



I'VE GOT THE POWER!

Naming and reclaiming power
as a force for good

Women Doing Theology Conference

National Conference Center Leesburg, Virginia
Nov. 4-6, 2016

Sponsored by the Women in Leadership Project
of Mennonite Church USA.

Workshops

Trail Sisters

Erica Littlewolf

For women of color: Using circle process, we will have a conversation to begin to build relationships and explore alliances.

Social Media: We've Got the Power

Carol Penner, Hilary Scarsella

Social media is a great equalizer, allowing women equal access to wider audiences, without institutional gatekeepers, and across national and denominational boundaries. How do blogs, websites and Twitter empower women's voices in the Mennonite church? Hilary Scarsella manages the blog Our Stories Untold, which looks at violence against women and the church. Carol Penner has a blog of worship resources (www.leadinginworship.com), and a blog about the Mennonite Brethren church (www.dearMBchurch.ca). After 10-minute presentations by Carol and Hilary, a facilitated discussion about social media, women and the Mennonite church will follow.

Power on the Dung Heap: Job's Wife Through the Centuries

Jackie Wyse-Rhodes

The wife of Job appears in just one verse in the book of Job, and yet she has remained a significant and controversial figure in the history of Jewish and Christian biblical interpretation. In this workshop, we will reconsider her story, as told in the Bible and in post-biblical writings and artwork. How do we interpret her words? How do we understand her suffering when so little attention has been paid to it? How might we continue to tell her story in meaningful ways? Participants will have the opportunity to discuss ancient texts and depictions of Job's wife, as well as more modern artistic representations.

Giving Voice to Biblical Characters Through Reader's Theater

Jane Yoder-Short

The workshop will begin with a short reader's theater built around the story of Shiphrah and Puah. The second part of the workshop will involve participants writing their own scripts in groups. To speed up the process, background information and creative sparks will be provided. If time allows, some groups will present their rough scripts. People will leave empowered (or at least less overwhelmed) by the process of going from a biblical story to script.



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Barriers and Access to Solidarity

Melissa Florer-Bixler, Chantelle Todman Moore

In striving to experience transformational solidarity as women, we experience both barriers and access points in our shared history. These must be acknowledged and owned for us to build a new sisterhood beyond and outside of patriarchy and white supremacy. This workshop will explore our shared histories and realities, as well as points of diversion, as women in a racialized society. We will also explore how we reinforce a script of white supremacy within our interactions and mindsets and ways to rewrite a new reality for solidarity as women.

Telling Your Love Story: A Revolutionary Act

Jos Duncan

Participants will be guided in telling personal stories and mapping their life journeys, focusing on love as a key to healing, change, and power.

Envisioning God's Power

Linda Gehman Peachey

This workshop will explore how we understand God's power. How does God's power show up in the Bible, especially in Jesus' life and ministry? What do these understandings reveal about God and about how God works in the world and in our lives?

I've Got the Pencil: Poetry as a Kaleidoscope for Understanding Self and Power

Hillary Watson

Learning how to manage power is also about learning how to manage self-expression. We'll look at several poems, discuss ways to use poetry for our own growth and health, and try out a few writing prompts. This workshop is designed to be a cathartic, creative, processing space in the middle of an intense weekend. Participants are invited to share work at Saturday evening's Poetic Showcase.

Sexy/Sexed Bodies in the Pulpit: Women's Negotiations in Pastoral Ministry

Melissa Florer-Bixler

Dressing the body is no neutral act, especially for women in pastoral ministry who embody female sexuality in a traditionally masculine space. Dressing also serves as a metaphor for how women's bodies perform gender in masculine spaces of pastoral leadership in the Mennonite church. Over time women have attempted to either "opt in" or "opt out" of this form of body politics. After exploring particular instances of the production of female identity in pastoral ministry in the Mennonite church, we move to an alternative: that there is no way of getting outside of being a sexed body. Instead dress, space and sex are persistent negotiations, occasioned decisions that can produce, diminish or reallocate power.



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Raise Your Voice

Katie Graber

What does it mean to claim power by raising your voice in song? Or to submit to written harmonies and blend your voice when singing with others? This workshop will explore the curious nature of voice as both material and immaterial and how in song, voice gives rise to many rich uses, meanings and metaphors. Together we will discover how singing invites us to simultaneously give up power and claim power, and how this complexity mirrors many life situations in which we can live “power through” rather than “power over.” Participants will also sing together and share our dreams for the future of congregational singing in the Mennonite church. Women helping shape the new Mennonite Song Collection will lead the workshop.

