# Femailings

Womæn's Caucus. Church of the Brethren

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# Womaen's Caucus Fully and Openly Supports **On Earth Peace**

By Sara Davis

Last year the 2016 AC referred the Query on Same Sex Weddings to the Leadership Team and Conference of District Executives. Two gueries regarding On Earth Peace, OEP Reportability/ Accountability to AC and Viability of OEP as an Agency of the COB, were referred to the Review and Evaluations Committee. And a fourth query, Living Together as Christ Calls, was adopted and referred to the Mission and Ministry Board "to appoint a committee to address the roots of our tension and develop strategies that will aid us in treating one another in a truly Christ-like manner."

The Supportive Communities Network leadership team has been in discussion with denominational leaders to review the Leadership Team paper on the Query on Same Sex Weddings. SCN will include information in their special Conference edition of NewsNet.

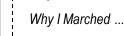
The Review and Evaluations Committee (REC) work is undertaken every 10 years. Their report was expanded to include recommendations concerning OEP. The concerns raised by the queries were summarized in two questions, "Do official agencies of the denomination have the authority to diverge from official Annual

Conference positions and, if not, should those agencies retain their agency status? The answer to each of those questions, based on current polity and basic organizational understanding, is no." www.brethren.org/ac/2017/ business/UB-2-Review-and-Evaluation.pdf

The REC response rests on the definition of agency, "a person who acts on behalf of another." It is a legal definition where "the authority of an agency is limited and cannot exceed that of the organization for which it works." While the response acknowledges that "Annual Conference often approves polity that allows for differences of opinion . . . Agencies serve a particular role within an organization's structure . . . there are clear understandings of what can and what cannot be done."

Recommendation #6 reads, "The Review and Evaluation Committee recommends to the 2017 Annual Conference that On Earth Peace no longer remain an agency of the Church of the Brethren." Recommendation #7 states, "that all congregations, districts, denominational, and agency staff find ways to involve the work of On Earth Peace in the ongoing mission and ministry of the

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We will be having our annual silent auction at the Womæn's Caucus Luncheon at Annual Conference. Please bring items you wish to donate to the Womaen's Caucus booth by Friday 9 AM. If you are unable to attend annual conference this year and have one or more item to contribute, please mail them to Kathy Gingrich, 308 E. Brown St., West Chicago, IL 60185 by June 24th. Thank you!

One Woman, All Women May 2017

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Church of the Brethren." This recommendation then allows REC to recommend returning the Viability query that asks, "Would the denomination be better served by dissolving On Earth Peace as an agency of Annual Conference and their responsibilities integrated into the general work of the staff of the Church of the Brethren, Inc.?"

The REC Committee uses this as a surprising springboard to discuss the tight budget of the Church due, "in part by some congregations in the denomination withholding funds due to their concerns over matters like those being discussed in this report. It is critical to highlight this practice of withholding financial support from one structure of the denomination due to dissatisfaction with another structure of the denomination that they have no control over . . . congregations are in violation of Annual Conference polity on Congregational Ethics: 'We seek to, national, and international program of the Church of the Brethrelive out our covenant with the denomination and district, supporting localn by sending delegates to Annual Conference and District Conference, through gifts of time and money, and most of all through our prayers' (Manual of Organization and Polity, Chapter 4, p. 34, number 6)." "Were there a mechanism to discipline such congregations for also being out of compliance with Annual Conference polity, we would pursue it."

And thus, Recommendation #9 asks that, "all congregations examine their financial contributions to both district and denominational ministries, and bring their giving into compliance with the Congregational Ethics Polity . . . ." The silly legalism and the threatening tone regarding financial support are disappointing to say the least.

The final recommendation of the REC Committee is for Standing Committee to rescind their 2014 rejection of OEP's 2011 Statement of Inclusion (onearthpeace.org/ statement-inclusion) because Standing Committee did not focus

Womæn's Caucus fully and openly supports OEP and the Statement of Inclusion. Following the prophetic voice of OEP would strengthen our denomination. Indeed, recommending that OEP "no longer remain an agency of the COB" is cutting off our nose to spite our face. What is our denomination without OEP?

their rejection on "covenantal relationships between homosexual persons" and "licensing and ordination of homosexual persons" but, instead, denied support for any part of the OEP Statement.

