

9/4

SOPHIA

W I S D O M

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



Volunteering: The Heart of Ministry

VOLUME 9 ■ NUMBER 4

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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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Don't miss our next issue!

Our first issue of 2000 will have a Literary theme, celebrating the gift of writing.

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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).

On the Covers: Artwork by Lis Vensel. The painting on the back cover is titled *Living Water*. Washing his disciples' feet, Christ opened his lesson on serving others. But in response to Peter, he infers layers of meaning for this action, such as cleansing from sin, and his identity as "Water of Life".



Giving, Investing or Repaying?

by Lorie Battershill

It's hamburger day Wednesday at my daughter's school and I'm there, taking a few hours away from my work getting this issue of *Sophia* ready for our design deadline on Friday. Usually I'm not this time pressured and I find that today the time spent is a real sacrifice. An assortment of other women arrive, most dressed in blue jeans and sneakers. Then in walks Corinne. She's obviously coming from somewhere else, wearing a blazer and fashion shoes. She's on a lunch break from her office job, offering her one free hour to help out at her son's school. Talk about time pressure! The question begs to be asked. What motivates Corinne to be here? She dismisses the question with a shrug. "Just because."

When the editorial committee of *Sophia* first considered the theme of volunteer work there were some reservations. Wouldn't we just be hearing the same old stories? Horn-blowing for organizations and a call for workers? I realized that this was a risk but I suspected that there was plenty of depth to this subject. And when I heard Corinne's casual answer this morning I was able to use the insights of this issue to go deep and uncover her guilty secret.

Corinne's motivation for giving is really quite self-centered. She's investing time in something which has value to her. By working behind the scenes she is able to get a sense of what her child's school is *really* like. That will help her to be a better parent and be more connected to her son.

Few areas of society have been more affected by the shifting role of

women than volunteer work. Organizations which were volunteer run for decades are having to hire workers to replace the volunteers who are no longer available. Churches are having to pay more staff as their volunteer base shrinks. Where is this trend going? Will society lose its valuable volunteers altogether?

The answer to these questions lies in the unspoken response to the "why" question. People have strong motivations for volunteering but those reasons aren't always selfless. Volunteers offer up gifts of time and service because of the value they take for themselves or to reciprocate for a gift received in the past.

It might be easy to dismiss serving for selfish reasons as a negative thing. But the good news is that volunteer workers who have their own value-added reasons for doing what they do are volunteer workers who will be faithful no matter how intense the time pressure of their lives gets.

So how does all of this impact the life of the Christian woman sorting through the priorities of her life in a society still not sure if it is willing to accept a woman's worth? If we *give* of ourselves, how will we earn respect and be valued? In my life, I try to pattern my giving in response to the greatest gift I've ever received. Salvation was the gift that Jesus offered me. Freely given. Grace.

Working on *Sophia* is like that for me. In the past, this publication helped me to discover who I was and all that I could be in a community of Christian "Brethren". That was a tremendously valuable gift to me.

My work on the editorial committee is a response to what I received then, and what I continue to receive through the privilege of working in the company of my sisters in Christ.

.....
Lori Matties is spending several months with her family in Canmore, Alberta, working with Concord College's School of Discipleship. Lorie Battershill is serving as guest editor for this issue.

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To Do Good Works

by Sue Simpson

Paul wrote to the people in Ephesus, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:8-10 NIV). I believe that these "good works" that we have been created to do are works of service – helping others. Exploring this path of good works has been a journey of faith for me.

As a child born in 1950, I grew up in a home where the model was one of the father working in business and the mother cooking, cleaning and looking after the children as well as doing volunteer work. Volunteering in church and in the community was as important a role in life as raising children. Helping others in any capacity was an integral part of my mother's faith. Serving others was an expression of her belief in Jesus Christ.

"Serve one another in love," Paul wrote to the Galatians (Galatians 5:13). This attitude of humble and loving service is still evident in my mother's life today as a 78-year-old who helps in the church, serves through pastoral care, volunteers at a cancer clinic, a meals on wheels program and a personal care home. As with many women of her generation, my mother never worked outside the home for pay. Her leadership and organizational skills, her amazing compassion and care, were translated into service and ministry to others as a way of living out her faith in Jesus Christ, the ultimate servant.

I belong to a different generation. I had a career but chose to be a full-time stay-at-home mom once my first child was born. During those early years of motherhood, I too found a sense of fulfilment in volunteer activities in the church and in the school – just as my mother

*Volunteering was one way
of defining who I was.*

had. I believe very strongly in the Roman 12 passage of scripture where it says, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully" (Romans 12:6-8). Since I felt that my gift was serving, that is where I put my energies.

Sometimes my volunteering was the result of the organization's need – "We are desperate for Sunday school teachers!" Sometimes it came from a desire to help others, but very often it was the result of my own need to interact with adults and to establish my identity as an individual. I wanted to be known as "Sue" in addition to being "the mother of young children". During this stage of my life, volunteering was one way of defining who I was. While I looked to God for guidance in these areas, I had forgotten about the part of the

scripture text that speaks of the "good works which God prepared in advance for us to do." God had different ideas about my areas of service.

Once my children were well established in school, I found part-time employment in the education system and continued to be involved in church activities. Then, two years ago, I was drawn into an area beyond my usual world. Wilma Derksen, whose 13-year-old daughter Candace had been kidnapped and murdered in 1984, had begun a new organization as part of MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) Canada. The purpose of Victims' Voice was to help survivors of homicide and violent crime. Wilma envisaged a national newsletter called *Pathways* that would tell survivors' stories and help them on their journey to hope and healing. Because Wilma had known me through our care group at church, she asked if I would like to be part of the advisory committee for this fledgling publication.

The world of homicide and violent crime was totally foreign to me. I had never been exposed to the horror of murder and the impact that rips people's lives apart. I had no

*It is evident to me that God's
plan for my service was laid
out in advance.*

understanding of how long it takes to begin to reshape one's life after such an event. However, I could listen to people. I could empathize with their frustration and, although I did not

have any answers or magic solutions, I could hear their pain and anger. I could respond to people's phone calls and letters, offer administrative support to Wilma, research and write articles for *Pathways* and do editing of material.

Being involved as a volunteer with Victims' Voice has been a journey for me as well. There was an unidentified "longing" within me that was being met. My paid part-time job in education was not as satisfying as it once had been. Balancing the part-time job and the part-time volunteering (which amounted to full-time work) with my family life, was becoming more difficult. I felt that I was being nurtured at MCC, that my writing was being encouraged and that my gifts were being used. I felt very strongly that God had called me to this place and that my work with

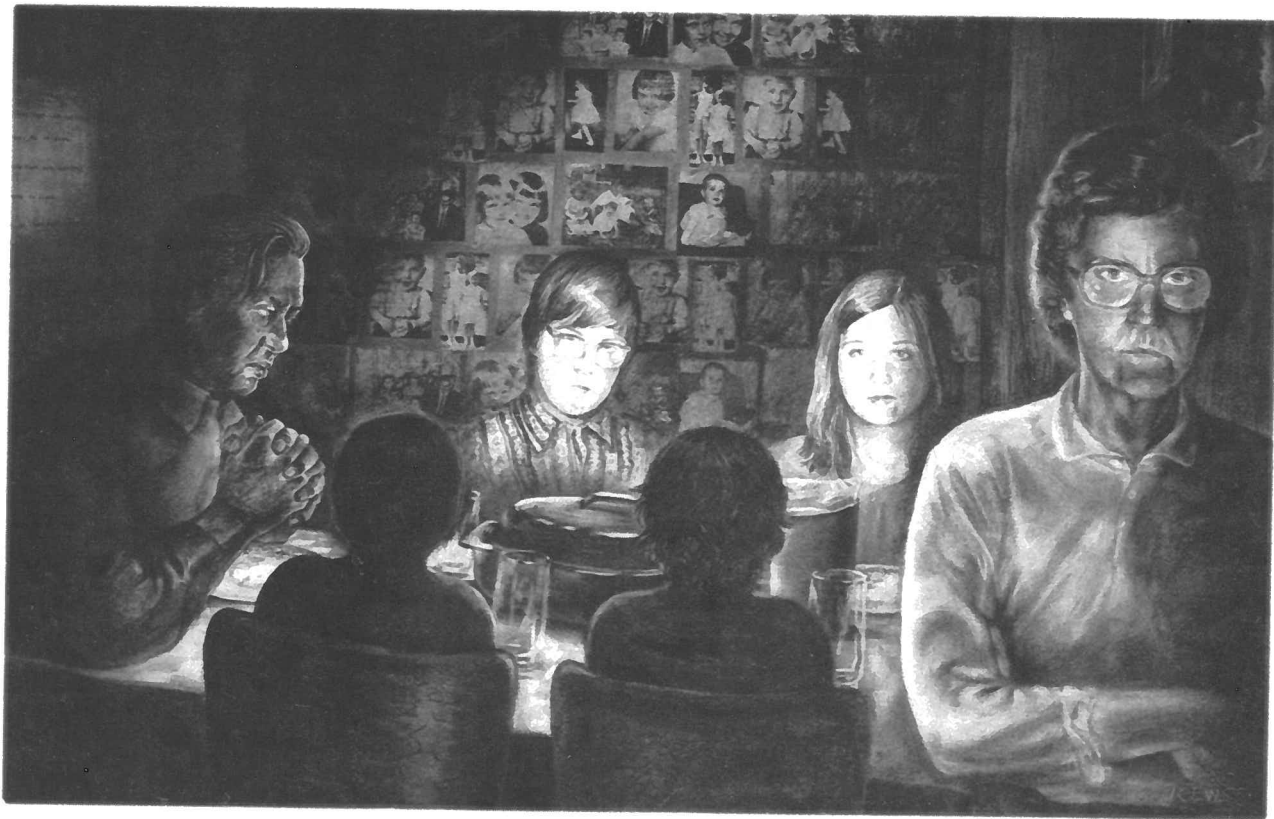
survivors of homicide was being affirmed. In the spring of 1999 Victims' Voice received a grant from The Winnipeg Foundation to research and write a guidebook for survivors of homicide and violent crime. I made the decision not to return to my education

I felt very strongly that God had called me to this place and that my work was being affirmed.

job and was hired by MCC on a part-time basis to research and write this guidebook. I am now able to focus all my attention on my paid and voluntary work with Victims' Voice. So, here I am at mid-life. It is

evident to me that God's plan for my service was laid out in advance. I certainly could not have predicted this path. I think that I am finally beginning to understand my mother and the women of her generation who volunteered so generously. I aspire to reach the place where I see my mother – the place where she integrates her life and her faith – the place where she balances learning and helping, giving and receiving. I hope that my life, too, can be a testimony to God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works."

