

SOPHIA

W I S D O M

V. 1

Volume 1, 1991

*Christ the power of God
and the wisdom (sophia)
of God
I Corinthians. 1:24*

*A woman who fears the
Lord is to be praised.
Prov. 31:30*

*The fear of the Lord is
the beginning of
knowledge
Prov. 1:7*

*... My Daughter
... accept my words and
store up my commands
... cry aloud for
understanding
... look for it as for silver
... search for it as for
hidden treasure
... for the Lord gives
wisdom (sophia)
Prov. 2:1-6*

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EDITORIAL

by Ester DeFehr



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"Sophia" is a vision originating from the Covenant Fellowship Ladies Group. It is a magazine for and about women. It is our desire that this publication be a ministry of the church, through which artists, poets, writers, and professionals, in and out of the home, may develop their gifts and their calling. Expressing their convictions, stories, and experiences of life as it happens to them will enable them to do this. Our goal is to draw in participants of all ages, every social and economic stratum, and marital circumstance. We see this publication as an avenue where we could all get to know each other better as we listen to each other's stories and dreams, thus uniting us with purpose of mind. A lot of good things came of the Women's Conference of the Mennonite Brethren last April 1991. I feel this could be a forum where we can continue speaking to each other between conferences.

The name "Sophia" was chosen because it is the Greek word for wisdom. Wisdom has always been regarded as a gift of revelation. In publishing this magazine I believe we will be encouraged to speak about those things that God has revealed to us as women with a calling; women of vision who ask for insight and understanding about the mysteries in our lives.

For this issue we have chosen as our theme "belonging". It is the desire of every human being to feel a sense of acceptance from other people with whom they feel love and compassion.

Ao tells us her story of how she fled the Thai refugee camp to become a new Canadian. She gives us tips on how we can help new Canadians at "McIvor" feel like they are a part of our church family.

Lorraine Balzer shares with us what it is like to suffer from a broken marriage. She tells us how the church was able to help her and make her feel like she belonged.

Edna Enns reflects on her past, when she lost her first husband. She gives us some helpful suggestions on how to respond to widows, so that they too feel like they belong.

The five ladies groups in our church let us know who they are, what they have been doing, and what is planned for the coming year.

Wally Kroeker, with his great wit tells us about a cholesterol club while Eleanor Martens stretches our thinking with a Christian approach to feminism.

Hildegard Isaak reviews the book *Alone - A Search for Joy* by Katie Funk Wiebe. She strongly encourages all of us to read it.

Erika Block, our representative for women's concerns, introduces us to her job and tells of an important conference coming up in late winter.

Carolee Neufeld, from the St.. Vital M.B. Church introduces us to their version of Shabbat and tells of the many positive aspects of this Saturday evening meal.

Irma Epp closes this first issue of "Sophia" by going to the source of wisdom for a Biblical view point.

We would like to invite you to share your wisdom with us. This publication is based on your opinions, experiences and convictions. Your response in the form of suggestions or opinions may be directed to M. Elaine Dyck (box #6) or Linda Penner (box #250). Ω

BELONGING: Ao's Story

as told to *Sophia*

Ao Phanthavongs' story reads like a spy novel. Born into a family of considerable means in the exotic Indo-Chinese country of Laos, life was more than pleasant. Under the keen eye of doting parents and attentive servants, Ao's future appeared bright.

Yet, in almost an instance, her life would be irrevocably altered, with serious consequences. The country was experiencing great political upheavals, culminating in a dramatic coup. Communist rebels emerged as the victors in the struggle, and Laos fell under a reign of terror. In a very short time, these events would pro-

foundly affect her own family.

Ao's father held a prestigious post as a Colonel in the now fallen army, and he became an obvious target for retaliation by the aggressors. Ao was a mere girl of sixteen when her father was forcibly taken from their home, not to be heard from for two years. Her own future was in jeopardy, because the Communists were rounding up the country's youth for indoctrination. Her mother's concern for her children's well-being grew with each passing day. She questioned the future that she knew would be theirs if they continued to live under these conditions.

Decisions needed to be made quickly, because time was running out. In order to escape this fate, they had two options: go into indefinite hiding from the secret police or seek amnesty in a refugee camp. Ao's mother decided the latter was the only solution.

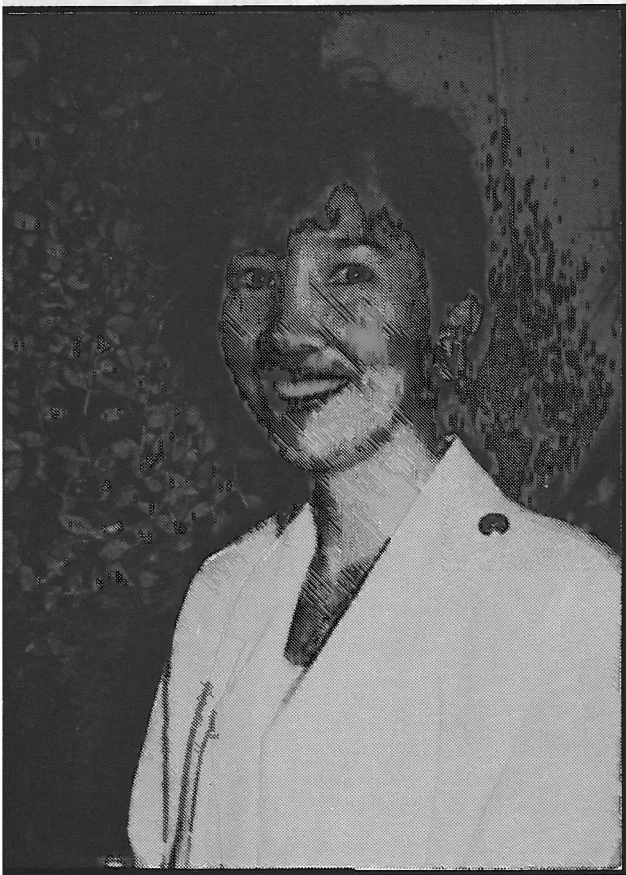
She asked her children to pack a light suitcase on the pretense that they'd be spending the night with an aunt. In reality, she had made alternate arrangements. What she hadn't told them was that once they got there, someone would be waiting to take them to a sequestered forest where they would lie in wait until yet another contact would come and expedite them swiftly to the refugee camp. The plan seemed fool-proof, except for one small detail. They'll never know who was at

fault, but their time and the driver's time had not been synchronized! Ao and her companions were forced to spend an uncomfortable and sleepless night hidden among the trees, all the while feeling strangely vulnerable. Every square mile of the country was under constant surveillance. No one in the group dared allow themselves to think of being caught, because they knew only too well the severity of the consequences. Fortunately, with the dawn of day came their long awaited ride, and the night of suspense ended without incident.

