

Femailings



Womaen's Caucus Church of the Brethren

One Woman, All Women

September 2015

Reflections on AC

by Sara Davis

The Nigerian Women's Choir provided a focal point for the entire conference. The women wore their beautiful long skirts and fitted tops of colorful printed fabric. The cut of each outfit was a variation on a theme but each used the same fabric. The effect was powerful. The singing beautiful. It was very appropriate hold the situation and all our Nigerian brothers and sisters foremost in our thoughts and prayers. It provided a healthy perspective on our own concerns.

The highlights of Womaen's Caucus' program were three conversations we hosted at our booth and, of course, our luncheon. This year Carol Wise was named the Mother of Caucus. We appreciate all those who came to the luncheon and the generous donations. We hosted a conversation with women in ministry. Jen Scarr, a recent Bethany graduate, and Angela Finet, who will graduate in May, were an interesting contrast as Jen grew up in the COB and Angela came from a faith tradition that did not allow women any leadership roles. Both Jen and Angela now have placements. Their advice: know your District Executive and get to know the District Executive in the location where you would like to serve. DE's can make room for women. Advice from someone attending the talk: find spiritual support beyond the DE, have an "open heart" and "thick skin." We held a great discussion with queer young adults and I was impressed with our young people in the church, with Karen Duhai's ability to moderate a discussion and with the brave young couple who brought their very newly adopted baby to Annual Conference. We also hosted a conversation with Ken Kline Smeltzer, where we heard about the continuing fallout from his officiating a same sex marriage in Pennsylvania. Being fired from his interim pastor position was not a surprise but the district initiating a muffled ethics process was. Ken appealed to Standing Committee which saw fit to refer him back to the incomplete process at the district level.

The On Earth Peace poster integrated with their report to AC had an impact on folks at Conference. The poster shows many scenes of conflict and resolution superimposed with the inspired "hashtags" pointing to the social media hubs created by these events. The text introducing the poster is, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, She has anointed me..." at the bottom of the poster is, "...This scripture is fulfilled in your hearing, today!" from Luke 4:16-21. On the back of the poster the first line of text is a question, "Can you find yourself in the front of this poster? How does it feel to live in a world where it is hard to see yourself?" At the end of business, there was time for the Moderator to take questions and these two issues bubbled over. Moderator David Steele did a good job of deflecting those that came to conference looking for a swift rebuke of the recent Supreme Court decision on Marriage Equality. And OEP Executive Director, Bill Scheurer, gave an excellent response to a woman offended by the feminine pronoun given to the Holy Spirit. More than

a few of our brothers and sisters were offended by the poster. Womaen's Caucus has written a letter of support to OEP, you can find it at the end of this newsletter.

I arrived early to Annual Conference in Tampa, Florida to observe Standing Committee. Stan Noffsinger addressed the group in a moving account of the Brethren work in the world, our global footprint, and our future. He reflected on his children graduating with student loan debt, that they may not value the church buildings but that we can hope that they value the legacy of Jesus' love. Stan left us with the message, "Let go and let God."

Reflections of NOAC

by Mary Kay Ogden

What a joy it was to attend National Older Adult Conference and to represent Womaen's Caucus. This conference is held every two years at the Lake Junaluska Conference Center. It is a beautiful setting, the food was delicious, the accommodations lovely, and the speakers were inspirational, and entertaining.

With many break out sessions from which to choose, I was pleased that four women attended the WC session titled "What's Your Story?" The session began with a brief history of Womaen's Caucus and the words from the third verse of the song "A Place At the Table" written by Shirley Erena Murray. "For women and man a place at the table, revising the roles, deciding to share, with wisdom and grace, dividing the power, for woman and man; a system that's fair." I then told my story of growing up surrounded by the stories and examples of strong women and men in my life and the influences they had on my opportunities for leadership within the church and my professional life. Each of the other four women then shared their stories. Each had served in leadership in their churches, and all but one felt the support of women and men. We talked briefly about stories of women in the Bible, and concluded by discussing the need to continue supporting women in ministry, the openness of churches willing to consider female applicants, and our hopes for a more inclusive denomination.

What a gift to be surrounded by open minded people! This was my first NOAC, and I am so grateful to Caucus for supporting my attendance.

On a side note, I found three books from Brethren Press well worth reading as I traveled from North Carolina back to California. *Llano Grande* by Jeanne Rhoades (experiences of a child of missionary parents growing up in Ecuador), *Preach Me a Story* by Earle Fike (retired pastor and preacher), and *The Heart of Grief* by Kurt Borgman (pastor of the North Manchester COB).

What's your story? Sharing our experiences is helpful to all of us as we seek to include all voices.