At their October 8, 2016, meeting, the Board of On Earth Peace approved submitting two recommendations to the 2017 Annual Conference (see AC 2017 New Business items 1 and 2). One recommends that Annual Conference develop polity providing "a process for resolving concerns with respect to agencies before considering any recommendations which would otherwise be made arbitrarily in the absence of such polity." The second, Patient Hope in Matters of Conscience, says, that living together "is done with abiding hope and faith that strongly held convictions shared through persistent prayer.

conversation, and walking together, in God's time, will persuade all of us to be of one mind in Christ in matters essential to Brethren discipleship."

All congregations are encouraged to write letters of support for On Earth Peace to the **Council of District Executives** (Colleen Michael, chair); the Leadership Team (AC Officers Moderator Carol Scheppard, Moderator-elect Samuel Kefas Sarpiya, Secretary James Beckwith, General Secretary David Steele, Conference Director Chris Douglas); Agency Leaders and Rev/Ev (Tim Harvey, chair). Congregations are encouraged to allow OEP to publicize their letters on social media.

Womæn's Caucus fully and openly supports OEP and the Statement of Inclusion. Following the prophetic voice of OEP would strengthen our denomination. Indeed, recommending that OEP "no longer remain an agency of the COB" is cutting off our nose despite our face. What is our denomination without OEP?

More importantly, this is a failure to live up to our core values. Jesus modeled a commitment to loving one another above all else. Our church structure is intentionally soft and oriented from the individual through congregations and districts coming together at Annual Conference to share our light allowing love to triumph over our differences and grace to fill our souls. Were we able to live in love and forbearance with this tension of thought regarding human sexuality, we would be a light to the world. A shining light desperately needed in these times.

During Annual Conference, follow us on Twitter @wcaucus #cobac17

## Women on the Move . . .

... is a new feature we are introducing in this newsletter. We plan on highlighting current trends, theological insights, and spiritual stirrings to raise awareness and continue the conversation about the important contributions women are making — "Continuing the work of Jesus. Peacefully. Simply. Together."

The following sermon was preached by **Rev. Christy Waltersdorff**, pastor, York Center Church of the Brethren on March 19, 2017, Lenten week 3. York Center Church of the Brethren is located in Lombard, IL, within the IL/WISC district. The monologue at the beginning was written by Presbyterian Pastor **Nancy Jo Clendenin Dederer**. Thanks Pastor Christy for the gift of this sermon and permission to re-print it in Femailings.

## Witnesses to Jesus — The Samaritan Woman at the Well, John 4: 1-43

I've lived with a wall around me for a long time. It's a wall that others began to build years ago a wall that I've also added to, stone by stone. You see, I've had five husbands. One by one they died or discarded me. It might just be because I'm unlucky, or maybe it's because they tell me I'm too headstrong for my own good. Can I help it if God made me confident and curious? My community is wary of me. A woman with no husband has no protection. No source for sustenance. What was I to do? Beg for my daily bread? So another man took me in — but we're not married. That caused quite a stir among the village elders. I'm not completely immune to their looks as I walk through town. No one wants to be seen talking to me. lest I might "rub off" on them and taint their sacred "family values." So I lived defensively, waiting for the next attack, the next snub, the next stone to be added to the wall that separates me from "the righteous."

It was in the heat of the day, after the women were long gone, that I'd trek to the well with my jar and fetch the water — a daily chore which would be so much easier to do before the sun is barreling down on my back instead of going at noon. But I save myself the trouble of dealing with the other women, their disapproving eyes, their pitying glances. One day, hot and sweaty, I set my jar down and moved to lower the bucket deep into the well. A man was there, a stranger. Without so much as a hello, he asked me for a drink. (Apparently he didn't know my reputation.) I couldn't help but challenge him. Why was he, a Jewish man, asking me, a Samaritan woman for a drink? It just isn't done.

His answer was both surprising and mystifying: he told me I should ask him for living water. I thought that was funny. He didn't even have a bucket!

