

Shalom!

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Reaffirming Women in Ministry

IN AUGUST 2017, the Brethren in Christ Church U.S. released a new statement on women in ministry leadership. This statement reaffirmed earlier actions of General Conference that opened all areas of ministry and leadership to women.

The statement begins:

“The Brethren in Christ U.S. fully affirms women in ministry leadership at all levels of Church life. Women are ordained and commissioned as pastors, bishops, deacons, denominational leaders, and members of local, regional, and national BIC U.S. governing boards.

As a denomination within the historic Christian faith, we are committed to the Bible as the divinely inspired, authoritative Word of God. And it is our reading of the Bible that leads us to support women in ministry leadership, grounded, more specifically, in our understanding of 1) the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all people—both women and men, 2) the witness in both the Old and New Testaments of women called to spiritual leadership, and 3) the example of Jesus partnering with women in ministry.”

In earlier years, *Shalom!* published a regular column, “Alabaster Jar,” on women’s issues, and this is the third edition since 1991 that specifically addresses the topic of women in ministry leadership. We’ve told the stories of women in ministry and have advocated for the inclusion of women at all levels of church life. This edition follows in that tradition. Personally, I’m proud of hav-

ing been a part of denominational efforts over the years to encourage women to pursue their ministry calling, and I’m gratified by this new statement that unequivocally “continues to fully recognize and support women in ministry and leadership at all levels of church life.”

A few editorial notes:

1. This is the first of two editions focusing on gender issues. While some of the stories in this edition mention less than positive experiences of women, the summer edition will delve in more depth into issues related to gender discrimination, violence, and exploitation. If you’d like to contribute to the next edition, please contact me (address on page 2). Other upcoming topics include being a “third way” church, religious freedom, creation care, and economic justice.
2. Thanks to all who have renewed their subscriptions and contributed to *Shalom!* in 2018. You can still renew by sending a check for \$20 (or more), payable to Brethren in Christ U.S., or going online at bicus.org/resources/publications/shalom.
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Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

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It's a Woman's World Too

by David Flowers

THE GOSPELS REVEAL that Jesus emancipated first-century women from second-class citizenship in God's Kingdom; he challenged the dominant culture of his day and overturned the accepted interpretations of the Hebrew Scriptures. For Jesus, his radical inclusion of women and elevation of their status was in keeping with his overarching ministry to defeat Satan and heal the destructive consequences of what we call the fall in Christian theology.

If (or since) that's the case, then why have so many in the church failed to accept women as equals? And what about those restrictive verses in Paul's letters? Did the Apostle Paul believe and teach in accordance

with Jesus? I think he did.

When we look at the ancient world of the Scriptures, whether we are talking about slavery or the oppression of women in a male-dominated society, the clear trajectory set forth by Jesus and the apostle Paul is one of liberation and equality. Both Jesus and Paul see themselves making all things new in the midst of a fallen humanity that is in full stride with practices that don't line up with God's original design for creation.

Take a look at the female followers of Jesus that Luke mentions in Luke 8:1-3. Women like Mary, Joanna, Chuza, Susanna, and others followed and supported Jesus in his ministry. They were present with the 12 disciples in the gospel stories. Female disciples (plus John) remained with Jesus at the cross and were the first to discover the empty tomb. Women first witnessed the resurrection of Jesus and were told to tell the good news (evangelize) to the rest of the male disciples who were in hiding. Galatians 3:28 declares that we are all equal or "one in Christ Jesus."

This begs an important question. If Jesus can entrust the greatest news in the universe to women (to go and proclaim it to his male disciples), why can't we entrust them to preach? If there is all of this early evidence for the equality of men and women, serving Christ together, then how is it that large swaths of the church have limited what women can do in ministry?

The answer is a combination of factors: 1) a failure to see what really happened in Genesis 3—Eve was deceived, but Adam willfully sinned after having heard God; 2) only in recent times have women had access to education; 3) several key church fathers and reformers demonized women because of their own weaknesses; and 4) Jesus has been largely ignored and Paul has been proof-texted from a few verses in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. Let's look at two passages.

First, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35: "*Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire*

about something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it's disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

All of the epistles were situational; they were largely written in response to something that was current for the believers at that time. In this case, Paul was writing to a church plagued by divisions and thoroughly saturated in Greek religion and culture. This church was a hotbed for sexual immorality and was dealing with various issues resulting from the surrounding pagan culture.

This passage comes at the tail end of a long response to the disorder that was being experienced in house church worship services—abuses of the Lord's Supper, disrespecting others in the assembly with attire, arguments over spiritual gifts, and finally, the disruption of the meeting by uneducated women asking questions and constantly chattering. This is probably why Paul instructed the members not to allow these women to break up their worship time with questions and distracting chatter. It was good that women wanted to learn, but the worship service wasn't the time to ask questions.

The second passage is 1 Timothy 2:11-15: "*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety.*"

The women in Ephesus were upper class Gentile women. They likely would have been educated, and we all know that highly educated people sometimes think they know more than they really do, and are opinionated and ready to speak with authority on all issues.

Ephesus boasted one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The temple of Artemis, a fertility goddess, was worshipped there. Whether it was the temple of Artemis or Aphrodite, Ephesian women would have been more accustomed to positions of influ-



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ence over men and might have assumed they could come into a Christian church (which appeared to be a new cult), where women were free to serve, and take up the role of teacher, regardless of their lack of experience, training, and education in the faith. Therefore, it seems, as the context suggests, that some women were usurping the already authorized male teachers with their “Ephesian” sense of freedom.

We should be careful that new converts not be given places of leadership. They aren’t ready. Let them learn and get some experience before they teach others. Also, Paul tells women not to “assume authority” over a man when he is teaching/speaking. Isn’t this something Paul could turn around and say to men who talk over women? Yes, but that wasn’t the problem here in Ephesus.

In the second part of this passage, Paul seems to be making a timeless command by rooting it in the created order. Here, Paul is simply trying to make a theological analogy to their current situation. Eve was deceived because she didn’t hear God’s command directly from God, as Adam did. In other words, Paul is saying: “You educated, upper

class Ephesian women: Learn straight from the source of God’s Word, hear directly from him first, before you presume to teach others, lest you be led astray and be deceived as the first woman was in the Garden.” That makes sense.

