

S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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



Worthy of Worship

SPRING 1999 ■ VOLUME 9 ■ NUMBER 1

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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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Remaining 1999 themes include:

June - Marriage and Other Endeavors;

October - Special issue from Ontario;

December - Volunteerism

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SOPHIA Mission Statement

Sophia offers a forum for Christian women to speak to one another about the joys and challenges of living faithfully in an uncertain, changing world. Its pages give voice to women's stories - their experiences in church and society, family and workplace, their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. It invites expressions of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. In doing so it hopes to affirm women in their quest for spiritual, emotional and physical wholeness and for the full expression of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Sophia was conceived and brought to birth by Mennonite Brethren women and celebrates Christian sisterhood. Its desire is to welcome differing voices. It hopes to challenge women and men of all ages as they live together in Christian community. The name SOPHIA (wisdom) expresses our desire to search and know the wisdom of God through the Scriptures and our experience as followers of Jesus Christ.

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).

Cover: "Sacrament of Baptism" by Anthony Chiarella, was one of the paintings displayed in the "More Refreshing Winds" Collection at the Mennonite Heritage Gallery. It depicts Christ on the cross with water and blood flowing from his side. To the right of Christ's body is an arch symbolizing the passage through which the believer passes in baptism and through which the water from Christ's body flows. On the far right of the cross is a vine, representing Christ, the true vine, and above his head, the dove, which is the Holy Spirit descending on the baptized believer, as it did on Jesus when he was baptized. Anthony Chiarella works as an electronics technologist. He is a member of St. Timothy Roman Catholic Church in Winnipeg.



EDITORIAL

Worthy of Worship

by Lori Matties

*What shall I return to the Lord for all
[the Lord's] bounty to me?*

*I will lift up the cup of salvation and
call on the name of the Lord.*

(PSALM 116:12,13 NRSV)

I was seventeen when I first began to take part in planning and leading worship services. Having recently become a follower of Jesus, I was full of the joy of my newfound faith, and like the psalmist I was eager to find ways to declare it. At my high school I took on a leadership role in the Inter School Christian Fellowship club. At church I joined an alternative "contemporary worship" group that took turns planning and leading services. I sang and played in a worship band. Since this was a "liberal" church, I was never told that women should be restricted in the ways they could provide leadership. I simply used what skills I had and tried to grow in my faith. I tried to emulate the strong and faithful women and men who were leaders in the church and in ISCF. This was "the cup of salvation" that I could offer for the bounty I had received from God.

I am grateful for the freedom I was given to explore my gifts. Of course, I have learned many lessons since then, not only about church politics and differences in theology and worship styles but also about worship as an inner discipline. Worship is all the ways we acknowledge God's worth, both publicly and privately. It is what we do when we live in obedience to God and when we use our gifts and abilities to make known

God's grace and love for all of creation. It is the gratitude we feel for the way God has entered our lives and saved us from self-destructive tendencies. Our response, like that of the psalmist who engaged in a public ritual act of sacrifice, is to return what God has so graciously given. All we have, all we are, is given by a generous and loving Creator. What can we return? Only what has already been given.

I am also grateful for the many ways the women I know offer their gifts for the benefit of the worshipping community. Whether it is in planning or leading worship, in music, liturgical dance, readings, prayers or sermons, these women are skilled in helping their communities turn to God. But the gifts of worship that women give reach far beyond the sanctuary. In teaching children to worship, in the many ways they work toward justice, mercy and beauty, in making their homes and lives a sanctuary for others or in doing mundane chores and activities as an offering to God, women are examples to the community of giving God worth.

This issue of *Sophia* celebrates what women can and have extended to God and to one another. Our experiences as girls and women who long to know and be known by God have led us down many paths. As God has nurtured each one of us, we have developed gifts that enrich the whole community and present an alternative to the brokenness and pain around us.

The articles and artwork in this issue are also worship. They are offerings from many perspectives. My

hope is that you will find in them nourishment for your own longings and encouragement for the offering of your particular "cup of salvation."



We are also pleased to announce the four winners of Sophia's 1998 New Writers Contest. You'll find their writings on pages 16 and following. Thanks to all who participated.

Our Mission
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Building on a heritage of faith, we aspire to:

- Demonstrate integrity in all relationships.
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- Respect the environment.
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- Strive for excellence in all we do.

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Intimacy with God

by Erica Block

We are seekers of God in a world of great darkness and pain. Our seeking for intimacy with our God is shaped by and must somehow encompass this reality. Michael Downey, author of *Understanding Christian Spirituality*, writes: "As I see it, Auschwitz and Hiroshima together are the most formative religious events of the twentieth century. Ironically they are demonic, not divine. It is human agency adrift from God which is the critical issue as well as God's apparent silence and powerlessness in the face of human arrogance and evil" (New York: Paulist Press, 1997, p 16).

I was about 26 years old when the need to experience God in my life became a compelling drive. I had given birth to our first child. I had grown up in the womb of the Mennonite Brethren church in Vancouver in the fifties. I had spent two years at Mennonite Brethren Bible College (now Concord College) in the early sixties. I had married a devout MB. I believed that God should reveal himself to me because I had "asked Christ to come into my heart." Why did I feel so empty and afraid...so far from God?

The longing for God is not intellectual, it's visceral – it's felt in the body, as are other longings. Ernesto Cardenal, a Franciscan, writes in a beautiful little book entitled *Abide in Love*, "All our desires and hungers, whether for food, sex or friendships are one single appetite, a single hunger, for union with one another and with the universe" (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995, p 80).

All our longings are in fact, longings after God. "We have come

from God's womb," Cardenal writes. "We are as much part of God as the unborn child belongs to its mother. And we long to return to the maternal womb" (p 81).

But we hardly know. We don't remember. The clatter and drivenness of our life and the reward of accomplishment so fills our waking hours that we feel full, saturated, exhausted probably, but content.

David writes in Psalm 46, "Be still and know that I am God." In the morning as I come to a time of prayer I need to sit on the floor. I begin to

*All our longings are in fact,
longings after God.*

notice my breathing and relax. My hands open. What happens in the silence? Can I find silence? What am I waiting for? What am I expecting? How do I know God? How can I enter the mystery of a relationship with God?

John 4 images for us again our insatiable thirst. Jesus speaks to the woman from Samaria who has come to draw water at the well. Jesus says to her: "Give me a drink" (v 7, *The Jerusalem Bible*). What a provocative request. Jesus, I'm imagining, has been sitting at the side of the well for some time. But the question is not about H₂O. Jesus wants to engage her, he wants to evoke her inner longing. Jesus is oblivious to the cynical barb: "What? You are a Jew and you ask me, a Samaritan, for a drink?" (v 9).

He ignores her references to

their shared history and his place in it. He instead makes a preposterous claim: "Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again; but anyone who drinks the water that I shall give will never be thirsty again: The water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside ... welling up to eternal life" (vv 13-14).

It seems the woman doesn't really understand. She quickly asks for this water – for pragmatic reasons – "so that I may never get thirsty and never have to come here again to draw water" (v 15). And then Jesus directs her to her life, her story, into that which needs healing – her relationships with men. He knows where she has projected her yearning, her thirst.

"The water that I shall give will turn into a spring inside..." (v 14). This promise of Christ speaks of the mystery of intimacy with God. When I begin to recognize my thirst – however it manifests itself, however it's been displaced – and when I bring that to God, then I begin to enter into the life of God. And then the life of God begins to reveal itself in me. "Take, eat," Jesus says. "This is my body broken for you."

"Drink," he says – Jesus, the Bread of Life, Jesus, the Water of Life. Jesus feeds the multitudes, the thousands – the hungry ones – and he offers them himself. "If you do not eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink...you will not have life in you" (John 6:52). When we begin to recognize our thirst, our hunger, when we begin to drink, to eat, something mysterious begins to happen. New life begins to bubble up. "Pay attention," God says. "Come to me!"

My prayer life began in a deliberate, conscious way in the early 70s. I was beginning to pursue God. I was wounded. I knew that now. And I had abandoned external ways of easing the inner hurt. Early in the morning I would take out my bicycle and ride to a quiet spot beside a little creek. And there in the tall grasses (hidden like Moses) I would take out my Bible and my journal. There was a hunger. I would wake up early, eager for the sun to rise. The hunger for God and for emotional healing were twisted together – one cord of longing filling my body, exciting my soul. And as I began to drink I also began to heal.

Scott Peck, in his introduction to *The Road Less Travelled*, wrote: "I make no distinction between the mind and the spirit, and therefore no distinction between the process of achieving spiritual growth and achieving mental (or emotional) growth." (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978, p 11). Is this why Jesus refers the Samaritan woman to her immediate situation? That her journey with God, into God, would lead her into herself, into the broken places?

The journey of life with God is not predictable. It was at a camp in Georgia in fall of 1979, on a retreat with other MCC volunteers, that we were invited to experience the personal love of God. Conrad Hoover from the Church of the Saviour, Washington, D.C., was challenging us to move from what he called "pragmatic agnosticism," from living from day to day basically as if God did not exist, to a deeply lived, experiential faith. He led us through a guided meditation. Each of us was invited to imagine Jesus approaching us at some favourite outdoor spot. And I did. Jesus walked down that path I had ridden so often in Winnipeg, to that place where I was sitting. I saw him. I heard him speak my name. I got up to meet him. He embraced me and told me he loved me. I felt his embrace and I heard his voice. And

my yearning heart was filled with joy.

This experience of God's love lodged assurance and worth deep in my soul. Over the next number of years I walked with Jesus frequently, if not daily. In my imagination I walked up a lovely country road to meet with Jesus. There under a tree I would sit at his feet. I did not want to lose the intimacy with God that I had now experienced. This was surely a time of "consolation." I spoke with Jesus about the struggles of my heart, asking for his help. My prayer was deeply felt and deeply personal. And my love for God grew.

Sometimes I would visualize myself walking on further with Jesus, and I would have a foreboding sense that Calvary was up the road. Ernesto Cardenal writes: "Prayer is as natural to us as speaking, sighing or

tion with God and as such it does not have to be in words or even articulated mentally. We can communicate with a look, a smile, a sigh, or a gesture" p 15.

