The Rev. Dr. Penny Ziemer’s Biography

Penny grew up in a small farming community called “Wonderland.” There were several versions of where the name came from. One claimed it was named by an outsider who commented, “You get here and you wonder, ‘How am I ever going to get out?’” One of her earliest memories was her father gathering soil from the roots of some rugged land he was clearing, holding the earth in his hands, and telling his daughter, “Leave whatever you touch better than you find it.” That seemed good wisdom for life. We will hold a few lives and touch many more. Our challenge, by God’s grace, is to leave them stronger than we find them.

Dr. Penny Ziemer is an ordained minister with the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ. In 1994, Penny was called to First Christian Church, Goldsboro, North Carolina, as Minister of Spiritual Enrichment where she still leads a Disciples Women’s Reflection/Prayer group on alternate Tuesdays. In addition, Penny teaches religion, literature and public speaking classes as an adjunct for Mt. Olive College. She has taught courses on Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Canon), Introduction to the New Testament, World Religions, and Christian Ethics, and more recently, Introduction to the Bible and Christianity and the Human Religious Experience. She has also taught a course in spiritual formation for the Christian Church in North Carolina Lay Academy. Penny also currently serves as pastor for Carr Memorial Christian Church in Clinton, NC.

Her publications include an article in the scholarly journal Moreana, a published speech monograph with Mt. Olive Press entitled “Three Wishes” and contributions to three books: Women at the Well, Volumes 1 and 2, and Sing Out New Visions: Prayers, Poems and Reflections. She also created a custom speech text with Pearson Publishing. Prior to beginning ministerial studies, Penny received a PhD in English with Directed Studies in various religious topics, focusing in her dissertation on Renaissance and Reformation literature. Although a member of Phi Beta Kappa, she is quick to add that her most valuable membership in with the Body of Christ.

Penny leads prayer groups focusing on the spiritual disciplines and has served as keynote speaker and presenter for retreats, workshops and conferences. Some of her favorite presentations include: “Listening for God’s Voice, “Forgiving Yourself and Others,” “Seven Layer Silence,” “Ministries to and with Single Women,” “Pots, Plots and Purses: Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Gifts,” “Covered in Grace: ‘Re-ragging’ and ‘Re-robing’ in Biblical Texts, “Stirring and Stilling: Re-kindling Women’s Gifts,” “Restoring, Releasing and Revising: Some Reflections on Human Trafficking and Other Forms of Slavery in Our Day,” and “Understanding to and Responding to Evil.” She is currently working on two new presentations: “Holy Movement, Holy Touch, Holy Speaking and Holy Listening: Using the Creative Arts in Christian Education, Worship and Service,” and “Why and How We Suffer: Some Wisdom to Guide All Ages through Seasons of Loss.”
She counts among her richest blessings her marriage to her husband Carey, her two daughters, Carolyn and Laura, and two wonderful new additions to her family: a son-in-law Chris, and Tom, a “son-in-law” about to be! The most important thing she has learned is this: every gift flows from God. We are only vessels. We are clay, held and shaped to be shared by the One who can truly say, “I hold your life, and I see you!”

II. Favorite Quadrennial Memory

The year was 1990. It was my first Quadrennial. The place was Purdue, Indiana. The setting was the large meeting hall. The time was closing worship. With my eyes closed, I felt the firm yet gentle movement of a finger forming the cross on my forehead. The one who touched me sat to my right. Her name was Barbara Hill. She was one of those wise, loving saints from my home congregation who was humble and gentle, and had a profound faith. She had the voice of one who trembled with gratitude and wonder at the mystery of holding holy things and holy people in her heart as she passed to me the word which had been passed to her: “Go and do the things you have the power to do.” Then she repeated it more slowly, retracing the Cross on my forehead once again and this time the vast distance between that Cross, that mystery, that longing and that love seem to diminish until I felt the shape of it moving from the inside out: “Go…. and with God’s help, do what you have the power to do.”

I turned to a sister I did not know, looked into her wet eyes and felt her hands grasp mine like one who was being given something she would keep for life. I etched that sign on her forehead and spoke the words given to me: “Go…and with God’s help, do what you now have the power to do.” From that moment, we came to know each other through an introduction only God can give.

Around us voices rose and fell in some sweet cadence from ages long before, passing to ages yet to be. Hands and voices moved over lives in a sacred trinity of call, commission, and blessing. “Go….Go….Go…. and do what you have the power to do.” That moment was and is for me the heart of Quadrennial. It was one of the significant moments that defined my call to ministry.

The dear mentor and friend who had sat beside me in Purdue and passed that call to me in 1990 died some years after. I keep her in my heart. The woman I passed the call to I keep in my prayers. My two daughters sat on either side of me in Louisville on my birthday sharing their first Quadrennial in 2002. My first Quadrennial and theirs I hold as sacred treasures.

When we come to Quadrennial, we gather with thousands of women to experience and embody a great mystery: we who are so small, so broken, so unlikely, have been called to touch and hear and see, really see, an unspeakable joy. We belong to this One who creates us with such love, and who invites us in every moment to celebrate the myriad
ways we are marvelously connected from one generation to the next to that sacred Self and to one another.

