

# Living More with Less

MARIANNE PETERS



When I was first married, I came across a copy of the *More-with-Less Cookbook*, written by Doris Janzen Longacre, a Mennonite and an advocate for the poor. Its approach to mealtime was to offer meals with simple ingredients and a focus on good health and economy versus gourmet ingredients and artistic presentation. The cookbook also connected food to hospitality, spirituality, and celebration: a deeply Christian concept.

Doris Janzen Longacre followed the cookbook with her landmark book *Living More with Less*, which has now been published in a thirtieth anniversary edition. In this book, Longacre demonstrates how to integrate our daily walk of faith with a passion for caring for the planet and its people. It's more than a lifestyle; it's a calling for us to live out Jesus's command to "love one another."

Longacre doesn't offer "ten easy steps to a more sustainable life." While she was penning the book, she was dying of cancer—in fact, the book was not quite finished when she passed away at age thirty-nine. Perhaps because she knew her time was short, the book's tone is both serious and urgent, though written with a deep awareness of God's grace. Above all,

Longacre wanted to emphasize that small actions by those of us in the West will add up to change for the whole world.

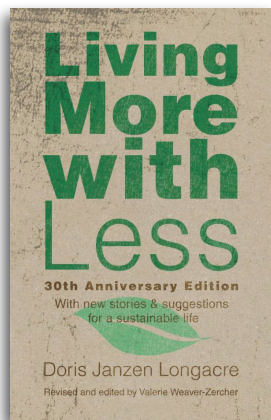
"Conserving resources at home and taking on economic and political issues are as inseparable as the yolk and white of a scrambled egg," she writes. "[O]nce you walk into a supermarket or pull up to a gas pump, you *are* part of the economic and political sphere. Certainly your influence is small. But whether you conserve or waste, it is real. *Many* people using or not using affects things in a *big* way. Gathering up the fragments of our waste—recycling, conserving, sharing—is a logical and authentic beginning. Such actions are the firstfruits of the harvest of justice. They are the promise of more to come."

*Living More with Less* was originally published in 1980, arriving on bookshelves at the end of the energy crisis of the seventies, when people were looking for a new way of living more lightly on the planet. Longacre's Mennonite background had taught her how to live lightly, but she wanted to give people "standards" they could use as a guide to sustainable living, rather than "rules" to follow. She came up with five: do justice, learn from the world community, nurture people, cherish the natural order, and nonconform freely. The word "freely" is important. Longacre recognized that living a truly just and sustainable life in North America was (and still is) very difficult, so she emphasized God's grace and the need to take gradual steps of obedience.

The new edition of her book has also arrived at a time when energy conservation is making headlines, and Longacre's original ideas still resonate. As in the original, her text is accompanied by voices of other Christians walking through the challenges of living sustainably. Contributors consider such questions as: Are all Christians called to radical obedience? What does a simple life look like for me? What if I don't want to hang my clothes on the line or wait until my shoes wear out to buy another pair? Is it wrong to want a beautiful house? Am I allowed to watch movies or have a Facebook account? How do I live in community? Like the author, the other contributors don't offer pat answers. They do provide examples, explanations, and biblical principles to help us live with God's priorities in mind.

Longacre's constant refrain is that living by kingdom values is a joyful journey and one that benefits all of us. She urges us to be aware and to live compassionately in the face of the world's problems, despite the easier road of denial or passivity. Author Brian MacLaren sums up her message in the book's afterword: "It is our joy to live with less so that others may have enough." ■

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**Living More With Less: 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition**

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