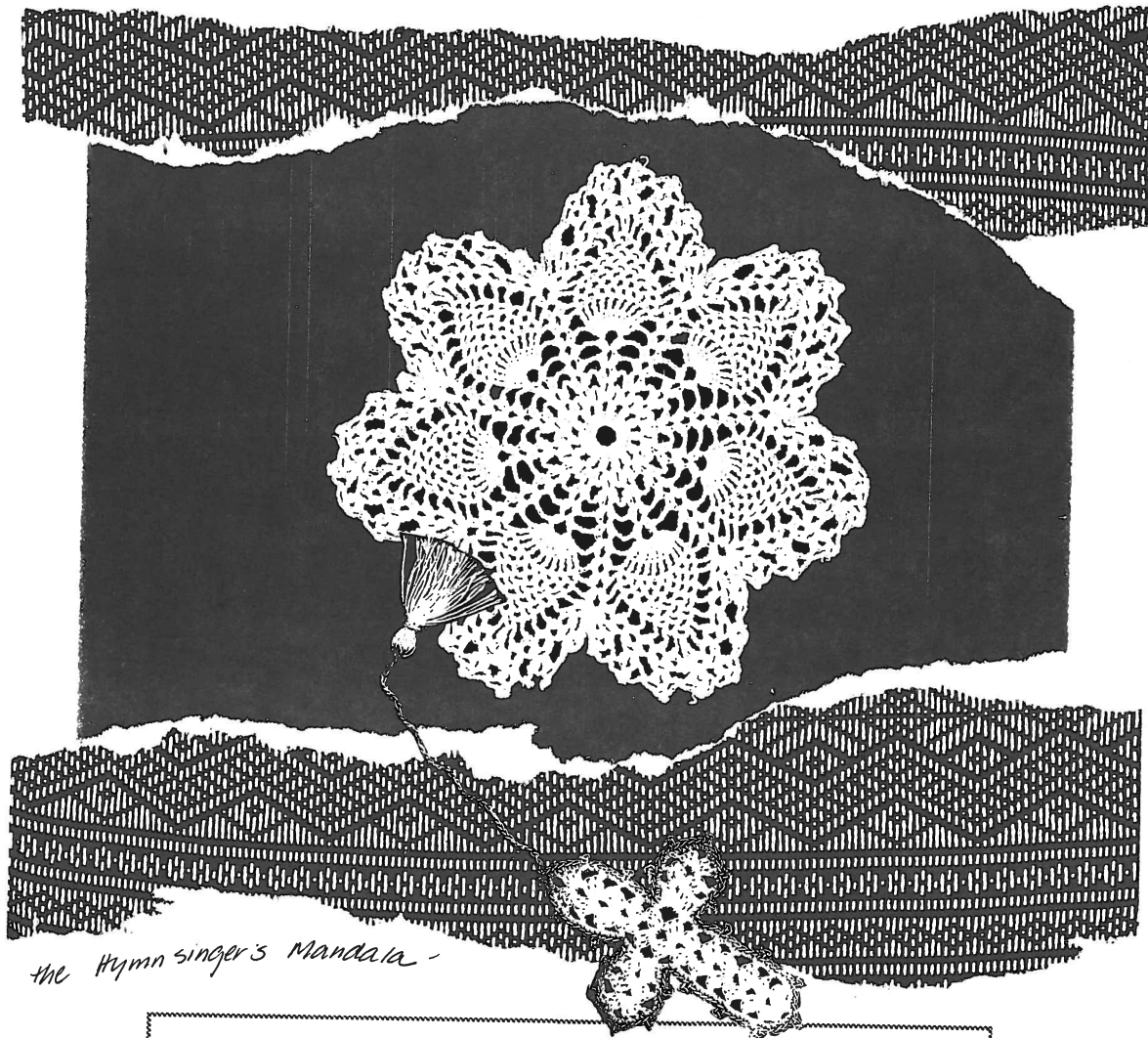


# SOPHIA

W I S D O M

*Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister."  
Proverbs 7:4a*



*the Hymn singer's Mandala -*

## PRACTISING GOD'S PRESENCE

Kathy Dueck  
REMB #11

WINTER 1994 VOLUME 4 NUMBER 1

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## MISSION STATEMENT: *Sophia*

*Sophia* offers a forum for women in the Mennonite Brethren Church. Her pages provide room for dialogue, room for women to speak to each other about their place in the family, the church, the work place and the world. She recognizes that the MB sisterhood is rural, urban and suburban; that it represents all age groups; that it includes diverse interests and experiences; that its members speak with various voices.

*Sophia* offers herself as a rallying place for women in an uncertain, changing world. She is interested in women's stories, in their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. She invites expression of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. She encourages women in the use of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Although *Sophia* was conceived and brought to birth by and for MB women and celebrates sisterhood, it is her desire to be inclusive. She hopes to challenge both men and women; she welcomes their voices and invites them into dialogue.

*Sophia* acknowledges the authority of God, the giver of wisdom, and of the sacred Scriptures, the story of God's dealing with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

### A NOTE TO OUR READERS

Welcome to our new readers. Because we ran short of copies of our last issue (*Imagining a Better World - Volume 3 Number 3*), some of you have had to wait until this issue to begin your subscription. We also regret that we were unable to fill all requests for back issues of *Sophia*. We will do our best to have sufficient copies in the future.

### KEEP SOPHIA COMING

To keep *Sophia* coming, please renew your subscription promptly and you won't miss the next issue: *Travelling Light*.

3 issues (1 year) \$9.00; 6 issues (2 years) \$17.00.

Please make cheques payable to *Sophia* and indicate church affiliation and church mailbox number if applicable. Send subscriptions to: *Sophia*, P.O. Box 28062, 1453 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB R2G 4E9.

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# The Lonely Place

We all feel, from time to time, that life is coming unseamed, its edges all frayed. An army of workshop leaders stands ready to help us stitch it all back together. They offer to help mend relationships, come to terms with the past, learn to cope with the present or plan for the future. Churches and evangelical organizations, as well as individuals, jostle each other to offer their brand of such services.

Where, in this abundance, is that quiet place where I can let the clamour and demands of career, culture, family and church slide away? Where can I become quiet enough to hear the cry of my own soul and to pay attention to the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit? Who will help me gather the fragmented fabric of my life and make it whole?

Jesus counselled his followers to "come away to some lonely place all by yourselves and rest for a while" (Mark 6:31).

Catholic women have a tradition of withdrawing to lonely places. Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich, for instance, knew how to pay attention, in solitude, to the mystery of God. Their contemplation, and their visions, led to creative thinking and living that still nourish us.

I wonder if my Mennonite foremothers were given to mysticism and the contemplative life. I picture them baking bread, raising children, keeping the household in order, tending gardens, making doilies. Eventually their vocations included teaching children, nursing the sick, caring for the poor.

In books like *Full Circle*, edited by Mary Lou Cummings and *Women Among the Brethren* by Katie Funk Wiebe I can read their fascinating and inspiring stories. I only wish their



spiritual pilgrimages could have been chronicled in as much detail as their struggle for physical survival and their devoted service to church and community. What did they think about while they baked bread?

Have the uprooting and dispersal experienced by our people, the struggle to survive, served to rule out a life of contemplation? Were time and place for devout or creative thinking an unattainable luxury? Did emphasis on community discourage individual retreat to a quiet place? Are we suspicious of mysticism because of its potential for error? How did women give each other spiritual direction?

For that matter, where do my Mennonite sisters of today find nourishment for a starved spirit?

Here and there I hear about Mennonite women who "come away" to a Catholic institution where they find both a quiet space and persons qualified to give spiritual direction. Our grandmothers would be astonished to hear that their granddaughters are seeking spiritual guidance from their Catholic sisters. It seems the Catholic church has fostered something the Mennonites have neglected.

Not that evangelicals are without their own traditions. It may have been

at camp, around a bonfire after the sing-a-long, that we made our first spiritual decisions. We have flocked to charismatic speakers who attract listeners in large numbers. These are mountaintop experiences from which we return, our spiritual motors recharged, to the ordinariness of life most of us are called to. Gradually the glow dies down and even the afterglow fades.

Attending to God must become a daily practice that we never quite master, a habit of the heart that does not become mechanical. I suspect we must learn to carve out for ourselves, from the busyness of workplace, church and family, that "lonely place." We must continually "come away" to be made whole.

