

"Not by Might, Nor by Power, but by My Spirit": Women
Workers in The
United Church of Canada, 1890-1940

by

Nancy G. Hall

A thesis
presented to the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master's of Arts
in
Department of History

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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ISBN 0-315-33838-5

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NANCY G. HALL

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis is not a history of the church but a history of women that utilizes the church as an institutional structure. The major focus of the work is the official relationship of women and their organisations to the church. It discusses what has happened when women workers have secured a power base and how that base affected further movements toward equality. What the work emphasises is women's changing power - not power in the traditional sense - but recognition that what women did was of equal importance to men's work. It is a description of women's status and experiences in a social organisation and the interplay between women's concerns and masculine authority. It also documents the times when tensions arose between prescribed social values and women's search for a more important role. Thus, the thesis revolves around the questions of status, recognition, and relation to hierarchy.

The thesis begins with a discussion of the church societies for women only; the Ladies Aids whose concerns were local congregational ones and the Women's Missionary Societies who were an influential part of the evangelical mission work of the church. The women's societies also provided the impetus for the establishment of the first

female professional workers in Canada - the deaconesses, the subject of the third chapter. Deaconesses were an integral part of Protestant social reform and translated social gospel ideology into concrete programs of relief. Chapter four focuses on the status of women in the new United Church and raises the crucial issue of the altered presence of the state and its effects on both the church and its women. The final chapter details the successful struggle for the right of women to be ordained; the attainment of ecclesiastical equality that occurred in 1936.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Women in varying economic conditions and varying cultures appear to have one activity in common. They have consistently organised to improve their community and their country.¹ This community institution-building has been expressed in a variety of social institutions: the family, political parties and reform movements, and labour and religious organisations. Often their specific interests were ignored or denigrated. Historians of this woman's work have sometimes missed these activities because they expected to find that women were involved in the same organisational pursuits as were their male counterparts. Instead, they have discovered that Canadian women created their own, separate organisations where they no longer felt marginal, as they often did in organisations dominated by men.² Women's organisational work and the emphasis of this work was different from that of male groups and should be studied in its own right. Also, while formal political changes have created major advances for Canadian women, their lives

¹ Gender Lerner, The Woman in American History. Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, California, 1971, op. cit.

² E.L. Silverman, "Writing Canadian Women's History, 1970-82: An Historiographical Analysis," Canadian Historical Review, 63(1982): 513-33.

appear to have been more profoundly affected by structural changes in society. Social institutions are created in an effort to come to terms with crucial structural changes. These institutions appear to have their own dynamic: a dynamic relatively inaccessible to political manipulation.³ For these reasons, any analysis of women's history should include a description of their status and their experiences within their separate social organisations. Since there is little historical information about the inter-play between women's concerns and masculine authority, such analysis should also include a documentation of the times when tensions arose between prescribed social values and women's search for a more important role in a patriarchal society.

Churches often offered women their first opportunities for social action. Yet, the participation of women is still virtually unknown in the history of Canadian Protestantism. Previous historical documentation has focused on the leadership of men in religious institutions. Further, though an increasing amount of writing on Canadian women is being done, these works contain little or nothing about the religious aspects of women's lives. Yet, more females became involved in Woman's Missionary Society work than in all other aspects of social reform and suffrage movements combined.⁴ The lack of attention given to women's work

³ R. Bridenthal and C. Koonz, ed. Becoming Visible: Women in European History, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1977, p.5.

leaves gaps in the record of the church's development. What share did women have in the early life of Canadian Methodism and Presbyterianism? When did women begin their organisational activities? Who was responsible for its beginnings and how dependent were women upon men for leadership? What gave rise to the work, what was the work, and how has it succeeded? What was the official relation of women and their organisations to the church. Most importantly, what has happened when women workers have secured a power base? How has that power base affected the achievement of equality for women? The task is now to give voice to the religious experience of women, the origins and development of their participation in organised work.

The period in Canadian history that begins around 1880 witnessed the development and rapid growth of national women's organisations. Several reasons help to explain this exceptional advance in women's activities. Canadian society was going through enormous change as it moved toward an urban industrial-capitalist society. Transportation had improved enough to ease the initial frontier difficulties of contact between women. The increasing urbanisation of Canadian society widened the potential membership base for any organisation. More women remained single. The

⁴ R.Radford Ruether and R.Skinner Keller (eds.), Women and Religion in America:Volume One:The Nineteenth Century, A Documentary History, "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition", Rosemary Skinner Keller, Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1981, p.242.

birthrate for married women had remained fairly constant from the 1700s to as late as 1871. However, the birthrate declined a dramatic 24% in the twenty years from 1871 to 1891. Increasing social affluence and an expanding middle class left more women with leisure time, as did the increasing separation of the workplace from the home. Advances in technology and the availability of domestic help decreased the time some women, particularly those in the middle class, spent on domestic duties. More women were receiving a better education as both the public school system and ladies colleges expanded.⁵ At the same time that women's material existence was improving, the Canadian public began to focus on social problems created by the new society. Urbanisation and rapid immigration intensified the need for organised attacks on crime, poverty, and intemperance. Philanthropy became less a private and more a public concern as the inadequacy of community and church resources became apparent. Women's organisations moved in to fill the gap, seeking collective solutions to a host of public difficulties. However, women did not become involved simply because they had nothing else to do. They were strongly motivated by their sense of Christian duty.

[T]here can be no strict connection established between degree of leisure enjoyed and degree of social concern. Leisure was a necessary condition for social work, not a sufficient one. Running

⁵ Linda Kealey, ed, A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-1920s, "The WCTU: For God, Home and Native Land: A Study in Nineteenth Century Feminism", Wendy Mitchinson, The Women's Press, Toronto, 1979, p.152.

through much contemporary criticism of women 'dogooders' of the time was what one might call the 'argument from boredom' - women busied themselves with the poor because they had nothing else to do It is belittling and insulting to suggest that women had only a negative motivation for their actions, and that they might as easily been beguiling the hours with playing musical instruments, exchanging visits with friends, eating chocolates, reading novels or having love affairs, as with seeking to be of use to the poor in their neighborhoods; and it is historically unhelpful to suggest that thousands of individuals acted without positive motivation or the exercise of choice.⁶

The entrance of women into lay leadership decisively changed their status and role within the church. However, lay leadership for women did not occur within established church structures. The expanding opportunities for females came through the creation of organisations 'for women only', in particular home and foreign missionary societies and deaconess orders. The ability of women to organise and consolidate was a major factor in making mission work an identifying characteristic of late nineteenth century Canadian Protestantism. "The simultaneous appearance of a militant Protestantism in need of workers and a large group of willing and able women encouraged the rapid development of female voluntary associations."⁷ Yet, women did not

⁶ Sandra Burman, ed, Fit Work for Women, "A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century Anne Summers, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1979, p.37.

⁷ R. Radford Ruether and E. McLaughlin (eds), Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, "Their Prodigious Influence: Women, Religion and Reform in Antebellum America", D.C. Bass, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1979, p.283.

challenge the traditional clerical and lay power structures and organisations of their church, despite the fact that they had no authority in the male-dominated administrative boards devoted to mission work.

Changes in the social fabric did not leave Canadian Protestant churches untouched. Scientific and historical criticism challenged the ethical and intellectual foundations of their Christian beliefs.⁸ Protestant denominations experimented with theological innovation as they moved from a strict Calvinist interpretation of redemption to a more democratic and voluntary view of salvation. The period from 1850 to 1885 witnessed a growing national consciousness within Canadian Protestant churches. These churches came to identify themselves increasingly with the fledgling Canadian nation. This identification led to a movement towards unity and national autonomy and growing efforts to strengthen each denomination's organisations and government.⁹ Also, the social issues that arose from the transformation of society led to the need to respond to the new demands of immigration and industrialisation. Institutional innovations accompanied theological ones. Most importantly, the social dislocation provided the impetus for a reform movement. The rise of the Social

⁸ R. Cook and W. Mitchinson (ed), The Proper Sphere: Woman's Place in Canadian Society, Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1976.

⁹ S.D. Clark, The Developing Canadian Community, 2nd ed., University of Toronto Press, 1968.

Gospel in Canadian Protestant churches from the 1890s through to the 1930s attempted to deal with this dislocation by reshaping Canadian society into a Christian community. The rise of the Social Gospel impulse paralleled the rise of women's organisations in those churches. The church's practical response was consolidation, expansion, and organisation through the union of smaller churches and the organisation of church boards, conferences, and synods. Voluntary associations, consolidating the participation of lay people, and church committees were formed to support religious aims.

The beginnings of Methodism in British North America occurred in the Maritimes and can be traced to two sources; British Wesleyans and American Episcopalians. The American Methodist Episcopal Church first entered the Maritimes in 1772. Reinforced by United Empire Loyalist immigration, it held its first Conference in 1786. The British Wesleyans entered Lower Canada in 1780 and Upper Canada in 1785. By 1824, the Canadas had formed into a separate conference and four years later became the autonomous Episcopal Methodist Church in Canada. An 1832 union with the British Wesleyan Conference, creating the Wesleyan Methodist Church in British North America, lasted only two years. At the same time, new Methodist sects were entering Canada: the Primitive Methodists in 1830; the Bible Christians in 1831; the Methodist New Connexion in 1837. By 1874 there were

five distinct Methodist Churches in Canada: Wesleyan, with one conference in Ontario and Quebec and one in the Maritimes; the Canadian Conference of the Methodist New Connexion; the Primitive Methodist Church in Canada; the Bible Christian Church; and the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada. That year the two Wesleyan Conferences joined with the New Connexion church to form the Methodist Church in Canada. Ten years later the three remaining Methodist churches joined with this new Methodist Church. At this time, 1884, the membership of the newly united church stood at 742,981 or approximately seventeen percent of Canada's 791,982 people.¹⁰

All Methodists in Canada shared the same basic theology but had differing institutional structures. The 1884 union was, in fact, a Wesleyan victory over the Episcopal type of government. The Methodist Episcopalals had maintained the circuit rider tradition, lay participation in church management, and a militant evangelism. The other Methodist churches tended to follow the Episcopal tradition and together numerically equalled the more 'conservative' Wesleyans.¹¹ Wesleyan polity was connexional and consisted of an exclusive clergy directed by a conference, and a system of committees and auxiliary committees.¹² The

¹⁰ S.D.Clark, The Developing Canadian Community, p.120.

¹¹ Ibid. p.123.

¹² W.H.Brooks, "Methodism in the Canadian West in the Nineteenth Century", PhD Thesis, 1972, University of

Methodist Episcopalians had a distinctive polity that incorporated three orders of ministry: the Episcopacy (embodying Presbytery authority); circuit ministers; and a Diaconate which was limited to performing marriages and baptisms, and preaching. With Methodist union, the episcopacy was abandoned in favor of a General Superintendency providing administrative authority and serving a representative function. The diaconate was also done away with. Lay representation (restricted to males) was guaranteed at both the Annual and General Conferences of the church. The church, as a whole, preserved its connexional organisation rather than adopting a proposed federal union.¹³ It was felt that the federal system would prove inefficient for an expansion-oriented church and that a General Superintendent, rather than conference presidents, would provide the overall direction required for this expansion. At the time of union, the Methodist church established central boards to carry out its work: again, its leaders reasoned that national work required a central, not congregational, organisation.¹⁴

Manitoba.

