



Ode to Mennonite Women

by Ruth Lapp Guengerich

They were valiant women
leaders who had no platform.
They created their own platforms
in living rooms and in church basements
leading subversively,
with integrity,
with compassion,
with dignity,
and with perseverance.

"Nevertheless, they persisted."

Not permitted to speak from the pulpit,
they taught Sunday School,
led Bible studies,
and organized women's meetings.
Unable to go as single women to a foreign mission field
they studied about faraway places,
and supported "missionaries" with prayers and pennies.
They used hard-earned "egg and butter" money
to purchase needles and thread
to create underwear, shirts, dresses, and baby layettes.
Loading their portable, heavy sewing machines into buggies -
baloney sandwiches wrapped in yesterday's emptied cereal bag -
they trotted off to a friend's home
to sew, to study, to serve
despite an already-full life as a mother of many children,
and with farm chores waiting at the end of the day.

"Nevertheless, they persisted."

They dared to stand up, speak out, support each other
in caring ministries others considered "women's work."
They challenged their church to recognize their faithful service,
to respect their leadership abilities,
to support them as they courageously stepped out
to study theology,
to serve in other lands in missions,
to become doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers, writers, artists, technicians.

"Nevertheless, they persisted."

From two denominations they led the way
combining their energies, their talents, and their vision
to work together,
to share resources,
to make an impact on church and on society in ways yet unimagined.

Women in Mission and
Women's Mission and Service Commission,
united to become Mennonite Women USA.

United to persist in serving, leading as they explored new horizons,
creating works of art,
collaborating in encouraging women and men to fully develop their gifts.

United to persist in finding healing from a past history of denied full humanity,
in experiencing empowerment as beloved daughters, created in God's image
and called to be all that God created them to be.

Nevertheless, they persisted.

We honor our foremothers,
giving thanks to God for these faithful, committed, and persistent women
who refused to be told they could not serve,
could not use their gifts, could not have a place in the church.

We give thanks for our foremothers who remained steadfast,
modeling for us,
- for our daughters and granddaughters,
- for our sons and grandsons
that we are all called to love and continue to grow as communities of faith
"so that God's healing and hope will flow through us to the world."

We give thanks to God for this indomitable organization.

Nevertheless, we persist

in calling all women to honor their call, to remain faithful
in serving
exploring new horizons
overcoming barriers,
challenging all women to remain faithful to our mission,
to nurture ourselves and each other as we reflect God's steadfast love.

Nevertheless we persist

as we commit our prophetic voice, our talents, our compassion, our vision, our
presence to furthering God's work through Mennonite Women USA.

Ruth Lapp Guengerich served as the Women's Mission and Service Commission
board vice-chair from 1994-98, president of Mennonite Women USA from 2009-2001
and co-director of Mennonite Women USA from 2011-2015. She resides in Goshen,
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