



**PLEASE BRING YOUR  
RAINBOW SCARF FROM  
LAST YEAR WITH YOU TO  
AC TO WEAR THIS YEAR!**

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## Taking Jesus Seriously

by Sharon Nearhoof May, editor

Progressives are routinely criticized by theological conservatives for not taking Jesus (not to mention the Bible) seriously. It is hard to know sometimes what to make of that, but I suspect it often means that many progressives simply take Jesus seriously in ways that many conservatives do not recognize, value, or understand. To many (most?) progressives, taking Jesus seriously does not mean using code words about Jesus to unite the church or prove our faith or guarantee our salvation. It does not mean agreeing with a prescribed set of core 'beliefs' formulated by others and perpetuated by the powerful. It does not mean trying to 'obey' every word the biblical Jesus says with as little conscious interpretation as possible, without trying to learn more about who Jesus was, where he lived, the cultures that shaped him, the faith traditions that formed him, the religious and political systems that structured his society, the *context* for his words and actions. For me, and I suspect for many other progressives and feminists...

...taking Jesus seriously means taking all of those contextual things about Jesus seriously.

...taking Jesus seriously means being willing and obligated to take seriously the things we discover Jesus taking seriously -- *prayer; faith; living with integrity; justice-making; peacemaking; taking seriously and drawing in those who have been cast to the margins (the poor, the sick, women, children, glbt persons, the grieving, etc.) as well as working for the redemption of those who hold the center; prophetically challenging the religious and political power structures that dehumanize and violate the dignity of those God created and loves, and much, much more.*

...taking Jesus seriously means taking seriously the radical equality of all people before God and within the community of those who say they take Jesus seriously (that would be the church).

...taking Jesus seriously means taking the pursuit of Jesus seriously and being open to new learning, new growth, new discovery, new faith, new understandings, new beliefs, and new life along the Way.

And so much more.

If I have learned one thing in the making of this issue of *Femailings*, it is that it is not easy to speak about Jesus. To many of us here on the

...continued on page 9

***"Transformation occurs as we dream about and work toward the fulfillment of ourselves individually and collectively and equally important as we assume personal responsibility for the directions of the Church and society."***

**Therefore, a for one woman and e for all women, representing our individual and collective presence in the Church of the Brethren.**

## Jesus Taking Women Seriously

by Elaine Sollenberger

Way back when, in my earlier years of Bible study, I was not impressed with Paul's—nor Timothy's—directives concerning women. The passing years have included more in-depth study of that issue and I gained a degree or more of tolerance, acknowledging the influence on Paul of his Jewish upbringing, the culture, and the times. That did not, however, lead me to accept Paul's words without question. I needed to hear what Jesus had to say about women and check his directives, if he gave any.

The Gospels clear up the issue. Try as I might, I could find no directives expressed by Jesus in regard to the appropriate behavior of women—no limits on speaking, no gender-based standards of behavior, the same invitation to serve as was given to men.

The closest I found to a set of directives, we call the Beatitudes. The descriptions there show not a hint of gender. Each one begins with “Blessed” or “Happy” depending on the translation. And those blessed ones are among “the poor in spirit”, “those who mourn”, “the meek”, “those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”, and “the peacemakers,” to name a few. The audience listening to Jesus at the time surely included women as well as men, and surely those women knew the message included them.

The Gospels offer other times when Jesus revealed his attitudes toward women, in one case a woman with a soiled reputation and flawed character. At the well in Samaria, Jesus had quite a conversation with a woman, not something in sync with the culture of the time and place. At this time in this culture, it would have been a grave offense to talk with a Samaritan of either gender. Jesus spoke with the woman about some deep matters, certainly not her everyday kind of conversation.

The scripture account of this conversation in John 4 concludes with the woman going back to her home, leaving her water jar behind. Someone has observed that, just as the disciples had left behind their fishing gear to answer the call to follow Jesus, this woman also likewise left behind her jug, accepted Jesus' offer of “living water”, and went on to share her new understandings with others. In spite of her reputation, people listened to her and came to hear for themselves Jesus' message, ultimately believing what they heard firsthand.

A second instance, I especially value, is Mary Magdalene's story after the resurrection. Here she is at the empty tomb, in tears, when she hears a male voice

behind her. After a few questions, the person says, “Mary.” And she knows with whom she is talking. Jesus entrusted this woman, not the disciples who had gone back home after checking the empty tomb, with the truth that he was alive and she becomes the messenger who will tell the disciples that Jesus has risen as he had promised.

Then there is Martha. I have always liked that woman. She knows the importance of hospitality but gets a bit chastised at one point for making that a priority. I see her as a practical person, concerned for the well-being of guests in her home. That, however, is just one of her attributes. At the time of her brother Lazarus' death, she was listening to Jesus say he was the resurrection and the life. Jesus looks Martha in the eye and asks, “Do you believe?” Her response without hesitancy is, “I do believe that you are the Messiah.” The first person to say that out loud and in public was a woman! Jesus knew this woman was more than just an aproned female usually found in the kitchen.