Life in the refugee camp was not pleasant, especially for a lovely young girl who till now was accustomed to more gracious living. Yet Ao's uncomplaining nature was already self evident. She chose instead to look for the pearls. It didn't take long before she found one. His name was Phet. The seed of friendship quickly blossomed into romance, and camp life became bearable for the young couple.

Eighteen months passed. Then news came that Ao and Phet were on their way out! Both had been selected by sponsors in Canada, and arrangements were made to bring them over. This was good news to them except for one small hitch: Ao's sponsors were a Mennonite church in Sardis B.C. whereas Phet was enroute to Winnipeg under a program from the Federal Government. Never-the-less, they rejoiced with the fact that they were finally released from the meagre existence that the refugee camp provided.

Ao was warmly received into a committed congregation, who made themselves available to her for any of



her needs. They gently eased her into the Canadian way of life. Ao faced many challenges, but it helped to know that she had the support of a loving community.

Phet, on the other hand, had a vastly different initiation to Canadian "hospitality". Upon arrival at the Winnipeg International Airport, a man from the government agency gave him a cool reception, drove him to a federal

building downtown, and left him at the door. Once inside, an impersonal federal employee scribbled - (in English) - an address on a piece

of paper, and motioned for Phet to take it. He was then dismissed and left to his own devices. No one in the Immigration Department bothered to consider the fact that English letters are meaningless to someone coming from the East. Phet simply accepted this as part of the experience in his newly adopted country. To this day he has no idea how he managed to find the address on that slip of paper. (It turned out to be his new place of residence.) What a lonely experience that must have been — to walk into an empty flat, with the realization that the only person he knew in Canada was hundreds of miles away. Phet was determined to keep his spirits up, though. He found employment, and shortly thereafter began corresponding with Ao, in the hopes that they could soon be reunited. When Phet became better established, he wrote to Ao, asking for her hand in marriage.

Ao, in the meantime was learning English, working, and attending the Mennonite Church. When she received Phet's proposal, she eagerly began making inquiries as to how their reunion could be arranged. Fortunately for her, the pastor of her church had connections in Winnipeg through his old friend Allan Labun. Between the two of them, preparations were made to receive Ao into

McIvor Ave. M.B. Church.

As excited as she was to see Phet again, Ao came with some trepidation. She would be jobless, still struggling with the English language, and once again be among strangers.

However, once she arrived, her anxieties melted away when it became apparent that the McIvor people showed a willingness to help her in any way they could. Two women

in particular reached out in a practical way, helping to find the special things that make any young bride's wedding truly memorable.

One couple in

particular drew Ao in to their family circle, adopting her as their daughter. Many would know this couple as Willie and Nellie Martens, but to Phet and Ao they are "Mom" and "Dad".

The signing of the nuptials did not invoke a fairy tale existence for the newly-weds. Adjusting to Canadian culture, especially when they didn't understand the reasoning behind some of the customs required patience. Colloquial expressions and idioms that are so prevalent in our speech were like stumbling blocks for them. Not being able to understand a simple joke only increased their sense of isolation. They missed their loved ones and longed for others like the Martens who would draw them in. More importantly, they longed for people to show interest in their own rich culture.

Ao sought in her own way to reach out to those around her by attending the Ladies Fellowships at church and any other social events announced in the bulletins. Then one day, she had an idea to hold a social event of her own. She announced in the bulletin that on a cer-

tain Sunday evening, she and Phet and their fellow expatriates would present a Laotian Festival. They descended on the church with bountiful platters of specialty foods, intricate costumes, music and stories indigenous to their homeland. Everyone who attended came away with a greater appreciation for the new Canadians and the life they had once known.

We live in a country which boasts a composite of wide-ranging cultures. Phet and Ao are two new Canadians who have demonstrated by their patience and charm that they are capable of accepting cultural changes. There are still many turnstiles and crossroads ahead in their new country. New Year's Day on our calendar is marked January 1, but in Ao's heart, it remains April 13. The practise of waiting for dinner invitations does not come easily for someone who is used to dropping in on friends for a repast unannounced. "Don't give up!" is Ao's urgent request. "Be patient with new Canadians."

If it's the outer layers that keep us apart, what's holding us back from peeling them away? We may discover we're not so different from each other after all. Perhaps it's time to have another cultural festival. Ω



Ao and Phet with their children Nora and Billy.

BELONGING: Divorce

by Lorraine Balzer

How does a separated or divorced person feel a sense of belonging to a body of believers that disagrees with the essence of divorce? Divorce is a reality in the church today. More and more of our church families are touched by this pain. We can not hide from it or ignore the facts anymore.

There have been many discussions in Sunday School classes, Bible Studies and at church council meetings on this subject. We all agree that divorce is not how God intended a marriage to end. Amongst the Christian community, numbers of divorce are not quite as high, none-the-less they do occur.

A Christian does not expect the church to condone divorce. But being labelled "divorced" in itself creates many disturbing feelings within the individual. Let me explain in brief some of the feelings, emotions, and pain associated with separation and divorce. It does not matter if the separation comes as a surprise or if there is a parting of ways, a severe sense of loss (similar to death of a spouse) occurs. Often our identities are so intertwined with our spouses that a person feels a loss of identity. There is a sense of shock, disbelief, sometimes denial, and wondering where our faith fits into all of this. Suddenly life will never be the same.

Changes are abundant, not just that your spouse is gone, but how do you live financially, where do you live, how do you fit in amongst your "couple friends", and much more . . . It is overwhelming.

Apart from all of this is the emotional strain of dealing with your feel-

ings of failure in the relationship and low self-esteem, a direct result of rejection. This can be one of the lowest periods in a person's life. Many equate the word 'divorce' with failure. At this point the comfort of knowing that one belongs to a church brings a sense of relief. It is probably the only 'constant' in your life.

Amongst all the changes that occur the one unchanging factor (hopefully) would be the love and acceptance from the church family. A lot of healing needs to take

place. This process can take many years to complete. A divorced person does not expect anyone to understand what they are going through, although those who've experienced pain can empathize, regardless of how the pain was inflicted.

As a church, what are our responsibilities to our members and non-members who are experiencing separation and divorce? We've had numerous sermons and discussions on Christian love and acceptance.

This would be the most important role the church family would have in helping make the person feel they "belong".

This can be demonstrated in many different ways:

> Directing the person to

Christian counselling. Counselling is an important part of the healing process.

> Helping the person feel like they belong even though they are not a "couple" anymore, but an individual with their own identity.