Then suddenly there we were having an intelligent, theological conversation. That's not done. either — not between men and women, and certainly not between Samaritans and Jews. But this man Jesus didn't seem to mind. In fact. he welcomed the conversation about "God-things." He answered question after question and he knew things about me — but didn't judge. Moment by moment, he broke through my walls. I felt something strange, like a spring of water bubbling up in my soul. I realized I was in the presence of the "Holy." I think he's the true Messiah!

After I encountered Jesus, the walls didn't matter anymore. I left my jar at the well and ran to tell the town to come and see the One who must be the Messiah. My need to protect myself at all costs melted away as my desire to share the good news grew. Amazingly, the people who had long questioned my lifestyle actually listened to me



Rev. Christy Waltersdorff

and went to see for themselves! Who knew that my testimony would catch their attention, their imagination, their hearts? I guess, even behind their seemingly "put together lives," they were thirsty, too. He changed my life that day. And he changed theirs too.

She persisted. She really did. There is no other way to put it. She persisted.

And Jesus blessed her. And she in turn was a blessing to others.

Every time I read this story I am astonished that it was included in the canon of Holy Scripture. Men in a patriarchal society made those decisions, after all, and I wonder how many voted to exclude this story, this woman, from what we now know as the Bible.

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Let's be clear. The woman Jesus met at the well was not a prostitute, and for the record, neither was Mary Magdalene. One nationally known male preacher has labeled the Samaritan woman a "whore." I can't even. She is one in a long line of strong, bold, fearless women across the centuries who found her voice and refused to be silenced.

I would have hoped that by now, in the year 2017, we would no longer be talking about the silencing and labeling of strong, smart women. But you know as well as I that we are still not where it appears Jesus was leading us over two thousand years ago. Misogyny is thriving in the highest levels of our nation's government from a president who brags about sexual assault to a female Senator who is told to sit down and be quiet in the Senate chamber to an Oklahoma state representative who labeled pregnant women "the host." When did respect for women become a political liability?

Patriarchy is alive and well in our country. We hear all kinds of warnings about how women should protect themselves against rape what not to wear, what not to drink, where not to go. Instead of blaming women for the violence against them, why isn't society telling men not to rape?

In the Church of the Brethren only 19.8% of our pastors are women. Many gifted women are studying for ministry but churches refuse to call them. And we know that on average women in the U.S. are still paid only about 78% of what a man is paid. I am tired of this. Aren't you tired of this?

I would guess that many women here today know what it feels like to hear disparaging remarks or threatening comments directed at them. More than a few of us have experienced sexual harassment. How many women don't automatically lock their car doors as soon as they get in? How many women aren't constantly aware of their surroundings and have learned how to hold their keys between their fingers as a weapon? You think I'm exaggerating? Ask the women you know.

What confounds me is that Christianity has been at the center of such deplorable treatment of women. Scripture has been used to shame abused women into returning to their abusers. It has been used to demean and control women for centuries.

And here we have Jesus, in the Gospel of John, in the bright light of day, shattering every stereotype, obliterating every religious and cultural barrier between men and women.

Jesus and his disciples were traveling, by foot, from Judea in the south of Palestine to Israel in the north. The most direct route between the two- a three day tripwas through Samaria. The problem was that Samaria was off-limits to good Jews like Jesus and his disciples. Even though they were members of the same familyconflict and tensions had them at each other's throats for centuries. When they weren't at war with each other they were cozying up their enemy's enemies. The Jews considered themselves the purebloods and the Samaritans as the half-breeds. They didn't talk to each other, didn't travel through each other's land, and certainly didn't share food or drink.

All of this tormented history is hovering in the air as we find Jesus exhausted, hungry, and thirsty, resting by Jacob's well in the land of his "enemy" while his disciples went into town to find lunch. And here comes, of all things, a woman. A good Jew wouldn't talk to a Samaritan but even that would be better than talking to a woman. Rabbis did not acknowledge the presence of women in public and they certainly didn't talk to them. Many Jewish men began their day with a prayer thanking God that they were not born female.

The longest recorded conversation in all of scripture between Jesus and another person takes place right here, beside the well in the desert heat at high noon with this woman. And what a scandalous conversation it is. She was bold in her questions and in her answers. She looked Jesus in the eye and engaged him in a profound theological discussion.