But what about women being saved through childbirth? According to the Artemis myth, the goddess helped her mother give birth to her brother Apollo; thus many upper class Ephesian women sought the favor of Artemis so as not to die in childbirth, which unfortunately was a common thing in the ancient world. Paul wants to challenge this superstition, showing he is aware of the sort of myths they’ve been taught, by saying that it is better to rely on faith, love, and holiness to save you. Trust in God, not Artemis. Leave your pagan baggage behind and learn the truth of things before you teach on behalf of Christ and his church. Ultimately, this principle applies to all who would presume to teach.

So who can do ministry in the church? Any person who is called, qualified, and equipped to build up the church into the fullness of Christ. We see these criteria laid

out in passages like 1 Corinthians 12:11 that says the Spirit gives gifts to each person, just as he determines, and in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 where Paul speaks of reasonable qualifications for all prospective church leaders, be they deacons, elders, pastors, etc.

Therefore, we should celebrate with all of those who are seeking to use their gifts, regardless of their social status and no matter their gender. If they are committed followers of Christ, living a life of discipleship, and are qualified and equipped to lead according to the Scriptures, we should affirm their calling and welcome their gifts for building up the Body of Christ. Not to do so would be to rob them and us of the glorious riches the Lord wants to bestow on his children, and the world, to whom we’re called to be liberators and light in the darkness.

David Flowers is senior pastor of the Grantham Brethren in Christ Church, Mechanicsburg, PA. This article is condensed from a sermon David preached in November 2017. You can listen to the full sermon: granthamchurch.org/2017-sermon-archives-1/2017/11/20/its-a-womans-world-too-tklgc.

When the Best Preacher in the House is a She

by Timothy and Beth Fisher

The journey

Timothy: My journey with women in leadership began with my own journey in ministry. When I was brand new in vocational ministry, as in my fourth day, circumstances in the local church where I served as youth pastor necessitated our senior pastor stepping down from ministry. Our associate pastor at the time was a female African-American woman who stepped into the senior leader role with the title of “Acting Senior Pastor.” I recently spoke at her funeral and said tongue-in-cheek that there was no “acting” in this role for her, as she discharged her responsibilities with a spirit of excellence. During this time, she met with me on a weekly basis as a mentor and demonstrated genuine care and concern for my wellbeing in all areas of life—a brand new ministry position, the challenges of an M.Div. program, my own

spiritual health, and the health of my two-year-old marriage.

My journey with women in ministry also became an academic passion, as I recognized there were a couple problematic passages in the New Testament, particularly 1 Timothy 2:11-12, that seemed to exclude women from preaching and leadership in the church. As a result, I have written on these verses during my M.Div. and D.Min. experiences, and my current Ph.D. dissertation is an application of biblical performance criticism to these same verses.

Beth: I grew up a pastor’s kid and have been surrounded my whole life by godly men in ministry. It was all I ever knew. It wasn’t until after my husband and I married that he began to feel like the Lord was leading him into full-time ministry. I never saw myself as a pastor’s wife, but after much prayer and

seeking God together, we knew ministry was where he was leading us.

The local church that Tim was serving as youth pastor licensed both Tim and me for ministry as they believed that the couple was called together. I was licensed and then later ordained in ministry because of my marriage. I never had any aspirations for this, and yet somewhere along the way God began to shape my leadership gifting and also my gift of encouragement. I wasn’t “acting” in any capacity of being ordained, but my love for serving in a local church continued to grow and mature as the years went by.

There were different situations when I would speak publicly and eople were almost surprised with how I was speaking. I was affirmed several years ago by a dear aunt, who told me that she saw a preaching gift in me and said it reminded her of my father, Rev.

Richard Long. Wow! That is probably one of the most meaningful compliments I have ever received.

After that, my husband went through some physical difficulties that called for some very last minute filling in for him. God was so amazing! The Lord also used the church to affirm and open their arms to this new gift I was using. Over the past five years, I have spoken numerous times on a Sunday morning. I still feel a bit odd to say I preach. I think it's because I am just an ordinary woman, with no special training in the Scriptures; I've just hung out a lot with Jesus (think Acts 4:13) and been disciplined by my favorite preacher (my husband) for 30 years!

Supporting Beth's preaching ministry

Beth: I could truly weep when I think of Tim's support. He is absolutely amazing. He has never been one to hold tight to the pulpit, always allowing other ministers opportunities. His love, support, and affirmation of not only my gift but those of other men and women is so beautiful. It is pure and selfless and so loving. Tim has a beautiful understanding of how the whole body of Christ works together, needs each other, and also feeds each other. Tim's affirmation and en-

couragement to keep pursuing Jesus, to keep digging into Scripture and keep loving people however God leads is an incredible gift of strength for me.

Timothy: Beth and I are each other's biggest fans in preaching, and often give one another feedback. My ears are open whenever Beth says that she feels the Spirit stirring a message in her heart for our local congregation. There have even been times when I've been ill on a Sunday morning, and she has preached from my brief fill-in-the-blank sermon outline after I've shared my thoughts for the sermon with her. I have never doubted that the people of God will be well-fed God's Word, whether I have called on Beth in last minute situations or when she had time for adequate preparation.

Beth has also had the opportunity to lead women's retreats, first locally, and then more recently in Southern California. I suspect these opportunities will increase and will continue to affirm the spiritual gifts God has given to her.

"The best preacher in the house"

Timothy: This was a phrase I hijacked from the late Rev. Billy Graham, who used it when referring to his daughter, Anne Graham

Lotz. I remember listening to Anne preach based on this statement. I forgot about the statement until I was introducing Beth one morning when she was preaching, and it came to me spontaneously. I introduced her as such and have referred to her since. I describe her this way because she has all the elements that are needed for great biblical communication, including vulnerability and openness to share her own life struggles, passion, and life applicability.

Beth: He is just in love with me. Ha-ha, love can be a bit biased! Tim is "the best preacher in the house" because he mines the Scriptures with a depth that never ceases to amaze me. Truly, I don't ever get bored listening to him. My gift is nowhere near his expertise—but it doesn't need to be. There is no agenda here, other than to keep following Jesus and be ready to love and speak whenever and wherever he leads.