What a contrast in the way Jesus looked upon women and the way Paul wrote—even though the scripture would reveal that Paul did use some women in

**“Jesus did not draw up rules for the behavior of women. Jesus' expectations for men and women were the same; gender was not a factor.”**

his ministry! Jesus did not draw up rules for the behavior of women. Jesus' expectations for men and women were the same; gender was not a factor. I wish he would have called a woman or more as disciples, but I have to think that the culture and the times were

obstacles just too big to ignore. One-on-one at the well, quietly at the tomb, and at other opportune times, Jesus said and did things that underscore his respect for and trust in women and perhaps have them counted among the apostles.

Paul's harsh directives to women, at the time spoken, brought about silence and cut off the creative abilities and talents of women. Sadly, to this day some insist that women honor Paul's directives. Jesus, on the other hand, taught all with the Beatitudes, lived as he taught, and called all to follow and serve—no stipulations based on gender. Paul should have taken note!

Elaine Sollenberger has served the Church in many ways over the years and was the first woman elected to serve as Moderator of the Church of the Brethren in 1989. She and her husband, Ray, have retired from dairy farming but continue to live on the farm and enjoy their “hobbies”—flower gardens, minor equipment repairs, completing projects that were set aside because something more important took priority, catching up on reading, and unabashedly enjoying and telling others about the accomplishments of their four grandchildren.

## Jesus Taking Women Seriously

### The Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite Woman

by Sarah Quinter Malone

The Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24-30; Matt. 15: 21-28) is one who certainly took Jesus' seriously for his exceptional healing ability, begging him to heal her little daughter of an "unclean spirit." (Could she have been suffering from premature menstruation?) She is also one of the few people in the gospels who ever won an argument with Jesus, compelling him to take her seriously. In contrast to our image of him as always welcoming the stranger, he at first brushes her off as if she were an irritating little dog, yapping at the family table for bites of human food.

The one whom we may call Lord, Savior, Friend or Brother began his ministry on earth still entrenched in prejudices typical of his time and place, only finding his way out of this morass by a process of encounter and reflection: encounter with others whose response to him shook up his cultural biases, and no doubt, reflection in prayer and meditation—as well as openness to the result of that reflection. Others who affected this process also include the Samaritan woman at the well, who brought many of her townspeople to believe in him (John 4); the [Gentile] centurion whose faith exceeded anything Jesus had seen among his countrymen (Matt. 8: 5-13); a single one of ten healed lepers—a Samaritan—who turns back to thank him (Luke 17: 11-19); here, Jesus is startled that a foreigner is the only one who does so. The Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite (perhaps we might read, "Palestinian") woman is one whose clever, humble answer to his cultural arrogance perhaps shakes most deeply those youthful cultural assumptions that saw his own group as "human" and those outside his group as "something less than human." Surely the rejection he eventually experienced from some of his own people also helped in his ethical maturation. That Jesus succeeds in developing a freer, looser, more inclusive definition of who is fully human is illustrated most completely and impressively in his parable of the Samaritan who



Sarah Quinter Malone is currently pastor of Washington City Church in Washington, D.C., and a board member of On Earth Peace, as well as a "faculty wife" and the mother of two young adults. Her developmental view of the life of Jesus is more fully explored in The First Resurrection of Christ, an untold story of the life of Jesus, a manuscript by the author, currently seeking a publisher.

attends to the victim of violent crime while others, concerned with ritual purity, cleanness and uncleanness, pass by on the other side of the road.

It took some time for Jesus of Nazareth to overcome the earthly cultural biases he was born into, and the Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite woman who took him seriously, and forced him to take her seriously as well, was one of the most powerfully startling influences noted in the gospels pushing him to do so.



## Taking Jesus Seriously

By Doris Abdullah

I take Jesus very seriously. Jesus is my liberator by death on a cross for my sins. Jesus calls me "daughter" even when I do wrong and Jesus touches me even when I am unclean. (Matthew 9:20-22). Most of all, I take Jesus seriously because of an appearance at an empty tomb and a message to me and all the world through Mary Magdalene in all four Gospels to go forward and tell the Good News story of everlasting life with a living God (Matthew 28:1-10, Mark 16:1-7, Luke 24:10, John 20:11-18).

The headline from the newspaper in February read: *G.O.P. aide is charged in violent family fight*. The man arraigned for attempted murder was married with two daughters, possessed a \$4 million house in Connecticut, had served in government as a deputy White House counsel, had a high-powered legal career, and was well educated. He was being charged for pulling out globs of his wife's hair, hitting her repeatedly with a metal flashlight until she passed out, and choking her with his hands.

His lawyer was not just upset with the prosecutor for asking for a three million dollar

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bond for his client, but called the \$3 million fee "ridiculous", given that his client had "never before been arrested" and had "worked at high level government and corporate jobs." (1) In other words, his client was a good citizen even though he had brutalized his wife almost to the point of death.

How do we understand the contradiction



between this man's love of his wife, daughters, and a living God, or his lawyers' belief in justice or God, and their actions? Oh, we could dismiss it as unusual, but it is not unusual in the least. Per the information coming from the March, 2010, *United Nations Conference On The Status of Women*, 70% of all women on Earth will be the victim of violence in their lifetime (2). Thus the upperclass Connecticut housewife falls in the 70% victim column.