> Maintaining a support system or net-working amongst individuals who have gone through similar situations. The support of a Ladies Bible Study group for me was paramount. The prayers for inner peace were certainly an integral part of my recovery.

As a long-time church goer at McIvor, I was included in a care group. Through this I also experienced the support of a deacon couple. The role of the deacons in a separation/divorce situation is not clearly defined, although the many phone calls, invitations, and commitment in prayers were a great support and source of strength to me.

Many of us have or will experience periods in our lives where a sense of belonging to the Church Family will be of utmost importance. For me it was the love shown to me

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and acceptance of my situation which drew me to, rather than away from the church. To feel a sense of belonging, one needs to feel loved. As Christians we preach hope, love and faith are the necessary tools for a Christian life,

but the greatest of these is "Love". As it says in Hebrews 13:5, "Never will I leave you . . . never will I forsake you". This is what the Lord has promised us. As loving Christians we need to take this seriously and apply it to our lives. Ω

BELONGING: Widowhood

by Edna Enns

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James 1:27.

Just after my husband passed away (March 1983) I was asked by our Ladies Fellowship if I would give a talk on 'What is it like to be a widow'. The following is an excerpt of that presentation.

When I was a widow, there was a group called H.E.L.P., Healing, Edifying, Lonely, People. I attended many of their meetings and found them very helpful. I found what I had experienced was very similar to what other widowed people had been through.

The funeral service of a spouse is only the beginning of a long struggle. When my husband died, I felt severe pains in my body. I thought it must certainly be cancer. Other widows I talked to had similar experiences. One lady told me she felt severe chest pains; another said her head seemed to be squeezed by a vise. My doctor told me these feelings were quite normal.

I couldn't trust my own judgment. Often I'd walk into a store to shop, only to come home empty handed. Some days were particularly difficult. Friday nights were the worst.

The church community can help in many ways. The best way is to be honest and sincere. A hurting person feels very sensitive. One gentleman told me at the viewing if I needed help with my car to just call him. One lady gave a quick call almost every week. The conversations lasted less than five minutes. Other widows also received help. One told me meals were brought to her house, another

was offered financial help from her church, yet another had a fresh loaf of bread left on her doorstep. It was still warm.

One must be careful what they say to a widowed person. Comments I have heard said by Christian women to widows are - and these are quotes, "You are not the only widow" or "The year of mourning is over" or "You are the best suited from the family to be a widow because the others would not be able to cope as well". I was told "Your husband is now at a better place". Of course I knew that to be true, but when one is hurting so much, that statement is no comfort.

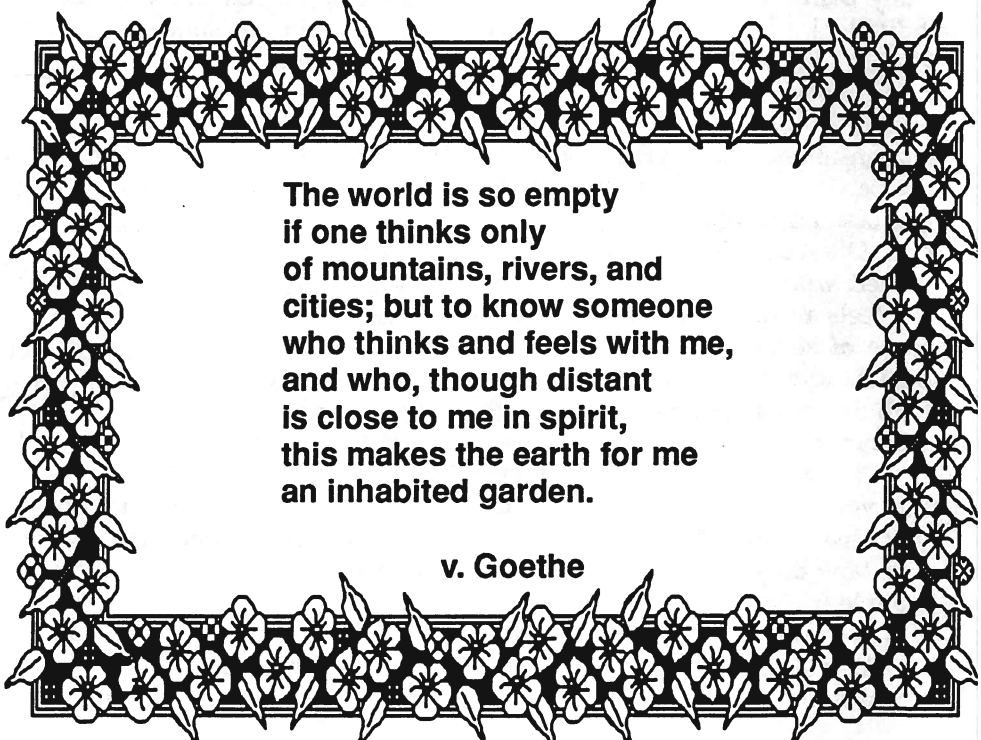
For me the second year was more difficult than the first. Loneliness really set in. Everything I did I did by myself.

Being alone isn't all bad though.

There is a freedom a widowed person has which I came to enjoy. I read many good books, I walked for miles every day, and I went back to work.

However one widow was quite apprehensive. She had been on a date but she felt very strange that a man other than her husband was in the same car with her. Dating is another sensitive issue to widowed persons. We must remember though, widowed people are free to marry. If God sends someone into their life in six months or six years, this should be no reason for gossip.

May the Lord help all of us to see the needs of others who are hurting, not only of the widows. Sometime ago a lady shared with me her concern for her teenage daughter. When this girl made a decision for Christ, the mother shared her happiness with me. It was a wonderful experience. The burden is easier when it is shared, and the joy is doubled when it is shared. Ω



The world is so empty
if one thinks only
of mountains, rivers, and
cities; but to know someone
who thinks and feels with me,
and who, though distant
is close to me in spirit,
this makes the earth for me
an inhabited garden.

v. Goethe

Afternoon Ladies Fellowship



The Afternoon Ladies Fellowship has 40 women attending their group. They meet at 1:30 in the Church every 2nd and 4th Tuesday of the month, with an average attendance of 30-35. Members of this group range in age from early 50's and above. Their president is Edna Enns.

Every Tuesday the meeting is opened by the president with welcoming remarks. An invocation fol-

lows, lead by one of the women. Group business is then taken care of. Occasionally the group has had a time of sharing after the business. Then the devotional is heard. This is sometimes replaced with a book report or someone's life story, which has proven to be very popular. One of their Tuesdays is designated as mission emphasis day. A special collection is taken at this time which is

then dispersed at the end of the year. The afternoon is closed with a word of prayer and then coffee is served.