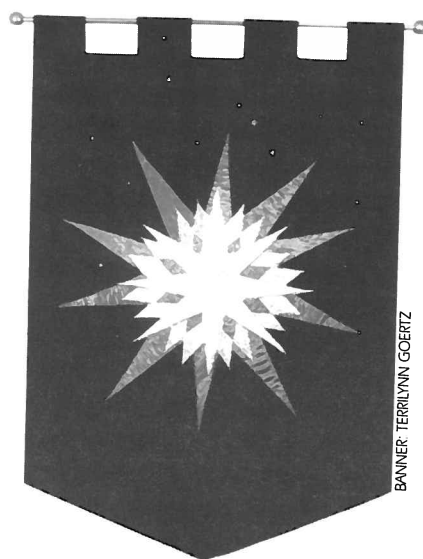
"God is person, personal, and interpersonal," writes Karl Rahner, Catholic theologian. God is friend – as close to me as my breath.

"God is also elusive and veiled. And it becomes more so as God comes nearer," writes Cardenal. "God is also infinitely far from us. We are infinitely distant from God. Union with God is like lovers kissing through a pane of glass. God is everywhere, even on Broadway, but we can hear God's voice only in silence" (pp 18-19). And so I begin to discover the paradoxes of the spiritual life.

As I was praying and journaling, I was also studying, reading and learning. Many new thoughts and avenues opened up – thoughts about who God is, where God dwells, how God works in the world. And I began to know more and more that the yearning for spiritual life is a longing to become more like God. My longing was growing, not only for "consolation" and assurance of God's love for me, but for "transformation" – to become more loving, more like Christ.

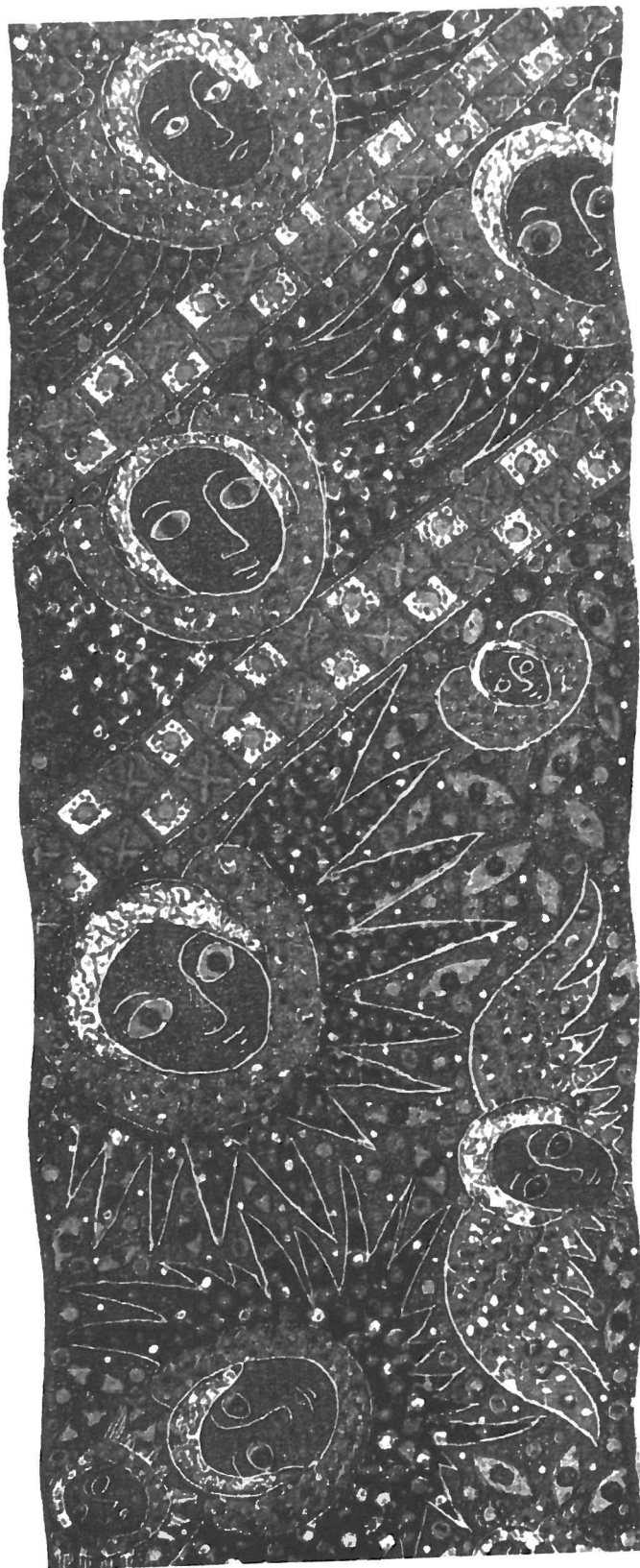
The deeper I go with God, the deeper I go within; also into those hidden places of darkness and conflict, of mixed motivation and compulsion. And the presence of God within is like what Thomas Merton describes: "To work out our own identity with God, which the Bible calls 'working out our salvation'...is a labour that requires sacrifice and anguish, risk and many tears. It demands close attention to reality at every moment, and great fidelity to God, as He reveals Himself, obscurely, in the mystery of each new moment" (*New Seeds of Contemplation*, New York: New Directions, 1961, p. 32).

Continued on page 21 ►



Terrilynn Goertz is a member of McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg. She has created banners for her church and for Concord College.

gazing...as natural as the beating of a lover's heart. Prayer is a murmur, a sigh, an instinct, but in our fallen state it is something we must learn anew, because it has become a forgotten instinct. Prayer is establishing contact with God. It is communica-



Angel Trumpets, Styrograph print, Karen Cornelius. Karen has worked at printmaking for a long time. An American who grew up as a "missionary kid" in Zaire, she has recently returned from Eritrea, and is living in Winnipeg with her husband, Jim. Some of her work will be displayed in the Mennonite Heritage Gallery, beginning April 30, 1999.

The Worship Leader, The Truth and The Darkness

by Karen Jensen Bowler

The worship leader is me, a woman seeking to craft a worship service that truly leads a congregation in worship. The truth is God's revelation to us through Word, Spirit and the life of Jesus Christ. The darkness can be many things: sin, ignorance, illness, sectarian tastes in music, inadequate resources, confusion or any circumstances that mitigate against an ideal worship experience. But darkness, too, has its role. It causes us to seek the light of truth.

One Story

Early morning is quiet in our house, a lovely part of the day. My mind is clear and I go to the kitchen table and spread before me the Bible, the song books and the list of sermon topics. The scripture passage for the morning is Matthew 17:1-5, the Transfiguration of Jesus. As I read, it slices its truth into my soul, and I pray prayers of confession. I am drawn to other passages of Scripture that enlarge the vision of Christ's blazing glory. I worship quietly in my heart. My time with God gradually unravels into unconnected prayers and promises, but these must be abandoned for the task at hand. How can I craft a worship service that will lead the congregation into direct communion with God? First, I must awaken their imagination, and I think of a recent night at Star Lake. A Call to Worship takes shape, and I write:

Gathering to Worship the King of Glory

Imagine yourself outside the city somewhere, beside a lake or out in the countryside on a beautiful clear night. The stars seem to shine more brilliantly out there, away from the city, and your thoughts drift beyond your own daily circumstances toward the Creator of all that is. You look up at the moon, and wonder that it could shine by the reflected light of the sun, now hidden. You remember that God's powers made the brilliant sun to shine, and that it is only a pale reflection of God's radiance and glory which was, and is, and ever shall be. God has drawn you to him in worship.

This leads naturally to prayer. I write:

Lord of All, we worship you. Come and bring the light of your truth into our thoughts, and the warmth of your love into our hearts. Draw us closer to yourself and unite us in worship by the power of your Holy Spirit.

Now focussed, we can speak and sing our praise to

God. I find a unison reading of praise and a hymn: "O Worship the King."

This brings us to the next part of our service. We need *details*. We need to be reminded of who God is and what he has done, and this is best seen in Scripture, which gives substance to our worship.

Jesus is the King of Glory

Scripture Reading: Matthew 17:1-5, The Transfiguration

I recognize that for each worshipper there is a thirst to be near the Lord. I write the following introduction to two songs emphasizing intimacy and worship. One is a chorus, and the other is a traditional hymn, and when the purpose of the music is clear it is very possible to use different musical styles together: *Peter saw the glory of God in Jesus, and said to Him, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." And so it is for us: let us draw strength from being near to Jesus.*

Song: "He is Lovely" (on overhead)

Hymn 2: "Holy, Holy, Holy" (on overhead)

Now we read of God's grace, leading us toward our celebration of the Lord's Supper. I find a verse that speaks this grace to my heart:

Scripture Reading: Titus 3:4-7

After this verse is read, it is natural for the congregation to respond. I find a song full of the drama and beauty of Christ's sacrifice. The verses are complicated to sing, so I plan to sing them as a solo, with the people singing the refrain: "We worship at your feet, where love and mercy meet..." As I invite the congregation to sing, I say: *This song invites us to be filled with the certainty of Jesus' love for us expressed in his willing sacrifice for our salvation. Please join in with me on the chorus.*

Jesus' Love, and Our Response

Song: "Come and See" (on overhead)

We pray a prayer of faith and repeat the Apostle's Creed. The Creed is repeated almost weekly, so that these words may be memorized by all.

Prayer of Belief: *Decision* 454

Affirmation of Faith: The Apostle's Creed (stand)

God's Grace Draws us to His Table

We are ready for the Lord's Supper. I write: *Because we are yielded to God, and willing to come to him for forgiveness, he can make us clean, pure, whole, healthy and truly alive. Let us bring our weakness and exchange it for his strength. In this time of personal confession, I will mention topic areas and leave some time for silent prayer for each. I will lead you in a short refrain at the end of each topic. The refrain repeats the words spoken to Jesus by the criminal who was crucified beside him.*

Personal Confession and Refrain: "Jesus, Remember Me when you come into your Kingdom" 822 (Taizé Community)

Let us pray: Lord, sometimes we have forgotten that you are the King of Glory, and that you can answer our prayers. Forgive our forgetfulness, prayerlessness and persistent self-will ...

Forgive us, Oh Lord, if we judge each other or presume to know what another Christian must do to follow you. Keep our eyes on you alone ...

