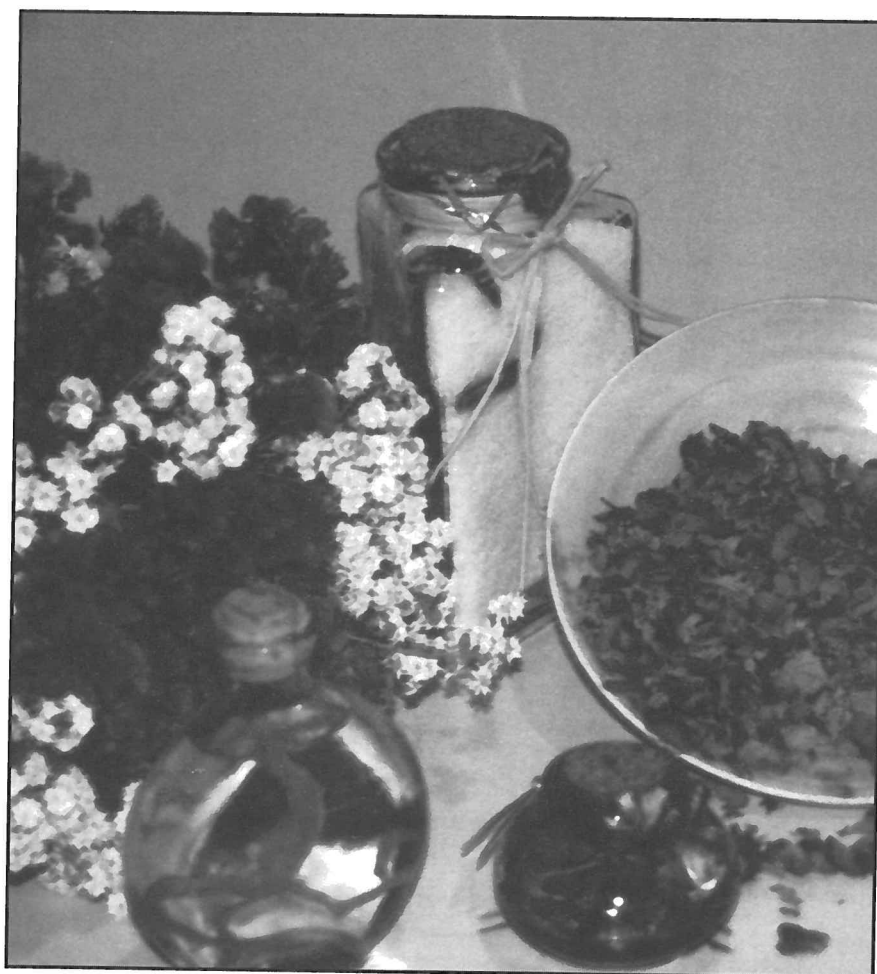


S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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

6/3



A Pot-Pourri of Fine Ideas

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SOPHIA: A Greek feminine noun associated with the biblical wisdom tradition, translated "wisdom" and personified in the book of Proverbs; equivalent in the New Testament to *logos*, the creative word that was with God in the beginning, creating and giving life to the world.

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MISSION STATEMENT

Sophia offers a forum for women in the MB 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 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 expressions 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 dealings with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33)

EDITORIAL

Who is Sophia?

by Lori Matties



Recently, the question of why we chose the name Sophia raised its head again. It's one of those subjects that always stirs the motivational pot for those of us who publish the magazine. It makes us look both backward and forward. From where have we come? To where are we going? Were we presumptuous to choose "wisdom" as the name that both guides and in some way represents us?

As George Shillington wrote in an early issue, *sophia* is the Greek noun used to translate a Hebrew feminine noun for wisdom, *chokmah*. The word represents a tradition of "wisdom literature"—the collected thoughts and writings of Israelite sages found especially in the Old Testament books of Job, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Early Christians continued to use the word, connecting *sophia*, the wisdom of God, with Jesus Christ, who was with God in the beginning to create the world and who continues to bring salvation and hope to humankind (see Proverbs 8:22 and 1 Corinthians 1:20-24).

In a later issue, Sarah Klassen wrote more about *sophia*, reminding us how names identify us, and how sometimes negative associations with names threaten to discredit us. She mentioned a 1993 conference where some participants reportedly used *sophia* as the name of a goddess. Sarah reminded us that though good names are sometimes used for bad ends, they are worth keeping and redeeming.

This summer, Debra Fieguth, of our editorial collective, visited the sight of St. Sophia, a church erected in 532-537 in Constantinople, now Istanbul, Turkey. The church was dedicated to the "holy Wisdom," that is, the person of Jesus Christ. Like many churches in the Middle East, it was captured in 1453 and converted into a Muslim mosque. Later it was restored and remains a reminder to Christians of their heritage.

I suppose we will always find reasons to reevaluate who we are and how we identify ourselves. And probably we *are* presumptuous to use wisdom as our title. But I am convinced that wisdom is exactly what we are about in *Sophia*—the sharing of the wisdom that is our legacy from the sages of Israel, that came to us from the beginning and brought us into being and continues to transform us in Christ. As I read the collected wisdom in the articles of this issue, I was awed and inspired by the gift God has given us and delighted that we can share it with each other. My hope is that you too will smell the sweet fragrance of this pot-pourri of fine ideas and find in it the richness of God's wisdom.



The Solitary Path to Community Servanthood

by Elaine Pinto

I have often thought that the Gospel stories of Mary and Martha seem to send a mixed message to the Christian church. We are frequently asked to choose which one of the sisters of Bethany was right in her approach to Jesus. For Mennonites, who advocate peaceful submission, the choice has been for Mary, the faithful, quiet disciple of Jesus. Yet in choosing Mary we've brushed aside the outspoken Martha whose gift of energy and focus on her duties seemed to earn a rebuke from the Lord.

Perhaps another way of seeing these sisters is to hear them speak as one – the two together suggesting one metaphor for discipleship. Truth often comes to us in the tension of embracing seemingly opposite views.

Martha, the upfront, take-charge person learns to wrestle with her theology in the face of a grave sealed for the fourth day. And out of her darkest hour, alone with Jesus, she leaves us the confession of faith upon which the Christian church rests.

Mary, the introverted one, gifted with a quiet spirit, finds courage to move out of her solitariness. And in her anointing of Jesus, she models a public act of worship so profound it is one of the few acts repeated in all four Gospels.

Both sisters know the solitary path that leads to community servanthood. Both know the struggle of private encounter with their Lord.

Martha's Complaint and Mary's Choice

Martha is the centre of the Luke 10 incident. Martha, the friendly, welcoming host, is always aware of physical necessities. Like Abraham, who entertained the messenger of God, she practises the hospitality for which God's people have been famed.

Martha, the activist, doesn't see anything beyond her own occupation and gift. Her way of interacting with Jesus is to have those nearby bustling with her work projects. Her own strength becomes a stumbling block to seeing Jesus in another manner. Martha is at the hub of community life.

Unlike Martha, Mary has learned to be alone. Luke pictures her as an intimate friend of Jesus. She has learned to listen in silence day after day. Silence can be the place where God speaks the loudest. We remember Elijah, who heard God not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in the still small voice.

Mary knew how to receive this gift of solitary encounter with God. She knew how to resist attending to the next thing that needed doing in order to build a deep and sure history with God.

Martha's Lament

In John 11:5 we read, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus," So the sisters send a cry for help to their friend: "Lord, he whom you love is ill" (11:3). And Jesus sets out to do something not only for Lazarus but for Mary and Martha – especially for Martha – because this time she will ask questions alone, painful questions in the presence of Christ, her Messiah.

In this Gospel, Martha shows us she too knows the importance of a history of friendship with Jesus. It is a friendship so close that, like Jacob who wrestled with the angel of God and like Hannah who cried out in her barrenness, she too will struggle with hard questions before God.

Perhaps those restless lament psalms Martha has heard in the synagogue give her permission to challenge the God whose love she knows. Now she and her sister are in distress. Lazarus should not have died – well at least, not so soon.

And so, on the day Jesus arrives in Bethany in belated response to the sisters' call for help, the hospitable Martha scurries out to greet him again. She wastes no time in delivering her heart-rending lament. It was Jesus' fault Lazarus died. He wasn't there when he should have been.

The Jews gathered at the graveside would say that too. "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (11:37). But they would say it with a cynical voice entirely unlike Martha's trust-

ing lament to her friend. Laments can question God's absence, an absence made more acute when the one who has helped so often in the past doesn't come. Laments are as much about faith and acknowledging the help of the Lord as are songs of triumph.