Twice a year the women invite their husbands or a friend to a social event. It is held at Christmas and at the beginning or end of their year.

Group members enjoy projects that range from crafts, to painting and knitting. The group also sews blankets, Tina Janzen being in charge. Four times a year the women get together with other women of the

Church to sew blankets for M.C.C.

Their first meeting will be on September tenth with missionary Betty Lavender. Book reports will continue to be a part of their afternoons and a craft day is planned. Ladies' groups from other Churches will be invited to spend an afternoon with them this fall. Ω

Ladies Fellowship Circle

The Ladies Fellowship Circle has between 20-30 women attending their group. They meet in Church every second Tuesday evening at 7:30. A president has not yet been chosen for the fall.

Their meetings begin with singing. They choose their songs out of the "Sing Alleluia" and are accompanied by piano or accordion. Business is taken care of after the singing followed by scripture reading. A devotional or testimony is next. The women take turns doing this. The evening is closed with refreshments which the women also take turns providing.

A special speaker is brought in 3 or 4 times a year. One such time is in spring for missions night. This is when an entire evening is dedicated to missions. A special collection is taken which is dispersed a few weeks later.

Their projects range from knitting to crocheting to decoupage.

Several special events are planned each year with their husbands or a friend. A Christmas banquet is held in Church. Besides the meal the evening includes a program with a special speaker and table games. This past year, Jon and Mary Anne Isaak were the guest speakers.

They spoke and showed slides from their two year stay in Kikwit, Zaire where they taught for M.B.M./S.. Valentines Day is celebrated but does not always include husbands. Something special is also done for Mothers' Day.

This past year they have been studying women of the Bible.

In fall they will continue having speakers in and having Bible studies. In October, a guest speaker from Pregnancy Distress will come to speak to the group. The women will also be visiting Donwood Manor and presenting a program for the residents. Ω

Friendship Circle

The Friendship Circle was started by Dora Dueck in 1975 as a newly marrieds' group, before the establishment of McIvor Ave. M.B. Church. Four original members still remain; Viola Epp, Edith Unruh, Valerie Loewen, and Marlene Regier.

Twenty-three women attend the Friendship Circle, with 15 of those attending regularly. Their age group is late 20's to late 30's. They meet on the 1st and 3rd Monday evenings of the month. Their president is Marion Olfert.

A typical evening for them starts with coffee. The meeting then opens with prayer and announcements. The Bible study which follows makes up a major part of the evening. After the Bible study, prayer requests are taken. If a large group is present, smaller groups are formed for prayer. The

evening is sometimes closed with a song. They plan to make singing a larger part of their meetings in fall.

Some of the projects this group enjoys range from quilting, to singing, to "clowning around".

Several outings are planned each year. Last Christmas they went on a hayride at Miracle Ranch. They ended the year with a B.B.Q. and a weekend at the lake.

Two books have been chosen for study this fall and will be used alternately. The first one is called "Woman's Workshop Series on Faith" by Martha Hook. This book comes with a leadership guide which a special speaker will use to lead the study. These studies, along with special musical numbers will take place in Church once a month. Topics that will be covered include: choices for



Marion Olfert - president

women; self esteem; budgeting; and the book of Esther.

The second book to be studied is "A Woman's Path to Godliness" by Martha Reapsome. These studies will take place in homes. Topics studied will correspond with the topics studied in "Woman's Workshop Series on Faith". Time will be given for sharing, prayer, and prayer requests.

In the past it has been difficult to keep to a time schedule. This year it is hoped that having a more structured evening once a month in Church will help them make the most of their time together. Ω

Womens's Bible Study Fellowship

Eighteen women attend the Women's Bible Study Fellowship. They meet in homes on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of the month. Their age group is late 30's to 50's. Their president is Marsha Friesen.



Bible study begins at 7:30 with coffee and is followed by business and announcements. The Bible lesson which is next lasts 30 to 45 minutes. The women take turns leading the lesson, which covers a chapter in the Bible. Discussion takes place throughout this time. This is followed by prayer time when prayer requests are taken. They break up into smaller groups to pray. The evening is closed with more coffee.

Projects enjoyed by this group include aerobics, crafts, sewing, baking, and golfing.

The women get together socially twice during the year, once is at Christmas. They go out for dinner and then to someone's home for a program and dessert. The year is ended with a weekend at the lake.

This fall they will be studying the book of Amos with the help of a study guide. Their first meeting will be on September 3rd at Marsha Friesen's home, 74 Delbrook Crescent. Ω

Covenant Fellowship

The Covenant Fellowship is a daughter group of the Women's Bible Study Fellowship. It was started by Ester DeFehr and Ingrid Martens at

the request of Irma Epp and Marlene Janzen. The Women's Bible Study Fellowship was becoming too large and it was felt that the needs of the



Cyndy Regier - president



young mothers were not being met. Their first meeting was on November 15, 1989, with 6 people attending.

There are now 23 women attending Covenant Fellowship. They meet in homes every other Tuesday at 7:30. They range in age from early 20's to early 30's. Their president is Cyndy Regier.

This past year began with Paul Patterson who spent two Tuesday evenings talking about New Age. Several meetings were then given to testimonies from women in the group and from another Bible study group. The rest of the year was spent studying Ephesians using a study guide.

Social events of the year included dinners, a costume party, car rally, sleep over and B.B.Q. at the lake.

This fall they will be studying "The Joy of Living - a Study of Philippians" by J. Dwight Pentecost. Ω

New Arrivals 1991

Ezra James Dahl
January 24, 1991
son of Wes and Doreen Dahl



Mark Lenard Nikolai Peters
May 3, 1991
son of Sherryl Peters

Jenelle Liann Reimer
May 15, 1991
daughter of Bill and Connie Reimer

Jenna Rose Klassen
June 28, 1991
daughter of Russ and Betsy Klassen

Kathleen Rose Dunn
August 4, 1991
daughter of Jamie and Lois Dunn

KAFFEE KLATSCH Fellowship - Sunny Side Up by Wally Kroeker

Most of us call it the Cholesterol Club. To others it's just Thursday Breakfast, or The Horse Shoe. Some have less complimentary names.

It meets every Thursday at 7 a.m. at a little cafe on Henderson Highway. The numbers vary (half a dozen to 15) but the menu doesn't. At least not much. Eggs, meat, spuds and toast. The big decision is bacon or sausage, white or whole wheat. Unless of course you're Doctor Ray,

who tries to set a good example by having "just toast". (He's the guy who came early one day and put a cholesterol chart at each place.)

