

S O P H I A

W I S D O M

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

Imagining a Better World



Dorothy Huebert
PAMB #130

Mission Statement: *Sophia*

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

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

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

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

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Cover Photo: David Firman, Jimmy Carter Work Project '93.

Imagining A Better World

By Judith Dueck



*The Christian life
is not a
passive waiting
for the
kingdom.*

There is a place in Palestine called Megiddo. It is situated on a hill overlooking the Jezreel Valley. Biblical scholars sometimes call it Armageddon. In ancient times it stood on the trade route between Egypt and the east, a busy place where traders from all over the world stopped, as did invading armies.

Megiddo was a strongly fortified city as early as 3000 BC. Its name appears later on the walls of the temple Karnak in Egypt where Thutmose III carved a detailed record of the battle he fought there in 1468 BC. Megiddo remained a vassal city-state of Egypt for over a hundred years.

Later, David took the city and Solomon beautified it. Solomon also designed a practical, camouflaged, underground water system to supply the city with clean water, especially during a siege. After its destruction by Egypt in 923 BC, Ahab rebuilt it even more beautifully. In 733 BC the Assyrians captured it and developed a good street system.

All we see of the city now, however, are ruins. When I stood at Megiddo for the first time and saw the 20 layers, evidence of ancient civilizations, I cried.

Imagining a better world had given people over centuries strength and excitement to work together, build, create, improve the quality of life, explore, design, invent, solve problems, beautify. People working together, trusting each other, can accomplish extraordinary things.

Unfortunately, each "better" world needed guarding and people began to fortify, arm, fight, win, destroy, kill, wipe out....

At Megiddo I cried because it all seemed so futile. All that energy to build, destroy, build, destroy, a cycle that continues both in the Middle East and in other parts of the world.

Is it possible to have a positive influence

in politics, finance, medicine, education, development, social services? Is it worth the effort? And where do we find the necessary power and courage to make a difference in our own community, province, country, church or home? How do we create the kingdom of God on earth?

Christ altered the religious and social norms of his day. In a society which promoted salvation through legalism he introduced forgiveness. In place of established lifestyles and value systems he offered divine, radical love powerful enough to change lifestyles and value systems. In a society that devalued women, he empowered them. As an alternative to rigidity and ritual he introduced ideas of freedom: freedom from societal pressures, from religious judgments and from set expectations. In a society dominated by religious leaders and the Roman occupation he offered himself and invited commitment to himself and to his teaching.

Our task as Christians is to focus on Christ's powerful vision. The Christian life is not a passive waiting for the kingdom. It is an active working force. Initially received by only a minority who believed in an improbable Messiah, Christ's message affirms the power of persistence. Indeed, that small minority, that first gathering of believers, has had a deep and profound impact on our world. Do we as a much larger body than that first church still have the power and persistence they had?

Imagine a better world. Take that power of Christ which can indeed move mountains and change life here on earth. Let us actively participate

with Christ in the mission he announced:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted and to announce that captives shall be released, that the blind shall see, that the down-trodden shall be freed from their oppressors, and that God is ready to give blessings to all who come to him (Luke 4:18-19).

(See Page 9 for an article about our guest editorialist)

Will you join us in imagining a better world? This issue nudges our readers to do that. Graham Green says in one of his novels, "Hate was the failure of imagination." Turn that inside out and you have an implied connection between love and imagination. If we are to build, at home or in the conference or in Central America or in Bosnia, healing and safe communities, it will have to begin there - with love.

Our articles suggest that this love will be active. It will strive for better support for pregnant teenagers in Winnipeg; it will seek to understand *campesino* women in Honduras as they reclaim land; it will make room for neighbours.

It must also transform into hopeful action the tears and anger of women disappointed with the conference vote on women in leadership. Already voices, heretofore silent, are speaking up with courage and confidence. They are calling us to continue to search scripture, to lay aside hostility and to act as if we believe that the words, "Your daughters *shall* prophesy," are not a question but an affirmation.

SK

l e t t e r s

↳ Compassion or Cost Efficiency?

I read with interest the article, "Nursing and the Feminine Ideal," by Eleanor Martens (Spring/Summer, '93). It describes feelings among nurses as I have experienced them in Winnipeg and now as a student in San Diego.

Who are the real heroes of nursing? Some are described in "Moriya" by Dora Dueck. Others have names like Ethel Johns and Isabel Hampton Robb, unknown for the most part, but they served Winnipeggers and went on to serve, with distinction, as nurses in North America. Some of us can think of nurse midwives within our own families who displayed similar strengths and courage.

Nurses have slowly come to realize that the present health care system does not want compassion, generosity and virtue. It values and rewards cost effectiveness, efficiency and aggressiveness. Caring is a nice ideal but not a practical reality. Nurses have been given the mandate to care without the power to do so. Society likes nurses but no one wants to be one. Few bright, young and capable women are going into nursing. Many of my colleagues are not encouraging their daughters to do so.

As a realistic Christian nurse I have dedicated my life to the art and science of caring. I know that if I am to make a contribution I will need power and I will need to use it wisely. The nursing profession is just learning to use power and mistakes will be made. I applaud their attempts and encourage the leadership to keep the caring agenda foremost. Hospitals are restructuring and nursing is losing positions; I hear of no similar reduction in the population of the aging, the infirm or those who need health teaching or mental care. Nurses will need increased education to meet the demands of an increasingly complex setting.

How will Mennonite Christians, who have always had a mandate to care for the community, support nurses?

Evelyn Labun, San Diego

↳ Scripture for our Culture

I have read several articles in your magazine written by feminists within our denomination. I became disappointed and sad. I asked myself, "Where are our hearts?" At stake is the authority of the Bible and our obedience to God's revealed pattern for living.

Why didn't Jesus choose a woman when he called the twelve disciples? Some theologians say that Jesus was speaking to the people within the tradition and culture of that particular time, and that Jesus would speak differently today. The people of Noah's day and in Jesus' time didn't think God's word was relevant to their day either. It isn't difficult to discern what was written for a given culture and what are timeless biblical principles. For instance, whether I braid my hair or wear a head covering has no far-reaching consequences.

Why did God inspire Paul to write, "The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23), and "But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything" (24). And it gets better, putting all the onus on the men to "Love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it" (25).

The same passage continues to speak about the sacred union between husband and wife. I cannot find room for any male chauvinism here. Neither do I believe this was written for only the culture of that day. This passage gives us timeless principles. It teaches us that the relationship between believing husbands and wives illustrates that which exists between Christ and the church.

Men, we need to see you renew your commitment to spiritual leadership and headship in the home and in the church. Our sons and daughters need to see that and experience it. I am convinced, after seeing families become dysfunctional when the order set out for us in scriptures is inverted, that our churches will also become dysfunctional.

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When Mercy and Justice Marry

By Lori Matties

It is hard to imagine a better world when we hear so much bad news. It is harder yet to do something about it when injustice and misfortune seem so unconquerable. Yet the story of God's people is full of episodes about how hope is born out of the darkest circumstances. In fact, imagining a better world is what the Bible is all about. Ezekiel 34 and Matthew 25:31 - 46 are two examples of the unlikely marriage of justice and mercy that gives birth to a new way of being.

God, the Shepherd of Justice

For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out...I will feed them...I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. (Ezek 34:11,14,16)

When the people of Israel heard those words, their country was in ruins; they had been dispossessed of their land by foreign powers and scattered as refugees into several of the surrounding areas. What must such words have sounded like to them, whose leaders had betrayed them and thus lost for them the security of a homeland?

Ezekiel's words give us a powerful picture of God's compassion for those who have been oppressed. But for western Christians at the end of the twentieth century, they pose a dilemma. On the one hand, we see God as the merciful shepherd who leads us through the rocky places in life. We, who often struggle with difficult choices and circumstances, identify with Ezekiel's skinny sheep, in need of the guiding hand of the shepherd. But on the other hand, we may squirm when we hear God say, "As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord GOD: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats" (34:17).

We live in a society where wealth, technology and political stability enable us to solve almost any problem we might face. We have been taught to value independence, self-sufficiency and the aggressive pursuit of our needs and wants. We admire those who manage by their own efforts and don't depend on others for their needs. So we become ashamed of those who can't quite make it for one reason or another, or who don't fit the standard we set for successful living. And we begin to look more like the fat sheep in Ezekiel's passage, who "pushed with flank and shoulder, and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide" (v. 21).

But it is here, in the tension between our experience of God as the merciful shepherd and the pain of feeling our own judgment, that we must begin to imagine a better world. It is God, who cares about what happens to the

sheep, who sets the record straight. Where there is injustice, God is the one who makes the move to rescue. God's shepherds, the leaders of Israel, failed to meet their responsibilities: it was God who would seek the lost, bring back the strayed, bind up the injured and strengthen the weak.

The story doesn't end there. In the very act of judging the shepherds of Israel, God once again gave human beings the privilege of becoming agents of God's purposes. A new shepherd would tend to the people's needs, God's own servant, a descendant of David.