Reflections on Ferguson

by Zandra Wagoner, reprinted with author's permission

During the weekend of August 7-10, St. Louis and the suburb of Ferguson commemorated the one-year anniversary of Michael Brown's death. It was a weekend of speakers, panels, gatherings, trainings, workshops, marches, and vigils featuring activists, academics, clergy, musicians, poets and community organizers. For me, the weekend began with a Friday evening panel at the University of Missouri on "Black, Brown, and LGBTQ Liberation" highlighting that Black Lives Matters is unquestionably a far-reaching, multiple issue movement for justice and deep societal transformation. On Saturday, there were trainings in Non-Violent Direct Action to prepare for civil disobedience actions that would take place on Monday. Later in the afternoon the community held a march through the streets of St. Louis to honor the activists and organizers who have steadfastly called for an end to racism and police violence, as well as a recognition of all the families nationwide (many who were present) who have lost loved-ones to police violence. Protest signs and posters from many different perspectives (Black, Latino/a, Asian American, Arab American, and so on) proclaimed the significance of Black Lives Matter and we filled the air with chants and songs of justice. The march concluded with a family-oriented Block Party of music, dance performances, poetry and food, and an evening of vocal artists.

Sunday began with an interfaith prayer vigil on the street in front of the Canfield Green Apartments where Michael Brown lived and the site where he was killed. We gathered around the community-maintained memorial, held hands, and said prayers. Following the vigil, there were church services throughout the area focused on the one-year anniversary. I attended a Unitarian-Universalist congregation to hear Rev. Julie Taylor, a white UU Minister that has been deeply involved in Ferguson activism and trusted by the Black community. That afternoon, hundreds gathered again at Michael Brown's home at Canfield Green for a moment of silence, followed by a silent march led by his family to Greater St. Mark's Church, the near-by congregation that has played a significant role in calling for justice and providing safety and healing during uprisings. And that evening, we gathered back at Greater St. Mark's Church for a large community hearing about the role and future of the church in addressing racism and state-sanctioned violence. Speakers included philosopher Dr. Cornel West, St. Louis clergy leaders, as well as Bree Newsome, who recently made national news when, as an act of faith, she climbed the 30-foot flagpole in Columbia, SC to remove the confederate flag.

Finally, on Monday, hundreds gathered for a clergy-led civil disobedience action in downtown St. Louis - the event that had drawn me to travel to St. Louis. The night before, a young black protester had been shot in Ferguson, which made Monday tense and uneasy. We trained and prepared ourselves for a variety of unpredictable scenarios, and with a mixture of fear and courage, we walked to the Department of Justice with a list of demands written by the local clergy. We were met by a barricade of police. Before crossing the police line, the list of demands was read, we blessed each other with oil and anointed the DOJ as sacred space with a moral obligation to do justice. In an attempt to personally deliver the list of demands to the DOJ, 57 clergy and activists crossed the police lines, and were arrested.

The weekend was intense, heartbreaking and empowering. Ferguson represents a non-violent movement of love, led by young people with a clear voice and vision. At many of the events espe-

cially the marches and civil disobedience action, we chanted these words:

*What does love look like? This is what love looks like.
What does community look like? This is what community looks like.
What does theology look like? This is what theology looks like.*

While the media was portraying the weekend as a "state of emergency," I experienced a community of deep abiding love. While there are instances of violence that erupt from within the community, it is a symptom of a system that is broken and oppressive. The media focuses on the occasional eruptions of youth violence and represents the movement as criminality. As Jeanne Davies (another CoB pastor who came to St. Louis for the commemorations) noted on Facebook following Sunday night's shooting of a young black man after an outbreak of violence, "Don't get distracted." The Ferguson community is not the violence portrayed by the media. What we experienced and observed over the weekend was a movement of thousands of peaceful protesters using their bodies and voices to call for change.

In stark contrast, we were surrounded by heavily armed police and followed by buzzing surveillance drones flying above our heads. Being in the presence of the militarized police was scary, and underscored the reality that the young activists of Ferguson who work for dignity, justice and safety in their community are putting their lives on the line every day. Importantly, this movement does not look like our romanticized memory of Selma's peaceful protest and idealized martyrs. The youth of Ferguson have experienced trauma and carry deep sadness and far-reaching hopes. They are creatively using non-violent means grounded in love, but it may not look "respectable." As Cornel West asked us "Are you more concerned with the profanity of their language than the profane conditions they live in?" We all need to resist the lure of "respectability" and the media-constructed pictures of Ferguson. There is life and love in Ferguson, and it is beautiful, courageous, prophetic, and a gift to our nation: an invitation to dismantle racial discrimination.