Let us return to the New Testament and Jesus' interactions with women where women are treated seriously by Jesus and are plentiful in all four gospels. For, somehow I think that if women were to get better coverage for being at the empty tomb, then maybe some of the awful violence so commonly perpetrated on women would be different, and the world as a whole would be less violent.

I cannot understand two conflicting actions at the same time. For how can we believe that a living God is watching our every move and participate in repeated violence without remorse at the same time? Either we believe that Jesus is alive, sees our every move and heaven and hell are real or we think the Good News message is just a story and Jesus was just another preacher that gives aid and comfort to people who cannot accept that this life is the beginning and the end for them. One must be able to accept first that Jesus is real in order for Jesus to be taken seriously.

I have heard preachers attempt to diminish Mary Magdalene's status in the gospels by hinting that she is the adulterous woman found in John 8:3-11 or, at best, the scandalous woman with a reputation that anoints Jesus head and wipes his feet with her hair found in John 12:3-7, Mark 14:3-6, and Luke 7:37. Yet, these sermons' attempts to reduce the importance and respectability of Mary Magdalene do not have any biblical basis in fact.

In the account of the adulterous women, Jesus is holding the men accountable for their actions and not the woman. It is the men who dragged her to Jesus demanding her death in the first place. The men said the

woman was "caught in the act", but did not bring the man she was in the act with along with her to throw them both at Jesus feet for condemnation. The law on death for adultery in Deuteronomy 17:5 is very clear. Both the man and woman are to share the death fate. Besides, all these men were at this woman's house for what reason on that day? Who believes that the men were merely passing by and saw what was going on inside of her home?

As for John, Luke and Mark's telling of the Mary whom we see washing Jesus' feet with the expensive perfume, John's gospel states that this Mary is Lazarus (whom Jesus raised from the dead) and Martha's sister (John 12:1-2). These women (Mary and Martha) are Jesus' disciples from what I can tell. Mary sat at Jesus feet to receive her lessons. (Luke 10:39). Surely, Jesus did not give Mary and Martha lessons for them to keep the knowledge to themselves. The fact that the women disciples were sinners is not of importance, because we all share the distinction of being sinners saved by the mercy of Jesus.

We come across Mary Magdalene becoming a follower of Jesus in the beginning of Luke 8. We are told that Mary Magdalene

had demons removed from her by Jesus and becomes a loyal follower afterwards (Luke 8:1&2). She is among the women at the foot of the cross (Matthew 27:55 &56) and we know Jesus spoke to her first after being raised from the dead. Most important we know for certain that Mary Magdalene was given the task of proclaiming that Jesus was alive (Matt. 28:1-10)

If we were to speak more about the women that Jesus came into contact with, maybe we could finally get out the word that Mary Magdalene told the disciples about Jesus being alive and all humankind will begin to take Jesus seriously. We must have more sermons on the miracle that Mary Magdalene witnessed. We women cannot go on blaming men for not getting this story out nor correcting men's interpretations of the scriptures. We were given a serious responsibility at that empty tomb and it is up to us to carry it through.

We know that armed conflicts, (wars between states and people, violence against women, individual



**"We women...were given a serious responsibility at that empty tomb and it is up to us to carry it through."**

one-on-one violence, and gang violence) is a constant factor across nations, in cities and towns across our land, and in other countries. And the assault on the earth's very survival is now in peril because of our mismanagement of the water and air of the planet. Our very survival depends it seems on taking Jesus seriously. We must all take Jesus seriously and live.

1. G.O.P. aide is charged in violent family fight by Alison Leigh Cowan and Al Baker –The New York Time 2010
2. Commission on the Status of Women-Fifty-Fourth session 1-12 March 2010:United Nations New York



Doris Theresa Abdullah was born Doris Theresa Carter in Virginia. She currently lives in Brooklyn, NY. In 2003, Doris co-founded the *Welcome Home Project* at On Earth Peace, a ministry designed to re-integrate those who have served in the Military back into their communities after serving in a time of war, and was honored as a Blue Star Banner Mother. She performs volunteer services at a homeless girls/women shelter, is a Deacon at Brooklyn First Church of the Brethren, stands with *Women in Black*, New York City and Co-Chairs the NGO *Human Rights Subcommittee for the Elimination of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance* at the United Nations. She serves at the United Nations as NGO Representative for Church of the Brethren and is an Executive Board Member of On Earth Peace.



### Who do we say that he is? Taking Jesus seriously... by Audrey deCoursey

I recently attended (infiltrated?) a local megachurch for a mid-week worship service. In stands by the panel of doors, I found a brochure spelling out the beliefs of the church, at least as stated by its outreach staff. Naturally, one of the categories pertained to the identity and meaning of Jesus Christ. How nice it seems to have an idea of Jesus that can be summed up in a brief paragraph! And yet, upon only a few minutes' contemplation, the statements left me unsatisfied.