.....
Sue Simpson lives in Winnipeg with her husband, Howie, and their two almost grown sons, Craig and Paul. Raised in the Presbyterian church, she now attends McIvor Avenue MB Church in Winnipeg.



After Grace is a large (3' x 5') charcoal and ink drawing by Lynda Tbews. Her biography and additional art and photos are found on pages 15, 21, and 23.

Sophia is a Volunteer

by Willa Reddig

A volunteer can be described in several ways. Official definitions describe a volunteer as a person who performs or gives services of their own free will or a person who renders aid, performs a service or assumes an obligation voluntarily. My own definition is that of someone who sees a project or cause to be of value and worth promoting. A volunteer jumps in to help it develop.

Sophia is a project that caught my attention almost a decade ago. The need for this publication developed within a women's Sunday school class approximately ten years ago. These women volunteered to put the magazine together.

Putting a magazine together takes a lot of time and energy. Information and articles must be collected to be printed. Individuals must be contacted and invited to write. The articles must be edited, laid out creatively and printed in magazine format. The job is done! One can now relax. No, not yet! It must be picked up from the printer and distributed – across Canada, the United States and overseas. After you go to all that effort, you want to make sure that individuals know that this publication exists so then promotion plans must be made.

Because the women in this Sunday school class had young children, they discovered that this project was a bigger job than they could continue to do on their own. Arrive – a whole new group of about a dozen women who felt that *Sophia* was a wonderful project to work on. I was among that group of women and I found *Sophia* to be a worthwhile cause. It is a magazine created and promoted by women who believe they have something to say about Christian women and the Christian way of life. *Sophia* gives an opportunity for women to write and express themselves where they may not otherwise have the opportunity to do so.

As I became involved in the work of *Sophia* I saw women who had the capability to write and put this publication together but did not also have the time to run the administrative side of things. This was where I decided to put some of my time and effort. I wanted to support women who want to communicate to other women.

A board was developed as a support mechanism for the editorial staff. A constitution with bylaws was developed and a corporation was formed. The *Sophia* board

serves a very vital function. It can be discouraging for the editorial committee if there is little or no feedback from the readers. It is crucial for the board to be there when the feedback is negative and unsupportive.

Sophia has gone through many growing pains and struggles. A few "biggies" have been the controversy over the name (often believed to be associated with goddess worship rather than the meaning "wisdom" taken from the Bible), the inability to receive charitable status (inhibiting donors) and the lack of support from the broader Mennonite Brethren conference. Despite these barriers, *Sophia* has survived and has served the needs of many women.

My first official function on the board was as treasurer. When the secretary was too busy to do her duties, I also filled in for her. Later I became the vice-chair. When the chairperson moved to North Carolina in 1993, I volunteered to act as liaison between *Sophia* and the chairperson. Later I became the chairperson – a position I've held until this year.

Promotion and circulation are the two areas on the board where the most effort is required. These volunteers must make people aware that this meaningful magazine exists.

Those in circulation must keep all the subscriptions organized and see that the magazine is distributed to subscribers. Church representatives in the individual churches volunteer to help in this area.

Who is *Sophia*? She is a volunteer. *Sophia* is planned, written, administrated and distributed by volunteers, women who believe in and support this cause.

.....
Willa Reddig is past chairperson of the Sophia board. She works as a teacher at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg.

We're sorry to be saying farewell to two longtime members of Sophia's collective. Willa Reddig has served as treasurer, vice-chair and, most recently, chair of the board. She has suffered and laughed with us through many phases of our development, and has been a tremendous support to the magazine. Many thanks to her for all of it. Dora Dueck has lent a wise and steady presence to the editorial committee since 1992. She, too, will be greatly missed. We wish her the best as she pursues a master's degree in history at the University of Winnipeg.



Sophia gives an opportunity for women to write and express themselves where they may not otherwise have the opportunity to do so.

Gathering of the Sophia Sisterhood

by Debra Fieguth

During a recent *Sophia* planning meeting at my house, in which peripheral conversation covered everything from Barbie dolls to *Tristram Shandy*, my husband was minding his own business in his office down the hall. It became apparent afterwards that he thought we were having too much of a good time.

"It sounded like you were playing a board game," he said with suspicion.

"No, we were having a meeting," I responded innocently.

"But there was laughter at regular intervals," he insisted. "Like every 20 seconds."

Well, yes, we do laugh in our meetings. We also listen sympathetically and debate vociferously. We don't have hugely strict parameters for our discussions, and that's the beauty of it all. Often Agnes will mention a book she's reading (she reads a lot), sparking a spontaneous round of informal book reports. And no subject is too trivial to tackle: Lori Matties once admitted to a life-long battle over the use of the comma.

We don't always giggle our way through the agenda. Any given *Sophia* meeting might also include talk of our struggles, careers, studies, relationships, church life. The gathering of the sisterhood is an important part of getting the magazine together.

And you know what else? After two hours of meeting, we've also managed to cover our agenda.

.....
Debra Fieguth is part of the Sophia editorial board.

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Sharing Wisdom

by Lori Matties

Sophia has grown and changed, struggled and celebrated over the last eight years. She has seen editorial and board members come and go, always with the joys and sorrows those changes bring. Production has increased from three to four issues per year. The range of *Sophia's* circulation has spread across Canada and as far away as Lebanon and Zambia. Columns have appeared and disappeared, but always, the search for dialogue, the desire to share the wisdom of Christian sisters on many subjects and from many perspectives, has kept *Sophia* alive.

In the editorial collective we have had many discussions about what *Sophia* should look like. Sometimes we have wondered whether we should push harder for the cause of women in the church to be able to use *all* the gifts God has given them,

whether they be in leadership or otherwise. More often we have opted for a gentler approach, hoping that our existence and the topics we chose to write about would encourage women to find their voices and to share their creative gifts and the wisdom God has given them. Sometimes we have felt we have been *too* gentle, that we have not challenged each other and the church enough to face the issues that confront us in our age. Often we have been encouraged by the comments of sisters across the country who have read and appreciated the magazine.

Sophia continues to be a very good idea. There are many more women's stories still to be told, and many subjects to be discussed. For that reason, we invite the entire *Sophia* sisterhood to attend a meeting on Saturday, January 22, 2000 at 9:30 am at McIvor Ave MB Church in Winnipeg. Whether you are interested in writing or simply excited about the work of *Sophia* magazine, please come. We are looking for women who will celebrate with us what we have done, and who will consider participating in the editorial collective, help in promoting the magazine or volunteer to be on the board. We are also interested in hearing from women who do not live in Winnipeg but who might be interested in corresponding with or writing for the magazine. We are looking for women of all ages to help us imagine where *Sophia* could go in the future. If *Sophia* magazine has significant meaning in your life, we hope that you will join us for this important meeting. If you would like to discuss these possibilities, I encourage you to call me at 204-668-2527 or e-mail me at <lmatties@escape.ca>. *Sophia* looks forward to hearing from you.

*We invite the entire
Sophia sisterhood
to attend a meeting
on Saturday,
January 22, 2000*

William Morrow has written, "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us!" There was a time in my life as a mother of two young boys about to enter school, when these words gave flight to my soul. I pondered how I would fill my days as I no longer felt needed at home. I ached to feel needed somewhere. I longed to feel purpose in my life and desperately wanted to be someone who could make a difference in the world.

I had discovered previous to this time that one of my spiritual gifts was a sense of compassion and mercy. I felt a strong desire to use this gift in my community, in an aching world overcome by pain and brokenness. I sought God daily for many months. Many times I was led to a passage in Matthew 10. In *The Message* translation it reads: "This is a large work I've called you into, but don't be overwhelmed by it. It's best to start small. Give a cool cup of water to someone who is thirsty, for instance. The smallest act of giving or receiving makes you a true apprentice. You won't lose out on a thing." These words tugged at my heart. I could picture myself coming alongside those God cared for and cried over. I sensed that God wanted Christians to care about those people too.

I began to feel a great desire to use the little I had in a place where our family had spent a lot of time in the previous five years. Our youngest son experienced severe respiratory problems and had to be admitted to our local hospital many times, fighting for his life. Throughout the many hours, that turned into many days, that I sat with him I observed a lack of compassion in the medical community. We took great comfort in knowing God was our strength and cared for us greatly but many times it would have felt so comforting to have someone – a professional, a nurse, a doctor or even a volunteer – to just sit beside us to



A Three Strand Cord

by Jennifer Pearson

witness our pain and share our load.

Through this experience I was drawn to offer myself for volunteer work in our small 70 bed community hospital. I wanted, through whatever work I would be assigned, to bring my compassion alongside those who were experiencing fear, pain, loneliness or grief or the many other emotions people naturally feel in the seemingly 'out of control' environment of a hospital.

