



Excited and Energized

A special message from the Womaen's Caucus Steering Committee

Womaen's Caucus . . . *advancing equality of roles and opportunities for all women*

For some, a 50TH birthday serves as the great divide between youthfulness and old age but Womaen's Caucus leadership takes a different view. As Caucus celebrates its half-century mark, we embrace a far different attitude, one found in the words of Betty Friedan, who said, "Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength." As a pioneering voice for women's rights, Friedan's elevation of women's issues inspired millions of women, including many associated with the Church of the Brethren, to reflect on their roles as "worthy individuals and active participants in the affairs of all social institutions."¹ The beginnings of Caucus were planted at the 1970 Annual Conference when a resolution calling for "a committee of at least 50% women to write a major paper stating the church's position on women in our church and society for the General Board's implementation²" was passed.

With growing interest and energy, the first edition of the *Femailings* newsletter was published in the fall of 1971 and in March 1972 an equality paper was adopted by the General Board. Within months, a group of women leading a fledgling organization created to advance the roles of women, settled on its unique name: Womaen's Caucus. Historical records that captured this decision state that, "womAn's seems to imply an individual woman's struggle and affirmation of her personhood. WomEn's implies the collective body . . . In naming the

caucus, they combined the crucial letters to capture the essence of who they are. The Womaen's Caucus, Church of the Brethren, speaks to both facets of their reason for being."³

Moved by constant reminders throughout 2020 that all persons deserve to be treated justly and with respect, Womaen's Caucus committed to refreshing its structure and practices following the radical teachings of Jesus. As a result of this effort, a modified organizational structure and new opportunities for Caucus to serve through an updated mission and statements of purpose were formally adopted to amend the organization's governance document. A complete copy of the governance document that was updated in December can be found on our website at www.womaenscaucus.org.

This issue of *Femailings* is dedicated to sharing our renewed efforts to advance the equality of roles and opportunities for all women. In it, you will find ways to support feminist interests through the ministries of the Church of the Brethren and beyond, so get to know us again!

Our hearts are filled with gratitude for the fifty years of rich history upon which we are now building the future. To all the Mothers of Caucus who have helped lay the path . . . thank you! To the future Mothers of Caucus who will be leading our way forward . . . welcome!

Index

<i>Excited and Energized</i>	p 1
<i>Who We Are</i>	p 2
<i>What We Believe</i>	p 2
<i>Reframing Our Effort</i>	p 2

<i>How We Are Organized</i>	p 3
<i>Getting Involved</i>	p 3
<i>Exciting Opportunities</i>	p 4
<i>You Can Find Us</i>	p 4
<i>Prayer for the Future</i>	p 5

Who We Are . . .

Womaen's Caucus is a network of feminists who identify with the Church of the Brethren. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and fueled by an awareness of the attitudes and practices of gender inequality, we strive to fulfill the prophetic task of creating a faith community free from attitudes and practices of injustice, beginning our work with a focus on gender.

Centering our efforts on education, support for women, and advocacy, Caucus builds connections through publication of its newsletter, *Femailings*, and its collaboration with like-minded organizations. At Annual Conference, Caucus offers a personal presence through its booth and opportunities to interact with others during Insight sessions and its hosted luncheon. Given the overwhelming interest in the 2020 online panel presentation, "*Speaking Truth to Power*⁴", we are excited to provide additional virtual events in 2021 and beyond. Watch for details.

What We Believe . . .

Commitments that framed the formation of Womaen's Caucus continue to guide our work. However, fifty years of change both in our world and our denomination require a new lens as we seek to understand today's challenges and opportunities. This new lens is described in the following two paragraphs that have been added to our governance document.

"The Womaen's Caucus of the Church of the Brethren was called into being out of a shared set of experiences of women in the church. Fifty years into our work, we continue to seek transformation of individuals, congregations, districts,

and the church as a whole, responding to the call of Christ to radical inclusion and egalitarian sharing of power. We lament the ways in which women's gifts have been wasted and squelched, and call for a recommitment and concrete action to include women's voices and women's leadership at all levels of ministry and administration.

"What does the feminist movement mean today? The scope has widened to include equality for all groups and a call for proactive diversity because we recognize that our human community needs full participation. Everyone's gifts and insights are required for society to move towards justice and love. Jesus gives us this goal of heaven on earth and models the beloved community. Without judgement there is only love and radical sharing. Womaen's Caucus continues to work for equality and diversity so that together we may move reality closer to Jesus' vision for a new world."⁵

Reframing Our Effort

Perhaps the use of technology to collect and transmit information is the biggest change in our world since Womaen's Caucus was formed. No longer limited to print publications or in-person meetings, we enjoy the nimbleness of electronically accessing one another and information while we also lament the personal isolation we feel when virtual connections become our primary tool for interaction. The commitment of Caucus is to utilize both in-person and virtual opportunities to reach broadly across our community as we provide education, personal support, and advocacy for enhancing opportunities for women.