In addition, Ferguson is giving birth to a vital and thriving theology. As articulated by a number of local clergy and academics, the church has too often shown up late and wrong. "Ferguson" said Cornel West, "will determine whether the church is still relevant, and the jury is still out." He continues: "The church needs to repent for not being in the street with the poor folk, the young folk, and the queer folk" - their lives were never negotiable." The clergy affirmed the brave and prophetic voice of the youth who are giving meaning to a theology of "the word made flesh." This is a theology where a sermon is not heard but seen, and the congregation is made up of persons of integrity who face oppression and put something on the line for the sake of justice and freedom. No longer can the institutional churches assume that they will be grandfathered into leadership positions. Instead, the spiritual leadership is emerging on the street where the people are gathering. According to Ferguson pastor Rev. Traci Blackmon, for the church to be relevant it must tell the truth of injustice. It must be a place of belonging, a safe space for revolution and social transformation, and a community that cares for the vulnerable in society and those who cannot care for themselves. At its heart, Ferguson's theology is an *embodiment* of love.

Ferguson continued

Most importantly for me, as a white person who benefits from a system of white privilege, I left Ferguson with a greater understanding of the work I need to do inside myself, as well as how one might be a worthy ally in the movement toward racial justice. Some of the messages I heard from the UU Minister Rev. Julie Taylor include: as white people we need to be careful about our need for “respectability,” as mentioned above. Rather than being the leader, white people need to learn how to follow and take the lead from those who are already working toward racial justice. We need to get comfortable with feeling uncomfortable. In other words, in our desire to be good allies, we will mess up and sometimes be called on our mistakes and we need to have the strength to take responsibility and keep showing up and coming back. Being uncomfortable is a small price to pay in comparison to those whose lives are at risk because of their Black bodies. And probably the most important message I heard was at the panel of local clergy. In contrast to white guilt, white arrogance, white fear, white patronization, white people need to find a different spirit within themselves - a soft, still gentle voice of humility.

I am grateful to On Earth Peace and the University of La Verne for supporting my travels to St. Louis and Ferguson. On Earth Peace has begun a very important racial justice initiative with a growing list of resources and tools that further our understanding of racial history, racial justice, white privilege, and how to engage mindfully in actions and efforts across our nation. It's my hope that the Church of the Brethren is a full partner in the current movements for racial justice. The community in Ferguson is asking us, “What does love look like?” In response, I hope we can affirm, yes, “*This* is what love looks like” and then roll up our sleeves and show up.

Book Review

by Kathy Gingrich

At Annual Conference 2015, I purchased a copy of the newly released book, *On The Beach of Possibility Hope for the Future from Brethren Voices*, published by Ralph McFadden. In the Introduction, Ralph reports writing to 60 pastors and other clergy in the Church of the Brethren, inviting them to submit a sermon or essay giving voice to “progressive thought”.

On the Beach of Possibility is a collection of 23 sermons and essays submitted in response to Ralph's question: *What pressing contemporary society and religious issues need to be faced head-on by progressive thinkers?*

I personally know many of the writers of these sermons. They are loving, grace-filled, wise, passionate servant-leaders. They preach with one foot firmly rooted within the teachings and practices of the Church of the Brethren, and the other foot stepping out in faith toward a reimagines, more inclusive,

more loving, more gracious, peace with justice seeking, Spirit infused, re-embodied, Body of Christ.

The sermons and essays give voice to the pain, struggle and hope of being faithful, courageous and prophetic in tumultuous and divisive times. Issues of peace and justice, grief, responding to terrorism, inclusion of GLBT persons, connecting with those who identify as spiritual but not religious, brokenness, reconciliation and spiritual wellbeing are “in scope” as the ‘pressing contemporary society and religious issues’ faced-head on by these 23 progressive thinkers. Ralph McFadden's initiative and written introduction set the tone for future hope and possibilities.

Spiritual distress and spiritual risk are acknowledged, though the stronger emphasis is the “Good News” prophetically proclaimed in the messages of hope, renewal, reconciliation, and possibilities. This collection of sermons and essays is spiritual food for the progressive soul.