¹³ Brooks thesis, p. 302.

¹⁴ J.W. Caldwell, The Unification of Methodism in Canada, 1865-1884, The Bulletin, 19, 1967, United Church Publishing House, Toronto, p. 51.

The first Presbyterian minister in Canada came in 1764 from the Synod of New York. The Church of Scotland's first representative came in 1783. Both churches worked initially in the Maritimes and, particularly for the Church of Scotland representatives, were affected by the religious conflict within Scottish Presbyterianism. The first rupture in the Church of Scotland occurred in 1743 with the creation of a Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland. It was chiefly missionaries from this evangelical strain of Presbyterianism, also split between Burghers and Anti-Burghers, who first came to British North America. Another secession developed in 1761, creating the Relief Presbytery whose representatives in Canada "also contributed to the din of controversy within the ranks of Canadian Presbyterianism."¹⁵ The last secession, of 1843, created the Free Church of Scotland. In 1834 there were approximately 102,000 Presbyterians and eleven separate Presbyterian churches in the Canadas and the Maritimes.¹⁶ By 1859 the number had dwindled to eight, and between 1860 and 1875 these eight churches were progressively drawn together.

In the Maritimes, in 1860, the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Nova Scotia and the Free Church of Nova Scotia united into the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of the

¹⁵ H.H. Walsh, The Christian Church in Canada, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1956, p.17. see also, John Moir, Enduring Witness: A History of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, Bryant Press Limited, Toronto, 1974.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.212.

Lower Provinces of British North America. This church was joined in 1866 by the Free Church of New Brunswick. In the Canadas, a union occurred in 1861 between the Synod of the United Presbyterian Church in Canada (Secession) and the synod of the Presbyterian Church of Canada (Free Church) creating the Canada Presbyterian Church. This church organised itself into a General Assembly of the Canada Presbyterian Church and created four synods (Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, and London) in 1870 and incorporated seventeen presbyteries and two hundred and ninety-two ministers. In 1874 (after four years of negotiation) the four independent churches incorporated into the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada. At their first Assembly, in 1875, they represented 578,185 Presbyterians in Canada.¹⁷

Unlike the Methodist Church courts, which were organised from the General Conference down, authority in the Presbyterian polity was transferred from the session up through presbyteries and synods. These courts were formed by voluntary associations of ministers and male congregation members. Thus, the church was based on a democratic principle which allowed each congregation to decide theological and social issues. The church was governed by these councils or courts, and every act was determined

¹⁷ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925, General Board, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Toronto, 1925, pp. 16 through 31.

there. There were four church levels - the session or congregational assembly; the presbyteries; the synod, or provincial assembly; and the General Assembly. The General Assembly consisted of one quarter of the entire number of ministers on roll and an equal number of representative elders. The Barrier Act defined the constitutional relationship between the four courts. This act required the approval of presbyteries for any proposed legislation and postponed, for one year, any legislation being enacted.¹⁸ One other procedure ensured the congregational organisation - the overture. This was a request for action that was proposed by a lower court to a higher court. Thus, any member could propose legislation through his session, which would then proceed through to the General Assembly.¹⁹ As in the Methodist Church, committees and boards were established to put into effect the policies of the church. At the first General Assembly of 1875, thirty-one boards and standing committees were created.

On June 10, 1925, the Methodists, a majority of Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists formed an organic union under the title of The United Church of Canada. This union established the largest Protestant denomination in Canada, with adherents totalling 19.44 per cent of the Canadian population.²⁰ In the preamble to the Basis of

¹⁸ The Presbyterian Church In Canada, p. 57.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 58.

Union, the church fathers provided a clear expression of their desire to create a national church that would both manifest the Kingdom of God in Canada and act as the conscience and moral guide of Canadian society.

It shall be the policy of The United Church to foster the spirit of unity in the hope that this sentiment of unity may in due time, so far as Canada is concerned, take shape in a Church which may fittingly be described as national.²¹

The new church did not choose a federal union but a more organic, centralised polity of connexionalism. Church court names and functions are little changed from the Methodist and Presbyterian systems. The session is responsible for congregational activity; the quarterly official Board retains general supervision for sessions and meets annually; Presbytery legislates; conference ordains; and the highest court is the General Council.²² Lay representation was maintained at all court levels and the committee system was carried over from the founding churches. The organisation remains highly centralised, with legislation worked out at the central administrative office and officially adopted by congregations.

²⁰ C.E. Silcox, Church Union in Canada: Its Causes and Consequences, New York, Institute of Social and Religious Research, 1933, p.477.

²¹ Preamble to the Basis of Union of The United Church of Canada as cited in, John Webster Grant, The Canadian Experience of Church Union, Ecumenical Studies in History, No. 8, John Knox Press, Virginia, 1967, p.30.

²² Ibid, p. 33.

Chapter II

WOMEN

Women Lay Volunteers: The Women's Missionary Societies The Women's Missionary Societies of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches.

The United Church of Canada has, within its official structure, an inclusive women's organisation - the United Church Women. However, the 'official' church histories tell us little of the original development of this organisation. In particular such works ignore the historical relationship between women's organisations and the official church. Denied access to the established church structures and with no voting participation on local or national boards devoted to mission and education, women helped to organise church societies for women only.

The first female organisations were Ladies Aids that limited their activity to the local congregation and channelled their concerns into areas that were an extension of their traditional duties: teaching, nurturing and private charity for the poor, the sick, and the aged. By the time women's missionary societies were organised, aid societies were already well established in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Women organised home and foreign

mission societies to meet the specific demands of their evangelical religion. Through these separate organisations, women greatly enlarged their church's mission program. They became involved because they were strongly motivated by their sense of Christian duty.

[W]omen showed great enthusiasm for personal and family religion as opposed to the purely church-based ritual from which they were excluded. Being so much outside a male-dominated institution, they were perhaps better placed than men to see its deficiencies, and their religious enthusiasm made them anxious to assist in repairing them.²³

While never losing sight of their original goals, the orientation of women's organisations began to shift to a desire to improve their own and other women's subordinate social, political, and economic status. For, although these women were seldom considered 'feminists', their goals - better education, more opportunities, and more respect and recognition - certainly were. What remains to be answered is why women were often thwarted in their attempts to create and maintain their own organisations.

The first female involvement in the church was limited to the local congregation. Spiritual organisations, which included women members, saw to the distribution of tracts and to district visiting. Women were also active in prayer associations which saw to the "spiritual oversight and

²³ "A Home from Home - Women's Philanthropic Work in the Nineteenth Century", Anne Summers, Burman, Fit Work for Women, p. 37.

instruction of members of the Church of their own sex who meet weekly for Christian counsel and conversation."²⁴ By 1900, approximately two-thirds, or 22,000, of all Sunday School teachers in the Methodist Church were women.

The first formal organisation of church women was also at the local congregational level, with the development of Ladies Aids. There is evidence that groups of women organised before the appearance of formal church organisations and, indeed that the first Canadian Ladies Aid was established 1832.²⁵ The objectives of such groups were local congregational ones - furnishing parsonages, assisting ministers, and supplying churches. Their expenditures included the cleaning and painting of church basements, the purchasing of clocks, carpets, hymnbooks, and pianos, flowers, heating plants, Christmas baskets, and groceries. In 1832, the Ladies Aid Society in Bathurst, New Brunswick recorded the purchase of 'five pounds of candles' and 'one bushel of oats' toward the maintenance of the minister and his horse.²⁶ A similar organisation of women in Bridgetown, in 1848, assumed the responsibility for the furnishing and maintenance of the minister's manse. Many Aid societies shouldered the major financial burden of the church

²⁴ National Council of Women of Canada, Women of Canada, Their Life and Work, original 1900, reprint 1975 by National Council of Women, p. 304.

²⁵ The United Church of Canada, The Observer, January, 1975, p. 32.

²⁶ Ibid.

mortgage. "One minister, observing the growing frequency of this and the complacency with which it was accepted by an inactive board [of managers] suggested changing the name of the women's organisation to 'Men's Relief'." ²⁷

By the 1890s there were over 1350 such societies in the Canadian Methodist Church alone. By 1898 Methodist Ladies Aids were contributing an astonishing average of \$100,000 per year for parish work.²⁸ As early as 1836 a Canadian minister confessed his work "would have been seriously handicapped but for the fact that women organised and did most of the visiting."²⁹

The Ladies Aids of the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches never possessed more than congregational organisation and were not an officially recognised part of the general structures of either church. At no time was there a central organisation or a constitution which outlined their work. In spite of the obvious contributions these women made to the spiritual life and financial health of their congregations, both clergy and laymen appeared suspicious of their motivations. An American account explained:

²⁷ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925, Toronto: General Board, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1925, p. 140.

²⁸ Women of Canada, p. 304.

²⁹ S. Davey, ed., Women Work and Worship in The United Church of Canada, The United Church of Canada, 1983.

One minister after opening their meeting with prayer was invited by the ladies to leave. He declined, explaining, "no one knew what they would pray for if left alone."³⁰

A female observer, present at the formation of the Halifax Wesleyan Benevolent Society, commented on the novelty that church women might contemplate organising their own society; "[a] very daring idea for women of that day! That they might draw up rules and even have a name."³¹

With no central organisation to provide coordination and direction, constrained by local Sessions and Boards of Management, and perhaps their own desires, Ladies Aids were limited in their approach to Dominion-wide social problems. They contented themselves with keeping their own backyards tidy. However, they were, in some respects, pathbreakers. Many local units affiliated with National Council of Women of Canada locals. For instance, the Ladies Aid of Knox Presbyterian Church, in Winnipeg, was participating at the local NCW meetings as early as 1894.³² Thus, many local Ladies Aid women were exposed to the feminist impulses and reform spirit of the NCW. These women also proved that females could organise for a useful purpose and were often more capable than men of raising large sums of money for God's work.

³⁰ E.H. Verdesi, In But Still Out: Women in The Church, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1973, p.38.

³¹ Women Work and Worship in The United Church, p. 20.

³² Winnipeg Council of Women, Public Archives of Manitoba, MG10, C45, Box 1.

The organisation of provincial and national female missionary societies in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches provided the clearest example of the desire of Protestant church laywomen to organise for useful purposes. These women's missionary groups were first organised on a local basis. In 1825, for example, Prince Edward Island women organised the 'Prince Town Female Society for Propagating the Gospel and other Religious Purposes'.³³ By 1841, an interdenominational Ladies Society, in conjunction with the French-Canadian Missionary Society of Montreal, was supporting a missionary. This group of women, reorganised under the auspices of the Presbyterian Church as the Ladies' French Evangelization Society, opened a mission house in Montreal in 1876.

The Church of Scotland Ladies Auxiliary was also actively involved in French evangelisation work in this period.³⁴ A Ladies French Missionary Society was supporting a bible woman in Montreal previous to 1881. In that year, this organisation united with a Methodist Women's Society to help in the work of the French Mission Church and the French Methodist Institute (which trained missionaries and educated French-Canadian Roman Catholic converts).³⁵ In 1882, the

³³ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1875-1925, p. 142.

