

## MEDITATION FOR WOMEN'S GATHERING, MARCH 18, 2017

By Anne M. Yoder

Good morning. My name is Anne Yoder. I've been serving as the Coordinator for the Sistering Committee of Franconia Mennonite Conference and Eastern District Conference for the past five years. It has been a great privilege to get to know many of you during that time, and to minister to and with each other through our gatherings. This is the 6<sup>th</sup> one that we have held since the Sister Care seminar took place here in this area in March 2012. We've ranged from 17 to 50 women in attendance at the gatherings, and this time to 80 women! I praise God for bringing all of you here this morning to share in this day of retreat where we can hear from the Lord and from each other.

The theme for today came from a picture of Elizabeth, Queen of England, with her grandchildren. I saw this one day last year and saved it onto my computer because I thought it was so well-composed. I liked the green background and how each child was arranged in the photo. And I thought the kids were very cute, especially the little girl holding her grandmother's [or great-grandmother's] purse. She looked so delighted to be the one entrusted with the purse, and I loved that the Queen let her carry it.



It wasn't until some time later that a deeper significance for this photo came to me. For one, the Queen carries her purse everywhere, even to a photo shoot. It is like an extension of herself. As such, it represents hundreds of years of royal etiquette and rules that she had to take on and to live up to. It represents what she was allowed to do and what she was not permitted to do, both as a royal personage and as a woman. And the little girl, as part of that family, will also be trained in royal protocol and in family dos and don'ts. Metaphorically, she'll be carrying her grandmother's purse all of her life, with its privileges and its burdens.

So too do we carry our grandmothers' purses, as it were, because we too have messages passed down through our families and cultural traditions. These can have a tremendous impact on how we view ourselves and our place in the world. Probably most of us can still hear our mothers', aunts' and grandmothers' voices handing down messages of how we should look and behave. Sometimes these were positive and have helped us; sometimes they were negative and it's been hard or even impossible to shed them.

Our Lord Jesus invites us to cast all our burdens upon him, for he cares for us. He doesn't want us to live with family and cultural messages that keep us from living full and free lives. He said: "Take my yoke upon you, for it is easy and my burden is light." What he has to offer us brings abundant life. What he takes from us are the loads too heavy to bear. In the Lord we also have each other as Sisters in Christ.

You may remember that in carpentry, when builders find a joist or beam that is too weak to carry a load on its own, they sister in another joist or beam to strengthen the first one, attaching them together permanently. It's a mystery to me why this wasn't called "brothering" by the male-dominated building trade. But it's named as sistering, and represents our calling to love and help each other.

So my prayer for us today, dear Sisters, is that we may be honest in examining our grandmothers' purses and in looking at our past and present; that we may learn from each other's stories; that we may enjoy each other's company to the hilt; and that we may become more fully the women of God we are called to be.