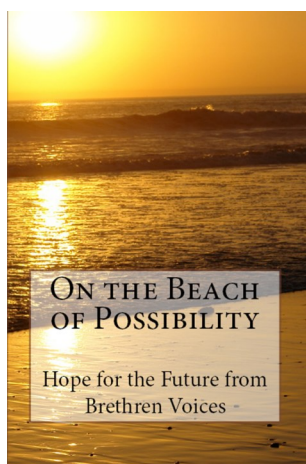
Reflections on the Call

By Jennifer Scarr

Becoming a pastor was never my intention. My whole life I cycled through desires for various professions including but not limited to teacher, archeologist, marine biologist, actor, director, psychologist, actor (again), and then maybe an activist. Somewhere in the middle of seminary...yes I went to seminary with no intention of being a pastor... I figured a few things out about myself. I wasn't afraid of pastoring, I was afraid of being a leader. Any kind of leader. I wasn't sure that I had anything worth saying, anything worth preaching about. To top it all off I was terrified of what it meant to be a woman and a leader... and then a divorced woman and a leader. This world has certain stigma associated with women, and divorced women, in leadership and I did not want to battle it. It wasn't my fight. Some other lady would step up to the plate on that one, not me.

But God is infinitely wiser than me, and patient as a snail. Gently and overtime, God strengthened my heart and revealed to me that I was already a leader. My gender, my marital status, even my age did not change that. Spiritual leadership is in my DNA. I was born this way.

I have been the pastor at Trotwood Church of the Brethren for just over two months now, and I could not be more in love with this congregation! They have embraced me as their leader and pastor in ways that have humbled and inspired me. Sure in the Trotwood community I still get comments like, “Oh you're a lady pastor? We ain't never had one of them before.” and “Gosh, you look like you're a teenage girl! You sure you're a pastor?” But within the hearts of my beloved church, I am respected for the person God created me to be. I am liberated to lead, and lead I shall.



Public and Private Faith (Excerpted)

Galatians 2:1-14, BMC Worship

by Susan Boyer

I have a weird experience when I attend Church of the Brethren denominational gatherings. People whisper when they talk to me. It all started in the summer of 2002, when the Southeastern District called for a boycott against Deanna Brown and Susan Boyer preaching at National Youth Conference. Ever since then I noticed that people who used to call out a loud hello across a convention center hallway now say, “Hi, Susan” under their breath, as they keep on walking past me. Some will even come up to me and say, “Hi, Susan” while they look around to see if anyone can see them talking to me.

This kind of experience isn’t new in the church. It has been there since the beginning of Christendom. In fact, in Galatians 2 we find a very similar scenario. Fourteen years after Paul spoke to Jesus on the Damascus Road he went to Jerusalem to share with the powers that be about his ministry to the Gentiles. He wasn’t in trouble. He went of his own accord because he felt compelled to go. He wanted to share with the rest of the church what he was doing on behalf of the gospel. He met with the leaders in private, although he says there were some spies in the room – “false brethren” is the translation from the Greek. He shared his ministry with James, Peter and John, these men he calls the “pillar apostles”. They recognized the good work he was doing on behalf of the gospel and they gave him the right hand of fellowship. They agreed on a united church with two different missions – Peter would preach to the circumcised and Paul would go to the uncircumcised without having to insist they become circumcised. This meeting ended on a high note...behind closed doors.

Some things never change in the church. I can no longer count how many times some one has whispered to me that they also agree with inclusion in the church but they will not say so publicly because...well you know, “I might lose my job.” Or “My ordination is more important than queer peoples’ place in the church”. Or “I stand for the Gospel behind these closed doors....but please, keep this conversation confidential.”

It was in Antioch where Paul told Peter to his face what he thought about his behind closed doors gospel message. You see Peter had started enjoying table fellowship with Gentile Christians. But then some “false brethren” showed up and told Peter that eating with the uncircumcised was causing repercussions for the Christians in Jerusalem. Peter instantly pivoted his attention back to Jerusalem...to the headquarters. He doesn’t want to cause disunity in the church. He has to go back on what he said to Paul, don’t you see? There are powerful forces trying to destroy the church. It is too fragile right now. We can’t have this argument going on. Unity is more important than Paul’s little mission to the Gentiles.

Some things never change in the church. It breaks my heart and I am incredulous every time someone says to me, “Gay people are selfish, asking for marriage.” There is this belief out there that inclusion will tear apart the fabric of the church and some people

actually believe it is because queer people are self-centered. Brethren hide behind position papers or heritage, as if these things are the gospel but often these are the very things that usurp the gospel. The church asks their lgbtq members to become second-class citizens in favor of unity. When the “pillars” of the church do that they deny the very rights and privileges that they enjoy. And in some twisted way they think they are saving their beloved denomination by creating second-class members. Where is the unity in that?

Peter, out of fear, turns his face towards Jerusalem and in so doing, turns his back on the Gentile Christians of his day. His argument for church unity is so compelling that he gets Barnabas to join him in his fear. They decide that they will no longer share table fellowship with their Gentile brothers and sisters. I’m sure they tell themselves that it is for the good of the church that they not display their private faith in public. Yvette Flunder, founder of City of Refuge UCC in San Francisco says, “The greatest detriment to the gospel is a fear of the religiously powerful.”