³⁴ H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years: 1881-1906, A History of the WMS of the Methodist Church, Canada, Vol. One, Canada, 1908, n.p., p. 85.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 85.

Montreal Presbyterian Women's Missionary Society for Home, French, and Foreign Work was organised and merged with the Ladies' French Evangelization Society. Canadian women also participated in the Centenary Conference in London, in 1885, joining with their British and American counterparts to create The World's Missionary Committee of Christian Women. This was the first international church mission organisation established for either men or women.³⁶

Formal women's missionary societies developed out of the male missionary societies organised at the unions in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches. Through the encouragement of men actively involved in the Church missionary organisations and the description given by missionaries of the plight of women and children in 'non-Christian' lands, women received the impetus to organise on a national level. "The need for more female missionaries put a strain on the already existing male missionary societies and it seemed logical to have the church women assume responsibility for them."³⁷ Their organisational goal was 'women's work for women'; they sought the redemption of the personal, social, and home life of underprivileged women in other countries.³⁸

³⁶ R. Pierce Beaver, All Loves Excelling: American Protestant Women in World Mission, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan, 1968, p. 143.

³⁷ W. Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies", Atlantis, 3, 1977, p.61.

³⁸ Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Presbyterian Church

It was the Presbyterian Church women of Belleville, Ontario who provided the nucleus for the formation of a Woman's Foreign Missionary Society. In Belleville, in 1868, women worked under the direction of Mrs. William MacLaren to support Presbyterian foreign missionaries.³⁹ Mrs. MacLaren's husband, the first convenor of the Presbyterian Assembly's Foreign Mission Committee and another Presbyterian minister, Dr. Topp, moved in 1876, at the second General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, that a Presbyterian Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, under the aegis of the Foreign Mission Committee, be created.

Your Foreign Mission Committee, guided by the instructions of the late Canadian Presbyterian Church, with the view of securing the more full co-operation of the female membership of the Church in support of the women who are employed as missionaries among the heathen, took steps to organize a WFMS, as an auxiliary to your Committee.⁴⁰

In Toronto, in February, 1876, a notice in the daily papers called for a meeting of Presbyterian ladies interested in the formation of a WFMS.⁴¹ A group of women met the following month and listened to Rev. MacLaren and

in Canada, 25th Annual Report, 1900.

³⁹ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 143.

⁴⁰ Acts and Proceedings, 2nd General Assembly, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1876.

⁴¹ J.G. Forbes, Wide Windows: The Story of the Woman's Missionary Society of The United Church of Canada, WMS Literature Department, The United Church of Canada, 1951, p. 3.

Dr. Alex Topp express the desire of their Foreign Mission Committee that a woman's society be organised. At its outset, the organisation was limited to a Toronto society with fifty female members. In the same year, a Halifax WFMS was organised and immediately sent its first foreign missionary, Miss A.L.M. Blackadder, to the Trinidad Mission field.⁴²

In October, 1876, the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada was formed "to engage and unite the Christian women in mission work, both at home and abroad."⁴³ The General Conference of the Methodist Church of Canada discussed the question of a women's organisation in 1877 but felt that "the time was not yet" and referred the suggestion to the Central Board.⁴⁴ A year later the same General Conference, in response to urgent appeals from missionaries in Japan and requests for the support of homes for Canadian Indian girls, authorised the organisation of a Woman's Missionary Society. The Methodist Conference authorised Reverend Dr. Sutherland, General Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society to organise, as soon as feasible, a society of women.

⁴² J.T.McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 141.

⁴³ C. Headon, "Women and Organized Religion in Mid and Late Nineteenth Century Canada", Canadian Church Historical Society Journal, 20, 1978, p. 9.

⁴⁴ The Missionary Outlook, January, 1881.

During the Hamilton Annual Conference of the Methodist Church in 1880, Dr. Sutherland addressed a group of women who then proceeded to draft a constitution and by-laws for a WMS auxiliary. It was believed to be premature to attempt to organise a General Connexional Society immediately. However, "it soon became evident that to secure united action and the wisest distribution of funds, some comprehensive scheme would have to be adopted, embracing a wider organization."⁴⁵ In April, 1881, a resolution to form a Dominion-wide WMS was moved by Miss M.J. Cartmell (later a missionary for the organisation). After correspondence with local conference women, whose names had been proposed by their ministers, a general meeting was held November 8, 1881. This organisational meeting saw the creation of a national woman's board.⁴⁶ In 1885, following the union of the various Methodist churches in Canada, the Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church of Canada was organised.

The Methodist Missionary Outlook of 1881 briefly outlined the circumstances which required the formation of women's missionary societies.

1st. The mission work of the Church has advanced beyond the power of the existing society to keep pace with it. 2nd. There are certain departments of work, such as the employment and support of lady teachers for mission schools, the support of benevolent institutions, like the McDougall

⁴⁵ H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years p. 85.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 7.

Orphanage' and the 'Crosby Home', which might appropriately be undertaken by the women of our Churches thus relieving the present society of part of its burdens, leaving it free to employ all its energies and resources in purely evangelistic work.⁴⁷

The goals articulated by the women in the formation of their societies indicate that these women were motivated by a deep concern and sense of responsibility for mission work for women. The constitution of the Presbyterian WFMS stated that the organisation's objective was to

aid the Foreign Mission Committee or Board of Missions, by promoting its work among women and children of heathen lands and especially to raise the necessary funds for the support of Female missionaries in India and elsewhere.⁴⁸

The Methodist WMS constitution expressed this same evangelical concern:

The object of this society shall be to engage the efforts of Christian women in the evangelization of heathen women and children; to aid in sustaining female missionaries and teachers or other special laborers in connection with mission work, in the foreign and home field; and to raise funds for the work of the society.⁴⁹

The Presbyterian Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, as its name suggests, focused on foreign mission work. Interest in Canada, for the Presbyterian women, was limited to work among North West and British Columbia Indians. However, other Presbyterian women organised on a local basis

⁴⁷ The Story of the Years, p. 15.

⁴⁸ Woman's Foreign Missionary Society First Annual Report, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1877.

⁴⁹ Ninth Annual Report, Woman's Missionary Society, Methodist Church of Canada, 1889-90.

for home work. As early as 1889, the Minutes of Assembly of the North West Synod note that women were organising Women's Home Mission Societies in the West by widening the scope of the women's foreign mission work.⁵⁰ By the 1900s, there were several active individual female home mission societies, such as those in Orillia, Ontario and Toronto. It was not until 1903, however, that a formal and separate Presbyterian Women's Home Missionary Society was organised.

The roots of the Dominion-wide Presbyterian WHMS are found in the Atlin Nurse Committee. A Presbyterian missionary, R.M. Dickey, working in the Klondike, sent a letter to the Presbyterian Westminster in 1897 lamenting the failure of the Salvation Army in Canada's North and pointing to the successes of the Roman Catholics due to their hospital work. Dickey requested aid in obtaining trained nurses, for "the people are mostly too eager for gold to care for the sick."⁵¹ A meeting of interested Toronto women was held in March, 1898 at St. Andrew's Church and a committee was organised to cooperate with the Home Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church. In October of that same year, John Pringle, a missionary in Atlin, called for nurses. To meet the call the Toronto women formed the Atlin Nurse Committee and financed the sending of two nurses to

⁵⁰ Minutes of Assembly, Synod of North West, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1889.

⁵¹ The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 145.

the field.⁵²

By 1901, Dr. Robertson, Presbyterian Superintendent of Missions in the North West, was proposing legislation "which would put into the capable and experienced hands of the WFMS" the responsibility of frontier missions and churches, under the direction of the Home Mission Committee.⁵³ When this proposal was denied by the General Assembly, Robertson recommended the formation of a separate Women's Home Missionary Society; "nothing now remains but to organise a WHMS and in such a movement Toronto should take the lead."⁵⁴ A deputation from the Atlin Nurse Committee approached the Home Mission Committee of the Presbyterian Church in 1903, seeking permission to enlarge its sphere of operation. With the sanction of the Home Mission Committee and Toronto Presbytery, a Women's Home Mission Society was formed that year. Its express purpose was

to aid the Assembly's Home Mission Committee by undertaking nursing and hospital work at such points in the newer districts of the country as the committee may select, by engaging in any work of a kindred nature that the Committee may deem it advisable to have taken up and by co-operation with the Committee in raising funds for the general Home Mission work of the Church.⁵⁵

⁵² Ibid, p. 145.

⁵³ The Woman's Missionary Society in Manitoba, 1884-1959, The United Church of Canada, Winnipeg, 1959, p. 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 16.

⁵⁵ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 146.

For years the Presbyterian auxiliaries and even presbyterials in the West affiliated with both the WFMS and the WHMS. Proposals for the amalgamation of the two women's organisations were continually being made. In 1905 a communication was received by the WFMS from Reverend R.G. McBeth of Paris, Ontario that he had forwarded an overture from the Presbytery of Paris to the General Assembly.⁵⁶ The overture pressed for amalgamation of the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Societies. In 1907, a committee of the Assembly was established to consider the question and by 1910 the Foreign Mission Board approached the WFMS to "consider sympathetically" amalgamation of the two societies.⁵⁷ The plan came to fruition in 1914 with the merging of the WFMS and the WHMS into the Woman's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

The numbers of women participating in their respective female missionary societies increased dramatically within the first years of organisation. In 1882 the Methodist WMS had twenty auxiliaries with 900 members who raised \$2,916.78 for mission work.⁵⁸ By 1915 the number of auxiliaries had risen to 1229, with 43,221 members and receipts of over \$160,500. The Presbyterians had 26,184 members in 1899 with

⁵⁶ Woman's Foreign Missionary Society Annual Report, 1905-06, Presbyterian Church in Canada.

⁵⁷ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 147.

⁵⁸ W. Mitchinson, 'Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century', p.62.

expenditures of \$56,544. In 1915 their membership had risen to 36,367 in the WFMS alone with an income of \$104,000.⁵⁹

The relationship established by the two woman's missionary societies with the Presbyterian and Methodist Mission Boards indicates that the women were not motivated by a search for power within their respective church structures. The women recognised their dependence on the established male missionary organisations. The Presbyterian WFMS was auxiliary to the Foreign Mission committee of the General Assembly and "subject to the action of that Committee." They also, at all times, consciously sought "the counsel and co-operation of the Pastors of the Church."⁶⁰ The Methodist WMS was also subject to the approval of their Church's Mission Society and worked "in harmony with the authorities."⁶¹ The existing church missionary societies wanted to avoid any conflict of authority and the church itself felt that "to be of real service" it was essential that the men retain administrative and financial control. Church women accepted their auxiliary relation and appeared happy that they did not have the responsibility an independent organisation would bring:

⁵⁹ The Canadian Women's Annual and Social Service Directory, McClelland, Goodchild, and Stewart, Toronto, 1915.

⁶⁰ First Annual Report Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1877.

⁶¹ Annual Report, WMS, Methodist Church of Canada, 1910-11.

