



Sowing Sisterhood

Honoring Our Past, Inspiring Our Future

SPARK

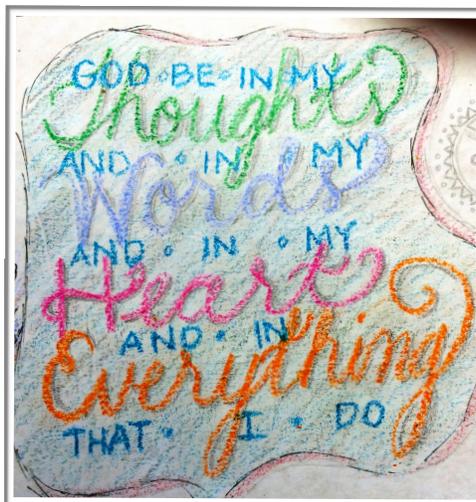
Women's Bible Study

~April Yamasaki

Spark, a women's Bible Study to nurture the creative spirit, is available now through MennoMedia.

'Rediscover the joys of being created in God's image, and nurture your own creative spirit! Spark: Igniting Your God-Given Creativity thoughtfully takes you deep into the Bible and unpacks stories of God's creative Spirit at work.

Spark, commissioned by Mennonite Women Canada and Mennonite Women USA, is the perfect resource for women's gatherings, Sunday school groups, or individual reading and inspiration.'



Sister Care Sparks... 'Sister Stories Sunday School'

~ Deborah Wetherill

On May 15 & 16, thirty-one women gathered at Lombard Mennonite Church for a women's retreat, a Sister Care Seminar. Sister Care Seminars are a ministry of Mennonite Women USA. As stated on their website, "Sister Care seminars provide women with tools for ongoing personal healing, recognizing and celebrating God's grace in their lives, and responding more confidently and effectively to the needs of others in their families, congregations, and communities."

During this weekend, women from Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio were able to share their stories with each other as we fellowshiped, laughed, cried, and talked with each other. The presenters, Rhoda Keener and Carolyn Heggen, felt like the group really connected quickly, especially around table groups during discussion time.

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– Marge Weaver, *Hopedale*

"I look at God.

I look at you.

I look at God again."

– Julian of Norwich

"This quote sums up my gratitude for my 'reading group ladies.' Always reading spiritual writings, our thoughts and lives come alive as we apply the truths we read.

I have found this to be a nurturing and receptive group that helps God become more visible in my own life and others' lives. It encourages me to keep my heart turned towards God, my eyes fixed on the Author and Perfecter of my faith."

'Sister Care Sparks...Sister Stories Sunday School' continued

The topics — *Claiming Our Identity as God's Beloved*, *Caring for Self and Others*, *Compassionate Listening*, and *Transforming Loss and Grief* — allowed us to both hear and share pieces of our lives with each other.

Each table was covered with paper, and crayons were made available if anyone felt the need to doodle as they listened and processed the information presented. I was touched at the beauty and genuine emotion conveyed in these pieces of art.



I attended a Sister Care Seminar in Indiana in the spring of 2014, so I wasn't expecting to experience anything new this second time around; but I was wrong. The topic that connected with me the

first time I attended the seminar was "*Claiming my Identity as God's Beloved*." The topic that touched me during this weekend retreat, "*Caring for Self and Others*," encouraged me right where I needed it most.

On Saturday afternoon, groups of women were able to reflect on the information presented throughout the weekend and brainstorm about how these ideas could be shared with women who weren't able to attend the retreat. The energy in the groups was inspiring. Adult women mentors, regular women's activities, a sermon series about women from the Bible, and a women's only Sunday School class are just a few of the ideas that grew out of my group's discussion. At Lombard Mennonite, we decided to start with the Sunday School class idea as a way of continuing to hear each other's stories. Thus, the "Sister Stories" Sunday school class was born.

We are three weeks into this class and have found it meaningful. Women can share a valley or mountain experience or they can simply share a piece of who they are. We have kept the structure flexible and allow the woman sharing her story to present it in whatever way she wants. Life is busy. As caregivers, schedule-holders, and balancers-of-responsibilities, it is nice to have a chance to simply be. "Sister Stories" provides a safe place to just be and be supported by other women.



MCC Thrift Shops and Ten Thousand Villages:

Responding Together in Christ's Call to Care

- Marian Egli

Many of us are familiar with Mennonite Central Committee Thrift Shops, which are located across the U.S. and in Canada. As Nelda Buller of Hope-dale Mennonite Church says, the **Thrift Shop** is where *people donate 'anything,' volunteers put most of the 'anything' on the shelves, and people buy 'anything.* The result: people around the world have basic life needs cared for.

The Mennonite Central Committee's Thrift Shops slogan is: ***Where Every Purchase is a Gift to the World.***

Local residents donate items instead of placing them in a landfill. People of all economic groups can purchase inexpensive goods and even repurpose them. Volunteers take pride in the art of displaying things to be sold. They make sure the items are clean and in working condition. It is hard work, especially when many volunteers are 75 years and older, but volunteers find purpose for themselves and camaraderie in working together.

The Illinois "Thrift Shops" are:

- The Et Cetera Shop, Eureka
- Spare and Share, Gridley
- MCC Thrift Shop, Arthur

In 1946 Edna Ruth Byler, a pioneering business woman from Akron, PA, was struck by overwhelming poverty in Puerto Rico. She took their handcrafted products, brought them to the States, and sold them out of the trunk of her car. The project grew and became **Self Help Crafts**. It is now known as **Ten Thousand Villages**, and is a non-profit partner of MCC. The stores empower and provide economic opportunities to artisans in developing countries. The world gets to see and purchase their extraordinary products born of rich culture and traditions.

Ten Thousand Villages grew so large that it is now its own business, yet aligned with MCC. Ten Thousand Villages was the founding member of the World Fair Trade Organization.

In 2008-2013 Ten Thousand Villages was named as one of the *World's Most Ethical Companies* by the Ethisphere Institute and Forbes magazine.

Mennonite women manage and volunteer at Ten Thousand Villages stores along with others who care about Fair Trade. Some TTV stores are independent, while other Fair Trade stores throughout the country feature Ten Thousand Villages items along with other items from around the world. In the IMC area these stores are:

- Crossroads Global Handcrafts, Bloomington
- Gifts of the World, Shaumburg
- Plowshare Gifts, Waukesha, WI
- Plowshare Crafts, St. Louis, MO
- Ten Thousand Villages, Champaign
- Ten Thousand Villages, Evanston
- Ten Thousand Villages, Glen Ellyn
- Ten Thousand Villages, Oak Park
- Ten Thousand Villages, West Armitage

In his 1986 recording, "My Voice Alone," IMC Conference minister, Chuck Neufeld, sings:

*"My love alone can't heal this hurting world
Your love alone can't heal this hurting world
But if two and two and fifty make a million
We'll see this world come 'round
We'll see this world come 'round."*

Mennonite Women volunteers and entrepreneurs, along with all who serve with them, are wise in knowing the value of small things and actions. When brought together, they demonstrate Jesus' love for all and produce life, dignity, and peace, building-up God's kingdom on earth.

We are eager to receive more stories of how women throughout IMC are 'Sowing Sisterhood' within their congregations and communities. Email your stories and pictures to Illinois Mennonite Women Co-Coordinator:

Kim Litwiller kiml@mennonite.net or Shannon Unzicker unzickers@gmail.com

Or mail them to: Illinois Mennonite Conference c/o Kim Litwiller P.O. Box 3, Tremont, IL 61568