The healing we experience must do more than give us a spurt of spiritual good feeling; it must sustain us in the long haul of being salt and light, faithfully and consistently, in the corner of the community in which we find ourselves. Hans Denk reminds us: "No man [woman] can know Christ truly, unless he [she] follow him daily in life."

\*\*\*

We welcome our new readers to this issue, the first in the "International Year of the Family." In it you will read how women find spiritual food and how they, in turn, offer others nourishment. As well, *Sophia* continues to offer space to ongoing conversation about women in leadership.

Our "Another Way" column will return with the next issue. We'd like to invite our readers to suggest stories of individuals, families or groups who have found "Another Way" to live out their faith. Ideally, such stories would be about the way faith modifies or alters the lifestyle in a significant way. *Sarah Klassen*

# Letters

I was glad to receive *Sophia* and have subscribed for two years.

I am glad to see a local church deal with women's issues -- the magazine is excellent and I will be reading it from cover to cover.

Jane Petkau  
Pinawa, Manitoba

Please send me a subscription of *Sophia*. The issues I have read I found to be refreshingly provocative. I appreciate your attempt to be inclusive in challenging both men and women.

Gudrun Mathies  
Elmira, Ontario

I appreciated *Sophia's* coverage of the August 5th meeting for women who "felt uncomfortable with the outcome of the vote on women in leadership." I remember hurrying to the McIvor Church that evening, asking myself: "Why am I doing this?"

For one thing, I had been challenged by Patricia Gundry's question in *Women, Authority & the Bible*: "Are women fully human?" In my seventy-one years I have often had cause to believe I was not. For another, where else could I sit in the presence of some of the most gifted people in MB circles today, all of them women? They are women who share my longing for gender equality and justice around the globe and are doing something about it.

I remember running in late, just as the last rays of the sun focused on the first speaker. She stood there, caught in its mellow light, looking almost ethereal. I sought out the last empty chair in the corner, my heart pounding wildly. I told myself, "The mind cannot comprehend until the heart listens." There was so much I wanted to know.

This meeting, and the one succeeding it on October 17, answered many questions for me. We are not without hope, and it was gratifying to know of a plan with which we could move forward. It was a path I could willingly follow. I went home exhilarated. I realized I had gone because I had to. Otherwise I would have been like the priest or the Levite, lowering my eyes as I pass my sister who has been beaten, robbed of her inheritance and in great pain.

Anne Martens  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Many thanks to all of you who make this publication what it is. I wish I could be directly involved in the discussion regarding women in the church, but my support and prayers are with you in spite of the distance. So, courage and wisdom to you.

Jenny Regehr  
Toronto, Ontario

I enclose a poem I wrote for the General Conference of MBs this summer in Winnipeg. I was about to read it when the moderator shut down the discussion.

*My Pastor is a Woman*

*I am a son of Menno,  
an arbitrary blessing.  
One chromosome difference and so  
Privileged to lead, to assert, to generate.*

*As a male considered  
not an inferior image of God  
not less rational,  
not the weaker vessel,  
not the original sinner,  
not the giver of the apple.*

*But cursed are Menno's daughters by his sons,  
Condemned to silence, to assistance, to dependency,  
Not powered to lead.*

*In days past lumped with slaves and Gentiles,  
Persons one thankfully was not created.  
The outer court was their lot.*

*A sign of the fall  
Women give birth in pain;  
A sign of the fall  
Men control how they mediate life.*

*In the world men lord it over women  
but not so among you.*

*Oh, children of Menno,  
your center will not hold,  
your spirit will die,  
if woman cannot also speak the word of God.*

*Sons of Menno in repentance give away your power,  
Hide not behind human rules divinely blessed.*

*If we are not just and compassionate  
Our daughters will not dream dreams,  
Our sons will sustain our sins.*

Al Dueck  
Fresno, California

# A Way to Hear God



Illustration: Julius Schnorr von Karelsefeld (1794-1872)

*And Mary  
abode with her  
about three months,  
and returned  
to her own house.*

*Luke 1:56*

"I found myself a spiritual director," John announced. The term my friend used sounds foreign to my Anabaptist ears. Mennonites are not known for seeking out spiritual mentors.<sup>1</sup> The concept of the individual priesthood of believers ranks high in our view of discipleship, and we question whether, by relying on a mentor, one might be relinquishing personal responsibility for the interior life. Yet the ancient practice of spiritual direction is finding growing acceptance today, and the number of Christians who seek such professional counsel is increasing. Others invest in quiet days apart at retreat centres.

One writer describes the role of a spiritual director or companion as:

analogous to that of the guide in a mountain climb or a midwife in the birthing of a child. The spiritual guide is a person who puts his/her competence at the service of the other's spiritual journey...entering by invitation to facilitate...growth.<sup>2</sup>

The biblical record of Mary's visit with Elizabeth reveals some of these same concepts. Luke's account offers a rich source of elements common to the ancient and contemporary practices of spiritual direction and personal retreat.

*1. In spiritual direction, the guide displays a maturity in the Christian walk. There is an older/younger balance, not necessarily chronological, between the director and the directee. Regular meetings impart a sense of refuge and provide space for reflection, and occasional personal retreats are encouraged.*

Luke tells us Mary sought out her

*By Elaine M. Pinto*

older cousin at the prompting of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:36). Likely in her teens, Mary was possibly inexperienced in the ways of the Lord. Elizabeth, on the other hand, knew a long journey with a faithful God in the face of bitter disappointment. The young cousin's arrival on the doorstep signalled the beginning of a three-month retreat. Elizabeth would share Mary's first months of pregnancy, rejoicing over and confirming what God had done for her. With both women still childless, there were long hours for meditating and asking questions. Daily physical work would have been minimal, as Elizabeth had withdrawn from active life (Luke 1:24) giving time for reflection.

*2. In spiritual direction, both participants respect the mystery and holiness of the Christian journey. The guide is able to identify and celebrate the Spirit's movement in lived experience, and in the interior life as discovered in the Word, or in prayer.*

The two women experienced the Holy One literally "in their midst" - in their wombs! Together they would have marvelled at this God who pierced the landscape of their personal history, changing every facet of their lives. Both welcomed the mysterious and supernatural. Elizabeth had already experienced what was now awakened in Mary. Old age and barrenness were not an obstacle for a God who did impossible things, so it was easy for her to recognize the working of God in Mary's life, even if it was not yet physically obvious.

Elizabeth regarded the work done in Mary as holy, and proclaimed this at the onset of the visit. Her confident word of faith to the young woman evoked a response. Welcomed and encouraged, Mary spoke her supreme magnificat.

*3. Spiritual direction is an ongoing process over a longer period of time. The relationship weathers the joys and disappointments of daily life, unlike pastoral counseling, which is often crisis-oriented.*

While the narration speaks of the joyful greeting and song, there must also have been low days for Mary. Misunderstanding and the possibility of stoning awaited the young virgin upon her return home (Matthew 1:19, Deut. 22:21). Both women were clearly aware of God's favour (Luke 1:25,30), but it would have been Elizabeth's task to allay fears and help Mary continue to rest in the knowledge

of that favour and to hear God's word of courage anew.

This ancient story of two women reflecting on God's work together, brought me back to my contemporary friend. John was far removed from angelic visits and Roman oppression, but he too was seeking an experienced companion for a season in his life.

"It's just so refreshing to share with another person committed to seeing God in all of life," he concluded. "Having someone help me hear what the Spirit is saying in crisis...or in ordinary events, makes God become so real."

---

#### Endnotes

1. In this article the terms "director", "guide" and "mentor" are interchangeable. The "directee" is one who seeks guidance.

2. Karen James Abra, "An Introduction to an Ancient Christian Ministry: The Practice of Spiritual Direction," in *Conrad Grebel Review*. Vol.IX, No.1 (Winter 1991) p.18.

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*Elaine Pinto is in the final year of a Master of Divinity program through the University of Winnipeg. She is active in the McIvor Avenue MB Church.*



# listening to God

By Kathleen Rempel Boschman

My husband and I recently read a devotional article entitled "Prayer is Listening." The article focused on the life of a seventeenth century monk, Brother Lawrence, who worked as a cook in the monastery. His holiness and humility were recognized by many, so much so that he became a spiritual director even to his superiors.