Once, when I was overwhelmed with sorrow, a friend said to me, "Keep talking to God in your pain. You are closer to the Lord than you have ever been."

Keep talking to God, Martha, keep talking when life doesn't make sense. Keep talking to the one who loves you. You, too, are learning aloneness with God.

So Martha meets with her Lord. She wrestles with ultimate questions in the face of death – as we wrestle – with the loss of a job, the loss of relationships, and, in our final illness, the loss of strength and dignity in our own bodies.

Martha knows how to pour out her grief before her Lord. And in her words are found the four stages of lament psalms: *address*: "Lord"; she knows to whom she is speaking; *complaint*: "If you had been here, my brother would not have died"; *petition*: "even now, I know that God will give you whatever you wish."

At this point in the story, Jesus intervenes in Martha's belief system. "Your brother will rise again," he says (11:23). Martha reverts to the theology of the Pharisees: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day," she says (11:24).

But today isn't the last day, Martha. The doctrine of the resurrection flies in the face of the death of someone you love. It's today, Martha, today in your grief I want to meet you. And Jesus, the Master of individual encounters, pulls her on into the greatest reality of all.

You stand before the great I am of Moses and the burning bush – before the I am that is Bread that feeds the multitude – I am the resurrection, Martha. If you are going to understand the resurrection in your daily life, that resurrection will happen through the one standing in front of you. Do you believe this?

And Martha, capable Martha, stands dependent before Jesus and shines forth with the last element of the lament psalms: *a confession of faith*: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the

one coming into the world."

What Peter proclaimed in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, Martha proclaims here at the grave of her brother. It is the same confession we've heard for nearly five centuries in our Mennonite baptismal services. And in that moment, for Martha, abstract doctrine is transformed into a present reality. Peter asked to walk on water and Martha asks for the life of her brother. Jesus responds to the faith of both. *Don't look at the waves, Martha, look at me.*

And the dead man stumbled out of the tomb.

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and dignity
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Mary's Servanthood

It is six days before the Passover. The evangelist depicts Mary, set against the example of Judas (see John 12): the traitor does not understand the identity of the Messiah. But Mary, who has listened to him, *knows* who he is. She looks across the room. Here, at this dinner, Lazarus who was dead sits alive at the table. But her Lord, the one reaching for food, talking with friends and looking steadily into enemy eyes, the Lord she loves, has said he will die.

Mary, with her reflective mind, who perhaps has questioned the meaning of Lazarus's death on the one hand and the claims of her Christ as the Messiah on the other, now rises. And before the critical eye of Judas, she walks toward Jesus and bows, mute before the crowd and begins to weep *her* confession of

faith. Her silent discipleship made manifest in a single radiant act, she publicly anoints her Messiah, her Christ.

And Martha? She is serving again but she is silent. She has given us her gift. She has taught us another way. She has taught us how to bring everyday life under the gaze of God. Her confession of faith rings clear for the church today.

Both Mary and Martha knew the cost of a solitary path before God. Both still call us to community servanthood.

Elaine Pinto, a chaplain at Winnipeg's St. Boniface hospital, and a member of McIvor Avenue Church, gave this sermon to the delegates of the 1996 Canadian MB Conference. It has been edited for Sophia.

Forgiving and Remembering

by Wilma Derksen



The other day I happened to catch two respected church leaders discussing the “forgive and forget” concept on a television talk show.

I stopped dusting and sat down to listen. In my work with victims, “forget” and “forgive” are words that are difficult to comprehend, much less apply. I understand; my own daughter was found murdered eleven years ago. So I sat and listened, pen in hand.

What struck me immediately was that these men loved the word “forget.” They found tremendous comfort in the thought that forgiveness meant forgetting. I was puzzled.

Then I remembered a time when my two children were “discussing” a certain injustice in their relationship. I tried to mediate and point out the errors made on both sides. Just when we arrived at an amiable settlement, one of them remembered something that tipped the scales irretrievably. One party was decidedly more guilty than the other. Suddenly there was no way of balancing the act.

“Why can’t you forget about that one?” the offender wailed in frustration. “It happened a long time ago.”

The victim in this case said, “I never will. How can I?” And we had to resort to other means of justice-making.

The Bible has twinned the two concepts of forgetting and forgiving, and we have to deal with them as such. Hebrews 10:17-18 says, “‘I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.’ Where there is

forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.” But we have to remember that offenders and victims perceive these concepts very differently. What comforts an offender can hurt and re-victimize the victim if it is propounded before the victim is ready.

We must first remember that a victim cannot forget at will. He or she would love to forget the offence that churns like an endless, unfathomable whirlpool, robbing of sleep, concentration, peace, happiness and the ability to move on in life. It is an accomplishment for the victim just to keep her head above water.

Second, we need to encourage victims to stop trying to forget and forgive too quickly but rather to do some hard remembering because forgetting comes by remembering. An offence that keeps churning in someone’s mind is usually too big to process all at once. It needs to be examined and organized into manageable pieces. This probably means going back and remembering the time of the exact hurt and talking to someone about it. It might demand confronting the offender, exposing the injustice, journalling until healing comes, insisting on changes or memorializing the loss. There are many ways to do this.

Just because we may have managed to process an offence once doesn’t mean it’s over. Life has a way of coughing up the same or similar experiences. The murder of our child revisits us in many different ways, and it will continue to do so until we die. It’s not that we didn’t process it the first time, it’s just that a major loss holds within it so many other losses. The healthy processing of secondary losses usually means we have to go back and remember the first.

Third, we need to encourage victims to remember the bigger picture and focus on the positive rather than the negative. It’s so easy to lose perspective and remember only the loss.

In the loss of our daughter, I might not be able or even want to forget, but I can choose which memory on which to fix my thoughts. I can remember the pain of grief, the police investigation, the publicity, or I can remember the love people showed us and the lessons I learned. I can remember my daughter lying in the coffin

*...we need to encourage victims
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or I can recall her running through the autumn leaves at three years old, her long hair flowing behind her, her cheeks red with excitement.

Fourth, remember that forgiveness comes more easily when we realize that all of us fail.

Fifth, we need to encourage victims and offenders always to remember God's mercy, God's love, God's victory, God's promises and blessings in our lives. It is only love that will heal us in the end.

Sixth, the term "forget" can mean different things at different times. Webster's definition is to "treat with inattention or disregard." Even for offenders forgetting doesn't mean erasing the offence entirely from memory. God promises to forget, but when we look at the story of David, we find his affair with Bathsheba written in detail (see 2 Sam 11,12). If it is recorded, is it really forgotten? Yet we are assured that God forgave David everything and called him a man after his own heart. God forgets in that he doesn't hold the sin against the offender anymore.

For a victim, forgetting comes when he or she regains control of the memory. It comes when the experience is safely filed away in the back of the mind and doesn't intrude on conscious thoughts and spin endless, fruitless circles in the mind. It can be retrieved at will.

The other day, as I was sharing my story, one of the women asked me a question about my daughter's death. As I groped for an answer, another woman in the circle answered for me. "In your book, you said that..." and she told a part of my story that I had temporarily forgotten. At first I felt guilty for having forgotten, then glad that she had remembered, and then relieved that I was forgetting. Forgetting has come as a by-product of eleven years of trying to remember.

Wilma Derksen, a member of McIvor MB Church in Winnipeg, has written about the murder of her daughter in *Have You Seen Candace?* published by Tyndale House. She has been president of Family Survivors of Homicide for six years and continues to speak on the process of healing.

Liebe Oma,

As you turn 101 years old this year I think of you on this Mother's Day in a special way. You have been a mother for 82 years – incredible, especially as I feel as if I have been a mother for a long time – all of five years!

As a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother to over 100 immediate descendants, your life has had a tremendous impact on us all, like the ripples that emanate from a small pebble that has been thrown into a pond.

Now that I am a mother and fully realize all you have gone through for your children, I pray that I can have the strong faith that you have passed on to your children. I wish with all my heart to pass this on to my sons.

Your quiet presence has emphatically revealed God in every aspect of your life. 101 years – a miracle – just as your life has been a miracle. You have endured so much more than I can imagine possible: the Russian revolution, hardship, brutality, long-distance travelling with several young children, uncertainty, drought, hunger, thirteen children, being near death's door yourself as well as experiencing the death of children and grandchildren. Yet I have never heard of the difficulties from you, only of the wonderful life God has given you. You have always been joyful, thankful and humble.