Who are You When You Perform?

Hillary Watson

Work presentations, teaching, sermons, poetry — we all spend time in front of crowds. Is it possible your body is saying something very different than your words? Deepen your awareness of your body and learn tips for working in a variety of settings *with* your body instead of *against* it. Using theater, poetry and pastoral techniques, we'll approach oral presentation via the body. This is a companion to the workshop I've Got the Pencil, moving from the written word to the spoken word and imbuing both with power, intentionality and truth.

Womanist Theology From an Anabaptist Perspective

Melody Pannell

Explore the Intersectionality of feminist thought and black liberation theology in the development of womanist theology as a model for the empowerment of women. How can womanist theology be implemented through the lens of an Anabaptist perspective? How does womanist theology connect to the current Radical Anabaptist Women's (RAW) Movement for Women seeking to reclaim their power and ownership within the Mennonite community?

Creating Personal Rituals for Empowerment

Hilary Scarsella

Through ritual we can give the parts of ourselves that have been silenced the space needed to come to voice. We can also use ritual to begin the work of transforming the dynamics of power that shape us and our interactions in the world. Come to this workshop to learn how to practice the basics of creating personal rituals for empowerment, using resources from the faith traditions that you value. This workshop will be highly interactive.



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Talking about Power in Congregations

Joanna Shenk

In this workshop we'll discuss how to develop a curriculum and pedagogy on power for a congregation. Joanna will share from her experience at First Mennonite Church of San Francisco, where they spent the year of 2015 focused on recognizing and resisting structural sin/oppression. She will share what this looked like in worship, education and small groups, and how such work set a framework for ongoing transformation.

Women of Color, Mennonite Women's Organizations, and Issues of Power

Alma Ovalle, Anita Hooley Yoder and others

Women of color will share stories about the empowering activities of Mennonite women's groups at local, regional and denominational levels. They will speak about how they have been supported by other women and the structure of women's organizations. They will also voice questions and concerns about potentially disempowering experiences in white-dominated Mennonite spaces. Anita Hooley Yoder will present stories and thoughts from additional women whom she encountered in her recent work on a history book for Mennonite Women USA, with ample time for questions and conversation.

Raw Monologues

Sandra Perez, Sylvia Shirk, Ruth Wenger and others

We will select real stories of Mennonite women and prepare skits to act them out, either by the woman who is telling her own story or a surrogate.

Claiming our Power in the Halls of Congress

Rachelle Lyndaker Schlabach, Charissa Zehr

Government policies affect all our lives, and yet often we feel powerless to speak to our governing officials. This workshop will help you learn how to engage effectively with policymakers and to speak out for more just and peaceful policies.

Mary Magdalene Feast Day Celebration

Sara Klassen, Kristy Shellenberger Yordy

This workshop will provide ideas and resources for planning a celebration honoring Mary Magdalene's annual Feast Day (July 22) as well as resources for planning a worship service to honor Mary Magdalene. The resources are based on the presenters' study of Mary Magdalene and their work of planning and leading a worship service and feast day in their home church and community of Goshen, Indiana.



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Our Stories Untold Wants to Hear From You!

Barbra Graber, Hilary Scarsella

In the two years since the last Women Doing Theology conference, conversation and action toward transforming the culture of the Mennonite church into one that resists the systemic perpetuation of sexualized violence has taken several important turns. In this workshop, Our Stories Untold (OSU) will make ourselves available to answer your questions. We are also interested in hearing your take on where the church now stands and what we (the church broadly or OSU specifically) need to focus on most in the next two years to keep the transformation train rolling. Come to this workshop to get connected to the OSU community, to gain clarity about recent developments in the church with regard to sexualized violence, and/or to help shape the way forward.

Sources of Power and Authority for Women in Ministry

Janeen Bertsche Johnson

This workshop will examine the three major sources of power/authority for people in ministry: personal power (who you are), positional power (what your role is), and functional power (how well you perform). We will explore how women are given (or not given) these different types of power, and how we can develop our authority in order to empower others.

Paper presentations

Power, Participation and Process: The Role of Polity in the Mennonite Church

Janeen Bertsche Johnson

“Polity” describes how things are done in the church — who has power, who is participating and what the process is. Mennonites have not been very explicit about their polity, which can lead to confusion and frustration, especially when someone wants to encourage change in the church. This paper will outline some of the key aspects of Mennonite polity and suggest ways that women’s voices can be better heard in the processes of the church.