"Brother Lawrence learned that prayer is more than words," we read. "Prayer involves waiting. Prayer often means closing our lips so that our dear Lord might have his turn to speak. We need to allow Him the opportunity to break into our thought processes...If we are willing to wait and be silent, becoming as Brother Lawrence advises 'like a dumb paralytic beggar at a rich man's door,' we may find ourselves in conversations we never dreamed possible."

My prayer life has had its share of ups and downs. Oddly enough, the time I spent at seminary was also the time when I developed some bad habits in my devotional life. I found myself reading devotional material as a means to an end. I would look for ways to use the insights to help others in a Bible study or sermon rather than pondering how I might be transformed through them. It was not until my experience with spiritual direction at St. Benedict's Monastery that I learned the meaning of "prayer as listening."

Prior to moving to Africa, I served as a chaplain at St. Boniface General Hospital, in Winnipeg. There I learned of an eight-month course en-

titled "Ignatian Exercises" offered through St. Benedict's Educational Centre. It is an eight-month course focusing on Bible reading and prayer. Participants are best served if there is an important decision, or several, they are facing in their lives. They should be prepared to spend 45 minutes to one hour in prayer each day, five or six days per week. Weekly meetings with a spiritual director and a monthly prayer meeting with the group are also part of the course.

Many of my Catholic colleagues had completed this course. Their lives gave witness to the transforming power of time spent listening to God in prayer. While I desired their experience of prayer, I decided that with my full-time job and other responsibilities, I could not commit myself to the expectations of the course.

*The  
first week  
was spent  
in silence  
at the  
monastery*

God did not give up on me as easily as I gave up on the course. The next year I faced a major life decision - whether or not to marry the man I loved. For many women this is an easy decision. I have always had a predisposition toward indecision, however. Furthermore, I was older than many women who are deciding whether or not to marry, and I was afraid to give up the satisfaction I had found in my single life for the unknowns of marriage, despite the fact that Don was/is a wonderful man. I decided to see this as God's way of trying to draw me closer to Him in prayer and enrolled in the course.

The first week was spent in silence at the monastery. I was fortunate to receive an educational leave for this week. We were not allowed to watch TV, listen to the radio or read a newspaper. The only book we were allowed was a Bible. The monastery is located on a beautiful acreage along the Red River. We were allowed to walk, run or cycle on the grounds as long as we did not get caught up in conversation with others.

Each of the seven days was focused on a particular biblical theme. We were given four passages to meditate on each day. After the first day I thought I would go crazy. How ever would I make it through six more days of the same routine? But as I got deeper and deeper into the scriptures I was amazed at the things the Holy Spirit lifted to my mind.

At dawn of the third day, I had a dream which I will never forget. In my dream I was transported back to age three, to the time when my father



"Didn't  
you  
come  
here  
to hear  
God  
speak?"

died. I was standing by myself next to my father's coffin when Jesus walked into the room. He sat down on the only chair in the room and placed me on his lap. He then began to cry. He told me how sad it was that my father had died at such a young age. Then he reassured me that he would watch over our family and provide for us in every way. When the dream ended, I lay in bed overwhelmed by a sense of God's great love for me.

Later that day, I sat on the river bank, pondering the question of marriage yet again. In my prayer I reflected on the morning's dream. It seemed that God was calling me to have more faith in His love for me and in His guidance in my life. I told God that I had always thought that a father would be a good person with whom to discuss that question of marriage. Just then a huge gust of wind blew off the water. The voice of the wind seemed to be saying, "Just love him."

When I met my spiritual director that afternoon, I prefaced my comments by saying, "I don't have a psychiatric history and I don't normally hear voices."

The role of a spiritual director is simply to listen, to ask questions for clarification and to recommend which passages, the same or different ones, need further time in prayer. She

or he very much respects the role of the Holy Spirit in enlightening the heart. My director listened to my account and asked, "Didn't you come here to hear God speak?"

The most important learning I gleaned from my eight months spent in disciplined prayer and spiritual direction is that God is acutely aware of the pain that exists in this world at an individual, national and global level. He desires, and offers healing at all levels in a way that no counsellor or mediator can, although they are often instruments of this grace. This is important for all Christians, especially those who are prone to carry the weight of others' burdens on their shoulders.

My prayer life still has its ups and downs, but I do feel I am better at listening to God than I was before I took the course.

---

*Kathleen Rempel Boschman and her husband, Don, are in Gaborone, Botswana, with the Commission on Overseas Missions of the General Conference Mennonite Church. Kathleen is helping to develop a program for the prevention and treatment of AIDS while Don teaches theology in independent African churches.*

*Kathleen has a degree in physiotherapy from the University of Manitoba and a Master of Divinity degree from Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries in Elkhart, Indiana. Kathleen and Don are both ordained ministers. Their first child, Elisabeth (Lisa) Kathleen, was born in Botswana on January 2, 1994.*



*Don and Kathleen Rempel Boschman  
Gaborone, Botswana*

# A PASTORAL LETTER TO Mennonite Brethren Women

*By Katie Funk Wiebe*

At the 1993 Mennonite Brethren Conference in Winnipeg the recommendation that congregations decide the issue of women in leadership locally in the interests of unity and consensus was defeated (61%-39%). I did not expect the recommendation to pass, given the wording. There were too many unexplained implications. As I listened to the debate, I heard several concerns, some of which were valid, some of which lacked a biblical and theological basis. Like many others, I was disappointed.

The real question is not why didn't it pass, but what now? Where do we, as MB women, stand, particularly those who are looking forward to greater opportunities for ministry? I agonize with younger women who feel cut off and alone and don't know what direction their lives should take. Is going to seminary an option if no doors open after they graduate? Women are impatient, for they haven't got thirty years to wait, and opportunities are available in other denominations and particularly in the helping professions.

Through the years I have frequently been asked two questions: "Why do you stay with the Mennonite Brethren?" and, "Wouldn't it be better if young women interested in ministry left instead of facing disappointment year after year?" I have stayed, some others - not all - have left. The decision is an individual one. I judge none of them.

Because I have made my main contribution to the church, I can afford to continue to

be patient, but that is not the only reason I write these words.

## **Period of Despair**

After the 1981 St. Catharines Conference, I wandered in darkness for some months because hope had left me that in my lifetime MB women would become full-fledged partners in the kingdom of God.

Before the 1990 conference I was asked by the Board of Faith and Life to be a member of an

ad hoc committee to prepare a resolution regarding the ministry of women to bring to the convention. When this committee of men and women gathered in Winnipeg, I realized that this was the first time that I and a few other women had been invited to discuss with men the role of women in the MB church. For about thirty years I have been asking, sometimes gently, sometimes stridently, that the gifts of women be acknowledged. Now, I and other women present at that meeting could talk about our concerns. It was over-

whelming. I wept openly. Always, men had decided alone what to do about the women.

During that period of despair I had the opportunity to hear Roberta Hestenes, then of Fuller Theological Seminary, now a college president, as she encouraged women who had lost hope to recall that God is active in our lives even when outward signs of hope are gone. Injustice shrinks your world to a bowlful of food, to personal survival. Hope extends horizons into the future. Hope looks for solutions for the large body, not just for the self.



So I have sorted through what happened at Winnipeg to locate that hope-net that holds us secure. I have done this from time to time when I hear women in ministry prayed against (by thanking God for sending men), and when their calling is dismissed as out of the will of God and their ministry disregarded as inconsequential.

Let's avoid despair and discouragement even though aspects of the Winnipeg convention offered substantial reasons for feeling downcast. Let's live with hope for what God will do. Official blessing on women's ministry has not yet come, and we know that even when it comes, we face decades of fighting ignorance, indifference and even closed doors to women's ministry. Yet despair cannot be our response. Or silence. Some of us left the conference in disbelief, and walked away empty, dry and unable to respond. I am not asking that we fake our feelings: shock, silence and distress are normal responses to great disappointment, but we cannot stay there.

#### Signs of Hope

Though the four main speakers were men, (even though the conference has accepted women in all areas of ministry except senior pastor since the last convention), and though the number of women elected to boards was minimal (3 out of 28 positions), and though the Board of Missions and Services still uses exclusive language, asking for "couples" for missionary service, there are signs of hope:

Thirty percent (172) of the 516 delegates were women. This is a change from 1975, the first year that women were officially allowed to be seated as delegates and to be elected to conference boards and committees in the Canadian MB conference. The yearbook then referred to women delegates as "ladies." That has changed. The real change will occur when women (married or single) come as delegates in their own right, not as someone whose husband happens to be a delegate and who is therefore also asked to be a delegate.