We've been doing it for almost six years. Back in 1985, three of us (two from McIvor) decided out of the blue to meet for breakfast at 8 a.m.. We had four the next week and five the week after — a 67 percent increase without even trying (church growth experts take note). Turns out we en-

joyed each other's company enough to make it a habit. Maybe we liked how the cholesterol thickened our blood and thinned our minds. We bumped the hour to 7 a.m. to give us more time together without getting late to work. Our numbers grew. We don't analyze it much, but it seems we just like getting together. Some might call it fellowship, or community.

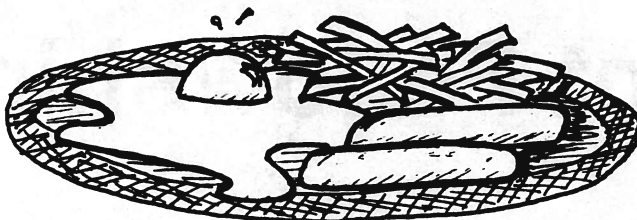
What have we talked about for the past 300 Thursdays? MB Conference Stuff, cars, politics, Conference Stuff, the Middle East, the Blue Jays, theology, Conference Stuff, McIvor church, war, Gerry Ediger's dissertation, Conference Stuff, sex . . . oops. In the process we've found solutions to many of the more pressing issues of our time, if only Mulroney and the Conference leadership would listen to us.

On a rare day someone might actually have a clever insight, or a good one-liner (Ken Reddig keeps score). Some come to learn, to listen, to share opinions or struggles, or maybe to have an inflated ego beaten back to size. Some just come to eat what one visiting theologian called "grease in three flavors".

We get some distinguished guests. Some regulars have brought their children, parents and spouses (not at the same time, of course). One new pastor in the city wanted to visit but thought he needed permission from a church official because he'd heard we were radicals. Fooled him.

Sixty percent of M.B.B.C.'s presidents have attended (the ones still living, that is). J.B. Toews, M.B.B.C. president back in the 1940s comes when he's in town. Ken Reddig once picked him up at the airport and before they were out of the terminal J.B. asked, "Do the brethren still meet on Thursdays"? He says he comes to listen but usually ends up lecturing . . . loudly.

Speaking of brethren, the group is sometimes criticized for being too male. We're working on that. Many women have been invited, and some have shown up. One Thursday when Dave DeFehr couldn't make it Ester came in his place – wearing his clothes! But few ever come back a second time, and we don't know why. Maybe they don't like eggs.



Absences are taken seriously. Miss too many times and you're apt to get a "deacon call". Some have checked in by long distance from as far off as Sarasota, Florida, and Palm Springs, California. (Actually they called to gloat – it was minus 30 outside.)

So by now you're wondering – Why an article on the Cholesterol

Club in "Sophia"? For one thing, several of the regulars are McIvor members. More important, though, is to encourage others to start their own breakfast clubs as another form of fellowship and community. Set the alarm an hour earlier, recruit a few folks and sit down together for a level of sharing you may not get in Sunday school or church. Breakfast is cheap, and it's a good way to start the day. North Kildonan has plenty of places just waiting for your business – Robin's, the Curtis, Nor-Villa, Smitty's.

And no, you don't have to have eggs. Ω

Singles Scoop

Some people take issue with being single; There are single people roaming around, feeling incomplete, daydreaming and longing for the day when they will be mailing out their wedding invitations.

Conversely there are single people who enjoy their status. It's not even a matter of their having "made their peace with it": they've enjoyed being single all along and hope to remain so. This stance, believe it or not, can be threatening to others.

Married people often appear confused when they encounter a happy single. "You mean, you really don't want to get married?" they ask incredulously. They find it inconceivable that someone may prefer living alone and remaining unattached. They say to themselves, "they don't really mean it!"

There is a prevailing attitude that when a woman is single, she "can't find anyone". Yet when a man remains single year after year, he's a "swinging bachelor", and must be having a ball.

Having said that, isn't it interesting that these same people will invite the bachelor over for meals because "poor guy, he's all by himself", but will they invite a single woman over? "Na, she can cook her own meals."

Married or single, we all long for

a relationship where we will be accepted as a complete and worthwhile person in our own right.

Should single people be singled out? If so, when, how, where? Do we single out singles when planning social events? Do singles single out married people? Are they so wrapped up in their single life routine that they don't make opportunities for including others? Are the needs of single people so different from married couples, or children, or seniors, or physically challenged, or new Canadians? If being single is an issue for someone, do we address it? How?

Is being single synonymous with being lonely, unfulfilled, desperate, undesirable, ungifted, eccentric, and full of phobias?

Who should take responsibility for the roles single people play (or don't play) in the church? Are all single people capable of fulfilling the same role? When a single person is not included in church functions, is it because there is something wrong with the church's attitude, or is the single person inadvertently alienating him/her self? Who should take the initiative in reaching out? Ω

We welcome your response to any or all of these questions. Please submit to M. Elaine Dyck box #6 or Linda Penner box #250.

AS I SEE IT: Christians Can Be Feminists

by Eleanor Martens

I have not, till recently, thought of myself as a feminist. Even now, declaring myself in this way feels like a confession of sorts . . . a "coming out of the closet". What will people think of me now? I suppose this has something to do with the bad rap feminism has generally received in our society. The media have done a good job of portraying its excesses as normative for all its followers. The church has generally gone along with depictions of feminists as angry, unforgiving men-haters who claim female superiority and call for an end to the family.

For much of my life I, too, have been unsympathetic to the "women's movement". The simplistic, often ridiculous version of feminism I witnessed did not seem to have anything to do with me. I was not an "angry" woman, nor a particularly outspoken one. I have always enjoyed being a wife and mother as much as I have working outside of the home. I like and respect most of the men I am personally acquainted with. I can't even say I've experienced discrimination to any hurtful degree. Why, then, this sudden shift in my thinking?

It seems to have begun with the proverbial "click". I accidentally came across some women's literature which struck an affirmative chord somewhere deep inside my being. Powerful, new emotions arose as I saw in print a reality I had always been sensitive to, but somehow unable to name. In short, feminism's assertions that women have been socially, politically, and economically discriminated against on the basis of gender, confirmed many of my own perceptions of the world. It explained, among many other things, why 75% of Canada's poor are women, and why women continue to earn 66 cents on every dollar earned by men. It enlarged my understanding

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of "domestic" violence and why females, its inevitable victims, are often blamed for the crimes committed against them . . . and why disproportionate numbers of women need anti-depressants just to "get them through the day".

