regular contributor to *Christianity Today* and *Missio Alliance* and is the author of two books: *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*; and *Making a Mess and Meeting God*.

If you can't attend or you or your church are able to contribute to the scholarship fund, checks may be made payable to "Church of the Brethren" and sent to the attention of Nancy Heishman, Office of Ministry, 1451 Dundee Avenue, Elgin, IL 60120. Contributions are much appreciated in assisting your sisters in ministry!

Need More Information? Contact the Office of Ministry at 800-323- 8039 or officeofministry@brethren.org.



Womaen's Caucus Appreciates Your Ongoing Support!

Our work over the past year has been to continue our presence at Annual Conference, and also to participate in the wider progressive and feminist conversation within the Church of the Brethren.

We are thinking about how to do this more effectively, but tangible representations of what supporting caucus means are: travel scholarships to women's clergy retreats, creating spaces of healing at conference, funding our website, and helping our steering committee members travel to our two in-person meetings a year.

And not to forget *Femailings*! We are looking forward a new editor and new directions for our newsletter.

"Christmas is built upon a beautiful and intentional paradox;
that the birth of the homeless should be celebrated in every home."

~ G.K. Chesterton, *Brave New Family*



Christmas wishes

May we rededicate ourselves
to the principles taught
by Jesus;

May the season kindle the fire
for hospitality in our
homes and the flame of
charity in our hearts;

May we sing the beautiful songs
of hope and promise;

May there be peace in our lives,
love in our homes, and
the spirit of Christmas in
our hearts all the days of
the year.

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Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee Transitions

The Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee has been in a time of transition this year.

Jennifer Keeney Scarr, our 2018 Convener and member of our Steering Committee, was elected to the On Earth Peace Board by the Annual Conference delegates this summer. Additionally she has been newly elected to the position of Board Chair for the Southern Ohio District beginning her term of service in 2019. Jennifer serves as pastor at the Trotwood Church of the Brethren (Ohio) and is a Reservist in the Christian Peacemaker Teams Corps. Jennifer will be with us in heart and spirit, but will conclude her role as convener December 2018.

Daisy Schmidt has been a faithful and hardworking member of the Steering Committee since January of 2010. She has offered valuable resources, history and envisioning for the work of Womaen's Caucus. For the past 2—3 years, Daisy and Ericka

have offered their home for our annual Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee planning meeting/retreat. Daisy continues as a member of the Steering Committee and will host our annual retreat, however she has set some limits on her availability in anticipation of new Steering Committee members joining Womaen's Caucus. With appreciation, we acknowledge the witness and service of Daisy and Jennifer.

We welcome **Anna Lisa Gross**, our newest Steering Committee member. Please read her biography, "Introducing," to learn more about Anna Lisa. Anna Lisa, we welcome you and your gifts!

We welcome the return of **Karen Duhai** to our Steering Committee. Karen is a recent graduate of Bethany Theological Seminary. Karen was hired in August, 2018, as Director of Student Development at Bethany Theological Seminary. Karen

was previously a member of our Steering Committee, but took a break as she was completing her coursework for her Master of Arts with a concentration in Theological Studies in 2018. Karen had previously completed a Master of Divinity with an emphasis in Peace Studies in 2016. Welcome back, welcome "home", Karen!

We welcome **Audrey Decoursey** to her new role as *Femailings* editor. Audrey brings new energy and skills for layout, format and article development. We look forward to Audrey joining us in 2019.

We are grateful for **Mary Jane Shearer** who has been formatting our newsletter, assisting with our annual AC luncheon, auction, and booth, and quietly working behind the scenes in ways too numerous to count. Thanks, Mary for all you do for Womaen's Caucus and the Steering Committee!



Introducing . . .

Rev. Anna Lisa Gross is from North Manchester, Indiana, and currently lives in Morelia, Mexico. She has a M.Div. from Bethany Theological Seminary and a B.A. in Journalism from Earlham College. Her ordination is in the Church of the Brethren,

and she's also pastored in the United Church of Christ.

Anna Lisa grew up on a small organic farm, and now she and her spouse (and dogs and cats) are doing permaculture projects on a small plot of land in central Mexico. Anna Lisa has also lived in India, Northern

Ireland, Guatemala, Portland, Oregon, Minneapolis, Minnesota, and central Pennsylvania.

Anna Lisa has worked with people from many cultures, faiths and world views, and trusts the vibrant variety of stories and symbols that humans use to navigate the complexities of life. She has enjoyed working as an interim pastor, and is grateful for the variety of tasks involved in pastoring: planning worship and rituals, creative writing, joining people in the joys and sorrows of their lives, asking provocative questions, tending to beginnings and endings, community organizing, and advocating for justice.

"At this Christmas when Christ comes, will He find a warm heart?

Mark the season of Advent by loving and serving the others

with God's own love and concern."

