

## **Recipes for a Revolution: The Enduring Wisdom of More with Less**

(based on Lee Hull Moses' article Christian Century Dec. 2, 2016)

Isaiah 58:6-12 by Patty Friesen (Peace Sunday, Nov. 10/19)

I have to admit that I have struggled with our MCC Peace Sunday's theme this morning on Food Justice, which has felt out of sync with the weekend's Remembrance Day reflections. While I love food and love to talk about it - my thoughts are on Remembrance Day themes this weekend - sacrifice, death, peacemaking and maybe others' thoughts are there as well. I think we Mennonites struggle to make meaning of Remembrance Day because we want to promote peace instead of honour war. But if we cannot remember with those around us who have served in the military and those who have died or those who continue to struggle with Post Traumatic Stress, we lose empathy and authenticity to become repairers of breaches and restorers of streets (Is. 58:12).

From childhood I have struggled with Remembrance Day - my family didn't buy poppies to wear and we Mennonite kids were exempted from the Remembrance Day service at school and we didn't attend the parade in downtown Fairview. I dreaded Remembrance Day because it always reminded me that we were different and I could never explain why.

I struggled with Remembrance Day when I worked as a chaplain at the Mennonite Nursing Home in Rosthern five years ago. I planned Remembrance Day services where we put up the flag and sang O Canada and God Save the Queen and I spoke about our veterans. The problem was our veterans often didn't want to come to our Remembrance Day services anymore. Mike, age 94 said "I'm tired of the parades

and services. I went because I was drafted not because I was a hero. I'm tired of it all." So veterans were opting out of services and Mennonite conscientious objectors were telling me of their experiences of being drafted and having to defend their conscientious objection to draft boards and being sent to work in lumber camps in Alberta and BC in the winter while they farmed in the summer. I began telling their stories during our Remembrance Day services also. Not all the staff appreciated the pacifist perspective but I insisted that we could hold both veterans and COs in our Remembrance Day services.

Everyone in Osler is aware of the tensions between nationalism and pacifism in the Osler School and Town celebrations of Remembrance Day as we Mennonites try to hold both perspectives in these celebrations. These are the things I want to talk about today and not pretend that we don't still feel the tension and the discrepancies between conscience and obedience to government. By the time I listened to *my conscience and lack of peace* on Thursday, our MCC Food Justice service was already planned and the bulletin printed so I was hooped to change the direction of things this morning but I had to speak into my conscience this morning. Thankfully the prophet Isaiah gives us a grounding in all kinds of peace - peace in heart, soul and conscience, peace between peoples and nations and a peace where all have enough to eat.

Isaiah's vision is of the fullness of all things, of creation transfigured. Isaiah's words paint a vivid and compelling pictures that speaks to the deepest longings of all our hearts this Remembrance Day weekend. The vision of this promise of peace is cast in terms of enough food for all and the reversal of all sorrow and vanquishing of all that tears at and weighs down human hearts and relationships.

Last Sunday, we spoke of different heroes of faith in the literary and political world who died this year. Today I'd like to speak about a Mennonite heroine. In 1975, Doris Janzen Longacre, a home economics teacher from Pennsylvania who had served in Vietnam and Indonesia began a conversation with her girlfriends around a picnic table about MCC's call for families to respond to the global food crisis by cutting food consumption by 10 percent. Doris and her friends knew North Americans would not change how they eat unless they had some recipes to inspire them so she issued an invitation to Mennonites, appealing to their ideals of simplicity and service to submit their favourite simple recipes. One wonders how she did this with no social media to spread the word and no Google Forms to collect the submissions! Doris thought of her project as a "food crisis cookbook" to work at questions as how to eat less, eat more healthy and maintain good nutrition.

The More with Less Cookbook was first published in 1976 and has sold a million copies. A copy of Longacre's original notes and proposal has been preserved in the MCC archives in Akron, Pennsylvania. They are a delight to read. She outlines her goals for the project, which range from the grand - to "prepare a book which would have lasting value beyond early awareness of the world food crisis" to the mundane: Simple paperback format would obviously be least expensive but personally I do not enjoy at all using paperback cookbooks. They never stay open. Hopefully some kind of binding which makes the book usable and lasting could be found." She achieved this goal too: the book's early printings were spiral bound and lay open easily. The 40th anniversary edition lacks this feature; in any case, it is a tad too beautiful to imagine spilling soup on!