It seems that we don't get those abbreviated testimonials very often in our Church of the Brethren, non-creedal as we are - and I'm glad for it. We don't need them. We already have the ultimate synopsis of Jesus' meaning in our lives, summed up in the one word we title him with: *Christ* (Messiah, Anointed One). We can spend our whole lives in conversation about what that single word means. And to the other extreme, we meet Jesus not in words alone but through the manner of

our living, our walk, our movement. Through the journey of discipleship, Jesus' identity comes to life through our living, not our dogma.

Still deeper, our Christ is inseparable from *us*, as we call ourselves the Body of Christ. This is not a package of beliefs but an invitation to belonging in a community, a new identity that transcends worldly categories. Our Jesus is our Christ, in our living, and in our relationships. To make sense of that great, new commandment Jesus laid out for his disciples, and for us, on that original Maundy Thursday - that we are to live out love for each other, love to the utmost we have ever experienced love - requires us to explore the complexity of our own lives as much as the Jesus story, and to find the places where they meet.

Too many doctrines and beliefs push Jesus away from us, distancing him from our lives. Talk of Jesus' perfection, divinity, and uniqueness too often seem to miss the point that when Jesus lived and died and rose among us, it was to demonstrate not his difference and distance from us, but God's closeness, intimacy, immediacy. God in the here and now. God is with us.

I gravitate to the Gospel of John's rich spiritual, non-literalistic interpretation

**"Talk of Jesus' perfection, divinity, and uniqueness too often seem to miss the point that when Jesus lived and died and rose among us, it was to demonstrate not his difference and distance from us, but God's closeness, intimacy, immediacy. God in the here and now. God is with us."**

of the Jesus phenomenon. For him, it is clear that the single most important message of the Jesus story is INCARNATION. The Word made Flesh among us. Jesus' sojourn within humanity testifies to God's unshakeable closeness to us. Through our Christ, God is with all of us, with me and with persons far different from me. Yet too many Christians use Jesus to push God away.

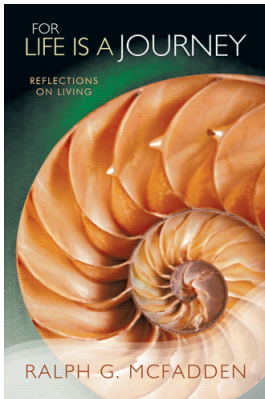
Taking Jesus seriously means trusting the incarnation, the truth embodied in our Christ. It may not fit in a paragraph or on a page, or even in a lifetime, but in the world's story that never ends, God is with us, and that presence suffices.



Audrey deCoursey is Associate Pastor at Highland Avenue Church of the Brethren in Elgin, Illinois, and the outgoing member of the Women's Caucus Steering Committee.



## NEW BOOK OF INTEREST



## For Life is a Journey: Reflections on Living

by Ralph McFadden

Reviewed by Audrey DeCoursey

There's a new book out about life in the Church of the Brethren. What makes this one unique is that it explores the particular tension of a man who's

lived at the very center of church life and also on its margins. It is the collected essays of Ralph McFadden, a friend of Womaen's Caucus and the Board President of Brethren Mennonite Council for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Interests (BMC). Ralph has been a pastor, a chaplain, and a CoB executive. But since coming out, he has experienced other sides to the church he has served.

The book is **For Life Is a Journey: Reflections on Living**. Carol Wise, Executive Director of BMC, writes, "Using the image of a chambered nautilus that moves into newer and larger chambers throughout its lifespan, Ralph reflects upon his experience of coming out as a gay man and 'surfacing his soul' through a collection of poems, essays and stories." Ralph writes, "In each day and year of our lives we build a new chamber. We move ahead on our journey by moving into that new unknown promise. Our life existence and experience is in moving ahead, not staying behind. If we do not build a new chamber and try to stay in the old, we are fatally locked into that 'secure cocoon' and eventually are so chained and shackled that we are eventually squeezed to death by the confines of the past."

For more information about the book, please visit the website: [www.chamberednautilus.net](http://www.chamberednautilus.net). You can order **For Life Is a Journey** from Ralph directly by sending a check for \$15.00 (postage included) to the address below or by sending Ralph a note via email (address below), so he can send the book and an invoice. Ralph will also be present to sell and sign his book at our Womaen's Caucus Luncheon at Annual Conference.

Ralph adds, "After you have read it, send me your observations. Or write a review. I may, with your permission, add your comments or review to the website."

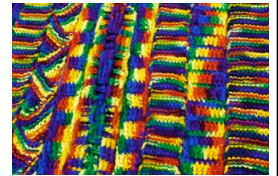
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## Rainbow HandCrafts for Annual Conference & NYC



**PLEASE BRING YOUR RAINBOW SCARF FROM LAST YEAR TO CONFERENCE WITH YOU THIS YEAR**, if you still have it. That will let us give our new scarves to people who don't already have one!