Timothy and Beth Fisher have served Walkersville Community Church (MD) for over 20 years, and recently celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary. They have two married sons and two daughters, and are expecting their first grandchild in October.

An Awakening

By Pauline Peifer

AWAKEN: A BRETHREN in Christ Network for Women in Ministry might seem to be a relatively new name on the denominational landscape. The idea of Brethren in Christ women in ministry is not new since the possibility of credentialing had its origin more than 35 years ago when General Conference voted in 1982 to "affirm the ministry of women in the life and programs of the church," and to circulate the paper, "Theology of Women in Pastoral Ministry." At that time there were no ordained women pastors and there were two licensed women. Other sister denominations in the holiness tradition such as the Nazarene, Wesleyan, and Free Methodist churches seemed to be open to the injunction in Acts 2 that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on both his

sons and daughters for ministry empowerment. The question seemed obvious: what about the Brethren in Christ?

Since then an awakening that recognizes the leadership gifts of women in the Brethren in Christ has come slowly. In 1988 there was one ordained woman pastor and five licensed women. In 1992 General Conference reaffirmed the 1982 decision. As an outgrowth of a retreat sponsored by the Board for Brotherhood Concerns (no longer in existence) and the Board for Ministry and Doctrine (now a Commission), the Council for Women in Ministry and Leadership was born. Led by Janet Peifer, and more recently Lois Saylor, a group of committed women accepted the challenge to awaken the Brethren in Christ to the fact that God has

gifted and called both women and men into ministry and leadership. For more than 20 years, newsletters, sermons and articles, retreats, a website, and conference lunches were the tools used.

By 2007 there were 13 women ordained and 28 licensed. The Directed Study Program saw a steady rise in the number of women preparing for ministry. Today women are serving in multiple church roles such as associate pastor, executive pastor, youth pastor, children's pastor, congregational care pastor, and worship pastor. A handful are designated as senior pastor, lead pastor, teaching pastor, or co-pastor. Based on congregational reporting of staff positions at the denominational website, more than 140 women are in either paid or volunteer

staff positions of one kind or the other in the U.S. Nineteen women have been ordained and 47 women have been licensed as of early 2018.

My journey as a woman in ministry began when I married a pastor in 1966. While I didn't hold a title or receive a salary until many years later, I knew I was called to serve in the local church. It just wasn't official. I even served as a "during the week pastor" while my husband, Dale Allison, was in seminary. He preached on Sunday. After his untimely death at age 46, I faced a crisis in my calling. While I knew God had gifted me for ministry in the local church, I was alone and confused. As a registered nurse, I immersed myself in the healthcare field, becoming a licensed nursing home administrator and eventually executive director of a retirement community. When questioned about the prospects of going to seminary, I responded, "why would I do that since there would be no place for me as a pastor/administrator?" There seemed to be greater possibilities in the business world.

Over the next 10 years, God didn't forget my call even though I still raised questions. He gave me new opportunities championed by my pastor and then bishop Ken Letner. The real test of my commitment surfaced when I was invited to become an integral member on a church plant launch team. God convinced me that he hadn't removed my gifts in ministry. As a result, I submitted my resignation to my employer and began to

prepare for pastoral ministry.

When I received an invitation from Grantham Church to join the staff as associate pastor, it was, without a doubt, the awakening of my earlier call. The losses I had experienced and the questions I had raised were fertile climate to propel me toward a new beginning. Years before, the congregation had begun to accept women in ministry when Martie Long became the first woman deacon. Young girls grew up observing godly women called to preach, lead in worship, serve communion, administer baptisms, and perform weddings and funerals. I will be forever grateful for such a welcoming environment. During my eight and a half years at Grantham, God confirmed to me over and over again that his gifts and calling are irrevocable.

In 2012, I was invited to become bishop of the Atlantic Conference. I must admit it was almost too much to imagine that God was calling me, a woman in ministry, to this awesome task as the first woman bishop in the Brethren in Christ Church. As I reflect on those years as a member of Leadership Council, it was a privilege to serve pastors, congregations, and the church at large. Many cheered and welcomed this new awakening and significant opportunity given to a woman. Even with those who were uncertain about my appointment, there was respect and cooperation.

Today it is my privilege to direct Awaken. Our mission is to empower, equip, engage,

and encourage women to celebrate God-given gifts, to prepare for ministry, and to live out that calling. Realistically we know there is much progress yet to be made so that every gifted woman finds a place to serve.

Awaken functions as an informal, organic network stretching across the U. S. and internationally. Partner representatives are assigned in every region who, along with the blessing of their respective bishops, expand the network as they promote mentorships, collect stories of women ministers that can be shared through our website and social media, and encourage connection points in the region so women can find a place to use their gifts.

On July 13, 2018, Awaken is sponsoring a pre-general assembly seminar to advance the call for women in ministry and leadership. It will be held at the Grantham Church. Katelyn Beaty from *Christianity Today* will speak, and Pastors Josh Crain and Meredith Dancause from The Meetinghouse Carlisle will lead a dialogue and open discussion about serving together. To find out more, go to bicus.org/event/awaken-seminar. I hope to see you there!

Pauline Peifer served as the first female bishop in the Brethren in Christ Church. She and her husband Elvin now divide their time between Pennsylvania and California. Learn more about Awaken at awakennetwork.org

All God's Children Can Serve

By Lynda Gephart

I HAVE BEEN blessed to be able to serve the Lord in ministry in the Brethren in Christ Church for most of the past 35 years, at three churches in Pennsylvania (Carlisle, Grantham, and Harrisburg).

I was raised in an American Baptist Church in Massachusetts. Women in ministry in that denomination were not unusual. For instance, during my college years in the early 1980s, we had a female associate pastor at my home church.

Just after my college graduation in 1983,

I interviewed with the Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church (now The Meeting House Carlisle) to lead their youth and young adult ministries. On the night of my interview, the church board interviewed a man, then me, then another man. In a recent chat with the man who then chaired the church board, he and I reminisced about that night. I remember it because there were 14 people sitting around the tables asking me questions; he recalled that there were 14 men! He said he was grateful to know that wouldn't be the

case if the interview were today.

