



Clergy Corner

Reflecting on Chaos

by Anna Lisa Gross
Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee

We read in the Gospel of Mark: *"On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.'* ³⁶*And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. ³⁷A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already being swamped. ³⁸But he was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they woke him up and said to him, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?'* ³⁹*He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, 'Peace! Be still!'* *Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm. ⁴⁰He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?'* ⁴¹*And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'"*

I'm seriously afraid of snakes. Even snakes in cages, or pictures of snakes get my heart racing and stomach queasy. One of my childhood friends had a pet boa constrictor – a huge snake in a huge cage, at the top of the stairs. I climbed her stairs with my eyes shut, holding on to the railing.

When I was 14, I was working at a kids' summer camp. As a couple of

8-year-olds and I were tromping through the woods one afternoon we came across a garter snake – suddenly – we saw it in the grass four feet from our feet, slender, sleek, slipping away. The kids stopped and shrieked. And because their fear was louder than mine, suddenly I wasn't afraid. "Look how beautiful it is!" I said, "Let's watch." I would never, ever have wanted to look at a snake alone. But as the grown-up 14-year-old, I didn't have room for fear because I was responsible for them. So we watched that snake, following it for a minute until it slipped out of sight.

In this boat on the Sea of Galilee in Mark, Jesus is the brave one. Everyone else is shrieking and he's sound asleep. He awakens not to the storm, but to their fear. If he hadn't been there, would one of them have risen to the occasion? Maybe Peter – he's the bold one who tries walking on water with Jesus – Peter might have calmed the crew. Or Thomas – the maverick who doesn't rush to welcome the risen Jesus but asks to see his side – maybe Thomas would have been the minority opinion on the boat and told everyone to chill out. Peter or Thomas couldn't have calmed the storm, but could they have calmed each other?

But Jesus is there, so everyone looks to him. This is only the fourth chapter of Mark, so Jesus' ministry is just ramping up. He's been banishing demons, healing the paralyzed, preaching new wineskins, cleansing lepers, and has called the twelve disciples. But just how powerful he is, or where the power comes from, no one has figured out yet. But they know he's the one they want to be with in a storm. So they wake him up and expect him to make it better.

They wake Jesus up with their fear and he doesn't say "there's nothing to be afraid of" even though he isn't afraid at all. He says, "Why are you afraid?" Because Jesus

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knows that we can't work on our fear until we start talking about it. Courage is not the absence of fear; but realizing that other things are more important than our fear.

The stormy seas of our world are too scary to list. From church conflict to racist violence to dehumanization of poor people to relentless misogyny, many of us aren't surviving today's horrors. Those of us who find a lifeboat tend to hunker down and hide our faces from the wind and rain. But then we're inclined to hunker down and hide our fear. Ignoring our fears should make them smaller, right? Paradoxically, acknowledging fear can make it smaller, because once we say it out loud, we can start to see the shape of it, to look at it from some distance, we realize it is separate from ourselves, rather than letting it define us or fill us up.

We're not literally in a boat with Jesus, but we can imagine. Feel the boat pitch and sway. Feel the spray on your face, the wind in your hair. What is your storm? Look at Jesus. He asks, "What are you afraid of?" Tell him. Tell him about the storm. Jesus sits by your side and tells your storm, "Peace, be still." Peace. Be still. Peace. Breathe into the peace.

The writer of Mark is specific.

Jesus got in the boat "just as he was." Just as he was, no trappings, no medals, no titles—and still had power over the storm. This story is part of Jesus' coming out as the Messiah. This story demonstrates Jesus' power, which doesn't come from the world, but from within.

Jesus commanding the storm is reminiscent of God commanding the chaos at the beginning of the world. In Genesis 1 we read:

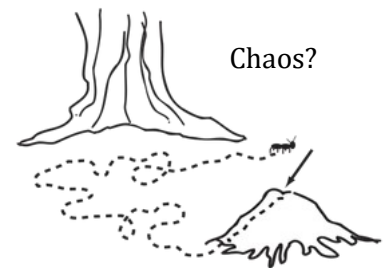
"In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. . . . And God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome."

God speaks to water and wind, creating order from chaos. Jesus speaks to water and wind, creating order from chaos. What does God do with chaos? Creates a whole universe of life: pain, pleasure, fear,

peace. What does Jesus do with chaos? Teaches and loves his friends.