Christine Longhurst planned and led the worship services with grace, skill, dignity and joy. Let's rejoice for her opportunity for service. And for Valerie Rempel's contribution to the Resolutions Committee and for those women who allowed their names to stand in nomination but were not elected. That also takes courage.

At the communion service, the servers included a few women. In Hillsboro, in 1990, no women served in this group.

The research of the Board of Faith and Life regarding changing our name, shows a movement toward changing "Brethren" (52.3% for, 47.7% against). That shows a desire to get away from the exclusive image we project by our name.

Men and women are buying, and I hope reading, *Your Daughters Shall Prophecy*. It is in a second printing.

MB women now have their own publication, *Sophia*. They can also turn to Mennonite Central Committee's *Women's Con-*

*cerns Report* (available for the asking) and the newsletter of Christians for Biblical Equality, *Priscilla Papers*.

At every level we could add to these signs of hope. Let's avoid cynicism and condescension. Some of us have experienced both for years and did so again at the Winnipeg conference. It is easy to label those who do not agree with us as narrow, legalistic and unsophisticated. Ridicule is not the way to inner peace and unity. Bridge building, forgiveness and reconciliation are ways to justice.

#### Networking

Hope leads to the next step - networking, with the goal of finding out who we are by name and what we are doing, individually and together. As MB women we lack a united common voice. As of now the church has heard mostly individuals speaking. *Sophia* could be that common voice.

I concluded after the Winnipeg sessions that as women we should have caucused. If that is too political a word, let's say we should have "gathered" to share ministry needs, vision and resources. At the next convention, to be held in Fresno in 1995, this type of gathering will be very important, not for political reasons but for spiritual strength. But who will arrange for such a gathering? Will the women and men who are gathered in Winnipeg be our leaders?

As women we lack experience in speaking on the floor of the convention and in participating in the subtle politicking that takes place at such gatherings. Though we may think of every convention decision as a movement of the Spirit, conventions are occasions when very human men and women gather, and by God's grace, something of what happens is Spirit-controlled, even though some of it is led by selfish motives. God can use it all. And God is using what happened at Winnipeg.

Let's keep working and praying. Let's be prepared to take risks. Now, after the convention, I feel like Caleb, who after the conquest of Canaan and the division of the land, at the age of 80, said to Joshua when the land was distributed, "Give me this mountain." I tell myself it is important to keep fighting battles I personally will not win. I do not want the next generation of women to know the pain and indecision my generation has known. I want them to enjoy greater freedom in exploring their gifts and finding opportunities for partnership in ministry in both home and congregation. I want to keep climbing.