Forgive us, Lord, when we do not love one another as ourselves. Give us your love for those around us, so that grace may abound ...

Forgive our materialism and the tendency to conform to the pattern of this world. Save us from the things we see and want ...

Have mercy on us Lord, when we do not do the things we know we ought to do, when we turn away from your purposes for us. May your kingdom come, your will be done ...

The Words of Institution are read, and we eat and drink together. Then it is time to pour out our gratitude.

Our Thanks and Praise Expressed

Hymn 115: "Fairest Lord Jesus"

Worship by Giving

Then comes the sermon, based on the Transfiguration of Christ. After the message, we need an opportunity to respond, and we sing a hymn asking for the Lord's blessing and power in our daily lives. We end the service with prayer.

I get up from the table, thanking God for this time imagining and planning this service of worship. Now I must contact the church with the hymn and song selections, plan a time to go over the music with the musicians so that tempos and refrains can be checked and overheads can be made. I look forward to the time of prayer before the service, so that my personal jitters about details will melt away, and the beautiful time I had with God in planning the service can be recreated for all to share. I realize that I have drawn upon gospel songs, traditional hymns, readings from the Anglican prayer book, choruses, and Catholic responses. For other services I have used African songs, blue-grass tunes, spirituals and even the music of the contemporary composer Charles Ives. I thank God that the music and liturgy of many different Christian traditions can enrich our worship of him. At the best of times, the service as a whole emerges as a poem to Christ, written in the light of God's truth, illuminated by his presence among his people. Faith grows. The darkness diminishes. We see Christ.

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Karen Jensen Bowler is Professor of Voice at the University of Manitoba. She attends Church of the Way in Winnipeg, where she frequently plans worship services.

In Spirit and Truth

by Leona Moder

I was raised in a home in which my family attended church every Sunday. There I learned a form of worship that I held to as truth. There I also heard others speak about God and God's love for me. This I accepted at an early age, and my journey has been one in which I have longed to really know God. It is wonderful how the Lord has implanted this longing in us, is it not?

For many years I also thought I should lead a life that would please God, and I tried diligently to do so. But I found that in all my efforts to please God, I still did not know him and the freedom his love brings. Then the Holy Spirit brought me to a place where I was to let go of all my efforts and seek only to follow God. My spirit received joy and a new peace and a new sense of effortlessness. I had been freed from the control of the Law. I began a new journey with God, very aware that he knew me. Worship was no longer an external form, but an internal reality.

Since then I have not ceased to ponder the whole meaning of worship. I have found it of interest that the word "worship" was first used in Genesis 22:5. There Abraham is taking his son Isaac up to be given in offering to God. He has been asked to lay down even that which God has previously given him. God has told him to do so, and in complete obedience he does it. From this I learn that "worship" means obedience.

One meaning of the word "worship" is "obeisance" ("homage, submission, deference"). Thus, worshipping God means that I live a life of obedience to him. This becomes a daily working out of the things God asks of me. And here I must learn to hear God's voice. I, too, have had to lay down things I have previously held on to. I realize that this is a process - one in which God will teach me as I submit to him.

Submission is not an easy concept to accept, as it seems I must give up everything, and my natural spirit does not want to do this. But I am learning that as I give up, or

should I say, let go, the Lord gives me truth that sets me free - free to worship him. This giving up is the sacrifice that is involved in worship. In Abraham's willingness to give up what he loved most, he learned what it meant to revere God. Daily I am given situations where I, too, must

I must learn to hear God's voice. I, too, have had to lay down things I have previously held on to.

WHEN THE SPIRIT OF
TRUTH COMES...



BANNER: TERRILYN GOERTZ

come to this place of submission.

In John 4 we read of the Samaritan woman who met Jesus and asked about worship. She was thinking about the conflict between the Samaritans, who worshipped God on a certain mountain, and the Jews, who insisted that God must be worshipped in Jerusalem. Jesus responded by saying that it is in spirit and truth that we worship. Thus, for me, it is not where I worship, but it is in spirit and truth that I seek to worship my Father.

And so I conclude that worship involves not only my head knowledge but also my heart or spirit communing with my Father. Worship is my spirit ever in tune with what our Father says, and then, in this age of many voices, doing only what he says.

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Leona Moder is the mother of four children and a neighbour to many. She lives in Winnipeg and attends Church of the Way.

Dance: An Offering of Worship to God

by Victoria James

Twenty years ago, I met Jesus. He heard the earnest desire of my heart to know God. I had sought him through a maze of "new age" spirituality and thought I had found him several times in that journey. I had even left dance – my first love – as well as my home and a boyfriend to seek the true meaning of life.

I suppose it all started when in dance conservatory I prayed, or rather, begged, for God (whoever God was) to get me through a choreography assignment. I was paralyzed at the thought of creating my own dance – and even promised to serve God if God helped me. Well, God helped me! According to my teacher, it was brilliant choreography – this dance I made up on the spot. But I completely forgot about my end of the bargain. Apparently, God didn't.

A few years later I met Jesus, and he was more wonderful than I ever imagined. The phrase "born again" was not a metaphor but a complete reality.

I also entered a whole new culture – a strange and foreign land called Christianity. My whole value system was challenged, and while I eagerly embraced many changes for love of Jesus I was perplexed by other apparent requirements that didn't seem in keeping with my reading of Scripture or my experience of God.

The reaction to dance was particularly puzzling. Comments like, "I gave that up when I became a Christian," and, "Your husband will never get another church to pastor if you continue dance," left my mouth hanging open. In all my voracious reading about Jesus and the Christian life, all I could find about dance was the odd chapter that regarded it as questionable at best or at worst a primitive urge that needed to be overcome by self-control.

I would have done anything to honour Jesus. In fact, I had given up dance and had no agenda to inflict it upon worship (though not because I ever suspected it was inherently evil). But my questions continued. I knew that music could, in the hands of the ungodly, be a tremendous influence toward evil. But it could also be used to give great glory to God. Wouldn't the same be true of dance? Is it not the spirit and motivation behind its use, rather than the art form itself, that can be credited as evil or good?

Psalms 149 and 150 specifically instruct people to dance or to "let (the people) praise his name with dancing" (Psalm 149:3). God seemed pleased with David's dance for

joy when the ark of God's promise was returned (2 Sam. 6:14), but his wife Michal was judged because she was more concerned with decorum and disdained David's unbridled joy.

It's highly likely, in my opinion, that Jesus danced. Everyone did in his culture. It's hard to imagine him at the wedding in Cana, performing his first miracle of providing more wine for the festivities, then sitting like a stone as the odd man out.

While other ancient cultures also danced for their gods, it was usually to appease them or win their favour with rain dances, fertility dances, etc. The Jews danced because they knew that they were loved by God and that God had chosen to reveal his purposes and law to them. They danced for joy, not out of fear or to curry favour.

So went, and still goes, my pilgrimage. The Lord kept me to my promise of serving him through dance. Most of my waking hours are spent teaching, choreographing, planning and researching dances that are to be used in corporate or private worship, mission settings that use dance as a tool for teaching or evangelism, community-building times of praise through line or circle dancing, and teaching varieties of dance disciplines that may one day result in students being "salt and light" in the secular arts community. I have discovered through teaching ballet that our progress is very similar to spiritual growth. For example, discipline leads to delight or freedom. (But try telling that to nine-year-olds who enter their first class with visions of twirling and leaping in pink tutus, then find themselves stuck at a barre doing endless repetitions of boring exercises!)

I have also discovered that dancing is not about skinny bodies and perfect feet. Dance is only a part of our whole life offered in worship to God, not an art form in which perfection is required but impossible to achieve, leaving broken, battered and starving souls in its wake. I've discovered that the message we have to offer is the only one that gives hope, meaning and real joy, and that somehow dance can penetrate a heart like no other art form.

But if I were to be really honest, my motivation to dance is still the same: it's fun and I love it! I think that's the reason God thought it up in the first place. That's what I love about God the most!

Dance can penetrate the heart like no other art form.

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Victoria James operates Masterworks Studio in Winnipeg.

Keeping the Sabbath – A Taste of Heaven

By Lorie Battershill

Susan recently moved onto our street. A fellow Christian and a Mennonite, she had lived in a newer development for the past decade and was shocked at the prevailing "Christian culture" that still reached out to constrain her behavior in our local Mennonite Brethren enclave. Christians, and even MBs, are still a majority on our street. "I got into trouble with my neighbour for mowing the lawn on a Sunday!" she exclaimed in disbelief.

We are in a time when living as a Christian means swimming against the current. Not many communities would present the sort of experience Susan had, demanding that Sabbath laws be respected in private life. Rather than having our Christian observances encouraged by society, we have reached the point where living as a Christian demands personal determination and commitment in action. How we observe the Sabbath is one of the first, and perhaps the most obvious, reflections of this new reality.

It has not been even one generation since most citizens were forced, by law makers' decree, to refrain from "business as usual" activities on Sundays. If you didn't go to work you

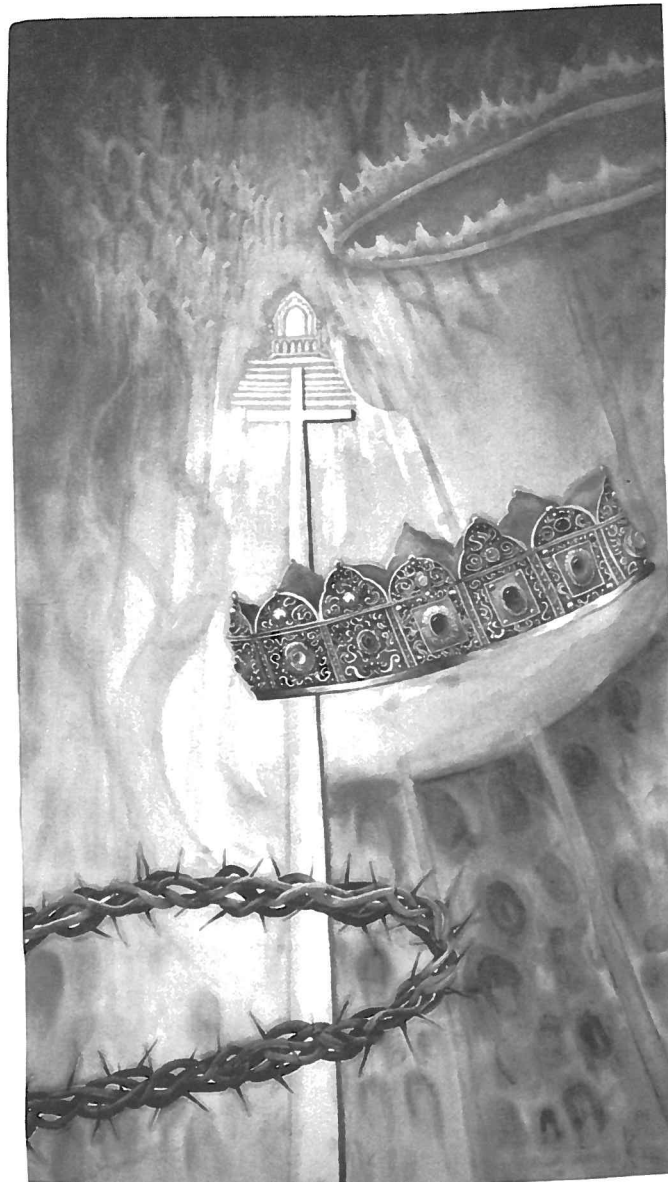
would obviously be doing something significantly different from what you did on the other six days of the week. But with the demise of such "go with the flow" thinking we need to reflect

deliberately on what Sabbath keeping means to us today.