I began to see with new eyes how women have been denied fair and adequate representation in the humanities and in the sciences. In fact, the critical thinking and events on which we base much of what we call "west-

ern civilization" have been dominated by a masculine consciousness which has largely excluded the unique perspectives and experiences of women. In bringing this to a more personal level, I discovered why, as a child, I somehow found men's conversations to be more "interesting" than women's, and why, as a teenager, I seethed inwardly at having to wait to be "asked" for a date instead of doing the asking . . .

Feminism has thus provided me with answers to many of the questions which have hung, suspended, over my life, and over the lives of many of the women I know. It is broad in scope, rich in insights, and, for me, rings with truth. This does not mean that I have accepted every means by which it chooses to express itself. I continue to feel discomfort and dismay with a number of the concerns and tactics of secular feminism. I have experienced considerable guilt and conflict as I struggled with the antagonistic stance taken toward it by the church. How could I be sure this new development in my life was of God?

Two new insights have helped me resolve this dilemma. Further reading has shown me, first of all,

that feminism is a social movement, not an ideology (rooted in centuries, not the "60's", as most of us believe). As such, it has never claimed a unified set of principles, or set of strategies to achieve its goals. It represents diverse (and sometimes conflicting) points of view and interests. One can aspire to justice and equality for women without endorsing all the ways in which this has been interpreted. And so I can protest, along with others, against "adult" video outlets in our neighbourhood or sexist educational materials in our schools without joining a pro abortion rally or favoring "gay rights".

Secondly, I have found a brand of feminism with which I do feel comfortable and "at home". "Evangelical feminism" has shown me a way to integrate this way of thinking with my Christian faith. It has been reassuring to discover that many Christian women and men are undergoing struggles similar to mine. Scholars among them are pointing out the many hidden "possibilities" in Scripture which provide deeper, richer interpretations of those passages which appear to limit women. I have found new affirmation of the full equality and personhood of all individuals represented in the teachings and example

Jesus was, and is, the friend of women.

of Jesus. Jesus was, and is, the friend of women.

Public disclosure of this

very personal journey has not been easy for me. My fear is that it will alienate and offend people, and that a "feminist" label will now become the basis for evaluating everything I say and do. That I have chosen to speak despite these misgivings will, I hope, give some sense of the urgency and conviction I feel regarding this subject. Taking my cues from the warmth and tolerance I have observed at "McIvor", I feel not only that I will get a fair hearing, but that further dialogue on what is surely a crucial issue for the church today, is a distinct possibility. Ω



SHELF LIFE

Alone - A Search for Joy

reviewed by Hildegard Isaak

Katie Funk Wiebe's book *Alone* has since its printing in 1987 become a must-read book for older women - at least that was my perception. Now having read the book, I would recommend it enthusiastically for all readers. It truly is a record of a journey which has ended in joy. I have been a fan of the author for years and remember how surprised I was the first time I met her, a petite, gentlewoman, but one with great abilities to tackle large subjects. This book is her story of survival, of lessons learned, of strength received and of God's faithfulness. It also provides for the reader some very helpful hints as well as do's and don'ts as we live our lives as a caring community.

Alone is divided into three main sections as well as an introductory chapter and an epilogue. In the introductory chapter she immediately catches our attention with its title,

"Twenty Years Later - No Longer a Widow". Here she describes her reactions as she listens and shares herself

with a group of widows - some young, with small children, so like herself twenty years ago (Walter Wiebe died in Nov., 1962).

The epilogue consists of a record of her early journey of faith as a child, young adult, and then as a young married woman trying to identify her role of personhood. Many will be able to identify with her longings and questions. Why she included a writing by her daughter as the final chapter, I'm not sure.

Part One consists of three chapters which outline the time immediately before her husband's death, as well as the experience itself which she aptly names "The Affliction". She is a widow, far from relatives, with four children aged fifteen, twelve,

eight, and four - what now? With honesty she describes the wide ranging emotional responses she had and which she encountered from others. On the first anniversary of Walter's death she could affirm Oswald

Chamber's words: "If your cup is pleasant, be thankful. If your cup is bitter, drink it in communion with God."

Part Two is the center core of the book and the nine chapters are really a log of the faith journey she has taken along side the growing realization of who she is as a person. The chapter, "Pushed Out of Noah's Ark", (where they went in two-by-two) was a stark reminder for me of how things were and sometimes still are in our couple-oriented society and church.

Each chapter is headed by a quotation and the titles she gives them are a good indication of their direction.

Let me just name three titles: "Pushed into the Boxing Ring", "Lord, I'm So Lonely", "When God Does Not Heal".

The last chapter in this section is called "Be My Comforter".

Although she gives no formulas or words,

there are many hints and examples. Gently she encourages us to be comforters, not to be afraid, but to go, to look, to listen, and to "try to understand the real human needs of people living under the dark cloud of illness or sorrow".

The three chapters of Part Three include two very personal musings - "When I am Old" and "Beyond Widowhood". As she takes "that deep breath of trust" she chooses, and encourages the reader to choose, creativity, thankfulness and "to be a sparrow not a snail". Between these two chapters is a historical overview of "Widowhood in Church and Society" from Old Testament times to the twentieth century. This book is Katie Funk Wiebe's story - who is more than a survivor. I will read it again. Ω

If your cup is bitter,
drink it in communion
with God.

a petite, gentle woman,
but one with great
abilities to tackle large
subjects.

CHECK IT OUT: Women's Concerns

by Erica Block

What are "women's" concerns? How are they different from "men's" concerns, or "people's" concerns for that matter? Or are these questions that bear asking at all . . . after all, women are still struggling on many fronts to be accepted as equal partners, aren't they?

I think we do need to ponder this question lest we exaggerate the differences between women and men and

perhaps do our own struggle a disservice.

Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty co-authors of a book called All We're Meant to Be write: "the point of the Genesis story

'When God created man he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them. He blessed them and gave them the

name Man on the day they were created.' Genesis 5:1-2.

is that men and women are not separate species with differing functions and capabilities and value. Both are created from one substance to be 'one flesh'. Just as the Godhead is not a hierarchy but a loving union of three equal persons, so God has created us male and female in His image."

It may be true that women experience life differently from men, may respond differently at times, but how much of this is socialization, built into the cultural sex roles and expectations? And how far can we generalize on this?

The problem arises not out of the actual differences in any case, but how the differences are valued or devalued. "Sojourners" Magazine May 1991, records an interview with Madonna Kolbenschlag, feminist theologian. She states: "Every young male comes into the world with a charter, and one piece of that charter is son preference, which is predominant in 90% of the world's cultures. The second part of that charter is male entitlement to power; every little boy grows up assuming he has a right to it. Otherwise we wouldn't have research that says that very few young boys ever express desire to be

female but lots of little girls want to be little boys. Now where do you suppose that comes from? They're not weird. Even children perceive who is in power in the culture."