So I ask you to continue climbing this mountain with me, to go ahead of me and my generation. Some of us have been working for thirty years and are weary and may tend to lag behind. Let's climb together steadily, patiently, "for the spirit helps us [you and me, sister and brother] in our weakness" (Rom. 8:26).

~~~~~  
Katie Funk Wiebe has authored many books, including *Alone: A Widow's Search For Joy and Life After Fifty*. A former professor of English at Tabor College, she lives in Wichita, Kansas.

Hope  
looks for  
solutions  
for the  
larger body,  
not  
just for  
self.

# *celebrating* ON THE

The dining room table at Anita's house is a constantly changing sculpture. Festooned with colourful boughs and yellow candles at Thanksgiving, ceramic birds in



*Anita with her mother,  
Agatha Warkentin*



*The House on Helmsdale*

spring, balloons and streamers hanging from the chandelier any time there's a birthday, the table illustrates the spirit of celebration Anita brings to all of life.

Aganetha ("grace") Cornelia ("horn of plenty") Elfrieda ("friendly counsellor") Buller - known to most simply as Anita - has lived in this house for most of her

life. It is here that she dispenses cups of tea and bowls of borscht, and welcomes people. But if her house is a place of welcome, it is only a small part of the welcome Anita shows to those she meets. Much of her energy is spent going to people "outside the camp" - in hospitals, in prisons, in old people's homes - to welcome them, to love them and to celebrate with them who they are as beings made in the image of God.

Her desire to reach out to people who dwell on the fringes of society reflects the influence of her mother, Agatha Warkentin, who, through storytelling and a strong sense of celebration, imparted her values. "All I can remember is stories about the weak and the powerless and people on the fringe," Anita remembers of her childhood. "I realize now what a tremendous dynamic that was."

The family she grew up in no longer lives in the house on Helmsdale, and Anita's own family, now living here, has long since included a husband and two sons, now grown. But the sense of community in the neighbourhood, fostered some forty or more years ago, is still there. At one time it was customary for the women on Helmsdale to get together for tea once a month. Agatha Warkentin came once, then decided she had better things to do with her time. She was confronted by her neighbour, who announced that she had been watching her running around doing things for the church, and if she couldn't find time for a cup of tea with her neighbours, her Christianity wasn't worth a thing. "That was the beginning of our family's move-

# fringe

By Debra Fieguth

ment in the neighbourhood" - a movement that includes occasional neighbourhood parties and a general spirit of togetherness.

From the time she was tiny, Anita remembers being aware that she was a spiritual being. One Sunday morning when she was barely two, discovering she had lost a shoe, she dumped everything out of her mother's dresser drawers. Instead of scolding her, "Mother sat down with me in the mess. The sun was streaming in and she prayed with me for the recovery of my lost shoe." From that moment, Anita saw God as being full of light and kindness.

She learned at an early age to care for those around her. She would sit on the steps of her house with a developmentally challenged neighbour boy and sing with him. Then she began taking him into her grade seven class and gave him things to do. He stayed in that classroom for four years. That friendship is a lifelong one: the two are still great pals, often spending an evening at the game of Skip-po.

Shortly after she turned forty, when her boys were in school and the family had already spent five busy years in West Africa, Anita cried out to the Lord to give her a work to do. "I felt like my days were empty," she says. Shortly after that, she received an invitation to join the Mennonite Central Committee women's task force, a gesture that she saw as affirmation "that somewhere there was a place for me."

She knew she could do at least one thing well: visit people in hospitals. She decided to pursue training to sharpen her skills, and it was during her year of training that she met a chaplain who invited her to prison. The first time she went to Rockwood, on a beautiful April day, she remembers realizing "that I loved the people I had never met." In the fifteen years since then, that love has continued to be the strength of her ministry there as she volunteers weekly as a chaplain.

"I felt as if I'd come home," she says of her first visit. "It was a sanctuary for me. It still is."

That may seem like a paradox, and even to Anita it's something of a mystery that she can be honest and open in a place characterized by dishonesty. "I think it has to do with the fact that the men who are there have come because of great difficulties, great trauma, great need, great loneliness," she suggests, "and they are willing to share who they are. And through them I encounter in myself all of the same characteristics, all my own brokenness."



Anita, Heather, Donna, & Mary

The men in prison have held her accountable, she adds. They have comforted her, sometimes just with a pat on the shoulder, when she was grieving. And in return she has looked for the special qualities in each one that show that he, too, is made in God's image.

Two years ago Anita accepted a part-time job working with three developmentally challenged women living together in a house. Perhaps in that context more than in others she has put into practise one of the several scriptures by which she lives. Micah 6:8 en-

courages her to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with her God. "For me that means to give to Heather, Donna and Mary what is rightfully theirs." It is also the recognition that "God is the one who will bring each of them into the fulness of relationship."

There is no greater joy for her than seeing the women learn and grow in new truths. "I want Heather, Donna and Mary to see that God is there and he has flung all sorts of fascinating things out there for them."

As for Anita, she daily exults in those "fascinating things."

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Deborah Fieguth is the associate editor of *ChristianWeek*.

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# Learning to Swim

*By Marlene Penner*



Swimming is the metaphor that describes my story of learning to know God more deeply.

The middle of the storm, of course, is not the time to learn to swim. But how does one learn? By just being in a pool? By watching great swimmers? Or does one have to learn and practise for oneself?

I was brought up in the home of an ordained minister in a small Mennonite community in British Columbia. In my teens I sang at nursing homes and in the church choir, taught Sunday School, attended a private Christian school from grades six to twelve, and even had a year of Bible college.

Soon afterwards I married a Mennonite professional. We settled down in our own house in a beautiful seaside resort town where I became president of the ladies' group as well as choir director in a tiny Baptist church. In spite of all my Christian activity I felt empty.

Sometimes it takes something traumatic to make us stop short and evaluate where we are going in life. For me that occurred at the birth of our third child, Kirsten, in 1973. Excessive hemorrhaging brought me to the point of death several times.

While the medical staff was astounded at my calmness, in my heart I knew God was honouring my acceptance of him at age four. The next few days, as curious staff and visitors dropped by, I felt I should tell people that it was God who had helped me, but I didn't and couldn't. Did I have nothing to share?

I decided to be totally honest, and I asked myself such questions as, was I getting all I should from Christianity? Was I accepting other people's words and impressions regarding God, making them my

own?

At this point, a friend invited me to a Bible study in the neighbourhood. I balked inwardly. After all, I had so much Bible training and knowledge. Why, I had even memorized verses in German as well as English. But I went. Here among people who didn't know the Bible at all I could explore the scriptures and seek out the essence of God.

The Gospel of Mark was wonderful. I got to know Jesus as compassionate, in control of every situation in the natural or spiritual world. He empathized with people, forgave them if necessary, showed them a better way of life. He alone was able to provide them with abundant life and teach them not merely to tread water but to swim.

As I continued in this study, my concept of God began to change. My knowledge of him moved from head to heart; "I should" became "Yes, I want."

Any swimmer knows that healthy food, proper breathing, exercise and rest are necessary if she wants to excel. I realized that the source of my emptiness had been spiritual malnourishment.

How do we eat? We eat by reading and applying scriptures. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Although there are many excellent Christian books, they are not God's living word through which the Holy Spirit speaks to our spirit, and should not be substituted for Scripture reading.

How do we breathe? We exhale in confession and inhale God's promises to us.

How do we exercise? We exercise our faith in an alien world guided by Romans 12:2: "Do not conform any more to the standards of this world,

but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Exercising correct thought patterns means walking by faith in the facts of Scripture, with our feelings conforming to the facts. We also exercise by making proper use of our time.

Finally, how do we rest? We rest, as Hebrews 3:1 instructs us, by fixing our thoughts on Jesus.

One way that I have found to incorporate these disciplines into my life has been via my regular routines on an exercise bike. While warming up, I sing praises to God. Then I read my Bible and pray, simultaneously exercising physically and spiritually.

My "swimming" ability was put to the ultimate test on a beautiful Sunday morning, August 23, 1992. I was home alone and decided to power-walk along the beach. I spent this time basking in my Father's love, being grateful and praising him. I knew the source of my happiness had shifted from expecting people and family to meet my needs to God who says, "I am the same yesterday, today and forever" and "I will never leave you or forsake you."

And so the world did not come crashing down when, after I returned from my walk, the RCMP informed me that Kirsten, our eighteen-year-old daughter had been killed instantly in an automobile accident in Ontario while I was walking along the beach. I tried phoning my sisters but no one was home. I believe God allowed me to be alone with the news for a while so that I could acknowledge that Kirsten was not our possession but had been given to us in trust. I could thank him for honouring us with such a darling gift, and thank him that he would help us face this situation.