I think of all the changes that have taken place in your life in 101 years – from horse and buggy to television, computers and space travel. You have always graciously taken it all in stride. I hope I can be as adaptable as you have been. You have accepted everyone unconditionally into your family. You have prayed faithfully for us, even to the point of asking God to take you to heaven instead of your children or grandchildren.

Oma, your physical frailty stands in stark contrast to your strong, enduring faith in God. You have been a living example of God's working in our lives from generation to generation.

I thank God for you and for all that you have taught me about being Christlike.

Happy Mother's Day (again)!

Ingrid.

Ingrid Reimer, a teacher, attends McIvor Avenue MB Church in Winnipeg.

From Silence into Quiet

by Bonnie A. Loewen

I grew up in a Mennonite home in southern Manitoba, convinced that my involvement in the church provided a place for me in my community. My mother and father held many church positions and spent most of their life outside their carpentry and secretarial jobs in the church. I tried to model myself after them. One Sunday I sang "I Gave My Life to Thee." I was eight years old. I played "Great is Thy Faithfulness" on the piano for offertory when I was twelve. I co-taught a young-adult Sunday school class when I was twenty. I went to college feeling assurance from my parents, extended family and church that I would one day have an important place in this world because I had a voice in the church.

While at college I married a 4.0 Honours student in political science. We read liberation theology and played tennis four times a week. We saw *Amadeus* and vowed to live with Mozart's zeal for truth. Instead of buying engagement rings we sponsored a refugee family from El Salvador and gave them three hundred dollars. I read politics, sociology and theology into Chopin, Bach and Khatchaturian to make my music true for my husband.

In 1985 we graduated and moved to Toronto to continue studying. I began the Master of Divinity program and he began his Master's in sociology. After three months in Toronto, he said he needed to leave me because I was not intelligent enough.

I walked about Toronto hearing voices in my head telling me how insignificant I was. I drew pictures of myself in my journal with a small head and a big body. Soon my body became small too. I believed I had to become intelligent so that my husband might stay. I poured over my books and got straight A's. He did not come back.

I couldn't come back to Winnipeg because the talk of my divorce was too much to face and I did want to continue studying. My favourite courses were in

homiletics. In preaching my intelligence was never a category in and of itself. It wove together my feelings, my breathing, my speaking, my standing. In preaching, my story, with its many layers, found its way of being conversation with the Bible and my Mennonite history.

One summer I had a job with a theatre company that toured churches with stories about street people and poverty. I preached, they acted. The churches seemed stiff and lifeless compared to the raw survival of this theatre group and the poor people of Toronto. I began to doubt the need for church since God did not seem present in the institutions but seemed alive in the poverty.

I left the church to spend much of my time where I believed God lived...with the poor. I eventually married a political activist. We invited street people to our wedding. We protested at rooming-house renovations, which we called "gentrification." I quit school to work with street women.

My husband was the hero of the street people and an effective activist among politicians, so I couldn't find reasons to tell what he was like at home. He told the people of downtown Toronto that we needed a break because I was six months pregnant. I said nothing. We moved to Saskatoon and I left the marriage ten months later when our daughter was seven months old. When I look back at that time I am amazed at how much personal interrogation and abuse I endured before I gathered enough reasons to leave.

I spent a very lonely year in Saskatoon fighting for the custody of our daughter. Two pungent memories come to me as I think back through that time of loneliness.

Shortly after the initial chaos of separating, a United Church minister, who was also a friend, asked if I would take a service for her. I preached on the Day of Pentecost – on the wind and fire of the spirit. I remember the raw but confident voice that came to me in the quiet of writing and preaching at the pulpit.

On a quiet Saturday afternoon (our daughter lived with her father on weekends) I walked along Broadway Avenue, the street with the little shops—stained glass, used clothing, a coffee shop with funky painted plant pots. I bought myself a ring. I wear this bent piece of silver all the time. It reminds me daily of the strength it took for me to live in that city and to leave that prairie province.

*We are a people of failure
and compassion;
we have a history of loneliness
and community;
we have times when we are
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and other times when we are
the quiet in the land
— not a clean, not a perfect, people,
nevertheless a struggling people.*

In those long, quiet hours in my Saskatoon apartment, I was given a chance to listen for my dreams. I heard a child singing "I Gave My Life to Thee," a 12-year-old playing "Great is Thy Faithfulness," a 21-year-old reading liberation theology, a 25-year-old living with the poor – but mostly I felt the tears of a broken 28-year-old who faced the daunting task of single motherhood and who felt like a failure in the face of her family and church.

After that year I moved to Winnipeg where I enrolled in a joint program with the University of Winnipeg and a Mennonite college to complete my Divinity degree. For a graduation assignment I wrote a paper on why, as a woman, I am a Mennonite. While writing this paper I realized that my confused feelings about being a Mennonite – hurt, love, anger, joy – were reflected in a history similar to my own. We are a people of failure and compassion; we have a history of loneliness and community; we have times when we are silencers of hope and other times when we are the quiet in the land – not a clean, not a perfect, people, nevertheless a struggling people.

I now live on a farm in southeastern Manitoba and am married to a farmer who loves me in honest ways. We parent two children. I have an office in the loft of a log cabin where I write. I sit and look out over the white quiet of winter prairie fields. During those minus 30 degree mornings I light a fire in the wood stove, brew a strong cup of coffee, then listen for the spirit of my past and present and let those

voices converse with my writing. I love the quiet that has become my most precious gift.

My Mennonite church may always silence my voice because I am a woman and divorced, but it cannot silence my voice in our house church, in the conversations that happen when my friend and I make noodles or in the times poets and songwriters gather in our cabin for art nights. The still quiet voice of God is the power on this prairie land. It is the sustenance within our fractured Mennonite history. This voice speaks to me through the people called church – rather than through the buildings or positions that name themselves as such. God's voice keeps whispering through all the pain, rejection and silencing. Nothing in the world could take Her voice away from me.



Bonnie Loewen first wrote this piece in response to a call by MCC's Women's Concerns Report for stories of Anabaptist women as "Quiet in the Land?" Excerpts of it were used in a multimedia piece created by Carol Ann Weaver and Carol Penner.

LETTERS

HOPE AND ECONOMICS

Once again Sophia has been an encouragement to me. I am thinking particularly of Eleanor Martens' description of the vision of the 44th Mennonite Health Assembly ("As I See It", Spring 1996), of congregations as caregivers and of her subsequent comments.

"Can we allow a situation to exist in the body of Christ where some live off the fat of the land and others live at the margins?"

That is a word we all need to hear. But Eleanor should be warned. Some years ago, Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship ran a program called Campus in the City. It was a wonderful program. Students lived together, shared

household chores, studied Scripture, evangelized, extended hospitality and put all their earnings from summer jobs in a common pot, from which they took their expenses and a small personal allowance. They even made common decisions about tithes. Then at the end of the summer, each took from the common pot not according to her/his contribution but according to need. A reserve was kept in case anyone had unexpected expenses in the coming year. They all testified to what they had learned about themselves, about God and about relating to fellow believers in love.

But the IVCF establishment shut the program down after a couple of years. I did not hear a

valid reason. I could only conclude that it was too "socialistic" for our upper middle class constituency. Such behaviour might be all right on the mission field, but surely God did not mean Acts 4:32-35 to be taken seriously in the seventies?

Nonetheless, it gives me hope when Christians begin to think about such things. Could we have an issue of Sophia dedicated to women and economics, or the socio-economic system?

May God continue to direct you in all your efforts.

Donna Stewart
N. Vancouver, B.C.

Recently I hosted a couple of international students who have come to the University of Manitoba to study geology. One was from Scotland; the other was from South Africa.

We were looking around the geological sciences building at the university, where there is a wonderful display of rocks, minerals and gems, many of which have strange or even unpronounceable names. One of my new friends explained to me that whoever discovers a particular mineral can name it what they want to—as long as it has “ite” on the end. Evidently “Minnesotite” was named after the state; “Cookeite” was likely named after a person.

Later we were having dinner at my house when the South African student picked up a brochure I had brought home from church that day. He had never heard the word “Mennonite” before. I tried to explain what it meant, where it came from, and who Menno Simons was. My friend was intrigued. He found it fascinating that there are people called Mennonite. “Sounds like it could be some kind of rock,” he said.

During my travels in Europe a month earlier I had come across two very different responses to the concept of Mennonites. “Do you know who Menno Simons was?” my Canadian-born transplanted relative asked a waitress in Friesland, the Netherlands. We had just come from Menno’s birthplace, Witmarsum, where we visited a monument in his honor. This was an important anniversary for followers of the Mennonite tradition: the 500th anniversary of Menno’s birth.