After meeting with the hospital volunteer coordinator

I was assigned to volunteer on the wards. Orientation with the coordinator and another volunteer was the order of the day. Within a very short time I experienced the faithfulness and love of God in an amazing way when I realized that the first thing volunteers did

every day was to provide water for each patient. The words from scripture that I had been so drawn to were now becoming a reality. "Whatever you do unto the least of these, you do unto me." Could God be so interested in me and my dreams that God actually created that very situation for me each day? I was very moved and felt God's great love and pleasure each day as I volunteered. I would

It would have felt so comforting to have someone – a professional, a nurse, a doctor or even a volunteer – to just sit beside us to witness our pain and share our load.

begin by simply offering water. I was reminded of God's blessing in leading me to this place where, by volunteering, I could somehow be Jesus to those who were hurting.

Chuck Swindoll has said, "Fulfillment has to be one of life's choicest gifts. A major building block toward authentic happiness." Never before in my life had I experienced fulfillment in such a way. What joy I felt as I offered the simplest of life's gifts: a cup of water, a smile, a hug, a listening ear. In times of crisis, small or large, the gift of another human being to help bear the load is the greatest gift that can be offered.

Within a few months the volunteer coordinator encouraged me to take a course that would enrich my life even more. It was a course in palliative care, the physical, emotional and spiritual support of people experiencing a terminal illness. I had begun to notice how people, professionals and not, withdrew from someone who was dying or suffering through an illness for which there was no cure. My heart broke as I watched them often suffer alone.

Even family or friends often seemed unable to bear walking through their pain with them. I began to feel God leading me into a more formal role, specifically in the area of palliative care, by bringing people who were palliative into my life.

I began visiting patients after they left the hospital. Soon word spread to others in the community and they asked me to visit them. God was making it very clear to me that I should follow this leading. I became more involved when Selkirk Hospital formed a Palliative Care Committee with the goal of starting a formal program there. I sought out courses in applied counselling and volunteered with St. Boniface Hospital's Palliative Care program. I had the privilege of studying with a medical team there. I agreed to become Palliative Care Coordinator when Selkirk Hospital launched its own palliative care program. Although the government did not, in 1993, see palliative care as a core service that public money could be allotted for, the community began donating money towards the program and we began a fundraising awareness campaign. Soon I began receiving a part-time salary for my work.

In a world where short appointments are the norm, people often feel that they aren't listened to. They are

rushed off before their needs have been met. They feel uncared for. I have found this saying very true: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." People's emotions haven't disappeared. In fact, in a more stressful world, emotional needs have become more of a problem. So God continues to seek out anyone who will reflect the heart of God to reach out to God's people.

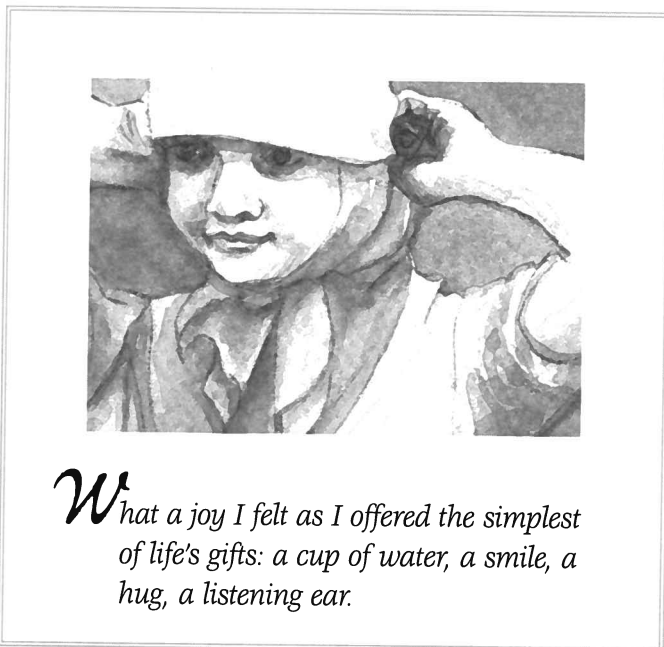
I'm so glad that volunteers, people who give their gift of time, can be used in effective ways. In fact, I found that when I volunteer, people are often more responsive to me, simply because they know that I'm there to try to give more than to receive. With no set expectations and no set agenda, discussion can go wherever the person wants it to. The relationship is easier because we are peers and the emotional response goes very deep.

We live in a world where there are many professionals.

Education is a must. The pace of life is quickening. Volunteers join the world of professionals in a three strand cord. When the person is one strand and the professional is the second, certainly the volunteer can step in as the third strand. This forms a functional team where needs are met, relationships grow, people feel valued and cared for. In Ecclesiastes 4:12 the Bible says that a cord of three strands cannot easily be broken. Take courage as you consider volunteering, joining a team to form a stronger cord of compassion and care.

There is a great sense of satisfaction and fulfillment as you use your time as a gift to enrich another's life. It has certainly given me joy to take my experiences, my love for people and the gifts I believe God gave me, to use them in whatever way God sees fit. Our world is so much richer because of people who volunteer. God bless them.

.....
Jennifer Pearson would say she is a woman most blessed. She resides on a working farm north of Winnipeg and is loved by a husband who is a gentle man and by two amazing teen-aged sons. Her experiences as an early childhood educator, health care provider and working with her husband in full time ministry have brought her much joy. She continues to be challenged by farm life!



What Is a *Pastor Couple*?

by Edith Dyck

From the earliest days of our relationship, Marvin and I shared a dream of one day being in ministry together. That dream was not part of our regular conversation but it evidenced itself in a consistent commitment to the lay-work of our local congregation. We loved and supported our church and gave many hours of time to its well-being. Sometimes we worked out of duty and sometimes out of gifting and joy.

Our church always used the title of "pastor couple" though it paid only one salary, and I became accustomed to the use of that phrase in referring to our pastor and his wife. I suppose I couldn't imagine a male pastor working without his wife's support, and I saw the term "pastor

couple" as a recognition of her equal contribution to the work of the church and the church's respect for that contribution.

Marvin made a career shift into pastoral ministry in 1996 when we had exactly reached our fifteenth anniversary. I describe my personal joy in becoming a pastor couple with Marvin at that time as similar to what I imagine it is like to have a child when one has hoped for one for a long time. I was then and continue to be at peace and in love with

this place where God has permitted me to be.

Being "the unpaid half" of this pastor couple is certainly a volunteer position because there is no pay and I do give much time to the work. Yet it is so unlike what the word "volunteer" implies. Volunteering can be simply the act of doing a task or filling a role. I have done much of that and when it was done out of duty it left me feeling ever so tired and too often, cynical. I have also joyfully volunteered much energy for a term of office or until a task was completed or until my inclinations moved me to a new assignment.

Pastoring, or being part of a pastor couple, is completely different from any of that. I am here out of longing and conviction and passion. This is not a matter of completing a task or a term of office. It is a matter of the heart. It is who I am and what I want to continue to be. It is where I want to grow. As I see it, volunteering is about "doing" and pastoring is about "being".

Some of the gifts I give to Marvin and the church as

we function in this "pastor couple" relationship are an unequivocal support of his choice of profession, a heart of love and a life of prayer for him and for the laity, enough distance from any situation to be able to add perspective to his viewpoint, and an unquenchable respect and admiration for the laity and all they do to keep their church healthy.

For us, in this church and at this point in our lives, to be a pastor couple means that as we talk through ideas or pray through particular situations or just exult in the fun of doing what we're doing. Together we are so much more than the sum of our separate parts. Being part of this "pastor couple" is, for me, a fantastic, God-given way of life.

I saw the term "pastor couple" as a recognition of her equal contribution to the work of the church and the church's respect for that contribution.

.....
Edith Dyck is a mother of four children below the driving age and consequently has developed strong skills for juggling a household agenda which includes sports and music lessons for all plus meetings, volunteering and just plain living. She loves to bake bread and cookies. Edith and her husband Marvin serve as pastor couple at Crossroads MB Church in Winnipeg.



Opening the Dialogue

Sophia is a place for sharing ideas. We'd love to hear your stories, thoughts and opinions about the topics presented. In this issue we are presenting what we hope will be a regular feature. We're calling it "Opening the Dialogue." Consider this feature to be your direct invitation to be a part of the pages of this magazine. Put your words on paper and send them to us. A sampling of responses will be published in an upcoming issue.

What's This "Pastor Couple" Thing?

Have you ever wondered how the term "pastor couple" came into being? What does it mean when churches say they hire a pastor couple but only one person is getting a paycheck?

Send your thoughts and ideas to:

Opening the Dialogue

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Making a Difference

by Monica Friesen



The Clean Team at work at the '99 Pan Am Games

This summer I was a part of SOAR (Sold Out And Radical) Pan Am. It was a program set up by Youth Mission International which revolved around the Pan Am Games being held in Winnipeg. Our role in the Games was as environmentalists. We were titled the Clean Team and were assigned to various venues to clean up garbage. In addition to our work with the Pan Am Games our groups were assigned to different ministries in the city. My team worked primarily with Winnipeg Harvest, our city food bank.

When we first found out what our jobs would be, I was worried that I wouldn't be able to look past the disgusting nature of our job. Once we got started though, I found that it wasn't that bad. In fact I found that it was fun. It actually became exciting for me to climb under the stands. All I could see was garbage. We didn't have sticks to pick the garbage up with. All we had were work gloves but it still didn't take us too long to make a serious dent in that sea of trash. At the end, it felt pretty good to look around and see how much we really had accomplished. It was the feeling that we were making a difference which gave me desire to go out and clean up every day. I was amazed how much my attitude towards our responsibilities changed.