Sunday, the day that Christians have chosen for Sabbath keeping, used to be set aside by a long list of rules. As an adolescent growing up the late sixties, I rebelled against those rules right along with wanting to wear jeans and listen to rock and roll. I enjoyed sewing and gardening and wanted to pursue these activities on Sundays when I had free time. Who but me, I demanded to know, should have the right to determine if these activities were work or pleasure?

In the end I, along with the rest of my baby boomer generation, got our wish. Today taking a stand by refusing to work or participate in sporting events on Sundays is a real problem. Is it worth it to make the effort? Now that we are left without society's support, we need to define clearly our own convictions about honouring the Lord's Day.

As with all decision making in Christian life, Scripture is the place to begin looking for guidance. Examination of Bible passages specific to Sabbath keeping can be a bit unsettling though. Surely we don't feel the need to put anyone to death for breaking the Sabbath as the



BANNER E VENSEL

Eliesabeth Vensel, Sophia editorial committee member, is an artist and teacher. She has created many banners for Church of the Way, where she attends.

Israelites did during their desert wandering (Numbers 15:32-36). And wasn't Jesus very deliberate about breaking the Sabbath laws of his times? Didn't Jesus come to take away all those punitive, restrictive laws and rules?

The beginning of understanding regarding Sabbath worship in our post-Christian culture is to accept the teaching that "The Sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27b NRSV). In a very real way, Sabbath observance brings us closer to understanding that we are made in God's image. As God created the order and nature of the universe there was a deliberate choice to create time for rest. If we understand God to be all-powerful, we accept that God didn't need to rest after the work of creation. Rather, God decided that it would be a good thing to focus on

move away from is much broader. Thus the words I used to defend myself as an angry adolescent have finally found their mark. To my parents' generation, gardening and sewing were essential to survival. For them, Sabbath observance would require that they rest from these productive activities. For me and many of my friends, gardening and sewing are a welcome physical release from a working life spent producing thoughts and ideas. With this in mind it is easy to appreciate the gardening poem that exclaims we are nearer to God in the garden than anywhere else on Earth. Indeed, if gardening is the activity that releases your mind to focus on things other than being productive – to focus on God and really live in the moment – then gardening is a true Sabbath observance.

Again and again Scripture has the same message about Sabbath keeping. It is a gift given as a blessing for God's people. The first message about the seventh day is found in Genesis 2 where we read that God rested. After that, the observance

of the Sabbath is not mentioned again until the exodus from Egypt begins. There in the wilderness God repeated to the Israelites the importance of resting. God accomplished this by giving them the gift of an extra portion of supernaturally preserved manna to sustain them on the seventh day. As difficult as it was for the people to accept after 400 years of non-stop work in Egypt, God was ordering them to stop and rest.

In the brokenness of today's society, the need to accept this

Continued on page 21 ►

Worship is an Everyday Act

by Debra Fieguth

The Great Commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your strength, and with all your mind" (see Luke 10:25-28), boils down to loving God with all our being. And yet, most of the time, I don't think about what that means.

About ten years ago I heard a woman in my church give a sermon on what it meant to worship God in the ordinary, everyday things we do. She talked about preparing meals and setting tables as an act of worship, and that was a new thing for me to think about.

Shortly after that, I was getting ready to make a meal for street kids in downtown Vancouver. I went shopping on Commercial Drive, a street lined with Italian coffee shops and colourful outdoor vegetable markets. As I went about choosing the lettuce and tomatoes and other ingredients for the salad I was going to make, I was struck by how important it was to get the very best, the brightest and reddest and most perfect tomatoes, and the crispest and greenest lettuce, because what I was doing was making this salad as an offering of worship to God. So even the choosing and the purchasing became an act of worship.

It had to do with seeing the street kids as Jesus saw them. In fact, it had to do with seeing the street kids as if they were Jesus himself. If Jesus was worthy of receiving the very best salad I could make for him, so were these kids.

It was a moment I had never experienced before, and rarely have since. Perhaps it stands out because it was an awakening. Perhaps there have been other times when I cleaned the house or did the laundry or wrote an article as an act of worship. But thinking about it in that way is something I have to make a deliberate choice to do.

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Debra Fieguth, a *Sophia* editorial committee member, is also the Associate Editor of *ChristianWeek*. She attends St. Aiden's Anglican Church in Winnipeg.

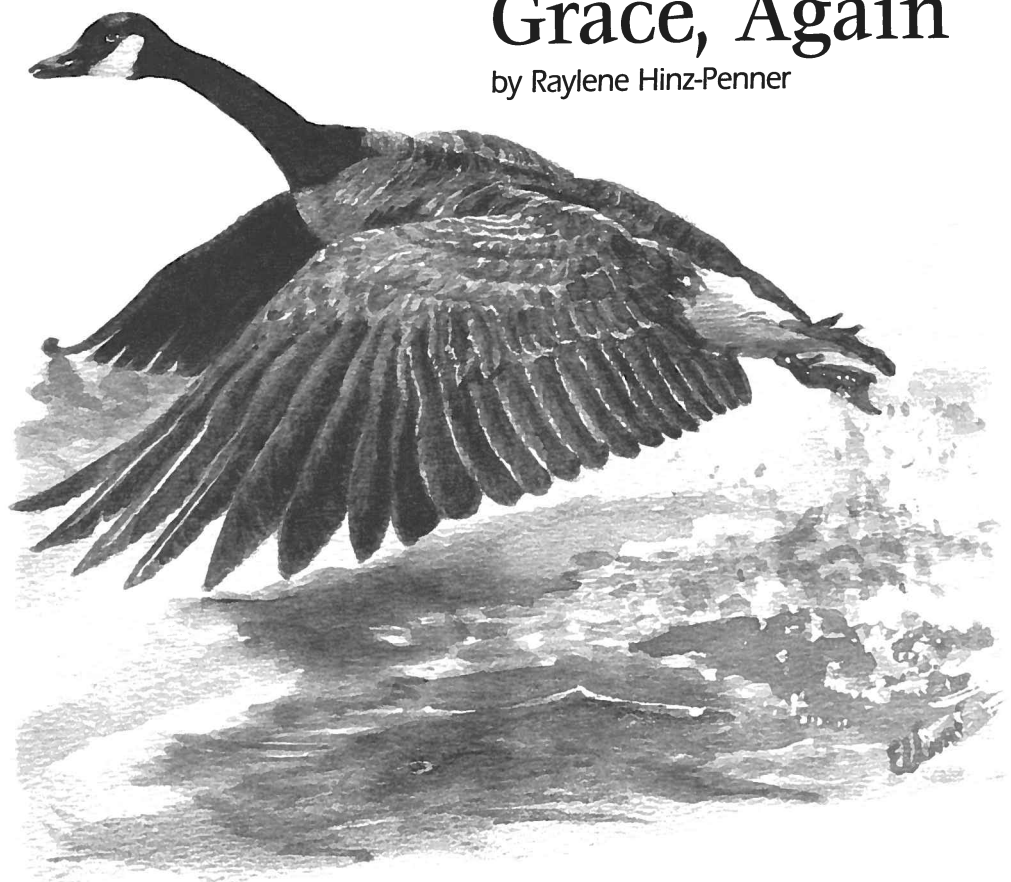
It has not been even one generation since most citizens were forced to refrain from "business as usual" activities on Sundays.

something else, focus on spiritual things by being non-productive.

These two words, *focus* and *non-productivity*, are key to understanding where we are required to set the boundaries for our Lord's Day behaviour. The requirement is not to keep a rigid set of rules but to shift our focus away from that which consumes us during the other six days. In times when life was more of a hand-to-mouth existence, this would mean moving away from the food-producing activities. In today's culture the range of activities that we need to

Grace, Again

by Raylene Hinz-Penner



I.

They say the wild goose, not the dove was the old Celtic symbol for the Holy Spirit. Imagine this heavy-breasted, egg-bodied bird to complete the otherwise flat-chested Trinity. How unlike the dove the stealth of the goose, a water bird with an urgent honk, gathering, always gathering the gaggle for a purposeful swim, the black neck arched beneath a tense, inscrutable eye.

II.

During catechism, when I was thirteen, I dangled on the edge of a precipice. I knew my heart was hard; I had committed The Unpardonable Sin. Nights, I could not unwind myself from the bedclothes, tangled and sweaty, nor from my proud, hard-beating heart. The preacher, a stern Canadian with a neck all Adam's Apple, waited at the parsonage where I came to ask my fate, though I knew the texts: God could no longer attract the hard of heart who all on their own had erased the power of God, condemned themselves to go it alone in this life, worse yet in the next: that's what Hell was, the preacher had said, God gone!

I watched his face. I would not be deceived by vague adult obsequiousness or cagey lying compliance. I could take this sentence; I wanted it right. His eyes blinked twice, and then he laughed – a loud guffaw, from his belly, or deeper yet, his gut. *But don't you see, he honked, If God had given up on you, you wouldn't be here asking this question of me.* (My first real understanding of the concept of irony).

