

Broken Bread

Newsletter of Social Ministries for Peace & Justice, Des Moines Presbytery
Volume 33 · Number 2
Spring 2015

Grateful are we for the richness of blessing that women bring.



We celebrate women who are:

Artists of mercy and preachers of comfort; savers of patience and spenders of faith; singers and players and actors in dramas; teachers and mentors from cradle to grave.

Rockers of children and shakers of cages; scrubbers of faces and dishes and floors; sponsors of mission and funeral luncheons; tellers of stories and spinners of dreams.

Bearers of babies and burdens and blessings; shapers of laughter and finders of coins; tutors of children and catchers of church mice; sewers of teddy bears, banners and quilts.

Builders of egos and Habitat houses; huggers and greeters and makers of peace; runners of pantries and day care and

closets; leaders of note in all courts of the Church.

Keepers of churches and pastors and order; raisers of money and writers of grants; feeders of hunger at socials and seders; bakers of pizza and Eucharist breads.

Elders and deacons and pastors of merit; clippers of coupons and ringers of bells; typers and stuffers and processing wizards; minders of schedules and secrets and books.

Mothers and sisters and best friends forever; lovers and dancers and vessels of grace; speakers of wisdom and seekers of justice; Daughters of the Trinity, women of hope.

Elaine McRobbie
Celebrate the Gifts of Women
March 2000

**YOUNG ADULT
VOLUNTEERS:**
a year of service for a
lifetime of change



Of the 90 YAVs in the 2014/2015 class, 66% are young women.

LAUGHING IS A CONSTANT
October 7, 2014

From the blog post of Abbie Heilman, Young Adult Volunteer in Zambia.

“I’m the youngest in the Heilman family.” This is a normal comment I make when conversing with someone in my community. They ask me, “How many are in your family?” I reply, “There are three of us, my older sister Anna, who is 26 and my older brother Ben, who is 29 and is getting married this weekend.” I then hear, “Ahhh so you’re the youngest. You were spoiled and loved (the most), but mostly you got away with anything!” Yes, I’m the youngest! I’m the baby of the Heilman clan. I pretty much did get away with anything (because of my sweet personality)! Now, I find myself with the role of the oldest in the Phiri family and I’ve realized, I’m not sure how to take on this role. How do I be a good example to younger girls from a different culture? How do I go from a stranger to a friend or sister with the huge cross culture line in the middle of our relationships?

I want everyone to know that these lines have been crossed beautifully in the last week and a half! We have played game after game, such as volleyball,

keep away, and dodgeball outside our house that has ended with each of us covered in dirt because of our rolling on the ground laughing. They taught me how to cook Nshima, then allowed me to try to cook it alone, with the results ending in a disaster, but they ate it with poise and control! We ate chicken liver, pink polony (bologna, I think), and sun dried fish, which I tried to eat with poise and control...

I haven't even mentioned my very brave oldest host-sister who led me through the bus station and Unip market, full of drunken men infatuated with us because of the color of my skin. She has boldly and continuously told the drunkards to leave me alone, then grabs my hand to steer me away in order to keep me safe. I've been taught the bus system and the long, rounding, and confusing routes of Mtendere. My host-mother always makes sure that I'm fully fed while saying she will make me fat, fat, fat by the end of the year. They have helped me learn how to heat my water for bucket bathing, how to cook over a charcoal "grill", and wash my clothing by hand without making my hands too rough. They care so much about my well-being that I'm not sure how to give back to them.

The Phiri family has claimed me as one of their own. They introduce me as their oldest child, which always brings a look of confusion on the recipients face. We explain it was through adoption. They have gone above and beyond in accepting me with open arms and open hearts. Most if

not all families in Zambia take in 'dependents' or distant family members who are not able to make it on their own. It turns out the Phiri family has a reputation for this act of kindness and hospitality. So right now, I have six, yes SIX sisters, with me as number seven! They range from age 7 to 19, then our 30-year-old Aunty, who is AWESOME! They are spunky, kind, outgoing, spontaneous, smart, and absolutely delightful! Laughing is a constant, chatting is non-stop, and dancing, well there is always dancing to African and American pop music, especially during power outages.

Life in Zambia is not easy and I see it every day in the Mtendere Compound from the students I teach, which is another blog entirely, to the people on the streets, even the obnoxious drunkards. However, it's amazing to live with a family who knows the importance of laughter, joy, and giving back to the community when you don't have much to give. I am not an example for my family, they are an example for me and I hope a little to you.

PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN WALKING TOGETHER

*By TE Linda O'Connell, HR,
Presbytery of Des Moines*

It has been my privilege to attend Presbytery meetings of the Presbyterian Women of Dakota Presbytery three different times. First, in August of 2011 Mary Lou Briles and I went on a mini-mission trip to Dakota Presbytery sponsored by Presbyterian Women of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

On this trip we attended the 139th Annual Ptaya Owoglake (Mission Meeting) of the Dakota Presbytery. This Mission Meeting is a joint effort between the Native American churches of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and of the United Church of Christ. Mary Lou and I were so moved by the Dakota people and their commitment and dedication to be the presence of Christ in their communities that we wanted to go back. In May of 2012 Mary Lou and I attended the Dakota Presbytery Meeting and Dakota Presbyterian Women's Meeting.



After hearing about our experiences in Dakota Presbytery it was decided that Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery of Des Moines would sponsor a mission trip to Dakota Presbytery. Eight women traveled to Pierre, South Dakota to participate in the 142nd Annual Ptaya Owoglake of the Native Americans at Oahe Chapel. The area is located on the banks of the Missouri River where a dam was placed for flood control and to provide hydroelectricity to the area. The 142nd Mission Meeting (a joint meeting of the UCC and Dakota Presbytery Mission) was hosted by the UCC. The theme for the gathering was Isaiah 40:31 "But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will

run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Each session included devotions, a song service in the Dakota language and worship. Conversations with our Native American sisters and brothers were interesting and we learned that South Dakota is divided into different dialects as we moved from the east to the west. The eastern third is the Dakota, the middle third is the Nakota and the western third is the Lakota. In North Dakota they do not use the "L" sound and the example was that in North Dakota they would say put a "dog on the fire", but in South Dakota they would say "put a log on the fire" to indicate the same action.

Because Dakota Presbytery is a non-geographical Presbytery that includes Native American Churches from the Dakota, Lakota and Nakota Sioux nations the Presbyterian Women have their meetings at the same time that the Presbytery meets. This can make for some very long days for the dedicated Presbyterian Women who attend and hold positions both in the Presbytery and their Presbyterian Women of the Presbytery organizations. These dedicated women seem to never tire of service to their church and community. Whether it is serving lunch, communion or moderating a meeting they are up to the task. Moving gracefully between the meeting of Presbytery and their own Presbytery PW meetings these women show their competence as leaders in the church. One of their members, ruling elder Fern Red

Cloud was recently installed as the Vice Moderator of the Synod of Lakes and Prairies.

The women have great concern for the people of their communities who suffer from diabetes, heart conditions, and a very high suicide rate especially among the youth of their community. They do not have a lot of resources so at each Presbytery meeting they have a silent auction of donated items to raise money for helping their friends and neighbors regardless of their religious practices or beliefs. On each of our visits the Presbyterian Women from Des Moines Presbytery brought items for the silent auction and bought many wonderful items to take home and cherish. We are committed to continue to walk together with our brothers and sisters in Christ from Dakota Presbytery.

Pam Yellow Bird summed up what they would like to have us do to assist them. She said, "Do not walk in front of us to lead us; do not walk behind us to push us; instead take our hand and walk beside us to support us."

UNEXPECTED GIFTS

by Rev. Lee Schott

What do I want people to see when they look at Women at the Well?

Not the wire fence

See the work of Jesus

--Susan (charter member)

"I prayed for God to deliver me," T said, describing the tough spot where she had been languishing. "I prayed, and the next morning the police came and picked me up." What sounds like a

reason to be mad at God takes an unexpected turn. "God knew I needed to be here. This was an answer to my prayer."

It's a conversation I have pretty often. "Here" is prison. "This" is the rescue this sister in Christ has received from addiction, abuse, gang involvement, meaninglessness. As the pastor of Women at the Well, a church inside the Iowa women's prison in Mitchellville, I have been surprised at the frequency of this refrain. "I needed to be here."



Photo: Prairie City News

The statistics help to explain why. More than sixty percent of the 650-odd women incarcerated at Mitchellville have a diagnosed mental illness. Eighty percent deal with addiction. Ninety percent (90%!) are survivors of abuse. Large numbers of our women are victims before they become perpetrators. Prison can erect boundaries around influences and situations that were destructive. It can represent a fresh start. We saw that in K, who had been trapped in abuse for more than

a decade, failing her children, unable to help them or herself. She found her voice in prison, a new sense of self, the ability to laugh, and dance, and witness to her faith.

Women at the Well gets to be part of that. We offer not just ministry but a church, inside the prison walls. We are United Methodist in origin but ecumenical in spirit and practice, as we welcome women from widely varied backgrounds. Church is more than just going to worship; it's being part of a community, working together, offering and receiving nurture for our faith journey. Our leadership group offers encouragement and accountability across widely differing experiences. We call one another—better than any church I've ever known—to high standards of relationship and behavior, and we celebrate one another's small and large "wins" with joy. Church is an unexpected gift in an unsuspected place.

These sisters haven't always found a church connection in their hometown. Bad choices can lead to exclusion from faith communities they had called home, whether that's imposed by others' judgment, or internally generated from her own shame. Our mission includes preparing people and churches to welcome these sisters, after or instead of incarceration.