God has done just that. On one of the first nights as I lay tossing and turning he whispered, "Don't let your heart be troubled. Trust in me. In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going" (John 14:1-4).

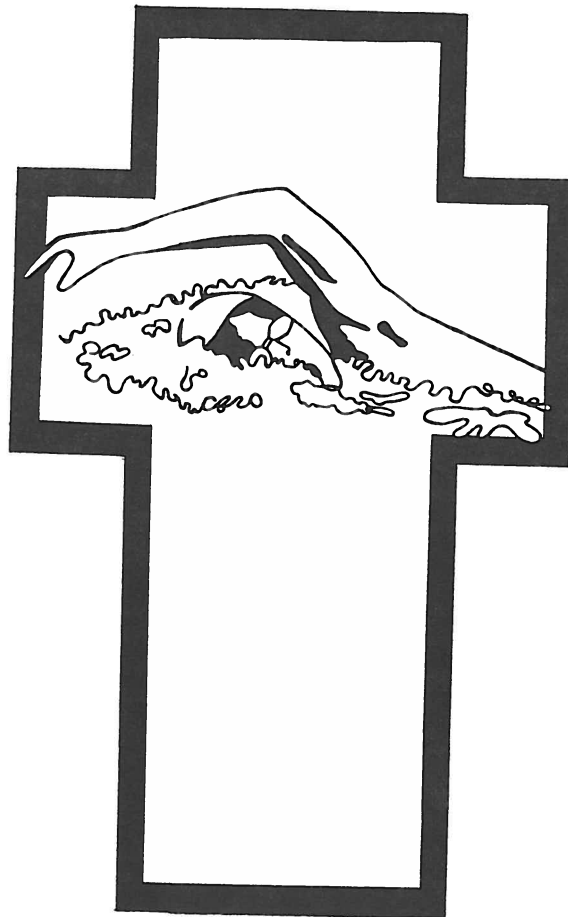
Another time, while on vacation, I was overwhelmed: "My daughter is ac-

tually dead!" and I cried for an hour. When I told this to a pastor's wife, she said, "Marlene, she's more alive than you are!"

I need to focus on this truth because the truth sets me free from overwhelming grief. I have asked God to take away the grief of keeping anniversary dates such as the twenty third of every month. If I awaken at night I pray or meditate on God's attributes.

Practising God's presence is a lifestyle. God will do his part if we do ours. We do not excel by watching other swimmers but by swimming ourselves. Jump in! The water's great!

*Marlene Penner lives in White Rock, B.C. with her husband, Ed, and their children, Michelle and Warren. She is active in Stonecroft Ministries as an area representative and international speaker.*



Illustrations: Linda Gilbert



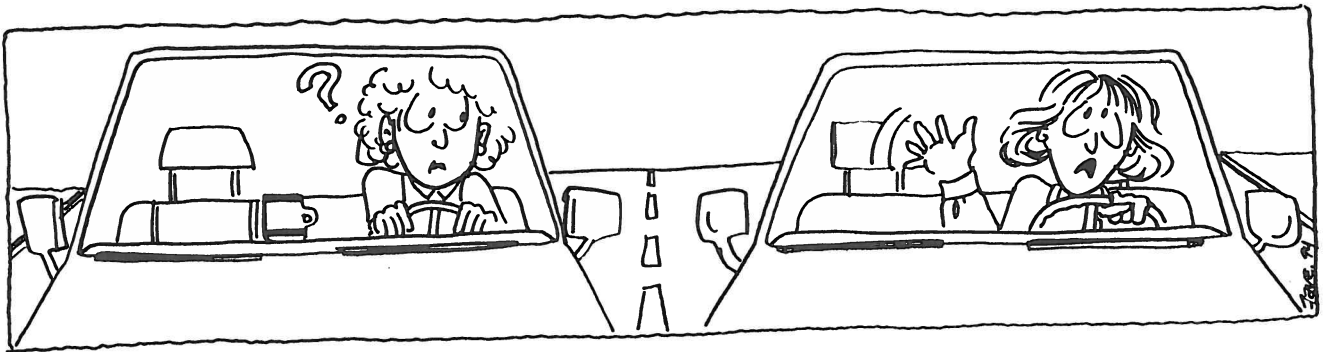
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# Making Time For God

By Trudy Reimer

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*I am sure there are people who still wonder who I was talking to as I drove by with one hand on the steering wheel and the other moving in animated conversation with no one they could see.*



As a mother of two preteens, I find my life busy at the best of times. Add to that working from my home: I babysit two preschool boys, and I have two businesses - I do clowning and have just started a landscape design company. I also take university courses and volunteer at my daughters' school. Oh yes, I work at the church I attend by being a guide at Pioneer Club, leading a women's Bible study and being a member of one committee (I cut back this year from three).

The truth of this is that I am not the exception. This is the story of most women in our churches and community. We are busy - very busy. So when do we who are Christians make time for that most important relationship with God?

This has been a very real struggle in my life. Just when I feel I have a routine established and can fit in my devotions and study time, my life is turned upside down again, the routine has changed and more or different demands on my time take place.

I used to work outside the home, and the half-hour drive to and from Selkirk every day became my quiet time with God. I am sure there are people who are still wondering who I was talking to as I drove by with one hand on the steering wheel and the other hand moving in animated conversation with no one they could see.

As life would have it, that routine changed. Now I try to fit in my quiet time when my boys (the ones I babysit) are having their nap. That too will change soon as they are growing out of naptime.

I have found that my time with God can take different forms. Fellowship with other believers has been a real resource for me. Sometimes this takes place on the cordless phone as I am straightening up or doing laundry. At other times it is at the swimming pool where my children take lessons and another mom and I share what God is showing us through our personal devotions.

As much as I benefit from these times I cannot let them take the place of communicating with God and studying the Bible. This time is the most difficult to fit into my life but the one from which I benefit most. Taking a book like *My Utmost for His Highest* (a daily devotional book by Oswald Chambers) and going through the scriptural passages that are included helps me apply the word of God to daily struggles.

I have realized that when I don't take time for devotions on a regular basis, my patience wears thin more quickly. The love that I should be able to give becomes more difficult and often has price tags attached. Devotions are not a pat answer to solving the problems we all face, but for me they give direction. By having devotions I rely on God to use me more effectively, to teach me to be more sensitive to the needs of my family and church.

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Trudy Reimer and her husband, Bob, and their two girls attend McIvor Avenue MB Church.

# AN ABORIGINAL ELDER ASKED, “Do you know how to dance?” You must be able to dance if you are to heal people.

I can teach you my steps, but you will have to hear your own music.”

During this last year, my journey has taken me in search of ways to become more culturally sensitive when providing therapy or "healing" to Aboriginal children with special needs. Respect for their experience and culture, as well as an understanding of the great pain they have suffered in the past, were essential before I could offer them anything from my knowledge or experience. In this journey, I've learned many steps to the dance, and I am grateful to many people for teaching these to me. They have helped me to hear my own music. In particular, I am grateful to Henri Nouwen for the insights in his book *Walk with Jesus* as well as to my Aboriginal brothers and sisters who walk with me on my journey.

Henri Nouwen reminds me that Jesus once walked on this earth and he continues to do so. As he walks, he meets the poor. The poor who walk on the roads and through the rough places of this world call me to humility - a word derived from the Latin word *humus*, which means "earth" or "soil."

The dance teaches me to remain close to the soil - the earth - just as Jesus remains very close to the earth. Jesus is deeply connected to the earth on which he walks. "He observes the forces of nature; he learns from them, teaches about them and reveals that the God of Creation is the same God who sent him to announce good news to the poor, sight to the blind and freedom to the prisoners," writes Nouwen. This reminds me to keep turning my eyes again and again back to the earth and to all those people who are walking their long, fatiguing journeys and inviting me to accompany them in their life-dance.

As I sit close to Mother Earth in the Sweat Lodge with my Aboriginal sisters, I experience a harmony of spirit as together we give our pain, sorrows and tears back to Mother Earth and pray to the Creator, the same God of Creation - for strength and healing. I learn of the ways and values by which the Aboriginal people live, such as tolerance, sharing, generosity and respect, and I become wealthier. It is here that I become truly humble. And as I watch my children and their children join together in the friendship circle dance, I discover that it is because of my brothers and sisters who walk with me that I can make the journey at all - the long, painful journey toward the cross.

I am still learning to dance in a circle where a People who have known great glory and great pain share the movement of the life-dance. It is "a time to dance" and I keep my eyes on the Lord of the Dance, who teaches me the steps and helps me hear my own music more clearly.

*Dorothy Schwab is an occupational therapist with School Therapy Services. She works with Aboriginal special-needs children throughout Manitoba and in Winnipeg's inner city. In seeking healing for these children, she strives very hard to look at the needs of the whole person - physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. Dorothy and her husband, Dave, and their two girls are members of Valley Gardens Community Church.*

## *a time to dance* By Dorothy Schwab

# THE CONVERSATION CONTINUES

The meeting held Sunday, October 17, 1993, at the Fort Garry Mennonite Brethren Church, was a highlight for a number of church members who felt uncomfortable with the MB Conference decision not to allow a diversity of conviction and practice on the appointment of women to pastoral leadership. The July decision represented for many an entrenchment of discriminatory policies and practices in the church. The exclusion of women from elected office at the convention seemed to indicate a backlash within the denomination against efforts to promote new understanding of the women's issue represented in the conference-sponsored book, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy*.

The nature of the debate on the conference floor in July had aroused particularly strong protests. Some Manitoba delegates, especially those witnessing the "women's" debate for the first time, felt hurt and humiliated at the sexism and forceful politics dominating the proceedings.

Women had opportunity to share these reactions at a meeting held in August (See report in *Sophia*, 3:3). Participants there expressed a need for further support and networking, as well as the desire to work in a positive way for change. A number of men also wished to be included in this process. The October meeting was held to accommodate these needs.

The October gathering of 150 women and men showed a broadening base of support for this kind of activity. Nine urban and three rural churches were represented and letters of support were received from six provinces. Interest spanned the generations, from university students to grandparents.

Most participants stayed for the entire 3 1/2 hours of worship, sharing and discussion. Besides affirming women in leadership and seeking ways to convey this stance to others in the denomination, the meeting also brought alongside individuals who came tentatively, wary of participating in what they feared would be a hostile "gripping" session. What they saw was a strong commitment to change grounded in the biblical teaching concerning equality of women and men, but also in love and respect for the MB Conference and for those who hold other views on the issue.

A Steering Committee was appointed to provide further leadership and continuity. The committee has begun to distribute copies of "A Statement of Concern" (see below) which can be signed by church members, sent to decision-making bodies and used for discussion.

A workshop on women in leadership will be held at the Manitoba MB Women's Conference in Brandon in April. An informal evening of worship and story telling is planned for spring and an ad hoc committee has begun planning an educational conference for November, 1994. Encouraged by the response in Winnipeg, similar groups have met in British Columbia and Ontario.

To contact the Steering Committee or to join the MB "Women's Network" mailing list, write:

Steering Committee  
Women's Network  
P.O. Box 28062  
1453 Henderson Highway  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2G 4E9

## A Statement of Concern

As members of the Mennonite Brethren Community, we believe that the Scriptures envision a world of reconciled relationships free of inequality and oppression. This vision, as lived out by Jesus and articulated by Paul, applies to race, class and gender relations.

We affirm the community of faith, past and present, in its attempts to discern and enact God's truth.

We express our concern that the Mennonite Brethren General Conference restriction of women in pastoral leadership misrepresents the Scriptural vision of gender equality. The July 1993 Conference decision to uphold this restriction perpetuates inequality, discourages many women from developing their gifts, and limits the effectiveness of the church in the world today.