I fully expected the church to hire one of the two men they interviewed, so I was shocked when the husband of the couple I was staying with came home and shared that they wanted to offer the position to me. Women in youth ministry were not common, especially a woman who couldn't play the guitar! They asked me to change my morning flight back to Boston to meet with a few from the board one more time. The main question from that subsequent meeting

was whether I was a militant feminist. It's hard to imagine that being a burning interview question today—at least I hope it wouldn't be!

On my first Sunday at the church in September 1983, I met R. H. Wenger, who had pastored the church in its early years. When he met me, he said, "So you're the woman the church hired." That was my first hint that this really was a big deal. What I didn't know was that there were no other women serving in Brethren in Christ congregations at that time. I was not the first woman to serve, but in the fall of 1983, as far as I know, I was the only woman.

Mary Jane (Davis) Fair began at Grantham in the spring of 1984, so then there were two of us. Sometime later, Martha Lady served at Messiah Village Church, Martha Starr and Martha Lockwood at Lancaster, and Harriet Bicksler worked for the Board for Brotherhood Concerns. The six of us were the women that I know of who were working for the BIC here in the U.S. by the late 1980s. (There were a few in Canada.)

When I began serving in 1983, I attended an Allegheny Conference event for pastoral staff. I don't recall much from that day, other than the fact that the men all wore suits and I was the only woman. One pastor greeted me with these words, "What are you doing here?" and he didn't say it jokingly or nicely. It was clear to me that my presence was not welcome, even though I felt very welcome at my local church. I didn't attend more of these meetings for quite some time.

I worked at Carlisle for a number of years before I preached a Sunday morning sermon. Ken Hoke, who had become the senior pastor, kept urging me to do so, and I kept hesitating. At some point he asked me the reason for my hesitation, and I told him I didn't want anyone to throw stones at him, knowing that some people opposed women preaching. Ken said he'd be happy to take those stones, and he strongly encouraged me to preach. It was very hard during that first sermon when I watched a couple, who were leaders in the church and with whom I had a good relationship, stand up and exit the sanctuary as I began to preach. Their protest was painful. I was a person with a passion and calling to serve the Lord who also was a woman.

To my surprise, I had a similar experience a year or two ago at Harrisburg. A couple had begun to attend the church very regularly. One Sunday a couple months after they came, I was preaching, which I typically do about 4-6 times a year. As I began the message, I watched this couple look at one another for a moment, then without saying a word, they simultaneously stood up and walked out. When I told our staff several weeks later about this incident, Woody Dalton, our senior pastor, affirmed me and said that if they didn't agree with women preaching, they didn't fit at our church.

I am amazed and thankful for the long way the denomination has come since affirming women in ministry at the 1982 General Conference. In my early years, I

never would have believed that the number of women serving today could be possible (the latest number I heard is 140 women), or that the church would call a woman to serve as bishop, as we did with Pauline Peifer. And it would have been just as huge a stretch to think of a woman serving as a senior pastor, but today a number of women pastor churches in either the senior pastor or solo pastor role. I serve on the Commission for Ministry and Doctrine, and approximately one fifth of those presently in some stage of the credentialing process are women.

As we seek to follow Jesus, we are called to imitate his equal treatment of women. There are girls and boys in our churches who need to learn that all of God's children can serve him in every way. People of all ages need to understand that having a high view of scripture, as we do, and affirming women in ministry are not mutually exclusive, but instead belong together.

I've had the privilege of serving the Lord at three wonderful BIC churches, with senior pastors (Elbert Smith, Ken Hoke, Bob Ives, Terry Brensinger, and Woody Dalton) and other staff and leadership who have not only affirmed women in ministry, but who have provided opportunities for growth and development by encouraging me and many other women to use our gifts and to serve in ever expanding ways. I hope their tribe will increase!

Lynda Gephart is pastor of congregational life at Harrisburg (PA) Brethren in Christ Church.

Raising Strong Daughters

PERRY AND MARTA *Engle, Warren and Connie Hoffman, and Bryan and Kerry Hoke have raised 10 daughters. As former and current Brethren in Christ bishops, they agreed to reflect on their efforts to raise strong daughters.*

What does it mean to "raise strong daughters"?

Engle: Raising strong daughters means raising them to have a relationship with Christ, and be independent, compassionate, hard-

working, and able to think and speak for themselves. It also means giving our daughters the strength of knowing that they are always safe and loved, and that their dad in particular will always stand up for them, defend them, and show them dignity and respect.

Hoffman: Our aim was to parent our daughters to have strong faith, good character, and useful life skills. We hoped to prepare them for a vocation (or calling) that fit their gifts and interests.

Hoke: For us, it has meant affirming them in ALL ways to build self-confidence/independence; helping them see that they are enough and can be on their own, but also recognize the kind of strong man who will appreciate and complement their strength; instilling strong identity in Jesus; and promoting and emphasizing their worth as equal image-bearers of God.

In what ways were you intentional about the way you raised your daughters?

Engle: I'm sure having daughters rather than sons changed our parenting style. We gave more attention to their relationships—especially with other girls. As a dad, I engaged them more in conversations over coffee or dinner than in sports and physical activities (which I love, but my daughters were not involved in).

Hoffman: We encouraged our children to be involved in pursuits, such as music, sports, and church activities. We made choices that created challenges for our daughters: to attend public school, to share bedrooms, to travel in a station wagon with two bench seats. We expected that these choices would increase the number of altercations and distresses they would experience. We also anticipated that these incidents would create “teaching moments” in which we could mediate a dispute or talk through a setback. Our hope was to teach life skills with corresponding gains in strength of faith and character.

Hoke: In many ways we just tried to raise them as children—with freedom to figure out who they were, space to decide their ownership of faith, inviting them to ask questions and have open conversations with us about sexuality, faith, identity, etc. Conversations with them as they grew older revolved more around the “heart.” One of our daughters got annoyed at one point, and asked us to “back off.” That was difficult to hear, but we tried to respect her need for space.