We cannot go where God is not. What looks like a chaotic mess may become essential elements for creating something fresh and fine. What scares us most may be what turns us into a body of believers, resilient and Spirit-led.

In this scary and chaotic time in the Church of the Brethren, we turn to wise artists and ask, "What are the gifts of chaos?" Join us at Annual Conference to learn and listen together.



☞ SAVE THE DATE ☞

Clergy Women's Retreat plans are being finalized. All commissioned, licensed or ordained Church of the Brethren clergy women are invited to gather for a time of retreat, reflection and renewal at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, January 6th—9th, 2020. **Mandy Smith**, lead pastor at University Christian Church in Cincinnati, Ohio, will be the presenter and facilitate some workshops. She is a regular contributor to *Christianity Today* and Missio Alliance and the author of *The Vulnerable Pastor: How Human Limitations Empower Our Ministry*. Mandy previously led

the Church of the Brethren New Church Planters Conference. Free time will be included in the retreat schedule for walking, reflecting and other activities.

An online brochure is available at: www.brethren.org/ministryoffice/documents/2020-clergywomens-retreat.pdf. Registration begins in August. Womaen's Caucus contributes financial support to this event and is directing those who need financial assistance in attending to apply for a scholarship through the Mary Blocher Smeltzer Scholarship fund. Follow this link for more scholarship details: <https://tinyurl.com/y2wye3g5>. More details to come!

Looking Ahead: Annual Conference Preview of Events

July 3-7, 2019

Greensboro, North Carolina

We are nurturing space for creativity and care within this summer's Annual Conference, engaging the theme: Gifts of Chaos. Visit our booth for creative and interactive expressions of shared wisdom. We will also be unveiling "Preach It, Sister" — keep an eye out!

The annual Womaen's Caucus Luncheon is Friday, July 5th at noon. Tickets are available for purchase when registering for Annual Conference or at the registration booth at Annual Conference. We will continue our recognition of the Mothers of Caucus, celebrating the contributions of women who were early founders and supporters of Womaen's Caucus.

We are pleased to announce two beloved, creative women will share how chaos is part of their artistic process. **Barbara West** and **Deanna Brown**, who have larger features in this issue of *Femailings*.

We will also be hosting the "Silent Auction" at our annual luncheon, as usual. If you are unable to attend Annual Conference but would like to donate an item for our silent auction, please send the clearly marked item to Kathy Gingrich, 308 E. Brown St., West Chicago, IL

Thanks!



Deanna Brown

Ordained since 1985, Deanna Brown embodies memories of nearly 3 decades of ministry in Church of the Brethren institutions and conferences — including serving Brethren Colleges Abroad in 1999 in South India.

In 2007, Deanna followed a new vocational calling and founded "Cultural Connections," an international pilgrimage for women in the USA traveling to India (and formerly Turkey). Partnerships in India with a nonprofit (Cultural Academy for Peace) and a social entrepreneurship (Blue Mango Trust) provide a context where mutual engagement, storytelling, ritual, and interfaith dialogue lead to transformative experiences for women from both countries.

Facilitating Cultural Connections' trips, women's retreats, and women's spirituality circles inspires Deanna with gratitude for those who are working for transformative justice and healing — here and around the globe.



Barbara West

Barbara West is the only parent of a 22-year-old son and works as a Wound/Ostomy/Continence Nurse, with prior work in Hospice.

Publications include *Full of Crow*, *Brevities*, *Medusa's Kitchen*, *Sacramento Voices*, and *Davis Shambhala Center Newsletter*. Her first book, *"...and I felt the simple sweetness of me"* was published in 2017 by Cold River Press. She is currently working on a memoir, *"Hunger to Help: Sorting Extraordinary Legacies,"* which explores the tension between Christian/Buddhist directives to "help others" and 12-step Recovery work which directs her to "focus on yourself."

Thanks to a background in theater, and some time singing with a band, Barbara often recites from memory, usually without a mic, since her voice is plenty loud. She also enjoys windsurfing.