We therefore recommend that the Board of Faith and Life continue the process of discussion and consultation that it has initiated concerning women in pastoral leadership.

We commit ourselves to work and pray for gender equality in the Mennonite Brethren community of faith.

We resolve to respect and to seek continuing dialogue with those who do not share this view.

## FOR MY DAUGHTER

by Lorie Battershill

This is a poem to my daughter Andrea  
the one who came to fill the last  
of my longings.

They told me that I would find  
my reflection in you  
my perfect counterpart.  
But the now is as I knew it would be.  
Each soul reflects  
itself alone.

You are golden where I am dark  
and you are all  
movement and mischief and chatter.  
Your fairy princess soul was not my invention.

Now the future beckons to us  
and I must teach you how to live  
I thought that I had grown enough  
to offer you everything.  
But now there are new things that I must learn.  
I know I must grow on  
so that I can guide you  
in a new direction.  
The old paths are behind us and won't lead you  
where you need to go.  
So I write this for you  
my daughter Andrea.  
You are the end of my longings  
and the beginning.

## COLUMBUS AVENUE NEW YORK

by Barbara Slater

Out of the night  
he emerges  
a black man  
half starved  
his palm twisted flung out  
he stares at us  
a white cataract  
crusting one eye.

The unseeing crowds  
step around him  
or thrust him to one side as  
a blight  
on stainless steel kitchens  
the scallops the fillets  
the buttercrunch lettuces.

My friend pulls me away  
from the wild staring eyes  
my need  
to fix what is broken.

His voice trails us as we walk  
past the sidewalk cafes  
the air heavy  
with steak and fish frying  
the aroma of spices  
garlic and wine.

A stain spreads over the city.  
Some shadow inside us  
saps light  
as red candles flicker  
and laughter flutters up  
like moths.

*Sophia* is pleased to announce a winning poem for her first annual poetry contest. Lorie Battershill's "For My Daughter" appears above. Lorie lives in Winnipeg with her husband and their three children. They attend Grace Lutheran Church. Lorie is a teacher who works at home raising her children, and she enjoys working on her writing.

We are also printing in this issue our first runner up, "Columbus Avenue, New York," by Barbara Slater. Barbara is also a Winnipeg poet. She is a mother of grown children, and she and her husband attend St. Aiden's Anglican Church.

The final judges for the contest were Lori Matties and Melody Goetz, both of Winnipeg.

# INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY

By Sarah Klassen

The word "family" no longer conjures up, automatically, charming images of father, mother and one or two smiling children at the breakfast table. Think of the words that have recently been juxtaposed with "family": besides "traditional," "nuclear," "ideal" and "perfect" we also have "dysfunctional," "broken," "extended" and "blended." Each adjective suggests a variation of the structure or quality of family. Some households now consist of same-sex couples, with or without children, and a good segment of our population lives singly. We all know someone who, because of death, distance or estrangement, must live entirely without family.

Challenges to our ideas of the ideal family may send us scurrying fearfully for cover, determined to defend the biological family, for is it not the strength of any healthy society?

Some years ago I was startled by this caption in *Christianity Today*: "Is the 'Traditional' Family Biblical?" (September 16, 1988). The author of the article, Rodney Clapp, points out that in the gospels God's kingdom takes precedence over the biological family. Neither a parent's death nor a marriage excused an individual from following Jesus' call. "Family - like possessions, reputation, and religion itself - is clearly

subordinated to the mission of the kingdom of God," Clapp writes.

Jesus respected and obeyed his own parents, he blessed children, and he upheld the ten commandments regarding the sanctity of marriage and the need to honour father and mother. But he also sent a clear signal, at age twelve, that his first loyalty would be to God. Later he made it clear that following him could result in divided families in which hate replaced love. He asked the question, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" (Mark 3:35) and answered it himself by pointing, not to his own kin waiting for him at the door, but to those listening to his words. All this is not necessarily soothing for those of us who have families we love; families that provide us with comfort and a safe place of refuge; families that welcome us with open arms at special times like birthdays, Christmas, Thanksgiving and Easter. We are cosy together. And exclusive.

Exclusiveness, however, is not what Jesus modelled. He shared time and meals with lepers, tax-collectors, women and others who didn't usually belong. He suggested inviting into the home those who seldom get invitations.

In this International Year of the Family, there will be parents who resolve to spend more time with the family they

have neglected and children who gain new appreciation for parents and siblings. Some families may foster togetherness and identity through projects like making a family tree or taking that last family trip before the nest empties.

It can also be the year when families of all kinds, and especially church families, look around for ways of being inclusive in the way Jesus was inclusive, for ways of removing barriers between "us" and "them," between "insider" and "outsider." In the current fragmentation and destruction of families we can find both our responsibility and the opportunity to open our doors and offer the welcoming home so many people need. There are international students far from home, elderly or ill persons with no family at hand, relocates, job-seekers, single parents and simply singles, to name a few, who would welcome the invitation to be included, even for a short time, in a family.

This year there will be individuals who must leave their families, and families who must relinquish members, because of God's call.

This may be especially hard for women, who tend to nurture and protect relationships. Kari Torjesen Malcolm's comment on the reaction of American Christian women to secular feminism seems relevant here: "Rather than risk losing husband and children, it seemed safer to retreat to the kitchen to try to catch the flavour of the good old days. In the process, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel' was forgotten, along with 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only' " (*Women at the Crossroads*, Inter Varsity Press, 1982, p.29).

Those who have families, intact or partial, have every reason to be grateful and to foster family identity. But it is not the nuclear family we worship, but God, who continues to call us into service.

"The place which Jesus takes in our souls he will never more vacate, for in us is his home of homes, and it is the greatest delight for him to dwell there." (Julian of Norwich: *Showings*, Paulist Press)

By Dora Dueck

"When I look back over my spiritual journey I see that books were stepping stones," says Anne Martens of the Elmwood MB Church. "Each one of them was needed. They came to me as if they were hand picked and they appeared when I needed them most, so that I might move forward. I once wrote in my journal that when I found the last book I had to read, then my life would be over."

These words could be echoed, I think, by many women. God coaxes our growth along in various ways, it's true, but for people who are inclined to read, the way will often be a book.

For this issue we have gathered, instead of reviews, recommendations. We asked nine women: "What one or two books have influenced or helped you on your spiritual journey?"

It has been fun getting their answers. Enthusiasm for books spills out. For some the "one or two" in the question posed a dilemma similar to 23 available flavours of ice-cream with only enough money for a single scoop.

Between the lines one also glimpses stories. These are good books, recommended books that have touched the lives of women we know.

**Hildegard Isaak (McIvor Ave.):** The Narnia series by C.S. Lewis. Reading the Narnia books to our boys when they were young led to many discussions and made me a devoted Lewis fan. A sentence I remember is: "Aslan is not a tame lion."

**Disappointment with God** by Philip Yancey. It's honest, down-to-earth, and asks all the questions friends were asking me. Yancey writes on Romans 8: "Just wait and God's miracle of transforming a dark, silent Friday into Easter Sunday will someday be enlarged to cosmic scale."

**Tina Doerksen (Eastview):** *Disappointment with God* by Philip Yancey. The author searches for answers to questions like "Is God unfair?" or "Is God silent?" Yancey read through the entire Bible at a solitary retreat, but, while he discovered more evidence of God's caring for his people, the answers still eluded him. Then in some rare bursts of insight he realized God doesn't want to be analyzed; He wants to be loved. It was an eye-opener for me in my spiritual journey.

**Evening** by C.H. Spurgeon. The author uses unusual, less common texts to bring quietness and poise to the soul after the noise and turmoil of the day is over. My husband and I find ourselves reading and re-reading this book. I highly recommend it.

**Amanda Williams (Valley Gardens):** *If* by Amy Carmichael. This small book with many pages of only one sentence on the blank page led me to silence, to listen and hear God. I was drawn to a closer sense of God speaking lovingly. It was as if He said, "Trust me; I'll teach you about LOVE."

**Lisa Loewen (McIvor Ave.):** After my younger brother Willie died, I had an incredible desire to read, to find answers. I've been helped to see my faith and other people in a fresh way. Two books I've enjoyed recently are by Gene Edwards, *The Beginning* and *The Birth*. They are wonderful for experiencing the creation stories of earth and humankind in a creative, simple, yet thought-provoking way. Two other recent reads are *The Bondage Breaker* by Neil T. Anderson, excellent for anyone going through a rough period, and *It Was On Fire When I Lay Down* by Robert Fulghum, reflective, humorous little stories.

**Anne Martens (Elmwood):** In my late forties I was all but dead in Christ. I found a beat-up *Stay Alive All Your Life* by N.V. Peale in a box of salvage books. Chapter two was the spark that lit a tiny flame within and I was off on my journey to know Christ. *The Living Bible* was very important for me. It was so simple to read yet was a link to further growth, as were all of Evelyn Underhill's books for my first lessons in "centering."

**Barb Loewen (St. Vital):** *Life's Not Fair but God is Good* by Robert H. Schuller. Challenging circumstances are part of everyone's life and are incidental to who we are. I have been encouraged by the author's suggestions to help make each situation I am placed in an opportunity to discover untapped resources of faith and talent. God's goodness is unchanging and He can help us make the most of life even when confronted with obstacles.

**Margaret Giesbrecht (McIvor Ave.):** *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made* by Dr. Paul Brandt and Philip Yancey. This book about the human body with comparisons drawn to aspects of church life was fascinating. I was reminded how important pain is. If you hurt yourself, the body rushes to take care of the hurt. This is how the church should be. A recent read has been *A Child Shall Lead Them* by Diane M. Komp, the reflections of a doctor who works with children with cancer. These children teach lessons in hope. I was reminded of my experience of my husband's cancer and death.

**Lynn Voth (Westwood):** *Weather of the Heart* by Gigi Graham Tchividjian. This easy-to-read book consists of short devotional articles that provide the quick pick-me-ups I need as homemaker and graduate student in religion and culture.

**Neoma Jantz (River East):** *Seeds of Contemplation* and *The Road to Daybreak*, both by Henri Nouwen. This author doesn't tell you "how to be spiritual." He invites you, in loving simplicity, to join him on the journey to a deeper understanding of God, with all its struggles and doubts, insights and rewards.

I think it is happening again. Jesus talked about it a while back, and he keeps on saying it, to our continuing chagrin: "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel" (Matt 23:24 NIV).

