

# GENERATING POWER

photo by Tyler Casey

Womaen's Caucus of the Church of the Brethren \* *one woman, all women*



You've heard of the glass ceiling; you've probably heard of the stained glass ceiling (women excluded from church leadership). You've seen it in action.

You've watched women get on the ballot, but lose to men. You've seen women side-by-side nominated for moderator both lose to a man nominated from the floor of Annual Conference.

You see many women pastors - you probably have women ministers (you might be a woman in ministry!) yet you know there are districts where women are virtually excluded from pastoral ministry.

We live with a pandemic of patriarchy which elevates aggressive, egotistical masculinity, and scorns vulnerability and intuition, diagnosing them as "feminine" and weak.

We grieve that these diseases are flourishing in the Church of the Brethren. We put on our lab coats, pull out stethoscopes, and work to diagnose: what keeps women from getting nominated?

What prevents women, BIPOC, LGBTQ and variously-abled people from responding YES to nominations? What blocks delegates from affirming these people's call to leadership?

Diagnosis is elusive and we can get stuck trying to figure it out. We have identified a few problems that we are ready to help treat. And we see health and vitality that we are eager to celebrate.

Our summer/fall line-up of events are treatment and celebration. Read on and mark your calendar!

Speaking Truth  
to Generate Power  
by Anna Lisa Gross

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

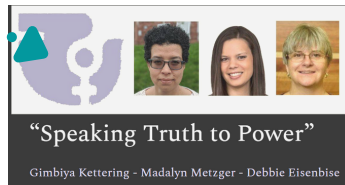
- July 3: Annual Conference networking session
- July 15: Speaking Truth to Power panel
- August 24: Leadership in the CoB Workshop
- October 5: From Nomination to Election session

# BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

Thursday, July 15 at 8 pm (Eastern)

We can cite statistics and wring our hands at the dearth of women in leadership (and we do!) but we know that stories are what transform and activate us. Gather to hear from four women about their unique - yet universal - experiences. Called to leadership but voted down. Offered a seat at the table but not listened to. Invited onto the committee but couldn't find reliable childcare and missed meetings and fell out of the loop. Grew weary of being the \*only\* woman, and/or person of color, and/or LGBTQ person in the group. **Tabitha Rudy, Susan Boyer, Rebekah Flores, Kathryn LaPointe** bring stories (this Femailings features their voices to build energy for the live event.) Just like our Speaking Truth to Power panel in 2020, expect challenge, Spirit, hospitality and passion!

The Living Stream congregation is pleased to once again be hosting the Womaen's Caucus panel. We support Caucus' purpose and vision and seek to embody in our online church full inclusivity and equality in the Body of Christ. We welcome visitors, explorers, sojourners every Sunday evening at 8pm eastern / 5pm pacific time at [www.livingstreamcob.org](http://www.livingstreamcob.org).



Kathryn LaPointe shares stories of barriers to leadership in Episode 1 of Speaking Truth to Power (on Messenger Radio) - [find it on our website](#) and [listen to all 11 episodes](#) while you're there!



Susan Boyer



Why are you seeking to be licensed? Does your father not have any sons?" That is what I was asked in my licensing interview back in 1981.

I was a wide-eyed optimist at the time, believing that the larger church would witness the call of God on the women in their midst and this kind of prejudice would end. Unfortunately, I have had many soul-crushing encounters within the church since. Well-meaning people have explained to me that we all just need to sit down at the same table and tell our stories in order to break down the barriers. However, my sisters and I are often not invited to this elusive table.

In 2012 a query, that originated in the church I now serve, asked the Annual Conference delegate body: How will AC ensure that our ballot preparation and election process support and honor gender equality in all elections? The impetus for the query was the 2011 election of a moderator elect, in which two qualified and competent women were on the ballot. A man was nominated from the floor and won the election. The 2012 Standing Committee's recommendation was to respectfully return our query and reaffirm the call for accountability in the "Goals for Annual Conference Elections and Appointments" adopted in 1979. As if it wasn't bad enough that the answer to our question was a goal set over thirty years before which was obviously not being met, the recommendation was delivered to us, in a condescending tone, by a woman who claimed she was proof that the Church of the Brethren was a bastion of gender equality.