Discovering the Gifts in Chaos

*“Chaos means a multiplicity
of possibilities”*

huffpost.com 12/717

*“Chaos is about “that which is possible,
not about disorder”*

Jok Church, creator of “You Can With Beakman and Jax”

*“Chaos is “a very healthy part of
the cycle of life . . . Chaos creates the
opening for new possibilities.”*

Matthew B. James, MA, Ph.D., President of the Empowering Partnership

*“Life is nothing without a little chaos
to make it interesting.”*

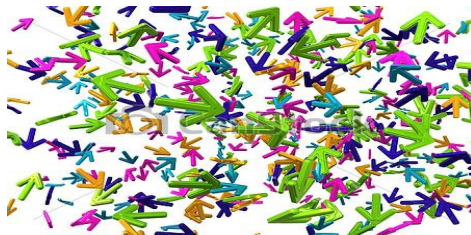
— Amelia Atwater-Rhodes, [Demon in My View](#)

“In chaos, there is fertility.”

— Anais Nin

*“Invention, it must be humbly admitted,
does not consist in creating out of void,
but out of chaos.”*

— Mary Shelly



Amazon Smile & Network for Good

Amazon Smile is a simple way to donate while you shop. Choose SmileAmazon when shopping and making purchases. Designate Womaen's Caucus as your preferred charitable organization and Amazon donates 0.5% of your purchases to Womaen's Caucus. Shop smile.amazon.com and support Womaen's Caucus with every purchase you make!

Network for Good is another way to make charitable donations to your favorite organizations. Please let us be one of your favorite charitable organizations.

Thank you!

Another Way of Giving . . .

The Office of Ministry on behalf of the Women's Clergy Retreat is accepting financial support to assist with the costs of the conference, to provide scholarships for women seeking financial aid and to defray childcare costs for women attending with their children, under 2 years of age. 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!

Correction

In a previous newsletter, we welcomed Audrey DeCoursey as our *Femailings* editor effective 2019. With regret, we announce a retraction of that previous announcement.

Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee

At our Annual Conference luncheon we recognize the pioneering men and women who had a vision for greater awareness for equality in the Church of the Brethren, especially around women's roles in our church and in the wider communities in which we live and serve. These dedicated and faithful women and men gave birth to Womaen's Caucus.

The denomination has been engaged in a multi-year conversation to create a Compelling Vision statement and that conversation will continue in the business sessions of Annual Conference in Greensboro, North Carolina, July 3-7.

At our most recent Womaen's Caucus steering committee retreat, which we held in North Manchester in May, 2019, we, too, reflected upon our work and struggle for inclusion and equality as women in the Church of the Brethren. We found it helpful to pause and reflect upon the work we have done and the opportunities that are before us as we continue to engage in raising awareness, and engaging the larger Church in issues of inclusion, equality and social justice.

Following are the commitments which guided the steering committees before us and which continue to guide our work today.

Womaen's Caucus continues to hold the following commitments:

- ◆ *To provide safe spaces for women to speak the truth about their life experiences and find support, affirmation and an opportunity for collective action.*



2019 Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee Retreat: (left to right) Kathy Gingrich, Anna Lisa Gross, Jonathan Bay, Daisy Schmidt, and Sara Davis

- ◆ *To name the realities of sexism, economic inequality, racism, domestic violence, health concerns, sexual abuse, and heterosexism as they affect the lives of women and children, and to call the church to accountability around these issues.*
- ◆ *To increase the awareness of the dynamics of power and injustice which compromise the dignity of person or whole groups.*
- ◆ *To connect with other individuals and groups engaged in the work of social transformation and develop local and national networks for those interested in feminist study and practice and its relation to faith.*
- ◆ *To bear witness to the strengths and courage of feminist women and men within the church.*
- ◆ *To advocate a position on abortion that is prayerfully respectful of women as moral decision makers.*
- ◆ *To claim women's authority as theologians, and offer opportunities to reflect on scripture, tradition and spirituality in light of our life experience.*

While many states in the US are racing to change or create new laws about the rights and roles of women, let us be mindful of Jesus' ministry which modeled recognition, honor, healing, inclusion and justice for women. And as we continue to think, discuss and create a "compelling vision" for our denomination, let us honor the "voices" that have gone before us and the "voices" that continue to call us to accountability and to a beloved community with peace, love, justice and equality for all.





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



Name _____

Address _____

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District/Home Church (if applicable) _____

Contribution

☐ \$100

☐ \$75

☐ \$50

☐ \$25

☐ Other

Membership

☐ I am already a member

☐ Membership — \$25/yr

☐ Student member — \$15/yr

Femailings

☐ Already receiving

☐ Send by mail

☐ Send by email