Many people connect with Women at the Well as volunteers, by scheduling a group for one of our Thursday evening worship services, by giving, by serving as part of our reentry program that works with women when they leave prison, by inviting me or

another representative to speak at a worship service or event, and more. You can learn more a

www.womenatthewellumc.org

on my blog at www.leeschott.com

on facebook at

"Women at the Well UMC,"

on Twitter at

"WomenatWellUMC,"

or contact me at

revlas333@gmail.com.

Check out the conference we're offering in October, at

www.rightnextdoor2015.org.

WOMEN, FOOD and AGRICULTURE

Women, Food and Agriculture Network:

"Women own nearly half the farmland in the US today, but are rarely represented on the boards of policy-making bodies and often encounter communications barriers when accessing information from agencies and institutions. WFAN exists so that women can give each other the information, connections and encouragement they need to be effective practitioners and supporters of sustainable agriculture and healthy localized food systems."



From the Council Bluffs, IA Daily Nonpareil, April 16, 2015:

ATLANTIC – The pair stood over a tub of cold water, sifting through pounds of spinach in the barn which would be

delivered tomorrow to restaurants in Omaha.

Denise O'Brien, owner of Rolling Acres Farm with her husband Larry Harris, has become a mentor to Amber Mohr, who in the past year took on her grandfather's land, Fork Tail Farm, in Avoca.

Both women were sorting out fresh produce Wednesday morning before checking on O'Brien's high tunnel – a long cabin like structure of plastic and metal which covered spinach, lettuce, radishes, tulips and more.

For the past year, Mohr has been learning how to farm from O'Brien's 40 years of experience. Mohr grew up in Omaha, and worked as a curator in Lincoln. When her grandfather passed away, there was a hard decision to make.

"There were people very interested in buying the land from my parents, but my father didn't want it to leave family hands after so many years," Mohr said. She recalled being struck with the realization 20 minutes before giving a big presentation at work.

"So it just hit me. Why don't we live there?" Mohr, her husband Jeremy Hall and their children took on the farm, knowing full-well the massive undertaking they were signing up for.

She heard about O'Brien through the Women, Food & Agriculture Network, which O'Brien founded in 1997. The organization seeks, among other goals, to create networks that support communities of growers, consumers, workers and others.

"I've learned so much about farming. I mean, I've learned to farm," Mohr said with a laugh.

O'Brien has some experience in teaching about agriculture; beyond farming for four decades come this July, in 2011 she traveled with a group of military and civilians to Jalalabad, Afghanistan, to teach people there.

"We did good work in those villages, teaching people how to market goods, enterprise development, what infrastructure they needed and so on," O'Brien said. "It was a very interesting year; I'm blessed to have gone."

O'Brien and Harris began mentoring in 1990 to help what she called the next generation of farmers, she said. Since they founded the farm, the pair wanted to educate others, since O'Brien and Harris had to learn farming by doing it first hand. And No Internet was there to help them when they started out, she said.

"It was about being risk takers and doing what we thought was right. Now we're trying to help those coming after us," O'Brien said.

Mohr said she considered herself lucky to have met O'Brien, who just happens to live 15 miles away from her. Mohr said she imagined becoming a farmer and moving to the country but never thought it would actually happen.

"I remember hearing my grandfather when I was a kid complaining about the prices of crops on the radio," she said. "It seemed like gambling

and I thought to myself, I'm not a gambler." And yet, Mohr and her family are raising vegetables and more on their 4.46 acres of land alongside 111 chickens. Working with O'Brien has helped make that possible, she said.

"I've learned how to take backyard gardening and turn it into a business enterprise," she said.

O'Brien said the two seem to complement each other well. "I'm messy, she's organized," O'Brien said with a laugh.

www.wfan.org

LA CAMPESINA

By Rev. Katherine Pater, Mission Co-worker, in collaboration with the women of the Pastoral Team, Our Sister Parish, Berlín, El Salvador

Let's imagine...

...that you are a poor farmer living in a rural Salvadoran village.

Like most farmers, you family rents a field that is 1-2 *manzanas* (around 1.75-3.5 acres) in size.

If you use fertilizer, in a good year, you will harvest an average of 35 *quintales*, or 100-pound sacks, of corn.

Corn usually sells for around \$6.50 per *medio* (40-pound sack), or around \$16.25 per *quintal*.

To sell your corn, you must transport it to the market in downtown Berlín.

Transporting a *medio* of corn to Berlín costs \$.50.

You need to travel with his corn in the same truck, which costs you another \$1.00.

Since it is a 2-3 hour walk from Berlín to your village, you also

must also pay another \$1.00 to travel home.

So, of the \$6.50 that makes from selling your corn, you only really make \$4.00, because you must spend at least \$2.50 to sell it.