The position of this Society, as an auxiliary to the Foreign Mission Committee of our Church, affords us an excellent opportunity for doing work of a congenial kind. We are happily free from much responsibility which would be unavoidable in an independent organisation. There is nothing to do which ought to bring us before the public or which will interfere with the priceless possession 'of a meek and quiet spirit'⁶²....

Church authorities believed that by making the women's societies auxiliary any monies raised by the women would not simply be funds diverted from other, established, church programs. The executive of the WFMS suggested that each of its auxiliaries ensure that they would not interfere with any other mission work; "make no appeal that shall conflict with duties Church members owe to any other benevolent work."⁶³ What resulted was a dual system of giving on the part of church women. Money raised for female missionary projects was accomplished 'by additional self-denial', not by withdrawing funds from other schemes.

Unlike non-denominational charity organisations that raised funds through the largesse of their socially influential membership, the women's missionary societies operated largely on the basis of the small monthly contributions of its members. Both societies were maintained, in large part, by a one dollar membership fee and the systematic money-raising strategies of mite boxes

⁶² WFMS, Presbyterian Church in Canada, Fifth Annual Report, 1881.

⁶³ First Annual Report, WFMS, 1877.

and envelope contributions - one dollar per month, twelve dollars per year. This strategy made enormous sense. Many women did not have direct access to money. If there had been substantial fees, a majority of women would have been unable to participate. The small systematic givings also prevented the draining of funds from other operations. The WFMS and the WMS demonstrated a remarkable ability to raise money. Between one-quarter and one-third of all foreign mission funds raised, before union, in the Presbyterian Church were donated by the mission society women.⁶⁴ The money raised and the work it accomplished were evidence of the positive role women could play within the Church and a source of growing self-esteem for the women themselves.

Methodist and Presbyterian women recognised the evangelical nature of the mission work of their churches. The missionary society women believed that their special task was to bring the good news of Christianity to those 500 million females living in non-Christian countries.⁶⁵ Canadian church women perceived that foreign women were subjected, due to their religious and social customs, to an oppression they did not share. Thus, their efforts were concentrated on the education and conversion of other women. Their special concerns lent a distinctive feature to their

⁶⁴ J.S. Moir, Enduring Witness Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 179.

⁶⁵ "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition", Rosemary Skinner Keller in R. Ruether and R.S. Keller. eds., Women and Religion in America, p. 243.

task: 'woman's work for women'. The work among women of non-Christian lands and, eventually, among women in Canadian cities encompassed three primary goals: evangelistic work; education of women and girls in academic, industrial, and domestic schools; and medical care in hospitals and dispensaries built for and run by women. Social welfare was also an extension of female missionary society work, as can be seen by the budget appropriations made at the second annual meeting of the Methodist WMS:

1. \$2000.00 for support of two missionaries in Japan and aid for a proposed school for women.
2. \$600.00 for the French Mission work in Montreal.
3. \$200.00 for the McDougall Orphanage.
4. \$800.00 for the Crosby Girl's Home at Port Simpson.⁶⁶

The respective missionary societies followed the pattern of work in the foreign field established by the Foreign Mission Boards of their churches. The Presbyterians were active in central India, at Indore, with a boarding school for girls, opened in 1885 and, later, a widow's home.⁶⁷ Japan was the focus of attention of the Methodist women who sent Miss Cartmell to Tokyo in 1882 and established a school for girls two years later. A girl's school was opened in 1887 at Shidzouka and work among orphans and young children

⁶⁶ H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years, p. 49.

⁶⁷ C. Headon, "Women and Organised Religion in Mid and Late Nineteenth Century Canada", p. 9.

was begun in Korfu, Kanazawa, and Nagano.⁶⁸ Presbyterian women concentrated their remaining efforts in the north of China and Korea while the Methodist WMS worked in west China. In September 1892, Dr. Lucinda Graham became the first lady medical worker sent out, under the auspices of Presbyterian women, to Honan. The WFMS had also established a medical dispensary at Chu Wang by 1890.⁶⁹

Work in the home missions followed the same three-fold pattern of evangelism, education, and medical care. Canadian Indian boys and girls were given their first exposure to the Protestant faith while they were trained in agriculture and domestic arts at the Methodist Crosby Home for Indian Girls and in the McDougall Orphanage in Morley Alberta. By 1887, the Methodist women were supporting workers at Coqualeetza Institute in Chilliwack and the West End French Mission School and St. Theodore Mission in Montreal. They established another Girl's Home at Kitimat in 1894 and a Protestant Home for French children in Montreal in 1901.⁷⁰ Hospital work was carried on at Port Simpson, Hazelton, and Bella Bella, British Columbia as well as in Alberta at the Stoney Reserve near Morley. The members of the female missionary societies of both churches placed a good deal of emphasis on schooling for the young.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.10.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

⁷⁰ H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years, pp. 49, 98.

It was the schooling that was "to develop the character upon which Christian home and community life might be built."⁷¹

By the end of the nineteenth century the women's missionary societies of both churches, buoyed by their successes in established work, became more confident about initiating work of their own. During the year of 1886-87 several appeals had come to the WMS executive (one from Reverend J.E. Starr, working in Vancouver) to the effect that Chinese girls in British Columbia were being bought and sold by white men for 'immoral' purposes.⁷² Both the Methodist WMS and the Presbyterian WFMS recommended that their respective church Mission Boards petition the federal government about this 'atrociousness'. Methodist women quickly established a Chinese Rescue Home in Vancouver and, shortly after, their General Mission Board recommended that the WMS take over completely the Chinese work. This marked an important gain for women's societies; work that they themselves had initiated had, for the first time, been placed under their sole supervision.

Female missionary society volunteers also began to take a keener interest in better educational opportunities for both women abroad and their own female workers. There was a

⁷¹ The First Fifty Years, 1895-1945: The Training and Work of Women Employed in the Service of The United Church of Canada, Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers, The United Church Training School and the WMS of The United Church of Canada, n.d., p. 12.

⁷² H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years, p. 105.

growing desire to see an expansion of the roles and opportunities afforded to women within the church. Emphasis began to be placed on the training of indigenous female leaders and workers. Nurses' training schools, Bible Institutes, Normal Schools, and Women's Colleges were established in the foreign mission fields. Presbyterian women began "taking a deeper interest in young women offering their services to the Foreign Mission work."⁷³ In 1890, the WFMS assumed the responsibility of examining the applications of women candidates and accompanying successful applicants before the Foreign Mission Committee. The Methodist WMS also became involved in the training of Christian workers. They resolved, in 1893, that each female candidate for Christian work attend a Training Home. Methodist women established and administered a Rest Fund for retired missionaries (female) and established scholarships for women entering training.

Presbyterian missionary society women began to agitate for better working conditions for their women workers. They were deeply concerned with the high incidence of sickness among missionary women and felt it was due to overwork. The WFMS suggested legislation to the Mission Committee of their church that would regulate the hours of work, rest, and recreation for their missionaries.⁷⁴ A further example of

⁷³ Annual Report, WFMS, 1890-91.

⁷⁴ Annual Report, WFMS, 1892-93.

their growing identification with women-oriented issues occurred in 1891 when the WFMS pointed out to their Foreign Mission Committee an apparent case of gender discrimination:

In ... the arrangements for the provision of 'aged and infirm missionaries', ... it is not stated whether the provision for a single ordained or medical missionary (male), is the same as that for a married ordained or medical missionary (male). If the provision is the same ... the provision for a missionary or medical missionary (female) is only one-half the amount given to the single ordained or medical missionary (male).⁷⁵

An equally important aspect of the women's missionary society work, one which benefitted society members themselves, was the publication and dissemination of missionary material. The first order of business of the WFMS, in 1876, was the collection of eleven letters from missionary wives and female missionaries and the distribution of those letters to their women's auxiliaries.

Unless direct communication was at once established with missionaries in the foreign field, the interest so recently and so thoroughly awakened in the minds of our Canadian ladies ... would speedily pass away.⁷⁶

By 1884, at the third meeting of the Methodist WMS, the value of missionary leaflets was recognised and the executive began to supply missionary literature to all of its auxiliaries. A woman was appointed in 1886 to edit a section of the Methodist Missionary Outlook devoted to women's work. Two years later a specific Literature and

⁷⁵ Annual Report, WFMS, 1891-92.

⁷⁶ W. Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies in the Nineteenth Century", p. 70.

Publication Committee was established. One of the many reasons women's mission work expanded so rapidly among Canadian women was due to the effectiveness of these publications.

Monthly letters, program leaflets, and booklets, were written

to stimulate the world-thought of the present missionary day, to quicken spiritual life, to enlarge mental vision, and to press the obligation of Christian stewardship upon our members.⁷⁷

In a society which discouraged women from attaining an education, missionary publications served another purpose. Church women were provided with an excellent opportunity to widen their intellectual horizons by learning about other cultures and different political systems. The missionary journals also provided a means of communication which strengthened women's sense of identification with each other. The journals also gave expression to the religious commitment Canadian women felt toward their counterparts in foreign countries. "Let every lady, who feels that she would be a missionary, go to work at home; and she may, by every dollar raised, teach her heathen sisters."⁷⁸

The Methodist WMS appears to have met with little resistance in expanding its mission work and experienced few difficulties with its church boards in asserting its

⁷⁷ H.L. Platt, The Story of the Years, p. 136.

⁷⁸ Wide Windows, pp 30, 31.

independence. Presbyterian women, however, were often faced with enormous difficulties when seeking support for their work. The attitudes of the women in the two organisations appear to have had a different emphasis. The independent thrust of the Methodist Woman's Missionary Society is exemplified by their hearty endorsement of the National Council of Women in 1892.⁷⁹ The Presbyterian Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, however, declined the invitation to affiliate; "we as a society, were auxiliary to the Foreign Mission Committee of our Church and could not, or rather should not, affiliate with the National Council of Women."⁸⁰ The more conservative nature of the Presbyterian women may have been due to their need to defend the work of their society to their own church.

Fears were expressed at the very formation of the WFMS that church finances and programs would suffer as a result of its organisation.⁸¹ In 1893, the Presbyterian Church experienced a serious financial deficit. Some clergy and laymen blamed the deficit on the woman's society.⁸² In 1895, the WFMS asked the Foreign Mission Committee to publish an official statement outlining its auxiliary relation to that

⁷⁹ Annual Report WMS, Methodist Church of Canada, 1892.

⁸⁰ Eighteenth Annual Report, WFMS, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1893-94.

⁸¹ First Annual Report, WFMS, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1877

⁸² Eighteenth Annual Report, WFMS, 1893-94.

Committee and the General Assembly due to "many unwarranted statements from Church ministers and others" about WFMS budget allocations.⁸³ By the turn of the century, when the WFMS was agitating to revise its constitution to embrace home mission work,

statements were made which would have been more or less injurious to our work had we not been in a position to refute them. The accusation of 'disloyalty' to our country could only have been made by one unacquainted with the nature and extent of our work.⁸⁴

The fears expressed by the clergy were not just directed at the Presbyterian women but at all lay organisations engaged in church work. However, this fear of competition expressed by the ministers, was particularly difficult for women's societies. Unlike laymen, women had no other route to full participation in the church. The only way women could fulfill their call to mission work was through their own societies. Any threat to these societies was, therefore, much more difficult for women to accept and handle.