Through EDUCATION, Womaen's Caucus

- *will build understanding of the intersectional issues facing women (e.g., sexism, economic inequalities, violence, reproductive rights) and the conditions that influence them; and*
- *will help persons and organizations develop the needed skills to remedy the dynamics of power and injustice that contribute to gender inequality.*

Through PERSONAL SUPPORT, Womaen's Caucus

- *will provide safe spaces for women to speak the truth about their life experiences and offer resources of support;*
- *will bear witness to the strengths and courage of feminists within the church; and*
- *will work toward social transformation with like-minded groups inside and outside the Church of the Brethren.*

Through ADVOCACY, Womaen's Caucus

- *will seek broad-based participation in activities intended to achieve gender equality;*
- *will speak loudly within the Church of the Brethren, calling it into accountability around issues of gender inequality; and*
- *will act boldly to change practices that limit opportunities within the church for all persons to live and serve equally.*

How We Are Organized

Womaen's Caucus is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that is open to all people wishing to support its mission, vision, and goals. It is led by a volunteer Steering Committee that oversees the business of the organization. From within its group, the Steering Committee selects a Convenor and members of an Executive Committee who handle Caucus business when needed. Caucus is not an agency or formal associate of the Church of the Brethren but relates to the denomination through Annual Conference and district functions, advocacy for women, engagement in the processes for identifying and selecting church leaders, and collaboration with denominational organizations. In the past, we have identified as "members" any persons who have contributed financially to Caucus. Going forward, we have four new categories of affiliation representing different levels and types of involvement that are intended to open up our available resources and sense of community.

Current Steering Committee members include Bobbi Dykema, Convener, (Springfield, IL); Jonathan Bay (LaVerne, CA); Sara Davis (LaVerne, CA); Anna Lisa Gross (Lafayette, IN); Kathryn LaPointe (San Diego, CA); and Carol Lindquist (Fort Wayne, IN).



Bobbi Dykema



Anna Lisa Gross



Carol Lindquist



Jonathan Bay



Kathryn LaPointe



Sara Davis

Getting Involved . . .

Come, join our effort to better understand and confront issues facing women and other marginalized people! Tailor your involvement to your individual interests and capabilities through participating in any or all of the affiliation categories listed below. During the month of February, you will receive a personal email from a WC Steering Committee member or a personal USPS letter from Caucus inviting you to update your contact information and to indicate your preferred affiliation with Womaen's Caucus. Anyone not currently on one of our mailing lists but interested in becoming a Caucus affiliate may contact us directly by emailing womaenscaucuscob@gmail.com. Please see our website for more details. We have room for your ideas and your efforts!

Supporters include people wanting to know about the efforts and impact of Womaen's Caucus. This is the most basic affiliation category. As a Supporter, you are encouraged to

- follow Caucus activities through email notifications, *Femailings*, and social media;
- visit the Womaen's Caucus booth and consider attending the luncheon if attending Annual Conference; and
- participate in events, when possible.

Thinkers include people interested in contributing to the knowledge base of Caucus by increasing our understanding of challenges facing women and the context in which those challenges exist. As a Thinker, you are encouraged to

- follow Caucus activities through email notifications, *Femailings*, and social media;

Continued on page 4

- participate in Caucus events;
- contribute to understanding women's issues through reading, research, collaborations, and polity development; and
- share your knowledge with others in Womaen's Caucus through discussions, presentations, or writing.

Doers include people interested in helping to plan and carry out the events of Caucus. As a Doer, you are encouraged to

- follow Caucus activities through email notifications, *Femailings*, and social media;
- participate in Caucus events;
- assist with planning and implementing Caucus events; and
- help to build collaborations with like-minded individuals and groups.

Funders include people committed to assuring that Caucus has sufficient financial resources to carry out its mission. As a Funder, you are encouraged to

- contribute as a Supporter, Thinker, and/or Doer, as desired;
- contribute financially to Womaen's Caucus; and
- assist in accessing additional funding sources.



Exciting Opportunities . . .