Ironically, David himself had failed in many ways to care for the people during his reign, but because he sought to love and serve God, he was honoured by being remembered and idealized as a faithful servant. Ezekiel's description of him is a prefiguring of the messiah - of Jesus Christ, another human agent, the ultimate example of God's desire to care for God's people. And again, the passage repeats, "He shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd." (v 23).

Ezekiel's vision of a better world begins with the assertion that it is ultimately God who will bring about the restoration of justice when people fail. But the vision also points in the direction of human agency. Though judgment for injustice is inevitable, God will not abandon partnership with people.

Jesus, the Good Shepherd

The images of shepherd and sheep continue in the record of Jesus' ministry. Jesus described himself as the "good shepherd" and the people as his sheep (John 10). The true shepherd, he said, is one who is known and trusted by the sheep and who calls them out of the fold and protects them from harm.

In Matthew 25:31-46 we read that the sheep in Christ's fold are not without responsibility. Paradoxically, it is the sheep and the goats who are to look after the needs of the shepherd, although Jesus qualifies that by saying that caring for the shepherd means caring for the poorest or least among the sheep. So, while in Ezekiel it is God who initiates the restoration of justice, Matthew reverses the norm by inviting the "sheep" to participate in the reordering of the world to establish God's reign.

This is one of the less comfortable passages in the Bible. It talks about final judgment and suggests we examine our lives to see if we measure up. We may feel guilty, smug or just plain confused as to what is being required of us.

I don't think any of those reactions are intended. It is clear that individual acts of goodwill and compassion are required of those who call Jesus Lord, but rather than worrying about whether that one time we gave someone in need a glass of water, we are invited to orient our whole lives to serving our master. Our actions will flow naturally from that orientation.

The sheep in the passage were surprised that they were called into the Lord's kingdom for the things Jesus said they had done, because to them, their little acts of mercy were just the ordinary acts of life. Likewise, the goats were sur-

prised, because they thought those little acts were of no consequence. They had the wrong perception of who Jesus was, and of who they were, because they didn't look at what was important to him nor think it necessary to imitate his behaviour.

The Eyes of the Maker

Imagining a better world begins with seeing the world through the eyes of the Maker - so that we will become good imitators. The Scriptures are full of words about how God cares especially for the poor and the oppressed - those not at the centre of the social world. Because of our devotion to God, these will be the little sheep we will turn to with love and compassion. And in so doing our actions as God's people will become a sign of Jesus' reign to the rest of the world.

It's such an upside-down way of seeing things, to tend to the needs of those who have less than we do, to see them as worthy of our care instead of being ashamed of them; to use our resources for the benefit of others rather than hoarding them or spending them on things we don't really need; to practise hospitality and to cooperate with one another instead of isolating ourselves so that we don't even see whether we are acting at the expense of others.

Jesus Christ is an upside-down king, a shepherd who truly cares for his sheep, and he invites his sheep to return their loyalty and their gratitude by seeing as he sees and doing as he does; by caring for those of his little ones who are the least among us. As we have received, so may we be given the grace to give.

Lori Matties is a freelance writer and a member of the editorial team of *Sophia*. She attends River East MB Church.

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Mary Kassian, in *The Feminist Gospel* says: "Whenever we remove ourselves from submitting to God's revealed standard and pattern for living, claiming that our knowledge is higher and loftier than that which God has revealed in his Word, we come under the influence of the other one vying for our souls. This is feminism's key error, but it is a tendency we all possess" (Crossway Books, 1992. 239 - 240).

Irma Froese, Winnipeg

✍️ **Serving with Joy**

I thank Mary Friesen for her enlightening Convention Comments in the spring/summer issue.

This reminded me of my first Mennonite Brethren Convention which I spent in the kitchen doing everything the sisters asked me to from waiting on tables to washing dishes. That was 35 years ago. Since then I've spent countless hours working with sisters in the kitchen.

After reading Mary's comments it suddenly dawned on me why, after we set the tables for banquets, they had to be re-arranged two or three times, until they were back in their original positions! It is inconceivable that a male could possibly visualize the proper aesthetic look for the occasion.

I found it amusing at a recent Women's Conference, where the entire kitchen staff was male, that the ladies were thanked for the meal. In my ignorance I never felt slighted.

I have always enjoyed serving, but now that I've been enlightened....

John Bergen (husband of Shirley), Brandon

✍️ **Stories that Encourage**

Perhaps because I am so far from home, I felt connected to the stories in the last issue.

I grew up in Winnipeg where Vern and Agnes Koop were my much appreciated youth sponsors in the River East MB Church. I had the chance to meet Linda Flatt (I took music theory from her older sister) and was always impressed by her charm and politeness. I was also impressed by the story of Elma Friesen who cared for her aging neighbour with Alzheimer's disease.

Through these stories I was challenged to believe once again in the very practical nature of God's Love. Their stories gave glory to God and encouraged me to lean upon God as I serve others.

Kathleen Rempel Boschman with Africa Inter Mennonite Missions, Botswana

✍️ **Being Batted Around**

Like many women and men, I was upset about the rejection of the Board of Faith and Life's recommendation on women in ministry.

For me the vote raised theological issues, because it seemed to deny that Christ saves people from the attitudes to women that prevail in the world. How can I invite women into the MB church then?

I see this also as a moral issue because it affects women's lives in other ways. It blights the hopes of women who feel called to serve in pastoral ministries in Christ's church.

But at the conference, when the results of the vote were announced, I saw some men, even pastors, slap each other on the back, shake hands, laugh triumphantly.

John Redekop in *The MB Herald* said not to worry; we are only in the sixth inning of the ballgame. Is anyone asking who is being batted around?

Now we who supported the resolution have some decisions to make. If we believe in a God who is saving people from the consequences of sin, do we want to continue playing this game? Or does our Christian faith require some other kind of action? What are the "mindful actions" we can undertake in a spirit of Christian love?

I hope we can have some respectful dialogue on this issue.

Donna Stewart, Winnipeg

A Better World FOR PREGNANT TEENS

By Erica Block

I attended a seminar recently for those working in the area of adolescent pregnancy and parenting. It was intended to provide a forum for discussion of ethical issues and value conflicts around this growing societal dilemma. The presenter made reference to John Stewart Mills, the 16th century ethicist who through his treatise "On Liberty" has so greatly influenced western notions on individual autonomy and freedom of choice. We discussed children having children and how we are in a moral conundrum. One participant could refer to male partners only with bitter sarcasm as "sperm donors." Another, with equal bitterness, saw us reaping the reward of the anti-abortion movement. And it is true, fewer teenagers are choosing abortion and 80-90% of those who carry to term are keeping their babies. Many left the seminar feeling disturbed.

How can we envision a better world? There are at least three overlapping issues embedded in the problem. These preoccupy us at Pregnancy Distress Service and they must disturb us also as citizens, as Christians, as women. There is the issue of choice, the issue of the absent male and the question of abortion.

When a teenager comes into our office and presents us with a positive pregnancy test, nine times out of ten we uncover a story of family disorder. In perhaps the worst case scenario the teenage girl's choice to be sexually involved may not be so much a "choice" as a logical extension of having been used as a sexual object by males close to her. In other unhappy cases alcoholism in the home may have triggered too-early stabs at independence, sending the young person on a search for love and security. Lack of communication, harsh discipline, inconsistent parenting, family fighting, failure in school, the dilemma of blended families, uncertain family and societal values regarding sex - all these and more confuse the issue of "choice" well into adulthood.

It is these very early layers of choice that are difficult to address. They take us right into the heart of the vulnerable teen. Studies show

that teens who get hooked in early sexual activity have lower expectations of self, less well-defined goals and more traditional views of male/female relationships. They are also more fatalistic. In a better world all children and young people would be valued and all parents would grasp the meaning and responsibility of their roles. At Pregnancy Distress Service we see the value counselling has for raising self-awareness, for building a sense of personal power and for increasing the range of choice. Education needs to play a role, of course; but we're confused about what we want to teach and adolescents flounder in the moral vacuum and in societal exploitation of sexuality.

In a growing number of cases pregnancy is not a shock to the teenager, who often chooses parenting over staying at school. Sadly, it seems those less capable of caring for their children often decide to keep them. Again there are forces at work that reflect a needy human being not ready to make the more immediately painful but more responsible decision of relinquishment. The teenaged mother will need support during parenting, especially as the child grows past cute babyhood into a more demanding stage. Fortunately more high schools are building childcare labs. Facilities such as our Young Parents' Community Centre located in the core area need to be opened in other parts of the city to teach and model life skills and parenting in a loving, non-judgmental environment.

What about the male half of the equation? Society has done him a disservice. Somewhere along the line he has learned that his involvement is peripheral, that women can manage without him and that fatherhood is not equivalent to motherhood.