We wanted our kids to have strong relationships with both parents, but especially the opposite-gendered parent. Especially when they were hitting puberty, Bryan made sure not to withhold hugs and to subtly affirm them and his love for them in the midst of their bodily changes. Girls are especially prone to the culture's physical presentation of “perfection,” and so affirming their outer and inner beauty on a regular basis is so important from both parents.

How did you actively work against perpetuating stereotypes of women's roles?

Engle: We did our best to encourage our daughters to speak their minds and not be afraid to ask questions. We affirmed that our daughters could do and be anything they wanted when they became adults. Since we have always felt that being a stay-at-home

parent is a noble vocation, we encouraged our daughters not to allow themselves to be looked down upon for choosing and making the sacrifice to stay home and raise their children if that's what they felt called to do.

Hoffman: Our daughters saw Connie as a full partner with me in ministry, in music, and as my primary confidant and advisor. It's possible that our understanding of leadership and partnership may have been a factor. As we mulled over Ephesians 5:21-33, we've concluded that in any group, whatever the size, there must be leadership and partnership. A group functions best when the leader emulates Christ in sacrificial service and people in the group reciprocate in purposeful partnership—like the church (at its best). Connie and I wanted our daughters to be able to lead well and partner well. However it came to be, all of our daughters in their respective vocations are wonderfully proficient in both roles, leadership and partnership.

Hoke: We let them know they could do whatever they wanted to, and modeled this in our marriage and the roles we played. When our first church situation was part-time and Kerry also had a part-time job, we split home time and work responsibilities. Mom and Dad equally cooked, did laundry, and performed hands-on care, like doing their hair and other little daily routines, when they were little. We also encouraged them in all subject areas in school, especially applauding math and science aptitudes and achievements.

What kind of future did/do you expect for your daughters—better than for women of previous generations or worse?

Engle: We wanted to raise our daughters to expect that they would not be taken advantage of by men. We wanted them to feel like they could express their opinions in a male-dominated environment. We hoped to instill in them the expectation that they would be treated with dignity and respect, and men who would not treat them this way would not earn our respect nor be welcomed into our family. Marta and I also speak quite openly in our family about the misogyny that is pervasive in our culture, and encourage our daughters to talk about times when they feel they have been bullied or sexually harassed by men. We want them to know that we are

their advocates, and that they are free to “air out” their feelings and experiences.

Hoffman: Being a stay-at-home mother (and now grandmother) has been the centerpiece of Connie's calling, and we knew we would welcome a similar vocation for any of our daughters. Still, for their generation, we wanted our daughters to have a vocation that could sustain them. When one of our daughters majored in piano and was so musically gifted that she could skimp on practice, we wondered how such a pursuit could generate a living income. But she parlayed this into worship leadership and landed on her vocational feet right out of college.

Hoke: Better than previous generations, although the culture still isn't perfect. Our middle daughter, a freshman in college, asked recently if it's ok if she just wants to be a mom. We can honestly answer, “Yes, of course that's ok.” We try to affirm their gifts, no matter what they are.

What is your advice for new parents of daughters in light of issues like sexual exploitation and objectification of women, inequality, sexism, violence, etc.?

Engle: We try to remind them as often as possible that they are strong, smart, beautiful, and loved by God and by us, their parents. It's an old adage, but I believe it is true—daughters will model their expectations of men after the way they see their father treating their mother. If their mother is treated as an equal, whose opinion is valued, and talents appreciated, daughters will grow to expect this from the men they date and eventually marry. Also, I have heard that daughters learn compassion more acutely from their fathers. So, I have always worked hard to remind myself to model compassion, generosity, kindness, and acceptance.

Hoffman: The most basic preparation is a life devoted to Jesus and a clear grasp of biblical truth so that, whether they know the words or not, daughters have a good sense of “mishpat” (justice), “hesed” (covenant love), and “shalom” (peace in community). It also seems important for daughters to have a sense of worth undergirded by learned skills.

Hoke: We always wanted our girls to know that they never deserved exploitation or objectification. Men and women have equal responsibility to treat and approach each other

with respect. It is not incumbent on women to monitor their behavior and clothing choices in order to avoid this treatment (though there are other reasons for considering our choices). We also wanted to educate them candidly about risky situations and choices, such as alcohol/drug use, traveling with friends, not leaving a drink unattended, calling us **NO MATTER WHAT THE TIME OR SITUATION** if they ever felt in danger or uncomfortable.

In what ways do you think you have been successful in raising strong women? and what do you wish you had done differently?

Engle: I think if I were to do it over again, I

would be much more intentional in impressing on them the positive strong women role models in the Scriptures. I think we do a disservice to our daughters by not working harder to expose them to the heroines and not just the heroes of the Christian faith—teaching them how Jesus treated the women of his day, and telling them about the glorious story of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out equally on both women and men, and on our daughters as well as our sons.

Hoffman: As it turns out, all four of our daughters are strong women. Yes, we would do some things differently, but we managed to get a lot right. If I had it to do over,

though, I would have traveled less while our daughters were growing up. Connie and I did what we could in partnership. We benefited greatly from supportive extended families, friends, and our church family. In all this and more, the Spirit has shaped our daughters to love and serve Jesus faithfully and well as a missionary, educator, church musician, and pastor's wife.

Hoke: It's always easy to look back and wish you had done this or that better. We hope our daughters saw strength in the humility of both Mom and Dad in their willingness to own up to mistakes and apologize.

History and the Church's Embrace of Women in Ministry

By Zach Spidel

I AM CURRENTLY finishing my first year of a Ph.D. program in theology at the University of Dayton. This term, I was blessed by an opportunity to write about the Brethren in Christ for a seminar focused on historiographical issues in relation to theology. I chose to explore what role certain works of historical recovery may have had on the denomination's decision, first made in 1982, to "affirm the ministry of women in the life and programs of the church" (General Conference Minutes, 1982). Here's a summary of some of what I found.

The names and stories of certain women are now well-known to those of us with a strong attachment to the Brethren and Christ and an appreciation for our focus on missions and outreach. Rhoda Lee is one such name. She galvanized the church over a two-year period with speeches read before General Conference (at a time when General Conference was an all-male body) and with passionate and well-reasoned arguments in the *Evangelical Visitor* (the denomination's regular publication for many years).