I remember that moment as if a snapshot had been taken. I know where I was standing and even what I was wearing. It struck me with full force that the denomination I had always believed offered a wider reach than the local church could provide, actually diminished us. I consciously pivoted. With new clarity I realized that God is not calling me to prop up denominational structures that exclude. My call as a person in ministry is one of revolutionary and radical courage bathed in the extravagant and inclusive love of our God, who wants nothing less from the Beloved Community.

*Speaking Truth to  
Generate Power*

Shairyar Khan on Upsplash



# BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP: PANELIST STORIES

Rebekah Flores

*Accept me as I am so I can learn what I can become!*



I have always had a desire to help others. That desire has manifest itself in many ways throughout my life. I thought I had to be the teacher, the mentor, the strongest person, but in 2007 things changed for me. In August 2007 I moved into L'Arche Chicago, L'Arche is an international federation of homes, where people with and without disabilities share life together. I moved in thinking I had all the answers and I could fix things. That couldn't be further from the truth. In reality I needed to acknowledge that help goes both ways. I need to allow others to help me. I don't always have the answers. What makes communities stronger is acknowledging that strengths in everyone.

In my ministry as Disability Advocate, I have found that in supporting/celebrating people with disabilities in congregations, it's the small gestures that make a difference. You may be surprised by the impact that small gesture has on your congregation, in positive ways. Taking the time to learn from each other is paramount. I have strengths and weaknesses, as do you, working together makes all the difference."

We celebrate our newest Steering Committee Member **Carla Gillespie**. Carla joins us from Dayton, Ohio. Find out more about her in our next Femailing or stay tuned for updates on our website.



## BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: CAUCUS STORIES

Bobbi Dykema

The most glaring experience I have had of an obstacle to leadership (and there have been a fair number) was when I was a candidate for a congregation that was looking for a new pastor, and one of the search committee members said, in the hearing of one of my mentors, that they "just didn't think a woman could do the job" - this in a church that considers itself progressive.

Tabitha Rudy



Anna Lisa reached out to me a month ago and asked if I would participate on a panel and share a story or two regarding barriers to leadership.

As I read her email, my first thought was, "Ohh do I have stories to tell!!" with a slight laugh...the kind of laugh that you eke out so you don't cry. The truth is that my current pastorate, which I started in January of 2019, has been anything but easy or smooth. Of course, the pandemic hasn't helped. I discovered early on that there were many underlying issues just waiting to come to a head. My call was apparently the tipping point.

Before my current call, I was the Interim Associate DE for our district. Before that, I was a full time student at Bethany. I taught high school history for three years prior to enrolling at Bethany. Each of these experiences, in different ways, taught me that good discernment and education will take you far. But, I've also learned, both as a teacher and pastor, that it's difficult to work in dysfunctional systems. Church or public school division...it doesn't matter.

Unhealthy systems do not just limit the leadership of women, however. I've observed male pastors suffer in unhealthy congregations and other leaders get played like pawns in a chess game. To echo Tara Hornbacker, *"Where is God in all this?"* Seriously, though. I know that the Bible often sounds like one story after another of dysfunctional relationships, but that's not what God intended! We don't want dysfunction and oppression in the church - and neither does God. But, here we are - still called to preach to, teach, lead and pray for and with the very communities of faith whose dysfunction often leaves us sleepless at night and wondering how long we can survive.

I often wonder what I can do. What can I do to help heal the broken systems in which I am called to serve and live? There's no quick fix and that is what makes the work so hard. Sometimes it's okay to exit. Sometimes that's the healthy and right thing to do. But when it's not, I cling to the message shared in the obituary of a recently deceased colleague in ministry - one that I also read in Kate Bowler's book, *Everything Happens For A Reason*. "Keep going."

# BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP: CAUCUS STORIES

Anna Lisa Gross

In my 20s, during seminary, I served on the outreach committee for my congregation. I was the youngest member of the committee and two of the other active members were men retired from long-term service in the denomination and at the seminary. I was in a disagreement with one of these men and I asked him to meet with me at the church building so we could work through our conflict. I was sitting down when he arrived and he came into the room, very close to me, standing over me with 2-3 feet between us. He spoke loudly,

emphatically, did not ask questions or seek deeper understanding. He seemed completely convinced that he was right and I was wrong, and was only there to “settle” the matter by me coming around to his way of thinking. Not only was I not convinced, I was intimidated, hurt and even ashamed for...for what? For being young? Female? Interested in conflict resolution? Thankfully this was not the last committee I served on, though it could have been given this experience!

Jonathan Bay

Logging in to yet another zoom meeting this year, I was surprised to find that one of the great joys of covid life has been stories from the Caucus steering committee. Each one has a unique story that relates to leadership, and fresh ways to be at work in the world. We are examining challenges for women in leadership and discerning how we can increase support.

I’m learning that support within relationships rests in three concepts: **availability, responsiveness and encouragement**. As we explore women in leadership, it doesn’t help to list barriers and sort them out one by one. Support in any area of life for me hasn’t felt like boxes that are ticked off a list. So I am intrigued by the three concepts that help build support, mostly because it is about building relationships with each other, which offers me the opportunity to grow in a relationship with someone.

In many ways WC started with **availability**. I remember when we decided to have a prayer for the women on the ballot at Annual Conference: a healing ritual, a moment of solidarity and support, acknowledging the difficulty of being voted on. Caucus’s progressive stance appeared to get in the way of that moment of support for some people (some women didn’t feel comfortable being part of the prayer). This was a perfect illustration to me of the complexity of women accepting and pursuing leadership - there is a careful dance happening.

I’m learning how to pursue **responsiveness and encouragement**. All three tenets of support fall flat if they are not engaged in earnestness and true relationship. I can see the ways that Caucus’s actions are embodying these principles from the Messenger podcasts that Anna Lisa worked on to our upcoming events, as well as the networks we are continuously building and fostering. How do we call leaders, how do we encourage the call, how do we discourage a call, how do we talk about the process, how do we expand or limit our definitions. I am interested in ways we can engage in wholly truthful conversations about leadership.

Carol Young Lindquist

When I first became a high school principal, there was one other female in my state in that role. I come from a family of school administrators (all men, but that hadn’t yet crossed my mind) and comfortable in my new role. I didn’t think about others’ concerns about my gender; I was busy doing my job.

▲ My first awareness of my difference was during a meeting of area principals and athletic directors who gathered monthly at a nearby restaurant. I knew them all and was paying attention to agenda items when a waitress came into the room to take our orders. Immediately, I was struck by how out of place she looked in her bright, feminine attire against a sea of suits and ties. She stood out as “not one of them”. Quickly becoming aware that I was the only other woman in the room, I looked at the pink suit I was wearing and realized that I didn’t look like “one of them” either. Through much of the remaining meeting my thoughts took me into deep reflection of who I wanted to be and how I wanted to be seen as a female in the overwhelmingly male world of school leadership. Among other things, I resolved to be true to my own style and, more importantly, to use my wits and grit to stand my ground. That resolve still holds.

● You don’t have to look very far to see a female standing out against a backdrop of male suits and ties. ● You know where to look. Legislative bodies at all levels of government. Business and civic organizations. Denominational leadership. Women stand out when there are few of them. Regardless of how capable they are, each of these role models needs to know she can count on us for support and that we are committed to adding more women to leadership ranks until gender is no longer an issue. ● What we do matters.

▼ My daughter recently began her first high school principalship and I am anxious to understand how, not if, gender adds to the challenges she faces. My maternal hope is that much has changed in the last 35 years to ease her way but, not taking any chances, I will continue to work fervently for her and all the other women who are entitled to live fully into their capabilities and aspirations. Women belong in all positions of leadership – let’s get them there!