III.

Ah, the miraculous flight of wild geese, not for me in their alignment or the beautiful instant patterning, the sky's sudden V, but in the miracle of the liftoff: those weighted bodies which need no running start, just will and powerful wings to take themselves up so suddenly from the earth's waters into air, the passage whirring into the ethereal, beyond where we can see.

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Raylene Hinz-Penner taught at Bethel Mennonite College in Newton, Kansas, for nineteen years before moving into the College's Advancement Office four years ago, where she now works. She is a member of the Bethel College Mennonite Church. Writing, she says, is for her a religious discipline.

Teaching Children How to Worship

by Marianne Enns and Trish Koslowsky

On your feet now – applaud Yahweh!
Bring a gift of laughter,
Sing yourselves into his presence.
Enter with the password: "Thank you!"
Make yourselves at home, talking praise.
Thank him. Worship him.
Psalm 100:1,2 & 4 (*The Message*)

The Lord God Almighty, the Lord of the heavens and the earth, desires for you and me to worship him. He dwells in the praises of his people. What a privilege! We have the chance to worship with 120 children, ages 6 to 12, each Sunday, and what a terrific experience this has been. Words like upbeat, contagious, creative, inspirational, and joyful spring into our heads as we think of these holy moments. Children are uninhibited worshippers. Children love all styles of music. Children are adaptable. Children respond with joy.

But how do we teach our children to worship? We do it through our example. Children learn through observation and modelling. They learn to speak through listening to others speak and practising with them. They learn to read by first listening to someone read and then practising the skill. Worship is no different. Children learn to worship as they watch those around them worshipping. Therefore, if you desire to teach children how to worship, you must model it for them.

We cannot underestimate the role worship leaders play in this process. They must be gifted, high-energy people with a passion for children and worship. The two passions are inseparable. Leaders must choose music that touches their own hearts. They must build relationships with the children and the worship team so that they gain the trust required to lead effectively.

We need to remember that our Creator wired each of us differently. Some of us are visual learners who need to see the words, while others are auditory learners and must hear the song before they can worship. Still others are kinesthetic learners who need to move to the music in order to worship. As we worship, we must remember to stimulate all types of learners.

Crucial to our Sunday morning worship time is the theme of the morning. The songs, the prayers, and the words spoken by the worship leader all flow together to reflect the theme. Choosing a variety of styles is very effective. The motions or sign language used during the songs must make sense and need to be "cool" enough for the boys. Finally, much time and preparation must go into each service. Knowing the music and the flow of the morning allows the team to worship freely with the children.

One of God's greatest gifts to us is worship. May we never enter God's presence with anything less than our best. May God bless you as you seek to serve him.

.....
Marianne Enns is a worship leader and Trish Koslowsky is the kids' church coordinator at Eastview MB Church in Winnipeg.

Our KIDS Church program serves children from grades 1 to 6. The children register each morning at 10:30, receiving a name tag and a password, which allows them to enter the gym for a 20 minute activity time. During this time, the small group leaders, the large group leader, and the worship leader meet for a prayer time.

At 10:50 the small group leaders gather their group of 6 to 10 children (grouped by age) and move to their group area where they have an opportunity to interact with each other and are introduced to the lesson focus through an activity or a series of discussion questions. The lesson focus is a principle found in the Bible that we will teach the children using a Bible story as well as modern examples. (Example: The lesson focus is "Jesus is able to meet all our needs." The memory verse is "I am the bread of life," and the Bible story is the feeding of the 5000. That lesson focus will be the theme reflected in the activities we do, the questions we ask, the dramas we perform and the songs we sing.

At 11:00 we gather together as a large group where we worship together for 15 minutes. This time is led by the worship leader who is often accompanied by a youth band or CDs. Then the large group leader teaches the 15-minute lesson from the stage. Finally, the children go back to their small group area with their small group leader for 20 minutes. Here they will apply the lesson focus to their own lives through role playing, games, discussion, crafts, etc.

Each morning ends the way it began, in a prayer time for the volunteers who meet in small groups to "debrief" the morning and to pray for one another.

The Hong Kong Kitchen

by Marianne Ewert Worcester

My daughter comes for dinner and eats my portion as well as her own. I say I'm not hungry when she says she hasn't eaten since Tuesday. It's Friday night at the Hong Kong Kitchen. For years we've been meeting here, close to home, even before the girls left; with their boyfriends, our family would swell to six or seven around the table and it would comfortably remind me of meals growing up, except, of course, we never ate outside our own dining room. My parents never saw the point of paying twice as much for something half as good, which meant my mother was never off the hook.

We pretend to study the menu and then order the same things every time, mostly vegetarian, with one meat dish for the men. This talk of not eating makes me a bit crazy, which is probably why they both do it. I know they won't starve but my genes come too recently from parents who

barely survived starvation in collectivizing USSR in the early 20s and again on the Canadian Prairies during the Depression years. My old *Oma*, almost a hundred now has lived here for seventy years but she still worries when the bread basket on her table at the Tabor Home appears less than full. How quickly her memories fly to those earlier years when she had nothing but the broth of rotting potatoes to offer her two infants with their distended tummies before the flight to Canada. These fears get passed down the Motherline; the body remembers.

Nowadays we don't know who's going to show up and we're sometimes alone, just the two of us, practising for later life. Our younger daughter works evenings at Calhouns, and to catch a glimpse of her sleek red head we often take a drive down Broadway, just to wave and mouth a "hi" through the door of the busy diner. The year the oldest was in Africa, her friends would show up in her place. Soon the youngest, a son, will not want to spend Friday nights with us for a while. But he'll be back: we know the pattern. We've been at this for a while now.

I wonder what they think of us at the Hong Kong Kitchen. They've been taking our predictable order and bringing us their hot, boring rice and noodle dishes for years and we've never exchanged pleasantries. Are we as invisible to them as they are to us? Have they been listening to our discussions, arguments, joking and pontificating over the years and having a good laugh out in the kitchen while they stir the hot and sour soup? We must seem so ridiculous, so pretentious, so unimaginative, so ordinary, so typical of – what? The modern Canadian family?

While we eat she describes the anti-poverty rally



Shared Meal, Karen Cornelius

downtown where they marched 2000 strong, stopping traffic with the force of their bodies together, baffling the police who looked on, unprepared, at this display of solidarity with the poor. Her eyes are fierce as she tries to make me feel the power of it and her part in it. I remember to breathe, one, two, three, counting the in and out, "to care and not to care." She looks like a harlequin doll in pig-tails, a gingham dress and black pumps. She understates herself on purpose, I think, to challenge cultural norms for 23-year-olds. She has an Honours science degree from a prestigious university and she's been to India and Africa. I feel like the child here, not the mother. I try to keep in mind that I'm fifty and that my life has purpose and meaning, but I can't think of what these are right now. I am meeting a younger, unfinished part of my self and I am suddenly full of grief. Where is she – that vivid, passionate, angry young woman I was in 1971, her age exactly, full of intensity and all the right causes? I am trying to focus on what she is saying, to really take it in. The anti-APEC riot at UBC, the kids arrested for holding up signs, for exercis-

ing their constitutional rights to protest the criminal behavior of tyrants like Suharto, being randomly pepper-sprayed by police acting as though this were a dictatorship and not Canada. I feel a slow anger beginning, and I remember to breathe, counting breaths through the gonging of my heart, through the rising panic, the rush of despair. I remember Kent State and how betrayed I felt when I heard that police had gunned down four young protestors exercising their democratic rights on an American campus while others ate lunch. I feel the old outrage at this silencing of the young. Then I am back in 1969 hearing myself hurl accusations of hypocrisy at my parents, those two morally scrupulous people, so dignified in their performance of life's daily sacraments, and I am ashamed for how that must have stung, that lashing out in helpless rage, holding them responsible for what they also did not understand. I keep breathing and listening, taking it in, her clear-headed reproaches, the rightful indignation. I know she is right, and I will not silence her. I raised her for this. With our Mennonite blood, we are joined to a long line of dissidents. We are dissident daughters, she and I, of a dissident people who would not now recognize either of us. But this too runs down the Motherline and cannot be denied. The body remembers. As my mother threaded my choices, my longings, with her fears, so I fear for her. Daughters who shed their protective covering, who refuse to be still, have a history of ending badly; the body remembers. I am afraid of what the world will do to her, how it may break her, and what that will do to me; afraid for us all, if nothing changes.

She has annihilated me again. Her Do-ing has trumped my Be-ing. I hastily gather my few rags of social action and hold them up for inspection, but we both know that's not the point. I breathe and try to remember who I was, who I am to her now, who I have yet to become. But I am tired and there doesn't seem to be much to offer, just this slow breathing, in and out, this remembering, this holding it all together around the table, feeling the sharpness of hard, necessary things, thinking how little we are alone, how much we are together. Tomorrow I will make sandwiches and take them downtown for whoever needs them. Tomorrow she will go out and challenge the system that makes this necessary. We both hold on to the Motherline. It reaches back through Oma in the Tabor Home, counting her slices of bread, and hurls itself forward into our unknown future.

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Marianne Ewert Worcester is a frequent contributor to Sophia. She and her family live in Vancouver, where they attend Christ Church Anglican Cathedral.

The Table

by Helga Doermer

*W*orship experienced as mindful practice of the presence of God breaks through the boundaries of formal liturgy and spills into the very matrix of our lives. A liturgical experience I find rich in its invitation to meet with our unseen God is communion. We gather around the table as community to share the elements symbolic of Christ's saving work. We also come away with renewed awareness of the ever present Spirit sustaining us on our faith journey. Communion holds for me a beautiful and most meaningful connection to our daily life.

Gathering around a table with family or friends, whether in a private home or coffee shop, I have on occasion found an unanticipated sense of sacredness. It does not matter whether there are two of us or ten. Nor does it matter whether we get together for coffee or tea or whether we partake of a meal. What is essential is our common bond. This has become most evident in meeting with my women friends, my sisters. Sometimes as we meet to spill our stories I have a sense of another presence with us. It is in the silences that I become most aware of an abounding grace and love surrounding us as we share the joys and difficulties of our lives. One of my most powerful experiences was in December 1997.