Oddly, a global pandemic enabled Womaen's Caucus to reconceptualize its work. Cancellation of the 2020 Annual Conference opened the opportunity for the traditional Annual Conference luncheon to be transformed into the virtual panel discussion "*Speaking Truth to Power*" that has been accessed by hundreds of devices since its presentation in July. Anna Lisa Gross then personalized additional messages sparked by the panel in a ten-part audio series that can be heard on *Messenger Radio*. Ongoing conversations within the denomination are leading to new virtual events as Womaen's Caucus and On Earth Peace explore a multi-week training and project development on Kingian Nonviolence as a way to offer healing both within and beyond the denomination. To better understand leadership development and identification, Caucus is creating an online discussion with church leaders about leadership and training opportunities for those who wish to grow their leadership capabilities. And when Annual Conference resumes in a more familiar format, Womaen's Caucus will be there, too.

You Can Find Us . . .

Continue to reach out to us as you have ideas and questions.

Mailing address Womaen's Caucus
818 SW 3rd Ave., #E1299
Portland, OR 97204

Online

Website	www.womaenscaucus.org
Email	womaenscaucuscob@gmail.com
Facebook	Womaen's Caucus of the Church of the Brethren
Twitter	@wcaucus

¹ A Not-so-Brief History of Womaen's Caucus. June 1971.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ "Speaking Truth to Power Panel Discussion", July 2020 (www.brethren.org/messenger/uncategorized/ or www.brethren.org/news/2020/brethren-bits-for-or-podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/cobcast-the-church or www.womaenscaucus.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ or <https://tinyurl.com/wcaucus-messengerradio>)

⁵ Womaen's Caucus Governance Document, December 12, 2020.

“. . . we engage in the prophetic task of creating church which is free from attitudes and practices of injustice.”

Creating, nurturing, disrupting God . . .

. . . We are grateful for the stirring of your Spirit that called visionaries in our denomination to birth Womaen's Caucus fifty years ago. Our hearts are overflowing with thanksgiving for their commitment to advancing the roles of women. Through their advocacy, they helped our denomination acknowledge the need for more equal inclusion and participation by women in the ministry of local congregations and our denomination, a vision that we continue to embrace and strive to attain.

We celebrate the engagement of our sisters and our brothers who stood together proclaiming the belongingness of women's voices and gifts in the building up of the body of Christ, and supported equal rights for women.

We lament that many of us continue to struggle for equality, inclusion and belonging within our congregations, communities and denomination. Women who have been called and "vetted" to serve, are sometimes cast aside in hurtful and de-humanizing ways. Too often, women who feel the call to serve are passively overlooked or overtly dismissed by those who are more privileged or powerful. We confess we have not always tended to issues of equality or lived as justice-seeking sisters and brothers in your kin-dom, We confess our complicity. We confess our silence has sometimes communicated consent. We confess our inaction in the midst of inequalities and injustices has enabled the oppressors, further

perpetuating victimization and wounding of those who are hurting.

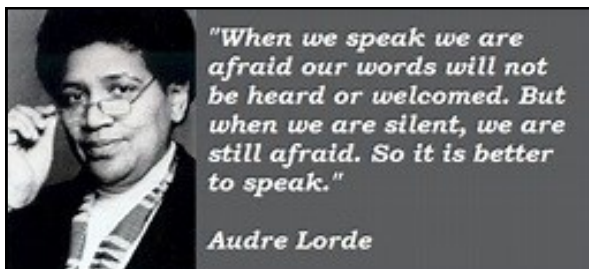
As we stand in the threshold, looking back over the past 50 years, we acknowledge you have called forth feminists who have led courageously and compassionately. As we cross over the threshold, we believe you are doing a new thing in our denomination. Following in the Way of Jesus, guided by your ever present Spirit, Womaen's Caucus renews its commitment to honor and celebrate the worth, dignity and gifts of our sisters. Following in the Way of Jesus, we commit renewed energies to creatively engage in the transformative work of gender equality.

We bear witness to the prophetic words of Amos, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." What you require of us has been written on our hearts from generation to generation and that is to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with You.

God of abundant living, as we embrace and live into our call to continue the work of gender equality, we commit to speaking truth to power, listening with an open heart, cultivating a generous spirit, and leading with love as we advocate for the full and equal inclusion and empowerment of women in the opportunities for ministry and service within our congregations, our denomination and beyond.

May it be so! Amen.

February is Black History Month



'A Mighty Voice'
Black feminist intellectual
Audre Lorde

March is Women's History Month



*"If our principles are right,
why should we be cowards?"*
Lucretia Mott



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 focused energy into growing our steering committee and commitments. We continue to find tangible ways to live out our mission and build community.

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 _____

Email _____

Phone _____

District/Home Church (if applicable) _____

Contribution

☐ \$100

☐ \$75

☐ \$50

☐ \$25

☐ Other