Another such name is Frances Davidson. She was the first Brethren in Christ person to gain a master's degree, a key leader (prob-

ably the key leader) on the first BIC missions team sent to Africa, a missionary memoirist, and an educator.

These two women are perhaps the most famous members of a much wider cohort of women leaders from that earlier, crucial era in our history. That cohort includes many others, such as Sarah Bert, Mary J. Long, Effie Rohrer, and Anna Kraybill. Some of these women were preachers who addressed both men and women with the word of God. All of them were highly influential, exercising godly authority and oversight over important ministries. And all of them were doing these remarkable things 100 or more years ago. While we know their names now, however, their names were not so well remembered in the middle of the last century.

The minutes of General Conference from 1894, for instance, do not mention Rhoda Lee. They do record the action of Jacob Stauffer offering the first \$5.00 for missions work, but fail to mention that he gave in response to Rhoda Lee's call and that she began passing a hat through the assembled body to collect funds for the work. This failure of the record is a token of a larger failure. Though never entirely forgotten, the memory of



Rhoda Lee (and of many of these women) faded from the shared consciousness of the denomination in the years following their pioneering leadership. They were not, in later decades, usually included as key parts of the story of our church as we regularly told it.

For example, the story of the missions movement within the Brethren in Christ was summarized from the podium of the 1978 General Conference without reference to either Rhoda Lee or Frances Davidson. A speech on missions at that meeting briefly recalled the earliest era in missions by referencing two things: Stauffer's \$5.00 at the 1894 conference and Jesse Engle as the first missionary to go abroad. Engle was a wonderful and brave man; he was also the only man on the team of five people that first went abroad. He was accompanied by his wife and three other dedicated women, including Frances Davidson whose sharp mind, indomitable spirit, administrative acumen, and eloquence made her the most dynamic member of that missions team.

So what changed? We could not now

offer even a brief summary of the early missions effort without mention of these women. Why? During the 1970s, a growing number of people within our denomination became increasingly convinced that we were ignoring biblical wisdom and the prompting of the Spirit by denying women opportunities to minister in credentialed roles. By 1978 the denomination had formed a Committee on Women and Pastoral Ministry to investigate these matters and make recommendations back to the General Church. 1978 was also a watershed year for Brethren in Christ historiography. In 1978 Carlton O. Wittlinger published *Quest for Piety and Obedience* (the now standard history of our church), E. Morris Sider published *Nine Portraits* (a collection of nine biographies of key

people including Frances Davidson and Sarah Bert, and Sider, Wittlinger, and several others founded *Brethren in Christ History and Life*, our denomination's still-running historical periodical. *Quest for Piety and Obedience* accurately foregrounded the role which so many women had in leading the denomination into missions work. *Nine Portraits* showed two women in ministry whose work at least equaled that of any male minister. And between 1978 and 1982, no less than four pieces of biography, written by four women about four other women in ministry from that earlier era were published in *Brethren in Christ History and Life*.

Thus, in the four years leading up to our embrace of women in ministry, a remarkable transformation of our historical conscious-

ness was effected. The decision of General Conference in 1982 gives several reasons for itself. The final one notes "the service and leadership of the sisters, in both the past and the present" as justification for ordaining women. Jesus said that you can tell a true prophet from a false one by the fruits they produce. We had long cherished the fruit of our first missionary endeavors at the turn of the previous century. When we were reminded in the late 1970s and early 1980s that this fruit came, to a large degree, from the ministry of women, we could no longer deny that God calls sisters, as well as brothers, into roles of ecclesial leadership.

Zach Spidel pastors *The Shepherd's Table*, Dayton, OH.

A Personal Journey in Pastoral Ministry

By Mary Jane (MJ) Fair

MY JOURNEY INTO leadership in the Brethren in Christ Church began as a young adult in the mid 1970s in the Palmyra (PA) congregation. Having grown up in a more conservative denomination that did not even permit women to vote in church elections, I was surprised to discover that women not only voted but held positions of leadership, served on the local church board, and served as deacon couples. When I was asked to be the director of Christian Education, putting me on church board, I was supported by the pastor and the older male and female church leaders. When I spoke in the services, folks of all ages were positive about hearing a woman from the pulpit.

Those early experiences in volunteer ministry prepared me when I was encouraged in 1984 to apply for a full-time position at Grantham Brethren in Christ Church. When I arrived, senior pastor Robert Ives invited me to preach on my first Sunday. No one voiced concerns to me personally, but I eventually learned of two men in the congregation who had differing beliefs. One believed my role should only be with children, while the other was completely opposed to women in any leadership role in the church or society. Interestingly, the one couple even-

tually sought counsel from both Pastor Ives and me. The other left to go to Messiah Village. Pastor Ives laid the foundation for women in ministry by preaching regularly from the Scriptures about women's roles in the church. Prior to my arrival, the church grappled with and elected a female deacon. Pastor Ives was instrumental in encouraging me to complete the licensing and ordination process, to take the core courses required of pastors, and to do additional seminary work at Princeton Seminary.

When I attended a "Pastors and Wives Retreat" in what was then the Allegheny Conference, I was confronted with questions about women in ministry. I had earlier been welcomed to Grantham and into the conference by the bishop, but when I arrived at the retreat, along with Pastor Martha Lady, from Messiah Village Church, I sensed disagreement about what was acceptable about my role in leadership. Martha and I were invited to join the pastors' wives for sessions on their roles as pastors' spouses and how they could best support their husbands. When the other associate male pastor from Grantham questioned that decision, the bishop was perplexed and asked the male pastors whether Martha and I could join the sessions on the

role of pastors. Thankfully, they voted that we could join them, although it was certainly awkward for us. In future retreats, the title was changed to "Pastors and Spouses Retreat." Ten years later, I was invited by the bishop of the Atlantic Conference to be the three-day speaker at their annual pastors' retreat. Times were definitely changing!

When General Conference was discussing the affirmation of women in leadership and ministry roles, some men strongly objected. With one gentleman (a pastor), I tried face-to-face conversations and letters to engage him in the difficult exegesis of the Scriptures about women in the church as well as to share my personal journey and calling to ministry. He not so politely refused. But then in later years, he had a dramatic change of understanding, and apologized to me for his previous comments and behaviors.