### Annual Conference 2010

We will once again be offering FREE Rainbow Scarves, Hats, Ties, etc., at the Womaen's Caucus Booth at Annual Conference this year. If you've been crocheting or knitting, please bring them with you or send them with your delegate to AC. Once there, drop your rainbow crafts off at the Caucus Booth. You can also mail your crafts **by June 15** to:

**Sharon Nearhoof May**  
2064 Ridge Road  
Tyrone, PA 16686

### National Youth Conference - NYC 2010

The La Verne Church of the Brethren Youth attending National Youth Conference invite those who knit or crochet to make rainbow scarves for youth attending NYC. Just as rainbow scarves were worn at Annual Conference, National Older Adult Conference and the Progressive Gathering, so the youth hope to have rainbow scarves to pass out at National Youth Conference, July 17-22, 2010 in Ft. Collins, CO. Help show that the church should be a place where everyone is welcome. Please mail your rainbow scarves for National Youth Conference to:

**Maurice Shenk**  
1601 West Swallow Rd.  
Unit 6-D  
Ft. Collins CO 80526

Directions for the scarves can be found on the our website at [www.womaenscaucus.org](http://www.womaenscaucus.org).

### We want to see who's helping!

Send photos of you and/or your rainbow-making group to [wcaucus@windstream.net](mailto:wcaucus@windstream.net).

**For all crafts, please use this yarn:**  
**Red Heart Supersaver Multicolor**  
**in Mexicana (0950).**

## Reproductive Rights

### **Abortion-Rights Setbacks Spread**

A series of **new state restrictions on abortion** have been enacted in the past several months. Emboldened by abortion fights during the health care debate, activists are currently managing to undo rights guaranteed to women for decades by *Roe v. Wade*. For example:

- Nebraska has criminalized abortions after 20 weeks of pregnancy in direct violation of *Roe*. This law will be challenged in the courts and could be the basis for the Roberts Supreme Court to overturn *Roe*.
- In Oklahoma, women seeking abortions will now be forced to undergo an intrusive vaginal-probe ultrasound while viewing the fetus and hearing it described in detail.
- Arizona now prohibits all private and public health insurance plans from covering abortion care -- depriving thousands of women of the insurance coverage they currently have.

More of these laws, which do not respect women as moral decision makers about situations affecting their own bodies, are coming. Where does your state stand?

### **End the Global Gag Rule For Good**

The "**Global Gag Rule**" is a U.S. policy that restricts foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that receive U.S. funds for family planning projects from using any funds (not just U.S. funds) to perform legal abortions, advocate for abortion law reform in their own countries, or offer medical abortion counseling and referrals. This policy not only undermines global women's health care, but presents an especially harmful response to women in countries that are rife with violence, rape, and sex trafficking.

The Global Gag Rule was first imposed by the Reagan administration, lifted by Bill Clinton, reinstated by George W. Bush, and now lifted again by President Obama. The congressional *Global Democracy Promotion Act* (H.R. 4879/S. 311) was introduced in mid-March by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY) and Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA) to bar future administrations from unilaterally imposing the Global Gag Rule. Ensuring the permanent abolition of the Global Gag Rule would mean helping to reduce the 52 million unintended pregnancies and prevent the 75,000 deaths that result each year from unsafe abortions. Please contact your congressional representatives and ask them to co-sponsor and/or support the Global Democracy Promotion Act so that women and girls will have secure access to reproductive health care.

## Violence Against Girls

In a surprising change to a longstanding policy concerning the practice of **female genital mutilation (FGM)** or "female circumcision" in some African and Asian cultures, the **American Academy of Pediatrics** is suggesting that American doctors be given permission to perform a ceremonial pinprick or "nick" on girls from these cultures if it would keep their families from sending them overseas to undergo FGM.

Rep. Joseph Crowley (D-NY), who recently introduced a bill to make it a crime to take a girl overseas to undergo FGM said, *"I am sure the academy had only good intentions, but what their recommendation has done is only create confusion about whether FGM is acceptable in any form, and it is the wrong step forward on how best to protect young women and girls. FGM serves no medical purpose, and it is rightfully banned in the U.S."* For more information, see: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/07/health/policy/07cuts.html>.

## *Spotlight on*

### ***Women & Immigration Issues***

More than half of the almost 12 million immigrants in the U.S. illegally are women and children. Undocumented women are especially vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and human rights violations. Women crossing the border from Mexico are targets for rape and trafficking by *coyotes* (smugglers) and cannot turn to the American police when they experience sexual assault or violence. Often, the threat of being returned home is greater than the hardship of living through the silence.

Once in this country, undocumented women carry extra responsibilities in the home and family and have a greater number of stressful contacts with institutions like the school system and healthcare facilities where documentation may be requested. They have little or no access to social services and basic healthcare, including reproductive healthcare.

**The National Coalition for Immigrant Women's Rights** (NCIWR) is working to provide justice and equity for all immigrant women and their families living and working in the U.S. by promoting:

- Legal and safe immigration options for undocumented men, women and children, including a path to citizenship that allows women to obtain work permits, travel internationally, and access higher education and federal financial aid.
- A family-based immigration policy that respects the rights of glbt immigrants and same-sex partners.
- An end to discriminatory and inhumane immigration enforcement practices and backlogs that separate families and destroy the homes and communities of immigrant women.
- Universal health coverage that provides adequate health services and care for all immigrant women regardless of legal status, and social services for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, and trafficking.
- Increasing public awareness, education, and understanding of the fundamental and pivotal role immigrant women play in the familial, cultural and social history and life of the United States.