No, the waitress didn’t know who he was. She didn’t even care who he was.

But in Belgrade, Yugoslavia, they know about Mennonites.

They didn’t until a few years ago, when war ripped the country apart and the economy was crushed. That’s when Mennonite Central Committee began sending shipments of food to help the refugees streaming in from Bosnia and Croatia as well as those Serbs whose lives were turned upside down by the war.

At one point, when hyperinflation made it impossible to buy meat, these meat-loving people were thrilled to be receiving canned beef from MCC. They have learned to cook all sorts of recipes with this canned meat: soups, stews, even “Mennoburgers.”

“We are having Mennonites for lunch today,” a Serbian friend would tell me with a twinkle in the eye.

The Christians I met in Belgrade have come to view Mennonites as humanitarians who have helped rescue them

from poverty and destruction. They have great respect for Mennonites, and that respect was shown to me, a Canadian Christian with Mennonite ties. They treated me as if I had personally been responsible for bringing them food shipments. I did not feel worthy of their gratitude. I could only humbly accept their thanks on behalf of my people.

They also taught me much about what it means to live as a Christian. Though none of them have much, they share what they have—with each other, with refugees regardless of ethnic background, and with strangers like me. The Christians I met

came from a variety of denominations, but volunteered together for a refugee assistance organization called Bread of Life, operating in the Pentecostal and Baptist churches. They worked together, ate their meals together, and prayed and worshipped together.

Denominational differences just were not evident.

I was moved by the love they had for each other, and how they reached out in love to the destitute. I was impressed by how the story of God’s love has been told so compellingly that many who thought they had no hope are coming to Christ. I met numerous new Christians in Belgrade, people whose lives have been transformed because they have heard

about God’s love, and have seen the evidence of that love.

This was a time of learning for me. One young man, Pedja, had formed his own views of North American Christians, especially Mennonites. Last year he was part of a group of young people from Yugoslavia, Northern Ireland, South Africa and other countries who travelled to North American Mennonite churches to tell youth groups here what it was like to live in a place of conflict.

Pedja enjoyed travelling, speaking and meeting other Christians. But he was bothered by something. The Mennonites he talked to spoke glowingly of peace theology, of following the way of peace, but they avoided talking about Jesus. He saw more of a philosophical position than a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ, the one in whose name they are speaking peace.

Pedja’s reflections made me think. How do I want to be seen if I call myself Mennonite? Not as “some kind of rock,” encased in glass for people to look at and admire; not just as a doer of good who is capable of providing meat to those who have no meat; not just as a promoter of peace who lives in a comfortable country. But as a follower of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, “for he himself is our peace.”

Rocks, Burgers, and Peace

By Debra Fieguth



Gifted Women

At the Canadian MB Conference this summer an informal lunch was hosted by the MB Women's Network, an ad hoc association with chapters in various provinces organized to advocate for women in leadership positions in our conference. Eighty-five women attended the lunch. Four women shared stories about how they have used gifts of ministry in the church. Their stories are excerpted here.



Serving God in Teaching Ministry

by Marie Speiser



Call to Me and I will answer you and show you great and unsearchable things you do not know. (Jeremiah 33:3)

Teaching has always been a large and very rewarding part of my life. A few years ago, as my husband and I anticipated our retirement from public-school teaching, we began to pray about our future. We thought teaching in a missionary school in another country was a good request, but God had other ideas and opened the door to a ministry of which we were not even aware.

About that time we began to attend Forest Grove Community Church in Saskatoon. Saskatoon attracts a large number of immigrants, many of whom need to become proficient in English to prepare them for employment. Rahim, an Iranian refugee, had received help with his English from a retired teacher couple in the church and had also accepted Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. He challenged the church to provide a teacher for an English-as-a-second-language Bible study class. He would provide the students to fill the classroom.

When approached about taking this assignment, we recognized God's answer to our prayers. God had brought the mis-

sion field to us. One class soon expanded to two, my husband and I each teaching a separate class.

Our students were often highly educated. They came from many different countries and represented many religions and belief systems. Church members befriended them and included them in social functions as well as in home Bible studies. Now, almost two years later, a number of the students have accepted Christ as their personal Saviour. Many attend Sunday morning worship services. God has shown us great and unsearchable things. Let me share with you about some of our students.

A Russian husband-and-wife team of medical doctors have become Christians and have experienced many answers to prayer in the long process of becoming landed immigrants. Another Russian doctor, a woman, has also accepted the Lord. A young woman, a Bosnian Croat, when faced with the simple truth of the Gospel, accepted the Lord. Another young woman, a Bosnian Serb, came to the class to improve her English and meet other people. She met the Lord after a few months of attending the class. She was baptized upon her confession of faith and joined our church in spite of the strong objections of her Communist parents.

The Lord willing, we will continue these classes this fall and reach out to the international students and immigrants in our city. We are also interested in hearing from others who are teaching in similar situations and in helping people in other cities to enter this ministry. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share how God kept his promise of Jeremiah 33:3 and showed us how to use our gift of teaching in ways we did not know.

Marie Speiser and her husband live in Lanigan, Saskatchewan. One of their three children is a missionary in France, the other two are teachers in B.C. and Manitoba.

Gifted Women



My Ministry of Encouragement

by Elfrieda Duerksen

As I reflected on the topic of encouragement, I was pushed to face various questions. Why is encouragement so important to me? How has this passion developed? Where am I at this point in my life?

I remember as a child I was much more encouraged by praise from my parents than by threats or punishment. And I received much affirmation. As a teacher I realized early that often encouragement is an effective method of discipline and results in positive relationships. With my children I have had countless opportunities to apply this principle as well.

In my involvements in the church I have experienced much joy but also sadness to find that we are hesitant to acknowledge another person's gifts and positive contributions, and yet I believe we all yearn for affirmation. Even a few words of appreciation have been most inspiring and uplifting to me.

What is the driving force of my passion to encourage those whom I meet on my journey? At the beginning of his ministry Jesus called certain individuals with the words: "Follow me." Through the centuries, Jesus has continued that call. As this invitation has come to me, I have desired and continue to desire to be a true follower. It has become crucial to me to discover more about my leader and Lord as, after all, he is my example. In this search, I have found that in his life here he accepted each person as unique in her/his need, showing compassion and caring.

As I try to walk the Jesus way and to follow him also in the area of encouragement, I find that my motivation must be his love. Only then can I genuinely and with integrity accept the other person without passing judgment. Only then can I listen to and truly hear each individual. To help me I ask God for a heart of compassion, not pity. My prayer is for guidance, grace and wisdom from God.

Seeking to encourage others has been a strong motivation to get to know better those on my journey and to find a point of

identity. Even though I have often found it difficult to relate to people, when I recognized that each person has been created in the image of God, I was excited and inspired; here is something we all have in common. Also, most of us experience struggles and disappointments, and we value empathy and encouragement.

Encouragement takes many forms and often it is the little things that count—a note, a card, a phone call, a warm smile, a few words showing personal interest, some baking, responses to such special events as graduations, anniversaries.

In the process of affirming others, I have gained so much more than I have given away. I have been able to develop relationships with people of different ages, which has kept me from becoming stagnant, especially as I get older. When we experience pain or other difficulties, our world tends to shrink, and we can easily become self-centered. My husband and I have experienced this during the last few years as I am learning to live with rheumatoid arthritis and he and I both with the effects of a stroke Dave suffered almost five years ago, leaving him with severe losses. Reaching out to others has helped me in my struggle to overcome self pity, which is most debilitating.

Investing one's life in others is never easy, but it is deeply satisfying. My journey is marked with weakness, failure, discouragement, disappointment along the way. But what can be more rewarding than to have someone say, "Your note came just at the right time" and to experience affirmation and peace from Jesus? So the words in Micah continue to be an inspiration to me as I attempt to encourage my wayfarers: "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)



Elfrieda Duerksen, and her husband, David, are members of River East MB Church in Winnipeg.

Two years ago at a women's conference in British Columbia, I experienced a profound touch of God in my inner spirit—a calling, a naming, a restoring of body, soul and mind that resulted in a desire to continue in Christ's steps by using a gift with which I think I have been graced and challenged. The book by Joyce Rupp *May I have this Dance?* has helped me put a name to it. The gift? Leaning and being a lean-to.

There are moments in all of our lives when we are not strong enough to walk alone, when we need people who will be strength for us in our pain, who will provide comfort, support and vision when the spirit is weak and visionless.

