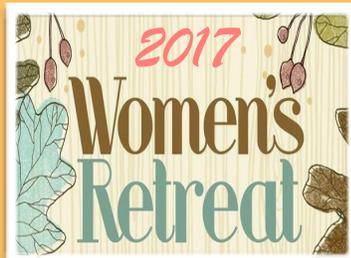


Sowing Sisterhood

Honoring Our Past, Inspiring Our Future



We are excited to announce the 2017 Women's Retreat which will take place **May 5-7** at Menno Haven Camp & Retreat Center.

That's right, ladies!
Three days of retreat!!
Mark your calendars and plan to join us!

More details will be released in the coming months regarding retreat theme, speaker and schedule.



Quilted wall hangings donated by
MW USA Housewarmer Project !

HOUSEWARMER PROJECT!

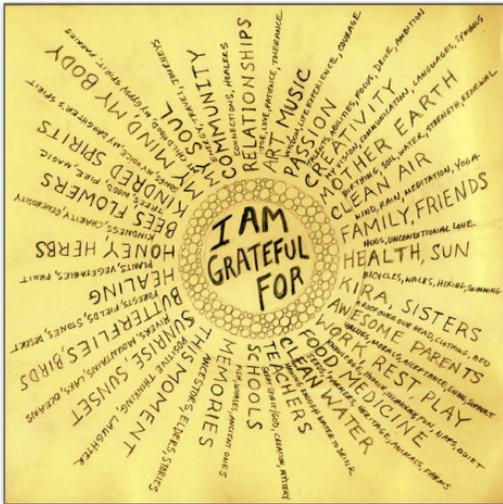
-Marlene Bogard, director of MW USA

The Mennonite Women USA Housewarmer Project continues to donate quilted wall hangings to Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) to give to homeowners when their home is completed and a dedication takes place. MDS is hard at work rebuilding after flooding in West Virginia, Detroit, Michigan, Lafayette, Louisiana, a typhoon in Saipan, and will soon begin rebuilding after wildfires in California. We are getting very low on quilted wall hangings. If quilting is your gift, please consider sharing. See the link below for more information.

<https://mennonitewomenusa.org/housewarmer/>

GRATITUDE

-Valerie Smith, First Mennonite Morton



Thanksgiving is more than an holiday. Expressing gratitude is not just an act, but an attitude and a discipline. It is an exercise in the art of living gratefully.

Sometime in November, the tick tock of the clock hits panic mode. We start list after list, diligently checking off items. Then, our beloved lists get buried on the kitchen counter... under the junk mail... and accidently winds up in the recycling bin. Oh, the stress and distress!

Much to do. So little time. How will we spend our moments? Time is a precious resource. I hear a little voice deep inside shouting, "Stop the insanity!" The season's meaning is easily misplaced, just like lost lists.

What does it mean to live intentionally with thanksgiving? The practice is an exercise in self-discipline. A grateful heart is a powerful tool. It sets a firm foundation for our relationship with Christ.

In January 2013 I began recording daily gratitude and sharing it with friends on Facebook. A one month challenge, but in just 31 days, I was hooked. Coffee, Jesus and a grateful heart changed my mornings... and my days. I committed to February... March... and then a year.

Year one I discovered: **"Gratitude didn't change God, it changed me."**

Intentionally seeking His face with praise opened my eyes to His hand on the tiniest details of my life. I had no idea anyone else read it, until I commented that I needed to make the decision as to whether I would stop or continue into 2014. The comments exploded with "Don't stop." Surprised, humbled, excited and overwhelmed that by sharing gratitude, others had joined the journey. So, we continued.

Year two, I learned: **"Strength grows in a grateful heart."** Life has continuing plot twists, sharp turns, motion sickness and bumpy roads. At times we feel caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Yet, somehow, that uncomfortable spot becomes the place His provision abounds. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Look up, weary pilgrims. Lift your hands in praise. Our God knows us intimately, like the stars He calls by name! We are not lost or missing. No sorrow is faced alone. No tear goes uncounted. Thanksgiving... especially for simple things... like a clean bed, hot water, clean water and enough to eat... unlocks joy. Our cup bubbles up and spills over.

January 2015, I wondered whether another 365 days would be too much. What if I failed? Who would I disappoint? Worse yet, what if I got something wrong? I know the scriptures, study and pray, but I am human and imperfect.



...Continued page 3

Gratitude Continued...

Funny how Satan whispers in our ear, and we hear him clearly. God speaks, and I question His direction. The woes of being human!

Year three's lesson: **"Courage takes root in a grateful heart"**

We can be brave. He is our provider and our "enough." I pray over each post, that God will guard His word and use anything I write for His purpose and to His glory. Some days, I know His hand has interfered and posts have been lost. He is faithful.

Year four concludes with: **"Vision clears in a grateful heart."**

Humans do not naturally see through "God Goggles." Prayer, exploring His Word, singing praise and learning to listen for His voice help us see what He sees. Hindsight is 20/20, but gratitude can give us clearer vision today.

Consider this challenge: For one month, write down the people, places, emotions, tastes, colors and scents that evoke joy. Think of it as "gratitude aerobics". God is the giver. We are the "thanks givers." 1 Thessalonians 5:17-19 states: **"Pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit."**

Give thanks in all circumstances and find joy. The "living water" of His Word and His Holy Spirit renew us. A workout with amazing results!



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