Dancing on the Edges of the Denomination Tent

Amy Yoder McGloughlin

I pastor a congregation that was removed from the denomination. I’ll share the story of the removal, explore the dynamics of power, and envision what leading might look like post-denomination.



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Dare to be a Danielle: Women, Courage and Leadership in the Mennonite Church

Carol Penner

I interviewed 10 women over age 65 who have shown leadership in the Mennonite church in Ontario. How did they show courage? Who did they learn courage from? What biblical characters inspired them? While I hope to write an academic paper on this topic, this presentation will focus on story as I share about courage, using the voices of the women I interviewed and reflecting on the impact that hearing their stories had on me, the interviewer.

A Menno Latina in the Making: Story of Roots, Leadership and Theology

Alma Ovalle

This paper will give women of all backgrounds insight into the journey of a woman who grew up as a Hispanic Mennonite preacher's kid in South Texas in the 1970s and 1980s and who throughout her adult life has seen the hand of God empower her to be a leader in her home, church and community today. We'll explore her roots in the Mennonite church, leadership opportunities for women in the Southeast Mennonite Conference, her work with Mennonite Women USA as well as her work with Hispanic Mennonite Women. Her story will ask us to consider how we lead in community with other women, how we lead for a greater purpose, and how we develop future leaders.

Who Here Has Ever Heard a Mennonite Sermon on Grace?

Hilary Scarsella

I've been asking this question in Mennonite settings for a while now. When I do, I am nearly always met with blank stares. One shadow side of the Mennonite emphasis on discipleship and "living like Jesus" is that we have a tendency to hold ourselves to an unattainable standard of perfection, and when we fail to meet that standard, we can become flooded with shame. Recently, a friend told me, "When I was a kid, I would secretly cry myself to sleep with shame because I realized I didn't want to endure being killed for my faith like Jesus was." The pressure to sacrifice our bodies, psyches and spirits is particularly high for women, and it has been used in both the church and wider society to disempower women and girls. What role could a Mennonite theology of grace play in the empowerment of Mennonite women, and how do we embody a theology of grace alongside our commitments to ethical living? This paper will use story and critical reflection to explore possible directions.

I Don't Need to be in Charge of Anything

Cathy Stoner

Beginning with her first taste of embracing her own power at the last conference, Cathy will share mid-life stories and anecdotes from her journey of empowerment as a woman of faith, living and working in her neighborhood. She reflects on her transition from a stay-at-home mom to whatever's next.



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On Earth as in Heaven: The Power to Celebrate and Bridge Intersectionalities of Creation and Creator

Erica Lea

Much of Christian theology has historically been more informed by patriarchal notions of dualism than a healthy respect for holistic interconnectedness. Diversity is the strength of Creation. Does Creation, including people, have the power to heal itself in partnership with the Creator? How would Creation care look different if Creation, often personified with feminine metaphors, were adequately celebrated as diverse, yet unified? Particular attention will be given to intersectional identities and socially constructed identities along with interactions between human and non-human parts of Creation. This presentation will incorporate insights from ecofeminist theology scholars, especially Elizabeth Johnson, Sallie McFague and Rosemary Radford Ruether.

Sophia at the Crossroads: Dismantling Patriarchy Through the Wisdom of the Biblical Goddess

Chris Hoover Seidel

The biblical story has been paved with patriarchal asphalt, suppressing the power of women and marginalized voices for millennia. This study encounters Hochma, Woman Wisdom, in the poetry of Proverbs, and uses the genre as a point of liberation for her character. It capitalizes on her development as Sophia during the Jewish Hellenistic period to uncover a biblical goddess figure whose life-giving wisdom counters the folly of the status quo, blurs gender binaries, and powerfully calls her seekers to walk the path of Life. It presents a reality where her voice and life-giving power break through the cracks in the patriarchal asphalt, offering readers a new light to shine on the Bible. This new light includes the life and ministry of Christ-Logos, the Holy Spirit in Acts, and Paul's message of the cross and resurrection. Sophia as a feminine image of divinity interrogates the patriarchal demands of hierarchy, binaries, and oppression, liberating the church to amplify its prophetic voice and move toward justice.