Our work at Winnipeg Harvest was something I really

looked forward to. I had been there a few times in the past and I enjoyed helping there. Our assignment at the warehouse was to sort through huge crates of potatoes and put them in bags. This too, like picking up trash, was a disgusting job. Many potatoes were beyond rotten and they felt pretty gross when you picked them up to throw away. Still I found great satisfaction in our work because we were helping distribute food to those who can't afford it.

I embarked on this trip with the attitude that I wanted to give back to people. All my life I have been helped along by many individuals. I felt this would be my opportunity to give back some of what I have received in my life. God had a different plan though. In spite of all the work we were doing, I feel I was affected more by the people around me than I could ever have affected anyone. This, for me, shed a whole new light on volunteering. Volunteering is very much a learning experience. If you just go to do the work and don't open yourself up to situations, you miss out on a lot.

.....
Monica Friesen is a grade 11 student at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg and a member of McIvor Avenue MB Church.



Who Will Be My Neighbour?

by Sarah Klassen

When I took early retirement from teaching with the intention of writing, I decided to build structure into my life by volunteering half time. Until this time, my writing had happened under stress of limited time and clearly defined responsibilities. I was afraid I wouldn't be able to write when a whole day stretched out before me. I needed an excuse in case writing didn't happen. Not a very impressive motive for volunteering.

For one winter I worked at Pregnancy Distress, an inner city agency which assists pregnant women and needy families in crisis. My tasks were varied: organizing the schedule for phone line volunteers, putting together food hampers and layettes for the clients, administering pregnancy tests, covering for the receptionist, writing for the newsletter.

Having lived and worked mainly in the suburbs, I knew very little about the inner city. At Pregnancy Distress I was given glimpses into poverty, the counselling process, the lives of aboriginals and the constant struggle of the small social agencies to keep going. My vision was enlarged and my life enriched through fellow workers and the clients who came for food, clothing, counsel and a cup of coffee. And maybe my efforts made a small difference in the functioning of Pregnancy Distress.

Although I still had much to learn, I left after only one winter because another volunteer opportunity presented itself, one I couldn't resist. Over the following years I taught in Lithuania, three times in the Summer Language Institute, and for two academic years at Lithuania Christian College. It was an opportunity to return to teaching (which I found I'd missed) without long term commitment; a chance to experience a different culture; and even something to write about. Not very altruistic motives. But I believed that if I fulfilled my teaching assignment faithfully, God's blessing would not be absent.

Volunteering offers many benefits besides the obvious one: a chance to be involved in something vital. The skills acquired in one's career can be put to use again (although many retiree-volunteers prefer not to relive the stress that accompanies professions or business and opt for volunteer assignments that are more routine). A woman who worked at a volunteer bureau noticed that one motive for many young volunteers is gaining experience that will look good on a résumé and possibly lead to gainful

My vision was enlarged and my life enriched.



Ettie Janzen, (seated, second from right) with her class in Lithuania.

employment. As long as such motives lead to sincere and faithful effort, who would insist on more?

Meeting other volunteers is another benefit. At Pregnancy Distress I had contact with several dozen women who handled the distress call line. They came from a variety of backgrounds and brought diverse convictions, skills and insights to their task. I was reminded how passionately many Catholics oppose abortion. I discovered quickly which volunteers faithfully covered the phone lines at their designated times, which ones would beg off at the last minute, which ones could be counted on to serve extra time. I was amazed that many of them worked the distress line after a full day's work.

In Lithuania, I met several waves of American and Canadian volunteers. Many had retired from long careers and could spare the time and money required. Some had not yet begun theirs and courageously approached friends, family and church for financial support.

But there were also those who fit neither of these two categories. Ettie Janzen, who told me her story over tea in her dormitory room in Klaipeda, is only one of many individuals and couples who volunteer while their peers are advancing in their professions, paying into a pension fund, buying houses.

Ettie stepped out of her career midstream to volunteer. Trained as an operating room technician, she had worked for many years in the Cardiac OR at Vancouver General Hospital. In 1987 she began working for Canadian Cardiovascular Products promoting pacemakers, heart valves, blood recovery systems, and training doctors and nurses in their use. As Western Regional Manager for this

company, Ettie travelled throughout western Canada. It was exciting, well-paid, hectic work and there were lots of perks. Not a job easily given up.

But Ettie was not completely satisfied. She felt a desire to do volunteer mission work, and her vision was for Africa. She traces this calling to God, who "wouldn't let me alone and the desire just grew stronger."

"Finally I made a deal with God," Ettie told me. "I'm not sure putting out a fleece is biblical but I did it. I told God that I would put my house up for sale and when it sold I would give notice at work and make preparation to go overseas."

She assumed she could safely count on another year or two of work since it was winter and house sales were slow. Also, "I had no agent and was travelling 75% of the time and not home to show the house." However, in two months her property sold for close to her asking price.

At MissionsFest Vancouver in 1994, Ettie researched various mission organizations and found no suitable opportunity in Africa. Instead, she filled out an application for Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda, Lithuania, and was accepted.

Trained in health care, Ettie found herself teaching English, both at the Klaipeda Medical School and at LCC's evening classes for the community. During her service, which lasted from January 1995 until June 1996, she also helped set up and run the computerized English lab, co-directed the Summer Language Institute and performed various other administrative tasks.

She faced the challenge of living in close quarters with colleagues, in a society still trying to work out the nitty gritty of independence after the collapse of the Soviet system. She walked the city streets endlessly, observing the poverty that required the elderly to supplement their pensions by sweeping streets. And she made Lithuanian friends who still keep in touch.

Ettie brought back to Canada a spiritual souvenir. Here's her account of it:

"In Lithuania, for the first and only time, I *heard* the voice of God. I had in the past received a few very definite directions from God and literally felt his hands on me. But I had never quite in this way heard his voice as if he were speaking through the loudspeaker system.

"It happened in chapel one day during the singing. At the time I was feeling low. During this chapel service the music stopped for me and through the loudspeaker, that wasn't even working, I heard these words: 'My grace is sufficient for you; I am all you need.'

"And then suddenly the music started again. I looked around and no one else had heard the voice; they just kept

singing as usual. I was so awed when I realized what had happened, I could hardly believe that I had actually heard the voice of God."

Volunteering provided the setting for a spiritual experience, an encouraging encounter with God. The sense of being where one ought to be is a blessing sometimes granted the volunteer.

Ettie Janzen returned to Canada where she helped set up the 1996 World Evangelical Fellowship in Abbotsford. In 1997 she fulfilled her desire to serve in Africa, working under Medair and serving the displaced people of South Sudan. Then, needing to be gainfully employed once more, she returned home to Mission, British Columbia, where she works now as administrator of a local animal hospital.

Perhaps her volunteer administrative responsibilities helped to reinforce this talent.

Volunteering can regenerate mind and spirit and exercise the body. It can also deplete and exhaust. Sunday school teachers, thrift shop clerks, soup kitchen servers, literacy tutors, volunteer visitors in hospitals become weary

and quit, and replacements are sometimes hard to find. It is necessary to acknowledge and applaud their labours, set them free to rest, and find ways to make unpaid volunteering attractive enough to draw new recruits.

We all know people whose way of life includes an offering of the self, a volunteering not dependent on specific assignments or time slots. They seem to be guided by an inborn sensitivity that pays attention to needs and hurts, that notices neighbours, whether attractive or unattractive, and makes room and time for them. Visa and airfare are not a prerequisite for this kind of volunteering.

If love is to make our hurting world go round, it will have to be the kind of love that issues in action. Love that has mind and heart, but also hands and feet. The kind that fashions, instead of an uneven balance between helper and helped, a sense of partnership and equal worth. This makes possible an exchange of energy instead of the arrangement whereby the volunteer is drained and the recipient feels patronized.

Motives for volunteering will not always be simon-pure, but the practise of helping can be given a boost if we intentionally value and teach it. Maybe we should ask ourselves daily: "When I am in need, who will be my neighbour?"

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Sarah Klassen, a former editor of Sophia, is currently working on fiction writing. She has published several collections of poetry. She lives in Winnipeg and attends River East MB Church.

Volunteering offers many benefits besides the obvious one: a chance to be involved in something vital.

Losing My Amateur Status

by Donna Neufeld

The wedding was a stunning success. Nothing spilled, ripped or tousled. Manners were exquisitely in place and conversation was sprinkled with witty comments and polite observations. The hastily arranged dance lessons paid off handsomely and I proudly watched as they box-stepped their way about the ballroom with an air of fierce concentration.

I'm not speaking of the other guests nor even of the Bride or Groom. (I should know how *their* day went?) I'm talking about my four elementary school-aged children. They were perfect. It was almost a Supernatural Perfectness, a stunning moment of Domestic Epiphany.

Rich Uncle Eddie was there – the globe trotting inventor with factories in Arizona and Germany – whose opinion was courted by all. After a mere two hours observing my offspring mince and bow he was heard to declare – “Donna is a Professional Mother.” – and my mom breathlessly carried his words to me and repeated his benediction with all the reverence of presenting an Ivy League Diploma.

Professional?

As in no longer Amateur? Like I can get PAID for this now?

Wouldn't it be nice if motherhood and homemaking were so easily defined?

“Well, Mrs Neufeld, the Parental Board has reviewed your stats for the previous season. Storytime is a strong 3.09 and you're off the charts in Creative Play. Now if you could pull up your showing in Laundry Performance – it stands at a mere 0.05, Mrs Neufeld! – you may have a real chance at Professional Status by the Spring Meet.”

But does homemaking even qualify as an “Occupation”? There are no prerequisite courses, no industry standard and not a union in sight. We can't be fired, were never actually hired and don't receive holidays, dental plans, overtime pay or even the visceral satisfaction of “quitting time”!