The problem arises when differences become license for exploitation and abuse of power.

This brings us back to women's concerns. It is important that women claim their God-given inheritance as children of God.

It is necessary to address areas of injustice.

With M.C.C. Woman's Concerns have become such

things as naming the violence against women and children, working to provide equal access to women in leadership roles within the M.C.C. structure, thinking about abortion and who is being exploited, struggling with the question of the role of women in the Christian community . . . and so on.

I am the M.C.C. Women's Concerns representative for Manitoba. In this capacity I am to try to represent the concerns of Mennonite women back to M.C.C.. Since taking on this volunteer role in

It is important that women claim their God-given inheritance as children of God

spring of 1990 I have sent out a letter of introduction to all Mennonite church women's groups in Manitoba and included a brief questionnaire to test interest and concern around some of the above issues. The responses registered high interest in further discussion.

With this encouragement and the endorsement of M.C.C. Manitoba I have proceeded to bring together a

committee to begin working on a Mennonite-wide inter-Mennonite conference on the topic of domestic violence

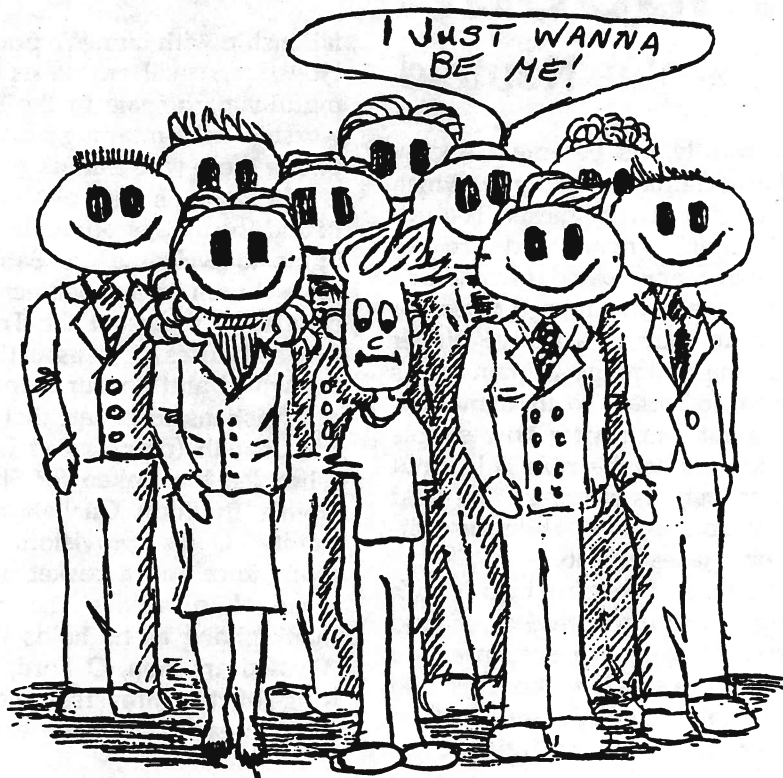
within Mennonite families. We want to create an opportunity to learn and to share on a problem that thrives in an environment of secrecy and denial. The theme is being taken from Ecclesiastes chapter three, "A Time to Heal".

The conference is being planned for late winter 1991, and there will be sufficient notice so all can include it in their schedules.

On the planning committee is Chris Lichti from Voices for Nonviolence, Lois Edmond, psychologist, and former instructor at C.M.B.C., John Regehr from Recovery of Hope, Marie Reimer (Steinbach) program co-ordinator Gracehaven Nursing Home, MaryAnn Hildebrand (Winkler) social worker and therapist, and myself, Erica Block, counsellor Pregnancy Distress Service.

Domestic violence is clearly not only a concern of women. We need to gather together in openness and trust to struggle with this difficult, pain-filled problem. But in solidarity with those women who are experiencing abuse and exploitation we need to say stop. It's time we allowed God's love and justice to permeate all relationships of life. It's time we learned to walk and live as one humanity. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile . . . male nor female. Ω

Watch for the Inter-Mennonite Conference on the topic of "domestic violence" to be held in late winter. Contact Erica Block 254-1706.



"A Stranger at the Party"



Mary Anne Isaak

For annoyance, not shame
under their covert stares
she would not give her name
nor demand theirs.

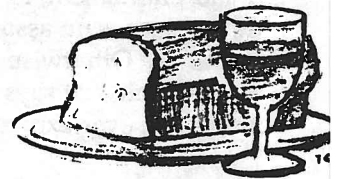
Soon everyone at the party,
who knew everyone,
eyed her with plain envy
for knowing none—

Such neighbourly mistrust
breathed across the floor,
such familiar disgust
with what they were and wore—

Until, as she was leaving,
her time out-stayed,
they tried to say they loved her;
but pride forbade.

Robert Graves

HOSPITALITY: Shabbat



Candles flicker. Grape juice sparkles in stem ware glasses. Around the dining room table hands are joined and heads are bowed.

This is a glimpse of Saturday night in our home. We call it "Shabbat", which is the Jewish word for Sabbath. For the past four years it has been a weekly celebration for us; a time of worship and bonding.

In Jewish tradition the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday. This is when the family gathers for the evening meal and the father leads in a liturgy of praise and thanksgiving. We have adopted and adapted the practice of Shabbat, with the enthusiastic help of Joyce, our Jewish neighbour.

Our initial goal was to help prepare the family for Sunday worship. My husband, Ken, and I deliberated for two years before we had the courage to try Shabbat. What began rath-

er awkwardly has become a deeply

significant family experience which we often share with guests. The impact is much greater and broader than we ever anticipated it would be.

Our meals vary from a tureen of homemade soup to a festive dinner with all the trimmings. Certain things are more important to us than what we will eat. No matter how simple the food may be, the table is laid out as attractively as possible. The food must be able to wait while the spiritual focus takes priority.

Our time of worship begins with singing, scripture readings, and prayers. At least one scripture is a psalm of praise. The choruses and hymns express our adoration to God and our desire for an intimate re-

lationship with him. We pray that the Holy Spirit will enable us to meaningfully participate in the service of worship next morning and will empower those who lead us.

In Jewish homes two candles are lit and the mother offers the prayer of lights to welcome the Sabbath. We have chosen an arrangement of three candles to represent the Trinity. My prayer focuses on Jesus as the light of the world and on our responsibility, as Christians, to radiate that light.