We're grateful at Pregnancy Distress whenever a young man comes along with his girl friend for a pregnancy test or to discuss options. Too often the pregnancy is a problem exactly because the partner has opted out. "There is no question in our minds," write Diane Marshall and Martha Crean, "that the male-female partnership is under attack in our society and this is most evident in the abdication of men from the role and responsibility of fatherhood." The result is "privatization" of pregnancy (and hence abortion), as a "women's issue." Women feel abandoned, used, trapped.¹

In God's design muscles develop as they are used, and we are thankful that a number of young women today develop and mature as they face the real issues of preparing for parenting. In a better world men and women, equally, would hold themselves responsible for their actions, and particularly in the area of sexual behaviour. We need once again to meld procreation and sexual pleasure, the birth control pill notwithstanding. And men need to be invited back into responsible partnership. As it is, fully 82% of all single parent families are headed by women. Every young woman facing an unplanned pregnancy dreams of a stable family unit, of a mother and a father for her child. She should not have to abandon this dream.

The issue of abortion, finally, becomes more difficult and less clear-cut for those of us working in the field. Studies show that children growing up in single parent families are more likely to experience behaviour problems, school failure, delinquency. In a better world all children would have access to equal opportunity; all children would be nurtured. In today's world single mothers are at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder, living in poverty - most of them on social assistance - with limited education and limited access to the work force. Unfortunately the cycle

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Embracing the Opportunities

One MB Woman's Quest for Global Justice

By Eleanor Martens

"Changing the world is a formidable task. And yet, it is only by taking the steps we each can take that the world does, in fact, change for the better."

Judith Dueck, Fort Garry MB

As Christians, most of us believe that in some small way we can, and indeed should, make a difference in the world. Our world tends to be a personal one, bounded by what we know and see. Our expressions of faith and service occur among the people, places and pastimes that comprise the everyday circle of regularity and familiarity.

The author of the above words, however, has broken new ground in living out her Christian convictions. Her vision of justice encircles the entire world. Since 1986 Judith Dueck has been trotting the globe on behalf of vulnerable, violated and disempowered people. Her work with Human Rights Information and Documentation Systems, International (HURIDOCS), an organization devoted to facilitating the documentation of human rights violations, has brought her face to face with the horrific realities of injustice and discrimination as they are played out brazenly and in secret around the world.

She could never have guessed her MCC assignment would turn out this way. However it was not long after Judith and her husband, Harold, began their stint with MCC in the Middle East during the 1980s that she was seconded from MCC to Al Haq, an organization established by two Palestinian lawyers to document human rights violations in the West Bank. A subsequent invitation in 1986 to attend a HURIDOCS conference in Rome spurred Judith's interest in this aspect of human rights work. It tapped her expertise and earlier ex-



*Making the cross-cultural leaps
necessary to understand
and integrate diverse
perspectives*

perience in the area of information retrieval and exchange within the education system.

While working with documents at Al Haq, Judith began to compile a file on the ways various other human rights organizations handle information and to dream how these might be improved.

Her dreaming bore fruit, culminating in a 1988 invitation to share her ideas on human rights documentation at a conference in India. So intrigued were participants with the possibility of creating a standard way of documenting actual human rights cases that a task force was created. This task force, chaired by Judith, was given the mandate to develop a set of "standard formats on events," a universally-adaptable tool for documenting human rights violations.

During the next five years Judith made the rounds on behalf of HURIDOCS: the

Philippines, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Austria, Netherlands, Peru, Greece and The Gambia all became venues for intense discussion and decision-making. Among her greatest challenges, recalls Judith, was achieving consensus in a group of passionate (as human rights activists often are) people who naturally brought their own cultural and organizational agendas to the table. Making the cross-cultural leaps necessary to understand and integrate diverse perspectives required patience and persistence. Judith remembers also the particular challenge of chairing a meeting held mainly in Spanish.

By 1992 the final product - two impressive volumes facilitating the compilation of information about human rights events, victims, source of information, alleged perpetrators, and interventions - had been tested and endorsed by a wide range of human rights organizations in the HURIDOCS network. In June, Judith attended the UN World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, where her work on documentation methodology was highlighted.

It seemed only natural that when her work with the task force was completed, Judith should be invited to join the five-member international board of HURIDOCS.

In reflecting on this unexpected but exciting phase of her life, Judith has some wise words for those of us who secretly nourish dreams of bettering our world, but lack the courage to act: "Embrace the special sensitivities and opportunities you are given - you never know when things will open up."

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of poverty too often repeats itself. We have reason to be concerned about the increased number of children growing up in deprivation.

As pro-life advocates we need to be careful not to offer simplistic solutions or short-term pregnancy support. We need to be careful how we present the negative side-effects of abortion. We do know, however, that inherent in God's created order is the sanctity of life. It is always with sadness that I hear of a woman choosing to abort her child. But there are times when I understand when she says she can't continue the pregnancy. And I struggle to understand when she says she can't give it up for adoption. This is the reality of her life at her stage of development.

If she does carry and keep, we need to be prepared to provide easier access to education and day care. In a better world women would not have to fight the system to advance themselves. They would have wage parity and be able to earn enough for themselves and their children.

There is a better world. It's born out of the Gospel and begs to be given hands and feet. All of us stand responsible to do just that. "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40b, NRSV).

Endnote

1, Diane Marshall and Martha Crean, "The Human Face of a Woman's Agony" in *A Time to Choose Life: Women, Abortion and Human Rights*, edited by Ian Gentles. Toronto: Stoddart, 1990. p.135.

Erica Block, *River East MB Church*, is a counsellor at *Pregnancy Distress Service*. She is the *Manitoba representative for MCC Women's Concerns Committee* and the chair of the newly-formed *Manitoba MCC Women's Concerns Committee*.

WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP:

Hallway Comments

by Mary Friesen

Delegates and visitors had just come out of the convention session where the recommendation on Women in Ministry had been debated and defeated. Conversation in the hallways was subdued. Emotions ranged from anger to disappointment to disillusionment. One young male university student questioned the value of belonging to this conference. He was surprised to learn that so many church leaders held the traditional view, but his greater concern was the judgmental attitude expressed by many delegates during the debate. A female college graduate said she was now putting on hold her plans for seminary and preparation for full-time ministry in the church.

Some women participated for the first time in a convention where this issue was debated. Many were shocked at the harsh tones and the lack of tolerance that dominated discussion. They expressed their hurt to each other not only over the defeat of the recommendation but also over the

judgmental attitude that prevailed. The assumption that only people on one side of this issue could be biblical implied that some delegates were not concerned about faithfulness to biblical teaching. Personally, I was disappointed that we are back to the 1981 resolution and hurt by the fact that our concern to be biblical would not allow us to respect our diversity.

Yet I came away with hope. I was encouraged that a significant number of delegates affirmed the Board of Faith and Life and voted "yes" on the recommendation. It was also affirming to see women express support for each other in different ways, something that didn't happen at previous conventions where this issue was discussed. Many men, including pastors and church leaders, put their arm around my shoulder or their hand on my arm in support and affirmation. Only a few seemed totally oblivious to the pain of those who had put so much hope into the convention of 1993.

Mary Friesen is vice-principal at *Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute*.

The Board of Faith and Life Recommendation

(This recommendation was defeated at the MB General Conference in July).

The Mennonite Brethren Church has formally discussed the role of women in ministry since 1974. All study conferences and resolutions have affirmed the giftedness of women for ministry. All churches are blessing women for ministry within the congregation.

During the past triennium, Mennonite Brethren have again in good faith examined the biblical material and arrived at different and sometimes opposing views on the question of women in leadership.

Despite our efforts, we are unable to come to consensus on the issue at this time. For these reasons, let us agree that neither this matter, nor the various convictions regarding it, shall be used to question or doubt one another's Christian integrity and faithfulness. We covenant that this issue shall not be a test of our faithfulness to Christ. We also resolve not to break the bond of fellowship with one another on this issue, but to allow for diversity of conviction and practice in the appointment of women to pastoral leadership in ways that are consistent with the governance patterns of the local congregation.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND HOPE

Convention Rejects Diversity

by Debra Fieguth

Despite the MB Board of Faith and Life's best efforts to present a compromise solution on the issue of women in leadership, delegates remained clearly polarized at the July North American convention.

The BFL had asked for diversity: that individual congregations be allowed to decide for themselves whether to hire women as senior pastors. Sixty-one percent said no to the resolution, 39 percent said yes.

Before the vote was taken, and after small group discussions, delegates were given an opportunity to speak publicly about where they stood.

While some saw the recommendation as a positive step, others warned that it signified a major shift in the way the denomination views the Bible. Several male speakers worried that the church was being pressured too much by contemporary culture. "We can be culturally correct and theologically wrong," said one man. Another stated that he is "pro-Bible, pro-woman, pro-unity, pro-Mennonite Brethren and pro-Jesus' style." One leader said he is concerned that the family is being attacked "because of weak leadership, and we men need to take responsibility."

Out of three women who spoke up, two opposed the rec-

ommendation. One said male leadership gives her "a greater sense of security," adding that women's chance for leadership is in the home. "I sorrow with women who have not had these opportunities," she said. Another suggested women who are striving for positions of leadership have come from an abusive past.

The only woman to speak in favour of the resolution, a seminary student from Winnipeg, despaired that the denomination is wasting time "standing on the seashore arguing about who's going to rescue the drowning people." The most important question, she said, was "whether we're ready to receive Jesus."

One of the few men in favour of the resolution, George Shillington of Concord College, said he has shifted his own position over the past 20 years on one of the most difficult passages, I Timothy 2:11. His focus now is on the opening phrase, "Let the women learn."