Immigration issues are complex. For more information on how immigration and women's issues intersect, visit NCIWR online at: <http://nciwr.wordpress.com/>. Through their list of partner organizations, you can learn more about how specific immigrant communities are framing and working on the issues.



## Caucus Remembers Myrna Wheeler

On January 9, 2010, Caucus and the Church was saddened to hear of the passing of Myrna Long Wheeler. Myrna was a woman of passion, intelligence, power, and grace, and she was a great friend of Caucus and women in the Church.

Myrna taught school for 27 years before she retired in 2001. She then served as Chaplain of Brethren Hillcrest Homes and as Minister to Older Adults at the La Verne Church of the Brethren. She was active in her community, church, and the denomination, having served on Standing Committee, as Moderator of the Pacific Southwest District twice, as chair of the Pacific Southwest District Board, and having preached at Annual Conference in 2006. Myrna also served on the Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee and was a constant supporter of Caucus and our mission. She was a faithful contributor of articles to *Femailings* as well as auction items for our annual Silent Auction and was the featured speaker at the Caucus Luncheon in 2001. In 2004, we honored Myrna with the Womaen's Caucus *Friend of Caucus Award* for her many years of creative,

wise, prophetic work for women and girls in the church.

Myrna faced the news that she was terminally ill with acute myeloid leukemia with uncommon grace and courage. We at Caucus celebrate Myrna's life and legacy and mourn her passing. We will miss her wisdom, her humor, her energy, and her presence among us.

### ***From Myrna's 2006 Sermon at Annual Conference...***

*"...we all need to come before God on bended knee with thanksgiving for the model of Jesus Christ, who showed us how to live. It does not make any difference how many Sundays you've attended church. It doesn't matter how many Bible studies or meditations you've done, nor how many prayers or hours of retreat you've expended. Without the spiritual discipline of love and forgiveness, without acknowledging that we, as individuals and as churches, do not have all the answers: that our positions on issues, our interpretations of scripture are only our opinions—they are not God's truth—without doing all this, we do not follow Christ.*

*Brothers and sisters, there is pain when you do aerobics of the heart, but that's how we gain an abundant life—a new world promised by Jesus, where love abides, where everyone is free—where all shall be God's people in justice, love and peace."*



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

Due to the economic crisis, donations have been down for the last few years. **We believe in the future of Womaen's Caucus.** We have exciting ideas for projects that will reach out to girls and women in the church to ensure that all of us have equal opportunity and support in the Church of the Brethren. We also have important issues and people to advocate for in a church and society that continue to challenge such basic rights as equal pay for equal work, reproductive choice and health care, and equality for all people of all sexual orientations. **But without your financial support, we cannot continue to exist as Caucus.**

***Please donate now so we can keep working for you and the girls and women you love.***

Complete the form below or donate online through our website at [www.womaenscaucus.org](http://www.womaenscaucus.org).

Make checks out to: *Womaen's Caucus*

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### **Contribution**

\_\_\_\_\_ \$100

\_\_\_\_\_ \$75

\_\_\_\_\_ \$40 for 40 Years of Caucus

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25

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### **Membership**

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**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**2010 Progressive**  
**Brethren Gathering**  
 November 12-14, 2010  
 Manchester Church of the Brethren  
 North Manchester, IN

Stay tuned for more information about this year's Progressive Brethren Gathering. Information and Online Registration is scheduled to be up and active on the new Progressive Brethren website at [www.progressivebrethren.org](http://www.progressivebrethren.org) by Annual Conference time.

**continued from page 1.....**

progressive, feminist edge of the church, it even feels vaguely or acutely unsafe. We have watched our peers pilloried for sharing their own deep experience and understanding of who Jesus Christ is to them, persecuted for the precise act of "taking Jesus seriously" in the church. Having experienced the oppressive actions of people with highly crystallized, coded theologies of Jesus, we often resist forming or talking too seriously about our own theologies of Jesus for fear of retribution or contributing to the oppression in some way. But that is no solution; it only deprives our children and the church of compelling, thoughtful, healing understandings of Jesus.

In this issue, four women courageously write about taking Jesus seriously. Elaine Sollenberger writes about how Jesus takes women seriously in the shadow of those who introduced the oppression of women into Christ's message and church. Sarah Quinter Malone writes about the encounter between Jesus and the Syro-Phoenician/Canaanite woman. Doris Abdullah asks how any person can take Jesus seriously and continue to participate in personal relationships and institutional structures that perpetuate violence against women and reminds us that even the first disciples didn't take Mary Magdalene and her sisters seriously, despite the fact that Jesus quite plainly did. Audrey deCoursey reminds us that taking Jesus seriously is a matter of doing it *here and now*.

This summer at Annual Conference, we will be hearing a lot about taking Jesus seriously. It is so important that we do not let others speak without making our own voices, our own understandings of Jesus the Christ equally heard. So, if you have not taken the time already, please take a few moments after reading this issue and articulate to yourself or someone else how you take Jesus seriously in your own life and faith. Make a list of what and who you believe Jesus took and takes seriously. And then find some way to share your Jesus with the church and world.