She is the very first person in the Gospel of John to whom Jesus reveals his true identity. She says, "I know the Messiah is coming." And Jesus replies, "I am he."

This is how preacher Barbara Brown Taylor describes this moment. "It is the first time he has said that to another living soul. It is a moment of full disclosure, in which the outsider and the Messiah of God stand face to face with no pretense about who they are.

Both stand fully lit at high noon for one bright moment in time while all the rules, taboos, and history that separates them fall forgotten to the ground." (1)

People have made a lot of assumptions about why this woman had five husbands and wasn't married to the one she was currently living with hence the desire to judge and disparage her as immoral. Although Jesus names this reality he never mentions sin or calls her to repentance. She could easily have been widowed or abandoned or deserted by any of those five husbands. As a single woman of a certain age, without a husband to support her she may have been living with a family member or her

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husband's brother as is recommended by Old Testament law. Rather than imagining this woman's story as tragic, generations of preachers have preferred to call it — and her — immoral.

As we travel this Lenten journey with those people who witnessed the transforming power of Jesus first hand, we can clearly see the difference between Nicodemus from last week and the unnamed woman today.

Nicodemus was a respected religious leader, an insider, who chose to come to Jesus under the cover of darkness in a private place. He could not comprehend who Jesus was or what he was talking about. This unnamed woman, on the other hand, was about as much of an outsider as you could get. She meets Jesus at noon in the bright light of day in a public place. When Jesus said something she didn't understand she pushed back and asked guestions until she knew what he was talking about. While Nicodemus couldn't get past the literal meaning of Jesus' words, this woman dove deep into the theological context and found common ground with Jesus.

This is a story about identity. Again from Barbara Brown Taylor: "By telling the woman who she is, Jesus shows her who he is. By confirming her true identity, he reveals his own, and that is how it still happens. The Messiah is the one in whose presence you know who you really are. The Messiah is the one who shows you who you are by showing you who he is -who crosses all boundaries, breaks speaking to you like someone you have known all your life, bubbling up in your life like a well that needs no dipper, so that you can go back

to face people you thought you could never face again, speaking to them boldly as he spoke to you." (2)

What touches me the most about this story is the way Jesus treats this woman — he treats her with dignity and respect. He doesn't make assumptions about who he thinks she is. He sees her as she truly is- a beloved child of God, his sister, a woman of worth and value. When he was thirsty she held all the power because she was the one with the bucket. I wonder if she was the one he was thinking of when he said what we read in Matthew's Gospel, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink."

The witnesses we are meeting during Lent have one thing in common — they were transformed by their encounter with Jesus. It seems to have taken Nicodemus awhile but he got there in the end. This woman, though? She gets it right away. She drops her bucket at the well and runs into town to tell everyone that she has found the Messiah!

We don't know what other people thought of her, but the fact that she didn't go to the well with the other women early in the morning makes me think she may have been an outcast among outcasts. But she ran to tell them anyway. She didn't keep the good news to herself. She didn't dole it out one person at a time to the ones she thought deserved it. Like Jesus, she poured it out like a gushing fountain of living water. She told everyone! She invited them not just to take her word for it but to come to the well and see for themselves.

And they did. Once they met Jesus they believed in him. She led them to the truth of the living water and they gulped it down themselves. They made Jesus' message their own. In verse 42 John writes, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world." This is the only time John uses the title "Savior" in his entire Gospel. And it is here — in enemy territory where the good news is shared first by a woman of questionable reputation.

Glass ceilings were shattered that day. Border walls crumbled to pieces.

She was an outsider and through her encounter with Jesus she became a witness.

She was a beginner in the faith and after spending some time with Jesus she became his first apostle.

He was a thirsty Messiah and she was a resourceful woman and together, they brought the good news to a whole city. From this moment on Jesus knew that his ministry would not be confined by social, ethnic, cultural, or religious boundaries. All social conventions that de-humanize and oppress God's people would be broken beyond repair. And no matter how hard we try — even now — to repair and rebuild the walls that separate us, they will not stand.

The woman at the well is our spiritual matriarch. She recognized the truth when she heard it.

She persisted. And because she did, her own life was changed.