— Mother Teresa

“All I Want You to Do is Follow”

by Rev. Marilyn Lerch, Central COB, Roanoke, Virginia

It was a warm August afternoon in 1991. At the age of 42, after years of not being able to imagine God was calling me to ministry, my family and I were ready to move to the suburbs of Chicago so I could study at Bethany Seminary.

I had completed half of my seminary studies at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia where we lived, but I had always dreamed of going to Bethany. My mind was in a state of panic over what we were about to do.

Suddenly God spoke to me. The one and only time in my life where I heard God's voice clearly: "Marilyn, all I want you to do is follow. Stop worrying about all the details." Through the years I have turned to those words many times to remind me what following Jesus is all about. And I have learned a thing or two along the way.

The agreement of a denomination to ordain women and the ability to welcome women into leadership are two very different concepts. During the 13 years I administered the TRIM program for our denomination I watched as, unlike most men who entered that program, many of the women began with a deep sense of call but a great concern about what the outcome would be of their ministry studies. I certainly could understand how they felt. Every time I made a move from one congregation to the next I wondered whether I could find a congregation who would be willing to call me. Many search committees

would not even interview me. Many churches did not want me as their pastor because I was a woman, I was divorced, one because I had an autistic daughter . . .

It is fair to say that, in my Brethren Academy position, I helped to train pastors for congregations who would never have called me as their pastor.

I am glad to be retired, but I do not regret hearing and responding to God's call in my life. Now I am able to look back with wisdom to realize that often it is those people and things we love deeply that have the greatest potential to hurt us. But it is also those relationships that can bring us abundant joy.

I continue to encourage women to be strong advocates for themselves and others, although regrettably at times I have watched women in the church hurt one another with a vengeance. When the church or those in the church or life treat us poorly, it is not helpful just to remain quiet, regardless of who is causing us pain. Some of my protests against unfair treatment either by the church or some individuals has resulted in my being treated even worse, but I do not regret speaking out for peace or justice because I believe that is what the Jesus I try to follow did and continues to call us to do.



Rev. Marilyn Lerch



“Off to one side sits a group of shepherds. They sit silently on the floor, perhaps perplexed, perhaps in awe, no doubt in amazement. Their night watch had been interrupted by an explosion of light from heaven and a symphony of angels. God goes to those who have time to hear . . . and so on this cloudless night God went to simple shepherds.”

— Max Lucado

Best Day Ever in Ministry

by Rev. Christy Dowdy

It feels a bit like a test question: What is my best day ever in ministry? And yet, as the possibilities for this reflection sat in front of me, I kept returning to this central focus.

If I have calculated correctly, I have close to 10,000 days in pastoral ministry, for I began my first pastorate in 1990 in Lincoln, Nebraska. That followed a summer intern experience in Canton, Illinois. When I was ordained in Lincoln, I was a recent graduate of Bethany Seminary, following a nine-year career as an elementary teacher.

As a new mother with a 6-month-old son, I felt ready and eager to explore what this new role might entail, as I joined to do team ministry with my spouse, Dale. I birthed two more children during those 9½ years while pastoring at Antelope Park Church of the Brethren.

In 1999, Dale and I were called to be co-pastors at the Stone Church of the Brethren, in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. That call was miles away from our Midwestern family roots. In the middle of beautiful mountains and next to Juniata College, Stone Church had made many transitions during its 100+ year history. Huntingdon became our home for 18 years. Sixteen of those years I served in team ministry with my spouse, and the last two years was spent solo and with interim pastor Anna Lisa Gross.

Each year, as I did a personal and congregational review and evaluation, I was surprised to discern my continuing call with these people who had become friends. They knew me well, and I continued to learn about them. It's revealing to me to admit my best day ever in ministry was my last.

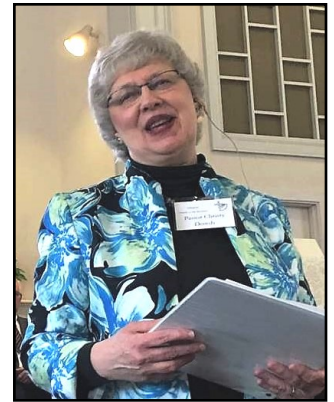
On that final 2017 August Sunday worship and celebration meal at Stone Church, I was honored and loved more than any person deserved. The sanctuary was packed with people who we had initially met on the search team, those who had joined through the years, as well as community folks. I was delighted to realize friends and pastoral colleagues had traveled hundreds of miles to be with me on that special day. As I looked out over the congregation, for my "last welcome," the memories and encounters of "all those days" of pastoral ministry flooded my whole being. A hand bell piece had been commissioned in my honor, and the children crowded around me and my puppet friend, Agatha, for our last

story time together. The words came rather easily for the "last sermon," which simply again shared the message of God's amazing love for us all. At the dinner and party following, stories were shared of the ways I had long forgotten about the impact I had made upon person's lives. We laughed, we cried, and gifts were showered upon me, and upon us.