*Sharon*



**We need YOU at**  
**ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

**Don't Miss the Caucus Luncheon**  
**Sunday, 12 noon, Rooms 413-414**



Don't miss our awesome luncheon and silent auction! **Nancy Faus-Mullen**, Professor Emerita at Bethany Seminary, will be speaking on "**Jesus Taking Women Seriously**". Our **silent auction** will

be full of awesome handcrafts and more for you to bid on! And our **Friend of Caucus Award** will be presented. We'll see you there! **Make sure to get your tickets early!**

### **Staff the Caucus Booth**

Because not all of our Steering Committee members will be at AC this year, we need volunteers to spend an hour or two (or more!) at the Caucus Booth during the hours the Exhibit Hall is open. This is an easy and fun way to support Caucus and spread the Caucus message. You will make sure the display tables are stocked, greet visitors to the booth, answer basic questions (we'll help with that, so don't worry!), and keep an eye on the rainbow scarves that are out for people to take.

If you can help, please contact Peg Yoder in advance at 814-599-9910 or sign up on-site at the Caucus Booth.

### **We Need Silent Auction Items**

Our annual Silent Auction at our Conference Luncheon is a major fundraiser for Caucus. We rely on you to donate items to be auctioned! If you can contribute an item, please contact Peg Yoder at 814-599-9910 for more information on where to send your item or drop it off at Conference. If you'd like to donate an item but aren't sure what to offer, please consider the following:

*Crafts & Handmade Goods, Artistic works,  
 Photography, Books, or Magazine subscriptions,  
 Gift Certificates to restaurant chains, etc.,  
 DVDs or Videos of interest to feminists.*

On any item you donate, please attach your name and the value of the item if sold at retail. Thank you for helping us with this fun fundraiser!



## Wanted: Femailings Editor

Womaen's Caucus is looking for a new editor for our quarterly newsletter, *Femailings*, beginning in 2011. The Femailings Editor is responsible for soliciting articles, editing, design, and layout and works with the Caucus Administrator to facilitate printing. The Femailings Editor also serves on the Caucus Steering Committee.

Applicants should have strong writing and editing skills, a passion for women's issues in the denomination and world, creativity, high-speed internet access, strong computer skills including some type of publishing software (MS Publisher, Create, InDesign, etc.) and the ability to make pdf files.

A complete position description and application are available for download at: [www.womaenscaucus.org](http://www.womaenscaucus.org).

## Caucus Steering Committee Welcomes New Members

Steering Committee is delighted to welcome two new members to Steering Committee. Due to our restructuring process, Daisy Schmidt is coming on as Caucus Program Director and Brenda McLearn-Montz is taking care of all the daily responsibilities as Caucus Administrator. Here's a little more about these great Caucus women.

**Daisy Schmidt** holds a BA in Spanish from Manchester College and a MSW from the University of Kansas. She has worked in long-term care for 10 years, most recently with the Long-Term Care Ombudsman program in Indiana. She lives in the Caribbean with her spouse, Erica, a veterinarian, while Erica attends veterinary school. She is a member of the Manchester Church of the Brethren and is a longtime member of Caucus. Daisy brings a wonderful energy to Caucus and is looking forward to what the future holds. She also has a special interest in elder issues.



**Brenda McLearn-Montz** holds a MTS in Church History with a concentration in Missions from Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary. She currently lives in Ankeny, Iowa, with her family and enjoys family and church activities and reading.



## Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee Members

**Daisy Schmidt**, Program Director  
*St. Kitts (gorgeous Caribbean Island)*

**Brenda McLearn-Montz**, Caucus Administrator  
*Ankeny, IA*

**Audrey deCoursey**  
*Oak Park, IL*  
*Convenor*

**Sharon Nearhoof May**, Femailings Editor  
*Warriors Mark, PA*

**Peg Yoder**  
*Huntingdon, PA*

## Contact Us

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202 SE Uehlar Drive  
Ankeny, Iowa 50021

## Find Caucus Online

<http://www.womaenscaucus.org>  
<http://womaenscaucus.wordpress.com/>

## Womaen's Caucus Mission

Womaen's Caucus is a network of feminist women and men who identify with the Church of the Brethren. Emboldened by our awareness of the violence and pain related to gender inequality, and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we engage in the prophetic task of creating church which is free from attitudes and practices of injustice.

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## 8 Questions for Nancy Faus-Mullen



Our Annual Conference Luncheon Speaker and beloved Professor Emerita from Bethany Theological Seminary considers questions about feminism, ministry, and issues facing the Church she has spent her life serving.

### 1. *"What is a feminist?"*

A feminist is someone pursuing equal treatment of, and relationship with, all persons, especially groups of persons traditionally not seen as equal.

### 3. *"What one or two things would you most like to accomplish as Moderator?"*

I am interested in helping establish good patterns for the denomination's use of the Strongly Controversial Issues process. If large numbers of the denomination can participate in that process in an honest way, it could really be transforming for us, and a possible model for us to use in a variety of ways, not to mention share with our brothers and sisters in the ecumenical church.