But Paul wasn’t commissioned by the religiously powerful. He was commissioned on a dusty road by Jesus....Jesus, who was never persuaded by the religiously powerful....Jesus, who was executed because of deals made by the religiously powerful behind closed doors...in private. No....Paul follows the one who said, “If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it.” Paul believes in the one who said, “What good will it be for you to gain the whole world while you forfeit your soul?” What do we gain if we save our beloved denomination but it loses its soul?

Paul doesn’t go to Peter and say, “Can I talk to you in private?” No. In front of God and everyone he says to the man who gave him the right hand of fellowship, “Peter...what are you doing? If you, a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew in attending these common meals, how can you now forsake these Gentile Christians and compel them to become Jews in order to associate with you? Peter, you have walked away from the welcoming table and carried Barnabas with you. Be the same man in public that you are in private.”

Friends, I think it is the message we have to hear in our context today, for we are struggling for the soul of our beloved denomination. There is no such thing as a private gospel.

We need a denomination of people who don’t have confidential conversations about their convictions. We need a movement. We need a church filled with people who don’t whisper their support. We need a movement. We need to stand up for inclusion and against the use of policies and regulations as a way to mire justice in a sea of ridiculousness. We need a movement. We need to speak out against a false unity won by hypocrisy. We need a movement. We need to quit standing quietly by while the gifts of lgbtq members are ignored. We need to stand up, speak out, and move forward. We need to get a little bit angry. We need a movement and we are the people who need to start moving forward. We need an altar call for the gospel. We need to come forward and declare our private and public faces set towards justice. We need a movement. It’s past time. Shall we do it? Amen.

(I attended the Festival of Homiletics this year and heard Yvette Flunder preach a sermon entitled: “Overcoming Fear Based Religion”. This sermon was greatly influenced by her words.)

Open Letter of Support for On Earth Peace

Dear On Earth Peace Board of Directors,

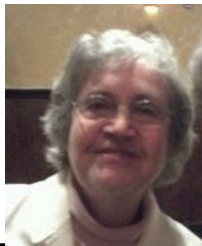
The Board of Womaen's Caucus, on behalf of the membership in Caucus, wants you to know how deeply we appreciate your inclusive stance, your Spirit of the Lord poster, and your work at reconciliation.

The range of programs you offer, involving all age levels, is impressive. You offer so many ways to connect, learn, and serve.

Womaen's Caucus celebrates the support we have received in having difficult conversations, particularly at Annual Conference, and the options you offer to reaching out to youth, as well as those who feel rejected, marginalized, and bullied.

Thank you for being proactive, working continually to end violence, and providing meaningful, thoughtful alternatives to war.

The Board of Womaen's Caucus: Kathy Gingrich, Sara Davis, Jen Scarr, Karen Duhai, Mary Kay Ogden, Daisy Schmidt and Jonathan Bay



Remembering Margaret Whitacre

Caucus would like to send out a blessing to Margaret Whitacre who died in July this year. She was an active member of Caucus many years ago. Our thoughts are with her family and friends.

Article Submissions

If you would like to write something for a Femailings issue, feel free to submit anytime to womaenscaucuscob@gmail.com or by mail to Womaens Caucus 818 SW 3rd Street #1299, Portland, OR 97204. The deadline for the December issue, which will have a theme of renewal is **November 15th, 2015**.

Would you like to become a part of Womaen's Caucus? Are you passionate about women's issues within the church and the wider world? We would love to have you! Please contact us through our email: womaenscaucuscob@gmail.com

Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee

Kathy Gingrich, Convener
Sara Davis
Karen Duhai
Mary Kay Ogden,
Jennifer Scarr
Daisy Schmidt



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 stepped up our Femailings from sporadic to four times a year, you will see an December and four in the upcoming year. We are working towards expanding our presence at Bethany and the way we advocate for women in ministry. We appreciate your support and look forward to hearing from you!

Complete the form below or donate online through our website at www.womaenscaucus.org

Make checks out to: Womaen's Caucus

Cut & mail to: Womaen's Caucus 818 SW 3rd Ave. #1299 Portland, OR 97204

Name: _____	Contribution	Membership
Address: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100	<input type="checkbox"/> I am already a member.
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$75	<input type="checkbox"/> Membership—\$25/yr
_____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Student Member—\$15/yr
Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	Femailings
Phone: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Already Receiving
District/Home Church (if applicable)		<input type="checkbox"/> Send by Mail
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