Can I Get a Witness? Claiming the Power to Transform the Common Shock of Patriarchy

Sarah Bixler

In her book *Common Shock: Witnessing Violence Everyday*, Kaethe Weingarten presents a psychological framework for persons who experience subtle forms of trauma through common, everyday experiences. When unaddressed, these shocks pass from one generation to the next, morphing with each transmission. This paper analyzes stories from Mennonite women under a patriarchal system that can be categorized as *common shock*. Drawing on Weingarten's theory of the role of the witness, this paper envisions how compassionate witnesses can transform Mennonite women's experiences of common shock under patriarchy. These witnesses have immense power to confer hope and affect transformational change in a system reeling from patriarchy.



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Inescapable Dream

Catherine Lee

The paper will play with and examine our dreams about power, in a discussion of the necessities, nightmares, and conundrums that we face when we talk about power and the visions we shape for the world. Wendell Berry's poem "Dream" serves as an entry point, imagining our "inescapable," and ultimately failed, attempts to restore a damaged world, "to build all that we have built, but destroy nothing." We will then turn to explore Hannah Arendt's contrast between power and violence and ask what resources she offers in conversation with Anabaptist theologies of peace and nonviolence. Does Arendt offer concepts of power that sidestep Berry's sense of inevitable failure? Does gender play a role in differing perspectives and senses of possibility? Can power without violence help us to dream different dreams? Through an accessible interplay of poetry, philosophy and Anabaptist theology, the paper will question and affirm the "inescapable dream" of power: how we recognize, imagine and claim power, and how we miscarry and prosper in our attempts to use power to transform the world.

Naming Mary Magdalene: Reclaiming Jesus' Female Counterpart

Kristy Shellenberger Yordy

This paper explores Mary Magdalene's significant and critical role in the life of early Christianity and of Jesus himself. It uses canonical and extra-canonical sources, such as the Gospels of Philip, Mary Magdalene and Thomas, to reflect on her life, voice and power. It also ponders Mary Magdalene's connection to her sisters of the text, like the prophet Miriam of the Exodus narrative and the Shulammitte of the Song of Songs. The paper is written in the form of midrash—it searches out meaning from within, between and behind the biblical and extra-biblical texts.

Non-binary Identity in Ruth and the Re-structuring of Power

Stephanie Chandler Burns

This paper provides a uniquely queer reading of the book of Ruth through the lens of bisexual hermeneutics. It examines Ruth's non-binary identities, between categories of Moabite and Israelite and in her relationships with Naomi and Boaz, which break with traditional dichotomous categories. Such a biblical example creates room for those who fall outside such binary categories to reclaim power through embracing uniquely non-binary identities as God-given.

Mennonites and Power: A Thwarted Conversation

Brenda Meyer

This paper looks at words and concepts related to power in the biblical texts and finds strikingly consistent warnings and invitations. Those warnings and invitations described in current sociological language become a lens for examining the relationship of Mennonite leaders Guy Hershberger and J. Lawrence Burkholder as they wrote about, conversed about and exercised power.



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Living in the Light of the Moment

Mary Wade

This paper will explore three states of being essential to working for the common good; reverence, imagination and justice. Each embodies energy and ways of thinking, feeling and acting that opens the individual to self-discovery and "other" discovery. As we embrace and practice the three our views, outlook, attitudes and actions are lifted to a different dimension, a higher state of being. We are elevated above the destruction, distractions and dis-ease of the moment. It is in this state of personal and community elevation that undaunted by the present state of confusion and chaos we collectively change the direction of our lives, homes and community. We draw deeper into our individual and collective consciousness, see clearer, feel with greater compassion, and are compelled to live and work for the good of all.

This is My Blood: Meeting God in the Midst of the Messiness of Menstruation

Joy Wahnefried

"Menstruation is unclean in the biblical narrative and it is, therefore, something to be ashamed of," the dominant narrative asserts. For too long the church has shamed women who are menstruating. This paper challenges that reading of scripture by closely examining Genesis 18:9-15; 31:22-55; and Mark 5:21-43. This paper asserts that instead of declaring menstruation unclean and a time where women are separated from God, the Bible tells a story of a God who draws close to women in the midst of their menstrual cycles.

Created in God's Image: My Path to Embracing Power

Jenny Castro

I grew up in a spiritual community and family that ascribed to a complementarian view of men and women, which translated into traditional gender roles and a theology implied that growing up to be a woman meant that I could not (on my own) reflect God's human ideal. In this paper, I explore the roots of those beliefs and the effect they had on me as a little girl. I contrast those ideas with the power I encountered inside myself through a journey of connecting with my body, pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood and how through those experiences, my understanding of myself — in relation to God and humanity — was transformed.