

Extraordinary relationships

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by Edwin Friedman, is that the same relationship dynamics at work in families are also at work in churches.

One of the tools used to explore and learn about relationships is the genogram, or family diagram. This tool looks a bit like what most of us would identify as a family tree. However, in addition to the information recorded on family trees like dates of birth, death, and possibly marriage, a genogram is expanded to include other information such as location, occupation, education, health, and even relationship patterns within the family.

One of the rewards of looking at relationships through this new lens is finding new insights into the biblical stories that I've never noticed before.

Though we don't have many specific dates in these stories, we often have information about relationships. And just looking at the complexity of

some of the families in our scriptures can help us to understand the dynamics at work. The genogram shown on pages 2 and 3 notes two relationships which were infamously cut off or distant. Many other relationships on the diagram could be noted for their closeness, their health, jealousy, or competition, illuminating patterns that are repeated from one generation to another.

This may all sound like a lot of work! It is! Extraordinary relationships don't just happen. They require our thought and attention. In addition, there are benefits which include raising the level of health of leaders and congregations, thereby strengthening our worship, faith and witness.

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One of the subsequent discoveries, explored at length by Edwin Friedman, is that the same relationship dynamics at work in families are also at work in churches.

Ohio Conference bulletin inserts are published six times per year by Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA.

For more information about the Ohio Conference, see the Conference website: www.ohiomennoniteconference.org

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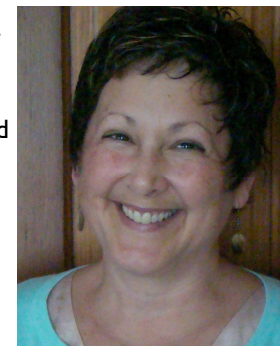
By Wanda Stopher
Ohio Conference Regional Pastor

"It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of human relationships. If love does not make the world go around, then surely relationships do."

— Roberta M. Gilbert

Relationships are a critical force in our personal lives with family and friends, at work, in our communities, among nations, and yes, in our churches. It would indeed be impossible to overestimate the importance of relationships in our shared lives of faith. Jesus himself said, "A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." — John 13: 34-35.

As I go about my work as regional pastor, I've found it helpful to return again and again to the guiding statement in my job description,



which reflects the mission and vision of Ohio Conference of Mennonite Church USA: "Ohio Conference nurtures healthy and growing leaders and congregations in the areas of worship, faith and witness."

Whether working with pastors, small groups of congregational leaders, or in full congregational settings, relationships are of utmost importance as we, together, seek Jesus Christ at the center of our lives.

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Supporting
healthy, growing
congregations

Extraordinary relationships

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One way of working very directly at nurturing healthy and growing leaders and congregations has been to invite pastors to participate in an Extraordinary Relationships group.

These groups have met once a month for a year, and were based on a book by that name, *Extraordinary Relationships: A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions* written by Roberta Gilbert. The book is based on

the work of Murray Bowen, M.D., whose life work of studying human behavior, culminated in the development of a theory known as *family systems theory*, or simply *Bowen theory*.

At the heart of this new way of understanding human behavior is the idea that the family, rather than the individual, is the basic unit of emotional functioning. One of the subsequent discoveries, explored at length

Abraham and many sons: a biblical genogram

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