Another man to speak in favour, a lone voice from British Columbia, where much of the opposition came from, described biblical passages on the issue of women as "inspired ambiguity." While the Bible is unclear on some things, it is clear "that we are to exercise the gifts we are given," he said. Stating that male dominated leadership "celebrates the Fall," he suggested we "get back to the Garden, where men and women live in full equality."

Debra Fieguth is associate editor of ChristianWeek. She attends Valley Gardens MB Church.

Naming our Pain; Sharing our Hope

by Jan Schmidt

After the resolution on Women in Leadership was defeated, conference leadership reaffirmed women's involvement in every church position except that of senior pastor. For some women in our conference this was encouraging; others perceived the decision on a continuum that ranged from "limiting" to "oppressive."

Many of us committed to the MB conference yet fundamentally in disagreement with the vote began to wonder, "What now?" The response to this question was interesting and possibly groundbreaking. A small group of us called a meeting of like-minded MB women to debrief the conference decision. The meeting was not publicly advertised but spread by word of mouth.

On August 5, the McIvor MB Church saw the gathering of over 50 women from at least ten different churches, some from as far

away as Brandon, to share disappointment and hope.

To begin, we were given a brief history of the recommendation as well as a clarification of what the decision means for women in the conference. This was followed by a time of sharing and naming our pain.

Many concerns and emotions were expressed during this time. Some women were sad over a church unable to live with diversity. Others expressed concern about being leaders Monday to Saturday and on Sunday being expected to pretend they were someone else. Mothers grieved for the limitations the decision would place on their daughters. Some felt embarrassed to be part of a church that practises policies of sexism and wondered how they could invite their friends to attend. Many spoke of disappointment at being denied women's unique contribution from the pulpit. Unfortunately, many were simply tired of the struggle.

After sharing our disappointment, we were invited to offer responses based on hope. We were informed of "Christians for Biblical Equality," an evangelical organization that believes men and women are created equal and that neither should be excluded from ministry. It was good to hear that we are not alone in this struggle.

We spent time thinking about positive action, believing that the combined wisdom of 50 women was bound to produce positive actions that promote change. This brainstorming enabled us to leave with some immediate and long-term goals, ranging from simply encouraging each other in our position to hosting an educational conference on the issue.

Jascha Boge, Manitoba Conference moderator, had re-

quested to meet with the group. He joined us at the end of the evening to answer questions and invite the group's responses both now and in the future.

We ended by asking, "Where do we go from here?" We decided it would be helpful to meet again, with other women and men concerned about this issue. The focus of the next meeting will be to follow up on the proposed action plans.

I have since reflected on the August 5 meeting. This was the first time, in a larger group of MB conference people, where I felt free to express myself openly and honestly on this issue. I did not have to hide my emotions for fear of being labelled. It was a safe place where I could simply *be* without entering into debate. A place where I could be honest without having my salvation silently or openly questioned. It was a good church experience!

Jan Schmidt, River East MB, is Program/Training Coordinator for Mediation Services.

A World for my Daughter

By Eleanor Martens

"Being Female can Sometimes be Fatal" glared the headline. It was a *Winnipeg Free Press* (June 16, 1993) article about human rights abuses against women as documented by the United Nations. I came across it the day I sat down to imagine for *Sophia* "a better world for my daughter."

There is, of course, so much I wish for all my children - rich, lasting friendships, fulfilling work, an intimate walk with God - all the things that give life purpose and meaning. But as the headline reminded me, there are features of my daughter's world that direct the course of my dreams and prayers for her along different paths than those for my sons. Unlike them, she will face certain pressures and dangers solely because she is female. Wishes and hopes cascade through my head as I begin to imagine how her world could be different....

In a world that truly honoured women, girls would grow up shaping their identity according to who they are rather than how they look. A recent Canadian schools study found that between the ages of eleven and thirteen, self-esteem in girls drops by 31%, primarily because of their concerns about weight and appearance.

My daughter is twelve years old. Some of her already too-thin peers are beginning to diet. A physical education teacher, alarmed at the escalating obsession of young girls with Barbie doll figures, recently told a Winnipeg conference on eating disorders that "kids are killing themselves" (*Winnipeg Free Press*, February 16, 1993).

Naomi Wolf, author of *The Beauty Myth* (Random House, 1992), maintains that girls and women are kept in perpetual states of anxiety, guilt and insecurity about themselves by the unrealistic, unwholesome images of female beauty held before them. Why

else would they be dieting, undergoing plastic surgery and suffering from eating disorders in unprecedented numbers? According to Wolf, 33,000 women told researchers they would rather lose 10-15 pounds than achieve *any other* goal. Wolf writes:

"Beauty is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact...it assigns value to women according to culturally imposed physical

*She will face
certain pressures and
dangers solely because
she is female.*

standards...it claims to be about intimacy and sex and life, a celebration of women. It is actually composed of emotional distance, politics, finance and sexual repression" (pp. 12-13).

In an ideal world for my daughter the education system would recognize and value female ways of learning and experiencing reality. Her understanding of the humanities and the sciences would no longer be distorted by the masculine lens that has traditionally interpreted them. She would not have to read between the lines of history to discover what her half of the human race was doing while men were off fighting wars and discovering America. Women's stories would enter the mainstream, their feats of solicitude and courage no longer silenced or unobserved.

An ideal world would not convey to my daughter that she must downplay her intelligence to "get a man," or that

intellectual work is incompatible with being female. Its artistic works would speak and sing of strong, independent women, not of those passively awaiting a male saviour. The destinies of her female heroes would not be poised only toward the arrival of that "handsome prince" who must first kiss them awake, then carry them off into the sunset to begin living "happily ever after."

Above all else, I would like my daughter's world to be one where she does not have to feel unsafe simply because she is a female. I hardly need to elaborate on the particular forms of violence that threaten her - sexual harassment, abuse and the multi-million dollar sex trades that degrade and exploit women. My daughter's world should have no room for them, or for the attitudes that sustain them, attitudes that center women's existence in male service and pleasure, that view feminine nature as diametrically opposed to masculine and therefore inherently flawed, and that indict women not only for bringing sin into the world but for keeping it there by leading men astray.

And then there's the church - a place where so many of my hopes and dreams still find their center. I wait for the day when my daughter - and yours - will belong to a community of faith where they are not "problems" but assets, free to use their gifts in whatever way God calls them. It will be a place where gender equality is not only believed but practised and where gender reconciliation and healing are modelled to our needy, broken world.

Eleanor Martens is a nurse practising in the area of community health. She and her husband Ray have three children and attend the McIvor Ave. MB Church.

The Woman's Voice

By Agnes Dyck

Agnes Dyck spent many hours last spring browsing through the last five years of Mennonite Brethren Herald. Here she reflects on the contributions of women to this publication.

Memory one: my mother stoking a wood fire in the church stove in order to produce huge boilers of coffee for church conference participants. At home she is billeting male conference members.

Memory two: Mrs. Marie Wiebe at a Manitoba conference in Steinbach describing how she sat crocheting in the back benches of earlier conferences while her husband attended as a delegate.

The stereotype of women generally accepted by our congregations and the larger world assumes that women (i.e. "good" women) manifest supportive, encouraging, emotional, more inward traits than men. My survey of the writing done by women in the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* suggests that generally their writing falls neatly into this box.

The writings of women in *Herald* issues during the past five years bring to mind such diverse words as confessional, personal, supportive, didactic, encouraging, emotionally authentic, nostalgic and heart-warming, guilt-ridden, family-oriented, victimized, preoccupied with illness and romantic.

One third of the features and columns in the *MB Herald* during the past five years were written by women. Just as women were confined to crocheting in the back pews during earlier conference debates, so their writing, supportive of the publication's

current theme, is often confined to the back cover. These articles might be a personal spiritual revelation, a healing anecdote, perhaps a story. They tend to be first-person accounts, emotional and detailed, the kind women might confide to one another over coffee. Theological writing in the *Herald* by women is almost non-existent; lengthier responses to contemporary issues are also rare.

Some examples of memorable writing by women over the past five years include Katie Funk Wiebe's well-thought-out and researched "Can the church survive the professionalism of its leadership?" (May 2/89); two insightful articles on abused women by Wilma Derksen (Jan. 20/89); Ingrid Koss's charming re-writing of a scripture story (April 5/91); and Dora Dueck's longer news article, "Zaire in Crisis" (Dec. 20/91).

Women writers who contributed to the issue, "Shall our Daughters Prophesy?" (Nov/92) had impressive credentials and the topic elicited a great deal of correspondence from readers.

Conference reports in the *Herald* feature almost exclusively male writing. For example, the 78th Canadian Conference issue included only one report by a woman (April 14/89). It was also hard to find women writers in the *Herald's* report on the 58th Convention of the General Conference of MB Churches (July 27/90). The final article is a first person account by a woman who survived the Russian holocaust.

Part of the mandate of the *Herald* is to "serve as a vehicle of communication within the church." According to editor Ron Geddert, the *Herald* does not discriminate against women writers.