She persisted and the life of her community was changed.

She persisted and I believe even the life of Jesus was changed as well.

She persisted. Thanks be to God. She persisted! So we can, too!

Amen.

#### Endnotes

- "Identity Confirmation," Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Christian Century*, February 28, 1996.
- (2) Brown Taylor



*If you have recently* participated in a march or are planning to participate in a future march, we would like to hear from you. Please reflect upon the question "Why I march."

You can post your answer on the Womaen's Caucus Facebook page, send us an email, or stop by our booth at annual conference. Several of our steering committee members have participated in recent marches. We are eager to hear your story and to share our stories with you. We may include some of the responses in a future newsletter.

## **Another Way**

Use <u>smile.amazon.com</u> when making your online purchases, and donate to Womæn's Caucus at the same time. Easy!

Select Womæn's Caucus as your recipient, and we will receive a donation of 0.5% of your purchases. It all adds up.

## Why I March

by Rev. Kathy Gingrich

The reason I march is the same reason I send postcards, emails, letters and make phone calls to elected officials. I want my voice to be heard. It's important to "rise up" in body or spirit for peace, justice, and the protection of human rights and stewardship of our planet. Jesus built relationships with the marginalized, the outcast and the disenfranchised throughout his ministry. He challenged the religious and political authorities with his



teachings, ministry and personhood. God's abundant love and generous grace flowed through Jesus into the lives, communities and religio-political institutions in which he lived and worked. Transformative! Healing! Empowering! Redemptive!

Today there are many obstacles and barriers to persons seeking physical, emotional and spiritual wellness. There are many impediments to people having healthcare and access to healthcare, affordable housing, and fair wages. Justice, mercy and equality rights for persons who are immigrants, LGBTQ, are differently-abled is why I march. I am advocating for human rights, women's rights, men's rights, climate concerns, care for our earth, water and quality of the air we breathe.

I attended the women's march in Chicago in January along with several women from my congregation. The crowd of 250,000 men, women and children overflowed the designated rally and march area. In the midst of the towering skyscrapers — a gentle, kind, respectful, empowering community shared a moment of resistance, persistence and advocacy. Despite it's being January in Chicago, I felt warm, safe, accepted, loved and protected.

I have since participated in a women's march in Springfield to advocate for a progressive and responsible budget in Illinois. We have been 23 months and counting without a full state budget. Social service programs have a contract with the State of Illinois to provide addiction, domestic violence prevention and counseling services, however, the state has not been reimbursing these agencies for the services provided resulting in reduction of staff, diminished services and elimination of programs serving the elderly. The two retirement communities in the IL/ WISC district who accept residents with Medicaid insurance are struggling financially because of the state's budget impasse.

Most recently, I participated with friends in Chicago's Climate March. Cutting the EPA's budget, eliminating web pages addressing climate change from government websites, or providing "alternate facts" in tweets and "breaking news" segments, does not change the command we have been given by God in the Genesis story to care for the earth. I march to give witness and "voice". I march to reduce my fear. Fear divides us. Standing together around issues of human needs builds community and an increase of love and kindness. From Mary Oliver's poem, The Summer Day....."Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" One of my answers is march, and send notes to my elected officials, and pray....pray for a day we won't need marches because we finally understand and practice a love that is transforming, healing, empowering, redeeming. May it be so!

## Why I Marched

#### by Rev. Jennifer Keeney Scarr

On International Women's Day, I gathered myself together and set out for Dayton, Ohio's Courthouse square where I rallied with hundreds of women and men in support of the Women's March on Washington. I knew I was going the minute I heard about it.

I stood in that crowd, listening to the speakers, remembering every time my intelligence had been



I

Marched

questioned because of my hair color and chest size. I looked into the faces of the women around me, remembering every cat call and "hey baby" I bristled at as a college student. I observed a young dad and his daughter wearing bright pink hats, Why

remembering the times men required me to smile because they were uncomfortable with my resting face. I spotted a fellow pastor across the square, and remembered the past Sunday when dear congregants complimented my dress and beauty instead of the service held for our God. I remembered that I am not a "pastor," but a "woman pastor, female pastor, lady pastor." I remembered the soul on Facebook who told me that my partner and I were being too confusing when

we chose my last name instead of his as our family name. These are shadows and echoes of a dying patriarchy, still present in my life and in the lives of the daughters yet learning to crawl.