Being a lean-to is like being a bus stop, a park bench, a crutch, an umbrella or a shade tree — not a permanent haven but a temporary and essential shelter when storms are raging around or inside of us. Being a lean-to is being a fellow journeyer to offer support, refuge and rest.

The more I have learned about the lean-tos in Jesus' life, the more I have uncovered what the gift of being a lean-to really is. He too needed others to walk beside him in the struggles of his journey. He knew what it was to need shelter and refuge. Mark's gospel tells us about his lean-tos.

First, in the lonely place, in prayer, he sought solitude and strength in God's presence. He learned, as I am learning, to trust his entire person to this compassionate presence. The gift of leaning on God has become more evident to me these past few years when my failing health, expectations, church and family work have all crowded in and tried to smother my inner strengths. Learning to lean is hard in our society where self-sufficiency is praised and dependency scorned. There is a tendency in Mennonite tradition for people to think they should always be able to stand alone and get through life without having to lean on others. I am learning that leaning is a gift that has to be cultivated.

Easier for me than learning to lean is identifying with the lean-tos in Jesus' life. Jesus leaned on his friends in his grief — for example, when he received news of John's death. Being a comfort in times of grief has often come naturally to me within the church and on the job as a community nurse working with many palliative clients. Only a few weeks ago I was called 12 o'clock midnight to go and pronounce the death of a mother, call the doctor, alert the funeral home and sit as a comforting presence at the table while a daughter and son contemplated the ending of a life.

Having experienced unexpected physical pain in the past two years, I have been able to understand a little the exhausting space in which chronic pain puts many, and I have been able to allow others the comfort of just being themselves in my presence.

Gifted to Lean and Be a Lean-to

by Naomi Enns



I'm reminded of Jesus, seeking out the lean-tos of friends as he travelled. Bethany was a welcome shelter for him—a place he could kick off his sandals and just be. I can imagine him sharing his struggles and taking comfort in the listening of good friends. In our church in Victoria I think of a young woman who has struggled with her health. She is a woman of tremendous strength and a cheerful spirit. Yet she also needs to lean on the physical and emotional strength of others. She has found in me a lean-to.

Sometimes the gift of being a lean-to is exercised at awkward moments—when there's laundry, vacuuming, cooking and an evening meeting all planned in a tightly scheduled day. Then, in the sound of a doorbell, all this must be pushed aside and a weary, emotionally fragile woman from the church community needs to be offered a place to rejuvenate her soul. The gift is used. So much for that "gourmet dinner." Thank goodness the kids are happy with macaroni and cheese again.

Being a lean-to also happens over the phone. Last week I was a listening presence to a woman in her seventies who was struggling with the burden of caring for a husband whose age and ill health is wearing her down. It is a humbling experience to help carry another's cross, but it is also a sacred gift.

Being a pastor's wife has meant to some in the church that I should have a spirituality stronger than others. I don't. Yet my gift of being a lean-to has allowed me to admit my great weaknesses and inability to walk alone on this path called life. Personal experience has proven time and again that becoming vulnerable and admitting my need for help has allowed others to unload their burdens and walk within the church community rather than alone, outside of it, as together we realize that leaning is a part of the gospel of Christ.

Sometimes I am frustrated with this gift of mine. I feel forced to give up moments of my precious space, to give energy and compassion when I feel my well has run dry. It is then that I am continually reminded of Jesus — the ultimate lean-to — who took a lifetime to learn to lean on God — the one he came to know in solitude, the one from whom he received his name and his calling, the one whose unending presence he learned to trust. And in this I too find strength to exercise my gift of being a lean-to, a shelter, a burden-holder, a place of comfort within and with church community.

Naomi Enns and her husband, Doug practise their ministry at the Saanich Community Church (MB) in Victoria. They have three children.

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Zairian Church Women are On the Move

by Irma Epp

On a bitterly cold, snowy afternoon last November 22, my husband and I left Winnipeg for Kinshasa, Zaire. I had been invited to speak at the Zairian MB Women's Conference, which was to take place in Kikwit during the first week in December. This conference had been scheduled to



Afternoon coffee break

take place earlier, but because of the outbreak of the Ebola virus in Kikwit, it had been postponed.

Entering Kinshasa we were appalled by the deterioration that had occurred since our last visit in 1982. There were many partially finished buildings fallen into disarray because of the lack of goods and finances, numerous hospitals standing empty because of the lack of finances and personnel, and many schools closed because the teachers who had not been paid for fourteen months had left their jobs. Garbage was piled everywhere along the roadside because there is no garbage pickup in this city of over four million people.

This is the setting in which the Zairian MB church women work and live. One would hardly expect a church to flourish in such an environment. But in spite of the stagnant economy, widespread political corruption, the exploding population, the vengeful return of the historic killers like malaria and sleeping sickness and the rampant spread of AIDS, this is the place where the largest and fastest growing MB church is situated.

What amazed me over and over again was the dauntless spirit of the women. They have found a way to live in the midst of chaos. They are not just treading water to stay afloat; they are on the move! This was so clearly demonstrated at the Women's Conference in Kikwit.

The overall conference theme they had chosen was "Women's Participation in Building the Church of Zaire." The three subtopics were "Let Us Build," based on the story of Nehemiah, "Let Us Serve and Build Together with God" and "The Power of God that Acts in Women."

The conference began with an opening ceremony on Sunday afternoon. The four-hour service was packed out. I wish you could have seen the women in their colourful African dress and newly washed head scarves. They were literally on the move. Their eyes were dancing along with their feet as they made their way into the church. This was the first Women's Conference they had planned on their own. The last Women's Conference in 1986 had been planned by men. You could feel the air of excitement!



Mama Kusamukanu Fumana, graduate of the Theology School in Kinshasa, Bible School Instructor



Part of the Women's Choir at the Conference

Three choirs sang at the opening ceremony—a women's choir made up of a number of the delegates calling themselves "The Choir of a Thousand Voices," a youth choir sporting flaming red blouses and shirts, and a male chorus in long-sleeved white shirts and ties.

Three women played the drums. Everyone, including the children, got caught up in the celebration. Those who did not have access to drums banged out the beat on barrel tops and colourful shakers. The whole place was "a moving and a rocking."

Mama Kadi Hayalume, the director of MB Women's Work in Zaire, opened the session with a dynamic Kituba rendition of Psalm 133:1, "How wonderful it is when children of God live together in one place like an extended family." Following the service all the guests were served buns and peanuts. The women had baked these buns in outdoor ovens the day before.

Conference sessions began on Monday morning. There were 144 delegates, numerous visitors and many, many children. (The four- and five-year-olds had come along to look after their younger sisters and brothers.) All of these people doubled up on mats for the night wherever there was room. There were no tables to eat on, no forks or knives to eat with. There were not enough plates to go around so the women shared. Everyone washed their hands in the same bucket of water both before and after meals. There were no towels with which to dry your hands. For washroom facilities, there was one little lean-to with a hole in the ground. None of these inconveniences dampened the spirit of the women. With uplifted hands and faces they sang about the joy that will be theirs when Christ returns, "Nkembo, nkembo kuna," the drums keeping up a steady rhythm.

Irma Epp, a member of McIvor Avenue MB Church in Winnipeg, has spent a number of years in Zaire as a missionary.

POETRY

The Solace of Sisters

*A foursquare of sisters:
such a solid standing place,
a blind in the reedy marsh
from which to hear the throaty calls
of invisible, treacherous things
and not be afraid.*

*A cross-shaped tangle of
hair, arms, laughing mouths,
impossible loves, exposed
to the four corners
of this churchly earth -
east, west, north, south,
a million miles of vagaries
from brain to heart
between us.*

*So, what is love
when all is said and done
but this four-sided sisterly container
into which we throw
our scraps of pain, bits of worldly glory,
splinters of ecstasy?*

*Ah, my sisters, my loves,
my earth, air, fire, and water,
This alchemical stew out of which
we've spun our threads of silver, gold,
semi-precious stones held in place
against our throats.*

A solace for the journey.

by Marianne Ewert Worcester

Thoughts on Being a Church Council Moderator

by Sara Jane Schmidt

It's still rare, apparently, for women to hold the office of moderator within Mennonite Brethren churches. For those who may not know, I'll begin by saying that Jubilee Mennonite is a dual conference church, in existence since July 1994. The founding churches were Valley Gardens Community Church (MB) and Northdale Mennonite Fellowship (General Conference).

I first got this job by default. I was asked to be vice-moderator, as our moderator was out of town a fair bit. Then he up and moved away completely so I was asked to fill in. We were going through the merger process at the time and I was on the merger committee anyway. One of my gifts is to organize and, believe me, there was a lot of organizing required in this process. Although it was not a position I would have sought, I really felt "called" to this specific task in the church. I have also been called to prayer more than ever before, feeling keenly the responsibility of leadership.