The female missionary societies of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches offered thousands of Canadian women an opportunity to utilise their intellect and abilities. No other Canadian women's organisation incorporated so many workers on such a large scale. In 1916, of the 250,000

⁸³ Nineteenth Annual Report, WFMS, 1894-95.

⁸⁴ Twenty-Sixth Annual Report, WFMS, 1901-02.

Canadian women who belonged to national organisations, 200,000 were members of the various denominational women's missionary societies.⁸⁵ These societies provided a source of identification for their members. They expanded women's ideas about the world they lived in and the role women might play within it. Women, for the first time, were provided with avenues of service outside their homes. Within these societies women created 'bonds of sisterhood' with other Canadian women and with women all over the world. Thousands of women gained administrative and leadership abilities that they would utilise in other organisations and in the workforce.

Missionary societies were not just beneficial to their individual members. They furthered women's involvement in Canadian society and expanded women's role within the church; "[n]o longer were women simply housekeepers of the Church, but minor administrators; no longer workers for male missionary groups, but almost full partners."⁸⁶ They had begun as 'helpmates' and expanded their work in the church. They laid the groundwork and gave impetus to the acceptance of paid female church workers. Their efforts to create a larger role for themselves within the church made them a part of the larger feminist effort which agitated for a

⁸⁵ M. MacMurchy, The Woman - Bless Her: Not as Amiable a Book as it Sounds, S.B. Gundy, Toronto, 1916, p. 12.

⁸⁶ W. Mitchinson, "Canadian Women and Church Missionary Societies",

wider sphere of influence and responsibility for women in Canadian society.

Chapter III

WOMEN

Deaconesses were the first female professional layworkers to work in Canada for the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. They were an integral part of the Protestant social reform movement, particularly because they translated Social Gospel ideology into concrete programs of relief. Working within an urban setting, deaconesses extended the church's mission to the poor, the homeless, the unemployed, and the immigrant. However, female church workers faced the same difficulties with the church as did their volunteer counterparts. Questions of status and recognition, and the relation of the deaconess to the church hierarchy were important aspects of the development of the female diaconate.⁸⁷

The antecedents of the deaconess movement are found in biblical times. The title 'deaconess' is a modern version of the Greek word 'diakonessa' or 'servant'. There are references to the role of the deaconess in Scripture (Romans

⁸⁷ John D. Thomas, "Servants of the Church: Canadian Methodist Deaconess Work, 1890-1926", pp. 371-395, Canadian Historical Review, Vol 65, 1984. This article came to my attention after this chapter was written. I do not agree with Thomas's contention that "deaconess work attests to the misspent energies" of maternal feminism. This argument is also found in Diane Haglund's "Side Road on the Journey to Autonomy", Women, Work and Worship.

16:1, Timothy 13:11). It appears that these women performed an active role in the 'ministry of mercy': the care of the poor and the sick; the instruction of female converts for baptism; and the dispensing of the sacrament to women. This female ministry was largely unofficial and private until the third century. At this time, the duties of the female diaconate were clearly defined and the deaconess became part of the ecclesiastical structure of the Christian church.⁸⁸

Although important and numerous in the Eastern Orthodox Church, the female diaconate never became popular in the Western or Roman Church. By the sixth century the deaconess order was in decline. As a result of the influences of asceticism and the limiting of functions for women within society, religiously-oriented women entered convents and many deaconesses became abbesses.⁸⁹ Several tenth and eleventh century pontificals mention the rites of establishment of the deaconess but, by the end of the eleventh century, the female diaconate ceased to exist.

For some seven hundred years women had few official religious functions outside the convent. English puritans may have utilised widows as deaconesses in the seventeenth century. A Puritan congregation in Amsterdam in 1608

⁸⁸ H. Dwight, H. Tupper, E. Bliss, The Encyclopedia of Missions, Funk and Wagnalls, New York, 2nd ed, 1904, p. 206.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 206, see also M. L. McKenna, Women of the Church: Role and Renewal, P. J. Kennedy and Sons, New York, 1967, p. 65.

selected "one ancient widow" who "usually sat in a convenient place in the congregation with a little birchen rod in her hand, and kept little children in great awe."⁹⁰ It was not until the eighteenth century, a period of renewed interest in missions, that the Protestant Church again found a need to create an active role for women. This change in church life created a revolution in the opportunities accorded to women within the church. Women were once again drawn into active service, caring, healing, and teaching, as the Church turned its concerns outwards to society.

The first organised revival of an order of Protestant deaconesses occurred in the nineteenth century under the direction of Theodore Fliedner.⁹¹ Concerned with the effects of industrialisation on his congregation and the lack of provision for the sick and the poor, Fliedner established a hospital at Kaiserwerth, Germany in 1832. The seven women he trained to perform both nursing functions in the hospital and spiritual and benevolent work in the community Fliedner titled deaconesses. The movement quickly spread to France, Holland, Italy, and the Far East. As early as 1849, Fliedner travelled with four deaconesses to America in an attempt to establish a Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouse in Pittsburgh. The first venture failed and not until 1884 was the first Deaconess movement established in the United

⁹⁰ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 149.

⁹¹ H. Dwight, The Encyclopedia of Missions, p. 207.

States.⁹² The American Methodist Church established its own Deaconess Order four years later. It was this order, under the direction of Lucy Rider Meyer at the Chicago Training School, which provided the example and the impetus for the establishment of similar orders in Canada.⁹³

By 1890 a handful of Canadian clergymen and women began agitating for the establishment of the office of deaconess in the Presbyterian and Methodist churches. They hoped the office would establish a vocation for women who wished to serve the church in Canada. Mary Daniels, in The Methodist Magazine and Review, wrote; "[t]he time is fast approaching when the organised benevolent work of women must have a recognised place in the economy of the Church."⁹⁴ That same year Methodist General Conference was memorialised by Toronto and Montreal Conferences "to legislate for the establishment of a Sisterhood", and also by the Conferences of Bay of Quinte and Niagara.⁹⁵ The Methodist Conference, although "feeling the importance of a more definite recognition of women's work" recommended that each Annual Conference could, "if deemed desirable", legislate for "a systematic organization of consecrated women as will give them an official relation to the Church, similar to the

⁹² Ibid, p. 207.

⁹³ R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin, ed, Women of Spirit,

⁹⁴ Women Work and Worship p. 216.

⁹⁵ Third General Conference Minutes, Methodist Church of Canada, 1890.

Order of Deaconesses in the primitive Church."⁹⁶ Methodist General Conference, while approving of the establishment of a Deaconess Order, felt that the time was not yet ripe. Conference expressed the belief, one that would become a recurring theme in its dealings with women, that Canadian society was not yet ready to have females employed in the work of the church. Referring the issue to the Committee on the State of the Work, they said:

[B]eing in fullest sympathy with the employment of women in the work of the Church and knowing that every encouragement is given for the exercise of their talents in promoting the work of God [the Conference] is persuaded that the time has not come, in this country, for the establishment of an order of Deaconesses.⁹⁷

A Methodist minister, A.M. Phillips, then turned to a handful of Toronto Methodist Church women to seek their help in establishing a Deaconess Order in Canada. A connection was established with Lucy Rider Meyer's Methodist Deaconess Home in Chicago. Young women had been working in Methodist missions as early as 1876. However, Canada lacked the training facilities and these women had to be sent to a Methodist Deaconess Training Institute in New York. To remedy this situation, and without waiting for official church sanction, these Toronto Methodist women established a Deaconess Aid Society in 1893.⁹⁸ Not until May, 1894 was a

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ H. E. Heffren, "The Ministries of Women in The United Church as Seen Against Their Historical Background", B.D.

Methodist Deaconess Home and Training School established.⁹⁹ The first three principals of this Training Home were women graduates from Meyer's Chicago Home. The Training School was established with the express purpose of establishing a Deaconess Order in Canada. However, the Methodist General Conference only officially recognised a 'Deaconess Society' which was essentially a Board of Management for the Deaconess Training Home. In 1895 the first three women were designated as Methodist deaconesses.¹⁰⁰

Presbyterian women, specifically the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, also took the initiative in establishing a training center for female church workers. In 1893 the WFMS discussed the matter of utilising a proposed non-denominational Deaconess Home but felt at that time a training school was of no use to their workers.¹⁰¹ Four years later, the WFMS provided the impetus for the opening of the Ewart Missionary Training Home as a school for female missionary candidates only.¹⁰² The Ewart Home remained under the auspices of the WFMS and in 1901 was unofficially (that is without Church sanction) broadened in scope to include

Thesis, Union College of British Columbia, 1965, p.62.

⁹⁹ The First Fifty Years, p. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Journal of the Methodist General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1895.

¹⁰¹ Annual Report, Presbyterian Woman's Foreign Missionary Society, 1893-94.

¹⁰² Annual Report, WFMS, 1897-98.

women training for church work at home.

[I]t is hoped that this practical training will have fitted and prepared the students to make the Deaconess work a success, so that we may look forward to the time when the Ewart Home Deaconess (or Bible-Woman) will be in such request that the work may not be confined to the city of Toronto, but that they may be sent far and wide in Canada, wherever there are congregations recognizing the value of this form of service, and willing to avail themselves of it.¹⁰³

In effect they had organised a Deaconess Order that was independent of Church policy.

In 1904, the WFMS approached the executive of the Foreign Missionary Committee requesting that the Ewart Home be made "a more recognized institution of the Church." These women also requested that a joint committee be established by the General Assembly to officially "enlarge the scope of the Ewart Home."¹⁰⁴ However, it was not until the General Assembly received an overture from the Presbyterian Synod of Manitoba in 1907, asking for the establishment of a Deaconess Order, that they acted. The overture asked the General Assembly "to take steps to set apart an order of women who shall be known as deaconesses; who shall serve the Church as nurses, parish visitors, dispensers of charity and in any other way that may prove to be desirable."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Annual Report, WFMS, 1901.

¹⁰⁴ Annual Report, WFMS, 1904-05.

¹⁰⁵ Record of Proceedings, Presbyterian Synod of Manitoba, 1908-09.

The General Assembly established a Committee on an Order of Deaconesses to confer on the question. The Committee included four representatives from the Women's Home Missionary Society and other Church Committees, but no representatives from the WFMS appear to have been included. The Committee report, which included a history of the service of deaconesses, made constant reference to 'deaconess work'. It suggested that women's care of the poor and the sick and their other benevolent work had always existed in the Church.¹⁰⁶ The Committee proposed to formalise this service by instituting an Order of Deaconesses. In 1909 directions were issued for the establishment of a Presbyterian Deaconess Order. The Ewart Home became the Ewart Missionary and Deaconess Training Home. At this time, control of the training school and the deaconess order was taken away from the WFMS and put in the hands of a, predominantly male, Board of Management. This Board became the Deaconess Board of the Presbyterian Church in Canada.¹⁰⁷

The Presbyterian Order of Deaconesses was "to consist of women trained for the service and devoting their whole time thereto" and of other "godly women of mature years."¹⁰⁸ To

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Deaconess Society Report, Methodist Church of Canada, 1912-13.

gain admittance for training, interested women applied to their respective Church Deaconess Board, upon recommendation of the Training School Superintendent. Prospective deaconesses were to be single, between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five, in excellent physical health, with a University Matriculation or its equivalent in a Nursing Diploma or Teaching Certificate, and a member in good standing of a Methodist or Presbyterian congregation. The majority of applicants appear to have been daughters of either ministers or women's society members. All had a strong Christian family background and responded to their church's call for 'Christian commitment' in the same way their brothers would respond to the call of the ministry.¹⁰⁹ A majority of applicants came from a rural or small-town background. Many came from Ontario communities such as Vineland, Brantford, Windsor, and Strathroy.¹¹⁰ It seems safe to assume that most deaconesses came from middle class homes because monetary provision had to be made for training and board and with little or no remuneration after graduation only the family with extra money could help to support a deaconess daughter.

