

## **Mennonite Women and AMBS Collaborate on International seminar on Healing**

By Rhoda Keener and David B. Miller

For three days (March 31-April 2), the Wadsworth Room at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) became something of a microcosm of the global church. Here six couples from Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America met together to explore and test new resources and approaches for healing ministry in their contexts. When asked what they hoped to learn from Mennonite Women USA's *Compassionate Care: Equipping Leaders for Healing Ministry* seminar, Patrick Obonde, AMBS student from Nairobi, Kenya said: "I want to learn how to break through the social veneer, traditions, and culture that keep women suffering in silence." Shabnam Bagh, India added, "Women don't speak, especially in the rural areas." Jonah Yang, Hmong pastor from Thailand currently living in Minneapolis said, "In my culture men have power over their wives. I want to learn how to break that. We need to reinterpret scripture."

This workshop for international student couples was hosted by David Miller, AMBS Church Leadership Center Teaching Associate, and led by Carolyn Heggen, psychotherapist specializing in trauma healing, and Rhoda Keener, psychotherapist and Sister Care International director for Mennonite Women USA. Representatives from Mennonite Men and Mennonite Mission Network were invited to be part of the seminar as observers.

Heggen began the workshop with an exercise asking men and women to meet separately with each group discussing and then compiling a list of "How my life would be different if I had been born the other gender". Responses from the women included: "If I had been born a man, I would be served as a King; I would be able to keep my own money; I would be ordained." The men's responses included: "If I had been born a woman, I would do more chores, eat last, be at risk for genital mutilation, learn to submit to men even against my will (first father, then husband, then son), I would have more friends."

Unit one of the manual and training is "I am God's beloved child". Keener said, "What we believe the Bible says about the worth and roles of women and men affects our sense of belovedness."



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Miller followed with teaching on the importance of anchoring our concept of male – female relationships on creation, the teaching and example of Jesus, and the promise of new creation in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. He noted that too often teaching on male – female relationships in the church has treated the curses of the fall (Genesis 3) as prescriptive rather than descriptive. When this happens, God's intention in creation – and the promise of new creation in Christ is subordinated to managing the curses. Hierarchical systems and male domination are treated as God's design, rather than the effect of sin. If the church is to be a body of healing and hope, we must open ourselves to the truth-telling, transformation and liberation that is envisioned and empowered by God's Spirit.

Participants affirmed the need to work on their own healing in order to help others heal. One tool they used to explore areas that still may need God's healing touch was creating a life time line and identifying in each era a blessing or gift and in each a loss or wound. They also identified people who were compassionate listeners who helped them heal. Pratik Bagh from India commented on the

importance of stories saying, “In the sharing and receiving of each other’s stories healing comes. To receive stories with hospitality is to create safe space for truth-telling, a vital first step toward healing and trust-building. This will work well in our context.” Rianna Isaak-Krauss, Canada, echoed that statement saying she was touched by the concept of using our tears to fuel transformation. Her husband Benjamin, from Germany, said he believes this material will work well for teaching lay pastoral care teams.

The Compassionate Care seminar is adapted from *Sister Care: Equipping women for healing ministry* which has been shared by Heggen and Keener in 16 countries for 4,500 women. The Sister Care manual, written in English, has been translated into 15 languages: Spanish, Portuguese, Kek’chi’, French, Swahili, Hindi, Nepali, Tamil, Bangla, Telegu, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Korean. The seminar held at AMBS was made possible by generous grants from the Schowalter Foundation and the United Service Foundation.

After participating in a Sister Care seminar, many international women leaders also speak about the need for exposing men to the healing concepts and practices of Sister Care. Their requests were the impetus for the AMBS event. Memee Yang asked for training for her husband, Jonah, saying a healing ministry in the Hmong Community would have more lasting benefits if men as well as women received the training. Esther Muhagachi provided leadership in Tanzania for a Sister Care seminar. Her husband Amos asked for this teaching to be extended to men worldwide.

Throughout the workshop leaders and participants challenged each other to keep looking to Jesus and not to cultural assumptions and practices to understand God’s intentions for women and men together in the community of faith. All agreed that followers of Jesus must develop a new Jesus-inspired culture, wherever we live.

Compassionate Care seminar group: (front l-r) Pratik and Shabnam Bagh with Shanice (Elkhart/India), Rianna and Benjamin Isaac-Krauss (Elkhart/Canada, Germany), Ger Her and May Yang (Minneapolis/Thailand); (second l-r) Esther Muhagachi (Elkhart/Tanzania), Rhoda Keener, Carolyn Heggen, Jonah and Memee Yang (Minneapolis/Thailand), Pamela Obonde (Kenya); (third row l-r) Amos Muhagachi (Elkhart/Tanzania), David Miller, Don Neufeld (MMen Canada, observer), Steve Thomas (MMen USA, observer), Mike Sherrill (Mennonite Mission Network Asia Director, observer), Patrick Obonde (Elkhart/Kenya). Not pictured: Cyneatha Millsaps (MW USA executive director)