On Being a Homemaker

Is homemaking “volunteer work”? By being unpaid work, does it lack in value?

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The Christian writer, G.K. Chesterton, took this sceptical view of the merits of stay-at-home motherhood to task when he wrote:

“How can it be a large career to tell other people's children about the Rule of Three,
and a small career to tell one's own children about the universe?

How can it be broad to be the same thing to everyone
and narrow to be everything to someone?

No, a woman's function is labourious,

but because it is gigantic, not because it is minute.”

Even without arguing the “vocational” aspects of home-making we can certainly see it as a volunteer position. That is, when “volunteer position” is defined as “a lot of hard work that they could never afford/can't be bothered to pay anyone to do”. Let's face it. We all ended up here by *choice*. (No matter *how* many times a day I may cast my eyes up to the ceiling tiles from the midst of the latest kid-leaves-pizza-pop-on-floor-and-cat-eats-it-so-he-can-promptly-throw-it-up-all-over-the-just-folded-laundry crisis and claim “I never ASKED for this!”)

I must confess, the words of praise from Rich Uncle Eddie did evoke an exhilarating tightness in my chest, like I'd just been spotted by a talent scout. Never mind that he had no children of his own, nor any intention of having any. I had arrived (Uncle Eddie has TRAVELLED the world. He's met umpteen Mothers – chic Mothers on the streets of Paris, business-tiger Mothers in the boardrooms of Switzerland, monied Mothers, thin-blond-starlet Mothers ... so he should KNOW a PRO when he sees one – but most of all because he is RICH Uncle Eddie ... did I mention his factory in Germany?”)

As we wearily stumbled back to our hotel beneath a midnight moon, my kids leaned against me and told me all the nice things people had said, and how they'd danced with the Bride. With safe, warm sleepy-swirling thoughts that will colour their unspoken memories in the future, they declared, “That was the best wedding EVER.” Suddenly all the efforts of new shoes and hemming suits and trimming cheap dresses to look designer made and endlessly drilling manners and courtesy and the unseen hours of tending to their *souls*, bloomed into fruition right there beneath the April moon.

Amateur or Professional, Vocational Homemaker or Hapless-Volunteer-Along-For-The-Ride. Whatever. I knew I had arrived *somewhere*.

And Rich Uncle Eddie didn't have a whole lot to do with it.

.....
Donna Neufeld is a freelance writer, part-time art teacher, occasional caterer, struggling housekeeper, wanna-be novelist and fulltime mom in Winnipeg.

Portrait of an Unknown Woman

by Joan Bond

A woman neither ugly nor pretty. At times, slats of light on her face framed in a mirror, would cause her to believe she was – for a moment – handsome. And she could be, if only smiles would trespass her face. But forty-four years stretched across her countenance, and recent news of births, remarriages, still did not bring wide parenthesis to her mouth.

Less than her prospects of getting married were the possibilities of her two older brothers having daughters. What could she discuss with nephews involved in hockey; she abhorred the sport. A niece would be her heart's desire. Someone who could distract her from her own drowned future. A niece with twin teddy bears in a doll carriage. A niece serving tiny jam sandwiches without crusts. A niece who would eat from a Bunnykins bowl, and one day leap into life's current and not submerge.

For she felt, although she could swim adequately, the dog paddle was her lot in life. And canines paddling out to

sea for all their worth do not grin.

The morning light flitted on the hallway mirror catching her cheekbones to reveal a vestige of beautification. Her lips tightened as she pulled open the door.

Surely one day her brothers would understand why she decided this morning to sell her antiques, her well-cared-for linens and library, her capacious town house, to travel to that country with the lead grey, crumbling orphanages. To write the organization which, for the past ten years, had sent her a Christmas letter, a reply envelope, a brochure with photos of children unwanted.

By the time her quickened steps reached the bus stop, the sun showers had relented. Her umbrella glistened.

.....
After living several years in the Maritimes, Joan Bond has returned to her prairie roots. She has been published in literary journals and Christian denominational periodicals.

Introducing Lynda Toews

Lynda Toews has worked as a graphic designer for many years. Her education includes a Graphic Arts Certificate and an Education Diploma both from Red River Community College, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree from the University of Manitoba.

Lynda is an artist of interests including portraiture, the human figure and cityscapes, but one of her favourite themes is the Canadian prairie. Her paintings have been shown at many Winnipeg galleries including the



THE SILENCE OF MOTHERS PAST. LINDA TOEWS

Winnipeg Art Gallery, Studio at the Top, Ace Art, Medea Gallery, and the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery. Her most recent projects include doing a prairie

landscape for Government House and painting a 130-foot mural of Canadian scenery for the Winnipeg International Airport's Transborder Lounge.

The Volunteer Who ... Didn't

by Helga Doermer

Volunteers are a vital and integral part of community life. Therefore it seems essential to uphold a vision of sacrifice – the sacrifice of time, talent and personal finances – to keep the many volunteer based services running smoothly and efficiently. However, if the operative word is sacrifice, there is a risk of eroding the indispensable resource of unpaid labor. A personal experience clarified my understanding of the distinction between truly volunteering and being manipulated into joyless work. I believe the meaning of volunteering is to be intentional and autonomous in giving. It is a freely chosen act by the volunteer. It has the potential of not only being a gift to the receiver, but also of generating life in the one who gives. In contrast, when the one who volunteers is manipulated into unwilling giving, the value of volunteers is insulted and undermined. This recounting is an experience of the latter – the most difficult kind of story to share because the experience left wounds.

I had left my profession in 1990 to stay at home with my children. By the fall of 1994, with both children attending school full time, it seemed like a good time to get reintegrated into the workday world. Volunteering seemed to be the ideal bridge, scratching the itch of needing to be active in the community without forfeiting the flexibility of being a stay-at-home mom.

The question was what to do and where. One option I kept stumbling across was the call for volunteer crisis line counsellors. I had reservations though. I could not picture myself relating to a faceless voice at the end of a telephone wire. In my ten years of experience in mental health, I relied as much on visual cues as I did on the words and tone of voice of a client. Too often words only told a partial story, sometimes an inaccurate one. Body language inevitably afforded other valuable clues. Reading the vibrations in the room was an additional resource. At times, interpreting those vibrations was key to breaking through invisible barriers which locked up crucial concerns. No, I did not like the idea of counselling over the telephone. It seemed too much like working with an unnecessary handicap.

After weeks of reading about the same kind of volunteer opportunities, it occurred to me that perhaps some of the crisis line services were attached to offices with in house counselling staff. I thought I'd take a chance and started dialing the information numbers. It wasn't long

before I thought I had found what I was looking for. In answer to my questions, the volunteer coordinator replied with an enthusiastic 'yes'. I was just what their centre desperately needed. When could I come in for an interview?

In preparation for the interview, I traded in my blue jeans for office clothes, packed my résumé and mentally filed questions I had – about the place of service, the clients and the counselling approach. The place seemed almost too perfect. My in-house training could start immediately. There were shelves of resources I could take home on loan and study. The formal introductory classes would be offered within two weeks. After that time, I would be set to see clients. That was actually more orientation than I had ever received from any of my employers. I was confident that I would be well prepared before the first client arrived.

The two weeks came and went. The formal orientation was over. I sat where I had sat my first day of volunteering, behind a desk, answering a phone. The phone rang incessantly, not with crisis calls but with office management dynamics. When had I volunteered to become a receptionist? I approached my 'boss' with my concern. Oh, she replied, actually my training was not over yet. She handed me a second packet of instructions. It was time to set up mock appointments with counsellors already at work there. She had to make sure I was ready to interview clients. I did her bidding. A few weeks later, I still sat at that same front desk and still fielded office calls. My patience was growing thin. What more did she want? I spoke to her again. She assured me that I could begin counselling right away.

More weeks slipped by. "Right away" never materialized. I thought perhaps she hadn't heard me clearly. I wanted to make sure. In black and white, I wrote up my understanding of our first communication and all that had followed. I clearly stated that I had never volunteered to be a front desk receptionist and was not willing to continue working in an area that I had not requested. I spelled out what work I would be willing to do. She seemed surprised and apologized. Excusing herself on the grounds that she had been too busy to notice that I was still only answering telephones and taking messages and filing and photocopying ... She said she would correct the situation right away. September, October, November, December. The months slipped by. The Christmas season was approaching. By the

*The meaning of volunteering
is to be intentional
and autonomous in giving.*

time the school break (and my break) rolled around, I had still not seen a client. I no longer cared. I was not going back.

Funny thing how a burning passionate enthusiasm can run dry. I began with the drive to take in new learning, and was eager to put my skills to work again. Yet the months of being stuck behind a desk with a perpetually ringing telephone and being brushed aside again and again took its toll. As trust was broken repeatedly, I grew tired of hanging on empty promises.

Before the break was over, I made my call. There was a pause after I stated that I would not be returning. Then a plaintive voice, "Couldn't you just stay until the next volunteers have done their orientation?" I wanted to laugh out loud. The next orientation was three months away. I chose to be polite and again, sounding like a broken record, reviewed the situation for about the fourth time. The message simply didn't sink in. I never did volunteer to answer telephones. After almost four months, I quit a volunteer job I had never begun.

.....
Helga Doermer lives in Winnipeg with her husband and two sons. She is currently studying towards a Master of Divinity degree at the University of Winnipeg.

Afterwards

by Joan Bond

In the day-after silence
(dishes done, gifts tidied,
children in soft slumber)
I hold a festive glass
of punch,
and gaze at the pyramid
Christmas evergreen
with its flashing royal
blue and white lights.
I see (hidden
amidst its spread branches)
a rough timber,
a crossbeam
and on it, there . . .
the Light of the world.