It was close to the end of the academic term. The previous four days had been particularly hectic. When a friend called to let me know a few women were able to get together for the evening, I welcomed the opportunity. Five of us met around my kitchen table. We hadn't seen each other in months. The evening began with a toast to us, to women. What followed was a time of sharing the unfolding of our lives since we had last met. Hours later all five of us rose simultaneously from the table and cleared away the signs of our gathering. It was shortly after midnight. We found ourselves standing in a loose circle. Silence enveloped us like a wordless benediction. In an awed whisper I attempted to give definition to the moment. The women responded with light banter, and unconsciously we formed a closed and unified circle. Silence surrounded us again. I could feel the Spirit's sacred presence. It felt as if we had just celebrated communion and were waiting for the words of commissioning. Finally we met each other's eyes. Drawn back to our reality we embraced each other and spoke words of encouragement and farewell.

We had come to the table, a community of women, and received renewed strength to step into our separate spheres once more. What a blessing to be reminded that God is not only found in formal liturgy but that the divine empowering Presence also resides in the ordinary.

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Helga Doermer, Sophia committee member, is studying in the Master of Divinity program at the University of Winnipeg. She and her family attend Eastview MB Church.

Contest Winners

Sophia would like to thank all those who submitted their writing to the 1998 New Writers Contest. And congratulations to the four winners whose articles appear on pages 16 - 19. Each winner receives a \$50 prize.

Our thanks also to Evelyn Labun, who has sponsored this contest for the second time, in order to provide women with an opportunity to develop their skills in writing and to find a voice for what is within them. Evelyn has recently moved to Grand Forks, North Dakota where she is Assistant Professor at the College of Nursing, University of North Dakota.

A Grape Musing

by Loretta Snider

Of course, I don't remember it. But as I brush back wisps of hair fallen onto my damp forehead while I labour in my steamy kitchen, I sense a remembrance of the lingering summer humidity and sweet grape scent of September days in another kitchen long ago.

Of course, I can't remember it. I was only nine months old. And yet, a story often heard is a life remembered.

The process was different then. Not today's shiny, stainless steel evaporator and rubber hoses spanning grape pulp and pure grape juice, flowing evenly into clean glass jars. Efficient and sterile.

Then, a snowy-white cotton bag hung on an open cupboard door. It imprisoned the bursting blue globes, so recently hanging free on living vines. And slowly the dripping life stained the cotton blood-purple.

The kitchen was quiet. Only the steady intravenous drip, drip into the clean, white, granite basin below. And I, captivated even then by the quiet, the solitude and the richness of the colour purple, sat patiently beside the miracle.

And gradually, I began to splash. Slowly at first but with rising abandon and glee. Some of the juice splattered on my recently soaped and starched cotton dress and on the circle of floor around me. When I put my hands in my mouth - ah - the discovery stopped the splashing and all was quiet again.

My mother, unnoticed by me, had been watching, waiting, allowing. Now she scooped me up and both laughing, she carried me upstairs to a splashing bath and fresh, starched cotton.

Now, in those quiet moments when I hold the communion cup in remembrance of blood-bought life, I ponder God's watching, waiting, allowing. And I revel in our joy as I am carried to restored life and a fresh start.

.....
Loretta Snider teaches English as a second language to adults in Kitchener, Ontario, where she lives. Former MCC workers in Kenya, she and her husband are parents of two adult children. Loretta is just finishing her term as moderator of Kitchener MB Church.



BANNER E. VENSEL

Waiting – A Response to the Call of Love

by Marisol McRae

“Sorry, I’ve kept you waiting,” Lynn said. I rose from the squat that tucked me into a corner of the airport lobby, safe from the avalanche of people that threatened to trample me. Although confused by her greeting, I didn’t clarify. Lynn seemed in a hurry.

I gathered my luggage. I followed Lynn through a door that opened and closed of its own accord to an orange Volvo with flashing hazard lights. Too preoccupied about getting through the door unhurt and riding to Lynn’s home safely in a broken-down car, I said nothing.

Twenty-three years have passed since Lynn welcomed me to Canada. I’ve since learned that the door had an electronic eye and wouldn’t have closed until I got through, that the Volvo wasn’t broken-down but parked illegally because Lynn was running behind schedule. But, somehow, I remained confused by Lynn’s greeting. And this confusion allowed the curse of waiting to sink its teeth into my flesh.

I grew up in a Philippine village where electricity was a rarity. Hence, labour saving – let alone devices that made this possible – was foreign to me. The process of working seemed more important than the meeting of product quotas or deadlines. Grandpa often said, “Nothing can’t wait that is worth waiting for.” I sensed that anything worthwhile took time to accomplish. Waiting wasn’t an issue. It simply was a fact of life.

The biggest surprise that awaited me when I moved to Canada was discovering how much I could accomplish within a given time period. I simply had to take charge of my life – set goals, follow schedules, push the right buttons! Deadlines became all encompassing, efficiency the key to success. Buying into this thinking hook, line, and sinker, I eventually found waiting a waste of time. All I had to do had to be done now. All I needed to know had to be known now. Until...

God used time, with its never-ending cycle of gains and losses, to teach me that taking charge of my life is nothing more than an illusion necessitated by the demands of a consumer-oriented culture. While the production of goods and services that meet the legitimate needs of humanity is a good thing, its excess runs anathema to God’s call on my life. Not only does it condition me to a harried lifestyle that deafens me to God’s nudging, it also exploits whom it purports to serve – enticing me to purchase goods and services I don’t need.

How then must I respond to the demands of this culture as it enters the twenty-first century exhausted by the very mechanisms it invented to make life-tasks easier?

“Come to me...I will give you rest...you who work so hard” (Matthew 11:28). God woos me away from the trap of working-more-to-earn-more-to-buy-more. I am beckoned, instead, to co-create with God. God asks me to birth in people’s hearts a taste of God’s love. God asks me not to take charge of my life – not to succumb to the cultural demand of reaching for the stars – but to take charge of my responses to this call of Love.

God is present in every moment and calls me to be present there also. God calls me to love my neighbour and myself because God wants to live in every one of us. This might mean saying “yes,” “no,” or even nothing. I suspect that discerning how best to respond depends on my relearning the art of waiting – not waiting passively for something to happen but with expectation for the fulfillment of God’s promises, with an alertness to the workings of grace at any given moment in my day.

I’m recognizing that I cannot live my life as though I were God. I cannot expect things to happen when I want them to, the unknown to become known when I wish them to be. After all, Eve’s appetite for the forbidden fruit and the overwhelming knowledge of good and evil that this granted her has resulted in alienation from God (see Genesis 3:5-6, 22-24). I’m recognizing that God isn’t bound by time (2 Peter 3:8) and doesn’t have to beat it. Less interested in efficiency than in character, God takes time to teach me what I need to learn.

Abraham and Sarah (Hebrews 11:11-12), Zacharias and Elizabeth (Luke 1), waited years for God’s promise of a son. Simeon (Luke 2:25-32) and Anna (Luke 2:36-38) waited a lifetime to see the Messiah. God is never in a hurry, but calls me to experience and, eventually, to *embrace*, the pain of *not* doing and the cloud of *not* knowing. “Don’t be afraid,” God’s angels said repeatedly (Luke 1:13,30, 2:10). Fear, in a last-ditch effort to ensure self-preservation, pressures me to control people, situations, my life. Instead, Love yearns that I let him take control of it. It is his way of being my God.

.....
Marisol McRae strives to contextualize God’s call to a contemplative lifestyle with the tenacious demands of today’s marketplace. She is most interested in things that create heart-space for prayer. When not engaged in these, she works with individuals, couples and families in her psychotherapy practice in Surrey and Langley, B.C. She and her husband, Bob, are members of Fraser Heights Community Church in Surrey.

Of Sparrows and Children

by Marianne Jones

Since we moved out to the Lake a few years ago, my husband, Reg, has been studying the birds with great excitement. Whiskey Jacks in winter, blue jays, grackles, grosbeaks, and hummingbirds come to our feeders, while, loons with their timorous laughter and merganser ducks drift gracefully into our bay.

Occasionally a bird will hit the window with enough force to stun or injure itself. When that happens, my tender-hearted husband frets, hoping it will be able to recover and fly off. "God sees the little sparrow fall / It meets His tender view / If God so loves the little birds / I know He loves me too," we used to sing as children in Sunday school. That hymn angered me every time we sang it. If God was watching over me, I wondered, then where was he when I was held captive and sexually abused at the age of eight by a stranger who threatened to kill me if I ever told?

The world was on the side of the strong and powerful. As far as I could see by the evidence, so was God.

Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." But how are we to reconcile what we read in our newspapers and see on our television screens with what we believe to be true?

If we judge by the evidence of our eyes alone, we would have to conclude that a loving God is not in charge of the universe, that might makes right, and that smart people look after Number One.

Yet the Bible states repeatedly that God is on the side of the oppressed. Psalm 10 portrays God as one who listens to the cry of the afflicted and defends the fatherless and the oppressed. Mary, the mother of Jesus, exulted that God reversed the positions of the humble and the powerful, bringing down rulers from their thrones and exalting those who were abased. Jesus identified his ministry from the book of Isaiah: to preach good news to the poor, freedom to prisoners and release to the oppressed.

For me the revelation of God's concern began in a counsellor's office. It was the means God chose to break the bonds of fear and anger that still kept me locked in a prison of pain twenty years after accepting Christ.

I remember the first time I knew it was helping. It was a spring morning shimmering with heat. I took the boat out onto the lake and rowed into a private marsh. The lake belonged to me. The only sound I heard was the tranquillizing music of the birds from the trees surrounding the shore. I listened to them, and the words of my childhood hymn came back to me.

*God sees the little sparrow fall;
It meets His tender view*

An image came into my mind of a wounded bird being lifted from the grass with infinite gentleness by a large pair of hands. The bird sat still, sensing that these were the safe hands of a healer. And I knew that I was that wounded bird, and that I was in the hands of a God who did care, and who promised healing.