All deaconess candidates were required to reside at the Training School and Home where they paid four dollars per

¹⁰⁹ "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition", Rosemary Skinner Keller in Women and Religion in America, p. 247.

¹¹⁰ Annual Report, WMS, Methodist Church of Canada, 1924.

week for room, board, fuel, and light.¹¹¹ Residence in a Deaconess Home remained compulsory even after the training was completed, which led to the establishment of Deaconess Homes in cities such as Winnipeg where deaconesses were working. One reason for the policy of compulsory residence was the assumption that single women would find it difficult to find suitable room and board.

The regulations for students in residence must have struck more than a few adult women candidates as unnecessarily restrictive. Each deaconess or student was subordinate to and directed by the Superintendent of each Home. Each woman was required "to give such portion of each day to practical household work as the Superintendent may direct." Each was to bring her own "towels, napkin ring, toilet and laundry soap, also kitchen aprons, rubbers, raincoat and umbrella." Students were admonished to take care of any necessary dental work, shopping, or dressmaking before beginning their training so "that studies may not be interrupted by these matters." Social life was equally restrictive. Social calls were received on Friday evenings only and students and deaconesses were given Sunday evening and one other evening a week to spend outside the confines of the home.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Deaconess Society Report, Methodist Church of Canada, 1912.

¹¹² Ibid.

Once the students completed their prescribed course and passed their exams, a certificate was issued and the deaconess was placed on two years probation. Upon completion of the probationary service, deaconesses were fully designated as members of the Deaconess Society or Order at a specific church service. The Methodist deaconesses received their license with the words "[t]ake thou authority to discharge the duties of a Deaconess in the Methodist Church."¹¹³ No vow of perpetual service was asked for and deaconesses were expected to withdraw if they married. The church reflected the general public's attitude that a woman's work in the home was her primary career. This prohibited women remaining in a profession after marriage. Presbyterian deaconesses were designated by their local presbyteries and it was made clear that "such designation is not, however, to be regarded as an ordination."¹¹⁴ Presbyterian deaconesses were appointed to their work on a yearly basis. The appointments were made in conjunction with the wishes of the deaconess and no restrictions were placed on length of service in any one appointment.¹¹⁵ Methodist deaconess stationing was done in a more arbitrary fashion, without consultation, by the Deaconess Board. These deaconesses could remain at a

¹¹³ Journal of the General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada,

¹¹⁴ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 149.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1910.

station for a maximum of three years, a rule which probably made it more difficult for Methodist women to view the diaconate as their life's work. This policy was finally amended in 1918 and brought in line with Presbyterian practice.¹¹⁶

A uniform was compulsory and in the Methodist Church consisted of "a dark navy blue cravenette dress, serge cloak, bonnet with white silk ties, and linen turn-over collar and cuffs."¹¹⁷ It is interesting to note that deaconesses, who had to wear the uniform, were allowed no choice in its appearance. This was a task for the Deaconess Aid Society, which paid a great deal of attention to creating the proper 'lady-like' image.

With maintenance in a Deaconess Home assured, there was little need for remuneration. "No salaries shall be paid, the work of the Deaconess being done for the love of Christ, and in His name."¹¹⁸ Methodist deaconesses received a small personal allowance every month and a Rest and Relief Fund was established to provide for those deaconesses unable to work due to ill-health or retirement. Presbyterian deaconesses, however, received a salary "based upon what is necessary for comfort and health and for making provision

¹¹⁶ Journal of the General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1918.

¹¹⁷ Deaconess Society Annual Report, Methodist Church of Canada, 1912.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

for age."¹¹⁹ In 1908 the salary was \$360 per year and by 1919 had risen to \$960. Comparatively, a trained nurse earned \$15 per month in 1889 and up to \$1600 per year in 1929. Female teachers earned between \$225 and \$675 in 1900.¹²⁰ Methodist and Presbyterian ministers received from \$750 to \$4000 plus manse in 1906.¹²¹ The meagerness of the Methodist deaconess allowance and retirement maintenance often placed deaconesses close to poverty. One deaconess wrote:

I do not believe it possible that a Deaconess could live on the allowance in the West and be absolutely comfortable in her own mind as to appearances I have not begun to live on my allowance yet.¹²²

However, when the Methodist Church began to pay salaries of thirty dollars per month in 1918, the motivation was their fear of losing women candidates to other types of work that paid a decent salary. This opinion was clearly expressed by one minister who employed a deaconess:

There are now, moreover, many fields of service in humanitarian endeavour for young women, many paying excellent salaries, and the supply of Deaconess students may be seriously impaired unless steps are taken to make the Deaconess self-supporting.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1908.

¹²⁰ Women at Work, Ontario, 1850-1930, Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974, p. 194.

¹²¹ Silcox, Church Union in Canada, p. 157.

¹²² All People's Mission, Winnipeg, papers. United Church Archives.

¹²³ Ibid.

Deaconess education at the Training School was to prepare the candidate for her difficult role as evangelist, social worker, teacher and nurse. All deaconesses received the same education no matter where they would be working - in a congregation, mission, or charity organisation. The purpose of the school was "to furnish Biblical and practical training" for young women who expected "to enter city, home, or foreign mission fields."¹²⁴ The original course of study in both churches was seven months but this was soon extended to a two year program when it became apparent deaconess education had to keep in step with expanding opportunities in secular education for women in nursing, teaching, and social work.¹²⁵ With the addition of second year courses, the training school was able to offer a combination of theoretical and practical instruction. Because students had no independent faculty for their theoretical studies, they either attended classes with theological students or were lectured by church college theological staff at the Training School.

Although during the two-year program the deaconess candidate's primary business was to study, she was involved each day in domestic work around the Home to gain "a practical knowledge of housework."¹²⁶ There were social

¹²⁴ Deaconess Society Report, Methodist Church of Canada, 1912.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

excursions for observation of Sunday Schools and missions. Candidates also did some practical nursing in hospitals and taught regularly in missions and Sunday Schools. During the summer, most deaconess students worked in city missions, for both pay and experience.

The first year course of study was primarily in religious subject matter. Students studied Bible history and geography in both the Old and New Testaments, Christian Doctrine (Methodist or Presbyterian), Church and Mission history, the life of Christ, and church laws. For general cultural enrichment, they studied English literature and composition, General history, public speaking, sewing, household science, and physical education. Students also attended lectures in sociology and Applied Christianity, economics, social science, teaching, child development and psychology, methods of evangelism, temperance, relief work, and studies of social reform. Each student was expected to have a basic grounding in elementary and preventative medicine and, therefore, studied anatomy, physiology, childhood diseases, hygiene and public health, and obstetrics.¹²⁷

The reading course, outside the basic biblical texts, gives an interesting insight into the philosophy behind the work of the deaconess. Some of the works included in the

¹²⁷ Journal of the General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1898.

study program were:

Mary Richmond's Social Diagnosis

Breckenridge and Abbott's The Delinquent Child and the Home

Towne's Social Problems

Healey's The Individual Delinquent

Trew's Boyhood and Lawlessness and the Neglected Girl,

as well as, Canadian Civics, His Dominion, and The Education of our Canadians.

Most of the reading material contained a critique of society and expressed the belief that some fundamental social changes must occur before the individual could be improved.

Mary Richmond's Social Diagnosis was a pioneering volume in social case work.¹²⁸ She believed that a "sympathetic study of the individual in his social environment" was an integral part of charity work. Richmond also promoted preventative measures that would put people "above the need of relief: campaigns for better housing and health of the people, child labor reform, industrial legislation, the recreation movement, the mental hygiene movement." Deaconess students exposed to the thought of Mary Richmond began their work with a belief in "the interdependence of individual and mass betterment" and a belief that "social reform and social case work must of necessity progress together."

¹²⁸ Mary Richmond, Social Diagnosis, The Free Press, New York, 1965 ed.

Breckinridge and Abbott's book stressed the importance of helping children (and all individuals) within the context of their family and neighborhood. The authors believed "the only way of curing delinquency is to prevent it." The Delinquent Child and the Home stressed the importance of civic responsibility in improving the physical environment of every child and the necessity of a family support network for those families with perceived social difficulties.¹²⁹ Social Problems suggested that unemployment, poor housing, and difficult working conditions and poor wages were the causes of much social dislocation.¹³⁰ The book also contained a critique of the existing industrial system and advocated a change in attitude toward individual poverty.

This type of education exemplified a significant change in the church's attitude toward society. The churches had practiced, as had society, a kind of benevolent paternalism, rooted in individual redemption, which laid the blame for social failure squarely on the individual. With exposure to these kinds of critical ideas, deaconesses were placed in the forefront of the social reform thinking of their day.

¹²⁹ S.P. Breckinridge and E. Abbott, The Delinquent Child and the Home, Wm. F. Fell Company, Philadelphia, 1912.

¹³⁰ E. T. Towne, Social Problems, A Study of Present-Day Social Conditions, The MacMillan Company, New York, 1910.

The churches viewed their deaconess movements as an extension of their mission to society. Deaconesses ministered to the neediest at home and their work became a reflection of Christ's 'ministry of mercy'. They became one of the church's key resources in the work of 'Christianising' and 'Canadianising' the immigrants who came to Canada. The work of the deaconess is described in this excerpt from the Methodist Deaconess Society General Rules:

The duties of the Deaconesses are to minister to the poor, visit the sick, pray for the dying, care for the orphan, seek the wandering, comfort the sorrowing, labor to save the sinning, and devote themselves fully to such forms of Christian work as may be suited to their abilities.¹³¹

The major focus of deaconess work was in the inner-city missions. However, they also established schools, industrial homes, orphanages, Redemptive Homes (for unwed mothers), charitable institutions, settlement houses, hospitals, and churches for the poor. Work in the inner-city presented not only a fundamental change in the direction of the work of the Church but, for the women involved, a radical break from their middle-class past. Deaconess work in the urban areas was directed toward the women and children of immigrant families. It focused on the three main areas established by the woman's missionary societies: evangelism; education; and medical assistance. Florence Bradley, a deaconess at Winnipeg's All Peoples'

¹³¹ Deaconess Society Report, Methodist Church of Canada, 1912.