Amidst

by Joan Bond

Amidst the cacophony
of donkey bray, sheep bleat
rooster cluck, dove coo
and gentled cows lowing.

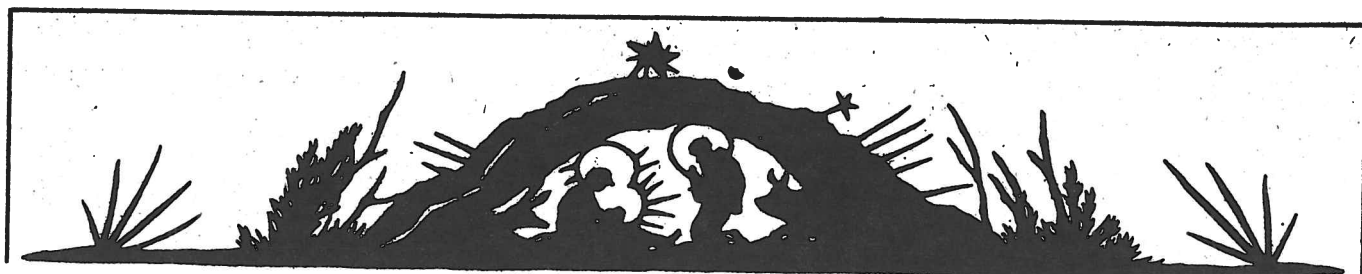
Amidst the pungency
of barn straw, travellers unrefreshed
shepherds' strong stench
and after birth blood.

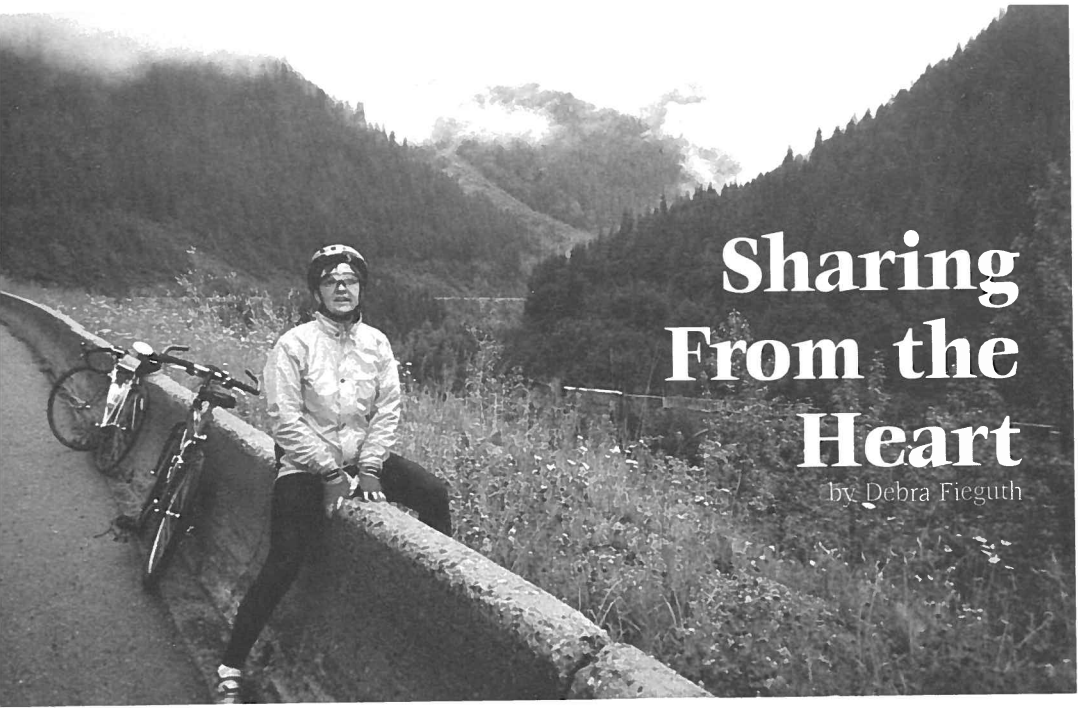
Amidst the dusty
onlookers, darkness sings
and all the angels incandescent
echo: "Glory, Glory, Glory".
Emmanuel has come.

Christmas Parcel

by Joan Bond

People scurry
in and out of shopping malls
arms burdened with heavy packages.
People unaware
of the best-wrapped Gift, so Light
it carries them.





Sharing From the Heart

by Debra Fieguth

them sound easy. On her first trip she rode her old bike using only one gear all the way to Eagle Butte because the gears had broken down. Accommodation is spartan and lacks privacy: usually a church basement or community gym, with everybody laying down their bedroll and claiming their own small territory. Though the riders try to choose roads that aren't too busy, sometimes they end up on Interstate highways with semis and buses

zooming by every few seconds. Mercifully, there have been no serious incidents.

But then there are payoffs: warm welcomes, especially in small towns (often the church communities themselves become closer knit if they've worked together hosting the group); hospitality all over the continent; and a bonding among riders who have to stick together, day and night, sometimes for a month at a time.

"When the ride starts, they all come because they like riding," Olenka explains. "But by the time the ride is over everybody has a totally different perspective on it." Each night on the road, one or two individuals are chosen to talk about why they are on the ride. At first the talks are perfunctory; but after a while, as they warm to each other, even the shyest are able to share their hearts. "Some wonderful camaraderie happens."

Each year the ride is different – not only because the destination changes, but also because of circumstances and personal dynamics. In 1997, the year her father died, Olenka was so busy she didn't have time to properly grieve her loss. But after setting out from Kelowna, B.C., and riding into the Rockies, where

she felt peace, and on through the Prairies, she finally had time to process her grief.

"When I came home from the Kelowna ride," she reflects, "my spirit was definitely in a different place."

Ending each ride is always bittersweet. "Physically, we're pretty tired. Mentally, we'd really just rather be cycling." But the rewards are worth the endurance. "Do we get back a whole lot more than we give? Always."

Olenka is no longer coordinating the Habitat ride.

In the spring of 1994 Olenka Antymniuk was challenged to organize a fleet of cyclists to pedal from Winnipeg to Eagle Butte, South Dakota, where Habitat for Humanity's Jimmy Carter Work Project was to take place that summer. The objective was to raise money and awareness for Habitat.

At first she said she didn't have time but being an avid cyclist and a committed Habitat supporter, she relented. The next few months for the interior designer were filled with meetings, mapping the route, finding accommodation, fund-raising, training, holding riding clinics, and many other things needed to move a dozen riders through a nine-day, carefully planned journey.

The Habitat trip has, in the five years since, become an annual ride and taken on a life of its own. Cyclists have ridden to Los Angeles, Atlanta, from Kelowna to Winnipeg, through southwestern Manitoba and through the Canadian Shield, with 50 to 60 riders participating. Olenka has been on all but last summer's 800-kilometre ride through the Shield.

"I don't think I had any idea how much time it would take," she admits. "It's all consuming." What motivated her to be involved – not just the first time but since – was the knowledge that by drawing attention to Habitat, she was helping others in their dreams to own their own homes. "I wouldn't do a trip just for myself."

By the end of that first ride her commitment was cemented. "What overcame me," she reflects, "was that some kid will have a better chance because of what I just did. And what I just did was really nothing."

Olenka's descriptions of Habitat rides don't make

Cyclists have ridden to Los Angeles, Atlanta, from Kelowna to Winnipeg, through southwestern Manitoba and through the Canadian Shield, with 50 to 60 riders participating.

She now pours her volunteer time and energy into her position as chair of the Winnipeg chapter of Habitat for Humanity. And that, she reports, "is all consuming."

Excerpts from Olenka's journal, 1997, beginning shortly after the death of her father.

March 18 - The committee has started late. The winter is especially cold. It's hard to motivate potential riders into a long bike ride mode, never mind initiate and maintain some sort of training regimen. Cross-country skiing, among the best physical and cardiovascular training for riders, is far from our minds on all those minus thirty weekends. The forecast is for a flood of the century.

April 5 & 6 - ... the weekend of our most sincere winter blizzard. It was also the Sunday of one of our clinics. So, with undefeated shoulders we attempt to shrug off still another setback. It's the clinics where we can impart as much information as possible about the ride. It is also the only time we have to educate participants about Habitat. After two hours our clinic attendees are saturated with information overload. If we prolong the session, they leave. We must be efficient.

April 19 - ... rider recruitment nearly came to a halt. Some of our most popular training routes were now under water. Our weekly committee meetings ... were postponed twice because we were doing what most Winnipeggers were doing, sand-bagging.

Mid-May - The route has to be driven. Handout materials for the trip must be prepared. Host expectations must be prepared. Lodging for cyclists. Storage for bicycles. Food. Which meals? How much food? Media. And then there are just all those other details like support vehicles, more support people, training rides, riding jerseys, signage, media releases ...

June-July - These months are a blur of events. Most done at break-neck speeds and, for me, rarely on a bicycle. It seemed to me that not only was I working at maintaining clients' needs and preparing for a bike ride, but that I was in a constant process of catch-up. Sometimes I was glad for the escape. That I had the fun of being involved in organizing and hopefully training for the bike ride. Much of the time,

however, I feel that I'd been robbed of the opportunity to mourn ...

July 28 - The ride begins in Kelowna - I thank God many times over during this ride. This time it's for the emotions that kept me going even though I was sure I could drop from fatigue just by thinking about it. I was elated that we were finally getting on our bikes. That sound of forty cyclists clicking into their pedals, hooting with excitement, is always fresh with me. The air is humid and hot even at 8 am. The thrill of cycling through busy downtown traffic in a long string of matching cycling jerseys. Line-ups of cars honking horns and being excited with us ... Somehow, the fatigue just disappears.