Challah (pronounced haullah) is a braided loaf baked for Shabbat. In Jewish tradition Challah and wine signify God's provision. We use grape juice and a basket of buns or bread. Ken speaks the words of thanksgiving as he holds the bread: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth". The

bread is passed around and everyone breaks off a piece. As we raise our glasses Ken again speaks words directly translated from Hebrew: "Blessed art thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who gives us the fruit of the vine".

Taking bread and wine has similarities to communion. Because we include children and even guests who are not yet following Christ, we are careful to maintain an emphasis of thanksgiving to God for his gracious care.

Affirmation of family members, which is done ritualistically in the Jewish Shabbat, is an aspect that we have personalized. A birthday, an imminent departure, a graduation or other special event provides the opportunity to focus on a member of the family. Ken gives personal and scriptural words of encouragement. Frequently everyone around the table becomes involved in providing affirmation by expressing appreciation, recalling special memories, or reading a suitable Bible verse.

Every time we prepare for Shabbat, Ken and I consider how to facilitate the bonding experience of those who will be around the table. We may sing "I love you with the love of the Lord". We may have a burden-bearing time where we express our concerns and pray for each other. At some point we hold hands while we sing or pray. The sense of togetherness and love is a very significant ingredient of these Saturday evening times together.

When we began having Shabbat our youngest child was six and our oldest was nineteen. At that time the spiritual menu took 15 or 20 minutes. Had we started when our children were younger we would have limited it to 5 or 10 minutes. Now, with a growing number of young adults around the table, frequently including friends of our children, we take about 45 minutes.

Clearly, the investment Shabbat is high. Preparation takes time. Creativity is important to keep it enjoyable. Participation gives everyone a sense of belonging. Flexibility is a necessity, especially in accommodating other commitments that some family members may have. Choosing themes helps to keep a focus. Spiritual authenticity makes it

relevant.

The Shabbat experience impacts our family in many ways. We are exhilarated and refreshed through worshipping together in the home. There is a realization of God's presence and power among us. Increasingly we are becoming open in sharing our spir-

itual walk with each other. This weekly highlight has deepened our bonds of love and our sense of belonging. As the candles flicker and the grape juice sparkles in glasses we extend our hands and our lives to each other and together we bring our worship to God. Ω

Carolee Neufeld is the mother of five sons, a daughter and a daughter-in-law. She and her husband, Ken, are the pastoral team in the St. Vital M.B. Church. If requested, they are willing to model Shabbat in a church group setting.

Renewal

"Take words with you . . . He shall come . . . as the rain."

Hosea 14:2, 6:3

"Oh Lord, revive Thy work in the midst of the years"

Habakkuk 3:2

Eyes shielded, the woman gazes far
into the wilderness scanning
for growth and hope of oasis
her feet stand on earth seared with
memories of joyful processions
and songs in the night.

The long season of the desert
has worn her garment fraying
first love and remembrances
of evening prayers as incense.

Her lips form vows -
words to take to the Lord of Hosts.

Mountain shadows shudder against hope
and wounds still gouge the scorched earth
but a cool wind blows low
into the valley turning
she hears the sound
of a gentle rain.

Elaine M. Pinto

A Peace Issues Conference is being planned for the weekend of November 1-3, 1991. Presentations will include: "Peace in Personal Relationships", "The Healing of Memories", "Mediation", and a Sunday sermon, "Our Historical Peace Stand".

Some of the featured speakers will be Isaac Block, Norilynn Epp and Terry Richardson (chaplain at Rockwood).

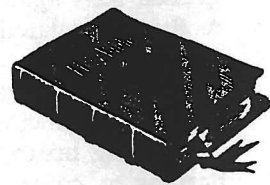
This provides an opportunity for members of the surrounding community to visit our church.

Please pray and plan to attend this worthwhile event.

Agnes Dyck (Christian Ed Committee)

FROM THE SOURCE: Unity

by Irma Epp



What is your understanding of the word "unity"? In all likelihood the words harmony, understanding, good will, fellowship, like-mindedness and wholeness come to mind. I think we would all agree that unity is not sameness or uniformity; we are not all cut from the same cloth.

Just prior to Christ's betrayal and subsequent crucifixion, he was heard speaking to his Father about Himself, his eleven disciples, and the future believers. Even though he knew how faint-hearted his disciples were going to be, that all of them would abandon him in his hour of need, he said these commendable things about them. "They have obeyed your word . . . they believed that you sent me." (John 17:6,8). Christ held these imperfect messengers and the messengers that were still to come in high regard.

During the course of his prayer he became overwhelmed by the dangers he was foreseeing. "Holy Father," he fervently prayed, "protect them by the power of your name . . . so that they may be one as we are one." (John 17:11). Later he continued, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father,

just as you are in me and I am in you . . . I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they be one as we are one." (John 17:11, 20-22). Three

times Christ addressed the matter of unity asking that they, the present and

future disciples, may be brought to complete oneness.

When Jesus spoke of "being one", he was referring to a spiritual, internal oneness, a close intimate unbroken unity of mind and spirit. J.C. Ryle in his Expository Thoughts on the Gospel paraphrased Christ's prayer this way:

Keep them that they may be of one heart and one mind, striving together, against common foes for common ends and not

broken up, weakened and paralyzed by internal quarrels and divisions. (p.434).

Christ foresaw the dangers that the church would be facing. He wanted his disciples to be one as he and the Father were one.

This is the foremost testimony that would draw men and women to the

gospel. History has proven that where there have been divisions, exclusiveness and competition between members of a church, the cause of Christ has been hindered.

How was this unity to be achieved? In the concluding sentences of his prayer Christ said, "I have revealed you to them, and will keep on revealing you so that the mighty love you have for me may be in them and I in them." (John 17:26).

In the course of Christ's prayer it became very evident that achieving unity is an ongoing process, "a being perfected into one", "a growing complete into one."

As Christ continues to

make himself known to his disciples it will be expressed in the love and consideration that they show to one another. Instead of selfish ambition and vain conceit, there will be an attitude of humility. Instead of just thinking about one's own affairs, there will be a willingness to learn to see things from the other person's point of view. Instead of a spirit of competitiveness, there will be a working together, a "talking with" rather than a "talking to."

According to Philippians 2:13, God, who is at work within his disciples, will give them both the will and the power to achieve his purpose which is to live together in harmony. This is the witness that will speak. Ω

we are not all cut from the same cloth.

As Christ continues to make himself known to his disciples it will be expressed in the love and consideration that they show to one another.

History has proven that where there have been divisions, exclusiveness and competition between members of a church, the cause of Christ has been hindered.

Tell us about your best friend. What makes your "kindred spirit" so unique, so treasured? Submit to M. Elaine Dyck box#6 or Linda Penner box #250, by mid October..