As I had packed up all my books and files and recycled countless pieces of paper, I had a life review. Isn't it fascinating, I reflected, that on that "best day" those days of struggle with my call, frustration with certain personalities and the tragic days of death and discouragement were swallowed up in the love of all those people?

The best day of ministry — yes — it was my "last."

Christy is currently serving an interim pastorate in Arlington, Virginia.



Rev. Christy Dowdy

This
Christmas
end a quarrel.
Seek out a forgotten
friend. Dismiss suspicion,
and replace it with trust.
Write a love letter. Share some
treasure. Give a soft answer. Keep
a promise. Find the time. Forgo a grudge.
Forgive an enemy. Listen. Apologize if you
were wrong. Try to understand. Examine your
demands on others. Think first of someone else.
Be kind; be gentle. Appreciate. Laugh a little. Laugh a
little more. Express your gratitude. Gladden the heart of
a child. Welcome a stranger. Take pleasure in the beauty
and the wonder of Earth.
Speak your love.
Speak it again.
Speak it yet
Once again.

— I'm Not That Kind of Christian, Facebook post, 12/7/18

#MeToo Movement

By Rev. Kathy Gingrich

Tarana Burke is credited with giving birth to the “Me Too” movement in 2007. In a recent article published in *The New York Times*, Ms. Burke reports that in 1997 she was sitting across from a 13-year-old girl who had been sexually abused. As the young girl described her experience, Ms. Burke reports “I didn’t have a response or a way to help her in the moment, and I couldn’t even say ‘me too’.” Ms. Burke reported, “It really bothered me, and it sat in my spirit for a long time.”

Ten years after that initial conversation with the young girl who had been sexually abused, Ms. Burke created Just Be Inc, a non-profit organization that provides care and support to victims of sexual harassment and assault. She named her initiative “Me Too.” In 2017, actress Alyssa Milano added the hashtag and promoted #MeToo to give voice to others who had experienced sexual harassment and assault. Women began to come forward using mainstream media, tweets, Facebook and other social media accounts to share their stories of sexual abuse, sexual assault and/or harassment using #MeToo and to call out their perpetrators by name.

Alyssa Milano tweeted, “If you’ve been sexually harassed or assaulted write ‘me too’ as a reply to this tweet.” The “#MeToo” movement has raised much awareness of the magnitude of sexual assault and harassment in the U.S. and around the world.

Black, Latino and other women of color responded with a campaign of their own, #OscarSoWhite, to

affirm women of color and to uplift one another when disparity occurs in how women of color are treated when they report abuse.

Unfortunately Ms. Milano did not give credit to Ms. Burke’s creation of “me too.” Ms. Milano, who had not been aware of Ms. Burke’s campaign, is now hoping to collaborate with Ms. Burke. Ms. Milano has publicly given credit to Ms. Burke for her work and together they are putting the focus on the victims and survivors. For more information on the history of this movement, see “The Woman Who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags” by Sandra E. Garcia, *The New York Times*, October 20, 2017.

Using social media, many Church of the Brethren women have self identified as victims of sexual assault and harassment using the #MeToo. Shirley Kirkwood, a former Caucus worker, recommends “Our Stories Untold,” (www.ourstoriesuntold.com) a website and “blog dedicated to sharing stories about sexual assault and rape in both the Mennonite Church and all spiritual communities.” SNAP, Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests, (www.snapnetwork.org) is a self-help group for persons abused by clergy and provides resources, advocacy and support to help victim-survivors heal, recover and prevent future abuse.

Dr. Marie Fortune of the Faith Trust Institute opines, “Religious teaching and communities will play a role: they will never be neutral.” Let us remain strongly committed to raising awareness and raising our voices as we educate, provide advocacy, and protect victim-survivors of sexual assault and harassment.



“It is impossible to conceive how different things would have turned out if that birth had not happened whenever, wherever, however it did . . . for millions of people who have lived since, the birth of Jesus made possible not just a new way of understanding life but a new way of living it.

It is a truth that, for twenty centuries, there have been untold numbers of men and women who, in untold numbers of ways, have been so grasped by the child who was born, so caught up in the message he taught and the life he lived, that they have found themselves profoundly changed by their relationship with him.”

— Frederick Buechner



Womaen's Caucus Needs Your Financial Support to Continue

With your continued support Womaen's Caucus can do so much to help further our mission of decreasing prejudice within the Church, empowering women and advocating for people on the margins. This year we have put a lot of energy into being an advocate for SCN members and creating a safe space at Annual Conference. We are thinking about tangible ways in which we can live out our mission and build our community and also interact with the community that Caucus has built over the past 40 years. We appreciate your support!

Options: complete the form below, visit our website at www.womaenscaucus.org and use the donate button, and/or select Womaen's Caucus to receive 0.5% of your purchases at smile.amazon.com.

Make checks payable to: Womaen's Caucus

Cut & mail to: Womaen's Caucus, 818 SW 3rd Ave., #E1299, Portland, OR 97204



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