July 29 - Leaving Salmon Arm - The last support vehicle and core of support people stay behind to do the final packing, ensure that the building we've been accommodated in has been cleaned, that nothing has been forgotten. The toilets are cleaned, the sinks are washed, the

kitchen is tidied, the floors swept, mopped or vacuumed ... We want to be welcomed should we ever pass through again.

August - The ride through the Prairies brings me face to face with a gazillion half ton trucks not unlike my dad's. A multitude of farmers in their fields. All bold, in my face reminders. I break the rules. I choose to ride alone. Often. I need to ride alone. Finally I grieve.

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Debra Fieguth is a member of the Sophia editorial collective.

What motivated her to be involved was the knowledge that by drawing attention to Habitat, she was helping others in their dreams to own their own homes.

Volunteer Adventures

What's been your most adventurous volunteer experience? Why did you do it? What was the biggest blessing you received from it?

Send your thoughts and ideas to:

Opening the Dialogue

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Volunteering From a Christian Perspective

by Katherine Morgan

Volunteering. The word conjures up many images, from those who work tirelessly on a weekly basis to those who spare one morning a year for the various charity runs in our communities. In between are the millions of volunteers who freely give of their time with varying workloads.

How does volunteering relate to those of us who call ourselves Christian? By definition volunteering means to freely offer or do something. I will amend this by saying that volunteering is for the benefit of others – whether an individual or an organization. Isn't that what Jesus Christ did for us? He gave freely of himself so that we might benefit. When we take on this attitude of giving, we come closer to being like him.

Volunteering is one of the best ways, as a Christian, to give – to God, to the church, to the community. There are often benefits for the individual doing the volunteering as well. Let's examine this issue more closely.



1. Volunteering as “missions”.

One of the problems we have when we belong to churches, especially if our churches have a wide variety of programs, is that it becomes too easy to have all our friends, all our social activities (and sometimes our work lives) in the church. A friend said to me that she was embarrassed when she realized that she had no friends outside of church and had not attempted to find any in several years. When we volunteer outside the church, we open ourselves up to other people's lives – the fun that they can share with us, the problems that they have, the love that they have to give us. In time, as friendships develop, doors may open for them to come to know Jesus.

2. Volunteering as giving.

We all know the importance of financial tithing. Shouldn't we tithe a portion of our time as well? Volunteering is something that can fit everyone's schedule in some way. All ages can contribute to the church or community – from manning a ticket booth at a conference to working in the kitchen for a banquet, knitting hats and booties for hospital

neonatal units and everything in between. There's no lack of opportunities to give of your time. Three hours a year or 60 hours a week. It all depends on what you want to do.

3. Remember that balance is important.

Volunteer at a pace that you can handle. Find time for family, for work, for church and for self. Perhaps one evening a week is too much. Can you spare one evening per month or one morning per year?

4. New friendships are valuable.

It's good to have different circles of friends - church friends, work friends, friends from the club, from the gym. Sometimes one set of friends cannot meet all your needs. By having friends in different circles you can take more energy back into the other groups. Church friends are a lifeline, a rock in a crazy world. But having non-Christian friends outside of church helps us to remember that we need to pray for the unsaved. We need to be a witness.

5. Our communities are richer for volunteers.

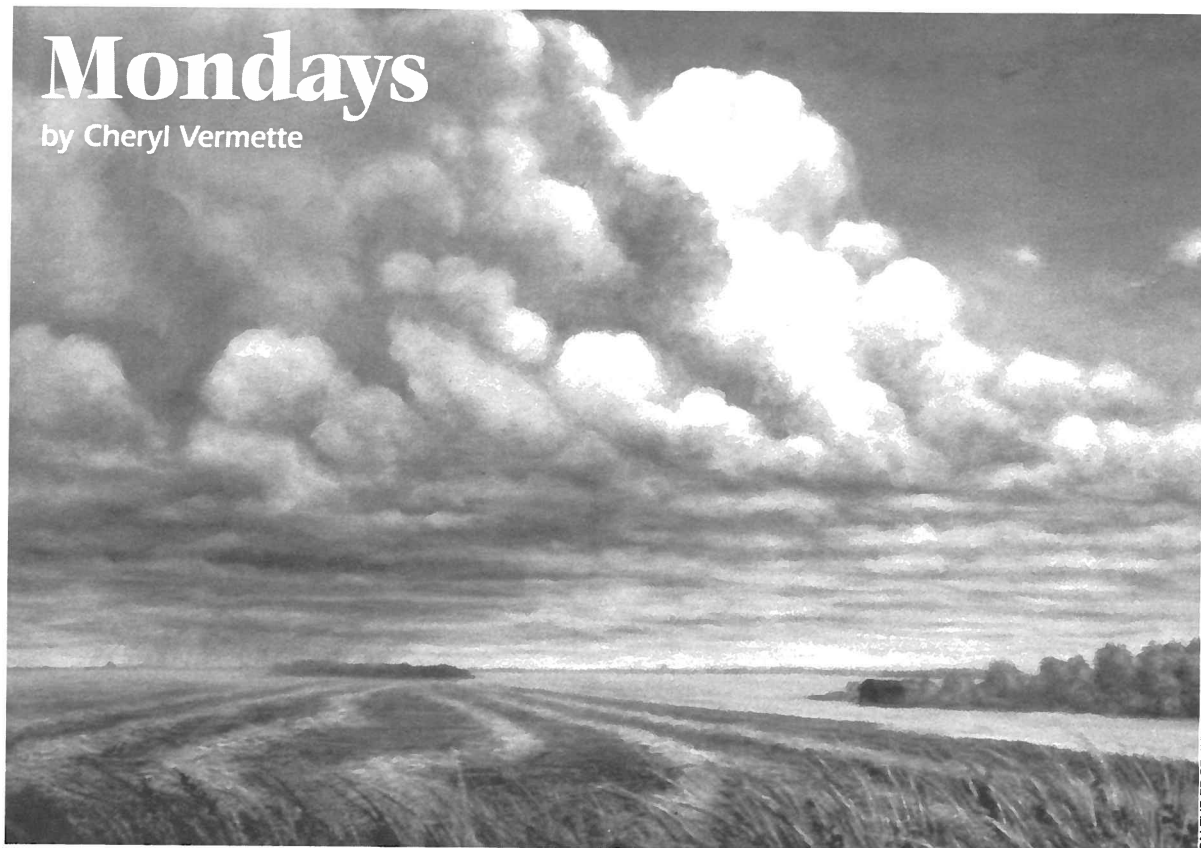
Having lived in Edmonton and Winnipeg, both of which have large volunteer communities, I can see how both cities have benefited from their citizens. The strength of their volunteer force has been instrumental in the cities' getting Grey Cup Games, World Figure Skating Championships, Curling Championships and most recently, the 1999 Pan Am Games. Officials have said time and time again, in both cities, that the volunteer force is incredible. And each event offers opportunity to welcome strangers in the name of Christ.

So go out and find something you enjoy doing. Then others will enjoy getting to know you and perhaps ultimately they will get to know Jesus. Is there a place where you can serve?

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Katherine Morgan attends McIvor Ave MB in Winnipeg where she is currently serving on the Girls' Club Committee. She is also a museum guide, in addition to having a full-time career as an underwriter.

Mondays

by Cheryl Vermette



When the notion of volunteer work crosses my mind, intellect nobly states, "To volunteer is to give. I am giving of myself and of my time." But my heart knows a different truth. With a clever furtiveness, I store away small moments of beauty when I volunteer so that later I might savour them with something akin to greediness.

On Mondays I arise at 6 am to drive 100 kilometers west to the small town where I grew up. I pass by field after field of raw dirt, some still gleaming with the golden bristle of wheat stubble. The sky is often a clear blue with piercing sunshine. Other times it is scudded grey with low-lying clouds. It matters not which. I know I am out in the open air of the prairies and that I am breathing deeply.

When I arrive at the unassuming building where I will spend my morning, I greet the other women who are arriving there. They are simply dressed, with simple speech. Most have heads of grey. Most are Mennonite. All are incredible women. I know this because in the few hours that I stand beside them in the MCC thrift store, sort-

ing clothes, I become part of their community. We rummage through bags and boxes of others' castoffs – the things rejected, the things no longer valued. The hands of these women sift clutter as they chatter about their lives, their concerns, and events from the newscasts. In the

room there is a sense of compassion, often broken by quick bursts of laughter from a story told.

And as my hands sort, and as I listen, I salvage small items for myself. An old black hat with a spray of fuchsia flowers, a tablecloth marked with the faint shadowing of stains, a shirt for my husband. These items come

back to the city with me. They become part of my home. I value them. I have brought back with me a sense of women communing, a sense of healing calm, a sense of the unvalued being restored.

To volunteer is to give, but I take every bit that I can.

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Cheryl Vermette is adept at turning discards into treasures. She lives with her husband in Winnipeg.

In the few hours that I stand beside them in the MCC thrift store, sorting clothes, I become part of their community.