III. Work With Women’s Ministries and Human Trafficking

My work with women’s ministries falls mainly in four areas: spiritual formation/prayer groups, regional Disciples women work, 2012-1013 programs on Human Trafficking, and presentations for conferences, workshops and retreats. An outline of some events/activities is listed below:

A. Spiritual Formation/Prayer Groups
   1. Reflection/Prayer Group
      I lead a reflection/prayer group for Disciples Women at First Christian Church, Goldsboro, every other week. For our 2013 theme, I am developing “Crossing Biblical Borders: Our Connection with our Biblical Sisters,” which is a look at some biblical women who “crossed borders” or were taken across borders literally or who “crossed borders” symbolically or spiritually in the biblical text and examine in informal sharing the connections between their stories and ours. We will also use some resources from “Just Women” – which is always an excellent resource – in these sessions.

   2. Labyrinth Meditative Resources
      After our youth enjoyed a prayer walk last year around a local labyrinth, I got the idea of creating some meditations on the theme, “Into the Center and Out; Out from the Center and In” for women’s ministries. I have created three of these so far using three biblical women, “the Syro-Phoenician Woman” from the New Testament, “the daughters of Zelophehad” and “Ruth” from the Hebrew Canon.

B. Regional/Local Disciples Women’s Work
   1. I have served as regional worship leader for retreats in North Carolina and currently serve as a regional co-coordinator for the Mill Creek District in North Carolina.
   2. Our congregation has sponsored and hosted NC “DEW” Workshops (Disciples Enriching Women) for Mill Creek District
   3. Brainstorming Ideas for Intergenerational Disciples Women’s Encounters

A. A new way to enrich our local Disciples Women’s service came from a couple of our teenage girls! “Why don’t we take our Sunday School class to the homes of shut-ins some Sunday mornings?” It was a great idea and the visit to Mrs. Nancy’s home was a powerful worship experience! We are looking at the possibility of enjoying other inter-generational sharing in the homes or parlors of nursing homes of those who can’t get out but who have a strong love of “CWF.” Some of the ideas brainstormed so far include:
   1. The CWF Prayer and Benediction and what it meant to older Disciple women and what it means to a younger generation. How would we “draw” or “paint” the prayers? How could our younger teenage girls who dance choreograph a
dance for these prayers? How could the original prayer and benediction be re-created using Lectio-Divina, Carmelite Contemplation, Taize, Ignatian Contemplation, Centering Prayers, Bead Prayers, etc.

2. “What Touched Me” moments from some of the stories and ideas from the “Just Women” publications.

C. Human Trafficking

1. Prayer Walk for Human Trafficking
   I was privileged to participate at a recent retreat in a multi-stationed prayer walk liturgy for Human Trafficking. We concluded by creating a thumbprint tree to remember our commitment to working to improve the plight of so many taken across borders of many kinds.

2. The congregation I serve in Clinton, NC recently hosted a community education event on Human Trafficking and later had training at a second community event.

3. From those trainings and the website “Caught in Traffic,” we have planned the following events/activities for 2013:

   A. Learning Center for Youth on Human Trafficking: S. T. O. P. (S – STATISTICS on who is involved in human trafficking; T TAKE TIME to learn about what human trafficking is and how it affects you and our local community; O OPEN YOUR EYES to what is going on around you in local stores, etc.; and P CONTINUE TO PRAY AND PREPARE other ways to be aware of and respond to this problem.)

   B. Community Youth Education Event on Internet Safety
   Our community youth group, made up of five different churches, has scheduled an expert to speak to community youth on internet safety in February, 2013

   C. “Helping Youth Respond to Violence and Loss” Resource Person
   In January, 2013, we hosted a community youth event in which a school guidance counselor addressed the dangers facing youth at school and invited a dialogue on some positive ways to understand and respond to violence, anger, sadness and loss.

   D. “Reelcalm” Updated
   “Reelcalm” is a reflective video project created some years ago by my daughter Laura Ziemer as part of a girl scout project. It provides a collection of movies/videos gathered from several sources, including “Feature Films for Families,” with reflective questions on such topics as anger management, conflict management, responding to prejudice and violence, positive choices and growing a strong sense of the self. We are updating the original movies to newer formats. We have used such movies during “Movie Night” and they are also available for home use.

Conferences, Workshops, Retreats
These have been presented either in regional retreats and workshops or at Quadrennial:
“Listening for God’s Voice and Finding Ours”
“Forgiving Yourself and Others”
“Seven Layer Silence”
“Ministries to and with Single Women”
“Pots, Plots and Purses: Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Gifts”
“Covered in Grace: ‘Re-ragging’ and ‘Re-robing’ in Biblical Texts
“Stirring and Stilling: Re-kindling Women’s Gifts”
“Restoring, Releasing and Reviving: Helping Women Come Back to Life”
“Understanding to and Responding to Evil.”

Currently working on two new presentations:
- “Holy Movement, Holy Touch, Holy Speaking and Holy Listening: Using the Creative Arts in Christian Education, Worship and Service”
- “Why and How We Suffer: Some Wisdom to Guide All Ages through Seasons of Trauma and Loss.”