The assigned material, however, is most often given to men, he admits, whereas most of the unsolicited articles and letters are written by women. Women, he says, are the main readers.

One wonders whether the stereotypes of women as nurturers and care-givers are a factor in choosing freelance articles submitted by women. One also hopes the time has come for women to be invited to write more of the assigned articles and columns.

In researching for this article I found myself deeply moved by the experiences of my sisters. MB women are beginning to write their stories and that is exciting. Our academic and non-academic grassroots women need a voice in our conference and in its publications.

Agnes Dyck, *Mclvor Avenue MB Church, is a former English teacher active in voluntary work.*

On Elgin St

Carmen Pauls

I turn my body in on itself
 Pulling shoulders together, in the wind
 Head low, an unintentional james dean.
 Rebel against the friends who desert loyalty
 Rejecting me for warm beds at the Y, wrapped together
 Arms tossed loosely over one another in fake sleep.
 I walk through the wind, intent, righteousness growing with each step,
 mixing in a froth of anger and self-pity.
 Self-pity wraps me tighter against the gusts than any bundling blanket.
 The lazy asses.
 Time is the deep pockets I thrust cold hands into.
 I begin to saunter, to see the movie posters and
 the tulips.
 Feeling superior - and lonely.
 Buy a bag of grapes in a fruit store
 A Hershey bar, a piece of cheese.
 Panhandler, looking raggy, stops me.
 I'll list it as "charity" in my blue account book.
 (Can I really say, unashamed,
 "I gave money to a bum because
 he was the only one who seemed to need me?")



THE *Healing* COMMUNITY

An Interview with Delores Friesen



Delores Histan Friesen is Associate Professor of Pastoral Counselling at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California. Besides teaching in the counselling department, Friesen directs the Marriage and Family Counselling program at the seminary. She does some administrative work and also carries on a counselling practise on the side toward her California License. She was interviewed by Agnes Dyck, a regular contributor to Sophia.

Agnes Dyck: Can you tell us something about your background?

Delores Friesen: I grew up in a minister's family. There are eight children in the family and I'm the only one involved in pastoral ministry. I taught elementary school for three years. I was in Africa as a missionary for thirteen years and on church staff as a resource minister for seven years. And now I've been with the seminary for five years.

AD: At seminary you're training women for more visible ministries, I would guess.

DF: I think the seminary has been positive in accepting the gifts of women and encouraging the development of these gifts. We have women in preaching class and they are placed in congregational settings. This year we had two churches in British Columbia offer full-time positions to women as associate ministers and one of these positions was filled with one of our graduates.

Women students at MBBS are known for their good writing and speaking ability; they give leadership in chapel and in student government and their theological insights are appreciated.

AD: In a better world what is the place for women in the church?

DF: I like to imagine that in the church we allow, we encourage, we celebrate differences. That's one of the most important reasons for involving women in ministry.

Not that men don't bring gifts, but women tend to bring a little more creativity, more of the arts into their teaching and preaching. They tend to have a kind of nurture and care that is special, that is needed in pastoral care and counselling. Women also have a sense of generations, a way of reaching to children and older people that is quite whole, quite priceless.

AD: As women we need to be concerned about justice. Can you talk about that?

DF: I see peacemaking and justice come through in the Beatitudes, particularly their emphasis on seeing our own need. Our need to mourn, to be pure in heart, to hunger and thirst for righteousness. Unless we recognize our own need for justice and healing we can't be healers, and we can't minister to others.

It's not hierarchy that heals. It's laying on of hands, it's speaking a word, it's washing, it's caring. It's also acknowledging times of paralysis in our own lives, times of being discouraged or depressed and then asking for healing.

That's difficult for women sometimes; we're so used to being caregivers that we don't take care of ourselves. We don't admit our need for God's healing. I've been helped by music, by the arts, by learning the skills of listening, by learning to talk. Giving to others a piece of ourselves brings healing to us. Grace comes in many different ways.

We need the ability to suffer with others and yet see beyond the suffering. We must point or lead in a direction, realizing we have a Lord who is resurrected, who is powerful and who empowers. It is Jesus who gives us the grace to go on with life even when we experience death or sexual abuse or poverty or war.

AD: Now you're touching on areas where women are most often the victims.

DF: Anita [Buller] and I were talking about the women in Bosnia and Anita said that she finally had to do something, so she decided to write. She would be a pen pal for one woman in Bosnia. I thought it was beautiful because we have to express our love and care in a personal way.

I have an artist friend in Fresno who was touched by a picture of women of Bosnia reaching for bread. I couldn't sleep," she said, "so I began to paint." She painted a large panel called "Madonnas of Bosnia," with face after face of women reaching, grasping, with hungry sunken eyes, devastated faces, depicting incredible pain.

My friend's painting has hung in several places, including one of the large bookstores in town, for the public to see, and to remember that the women of Bosnia still are Madonnas touched by God, still birthing, as it were, God, in the terrible places of war and suffering.

AD: You've written a study guide for Doris Longacre's *Living More With Less*. What was behind that?

DF: Doris was a good friend of mine - we went to seminary together. My hope in writing the guide was that people would actually study it and commit themselves as a group to do justice, to nurture people, to cherish the environment. I really try to live by the standards of the book.

AD: Can you describe the community where you live?

DF: I live in a community that's more non-white than white - large numbers of Asian, Hispanic, Mexican, Central American, African-American, Lao, Hmong, Armenian. Many of them come out of refugee situations or war, or out of intense poverty. A number of those cultures are hierarchical and almost macho. As a counsellor I've worked with families and individuals who have suffered personal and economic deprivation.

In working with them we try to honour the person and see their worth as an individual, their potential for sharing life and enjoying love, for being liberated to come to faith, to have something worth living for, to find community.

In a better world we build community with one another. We must take seriously the voices of minorities and give equal opportunity for all voices. Otherwise we miss what God wants us to hear, what the church was intended to be - a coming together of all nations.

[My husband and I have] chosen to live in community like that, a community where ministry is at our doorstep, where human needs are very obvious, where it's not so easy to erect a facade and just worry about who makes the best brownies for the church supper.

Our congregation bought extra land and we kept it for a park so that the children near our church have a piece of green earth in the hot, dusty city. We've created that space to be a space, a witness: this is your land, this is your property. Our lifestyle and choices do affect other people.

AD: Women are concerned about the kind of world their children will grow up in. Do you have children?

DF: Yes, we have three children. Two of them were born in Africa and this is the first year of being without children at home.

I grew up on a farm, where we didn't bother to lock doors. Our children have grown up in a city where there's graffiti, violence, rape and drugs - where we lock doors and windows. They speak Spanish as well as English.

In a better world people speak more than one language, both literally and figuratively. And they stay in community, even when there's violence, to be ambassadors of peace and justice and hope.

AD: Can you say something about your experience in Liberia?

DF: Two years ago I went to Liberia which had been through 21 months of civil war and unrest. I went as part of a healing and reconciliation team. We worked as pastors and teachers. It was a profound experience to be with people who had fled, lost everything, children who had seen family members killed or mutilated.

We used as our theme "Seeds of Reconciliation and Hope." We have to plant seeds of justice and care and wait for them to grow.

If we have no imagination as Christians, we have no hope.

We still had celebration in Liberia, a time to bring gifts to the table, the grieving table. One woman brought a little white lily with finger-like projections and she said, "I think we just need to grow more arms, like this flower - we have to somehow be the arms of Christ to encircle hurting people, to encircle our country, to encircle the whole globe with the love and peace of Christ."

Drawn into Revolution

Journal Excerpts from Nicaragua and Honduras

Sometimes imagining a better world leads women into revolution, as Tammy Sutherland discovered on a study tour of Nicaragua and Honduras. Martha Klassen, part of the same study group, provided the pictures.

May 9, 1993: Today I begin a two week women's study tour of Nicaragua and Honduras sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee Latin America. I'm the youngest of the twelve Mennonite women from across Canada and the United States. I heard about this trip through my involvement with MCC Manitoba Women's Concerns Committee and decided to apply. The objective is for us to learn of the challenges that women in Nicaragua and Honduras face daily, to begin understanding their struggles and victories in the midst of poverty and to discuss together how women are affected by poverty. We hope it will be a time of building bridges and solidarity with Central American women.

May 11, 1993: My mind is full of Managua, Nicaragua, the city we landed in late yesterday evening. People who were only statistics two days ago are beginning to acquire identity, and faces. Today we visited the Eighth of March Women's Centre which offers counselling, health care, legal services and information on a variety of women's issues to those in the surrounding barrio.

One of us asked Marlana, a social worker, if she had hope for the next generation, hope that *machista*, or patriarchal, attitudes and structures would be confronted. Yes, she has hope. She told us to struggle together as sisters in the U.S. and Canada against oppression in our own countries. Her passionate words brought me into the revolution.

May 12: A woman working with the MEDA program in the Massaya region told us today that problems for women are the same everywhere. "Continue the struggle to improve conditions for your women," was her challenge to us.