Longacre's original notes include a typed list of possible titles, including Responsible Eating in a Hungry World but below the typed list is her handwritten title: More with Less. The subtitle has changed over the years. The 40th anniversary version goes: Timeless Recipes and Inspiration for Simple, Joyful Eating but I like the original subtitle: Recipes and Suggestions from Mennonites on How to Eat Better and Consume Less of the World's Limited Food Resources. That combination of bold vision that we could have an impact on the world and gentle nudging calling it Just a Suggestion has made More with Less both revolutionary and effective. The cookbook was a constant, steady call to action for responsible eating, long before it was cool.

Throughout the book runs a deep commitment to Christian ideas of hospitality, stewardship, gratitude and justice. The call to respond to the food crisis comes from a conviction that we are connected to our global neighbours. Justice requires us to pay attention to how our actions impact others with whom we share this planet. Food - especially good, nutritious food - is a gift to be grateful for and to be used wisely.

But the title of the cookbook isn't just Less. Longacre understood that there is something deeply good and faithful about breaking bread with other people, be it simple dinners on ordinary evenings or grand festivities on special occasions. Rachel Marie Stone, who edited the 40th anniversary edition, says that the book's primary conviction is that "it is possible to eat simply, healthfully, and joyfully all at once."

Over 40 years, the book's message hasn't changed - and the need for it remains. In the original, Longacre says the project was "born from the compulsion that someone, somehow must prod us overfed North Americans to do something about our overabundance in relation to the world food crisis." If anything has changed, it is that

global hunger crises go far beyond questions of food supply - and that there is a significant hunger crisis in our own country as well.

While the anniversary edition stays faithful to the original's message, the receipts have been updated. "People probably eat fewer casseroles and loaves in 2019 than they ate in 1976," Stone explains, "and I think most Americans are generally more aware of foods that in 1976 would have seemed exotic - tofu, for example, needs much less of an introduction these days." The revision also includes labels indicating which recipes are gluten-free or vegetarian.

Recipes have also been updated to reflect changes in the science of food. For instance, many of the original receipts called for margarine, which was then thought to be not just cheaper but also healthier than butter. More recently we've come to understand that partially hydrogenated vegetable oil isn't really better, even if it is less expensive.

This example from the book's receipts points to a significant dilemma in the quest to encourage responsible eating: nutritious, simple, sustainable food can be expensive. It takes a measure of privilege to take the time to go across town to the farm's market and pay a premium for locally grown, organic produce. Many markets now accept US public food assistance benefits as payment which is a step in the right direction - but shopping there still requires transportation and a flexible schedule. People who live in food deserts often have little choice but to buy processed food from convenience stores - processed food made cheaper by federal subsidies for corn and soy but not produce. Solving our country's food crisis requires better public policy, not just better recipes.

Perhaps it is a bit much to ask a cookbook to promote political advocacy and the anniversary edition acknowledges that such issues are beyond its scope. Stone maintains, however, that *More with Less* is a handbook, a field guide, for simple and wholesome cooking and a way of thinking about food that opens one up to concerns beyond one's own table.

Longacre who died three years after *More with Less* was published, would have been pleased by the book's lasting impact and glad for the move many of us have made toward locally grown, less processed food. "As North Americans, most of us grew up believing we were born into an era of abundance," writes Longacre. "The ability to buy something has meant the right to have it. Christian discipleship now calls us to turn our eating around." Turning around means revolution that is rarely a onetime event; it is a lifetime of learning and practice.

I personally have come to see meal planning and cooking with local ingredients as something of a spiritual practice - something that feeds our souls while it feeds our household and others we share food with. We love picking fruit at Anna's orchards, storing Community Garden potatoes at Living Soil and love eating Floating Garden Eggplant Burgers and Pineview Chicken Kabobs. We are humbly proud of our own garden and preserving but we are not perfect food disciples either! We still buy Doritos and gummy bears but Doris Janzen Longacre's work helps us think locally and globally as we eat more with less and pray for peace. Let us pray...

God of peace and enough food for all, thank you for this Remembrance Day weekend where we are reminded again of all kinds of sacrifices. Thank you for these lessons on peace from the prophet Isaiah and Doris Janzen Longacre. Amen.