Later I chaired the joint council of the two churches and later still was officially elected to a two-year term. I had the privilege of speaking at both provincial conferences when Jubilee was accepted as a member church in February 1995.

I recall a meeting of the Manitoba GC moderators and treasurers. From my MB roots, I had the impression the GCs were more "liberated." I was amused to find I was the



only female in attendance. I have since discovered that the range of views on the gender issue is very wide within the GC conference, and each church is allowed to set its own policy. It seems to work.

I have "flown by the seat of my pants" throughout all of this, having zero experience of this type. My personal style is informal (Roberts' Rules are largely ruled out) and in council we work by consensus, not vote. My husband, involved in conflict resolution, has also influenced my thinking and he's the "man behind the woman." I've learned a lot from him about process.

Running congregational meetings has presented its challenges. Agreeing on a name was worse than giving birth! Here too, I've discovered that process is at least as important as the issue under consideration. We've tried to avoid the voting procedure, which tends to be secretive and is potentially divisive, with winners and losers. Instead we foster a process that allows everyone to be heard and understood and, having done that, to agree on where we ought to go. The "line game," where everyone places

themselves on an imaginary line representing a continuum of opinion, is one device we've found helpful. One member recently suggested we ought to patent this as a Jubilee special!

Some might ask, "What's it like to work with a lot of men?" It's true that men have been the majority on our council and on conference committees. For me this has not been a problem, or something I even think about much. There may be several reasons. One is that I like men. As a child some of my closest cousins were boys out on the farm. I was a tomboy and sports-minded. I still have numerous male friends. Most of my racquetball opponents are men.

The second factor is that my personality is of the take-charge type, an attribute often viewed as masculine. My husband reported to me once, after attending a session on "Biblical Manhood," that when the speaker listed the attributes of the male leader, his first thought was that they had just described me! Hmmm...

I believe that individuals with leadership qualities exist in equal proportion among both genders, but we have not allowed women to use their leadership gifts fully. We also have not always recognized that the feminine expression of leadership may be distinct in character from the masculine, though no less powerful.

Somehow I have rarely experienced barriers because of my gender. At age 13, when I gave my baptismal testimony before a large congrega-

tion, an older man commented that I should be a preacher. I think he was sincere.

My upbringing taught me I had a responsibility to use my gifts to serve, and to do everything to the best of my ability. My parents led me to believe there was nothing to prevent me in any area of endeavour.

During my college years my professor and mentor Bill Baerg (and equally Irmgard Baerg, who led a life quite different from most women her age) helped me develop as a choir conductor even though there was no conducting major available. I was given opportunities to lead the A Cappella choir on tour. Holda Fast-Redekopp's encouragement after one such occasion, and her own example, have been an inspiration to me. Soon after, I was welcomed by choir director Roland Sawatzky to be his associate at River East MB Church.

Am I a trailblazer of sorts? Maybe. Has that been my intention? Never. I've only done what I felt I was able and responsible to do, gradually learning more about my gifts and how to use them. I hope I can continue to do this.

When not moderating for her church, Sara Jane Schmidt teaches piano at Concord College. She and her husband, Rick, have two teenaged children.

Called to Serve the Church

by Lorraine Dyck



I remember the day I knew I was happy. I was in Brazil, walking down a dirt road with children and dogs running around me. Out of the open windows came the hiss of pressure

cookers getting lunch ready. I was on my way to the mission church where I was working in Curitiba.

Brazil is also where I "fell in love" with the church. It was while I was working for the Board of Missions/Services through the Good News Corps that I became involved with a Mennonite Brethren mission church in Villa Sao Pedro in Curitiba. Working with children, youth and adults gave me an opportunity to see the church at work and to realise that this was the work for me.

At the end of my time in Brazil, I returned to Canada with a desire to continue in church work. I didn't know how or where it would happen. God provided the opportunity when I became secretary in my own home church. For seven years I worked in the office with a variety of pastors and lay workers to become familiar with church work and to practise the gifts and skills God had given me.

From there, with the encouragement of my pastor, I went to Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno. I did not go thinking about becoming a pastor—I only knew that I wanted to continue working in the church. But as I completed my seminary work, I did think that I could be a pastor.

My first assignment was at Waterloo Mennonite Brethren Church. Again it was a time of learning and growing and discovering about being a servant in ministry. I was there for just over five years. I am now in my second assignment at South Langley Mennonite Brethren Church in Langley, B.C.

I have learned a number of things in ministry. I would like to highlight six of these:

1) My first desire is to be a servant of Jesus Christ. When I came to South Langley MB Church, I chose a verse from 2 Corinthians 4:5 as mine for this ministry. It says that ministry (preaching) is not about

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ourselves but about Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as servants of the church. Being part of the staff at a church gives one many opportunities to serve.

2) Ministry means being available. I believe God has provided me the opportunity to be available as a single person. I see that being free from having to be available to a family is a benefit to ministry. I still need to balance work time and time away from work. I do not hold up singleness as the best way for ministry, but for me it is the way God has provided an opportunity to be available.

3) Ministry is not about being used in all situations, but about being available to be used. I have learned that I am not always the one who can minister to a situation. Sometimes I can only stand on the sidelines and pray. There are other times when I may be the person to speak truth as no one else can.

4) Ministry is always about learning. On the Board of Christian Education, we are working through core values for being a disciplined person. One of the core values is about being "journey conscious." That means we realise that all our lives we need to be learning and growing spiritually.

5) Ministry means working together. Church ministry involves working together with other pastors, with secretaries and other church staff, with volunteers. I am constantly being reminded that I need to have many people working together with me to get the job done.

6) Ministry is about knowing when to speak and when to be quiet. Recently, as I was working through a chapter on the discipline of solitude in Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, I came to the conviction that there was an issue about which I needed to be silent. My preference is to explain things until people understand. God faithfully gave me the opportunity to put my silence into practice that very day. Knowing when to speak and when to be silent is allowing God to be the director of my thoughts and the intents of my heart.

I thank God for the opportunity to be in ministry and to work for the Kingdom of God in the church.

Lorraine Dyck recently wrote an article for Sophia's "From the Source" column.



Adult Life Changes and Faith Development

by Valerie Wiebe

“I just don’t have enough faith.” I hear this from adults in distress facing questions they can’t readily answer. It seems we expect that once we reach adulthood, our level of faith should be at a consistently effective level. Not so.

Many things affect how our faith develops—crises that we face, the circumstances within which we live, our responsiveness to God’s spirit. As we visit and revisit the various experiences of our lives, we are given continued opportunities to learn and to deepen what we have learned.

I want to talk about faith development in three broad strokes: finding faith, deepening faith and integrating faith. Although these stages are not rigidly attached to a person’s age, they roughly correspond to early adulthood, as a time when people work their way through searching faith to the point where they land upon something they believe; middle adulthood, when faith experiences are deepened; and mature adulthood, when faith becomes more fully integrated.

Finding Faith

Young adults respond to questions about faith in a variety of ways.

1) Some want to explore the options that are available and often seek to understand a variety of belief systems after they leave home. Young people need to question the faith with which they have affiliated as children in order to make it their own. Although this can be a very anxiety-provoking time for parents, it is important to remember that doubt and questioning are integral to faith development.

The intensity of the searching stage varies from person to person. While some totally reject the belief system of their parents, for others the searching stage will be barely perceptible.

2) Some youth do not go through a searching/questioning stage until later in their lives. They continue to affiliate with the faith of their family and friends until a crisis or a change in circumstances raises questions about identity and belief.

3) Some young adults who have grown up in Christian homes declare a moratorium on their faith.

They do nothing with it until many years later when they decisively involve themselves in the Christian faith, perhaps in response to a crisis or because they begin to have children.

4) Some embrace their faith with ideological vigour. They are full of enthusiasm and energy, and they are eager to serve God. They may experience disillusionment along the way, which will propel them into a round of questioning God, their faith and the church. A young adult must find a way to account for failure and suffering as well as success.

5) Some young adults have grown up in homes that espouse to be Christian but where such virtues as love and grace were badly distorted. Their journey is a long and arduous one of sorting out God’s truth from what they were brought up to believe was God’s truth.

Deepening Faith

During their thirties many adults are busy establishing themselves in their careers and as families. It is during this time that a concern often arises about resolving conflict and relationship hurts that are rooted in the families in which they grew up. It is a time when family values are reevaluated: what do I keep and pass on to my children and what do I let go?