### 4. *"Which story/stories/verses from Scripture most inform(s) your approach to your year as Moderator? Why?"*

Simply...the New Testament! From there, I've always found myself pulled to the Gospel accounts with Acts thrown in for good measure. Perhaps I'm just a product of my generation -- drawn more to story than to explanation -- but for me that is true. Narrowed further, I've felt very attracted to the wholeness/completeness of Luke 10:25-28 (loving God with everything). In John 17:3 a simple truth has developed for me: learn to know Jesus -- within myself and in others; all else will come.

### 5. *"What should be the role of Annual Conference decisions in the lives of individuals, congregations, and districts that may disagree with them?"*

Annual Conference decisions these days represent the best thinking of the collective church on this topic for the time being. I see that as neither legislative nor punitive. But I do see it as being instructive of both the way in which the Spirit can and does move among us, and the tension of what it means to be a larger Body than just our own.

### 6. *"There has been some discussion that large Brethren gatherings like NOAC, Song & Story Fest, and now the Progressive Brethren Summit are drawing off attendance from Annual Conference. Why should people choose to go to Annual Conference?"*

I have also heard mention of BRF's Annual Meeting, NYC, NYAC, and National Junior High Conference. Unlike all of the above mentioned (except maybe Song and Story Fest), Annual Conference is the only meeting in the Church of the Brethren that is not group-specific. There, the generations and varying theologies meet...or at least co-mingle. Because of this, Annual Conference alone remains the place for the whole church to be together, perhaps as fragile and flawed as that is. I still think God rejoices when we are able to make it happen.

### 7. *"If you could re-create Annual Conference in any way you wanted, what would you do differently? What would your 'dream' AC look like?"*

We live in a culture that is threatening. Everything we develop has a sense of being threatening or non-threatening, rejected or incorporated. If I encounter something that seems threatening to my own sense of belief, my culture has taught me to reject it at least, and often try to eliminate it. We seem to have lost the capacity to sit with something that is different than us and to investigate it, see what we can learn from it, without feeling like we "have" to be changed because of it. So-called "liberals" and "conservatives" both have much work to do in this area. I would dream for our ability to move beyond our heightened sense of being threatened to a place of security in Jesus' love, even when in conversation with someone with whom we have significant differences. You asked me to dream....

### 8. *"What important topics, issues, etc., are we as a church not paying attention to that we should be?"*

Cross-generational conversations. In fact, while clearly important, other "hot" issues may actually be distracting us from a looming conversation that we are not prepared to engage in. We have agreed to a possible way of conversing about Strongly Controversial issues, but cross-generational issues do not so easily fit that mold. They affect every congregation in very real ways.

Sociologists point to there being four generations co-existing at any one time in history. Because of the rise of information systems and the hyper-advances in technology, many are making the claim that there are five generations now co-existing -- with the possibility of technological advances forcing the issue and perhaps creating even more. Communication advances are a prime example. Over the course of millions of years of human communication, there has been the development of language, smoke signals, newspapers, telegraphs, telephones, the internet, e-mail cell phones, Facebook, and now Twitter. Most of those communication advances have happened in the last forty years, with hyper-advances in the last four years. At that exponential pace, few of us have a clear sense of where we are headed. Can the church possibly keep pace? Maintain relevance? Can the oldest generations find anything in common with the youth of tomorrow? I believe some of the oldest and youngest generations share many of the same values, but younger generations have many more choices in how they live those values out. I'm just not sure that "church" is equipped to help those generations see their commonalities, celebrate its past, and embrace the future of being and doing church, a future that could be very different than "church" of today.



## Would you like to write for Femailings?

We are always looking for good writers and articles for ***Femalings***! Articles from a feminist perspective on faith, Church of the Brethren business and issues, book and movie reviews, letters to the editor, and such are always welcome. If you'd submit writing on any topic, please do!

**August: Annual Conference Wrap-Up.** Share your experiences, analysis, and responses to the events and actions taken at Annual Conference 2010. ***Submission date: August 1.***

**December: Body Language.** So many of the transitions in women's lives are bodily. Menstruation, menopause, childbirth, reproductive loss, illness, dementia, death. All of these involve women's bodies as well as their minds and spirits. We're looking for women to share their experiences and theological reflections on the bodily transitions and passages of their lives. ***Submission date: October 31.***

Articles are generally 300-500 words, though they can be longer. Poetry and liturgies should be of a length appropriate to the size of Femalings.

Femalings is posted online at our website; any writing for Femalings may be used on our website unless you specifically request that we do not use your submission online.

Submissions can be sent in Word, pdf, or text to  
Sharon Nearhoof May at:  
[wcaucus@windstream.net](mailto:wcaucus@windstream.net)  
or mailed to  
2064 Ridge Road, Tyrone PA 16686

### NEW Subscription Prices for *Femalings* by Mail

Please note that beginning in 2011, paper copies of *Femalings* by mail can be obtained by paid subscription only. Subscription fees will be \$10 per year for *Femalings* by mail only.

*Femalings* will continue to be available for download free online and through email. Unfortunately, we need to institute a subscription fee for paper copies to cover the substantial cost of printing and mailing.

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