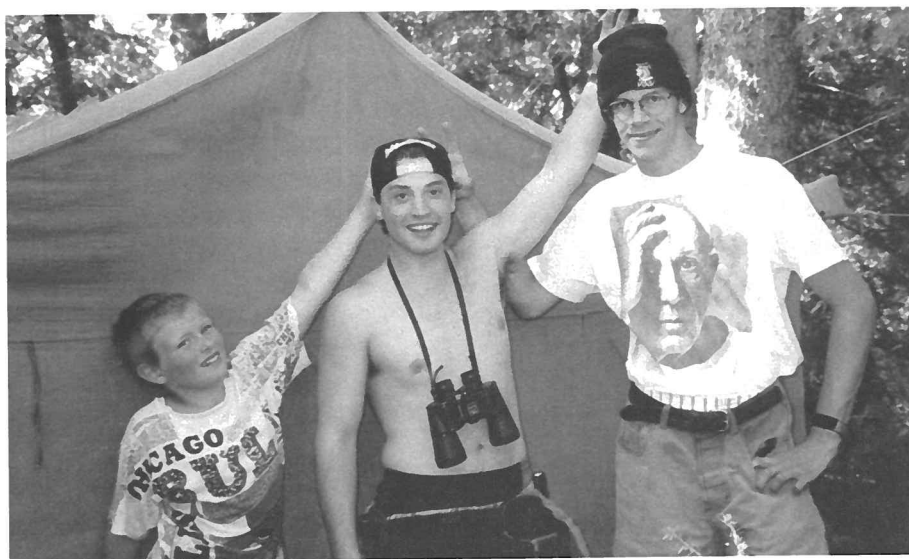
An Open Door

by Matt Redekopp

When I was first asked to write about why I volunteer, I knew I couldn't simply state that volunteering makes me feel good. Volunteering does so much more than that. It provides an open door, a passage into people's lives and a commission to stick it out in a working relationship with others. Personally, it has put me on a path that has led me to pursue a Masters of Divinity degree at Regent College in Vancouver so that one day I will be equipped to work with young people full-time. Best of all, volunteering has been an opportunity for me to experience God's mercy and grace over and over again.

Some of my best friends and greatest memories have been made volunteering. I yielded my life to Jesus the summer I started working at Manitoba Pioneer Camp and there I caught a glimpse of what God may have in store for my life. I was assigned to cabins occupied by treacherous little campers who pushed me to my limit and won my heart. They challenged my patience far too often and usually left in tears because they had lived their best summers ever. That transformation showed me the kinds of joys and rewards that stoke the Christian youth worker. Volunteering offers one of the few times in our lives when we can have fun while being pushed beyond the boundaries of our comfort zones. Experiences can be both intimidating and exhilarating, and they always instigate spiritual growth.

I believe that the places where we volunteer help define us. I love the Canadian wilderness. Those three summers at camp have given me the skills and experience to pursue the



Matt Redekopp (on the right) making new friends at camp.

backwoods as a lifetime activity. It was a desire to spend my summers in a canoe and share that canoe with others that later led me to Inner City Youth Alive (ICYA), a North End Winnipeg mission which includes a wilderness camp as part of its outreach. I was taken on board to chauffeur small groups of inner city kids to a lodge at Gem Lake in Northern Manitoba for fishing, swimming

The places where we volunteer help define us.

and fun. Living with and leading those very needy kids was a great challenge. When the summer was over, I must confess, I wasn't too sad to move on.

However, God's great gift to me during that summer was a new friendship with a fourteen-year-old boy by the name of Cecil. The two of

us agreed to hang out together every other Friday and, after several months, we were able to communicate openly about life's issues. Cecil decided to follow Jesus on his own after a little thinking about the things he had been learning about God at ICYA. He taught me that being a messenger of love for Jesus is about living alongside others. I learned early in my relationship with this young boy that verbalizing the gospel is not always what others need. They need to feel our commitment to them first. That is the singular opportunity provided by volunteerism, where everything is freely given and freely sustained.

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Matthew Redekopp is studying at Regent College, after completing his BSc. and a year at Capernwray, Sweden. He attends The Meeting Place in Winnipeg and has served as a youth leader there. He has been involved in voluntary service at The Firehall (YFC), Agape Table and Habitat for Humanity.

She Has Done A Good Thing: Mennonite Women Leaders Tell Their Stories

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 Edited by Mary Swartley
 & Rhoda Keener
 (Herald Press, Scottdale, PA, 1999).

Reviewed by Lorie Battershill

When I was a teenager I really thought I was cutting a new path for myself. Looking back, of course, I can see that I was only choosing from existing paths that were in some way unique for me. That which I was in the process of becoming was only possible through the roles that I had seen modelled. I was never actually bold or courageous enough to forge a new path for myself.

She Has Done a Good Thing is a collection of writings by women who, willingly or not, did journey on new paths for women in the Mennonite church. The title of the book is taken from the story in Mark 14 which tells of the woman who came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of rare perfume.

Because of her love for Jesus, she spilled out the entire contents of the jar, not allowing herself to be pushed away by naysayers who tried to tell her that what she was doing was not appropriate. This theme of courage in the face of discouraging forces is repeated often in the pages of this excellent collection. The stories told are of women who spilled out their lives because of their love for God and did not allow themselves to be turned away by the opinion of others. In doing so they were required to move forward without benefit of trail markers left by those who had gone before.

Part of the challenge of being a pioneer is that you have to be especially skilled at watching and listening for signs that will tell you which way to go. This truth emerges as a central theme in this book. Often these women had no intention of becoming pastors or church leaders. What led them to those positions was a sensitivity to the call of God upon their lives and a willingness to move forward when the call came.

The book is divided into four sections: Theologians, Pastors, Educa-

tors and Administrators. Each section relates a wide range of experiences. The story headings tell a story of their own – *God's Mysterious Doors; I Never Intended to Become a Pastor; Proceed With Much Prayer; Way Leads on to Way*. These women were often surprised when they realized where the path they were on was heading.

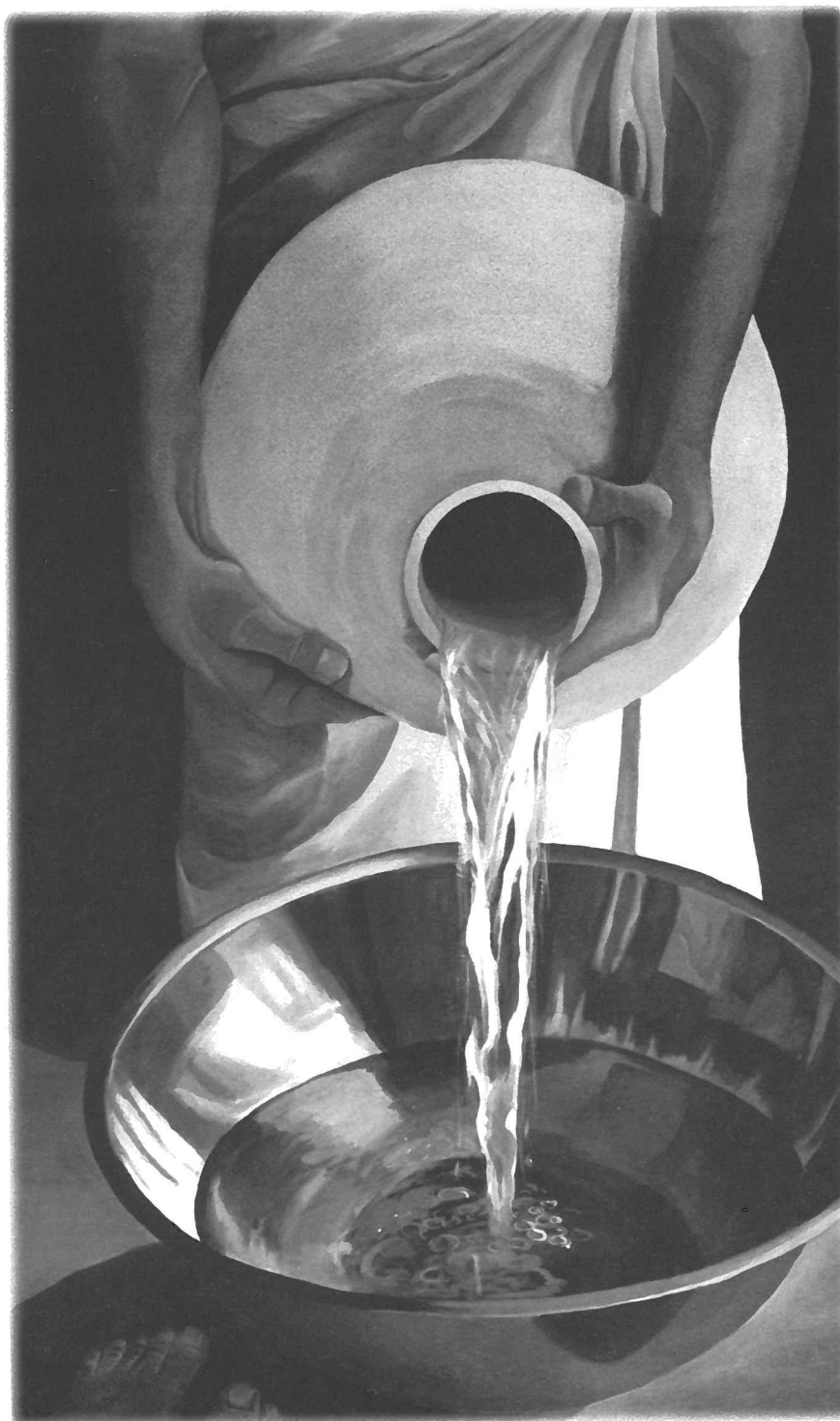
Marilyn Miller speaks of this journey of grace and courage in her story titled *The Alabaster Jar*. "I experience grace and giving as a cycle. I experience grace, and with the grace comes an urge or call to give of myself. But often, to respond to the call, I must risk and sacrifice. When I do so, it often leads to a new grace experience, and the cycle goes on."

She Has Done a Good Thing makes for exciting, hopeful reading for anyone in need of images to model themselves after as they challenge the gender boundaries still in place in many of our churches. But perhaps the most important witness we see is the process of spiritual discernment and the model of a courageous response, whether that response challenges gender issues or not.



Pioneer Mennonite homestead, Horndean, Manitoba

LYNDA TOEWS



US VENSEL

"Serve

ONE ANOTHER IN LOVE."

GALATIANS 5:13B