Mission in 1911, described her work in this way:

For the Juniors we have classes in sewing, kitchen garden, gymnasium work and swimming. These classes are just as popular as ever among the children and the attendance increases week by week. Recognizing the fact that character is not developed in a day, and that the seed sown does not take root and mature without care, we are aiming to work with the same children year by year as far as possible. As the children graduate from these classes we enroll them in our Girls' Clubs. Every Monday evening we have our story hour club, when we use the large hall as a recreation room where the girls enjoy marches, drills, stories, games, music, and some physical culture exercises. The 'Friendly Girls' Club' meets every Wednesday evening. The girls come direct from their work to the Club. Supper is served at 6:30 and later classes are held in music, fancy-work, dressmaking, millinery, shorthand, English, and in swimming. Our library is a very important feature of our work. From this we loan approximately 300 books a month. With every confidence in Him whom we serve we look hopefully into the future with the conviction that with the help of old and new friends we may realize some of the aims we have in view for our girls.¹³²

Deaconesses were primarily concerned with evangelisation efforts among families and directed their work toward conversion. House to house visitations were made to bring new families into the Methodist or Presbyterian fold. The classes and clubs that operated out of the missions and settlement houses served the dual purpose of religious instruction and education.

Deaconesses did not ignore the fact that the basic needs of food and work had first to be met if spiritual conversion was going to occur. Therefore, they were also social

¹³² All Peoples' Mission Papers, United Church Archives, Winnipeg.

workers and teachers. Unlike foreign missionaries whose only interest was their evangelical mission, deaconesses saw themselves also meeting the needs of immigrant families through charity and social aid. As the earliest Canadian social workers, their family visiting was also done in an attempt to meet the individual needs of the area families. It was deaconesses who established the Fresh Air Camp Movement in 1901 as an extension of their social concern. The basic impetus behind the camp movement was the desire to alleviate the damaging effects of the urban environment on children and to provide rest and respite for city mothers. A mission deaconess explained the purpose of the Camp in a 1908 Mission Report:

Four parties were entertained during the month. The first week the party was composed of members of the girls' club. There were girls with whom we were anxious to get into closer touch and to find out something of their inner life as we could not in class work. The next party were boys. They were all foreigners whose homes we had visited but who had never attended the Mission. We were anxious to secure them for our fall classes. In addition, we had some six or eight children who remained with us during the entire time. These were children whose parents were dead, in the hospital or jails, and who had no home to go to. ... An hour or two each day was spent in putting into practice kitchen garden methods, and even the boys enjoyed their lessons in bed-making, dish washing, etc. The balance of the day went all too quickly in the woods gathering flowers and picking berries, or in playing baseball, flying kites, or on the swings, and in many other ways in which boys and girls find amusement. In the quiet hours we found time to gather around the organ and sing patriotic songs or gospel hymns, teach the Lord's Prayers and Ten Commandments, and tell over and over the stories of Moses and David, of Ruth and Esther, and talk about Jesus, the children's Friend. We hope these children have returned to their homes not only stronger in body, but with

purser thoughts, and with aspirations ever directed toward that which is good.¹³³

Deaconesses seem to have expressed little interest in women's rights, concerning themselves more with raising the standard of living of poorer families. They believed that, by comparison to many immigrant women, Canadian women enjoyed a richer private and public life. Their attempts to improve the lot of females was done for its own sake, "because the lives of women were of value in themselves."¹³⁴

The teaching responsibilities of the deaconesses were carried out mainly through the city missions and settlement houses. They provided practical domestic training as well as academic training for the young, and religious education for all ages. Deaconesses worked with younger girls in sewing, cooking, and garden classes. Mother's Club were established not only for their social benefits but to help women learn the English their husbands acquired in the work force. Arthur O. Rose of All Peoples' wrote of the impact the work of the deaconess had among immigrant women:

No more telling tribute to her work could I give than the words of an old Polish woman whom I visited yesterday after her return from Gimli. I saw as I entered that the remembrance of a hard winter and summer were gone, and her heart was full of hope. "And", she said after telling me all about it, "I never expected to meet in my life so kind and good a young woman."¹³⁵

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ "Lay Women in the Protestant Tradition", Rosemary Skinner Keller in Women and Religion in America, p. 249.

Deaconesses also encouraged older working girls to consider the inner-city mission as a more positive form of after-hours recreation. Classes were operated in dress-making, music, and gymnastics; social and literary clubs were formed. Classes were also held in stenography skills and English-language skills.

Deaconesses were vocal proponents of compulsory education, believing that education was the key to improvement for first-generation Canadian children. As one Deaconess stated:

What seems a shame to this city is that so many of these little foreign girls are made the burden bearers of the family. Instead of being at school or protected in the home they may be found along the river or railroad tracks gathering driftwood, which they carry away in bags on their backs. Many times their backs are bent with the weight of their load. Cannot something be done to remedy this?¹³⁶

Deaconesses also served established city churches as congregational workers. One deaconess wrote, of her work with a church congregation; "[m]y duties partake of more than half a dozen well established professions." They devoted their time to congregational visiting, Sunday School work, and young peoples classes such as the Canadian Girls in Training. They also assisted the local minister wherever possible. The Principal of the Presbyterian Training Home

¹³⁵ Annual Report, WMS of the Methodist Church of Canada, 1914-15.

¹³⁶ Annual Report, WMS of the Methodist Church of Canada, 1908-09.

in the twenties, Miss Macdonald, outlined the three forms of service deaconess congregational work usually took:

First. The work of the Church office when no secretary is employed, including the Keeping of Communion Roll and records.

Second. Much visiting can be acceptably done by the deaconess and reported to the Minister as there is need. This is the very heart of deaconess work. Visiting in the name of the Church, to her is opened many a need of body, mind, and spirit. ... She is in contact with need: with the sick, the aged, little children, girls at the difficult age, young women away from home, the indifferent, the detached from Church connections.

Third. The work of Religious Education, particularly in relation to girls and young women, is imperatively part of the modern deaconess's work. Her part may be largely Teacher Training and the development of potential voluntary workers. Further, as she knows well the whole organization of the Church, she is better able to help those with whom she comes in contact to find their place of self-expression in the Church's work.¹³⁷

Deaconesses also became involved in the expanding city social services. Most larger cities had a Deaconess-at-Large who worked with Associated Charities or Childrens' Aid. Many deaconesses became involved in Juvenile Court work and did a great deal of probationary work with juvenile offenders. By the twenties, Presbyterian deaconesses were receiving training under the auspices of the Social Service Board of the Church. Many were graduates of the Social Service Faculty of the University of Toronto.¹³⁸ These deaconesses undertook the work of moral

¹³⁷ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 151.

¹³⁸ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1912.

and social reform, including temperance, suppression of gambling, campaigns against 'personal, social, and political impurity' and white slavery, and prison and redemptive work.¹³⁹ They also lobbied for the securing and enforcement of laws designed to improve existing social conditions: better public housing legislation; improvements in sanitation regulations; improved public health standards; milk depots; and various other reform issues.

By 1912 there were fifty-one full time deaconesses at work in the Presbyterian Church and thirty-two students in training.¹⁴⁰ The Methodists had seventy-seven deaconesses working throughout Canada. They were employed in the following Methodist Conferences: Toronto, 21 ; Hamilton, 5 ; Bay of Quinte, 2 ; Montreal, 8 ; Nova Scotia, 3 ; Manitoba, 9 ; Saskatchewan, 2 ; Alberta, 1 ; and British Columbia, 4 ; with the remainder on temporary leave.¹⁴¹

In spite of the enormous importance of the work of the deaconess, she was no more independent in her relation to the Church than she was in her salary or living arrangements. She was not an official of either the Methodist or Presbyterian Churches but a member of a lay

¹³⁹ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1913.

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1912.

¹⁴¹ Journal of the Methodist General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1914.

movement in the service of that church. In the Methodist Church, the Deaconess Home Board of Management, consisting of seven ministers, seven laymen, and seven church women, had the responsibility of overseeing the Deaconess Society. The Board was to foster the interests of the Deaconess Order, conduct the training school, promote the establishment of Deaconess institutions, and ensure adequate maintenance for designated deaconesses.¹⁴² Provisions were also made for the establishment of Deaconess Aid Societies where deaconesses worked. These female aid societies were to help in the provision of funds and equipment and were often responsible for the furnishing and maintenance of Deaconess Homes.

It was not until 1908 that the Deaconess Society became an official part of Methodist national structure and not until 1922 was the official label 'Deaconess Order' brought into use and mentioned in the Methodist Discipline.¹⁴³ Prior to this, the entire deaconess program, including provisions for deaconess homes and training schools, Rest Funds, remuneration, and designation, was outlined without use of an official title. Deaconesses at work were under the direction and superintendency of a local Church minister or the local Conference Board. In the Presbyterian Church the

¹⁴² Journal of Proceedings, Methodist General Conference, 1904.

¹⁴³ H.E. Heffren, "The Ministeries of Women in The United Church", p. 62.

relation of deaconesses to the Church was through the Ewart Home Board of Management, which was the Deaconess Board of the Church. Deaconesses had no representation on this Board.

In 1904 one representative deaconess became an ex-officio member of the Board of Management of the Deaconess Home, along with the Superintendent of the Training School.¹⁴⁴ In 1910 the Deaconess Movement Committee recommended to the Methodist General Conference that Superintendents and deaconesses should become members of the Quarterly Official Boards where they were stationed.¹⁴⁵ No action was taken on this recommendation until 1921, but even this move did not give deaconesses access to the courts of the Church. Also, the action of the Methodists in 1918 in endorsing the Deaconess movement as a denominational institution did little to raise their status. In the Presbyterian Church, an overture from the Presbytery of Regina in 1922 suggested Assembly give deaconesses representation in their Church courts.¹⁴⁶ The committee that was appointed to consider the matter sent the question down to presbyteries with the suggestion of exploring "the whole question of how best to bring to bear on church work the view-point of women."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Journal of Proceedings, Methodist General Conference, 1904.

¹⁴⁵ Journal of Proceedings, 1910.

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1922.

The question was held over due to church union negotiations with the Methodists. Neither church believed it necessary to give the deaconess movement anything more than connexional recognition. Thus, the Deaconess Order remained outside the Church hierarchies.

While the work and worth of the deaconess grew steadily in repute, questions about her status within the church and official recognition of the importance of her ministry led her into conflicts with the church hierarchy. Was the deaconess part of the clergy or the laity? Even those church members in favor of some form of clerical recognition for deaconesses were careful to state that deaconesses were not ordained and that their work was a special sphere of service "for women only". The deaconess was seen as part of the 'Ministry of Mercy' separate from but equal to the 'Ministry of the Word' or preaching.