Then I remembered **Ruthann Knechel Johansen** who hosted a tea the semester she retired from being President of Bethany Seminary. Ruthann — a poet, professor, president — could track in her lifetime the progress woman have made toward equality. This woman of valor sat there in all her quiet grace and, with a fire in her eye, told us her greatest fear was that young women believed the battle for equality was already won. She knew it wasn't over, she knew we had a long way to go

before we sleep. And she's right . . . we do have a long way to go.

Her words have never left me. And so I rallied, and will rally, and march, and shout, and preach until persons of all colors and genders stand on level ground. When I was at the rally in Dayton, I didn't feel so alone. When I heard that this march was the largest of its kind in history and took place all over the world, I held my head higher. We're gonna get there. O yes, we're gonna get there.





# Highlights of Womaen's Caucus at Annual Conference

- Stop by our booth and visit with Steering Committee members and friends of Caucus
- ♦ Attend the Womæn's Caucus Luncheon on June 30 at noon where we will be recognizing this year's recipient of the Mother of Caucus award. We will also be featuring a panel of women in ministry who are currently developing or participating in new ministries. Our panelists are: LaDonna Sanders Nikosi, Jeanne Davis, Elizabeth Ullery Swenson and Monica Rice. They will share their stories of the obstacles overcome and the ways in which they "risk hope" in their current ministry setting.
- Join with us as we give support to the prophetic and visionary work of On Earth Peace. The 2016 gueries about the mission and ministry of On Earth Peace, and OEP's response to those gueries by bringing their two gueries this year, invite us to think more deeply about Annual Conference authority.
- Prior to Annual Conference, please check your email or stop by the booth for a copy of "The Progressive Guide to Annual Conference."
- There will be a prayer for the women on the ballot before the vote.

## Excerpts from "Looking Back to Look Forward"

By Shirley Kirkwood

In 1987, we published the book, *Women at the Well* edited by Betty Jo Buckingham with personal expressions of faith, life and worship drawn from their own wisdom from many Caucus members. In 1985 Pamela Brubaker wrote and Brethren Press published the book, *She Hath Done What She Could* — a history of women's work in the COB which fits into the "little extra for the next in line" category. In 1984 Yvonne Dilling and Ingrid Rogers wrote *In Search of Refuge*, published by Herald Press. And while these last two books were not Caucus related, it seemed like the motivation came from the same source acknowledging the efforts of women.

Events sponsored and planned by Caucus during those years were "As the World Turns: Feminism and Nonviolence," held at Elizabethtown College in 1984; "She Will be Remembered for This" project that would locate and remember women whose lives influenced others; and then the first COB international women's conference, "Empowered by Our Birthright," which celebrated 100 years of women's organizations in the COB. This event was held at Bridgewater College in 1985.

Caucus members were passionate about their concerns, and activists as well. I recall one march in Washington where many Caucus members from all over the country participated. . . . Sometimes I wonder if or how we as Caucus or one person can make a difference. We may wonder if the efforts of Caucus throughout the years did change or affect others. I think they did make a difference — one person at a time — as when one experienced a difficult situation and was enabled to consider other ways as "water from another time" to respond and feel support from within the denomination.

I truly believe Caucus members are creative and resourceful in planning ahead and addressing the issues before all of us — women *and* men. Creating opportunities for women in the COB (and others) to share these and other concerns (as in past conferences/events) may be the best way of "leaving a little water for another time."



## Womaen's Caucus Needs Your Financial Support to Continue

With your continued support Womæn'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 <u>www.womaenscaucus.org</u> and use the donate button, and/or select Womæn's Caucus to receive 0.5% of your purchases at <u>smile.amazon.com</u>.

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

Name	Contribution	Membership
Address	□ \$100	□ I am already a member
	□ \$75	Membership — \$25/yr
	□ \$50	□ Student member — \$15/yr
Email	□ \$25	Femailings
Phone	Other	Already receiving
District/Home Church ( <i>if applicable</i> )		Send by mail
		Send by email