We keep doing it. We are meticulous about being correct on details, while we accept the larger context unquestioningly. At conventions we may be at pains to follow parliamentary procedure while we violate people and grieve the Spirit in them by not hearing them out. We do everything right procedurally, but we don't question the "confidence vote" method ousting the pastor or dismissing the teacher. We are ethically irreproachable in the process by which we get ourselves elected to an important office, while the very system of which that office is a part continues unchallenged.

I think we are doing it again in the matter of women in ministry. The question we've been asking is whether women may have God's sanction to do what men have been doing all along. Men have been in leadership. One man heads a corporation, a church, a faculty, a board of elders. Wherever we may have gotten the pattern, we have accepted it. In the last couple of decades we have been asking whether a woman might legitimately assume that kind of position. The thinking is that if men have a right to it, then women equally gifted and equally called should have equal right to it.

The question, it seems to me, is misguided. We assume the pattern and then ask the question of propriety. I think we ought to question the pattern, particularly in the church. If the creation story is informative here (Gen 1), we ought to think in terms of a joint leadership of male and female. After all, it was to both equally and together that God initially gave the mandate to care for the earth and the human family. And if in Jesus and the redemption through him the original intent of God is to be recovered, then perhaps the leadership of the church is the first place where the recovered model might be put into practice.

But even saying it that way is making an assumption that ministry is leadership, and indeed leadership in the sense of being "up front," "in charge." That's another camel. Ministry is more like stewardship, caring for someone else's interests--the earth's,



Illustration: Faye Kliever

and people's, and God's. It is particularly in this caring for the earth and its people that we need teams of female and male persons to ensure that the caring does not deteriorate into running a program or protecting an institution.

The marketplace is attempting to resolve the gender issue by suggesting that a resume ought not to include gender information at all. When a person is qualified to do the job, it is discriminatory to ask if the applicant is male or female. If we accept that approach in regard to ministry in the church, I think we will be swallowing another camel. Though as females and males we are much more alike than we are different, and though we can perform many tasks equally well, we are significantly different. We are so by design, if we are to take the creation story seriously. So if we want to do holistically the large task the Creator and Redeemer has given us to do on earth and in the Kingdom, we will have to do it together. We will need to recognize and honour our differences within the understanding of our common humanness, acknowledge our need for each other, and work together in profound respect.

It is discouraging actually, the way we keep swallowing camels. If at least we'd choke on them, then we could be healed. As it is, we seem to have learned to dissociate, to fragment, our souls, so that we can swallow camels without indigestion and then mount high-voltage crusades in-

tent on straining out gnats.

So the next time someone raises the question of women in ministry, remember Jesus' comment about our distortion of leadership: You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them.... Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...just as the Son of Man [came to] serve, and to give his life" (Matt 20:25-28).

Is it appropriate for a woman to be in a position of power? No more than it is for a man. And when we rid ourselves of that camel, then perhaps we can think of leadership in terms of caring stewardship. When we do, we will recognize that if we want to do it in a way that deals with all the needs of all the people in our care, we will have to do ministry and leadership together, men and women together.

I am not so naive as to think that doing it in the way the Creator first intended will be without risk. We are, after all, sinners together even if we are committed to doing our work well. But surely we wouldn't opt to continue the practice of swallowing camels simply because, if we quit doing so, we'll have to cope with gnats.

*John Regehr works with his wife, Mary, as part of a counselling team at Recovery of Hope counselling centre. He and Mary have four grown children and eight grandchildren. They are members of McIvor Ave. MB Church.*

# OOPS!

## DOWN GOES ANOTHER CAMEL!

*By John Regehr*



✱ **Margaret Fast** coordinates a fledgling support program for families of pediatric bone marrow transplant patients at the Health Sciences Center in Winnipeg. Volunteers in this program have had experience with leukemia and its potentially disruptive impact on families. The work includes regular visits with patients and their families, putting donors in touch with other donors and dealing creatively with the emergent needs of the family involved. Margaret, whose son, Willie, died of leukemia, is uniquely fitted for this position. She feels she is able to handle the sadness associated with this volunteer assignment.

✱ **Helen Litz**, recently honoured with the Canada 125 award for her unique musical contribution to the community, maintains that she "has always felt blessed" and that she has always wanted her music to have "a spiritual thrust." Her Mennonite Children's Choir has won numerous awards and trophies. "Every tour is something new," Helen claims. A children's choir movement has developed across the continent.

✱ At its October 1993 meeting, the MCC Women's Auxiliary elected **Debbie Giesbrecht** (Steinbach), to the position of president. She succeeds **Martha Klassen** who held that position for two years.

✱ In June, **Helen and Eugene Regehr** celebrated the tenth anniversary of the arrival of their special son, eighteen-year-old **Paul Kovacs**. Paul, now 28, has a wonderful sense of humour and always prays for his birth family. Paul loves his work at Palliser, loves holidays, and has contributed to the family understanding of the feelings and hurts of a person like himself. Helen and Eugene feel privileged to have this special son.

✱ Mennonites who view the Chortitza colony as their ancestral home were recently saddened to learn that the legendary Zaporoshjan oak has died. The property on which the oak stood was owned by Jakob and Susanna Loewen and confiscated by the communist government during Makhnov's reign of terror. In 1989 **Maria Block** brought back two acorns from the tree; one grew and

Maria nurtured it for three winters. In September 1993 it was transplanted into a huge pot at the Steinbach museum at a ceremony held to mark this historic event.



*Maria Block & The Little Oak That Grew*  
Photo courtesy of "The Carillon"

✱ **Vange Thiessen**, B.C. was instrumental in organizing a group of women concerned with the defeat of the resolution on women in leadership in Winnipeg in 1993. The women have appointed a steering committee and will continue to meet.

✱ On November 19, 1993, MCC Women's Concerns celebrated 20 years of activity on behalf of women. **Peggy Re-**

**gehr**, the first Canadian staff person, served for four and a half years, from 1984. Most provinces have provincial committees now and more women occupy administrative positions in our conferences. Sexual abuse, not dealt with 20 years ago, has become a major focus for Women's Concerns. In jeopardy quite frequently, the program continues to deal with vital issues. "Women were glad for the program; they were not alone; there were people who were concerned and were speaking for them," said **Peggy Regehr** in speaking of the initial impact of the program.

✱ **Laurie Goetz's** article "The Importance of Saying No" (*Sophia* Vol.3 No.3), piqued the interest of **Lorna Dueck** who coordinates the Vision TV program "Cross Currents," a series that examines trends in family and society. Lorna and a television crew visited Laurie and her husband Willie with their three boys, Cody, Kylo and Levi over the Christmas season.

✱ **Carolee Neufeld**, who served on *Sophia's* advisory board and contributed a series of articles on hospitality, is now living in Moncton, New Brunswick, where she and her husband **Ken** co-pastor the Riverview Bible Church.

## MANITOBA MENNONITE BRETHREN *Women's Conference*

**Date:** April 8 - 9, 1994

**Place:** Richmond Park MB Church, Brandon, Man.  
**Speaker:** Reverend Barbara Mutch, associate pastor of the First Baptist Church in Regina.  
**Topic:** "Gifted - Who? Me?"

*Workshop topics include:*  
"Women Ministering to Women"  
"Discovering Your Gifts"  
"Staying at Home Versus Working Outside"  
"Time Management"  
"Praise Him with the Tambourine"  
"Self-Esteem and Adolescence"  
"Exploring Our Gifts in Leadership"

Registration forms will be available at MB Churches.

## The Manitoba Women's Concerns Committee

*is hosting  
an evening  
of conversation with  
Lydia Harder,  
a Mennonite feminist  
theologian.*

**MARCH 10, 1994**  
**7:30 p.m. - 9:30 p.m.**  
**Bethel Mennonite Church**  
**870 Carter**

Refreshments will be served.

Jesus declared,  
I am the bread of life.  
The one who comes to Me  
will never go hungry,  
and the one who believes in Me  
will never be thirsty.  
Just as I live because of the Father,  
so the one who feeds on Me  
will live because of Me.

John 6:35, 57, 58  
(New Revised Standard Version)