*If God so loves the little things,
I know He loves me too.*

In a burst of joy I knew that despite all the darkness we see around us, the story is not finished. Like a guard dog who terrorizes intruders, God thunders against oppressors, yet leans toward the weak and defenseless, the hurting and fearful, with the compassion and sensitivity of a mother toward her sick child. The tale is not told yet. God

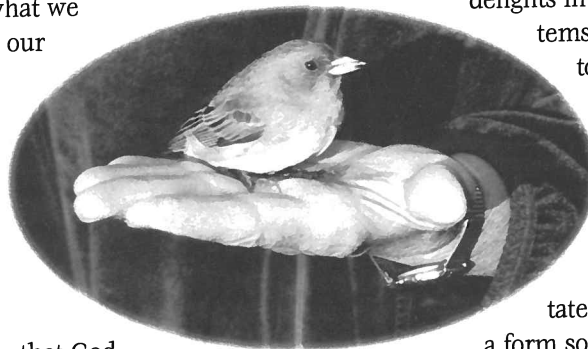
delights in reversing the order of human systems. God chuckles at turning things topsy-turvy, at choosing the weak things of this world to confound the wise, and the lowly things to overcome the mighty. True to character, God came to earth, not in a display of terrifying and impressive power, such as potentes and dictators love to flaunt, but in

a form so weak and helpless we marvel at

God's incredible humility. Jesus associated in his earthly lifetime not with the sophisticated and self-assured but with the outcasts and rejects of society, those who hardly dared to hope that God had an interest in them, or cared about their pain. And his ultimate victory against the power and ruthlessness of evil was in submission and weakness.

I do not know what God's plan to right wrong and establish justice on this earth will look like. I only know that the Lord who stores our every tear in a bottle will not overlook one detail in repairing that which has been broken. Not one cry of anguish has gone unheard. Not one broken heart has escaped God's notice.

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Gifts From the Fragile, Common Ground

by Madelaine Enns

Learning Spanish, German, Chinese. Teaching English to speakers of other languages. Moving away from the safety of the known to the insecurity of possibility.

After these many years of being a learner and a teacher of languages, I am still awed by that first moment of true communication, when stilted phrases and memorized vocabulary are suddenly transformed, when the passionate need to connect, twists and molds skeletal words and phrases into a living form that carries the essence of me to you and of you to me.

My friend, who is my age, has Alzheimer's Disease. I have become aware that again we are two people seeking that fragile ground where we can truly meet. Most days when I walk into his hospital room Al will recognize me. But after the initial eye contact, his gaze glazes over. He finds a spot on the wall and his spirit, removed from his body, settles there in a space where I cannot follow. His head bobs gently. Any responses to my comments are fractured, indistinct swirls of sound caught between his thickened tongue and barely opened teeth. We sometimes continue for a long time through silences and halting words. Speakers on two different planes.

Then, "Al, it's been raining a lot. The crops are looking wonderful. Have you been out to see them?"

"Not enough." This I can understand. We stumble on. I strain to listen and he continues, "You can't...that's...there over here...bumps you know."

"You've been having a hard time, Al?" He stays away. His eyes multi-faceted see everything. Or nothing. I ask about his wife. "She's visiting her mother, isn't she?"

Slowly, "She 's in Japan. No," and then faster, more frantically, "No, that's not right In...in..." His voice trails off.

"In Ontario?" I ask.

"No, no. Oh, I don't know. B.C. Yeah, in B.C."

I know she's in Ontario, but we let it be. My brother-in-law has given me some advice. "Talk to him about the T-Bird. That usually brightens him up." I try.

"Remember that old car you rebuilt? Did you ever run into any trouble with it on all those dirt roads?"

He grins – that wonderful familiar grin. "Yeah, but we won't talk about that."

"People loved getting rides with you. How many peo-

ple could you fit into that thing? Six, seven? And kids? Then you could squeeze in more?"

"Kids," he says, drawing out the middle of the word. "Yeah, kids were...heavy?" He approaches the word and then steps back, knowing something has eluded him again. Thoughts and words drift toward him and then recede – waves that are almost within his grasp and then move off to leave him on the shifting sand being pulled out to sea.

He looks at me, face frighteningly open. "Why are you here?"

Now I'm the one caught off guard. "To visit you."

"Oh?"

Lunch comes. He eats two little sandwiches. "There's a milkshake too. Would you like it?"

He turns to me, eyes clearing briefly. "Everybody gets this, you know. Not just me."

Al, who was always the first to lend a hand, always finding time to be there for a neighbour. Yes, Al, I know. He finally finishes the lunch – minestrone soup, half the tuna salad sandwiches, the whole milkshake.

"There are cookies, too, Al. Have one." His elbow rests on the wheel chair, his forearm up, a limp flag testing the direction of the wind.

He refuses. "No, it's for you."

"How about, you have one and I'll have one?" I put the digestive cracker between his stiff thumb and fingers. I eat mine. His stays midair, swaying slightly. "Eat it, Al."

"No, it's for you."

It's time to go. I leave, taking with me unexpected gifts from the fragile, common ground.

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Madelaine Enns has spent many years teaching English and English as a Second Language both at home and internationally. She attends Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

*He approaches the word
and then steps back,
knowing something has
eluded him again.*

Refreshing Winds – A Conference on Worship Renewal

by Sara Jane Schmidt

It was my privilege to be a delegate to this conference sponsored jointly by Concord College and Canadian Mennonite Bible College. I'm a real junkie of these music seminars, having attended every single one (they began in the 70s while I was a student at MBBC). Getting together with 200 people who can read music and harmonize, who know where to put the "t" and, in short, make beautiful music together is always an awesome experience – one we don't have on a week-to-week basis in our work within the local church.

This conference had a distinctly different focus and was geared to all within the church setting who have anything to do with planning worship in general, not just music, although that is an integral part. The organizers accurately read the mood out there (more than 300 people from across Canada showed up!) in deciding to address the issues that most churches are dealing with in the face of the changes of the last decade or two – among all Christian denominations, I might add.

Dr. Robert Webber, a theologian with experience in various traditions (not Mennonite, however), was the keynote speaker. It was a real treat to listen to him. Initially his presentation seemed awfully "slick," but his lack of notes were testament to in-depth preparation and thought as well as to the fact that he's obviously done this a thousand times (but we can't hold that against him, can we?). I only regretted that there wasn't time to hear him on all the topics that were in the outline provided.

So what was the basic message? *Convergence Worship*. What does this mean? First, we were encouraged to know our history (preferably all the way back to the early church) and to understand the twentieth century. Then, to understand the differences between *content* (always the same –

the gospel: an event and a hope), *structure* (a necessary and meaningful framework), and *style* (the most variable). Last, to examine ways of doing worship that take the lessons and examples of the past together with the best of contemporary expression, resulting in worship that is intentional in all aspects. I've thought for a long time that we Mennonites claim not to have a liturgy but I believe that we *do* have one. The difference is that it has developed by accident and not through conscious thought (doesn't your church have basically the same order of worship most Sundays?).

Webber based his talks on the four parts of a worship service: the *gathering*, the *service of the word*, *communion* or a service of thanksgiving and the *benediction*. Although there are many ways to do these parts, he said, each one is an important element of a worship service. And it is quite possible to combine both "traditional" and "contemporary" styles in the same worship service.

One particular aspect of Webber's emphasis involves restoring a central place for communion in our worship, preferably every week, and transforming the funereal aspect of our observance of communion. Amen to that! Communion is one place in the service where we are

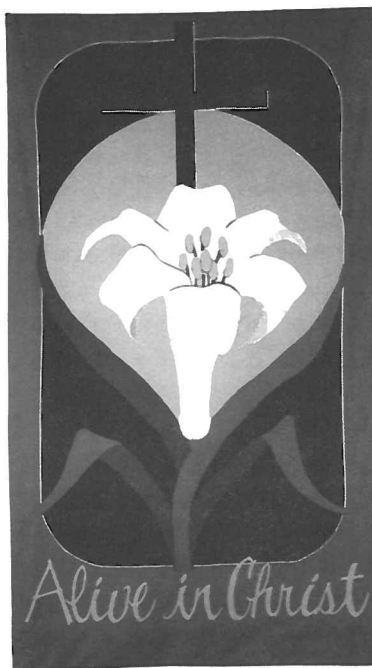
invited to meet Jesus, he said, and the congregation should be allowed to linger there in Jesus' presence. Our communion should include remembering the death, celebrating the resurrection, enjoying fellowship and giving thanks.

The other highlights of the conference were the actual worship services. I came with no particular expectations and found myself being moved to places of real worship where I was challenged and inspired, without feeling manipulated. The drama of Mary Magdalene, written and performed by Connie Epp of River East MB Church is especially remembered by many participants. Kudos to all who worked hard to plan these services. These were the "highs" that one cannot hope to achieve week-by-week in the local church but were inspiring all the same.

Workshops on all kinds of topics also took place throughout the weekend. Our church had representation at most of them and the usefulness varied. But there was definitely lots of food for thought, as well as practical ideas.

There was also lots of real food and wonderful fellowship, which is always a significant event.

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BANNER: LORRAINE MEUNSTER

From the Source

Continued from page 5

And the voice of God within is like an almost imperceptible inner nudge; if I don't listen intently, I miss it. "You must want love more than anything else..." writes Paul (1 Cor 14:1). God is love.

My prayer began to change. Words failed me. There seemed to be no more words. I longed for silence, to simply be with God, to be before the Holy One, to open myself to God completely – as I was – in my brokenness, to know God within, to come to truly trust God – without manifestation. Images were not satisfying anymore. God was beyond all images, all my imaginings. And I knew how far I was from God. "The wind blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. That is how it is with all who are born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

Intimacy with God is many things. It's realizing that my longings are only realized as I turn my heart to God. It's knowing I am loved, unconditionally, as the Father loves the prodigal child. It's communing with God, opening myself before God. It's knowing God's loving embrace. It's being with God, expecting nothing and knowing God is all in all. It's paying attention, always, and then letting go, and letting God. It's suffering to grow more like Christ.

And this is the promise: "And we, with our unveiled faces reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18).

And all this to return finally to where we began – living, as we are in our world of brokenness and pain – knowing that the life we share with God brings us also into the pain of the One who loves all and longs for all. I close with the words of Elaine Enmoth, in "Lessons From the Holo-

caust: Living Faithfully in The Midst Of Chaos": "In a post-Holocaust world, we cannot make a claim as Christians to be God's only children, nor can we rest secure in the idea that God controls everything that happens. No statement, theological or otherwise, should be made, that would not be credible in the presence of the burning children" (*Weavings*, March/April 1998, p 17).