# GENERATING A POWERFUL, FAITHFUL FUTURE OF THE COB

As we speak truth to power we are generating power. Stories can change us; stories can change our culture. Womaen's Caucus wants to generate power with you as we call the equitable, just, diverse and passionate church! Let's get equipped:

## NOMINATION TO ELECTION

Tuesday, October 5, 8pm (Eastern)

Have you been nominated? Have you nominated someone? (Or you're at least thinking about it?) When Womaen's Caucus learned that half of the people nominated never fill out their Nominee Information Form (and therefore are never considered for the ballot) we grieved all those gifted and faithful individuals who may have interest, may feel called, but found too many barriers. In conversation with representatives of the Nominating Committee, we have discovered that they also would like to better understand what barriers nominees are experiencing – let's work and pray together for a healthier and more diverse church!

You'll hear from others who have been nominated, get tips on filling out those forms, and generate new ideas for this process. You'll also find solidarity with others who know putting our hats in the ring can be vulnerable! And we'll share advice on encouraging others to follow through on Nominee Information Forms, so that our heartfelt nominations of others get to see the light of day.



With your continued support Womaen's Caucus will empower women and advocate for people on the margins. Complete the form below, [donate at our website](#), 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) \_\_\_\_\_

## LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP

Tuesday, Aug 24, 8pm (Eastern)

How do people get on Program and Arrangements Committee anyway? And Standing Committee—how is that different from Mission & Ministry Board? Do Brethren Benefit Trust and On Earth Peace pick their own board members or do we? How do I nominate people? Who can I nominate? What do I do if I get nominated? How do we deal with getting nominated every year but never making it on the ballot? Or getting on the ballot but then the delegates vote for someone else - publicly and painfully? Bring all your other good questions, too, and Nominating Committee and Annual Conference Officers will be with us as we get equipped to lead the church: today and tomorrow.

We'll continue discussion of the Compelling Vision at Annual Conference – how are you and your faith community hearing God's call in this vision? The Mission & Ministry Board developed a Strategic Plan for denominational staff rooted in the Compelling Vision. We are ambivalent about the Compelling Vision but we see a powerful, faithful future for the CoB in this Strategic Plan. Read it at [brethren.org/strategicplan](#)

### COMPELLING VISION (Beyond the Horizon Vision)

#### JESUS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Together, as the Church of the Brethren, we will passionately live and share the radical transformation and holistic peace of Jesus Christ through relationship-based neighborhood engagement. To move us forward, we will develop a culture of calling and equipping disciples who are innovative, adaptable, and fearless.

### STRATEGIES (Background Vision)

PURSUE CHRIST'S CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP	EMBODY THE BIBLICAL COMMAND TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS	SEEK GOD'S RACIAL JUSTICE	RECLAIM NEW TESTAMENT MODELS OF GIVING
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# WE'RE IN THIS TOGETHER! HOW DO YOU WANT TO ENGAGE?

Tailor your involvement to your individual interests and capabilities through participating in any or all of the affiliation categories listed below. **Supporters** include people wanting to know about the efforts and impact of Womaen's Caucus. **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. **Doers** include people interested in helping to plan and carry out the events of Caucus. **Funders** include people committed to assuring that Caucus has sufficient financial resources to carry out its mission. Caucus is reaching out to everyone on its contact list to learn their preferences for affiliation. If you have not been contacted, please contact us and we will respond to you personally to receive your information.

[www.womaenscaucus.org](http://www.womaenscaucus.org)

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Portland, OR 97204

## ANNUAL CONFERENCE NETWORKING EVENT

Saturday, July 3 at 5:30 pm (Eastern)

In the historic first fully online Annual Conference, we look forward to seeing faces up-close, unmasked, as we greet old friends, meet new friends, and learn about highlights from 50 years of Womaen's Caucus! Just like any of us reaching 50 years, Womaen's Caucus has grown up, acquired stretch marks, earned wrinkles, gotten tired at times, and gained wisdom. In the past year Womaen's Caucus has chosen to refresh-at-50, and we are excited and energized! We've been updating our organizing documents and rejuvenating our vision. We invite you to engage this refreshed Caucus, as a \*thinker\* \*doer\* \*donor\* \*supporter\* and we'll explain all of this in our networking session! Whether you're brimming with memories of Caucus, or newly-encountering Caucus, you are most welcome.

*Canoeing over the people who already lived there?! The adaptive leadership we seek is **confessional** and **transformational!** Read "Calling in: A Letter for AC Leadership" on our website.*