In subsequent years, various events were held that provided current biblical research, storytelling, and opportunities for discussion about the role of women in the church. One time, at a joint task force meeting of the Board for Ministry and Doctrine and the Board for Brotherhood Concerns, a pastor on the task force was very vocal about his

concerns about what he called “unbridled feminism.” Slowly and cautiously that day, we shared our stories and continued dialogue with him. At the end of the day, he smiled and took back some of his negative retorts, saying he would be comfortable with any of the female pastors on the task force as his bishop—quite a turnaround! A highlight of my own ministry during those years came when I was invited to preach a conference sermon at the 1992 General Conference at Messiah College.

Looking back, I realize that more often than not it was the older generation and retired pastors and bishops who were the most supportive of the growing roles of women. For example, in the early 1980s, Messiah Village was the first to call a female pastor when Martha Lady was hired. As I grew in my ministry responsibilities at Grantham, I often re-

ceived notes of support from senior parishioners, many of whom were retired missionaries, pastors, and bishops. I was truly blessed that while supporting retired Bishop Henry Ginder through his bout with cancer and his last days, he shared that he was blessed to have me as his pastor and wanted me to do his funeral with Pastor Ives.

Grantham Church has hired numerous women since I was first “called” in 1984. One parishioner, who had a daughter born shortly before I arrived, told me one time about when their family had visited a church while on vacation. Sitting in a church that had only men leading worship, the young girl leaned over to her mother and said, “Where is the MJ in this church?” As she grew up in Grantham Church, she was accustomed to seeing and hearing a woman leading worship and preaching. It was very strange to her to

only see men leading the church!

Today, many more congregations have added woman to their pastoral teams, and some have hired female senior pastors. There has been a female bishop! And yes, there will always be dialogue, questions, and study on the issue, for we are all on a journey of understanding. Today as I reminisce about my personal pastoral journey of 34 years and the path God has taken me on, I am even more confident that I followed God’s voice to the path he made known to me at the Grantham Church.

MJ (Davis) Fair was associate pastor at the Grantham Church for 19 years, retiring in 2003. She also served on the denominational Board for Congregational Life, the General Conference Board, and the Board for Ministry and Doctrine during the 1980s and 1990s.

From PK to PW to BW

by Carol Long Thrush

MY LIFE EXPERIENCE has been from PK (pastor’s kid) to PW (pastor’s wife) to BW (bishop’s wife). I grew up in a pastor’s home. My dad started his pastoral ministry part-time and later became full-time. He went to Messiah College when there were four children in our family and one on the way. After Dad graduated, Mom went back to school to complete her training to be a teacher. She had a sixth child and then taught school for many years. She was a hard worker and a person who seemed to be able to do it all. She fully affirmed Dad in his pastoral role and was involved in a variety of ministries within the congregations they served.

While my mother was an excellent role model for me, I was not exactly like her in my role as a pastor’s wife (PW). I was a stay-at-home mom by choice until the youngest of our four children went to junior high school, after which I obtained employment in the human resources department in our local school district.

I served in a supportive role to Lynn. I listened and was a sounding board for him, and encouraged him. I have the gift of helps; I was not in the limelight as far as leadership

roles, such as chairing committees. I was comfortable in the background supporting other leadership.

I was, however, fully involved in the life of our congregations, including assisting in women’s ministry planning and activities at the local and regional levels, Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS), women’s Bible study groups, and women’s retreats. I was also involved in music ministry throughout all our years of ministry.

Lynn and I practiced hospitality, hosting the deacons twice a month for dessert after they visited church family members. Hospitality also meant hosting, sometimes overnight, church officials and guest speakers who visited our church or area. Though fully involved in church life, I resisted others putting me into a box with their expectations. I was willing to say “no” to roles that did not fit my gift-mix, though this was not easy as I am a people-pleaser.

Lynn’s view of confidentiality meant that he shared fully with me. He trusted me to hold matters in confidence. It was helpful to him to talk things through with me. I also helped him keep boundaries around his

work, because pastoral work is never done. I continue to do that now that his role has changed to bishop.

The congregations and guests we served affirmed me/us. They affirmed our home for being well-kept, meals for being tasty, hospitality for being warm and welcoming. They respected our parenting. I sought to get along with all kinds of people and did not show favoritism. I did not speak negatively about someone else to persons in the church, because the person to whom I was speaking might have had a good relationship with the other person, and I did not want to sully that relationship. I did not gossip. I tried to practice the scripture that says we should be at peace with all persons if at all possible (Romans 12:18).

I experienced a number of challenges as a pastor’s wife. One of the challenges related to being kind and loving to all persons and not speaking negatively of others, is that it meant I did not have the kind of relationships within the congregation where I could completely bare my soul. Therefore, this role of being married to a pastor can sometimes be lonely.

Another challenge was when Lynn would be criticized in an unfair or harsh way. Some congregational or council meetings were difficult. Hearing public or private critique was not easy to handle. One evening, during the prayer at the end of a particular council meeting, I fled in tears to a classroom.

It was a challenge when persons would leave the church without the courtesy of saying why they were leaving. Because of my perfectionistic tendencies it was also challenging for me to observe when the church facility was not kept neat, and therefore not inviting to guests.

Besides the challenges, I experienced many blessings and opportunities as a pastor's wife. We had a ready-made group of people who welcomed us to our new community: in our case, the Brethren in Christ congregations at the Fairview Avenue Church in Waynesboro, PA, and the Gateway Community Church in Chino, CA. The pastor and spouse position is one of honor. It is a privilege to know a group of people intimately for a long time. It is an honor to work with congregational leaders. It is encouraging to see people mature and take on leadership responsibilities. It is rewarding to host guest speakers and denominational

leaders.

Now as a BW (bishop's wife), I recommend that pastoral couples be involved in denominational activities. Good relationships are built during such times. Even when busy with children, take advantage of the opportunities to be involved locally and regionally. Try to give people the benefit of the doubt, and try to live at peace with everyone. Regarding children, we did not say, "because you are the pastor's kids you must behave" in such and such a way. Rather we said, "because you are a Christian, this is how you should behave."