*Elvia Alvarado, Honduras,
author of
Don't Be Afraid, Gringo*



*Shanties in Managua,
Nicaragua*

May 13: Veronica works with SERPAJ (Service for Peace and Justice) in Managua and is also a leader in the Mennonite church she attends. She spoke to us candidly about her experience as a woman in society and the church. She believes that although individual women struggle with different issues, underlying these are the same patriarchal structures. These need to be broken down. She assures us that this will be hard, but not impossible.

Veronica strives for her goal by helping to raise women's consciousness, so they can analyze their situation and discover alternatives to it. In the church, however, women are taught to remain within circumscribed roles. This means constant tension for women struggling for justice and equality. "I will never leave the church...never," she told us. "Sometimes I run ahead and then I have to go back and bring my sisters with me."

May 14: Early this morning a group of at least five Nicaraguan women and children, dressed in their best, began a three hour trek along muddy, washed out roads to meet us at a local church in the region of Buaco, Nicaragua. Our delegation drove to town by jeep and had to walk perhaps a mile on roads that were impassable by vehicle due to the heavy rainfall. The mud was inches deep. The group leader suggested I walk barefoot since I was wearing sandals and was bound to get dirty either way.

Some Nicaraguan women who joined us midway found it curious that I wore no shoes. Through a translator I tried to explain the reason, and that I actually enjoyed the sensation of walking barefoot in mud. Once at the small church, however, I felt unsure of what to do with my dirty feet. Suddenly all the practical

Spanish phrases I had memorized before the trip left my brain.

One woman, about my age, must have sensed my confusion. She simply took my hand and guided me to the water pump. We looked at each other and I wondered how I would balance a camera, a notebook, a water bottle and my sandals while pumping water and removing a thick layer of mud from my feet. She began pumping water into a small basin. She motioned for me to give her my foot. So I did and she washed it, toes and all. The young woman washed both my feet and slipped my sandals back on. Still, no words. We entered the church together and sat across from each other, smiling. I needed to know her name so I asked someone. Juana.

May 16: Anabaptism Nicaraguan style: this morning I attended a Baptist church with an American woman living and working in Nicaragua. The pastor, a woman, preached on the theme of women in ministry from Luke 8:1-3. The teaching reminded me of how I imagine the early Anabaptists did it. Everyone, not just the pastor, shared insights and questions. Here's a clip of the congregation's conversation:

From the pastor, "Jesus hung around with women." "This must have been one heck of a scandal," remarks one woman. Another woman from the back asks why we discriminate against women if Jesus didn't. "What's with our church?" Another woman lists female characters from the Old Testament and comments on their goodness. And about the conference to which the church belongs: "It's phallocentric and male-dominated," says the pastor. "There's one woman on the board, but let's face it, she's got money." And what about Mary Magdalene? "Why did she get such a bad reputation and who was evaluating her behaviour?" Someone at the back suggests the church rent *The Last Temptation of Christ*. "Christ's ministry was nurtured by the women, by their service."

One woman proposes that the women who followed Christ did not know he was Christ, the son of God, but simply served. "How much more should we obey and serve Jesus with this knowledge?" "Christ is the key to reading and understanding the New Testament," says one person. Despite Christ's acceptance of women, they are kept silent today.

May 19: Today we met Elvia Alvarado, a courageous *campesino* (peasant) activist in Honduras. Before the trip, our group read *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo*, the history of her life. During our visit Elvia said to her people, "We must not be so materialistically minded." These words came from a woman who often doesn't know where her next meal will come from or where she will lay her head at night. "My principles are not for sale," she says in her book. "The struggle is my life. When I'm hungry, when I'm thirsty, when I don't have a cent, the struggle keeps me going."

The struggle of which she speaks is the effort of the poor *campesinos*, the workers, the women, to organize themselves and recover land to grow their crops on. Despite the deep and relentless poverty of women in Honduras, they possess a remarkable capacity to see beyond it.

What are Elvia's words to our people? "We want you to educate and organize your people. We want you to denounce what your government is doing in Central America." In her book she says, "Tell your government to get out of our country and leave us alone. And stand by us in our struggle."

Elvia has worked with women's groups for years and has much to teach us about women getting organized. Sometimes it's hard for women to understand the need to work together. Also, many husbands are opposed. "It's often a tough battle to win the women over. But once you do manage to get them organized, they start to change overnight. The men are often afraid of women organizing. Because once we're organized, you can't shut us up."

Just being near this woman, listening to her passionate words, watching the humble and loving way she walked among her people, was a powerful experience. And she called us sisters. Because we were there, in that tiny *campesino* village, to learn about women's reality in Honduras, we were now sisters

in the struggle.

The spirit of Elvia and of the many other women we met on our short trip has filled me and given me courage, hope, high spirits to continue the struggle for justice for women both in Central America and in Winnipeg.



MCC encouraged women in Boaco, Nicaragua, to open a bakery, using an outdoor brick oven



Tammy Sutherland and children of Honduras

Tammy Sutherland, a Women's Studies and History major at the University of Winnipeg, is a member of the Manitoba MCC Women's Concerns Committee. She attends River East MB Church.

Two years ago, when Lisa and I decided to share a house with Dave Dyck and Tammy Sutherland (my brother and sister-in-law), we began a process that has taught us much about what society thinks is appropriate for marriage. We've also experienced the benefits and difficulties of choosing a lifestyle that, at times, contradicts our western ideals of property, privacy and individualism. As we prepare to move back, at least temporarily, to a more typical life for a young couple, we've been reflecting on our experience.

We found that talking about the ideals of living in community was almost always worthwhile but opportunities didn't come often enough. These conversations were usually initiated by a friend expressing concern about the dangers he or she saw in sharing living space with another couple. Such dangers included annoying the other couple with undesirable habits (use your imagination), conflicts over food tastes and more vague concerns about two brothers reliving sibling rivalries. Fortunately our mother's Mixmaster has remained ensconced on Bardal Bay, subverting the eternal struggle for control and consumption of leftover icing.

Actually, I think these concerns are valid. Implicit in them, however, is the assumption that talking about difficulties is nearly impossible and seldom likely to lead to an acceptable conclusion. I wonder if our non-resistant anabaptist heritage has sometimes left us feeling hopeless about the creative resolution of conflict. Living in community requires a conscious decision to be ready to discuss issues regularly and to confront conflict openly.

It was interesting to us that most people were concerned only because our household consisted of married couples. Almost all of these problems would apply equally to people of the same gender, yet in our society the "roommate" phenomenon remains unquestioned. One problem exclusive to married couples that was pointed out to Dave was the "obvious" fact that "there isn't room for two wives in the



Living in Community

By Michael Dyck

kitchen" - we hadn't worried about it until that conversation, and somehow we haven't since.

I think certain assumptions about marriage aren't entirely compatible with sharing a home with other people - the drive to accumulate material wealth, the establishment of a "household" distinct from and unaccountable to larger family and community structures, ideas of fixed gender roles and the notion that raising children needs to be done apart from "outside influences." One reason we chose to live in community was to challenge these assumptions.

Living in community encourages responsible use of space, materials and time. Rational rethinking of the amount of space we each really require could go a long way to redressing the problem of urban sprawl. This also applies to the various consumer items in a household - one toaster served four people quite well. Lisa and I have also been struck by how much less we spend on food per person than when we lived by ourselves. It would be interesting to know how much it costs to feed one member of a Hutterite colony compared to the average urban dweller.

Living in community has also encouraged us to think carefully about what we buy. It is more difficult to make purchases that are against our better judgment when we're aware that we're accountable to others in the household. The sight of others re-mixing the separated peanut oil with the peanut butter in the No-Name peanut butter jar has inspired me to realize that, yes, I too can forego Kraft in favour of a less expensive brand. (I should probably forego the vice altogether). There are less trivial examples, but the point is that one of the advantages of living in community for people of middle and upper incomes is that we can help each other take stewardship seriously.

Accountability in community can extend beyond purchases. I think we've made more responsible decisions about issues such as transportation, environmental responsibility, church issues and politics because we've been talking and living out these decisions with others. There were Yes and No voters in our house last October - the crisis passed locally, but reverberations (i.e. needling) continue in the extended family. This broad accountability may sound onerous, but for us the process has been enriching and enjoyable. My last two years of medical school were more manageable because I had the opportunity to talk with people involved in liberal arts education. This helped abate my sense of being a U of W student who has lost his way.

While I've had a positive experience of living in community, I readily admit that our experience is particular to young couples without children. Children would, I am sure, change the dynamic substantially. The last two years have left me feeling that I would be interested in living in a larger community like Reba Place or Koinonia Farms when we have our own children.

I'm inclined to agree with the Hutterites that the mutual accountability and responsible use of resources that arise from holding things in common could be central to a rejuvenation of

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From the first of November, I begin to anticipate Christmas. I fantasize about decorating the tree with my family, drinking hot cocoa by the fire and tobogganing with the kids. All too soon I'm reminded that decorating a tree with toddlers can turn into your worst nightmare, and if you're fortunate enough to have a fireplace *and* a white carpet you most definitely won't serve your young ones hot beverages there. And as for tobogganing, after spending 45 minutes struggling to get everyone into snowsuits, someone informs you he's got to go to the bathroom (or already has). Still, I'm determined to have a Hallmark Christmas.

