

April 2013

Naomi Unger recently interviewed Elsie Rempel, Formation Consultant for Mennonite Church Canada. Elsie holds a master degree in theology with a focus on Mennonites, children and communion, an education degree, has taught primary school in a Christian setting for 40 years, and is a grandparent of four youngsters. Her new book [Please Pass the Faith: The Art of Spiritual Grandparenting](#) is a treasure trove of practical ideas and tips for grandparents wanting to pass on their faith to their grandchildren. (from the [Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre](#))



Naomi: *Tell us a bit about your work as Formation Consultant for Mennonite Church Canada. What are some of the highlights and challenges of your work?*

Elsie: First of all, I should include a word about my current ministry title. I have worked with Mennonite Church Canada since 2002 under several titles. I began as Director of Christian Education and Nurture. After some years we sought a shortening of the title and thought that Christian Nurture captured the essence of my ministry. When my work was reduced to half time and ministry with and for seniors was added, we felt that the term

Consultant reflected the more limited role, and Formation reflected the whole life journey of Christians as they are being formed by Christ. Such a formation consultant, one who helps Christ take form in others, is what I strive to be and do as I gather, develop, and share on a wide variety of faith forming topics for our denomination and beyond.

The greatest highlights of my work are:

~ Hearing that resources we have produced or promoted have had a positive faith forming impact in our congregations, or in people's personal lives. I've experienced this numerous times with my book, *Please Pass the Faith* and it has been deeply rewarding. Writing the book was a particularly intensive and extensive project, so it's good to know it's been worth it.

~ Meeting with dedicated and gifted church leaders in Canadian writing teams to prepare worship resources for *Leader* magazine. We immerse ourselves diligently in the seasonal scripture texts and our contexts for faithfulness, but it always feels like we're on a spiritual mountaintop as we arrive at new themes and worship outlines.

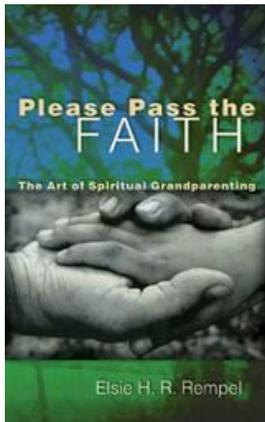
Naomi: *Over the years, you have written and edited numerous resources for children, such as Lent and Advent family devotions, Lectionary-based children's stories, and Vacation Bible School curricula. You've helped shape; you've introduced, and worked with Sunday School curricula. What motivated you to write resources for children of the church?*

Elsie: Whenever I work with children directly, I am inspired by their child faith and their insights into living God's way. They are eager for stories and messages that help them name and claim God's role in our individual and corporate lives. On the other hand, our

current society exposes children to many competing sources of identity formation, many of which can dim their sense of being created in God's image to be joyful and loving members of God's bigger family. This combination of opportunity and need, plus my immense enjoyment of children, motivate my ministry of producing and promoting good resources for the church's children.

Naomi: *Alongside of writing for children, you've also provided christian nurture workshops, and written, and edited faith forming resources for adults, such as Prayer Journeys with Children, Many Gifts: Calling and Growing Congregational Leaders, Leader Worship Resources, and Special Sunday worship resources. How do you navigate writing for children and adults?*

Elsie: The distance is short between writing for children and writing for adults so that they can work more effectively with children. Because I think like an adult it is easier to shift from writing for children to writing for adults, than the other way around, especially on the topic of children which has been my core focus. However, I also live, work and worship regularly with adults, so working with other adults to create worship resources is stimulating and enjoyable. Because my theological studies focused on children's faith nurture I sometimes need to do extra background reading. For instance, as I accepted the mandate to work on ministry with and for seniors, I did a lot of extra reading and interviewed older seniors to add insight to the experience I was gaining as a young senior.



Naomi: *Your recent book, Please Pass the Faith: The Art of Spiritual Grandparenting, is a very helpful tool for older adults in encouraging/guiding children and youth in their faith journey. But in a delightful flip, the book also tells how children and youth can shape the faith of their elders. Please say a bit about this intergenerational flow of faith that goes both directions. How can older people be open to learning from their grandchildren?*

Elsie: Wherever we are on the journey of life and faith, God has a place for us. By spending a good chunk of my professional career working with children, and now enjoying being a hands-on Omi, I've experienced how much we can learn from and be blessed by children. That intergenerational flow of faith was natural for many people through most of church history. About 50 years ago, we began to specialize and develop age-specific curricula. During that time, the church lost many of the blessings of intergenerational learning, even as children and youth received age appropriate content. Now, we need to relearn how to worship and follow Jesus as an intergenerational family again. To do so will involve learning to enjoy and accept children, their child faith, and their child behaviour as unique reflections of the image of God.

Please Pass the Faith: The Art of Spiritual Grandparenting is available from [Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre](#). For more information on the author or to follow her blog, please visit <http://elsiehannahruth.wordpress.com/>