To congregations I would say, be supportive of the spouse. Be careful how criticism is given to the pastor, because it affects both the pastor and the spouse. Think about ways to bless the spouse. When Lynn was away for studies for two weeks and I had charge of our four young children, a deacon couple took our family out for dinner. Another family, at the birth of one of our children, gave us a diaper and cleaning service gift. The congregation provided a baby shower when I was pregnant with our first child. These acts of love are wonderful.

To ministry spouses, live a life of integrity and honesty. Be committed to your spouse,

not flirting with others. Dress carefully and modestly. Do not talk about your home-life problems in public. Also, do not speak negatively of your spouse in public.

I have been blessed by a long exposure to the life of a pastor's spouse, seen first exemplified in my Mom, and then my own experience in our 13 years in Waynesboro, and 25 years in Chino. Now I have the privilege of listening to and encouraging spouses as Lynn serves as bishop of the Great Lakes Conference. The testimony of my life is that God has been faithful in my vocation as the wife of a pastor/leader.

Early in our dating relationship, Lynn's father encouraged him to talk to me about whether I would be open to Lynn becoming a pastor, and by implication, serving as the wife of a pastor. Lynn made a trip to Buffalo, NY, with a specific agenda to find out my answer. I said I would be open to him becoming a pastor, and knowing what I know now, I would again answer that question with a "yes."

Carol Long Thrush and her husband Lynn live in Tipp City, OH, while Lynn serves as bishop of the Great Lakes Conference.

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cause of his concern about how this would impact the church.

In the summer of 2016, we packed our belongings into a U-Haul truck, left comfortable jobs in a pleasant community, and ventured into the unknown world of planting a church. Initially, we decided to do this bi-vocationally, so Heather began working for the city school district, and Micah, with a non-profit organization. For the first several months, we took time to learn about our new neighborhood and city. It was also a time for us to discern our callings in a hands-on manner.

Micah began to realize that his ministry was different than he once thought. Although still committed to church planting, he discovered that his gifts could better serve the church by being a supporter of ministry, rather than as a "pastor" in the traditional sense of the term. We knew that Heather's gifts as a leader, being both an apostle and a

shepherd, would be best used as the lead pastor of Branch & Vine, the new church community we are forming in Lancaster City, PA. Heather's passion for seeing people come to know the life-transforming power of Jesus has led her to take a holistic approach to community engagement, seeing herself as not just the pastor of Branch & Vine, but also for our neighborhood. In this way, Heather has been able to engage with local schools, community groups, and neighbors all around us. Her entrepreneurial gifts are being used in ways that are helping people come to know Jesus.

We are still learning what it means to lean into our own gifts together. Even more so, we seek to help people lean into, and then, lead out of their God-given gifts and passions. This means investing in young and old, new and mature believers, men and women, introverts and extroverts, etc. Not to the exclusion of gifted young men, Heather

intentionally looks to encourage and equip young women to pursue ministry. Becoming a pastor was not on Heather's radar until someone acknowledged her gifts and encouraged her to consider ministry as a vocation—a reality that Micah and many other men have not experienced. The kingdom of God expands as we encourage all people to live into their gifts to help more people embrace the love of Jesus. As pastors, leaders, and fellow brothers and sisters, each of us have a role in helping both men and women lean into their giftedness.

Heather and Micah Brickner live in Lancaster City (PA) with their son Lucas. Heather is the lead pastor of Branch & Vine and serves on the ministry leadership team of the Atlantic Conference. Micah will assume the role of writer/editor for Eastern Mennonite Missions in July and is the executive director of the Brethren in Christ Historical Society. They both hold M. A. degrees in ministry from Wesley Seminary.

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Leaning Into Giftedness

By Heather and Micah Brickner

“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13, NRSV).

GOD BESTOWS ON each of his children gifts to help more people come to know him. Often, complementarian biblical hermeneutics regarding gender roles have resulted in telling women, “No.” While we understand all of the theological debates about women in ministry, we hold to a pragmatic perspective—people need to know Jesus, and if someone is gifted in a certain way, he or she needs to use that gift to help people come to know Jesus. The kingdom of God cannot grow if we stifle people and their callings. We believe that God calls people based on giftings, not on gender.

Having grown up in the Refton (PA) Brethren in Christ Church, Heather developed a calling to ministry during a mission trip when she was in high school. Throughout her teenage years, she was given opportunities to lead new ministry endeavors. Later, as a student at Messiah College, the

ministry opportunities broadened, opening doors for Heather to explore her gifts. Participating in the NextGen internship program of the Atlantic Conference, Heather spent a summer with Circle of Hope in Philadelphia, PA. During this time, God began to help Heather’s imagination for church multiplication grow.

Micah grew up in a church plant and has many fond memories. He later worked with church planting for the denomination in which he grew up. Micah was recruiting potential church planters at a job fair at Messiah College but had left the booth for a few minutes to eat lunch. During lunch, while Micah was away, Heather visited the empty booth. Simultaneously, Micah saw a poster for a ministry that Heather was helping to lead and was intrigued. We did not meet each other that day, but we would later meet, date, and put the pieces together to realize that God was beginning to stir in both of us a shared calling.

Knowing she wanted to serve in a local church, Heather met with Doug Sider, who was then bishop of the Susquehanna Conference. Through his guidance, Alan Robinson, at the time the senior pastor of Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church, offered Heather a one-year position as a pastoral resident. The

year was devoted to learning the “nuts and bolts” of ministry, gaining skills in leading and preaching, and discerning God’s direction in ministry. During this year, we were married, and Alan and Doug, who had since become the executive pastor at the Carlisle Church, took an even greater chance by hiring both of us. We shared our desire to plant a church, and because of their leadership, we served together for several years, while discerning when and where God was leading us to plant a church.

Heather’s call to ministry has been affirmed and encouraged by many people, but her journey has not gone without challenges. People have told her directly that she should not be a pastor—not because she was not gifted, but simply because she was a woman. Both men and women have told Heather she should lead more like a man—insinuating that being a successful pastor is more attributed to gender stereotypes than someone leading in his or her unique style. People have walked out of services when Heather has preached, not because of exegetical errors, nor because the service was running long, but because she was a woman. Heather was even asked by a potential employer about when she anticipated having children be-

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