Toward middle adulthood comes an enduring and growing sense of what one is to do with one’s life. This may involve re-aligning oneself with dreams that have been deferred or forgotten. It may involve recognition that too much has been sacrificed for ambition—friends, family, health, peace of mind. It may involve mourning for dreams that did not and will not come true. Once this occurs it becomes possible for new dreams to rise up and take shape.

I married into a family where individuals spoke of being called by God into ministry. As far as I knew I had not had this kind of calling. As a young adult my faith was pretty pragmatic. I did things because they seemed to make sense: Bible School, summer ministry that led into gospel music ministry to youth, marriage, children. Then one summer Sunday, while I was home from church with a sick child, God impressed upon me as I was reading the Bible that God had gifted me too – that

I had a vocation to fulfill. That was all. It was one of those spiritual experiences that are hard to put into words. But it felt like the closest thing to a “call” that I’d had to that point.

Since then I’ve continued to walk through the open doors, in much the same way as when I was a pragmatic young adult, but with a growing conviction that it is God who opens the doors and offers each of us a vocation. That vocation encompasses individual roles as wife, mother, career person. It is an enduring and growing sense of what one is to do with one’s life. God continues to call us forth, to walk and to work in conjunction with the agenda of God’s kingdom.

A new challenge that approaches toward middle adulthood is finding a way to incorporate this growing sense of what one is to do into the network of existing commitments and responsibilities. The needs of aging parents and growing children, and the responsibilities of work, community and church continue to increase.

Discipleship occurs as we take on the posture of listeners and learners—to Scripture, to the church, to the spiritual guide. Doubts and questions continue to play an important role in our faith development. Although we dislike the discomfort they cause us, difficult questions can serve to move us into deeper places of understanding.

As we journey with God, continuing to try to make sense of our lives in the light of Scripture and our experience with God, transformation occurs. The name my colleagues and I chose for our counselling center—Kairos—is a Greek word for time, not chronological time but the seasons of time, the rhythm of planting and harvest. Throughout our faith journey we all experience moments of kairos, a time of ripeness, of understanding, when change occurs as we see and listen and respond.

Some transformation stories are dramatic, others less so. I marvel at my children; when did they get so tall? My son has been buying men’s large t-shirts since he was six years old, and all-of-a-sudden they’re too small. Each year, when our children try on their snow boots and find them too small, we mark their growth. This is how we mark our spiritual growth as well. Over time we go through similar seasons but find ourselves responding to them differently, asking different questions, becoming more content with the growing process.

Integrating Faith

The winds continue to blow and beat against our faith as we get older, so it is to our advantage to have it grounded on a solid foundation. My father-in-law, at 87, has spent many years in the ministry. His faith contin-

ues to be an inspiration to many. As in the case with many older people, he has experienced his share of health problems, grieved the loss of his wife and adjusted to many difficult life transitions. When he suffered a stroke, he was no longer able to recall much of the Scripture that he had memorized over the years. So he started over again, re-memorizing passages he once knew fluently.

Opportunities to model our faith and to exercise spiritual discipline continue to present themselves as we grow older.

The apostle Paul encouraged his readers to “follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Very few of us aspire to this calling. There is a temptation, as we journey along the road to maturing faith, to defer responsibility that comes along with this maturity. However, after spending a season learning and listening, familiarizing ourselves with the work of God in our lives, we are summoned toward another dimension of service.

We are called to mentor, encourage and hold accountable those who follow us in the faith. There comes a time when the people to whom we have looked for direction are no longer around. We are the ones with whom people are checking to see how things are done.

An added dimension of this responsibility, however, is to be caring without controlling, to be decisive without becoming possessive. When we care for something deeply, we are inclined to try to control it, to possess it. But mature love has learned to offer itself without taking over. We meet such a love in Christ, where we are not dominated – we are set free.

As we move through the various stages of life we are faced with many situations that challenge what we believe and how we think these experiences can serve to expand and deepen our faith. As the values of the Gospel are tested and internalized over many seasons, our faith is shaped within us. And as we continue to respond to God’s movement in our lives we become like the wise woman who built her house on the rock: “The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock” (Matt 7:25 NIV).

Valerie Wiebe is a counsellor in private practice at Kairos Counselling Centre. She and her husband are members of Westwood Community Church in Winnipeg. They have three teenaged children.

THE COLOUR OF BREAKFAST

by Al Doerksen

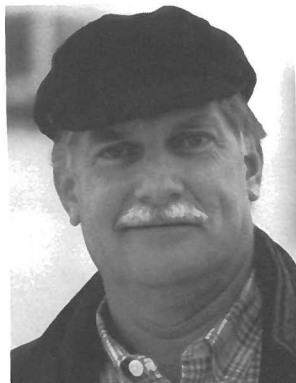
I first started making breakfast foods when I was twelve. My mother had taken the train to her sister's wedding in Manitoba, and she left it to me, the eldest son, to put food on the table. I don't remember whether she left a pot of borscht behind for us or not, but it was then I started making pancakes.

The pancakes were the low-rise variety, what we now call German pancakes in our house, relatives of what more sophisticated people call crepes. We didn't have a Betty Crocker Cookbook for Boys but my mother showed me where to look in the Mennonite cookbook.

In those days we didn't eat pancakes for breakfast, and certainly not as a dessert like Crepes Suzette. We ate pancakes as a main course, with sugar and water-diluted Rogers syrup. It often took a couple of hours, even with two frying pans, to serve up enough of them to still all appetites. I developed skills such as getting the temperature in the frying pan just right, flipping the pancakes without draping them over the side of the pan or stove top, and rationing limited quantities among the starving masses—our family had eight kids!

I've always made breakfasts for my own family. I don't suppose one should be too linear about deducing why one does what one does later in life, but it must be at least partially true that my commitment to making family breakfasts had its genesis in my coming-of-age flipping pancakes.

My repertoire has expanded over the years to include things I never heard of as a boy, things like croissants, baked grapefruits, bagels, cream cheese, freshly squeezed orange juice, French toast, thinly sliced cheese, yoghurt, strawber-



ries, fresh fruit, brewed coffee. I don't do eggs often (because I don't like eggs) but we do have corn flakes, Red River Cereal and the like from time to time.

The best part of breakfast isn't the menu, however, but the appreciation received from those who sit down with me to enjoy it. That's why Saturday breakfasts are my favorite, and that's also why I started to also pay attention to the colour of breakfast. Traditional breakfasts tend to be monochromatic, into the cereal/earth tones. Adding a bit of colour in the form of chokecherry jam, for example, provides as good a kick start as freshly-squeezed, Vitamin C-rich orange juice. The choice of tablecloth and dishes make a difference too, as does sunlight.

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My family sometimes raves about "Al's great breakfasts," and they embarrass me when they do, because if they stopped to think about it they'd realize my breakfasts aren't any more flavourful than anyone else's. They only seem that way because the little touches have the effect of telling them they're special.

The connection between nutrition and nurture is a close one. Traditionally, women have played predominant roles in food preparation. In developing countries, they also take primary roles in producing, harvesting, processing, and marketing. This may be an inequitable distribution of responsibility, but it certainly represents a commitment to family. Western boys have traditionally been taught to assume breadwinning roles but too often fail to understand that bread is more than economics. It's family, it's fellowship, it's celebration.

One of the best Christmas gifts I have received was a series of Italian cooking classes, taken with my eldest daughter—it was her gift to me. We learned how to make a great *insalata caprese*, but more importantly, I learned again that serving food isn't just piling nutrients on the table. It's about relationships.

That's why every boy of twelve should learn to make pancakes.

Al Doerksen was, until recently, the director of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank, an organization that distributes donated grain to needy countries around the world. He cooks breakfast for his wife, Agatha, and two grown children. They are members of Fort Garry MB Church, Winnipeg.

Colouring Outside the Lines

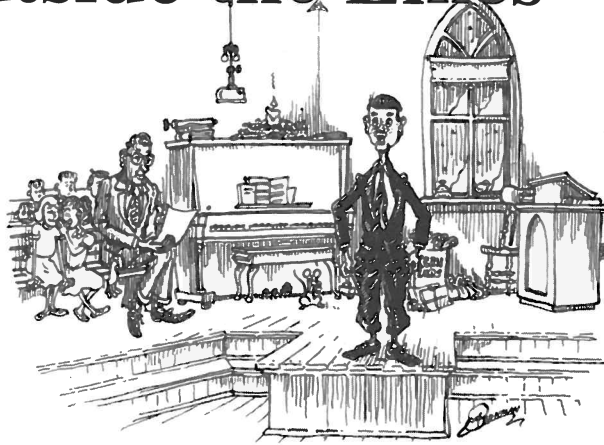
by Lorie Barkman

I don't recall that my mother ever insisted I colour inside the lines. She always made sure that as a child I had a colouring book and crayons. I remember how she took time to admire my work, especially when I added my own creative interpretations. Perhaps she was so kind to me because others near her were not always as kind to her. She was a young mother at a time and place when a work ethic based on the survival mindset of the Great Depression and the uncertainties of the Second World War discouraged time spent on artistic projects.