Your family of 8 will need to save 26 *quintales* for the year to eat.

That leaves 9 *quintales*, or a bit more than 18 *medios*, left over for you to sell.

You make approximately \$146.25 selling corn.

However, you must take around 18 trips to sell your 18 *medios*.

Since each trip costs \$2.50, you spend approximately \$45.00 selling all of your corn.

That leaves you with \$101.25.



Like many farmers, you pay at least \$50/year to rent your farmland.

It means that you can use that remaining \$51.25 for other needs.

As a woman, you often have to help with weeding and harvesting your family's field.

Your field is on a steep mountainside and has to be weeded, planted, and harvested by hand.

You also have to walk to the nearest water source several times a day to provide for your family's water needs.

In some communities, you have to walk at least an hour to the closest river or spring.

During the dry season, you have to walk through thick, talcum-powder like dust that sticks in your hair and your clothing.

During the rainy season, you have to walk through thick, slippery mud.

You spend most of your day cooking over the fire pit in your kitchen, making corn *tortillas* by hand.

You also have to feed any animals you have: chickens, pigs, or horses.

You have to wash all your family's clothing by hand using as little water as you can.

Every day is a struggle for your family's survival.

As a woman, much of that struggle depends on you.

SOWING THE SEEDS OF A NEW REALITY IN EL SALVADOR

By Kristi Van Nostran, PCUSA Mission Co-Worker with Joining Hands El Salvador

"Four years ago, when a friend asked if I wanted to have coffee with a missionary of the Presbyterian Church I was expecting an older, gray-haired woman, dressed conservatively in a long skirt," Doris tells of her first encounter with Kristi Van Nostran, Companionship Facilitator with the Joining Hands Network of El Salvador.

"Kristi walked in wearing a t-shirt and capris and I caught a glimpse of a tattoo on her ankle. I remember thinking to myself; this must be different than any ministry I've ever been involved in," she chuckles, "and I wasn't wrong!"

In 2012, Doris Evangelista came on board as the National Coordinator with the Joining Hands Network of El Salvador, *RUMES* by its initials in Spanish. This network of churches, smallholder farming associations, women's cooperatives, and other grassroots organizations is working toward food sovereignty in El Salvador through local and national actions to reclaim native seeds and promote sustainable agricultural practices free from toxic agrochemicals, and in partnership with the Presbyterian Hunger Program and U.S. Presbyterians, through national and international advocacy, for policies that respect human dignity and the rights to food, water and land.

After 15 years of stable work with a faith-based organization empowering community development, Doris felt God calling her to make a change and began praying for direction.



"I caught the enthusiasm for the work of transformation that *RUMES* wanted to do in El Salvador, but the term 'food sovereignty' was not even in my vocabulary. However," Doris goes on to say, "that initial conversation stirred something in me and as I continued to explore the topic and continued to pray, it became clear that working to

battle the injustices that keep people poor and hungry, working with *RUMES* was the answer that God had for me."

Anyone who has been engaged in work for social change knows well that the work is slow and difficult and the Salvadoran context presents its own challenges, particularly for women. Violence and *machismo* are prevalent in El Salvador making it increasingly difficult for women to rise into significant roles of leadership. While the social movements tend to be more accepting and encouraging of female leaders, Doris considers that *machismo* culture threatens the potential of women in every sector of society. "Every woman's life has been marked by it in one way or another," she says.

Breaking down barriers as a food justice leader on the national scene, Doris finds satisfaction in her work with *RUMES*, accompanying women and men as they determine and seek to create the kind of just and equitable food system they want to enjoy. She is certain that it is God, who has made a way and makes sure her steps as an advocate for positive change in El Salvador, and that every success that *RUMES* might celebrate is the result of the hard work of a team, sustained by God's grace.

"To live in a more just world has been a dream of mine since I was a child. I've lived in poverty and I learned to see problems as opportunities. The best tool that we have is education; to be able to question, critique and trans-

form the systems that impoverish so many,” Doris shares.

RUMES’ advocacy work for agricultural practices and policies that will protect peoples’ right to healthy, nutritious, local and sus-

tainably produced food plays a vital role in our shared efforts as servants of God’s justice, and Doris gives thanks for this mission to which God has called her.

“I want to keep learning,” Doris says with a smile. “Believing

that another way is possible is the first step, and then we must commit to sowing and tending the seeds of a new reality.”

May it be so.

GRAINS OF TRUTH



i am fearfully &
wonderfully made;
Psalm 139:14

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In This Issue:

Young Adult Volunteers / Laughing Is a Constant	1
Presbyterian Women Walking Together	2
Unexpected Gifts	3
Women, Food and Agriculture	4
La Campesina.	5
Sowing the Seeds of a New Reality in El Salvador	6
Grains of Truth	7