God is with us, longs for intimate relationship with us, brings us to peace and a heart full of gratitude, and will in Christ reconcile all things to God.

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Erica Block has spent the last couple of years studying Spiritual Direction at St. Benedict's Convent and Educational Centre in Winnipeg. She works for Pregnancy Distress Family Support Services and is a member of River East MB Church. She and her husband, Dan, have three adult children.

As I See It

Continued from page 11

gift from God is greater than ever. In an age in which being overwhelmingly busy is often seen as the supreme virtue, accepting the gift of Sabbath rest may be more important than it was even to the Israelites. Will it be difficult to accept the possible restrictions of having to do things differently on one day of the week? Of course! But we're not the first ones to have this problem. God knew that convincing us to rest would be a challenge, so the Sabbath law wasn't passed out in a passive way. God gave the commandment to rest on the Sabbath as one of the "big ten" commandments, right up there with killing and stealing and adultery. God knew that rest was what creation needed and so made the expectations very clear.

So where does this leave us in our new millennium Christian walk? Again, Scripture points the way. If we think that losing the protection of

local laws regarding Sunday commerce is a bit of a shake-up, think of what it was like when Jesus began his work. He didn't come in and sort through all the petty laws that the Jews had made regarding the Sabbath, keeping some, crossing out others. He came in and blasted the people for their incredible hypocrisy. He insisted that they examine their Sabbath day actions by revealing the intentions of their hearts.

In many ways this is how we as Christians in contemporary society are being challenged today. If we frown at our neighbour for mowing the lawn on Sunday (which disturbs our peace and quiet) or clamour in protest when the Lord's Day Act steadily loses ground but see no problem with finishing up a bit of office paperwork on Sunday afternoon, then we are guilty of the same kind of Sabbath-keeping hypocrisy that Jesus challenged.

Ideas of what heaven will be like have been a common cause for speculation ever since the Bible spoke about those pearly gates and streets paved with gold. Whatever the reality of heaven turns out to be, one thing is certain. In heaven we will be close to our Creator. We will finally be able to worship in the overwhelmingly real presence of God and focus our entire attention on that reality. By commanding us to observe the Sabbath, God is giving to us the gift of a taste of heaven. If we honestly, letting go of every bit of hypocrisy and falsehood, examine our lives and our faith, Sabbath worship holds the possibility of sampling that incredible richness.

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Lorie Battershill, Sophia editorial member, is a freelance writer and editor. She and her family attend McIvor Ave. MB Church in Winnipeg.

Worshipping God Through All of the Senses

by Ian Ritchie

How much does our current worship of God express the belief that we are to worship God in "all of our being"? If we are to worship God in all of our being then it is good that every sense should be fully engaged. Unfortunately, much of historic Protestant worship has concentrated on what we hear, with a lesser emphasis on what we say, but with little or no emphasis on what we see and none at all on what we smell, taste and touch.

It was not always this way. In the Temple of ancient Israel there was a special incense, made to a formula that was to be used only in the Jerusalem Temple. This was an aid to worship and was intended to symbolize the prayers of the people rising upwards to God. Up to the present day, Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and some Anglican churches use incense to symbolize the prayers of the people rising to God.

Beginning with Noah's sacrifice of thanksgiving after the Flood, the Hebrew Bible suggests in many places that God does not respond to the prayers of the people until he smells the smell of sacrifice rightly made. In Amos 5:21 we read that God tells the Israelites, annoyed by their corruption: "I will not smell in your solemn assemblies" (KJV). The lesson we may learn from this is that while people may say a lot of fine prayer words with their mouths and sing a lot of fine songs, or may look very fine in appearance, God is not impressed by any of it. Not until the odour of a right sacrifice reaches God's nose, is God convinced by our "performance."

Now to many modern people,

this may have a peculiar ring. After all, surely the Almighty God who created the heavens and the earth would not need anything so physical as a particular odour to get "on his good side," as it were. I understand it in this way. Recent studies in the psychology of odour indicate that smell has several unique properties. One is that it is, of all the senses, the one that most profoundly embeds memory. This would be of special significance to the people of God who were constantly reminded to "remember Yahweh in all things."

The second important property of smell is that it is the only sense

Smell is, of all the senses, the one that most profoundly embeds memory.

through which one can distinguish if a thing is rotten on the inside, even when the outside still appears sound. This property may well have been understood by the ancient Israelites. We read, for example, in Isaiah 11:3, that the future Messiah will "smell in the fear of the Lord, he will not judge by what his eyes see or by what his ears hear, but he shall judge the poor of the earth with equity." This passage has been translated euphemistically by virtually all Bible translations since 1850. Many commentators before 1850, however, understood the verse correctly, as a reference to the discernment powers of the Messiah. John Calvin, in the 16th century, said: "the sense of smell is the most

refined of the senses."

To me, the best way to understand what Calvin and many of the Jewish commentators said on this verse is for us to think of the fact that smell is the most deeply revelatory of one's psychological state. For smell reveals to others much about one's inner state, whether this is embarrassing for us or helpful. The rise of massive industries around the masking of certain odours indicates that we, as a society, have come to devalue the quality of the information given to us through the nose. Most "room deodorizers," for example, simply anaesthetize the olfactory nerve, but do nothing to improve the actual air quality. This approach fails to deal with the root of the problem, but only delays the day of coming to terms with it.

So then, it is very appropriate for the Bible to speak of smell as a means of knowing, and even as the favoured means for the Messiah to discern. For it is through smell, above all, that the One with discernment can know the thoughts of the innermost heart, can pierce through the outwardly deceiving words and appearances of deceptive and self-deceptive hearts.

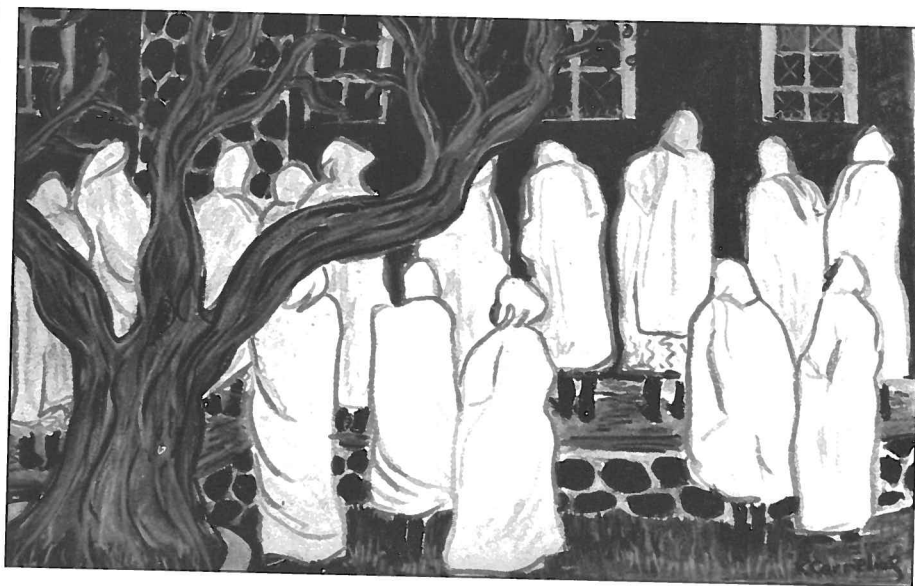
In this connection, it came as a revelation to me to discover that there are independent churches in Africa that have "chief sniffers," whose gift it is to stand at the entrance to the church courtyard and sniff the air to guard the entrance against those who might enter with evil intentions or evil objects. Although the particular church I visited in Kenya did not seem to base this practice on scripture, they

actually could be said to have scriptural warrant for it.

Perhaps we in our modern, western and ocular-centric culture have much to learn about worship from cultures where the means of knowing are believed to be ordered in a different hierarchy than our own. Since 1850, western cultures have privileged sight above all the other senses. Protestant cultures traditionally privileged hearing the word, rather than seeing. But in the 16th century there was a moment in western culture when any of the five senses could be an equally valid means of knowing.

I believe it is time for a reappropriation of all of our senses in worship, with a full valuation given to each. To do less is to accept a secular division of the concept of the person, and to thus truncate ourselves. We end up being less than what we can be as a result. But when we worship God with all of our being, then we experience all of what we can be through Christ.

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 Ian Ritchie is Assistant Professor of Religion and Culture at Concord College in Winnipeg. He and his wife, Debra Fieguth, attend St. Aiden's Anglican Church.



Coptic Christian Women, by Karen Cornelius. Before dawn these white-robed women gather for a 5 a.m. baptismal service at the Coptic church on the outskirts of Asmara, Eritrea. The Coptic church blends Judaism and Christianity. Following Levitical laws of purification prevents some women from entering the church, and they stand outside to listen, leaning against the walls for many hours.

Spirit Mourn, Spirit Dance: Wisdom for the Decade and Beyond

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 edited by Rebekah Chevalier,
 United Church Publishing House,
 Toronto, 1998

Reviewed by Helga Doerner

While some of us slept, others joined minds, hearts and voices. They were active participants in the 1988-1998 Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. Rebekah Chevalier collected a diversity of writings shared during the Decade. Like an assortment of seeds, she planted them in the pages of *Spirit Mourn, Spirit Dance*.

Chevalier opens the book with an introduction to the Decade, describing its history, its purpose and its outcome. The body is composed of a concert of voices, predominantly women's voices. Through reflections,

poems, songs, stories, drawings, plays, prayers and litanies, we meet our sisters and hear their hearts.

Themes of oppression, discrimination and violence against women are tempered with visions and dreams born of hope and a growing movement of solidarity during the Decade. Most powerful is the hope born of women's experiences of the Divine. Here we find women communicating encounters that free the image of God from its deeply rooted, idolatrous, masculine frame. A God who is reflected in all of humanity emerges and revitalizes the profound mystery of the Divine.

Each writing is a seedling. It brings to mind a work begun and not to be forgotten. We are invited to nurture these beginnings and add our own. Through reflection and awareness of our own experiences, *Spirit Mourn, Spirit Dance* becomes an open and ongoing dialogue of celebration and challenge.

*Those who drink of the water
that I will give them will never be thirsty.*

*The water that I will give
will become in them a spring of water
gushing up to eternal life.*

JOHN 4:14 NRSV