I loved those mornings in my pre-school years when she brought out her boxes of patterns and made quilt covers with pictures of elephants, cats and ponies. Sometimes she made bouquets of crepe paper flowers and let me make my own creations out of the scraps. I was too young to notice that she did this mostly when Dad was gone for the whole day, working out on the fields. He didn't see the need for things artistic, unless it was to design or modify a machine that made his manual labour easier.

The time came when all of that changed. Decades later, after Mom had died, I was cleaning out her craft cupboard in the basement that contained shoebox upon shoebox of craft catalogues, supplies and unfinished projects. It was completely uncharacteristic of her that there, buried under the sequins, flower stems and plaster-of-Paris molds there should be a brown Pension envelope hiding three crisp, new, one-hundred-dollar bills — almost as though she had planted them as a reward for whoever would be patient enough to muse through her version of the colouring books, where she had spent so much time colouring outside the lines.

Now, however, her proudest convert and fan was Dad as he reviewed to his children and grandchildren how resourceful and creative Mom had been. When the old country church closed and was torn down, Mom had rescued some of the best old boards, which she had Dad cut into blocks. She then took the old hymn books, which she had also rescued, cut out a carefully chosen hymn, decoupage it to the block along with macaroni



lettering, and sent a shiny varnished souvenir to each of the former members of the church.

She had also saved boxes and boxes of used Christmas cards from which she made cellophane-covered vases, crocheted together at the corners. Each of the six cards forming the sides were selected carefully to match in colour, theme and poetry.

A few days before she died she received a special message of thanks from a now grown-up boy who had once been a member of her craft club.

I know she prayed that I would give my life and gifts to be used by God in some way. She prayed very specifically about a decision I made to enroll in the "Draw Me" correspondence commercial art course. It pushed her to see me specialize in cartooning and then to dabble in political editorial cartoons for a newspaper. She once chided me, saying that God didn't create people to look as funny as I was drawing them. I was colouring too far outside the lines.

Once, after years of studying people at bus stops in downtown Winnipeg, I reported to her that I couldn't draw them as humorously as God had made them. But she never discouraged me. Rather, she clipped and saved whatever she could of what I had drawn. When I left pastoring to spend fifteen years as a producer, writer and cartoonist of a Christian television program, she never indicated that she valued my ministry any less in that position. She continued to pray that I would not colour too far outside the lines.



Lorie Barkman has been the pastor of Westwood Community Church, MB, in Winnipeg since 1990. He and his wife, Deanna, have three grown children.

BOOKS

The Concubine's Children, by Denise Chong.
Penguin Books, 1994, 266pp.

Reviewed by Agnes Dyck

"The river flowed both ways" (M. Laurence).

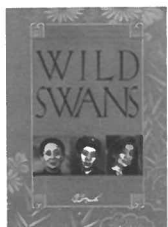


Action in this book flows both into the past and, by implication, into the future. The arresting gaze of a beautiful Chinese woman graces the cover of this biography, which is about betrayal, abuse, courage and, in the end, a rage to live. Seventeen-year-old Leong May Ying, unwillingly brought to Canada through an arrangement devised by her foster mother, arrived in Vancouver under an assumed name. Needing a wife here, Chan Sam, a Chinese immigrant with strong ties to his wife, Huangbo, in China, had solicited May Ying as his concubine. Chan Sam had left China in order to prosper quickly in "Gold Mountain," that is, Canada. The biographer, Denise Chong is the grand-daughter of May Ying and Chan Sam.

The title of the book is a trifle misleading since Denise Chong's main concern appears to be her loving quest to understand her mother, Hing, through an investigation of her grandmother's roots.

With the burgeoning Chinese population in Canada, Denise Chong's rivetting story could perhaps assist fellow Canadians in understanding human beings whose roots stand in stark contrast to our largely European past.

Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China.
Doubleday, 1991, 508pp.



Each of the twenty-eight chapters of this book is intriguingly titled with a current slogan or Chinese truism and the theme of the chapter. A family tree, a chronology and an index enhance this carefully researched family history.

Wild Swans spans the period from 1909 to 1978, a time when China experienced great upheaval. This period of some seventy years includes the Japanese occupation, revolution, famine, violence and disease. Purges, with their widespread fears of betrayal by friends and family, and Mao worship were followed by a cultural revolution with its torture and persecution of the intelligentsia. The subsequent dismantling of a long-entrenched societal structure affected all of China.

The book includes a thorough explanation of the causes of the cultural revolution. The historical and political events portrayed here must appear familiar to Mennonite survivors of the Russian revolution.

If you love biography you will not be disappointed with this saga of one three-generation family caught in the maelstrom of upheaval and dispossession in China's twentieth century.

MOVIES/VIDEOS

Migration North, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, 1995.

Reviewed by Debra Fieguth



A Winnipeg woman who spent time interviewing Mexican Mennonites last year has given Canadian professionals and other interested people a glimpse into life on the colonies. *Migration North*, narrated by Gladys Terichow and produced by Bruce Hildebrand, both of whom work for Mennonite Central Committee Canada, provides a respectful yet insightful look at the Old Colony Mennonites who left Manitoba for Mexico in the 1920s in order to have more control over their children's education.

Some younger colony members, tired of poverty and a too-controlled lifestyle, are now migrating back into Canada, and finding huge adjustments to modern life here. The 45-minute video was made to help Canadian school, health, police, social workers and others to understand what that adjustment means.

Terichow used Low German to interview numer-

ous people – including one of her own relatives – for the project. With her gentle, interested and compassionate manner, she was able to elicit a number of perspectives: from those who follow the old ways, those who question them, and the elders who teach those ways.

The interviews are revealing. One elder has been banned from preaching because he has been taking part in Bible studies. A young teacher has been let go from his job for the same reason. Education is limited: girls attend school until they are about 12, boys until 14.

Families are large, and land in Mexico is becoming more scarce. Belief in the old ways comes from a need to follow tradition rather than to understand a biblical basis for their lifestyle.

Some 27,000 Mexican Mennonites have returned to Canada in recent years to find a freer and more economically viable future. Most have settled in southern Ontario, with others in Manitoba and Alberta.

Not surprisingly, they face enormous adjustments once in Canada. Migration North is a way of making this adjustment easier. The video, which was released last November, has already shown its value, with 550 copies sold within the first six months.

The video can be rented or purchased from MCC Canada (204) 261-6381. Contact Sharla for rental or Kathleen for purchase.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

An Invitation

To *Sophia's* Annual General Meeting

Saturday, January 25, 1996

9:30 A.M.

River East M.B. Church 755 McLeod Avenue, Winnipeg, MB

Refreshments will be served.

SOPHIA'S FIRST ANNUAL NEW WRITERS CONTEST

Sophia is inviting women who have not previously written for *Sophia* to submit their writing to our first New Writers Contest.

Submissions should be a maximum of 800 words, typed. Please include title of article, your name, address and phone number on a separate piece of paper. Include title, but not your name, on article. Submissions will not be returned. DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS IS MARCH 31, 1996.

A \$50 prize will be awarded for each of the four best entries, which will be published in a future issue of *Sophia*. Runners-up may also be invited to have their submissions published. Writing should be in one of the following categories:

1. *Life Writing*. A thoughtful account of a personal experience, a biographical story about a woman you know, or a life's experience recounted through letters or in diary/journal format.
2. *A Reflection from Scripture*. Of particular interest is interpretation of Scriptures about female characters or from a female perspective.
3. *My Experience As a Christian Woman at the End of the Twentieth Century*. A reflection on how you see your life and experience (or a particular facet of your experience) as a woman and a Christian in the present age; how this relates to your past and/or your future; what you see as the most important issues facing you in your daily life or your future.
4. *A Theme of your choice*.
5. *A Short Story*.

We are the aroma of Christ to God
among those who are being saved
and among those who are perishing;
to one a fragrance from
death to death,
to the other a fragrance
from life to life.

(2 Corinthians 2:15 NRSV)