As a young mother in the nineties, it's easy to fall into the "Try to keep up with the supermoms" syndrome. I fall into this trap from time to time and in the process my vision for what is really important has been clouded. It is important to realize that you can't be all things to all people and will burn yourself out trying. I'll admit that I've put too much pressure on myself trying to do it all. I've tried being a good ol' fashioned mom spending relentless hours baking *Fleisch Perishki* (meat buns) only to watch my husband swallow two dozen whole before I can get them off the pan. I've tried to keep up with all the latest crafts with my three helpers all making sure I don't complete a single one. And I've resolved to keep a somewhat organized household as I watch the third bowl of soggy cheerios hit the flour.

From time to time we do have to take a step back, shuffle our priorities and realize that what really is important is to recognize Christ first. This is always much easier said than done.

During the busy season of raising children, when time is limited, I'm learning that we can still serve God in small but effective ways. Perhaps I'll send my husband out to shovel the widow's sidewalk, for instance. While shopping it's easy to select a few extra items for the Christmas hamper. Recently I had a neighbour over for a lunch of macaroni and cheese and she was forced to listen to my children take turns saying grace. And

another neighbour had to pour herself coffee while I folded the laundry and we visited. It may not sound like much, but these were important steps for me. To be effective in any of these areas of following God, we have to let go of some of the things that really don't matter as much as we think. We need to let down our guard, change our idea of how we would like to appear to others, which is often perfect, yet unrealistic, and become transparent enough to let them see through us as real people in a real world.

This Christmas, maybe I should buy a tree at Super Valu for \$17.88 instead of going out and cutting down that perfect one. I could fill my freezer with store bought pastry instead of baking everything from scratch as I would like to. When I invite company for parties I could ask if they wouldn't mind bringing something if

they have time.

I've said "no" to my employer about returning to work, a decision that hasn't been an easy one for me. I've said "no" at times when asked to babysit and I've even said "no" when asked to volunteer my time in various positions within the church.

I'm determined not to feel guilty about this. I'm struggling to say "no" to the expectations I put on myself. We do have control over how much we burden ourselves with. If our load is too heavy we become disappointed when we have not lived up to our own expectations.

I truly believe that if we can learn to say "no" to what *appears* to be important, we can learn to say "yes" to what really *is* important and what will make a difference. Whether it's the season of raising children or the season of Christmas, whatever our lifestyle, we need to focus on serving our Lord any way we can, big or little. During these crazier moments in life, we can't always put out the fire, but by loosening up our own expectations we can learn to walk through it.

The Importance of Saying No

By Laurie Goetz



Laurie Goetz attends McIvor Avenue MB Church

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our anabaptist vision. This in return might allow us a clearer vision of what it means to be anabaptist Christians in a world that is becoming increasingly aware of its limited material resources.

For Mennonites and other Christians

interested in mutual accountability and an alternative approach to the use of resources, I think that living in community is a challenging way to explore the broader implications of what sister/brotherhood can mean. As awareness of the importance of environmental stewardship increases, we may have the

chance to discuss this option more often. I'm hoping so.

Michael Dyck received his M.D. degree in May. In July he began a Psychiatry residency program in Calgary. He and his wife, Lisa Bueckert, a nurse, are members of River East MB Church in Winnipeg.

What the World Needs Now...

By Doreen Martens

Thinking about the theme of this issue of *Sophia* got me wondering about what would help make life a little better for all of us. Alas, the big things that came to mind - world peace and so forth - I have very little power to bring about. But every journey starts with a single step, and giant oaks from little acorns grow, and . . . well, anyway, here are some suggestions for small things that would help make the world a better place, or a least get us on the right track:

1. The little sister of Peace is Kindness. As one who sallies forth to work each morning on the battleground of egos known as the road, I'd enjoy witnessing more frequent exercise of that rare fruit of the Spirit. How about fitting each car with an extra piece of equipment: a special signal planted between the taillights that lights up to say, "Thank you!" Inside, a button could be pressed to light the sign each time someone actually yielded the lane when you signalled your desire to move over. A little positive reinforcement like that could do wonders to improve the courtesy of drivers, to say nothing of their mood when they arrive at work.

2. People with sore feet are soreheads. I read recently that, according to a survey of footwear salespersons, eighty percent of North American women wear shoes that are too small. Clearly, it's not our fault. The shoemakers are simply putting the wrong sizes on the shoes. I say, let's pressure the industry to adjust their sizing system to a more reasonable scale, so that a size 7 fits comfortably again. And while we're at it, let's get our government to declare (a) extremely pointy toes, and (b) heels more than two inches high, to be discriminatory to women. Flat, round-toed shoes would become both fashionable and progressive. At last, I'd be able to "go the extra mile" with a brother without boosting the fortunes of the Band-Aid company.

3. Still close to the subject of feet: Let's get to the bottom of this sock-disappearance thing. Some say the billions of unmatched socks lying forlornly in drawers all over the continent can be blamed on washing machine drains that suck in unsuspecting footwear when nobody's looking. This, of course, creates great frustration for sock wearers, who probably take their annoyance about not being able to put together a matching pair in the morning out on their loved ones. In the interest of bolstering the family, manufacturers of washing machines need to study this problem. Meanwhile, MCC could set up a lone-sock donation centre where single socks could be gathered and matched as closely as possible for distribution in developing nations where neither socks nor ravenous washing machines are easily obtained.

4. Humans have a need, at least occasionally, for a little quiet solitude - something hard to find in an urban home also populated by two small children with a screaming habit. Maybe you remember the old "Get Smart" TV show, in

which the characters sometimes lowered over their heads something they called a "cone of silence" - a big glass bubble that was supposed to prevent their conversation from being overheard. The gag was, it worked so well they couldn't hear each other, either. Imagine having a bubble like that - let's call it a "cocoon of serenity" - in your living room, under which you could sit, smiling benignly at your gesticulating offspring while letting your thoughts drift happily on a sea of blessed quiet. A cocoon in every home might reduce our national reliance on headache remedies, aid in the retention of parental sanity and even improve our spiritual condition (how can I hear a still, small voice with all that yelling going on?).

5. Self-cleaning ovens are commonplace. Now it's time for the self-cleaning refrigerator. They could design it with a hinged trapdoor at the back. Once a week, the door would open automatically, preferably in the wee hours of the night, allowing that last, shoved-back-and-forgotten row of old yogurt tubs containing who-knows-what hideously mutated leftovers to drop into an automatic disposal system. Thus would this shabby proof of slothful housekeeping habits and ingratitude for abundance quietly disappear, never again to prey upon tender consciences trained by frugal mothers not to throw away even a spoonful of old peas that could have nourished some poor child in Kajiji or Hyderabad. At last! Freedom from guilt! Or at least the chunk of it that confronts me every time I'm tempted to gather a posse to search for the mustard in there. The way I figure it, I've got more important things to feel guilty about. Like not letting that guy into my lane this morning . . .

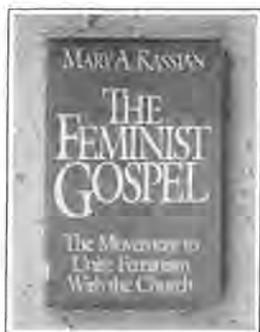
Illustration: Terri Goertz



Doreen Martens, a regular columnist for Sophia and a mother of two screamers, still lives, works and drives in California.

***The Feminist Gospel* by Mary Kassian.
Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1992.**

Reviewed by Ruth Jantz, student and homemaker worker.



Mary Kassian examines the role of feminism in the Church, based on the premise that "feminism and Christianity are like thick oil and water; their very natures dictate that they cannot be mixed" (p.217). Statements such as "Feminism is but one of Satan's many lies with which we are beguiled" (p.239), signal the viewpoint the author takes. According to Kassian, Christian feminists,

like the secular feminists with whom they align themselves, are most interested in serving their own interests and can not be committed to Christ.

Part I, "Naming Self," is based on impressive research. Here Kassian outlines the history of secular and religious feminism and the main ideas of both, which she sees as basically the same. Feminists, she says, view the role of women as having been created by men and in need of re-evaluation. Kassian interprets the feminist quest for equality as a quest for "unisexual androgyny." Women, she says, want to be "just like men."

In Part II, "Naming the World," Kassian discusses feminism's integration into society and points out how women's interpretation of history has changed societies' world view. Kassian accuses feminists of selectively interpreting the Bible in order to promote feminist ideals.

Womens studies, according to Kassian, are "strategic battalions for the feminist cause" (p.123) and tools for the promotion of women's self-interested world view.

Part III, "Naming God," deals with the issue of naming God as other than male, for example "She" instead of "He." Kassian calls God "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" and accuses feminism of idolatry in naming God otherwise. Even the names "Creator," "Redeemer," and "Sustainer," are unacceptable to Kassian, who states that, "feminism's attempt to rename God is a blasphemy that comes out of the very depths of Hell" (p.244). God, says Kassian, should be able to name *Himself*. If God called *Himself* "He" in the Bible there is no reason to call God otherwise.

