



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 30, 2007

Being on the margins can be prophetic, guest speaker says

Elkhart, Ind. (AMBS) - Mennonites and Pentecostals have perspectives in common, Cheryl Bridges Johns told students and faculty of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary on her recent visit as Theological Center Guest.

From October 16 to 18, the Pentecostal theologian had opportunities to extend her inter-faith dialogue as she met with AMBS students and faculty. Johns is professor of discipleship and Christian formation at Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tenn. She serves in the Church of God-Mennonite Dialogue as well as in dialogues with several other Christian groups, including Roman Catholics and evangelicals.

She began her series of presentations explaining that she is on the margins. This was true when she was a child growing up as part of a small charismatic congregation in the southern part of the U.S. She continues to feel this now because the Pentecostal denomination of which she is a part is not at the center of Christian faith in North America.

She believes she is called to be on the margins, because “marginality in many ways can be a place of grace,” she said. “It is often to the center that it can bring words that are fresh and prophetic.” In addition, she said, “Possibilities of new partnerships are found on the margins.”

Noting that Mennonites also are on the margins of mainstream Christian denominations, she said, “We are different in many ways but we also are alike. We get to check the ‘other’ box. And at a time when Christianity itself is becoming marginalized, we can offer to our brothers and sisters what it means to be marginal and thrive, what it means to have a prophetic witness. Sometimes that is where the creative spirit does her most profound work.”

Johns' involvement in Pentecostal-Mennonite conversations stems, in part, from her commitment to peacemaking. she is part of the Pentecostal Charismatic Peace Fellowship which is attempting to reclaim the pacifist beginnings in the denomination, and had opportunities to talk with students and faculty about how this commitment sometimes also puts her on the margins of her own Pentecostal denomination.

In another chapel presentation, Johns compared the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples in John 20 with that of the Pentecost story in Luke and Acts. Mennonites represent the account in John, she said, because of its emphasis on the gift of peace with the Holy Spirit.

"My own tradition of Pentecostals focuses on the signs seen in Luke-Acts. That is our gift to the body of Christ. Taken together these gifts become a harmonious witness in God's great choir.

"In my side of the choir, sometimes our singing and shouting about signs and wonders is shrill. But perhaps the other side [Mennonite side] is a bit too ... unassuming. So we need to be quiet and lower our voices, and I ask that you raise yours so that we together might sing the glorious praises of God."

The Theological Center Guest program at AMBS brings to campus each fall a guest who shares how faith and vocation come together in their lives.