

# Women's Retreat Advances Unity by Carol Calise

It is a simple concept: a women's retreat hosted by Beth Zion Messianic Congregation themed, "More Than Conquerors through Him Who Loves Us." What, then, made the annual affair this February, and now in its eighth season, so popular that it attracts registrants from a broad local and national spectrum?

In short answer, Messianic leaders from various venues are invited to partake equally during the weekend, achieving a unique spirit of *echad* (unity). As the women mingle, "relationships form beyond congregational and organizational lines," comments attendee Sara Chwatt.

Sara, a member of Beth Messiah in Livingston, New Jersey, says, "I came to deeply appreciate the sisterly bond between those from the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America, along with the Union of Messianic Congregations, Jews for Jesus, and many other associations. We all exhibited genuineness and transparency. I felt that is what made it so meaningful."

In opening remarks at the 2012 event, Messianic Rebbetzin Marlene Rosenberg, reminded, "The number one reason for having the retreat is Yeshua. He is to be kept front and center in what transpires." With her husband, Jan and Marlene lead Beth Zion located in Jackson, New Jersey.

"I was overwhelmed with the heart of Adonai," relayed Emily Snyder, of Congregation Beth El Gibbor in Easton, Pennsylvania. "The message about trusting God called me to a higher level of righteousness in a specific relationship that had not been wholly glorifying to Him. I felt convicted by my battles concerning a situation with a co-worker, which I found oppressive."

Four panelists expounded on the theme by teaching how to overcome in prayer, love and life. Using themselves as examples, the presenters challenged and encouraged those attending by sharing commonplace situations. Not content to communicate a "mountaintop experience" that would quickly fade once back home, practical tips were given to illustrate how to achieve and maintain the victory. "When we turn our focus on the Messiah, we master fear," exhorted Miriam Nadler from Word of Messiah Ministries. She advised participants not to let anxiety quench the daily success promised by God.

The overriding lesson over the three days was, "Don't listen to the lies of Hell." "Be aware of the enemy's tactics to isolate and draw us into condemning ourselves," advised Rebbetzin Gloria Brawer of Aytz Chaim Messianic Congregation in Boca Raton, Florida. Referring to Revelation 12:11, she proclaimed, "We can defeat the enemy through the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimonies." As to the source of this transformational power, Ronna Cohen, of Jewish Voice Ministries, focused on the *Ruach HaKodesh* (Holy Spirit) and His ability to lead followers to victory.

Using a variety of topics, more than 20 teachers addressed cross-cultural and generational issues. "Most of them had ten-minute slots to speak about one aspect of the theme," Marlene Rosenberg explains. "Younger women were invited to be mentored and trained by those who are older and established in the movement." She urged the ladies to welcome newcomers, emphasizing that cliques were not allowed.

"Our schedule is different in the way that it's programmed," she continues. "We do not

have a plenary speaker. Even though I am the overseer of the event, I serve simply as the mistress of ceremonies. My goal is to delegate to as many people as possible. In the beginning I did everything. Now I take pleasure in seeing God raise up others." Applying this thought to the young adults present, Marlene indicates, "In our most recent group, six of our presenters were in their late 20s or early 30s. We want to give those who show promise an opportunity to mature and shine.

"The initial collaboration was accidental. We planned a smaller gathering but overbooked the rooms. The only thing to do was open it up and start calling the synagogues I knew. I was amazed that almost everyone was interested in joining us! That first event we had 60 women from nine fellowships. By word of mouth, we doubled in size the next time." This year, 168 ladies from 28 venues and 14 states filled the rooms at Pennsylvania's Tuscarora Inn. "We always had it in our minds what the ideal conference would look like, but our retreat planning committee never dreamed we'd have the option to play it out in real life."

Many attendees have found the retreat to be a shelter where struggles can be confessed without condemnation. "In this type of atmosphere we can be vulnerable, hearts can be mended and

willingly reach across—or even ignore—denominational ties. There is an unusual level of authenticity and honesty even among the teachers, who are often leaders or leaders' wives."

At the Saturday afternoon workshops, Patricia Bucko, a member of Beth Zion, instructed the art class. "Viewing the various age groups, backgrounds and cultures, I was reminded yet again of how our Creator delights in variety," she observes. "Yes, we are one in Messiah, yet unique as daughters of the King of Glory. As brushes and paper produced a symphony of color and design, I sensed that for many of us, art is a form of therapy. Souls are quieted, refreshed and restored."

"I have been blessed here—and each of the eight retreats have been the best ever," quips Peggy Michalchuk,



made new, and the ladies can really get to know one another," Marlene elaborates.

Beth Zion Women's Retreat has become a sanctuary of great refuge for many," offers panelist Messianic Rebbetzin Ranjienna Shulman, from Beth El Gibor in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. "We are challenged to grow, and we're not judged for who we are or what we are going through. We find a lot more in common than not. We come from different localities, but know that we will end up in the same place—with our Messiah."

"What I appreciate so much is the welcome and acceptance I find," enthuses speaker Melissa Moskowitz from Jews for Jesus. Somehow, we

Congregational leader from Lion of Judah, Yardley, Pennsylvania. "One of the greatest gifts is the establishing and renewing of relationships among those in the Body of Messiah. During the mealtimes, I have gotten to hear amazing personal testimonies of salvation, healing and deliverance, and how God is advancing His kingdom through ordinary—actually extraordinary—women."

"I've been coming for approximately five years," says Ethel Chadwick, who directs worship at Shema Yisrael in Rochester, New York. "These events are wonderful and refreshing. We bask in the Lord as we enjoy friends—both new and

old. This was my third occasion to lead a choral workshop. It's always exhilarating and fulfilling to see the end result. After a very short rehearsal, we join in perfect harmony and sing our praises, directing them to an audience of One. I always look forward to getting together, and I thank God for the sweet fellowship that lasts until we meet again." **MT**

**Top:** Miriam Nadler leads an enthusiastic and heartfelt worship time

**Middle:** Some of the speakers included Gloria Brawer, Marlene Rosenberg and Merryll Eaton

**Lower:** Dancing and singing express the joy of women's worship

All photos: Grace Hudacek