Kassian's position is clear and her bias obvious. While accusing Christian feminists of stereotyping the Church, Kassian stereotypes feminists as extreme and destructive. Furthermore, she fails to acknowledge that the practise of selectively reading the Bible is not a new, feminist phenomenon, but has been used throughout history to condemn and discriminate against certain groups while protecting others. The history of slavery or racism, for instance,

might reveal a carefully selective interpretation of the Bible. While both sides of the feminist issue may have been guilty of this selectivity, there has also been honest research (Kassian's in Part I, for example) on both sides.

But we need to be reminded to reflect on Jesus the reformer and the radical who tried to change the Jewish order at that time and was considered a heretic by those who thought they best knew God's will. He began a process of change that brought truth into the world. Just as Jesus was not "un-Jewish," so Christian feminists and other reformers today must not be quickly labelled "un-Christian," because they introduce unconventional thought. As well as maintaining the integrity of the Christian faith, Christians ought to be willing to face challenges to traditional thought in order that growth in understanding may happen.

***The Best of Mennonite Fellowship Meals* by
Phyllis Pellman Good and Louise Stoltzfus.
Good Books, 1991. 304 pages.**

Reviewed by Dora Dueck, Winnipeg freelance writer.



Paging through this attractive recipe book evoked good memories of fellowship meals I've attended - those cauliflower and broccoli salads, pots of chili, jellios full of mandarin oranges and cream cheese, homemade pies and large pans of brownies! The authors, both of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, observe that while the tradition of the bountiful Sunday dinner at home may be waning, the interest in

eating together is not. This collection of over 900 recipes from Mennonite individuals and churches is a helpful resource for doing just that.

Most of the recipes serve a good-sized family or more and are ideal for potlucks or for company meals at home. These are hearty, people-pleasing, transportable dishes, made from ingredients readily available.

I've enjoyed trying several recipes: a delicious Italian vegetable soup, a variation of the chocolate chip cookie, and on Sunday, an easy rhubarb dessert big enough for our family and guests.

With this book, one would not soon run out of ideas for "something to bring." Not only that, but one is freshly inspired to keep up the happy practice of eating with friends.

Partners in Faith

By Ken Reddig



My parents were financially impoverished and spiritually rich. For the first fourteen years of my life we existed on a small dairy farm on the outskirts of Lehigh, a small town in central Kansas. We milked twelve cows by hand, raised hogs, chickens and rabbits, besides cultivating more square feet of garden than any young boy should ever be exposed to.

My father earned extra income by working stints as well-digger, plumber, truck-driver and maintenance person. When I was fourteen the farm was sold and we moved to the "big city" of Hillsboro, some seven miles away, where Dad and Mom became custodians of the Hillsboro MB Church, a position they retained until retirement. Their wages were meagre; upon retirement their monthly income increased when they collected Social Security.

When I started school my mother went with me, working as cook in the

hot lunch program. Later, she worked alongside my father at the church. I had two sisters, ten and twelve years older than I, who left home shortly after graduating from high school. My mother was a very good cook. Her fried chicken dinner can never be replicated, though Willa and I have tried on numerous occasions. She baked, canned, gardened, worked out of the home, cleaned, milked cows and fed hogs and chickens. In the evenings she crocheted, made quilts and read, her favourite three hobbies.

Though poor, we never lacked food. Steaks, roast, ham, rabbit, chicken, beans, potatoes, *zwieback* and fresh bread were part of the menu. If we couldn't grow it, we didn't eat it. An exception occurred several times each summer, when Mom or Dad would buy white bread, bologna and Pepsi Cola for lunch. To this day I consider bologna sandwiches and Pepsi Cola a treat - why doesn't my family think so? Somehow I never felt insecure in our poor surroundings, even though Sunday School or school outings were difficult times because most often I had to go without money. Much as I hated those awkward times, somehow I felt secure within the strong relationship my parents had with each other and the love they gave us as children.

Dad had three years of education (Late in life he confessed that it was one or two months over a period of three winters). He could barely read and one could hardly call his scratches writing. Mom, who had nine years of school and had aspired to be a teacher, did all the letter-writing, kept the books and wrote checks. Dad, in turn, helped with household chores and almost always helped my mother wash and dry the supper dishes pro-

vided he was not obligated to go back to work.

The only glitch in their marriage relationship that we kids know of occurred in 1973. On their way to visit us at seminary, somewhere off Highway 70 in Illinois, with Mom navigating and Dad driving, they made a wrong turn. They argued. Over the next twelve hours or so the issue was brought up on several occasions. None of us children had ever heard them argue before.

They both enjoyed company, particularly young people. After I left home they often befriended young people who attended Tabor College and invited them over for fried chicken and Dad's favourite stories.

What made their relationship with each other and with other people so powerful that they were able to overcome their constant financial stress and look beyond it? I don't have to pause for an answer. Faith! A simple, basic faith in God. They believed that whatever they did they must do for God. They shared a faith that did not blame God for their status in life. Faith permitted them to accept who they were and what life had brought them. Their life together was a partnership in faith without which they could not survive - a realistic form of equality. Only when cancer took one of them a few years after their fiftieth wedding anniversary was that partnership broken. Oh to have such faith!

Ken Reddig is head of textual records and public service for the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. He has previously been a pastor, MCC worker, teacher and archivist for the Canadian MB Conference. Ken, Willa, and their two children attend Mclvor MB Church.

*They believed
that
whatever
they did
they must do
for God.*

✱ **Jennifer Dueck**, daughter of Judith and Harold Dueck of the Fort Garry MB Church, has won a placement in the prestigious Li Po Chun United World College in Hong Kong for her final year of high school. Essay submissions, interviews, excellent references as well as outstanding academic credentials and numerous extra-curricular interests helped win her this coveted international learning experience.

✱ The time and labour donated by approximately 40 Mennonite women to the "Habitat for Humanity Jimmy Carter Work Camp" in Winnipeg this summer contributed significantly to its highly-rated success. Employing skills in areas such as carpentry, food production, communications, and first-aid, these women shared the challenge and the joy of seeing 18 families move into new homes after five days of intensive labour. **Lori Matties**, assistant editor of *Sophia*, is on the permanent staff of Habitat and served as Chairperson of the Promotion Committee.

✱ The first issue of *Sophia* carried a story about **Elfrida Penner** who cycled the "Golden Triangle." This summer Elfrida, with her husband and another couple, cycled from Jasper to Banff.

✱ **Joanne Klassen**, who graduated from MB Theological Seminary in Fresno last spring with a Masters degree in theology, received the Nettie Toews Scholarship, awarded annually to a woman who makes a significant contribution to campus life at the seminary. Joanne returns to seminary for

her final year toward a Masters degree in counselling. Joanne is a member of the River East MB church.

✱ **Jacqueline Neufeld**, Fort Garry MB Church, won the Canadian Physiotherapy Association Award when she graduated from McGill University. Earlier this year Jacqueline, a Kelvin High School graduate, won a \$1750 bursary sponsored by the Foundation for Quebec University Athletics.

✱ **Christine Longhurst** has been appointed Adjunct Professor in the area of Church Music at Concord College. She has also been appointed editor of the MB Hymnal Project. A member of River East MB Church, Christine previously taught music at Nazarene College.

✱ Included in the team that taught English at the Summer Language Institute in Klaipeda, Lithuania, were **Debbie Kroeker**, Fort Garry MB Church (for the second time); **Susan Huebert**, Portage Avenue MB Church; **Kelly Sudermann**, Mclvor MB Church; and *Sophia* editor **Sarah Klassen** (for the third time).

✱ **Lori Bergmann**, Mclvor MB Church, was on the Manitoba women's rowing team that won the gold medal at the 1993 Canada Summer Games this August in Kelowna.

✱ **Doreen Klassen** has returned from Zimbabwe where she completed a year of dissertation research in rural Shona women's traditional story telling. Doreen teaches in the music and drama department of Steinbach Bible College and attends the Steinbach MB Church.

A N N O U N C I N G . . .

SOPHIA'S FIRST ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST...AGAIN!

Because of limitations of time and space, the deadline for the contest has been extended to December 31, 1993. Keep those submissions coming! The winning poem will be published in our Winter 1994 issue and receive a \$50 prize. Runners up may also be published. Here's a recap of the rules.

1. A cost of \$5 per poem will be charged. (Cheques should be made out to *Sophia*.) Entries of two or more poems will receive a one-year subscription to or extension of *Sophia*. (If you wish your subscription to be given to a friend, please send the name and address along with your submission.)
2. Do not send your only copy, as *Sophia* will not be responsible for lost copies. Poems will not be returned.
3. To preserve anonymity in judging, please do not put your name on the pages of the poems but include your name, address and the title(s) of your poem(s) on a separate page.

Address your entries to: Poetry Contest, *Sophia*
P.O. Box 28062, 1453 Henderson Highway, Winnipeg, MB, R2G 4E9.

I myself will be
the shepherd of my sheep,
and I will make them lie down,
says the Lord GOD.

I will seek
the lost,
and I will bring back
the strayed,
and I will bind up
the injured,
and I will strengthen
the weak.

Ezekiel 34:15-16
(New Revised Standard Version)