

**WOMEN & PRESCHOOL PROGRAM
LANCASTER AREA
Doris Nolt**

Recently, the 31st annual Assembly of the Women & Preschool (W&P) Advisory Group was held at Mellinger Mennonite Church, Lancaster, Penn. Co-sponsored by Lancaster Mennonite Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference, the W&P Group serves as a coordinating council for women's ministries and preschool programs in many of the Conferences' churches.

This ministry movement was birthed nearly 40 years ago in the Lancaster area when churches began to look for fresh ways to connect with their neighborhoods. Several tuition-based preschools were started, with women's programs begun simultaneously to give mothers an opportunity to enjoy fellowship while their little ones were in classes. There was also a need to provide childcare for children too young to attend the formal preschools, so "story hour" programs were started for infants and toddlers.

Many churches offered only the women's programs and childcare for the children, instead of a formal preschool. There are about 50-60 such programs held in Lancaster area Mennonite churches, providing weekly or semi-weekly teaching/fellowship times for women, both young and older alike. Over the years, we have developed a Directory of speakers who are willing to address different topics such as home-making/budgeting skills, marriage and family issues, or in-depth Bible studies.

As the women's programs have grown, so have the children's. Creative teachers along with church volunteers plan delightful activities for the little ones, so that their mothers are free to enjoy a few hours of respite time in the middle of a busy week.

It is precisely the leaders of these women's and children's programs that our Assembly targets each year. The annual program we present offers teaching hints, program ideas, and encouragement to keep their teams ministering to the mothers and children from their communities. We praise God for the impact these programs are having in the surrounding communities.

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