The Deaconess movement also suffered from serious financial difficulties, due entirely to its connexional status. A 1918 request to the Methodist Church to place the maintenance of the Training School under the direction of the Education Society, as were the other theological schools of the church, was denied.¹⁴⁸ A 1922 proposal to include the Deaconess work in the proposed 'benefit' or fund-raising

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Journal of Proceedings, Methodist General Conference, 1918.

project for church departments was similarly denied.¹⁴⁹

A 1914 memorial from a number of active deaconesses asked that provisions be made "to recognize the deaconesses and place the order under the direction of the Annual Conference."¹⁵⁰ Deaconesses were given connexional status, as a lay group, four years later, but were still excluded from the decision-making bodies of the Church. A 1922 memorial from twenty-six Methodist deaconesses "in active service throughout Canada" stated, in part:

The Deaconess work does not occupy the place of importance in the activities and religious life of the Church that it ought to ... the Deaconesses request the General Conference to enact such legislation as shall place the Deaconess Order in a position to do more effective work, or if this is impossible to disband the order of Deaconesses.¹⁵¹

In the same year and accompanying the memorial from the deaconesses was a memorial from the Deaconess Board of Management asking that a committee be established by the General Conference to consider placing "the Deaconess work of our Church on a more satisfactory basis." The General Conference, in response, established a Deaconess Work Committee consisting of twenty-six ministers, twenty-six lay members, and five women - but no active deaconesses.

¹⁴⁹ Journal of Proceedings, 1922.

¹⁵⁰ Journal of Proceedings, 1914.

¹⁵¹ Journal of Proceedings, 1922.

Presbyterian deaconesses were expressing the same dissatisfaction with their status. The deaconesses and their Board had asked for a special Committee on the Status of Deaconesses which reported in 1922 to the General Assembly. The committee expressed the conviction that "in its government the Church lacks the feminine element", that is, no women or women workers had access to positions in the Church courts. The report encouraged General Assembly to give absolute equality to women in church management and on its governing bodies and, particularly, that Sessions and Presbyteries should include Deaconesses in their organisational structure.¹⁵² Due to church union negotiations between the Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists, the work of both committees was put on the back-burner. The entire question of the status of the female professionals in the Church would be inherited by the new United Church of Canada.

Deaconesses were the pre-eminent examples of professional church occupations for women. While deaconesses ministered to the needs of immigrants and the poor, they sought to expand opportunities for women within their church. With the help of their Training School personnel, deaconesses attempted to widen the vision of their church. Unfortunately, the deaconess movement was only a partial success. The majority of women who wished to participate in

¹⁵² Minutes of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1922.

religious work did so in the volunteer lay societies. The deaconess profession was hampered by its lack of independence and responsibility, its limitations on the individual's freedom to marry, and by its 'for women only' definition. The unmodernised diaconate must have seemed unappealing to many women who could now enter careers that had been established in a time of increasing women's rights. Nonetheless, despite difficulties in establishing equal status with male colleagues, deaconesses were the first female salaried church workers in Canada. This separate female ministry was the forerunner to the ordination of women.

Chapter IV

THE

A crisis occurred at the very birth of The United Church of Canada: a crisis that was due to the inherent contradictions between the church's perceived role and the changed social context of the post-1925 era. The United Church had hoped to create a truly national church that would be the conscience of Canadian society. However, the church failed to assume this leading role. Due to the presence of a growing state bureaucracy and the professionalisation and secularisation of social service, there ensued a major reorganisation of social reform activities. This reorganisation changed the social context within which the church operated.¹⁵³ Although the church appeared little aware of the altered presence of the state, there were far-reaching ramifications for female workers in the church. These women, in their attempts to achieve status and recognition within The United Church, forced the church to come to terms with their new, modified, role in society. Both volunteer and professional women raised crucial issues which bore directly on the church's attitude to women and to social reform.

¹⁵³ Stephen Yeo, Religion and Voluntary Organizations in Crisis, Croom Helm, London, 1976.

As the question of female participation in lay and professional leadership arose, the church had to resolve the basic issue of whether to grant women, whether trained or volunteer workers, equal status with men. The concern voiced by the WMS about their relation to the church Boards and Conferences and the newly formed Women's Associations reflected the internal United Church uncertainties regarding the status of women within the church. Trained women workers continued to pursue their goal of acceptance as professionals. However, the decline in church activity in the social reform field led to a decline in the actual numbers of female professional workers. With social programs within the church not clearly defined and low in priority, there was little encouragement for women to choose church service as a career. Many women workers left the church and increasing numbers chose to pursue professional careers outside the church. In response to the demands of church women and to the changed circumstances of the period, the church attempted to come to new arrangements with its women volunteers and employees, especially its deaconesses. Two 1928 United Church reports, The Report from the Committee on Employed Women Workers and the Report on the Ordination of Women, delineated the place of the professional woman in the new church.

Given the advances made by women in the wider society, it was inevitable that the whole question of female

participation in lay leadership would arise. A resolution that Methodist women should have equal rights with men regarding all the privileges of church membership passed at the 1918 Canadian Methodist Conference. "No one voted against it, and only a brave few refused to vote for it."¹⁵⁴ 1922 marked the first Conference in which women were eligible to participate.¹⁵⁵ Presbyterian women, although they had equality with men on the congregational level, were not permitted to be members of the local governing board, the session. This meant that they could not be elected as representatives to Synod or Assembly meetings.¹⁵⁶ In the Basis of Union of The United Church, women were not included in the membership of the session and, thus, they were again excluded from the church courts. A 1926 remit from Toronto West Presbytery to General Council asked that the election of women as members of session be considered. The memorial was sent first to the Executive Committee which recommended that it be sent to the Committee on Law and Legislation. The Executive further recommended that the remit, along with a report on the legality of electing women as session members, be forwarded to presbytery for consideration. The Committee on Law and Legislation "contemplated that the persons, who, with the minister or ministers, constitute the session shall be men, because sub-section (a) of section 9

¹⁵⁴ Atlantis, Vol 4, No 2, spring, 1979.

¹⁵⁵ Methodist General Conference, 1922.

¹⁵⁶ Presbyterian General Assembly, 1922.

is as follows;"

The oversight of the spiritual interests of the charge by the minister (or ministers) and a body of men specially chosen and set apart or ordained for that work, who shall jointly constitute the session.¹⁵⁷

When the results from Presbyteries were compiled, forty-two conferences reported in favour of allowing women to be eligible for membership in the session, thirteen opposed the move, and fifty-five conferences failed to report.¹⁵⁸ Finally, in 1928, United Church women won the right to be ordained to a lay office, that is to join the church session as elders. It is difficult to ascertain if the general church membership firmly believed in the principle of equality for women. The remit on women's eligibility for session membership accompanied the remit sent to presbyteries on women's ordination to the ministry. It is entirely probable that many conferences voted for session membership because they refused to ordain women and desired to salve their consciences.

Yet another example of the church's ambivalent attitude toward women was shown by the establishment of Women's Associations in the church. The United Church Women's Association, that developed out of the one hundred year old Ladies' Aid Societies, began to take shape in the 1930s.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of

In 1940 the Dominion Council Women's Association was organised to oversee the congregational Women's Associations.

The two women's volunteer organisations, the WMS and the WA, had very different aims and objectives. The differences exemplified the contradictory views within the church on the purpose of women's service. The WA leaders saw their function as the "homebuilding of The United Church of Canada", and believed that they should act as help-mate to the clergy.¹⁶⁰ The WA members occupied themselves in local community and philanthropic enterprises, commencing with the traditional Ladies Aid work of furnishing manses, and, then, with war-related activities such as sewing, knitting, and the sending of parcels to servicemen overseas. The WA reflected the church's view of woman as wife and mother.

The WMS desire was to unite all church women in its work for the world mission of Christianity. Although both women's organisations maintained a strong educational purpose and had developed national study programs for their membership, the WMS "saw itself as an organization with an evangelistic mandate of its own" while the WA's believed they should act in a helping relation to the clergy. Although the WA had a much larger female membership, the WMS had a stronger organisation with an active vision and

Canada, 1940.

¹⁶⁰ Women Work and Worship, p. 170.

purpose that was to some degree independent of church structure. The financial arrangement of the two organisations also differed, probably due to the different emphasis of their work. The WMS raised money for world-wide mission work and maintained some autonomy in its allocation. The WA's raised money for local church enterprises and turned over their funds to local Boards of Management. The two organisations reflected the two views of women in church and society: WMS women were independent and active in world and social concerns; WA women were help-mates who served at home.

Neither women's organisation was part of the official church structure. The WMS was present at Council meetings by deputation only, with the exception of the two representatives who sat on the General Council Executive. However, the WMS appeared to have much more difficulty defining its status within the church, due both to its desire to gain some recognition and the church's ambivalence to an independent women's organisation. No women were members of the Joint Committee on Union. In fact, no reference was made to the women's society until the fourth meeting. At this time, the following clause was included in the general section that dealt with missions:

That, recognizing the very valuable services rendered by the women's missionary societies, the union, constitution and lines of work of these societies be determined by the joint action of their boards, subject to the approval of the

Supreme Court of the United Church.¹⁶¹

During the initial post-union church reorganisation it also became clear that women's work was excluded from the struggle for pre-eminence between various church committees. The WMS did attempt to define the lines of its work by defining its relation to those church boards involved in mission and educational work. In 1936 the WMS executive informed the General Council of its desire that the question of its cooperation with the church as a whole be studied by a special committee. A committee was appointed but the results of the cooperative discussions led to a weakening of the WMS structure and a limiting of their autonomy.¹⁶² In 1938 the WMS Dominion Board made recommendations to General Council regarding election of WMS officers. The General Council amended the recommendations by declaring that "the minister shall have the right to preside at the election of officers."¹⁶³ The 1940 General Council further restricted the independence of the WMS by moving that it had to seek approval from the Board of Home Missions before placing WMS missionaries in Home Mission work.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Church Union in Canada, p. 151.

¹⁶² Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1936.

¹⁶³ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1938.

¹⁶⁴ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1940.

While the WMS was seeking assurance of continuing Council support the WA was receiving appreciation for its work in the Church. These accolades were not given to the WMS. The Sixth General Council of 1934 moved an appreciation of 'Women Workers' by recognising and recording its appreciation of the "labours of sacrificial love" of the nearly five thousand Women's Associations of the Church. The appreciation went on to praise "their faithfulness, unswerving loyalty and consecrated devotion revealed by ministries of thoughtfulness in the upkeep and furnishing of Parsonages and Manses and in a general interest for the well-being of the congregation of the Church."¹⁶⁵ Again, in 1940, the General Council recorded its satisfaction with the work of the WA's. The Council rejoiced "in the splendid and sacrificial work" of the WA women and felt moved to comment on the sustenance and strength enjoyed by ministers due to the "educational, spiritual and especially social maintenance of Church life" by the local associations.¹⁶⁶

The post-union period also witnessed the secularisation of the social reform activities. The entire field of social service was transformed through increasing specialisation, bureaucratisation, and secularisation. There was an increasing differentiation between religious and other social institutions and a decline in the influence of

¹⁶⁵ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1934.

¹⁶⁶ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1940.

traditional religious organisations.¹⁶⁷ The United Church did develop new structures for social service work, blending the practices of its Methodist and Presbyterian origins. It maintained the Methodist idea of a separate social service board, The Department of Evangelism and Social Service, but it was reduced to one-half its previous size. Social service responsibilities were split; Settlement Houses and All-Peoples' Missions were placed under the supervision of the Board of Home Missions while the Department of Evangelism and Social Service was given the administration of Redemptive Homes and Child Welfare Institutions.¹⁶⁸ It appears that this new board and the entire church failed to make headway in social programs. At least three reasons may explain this lack of advance: the moderating role of the Presbyterians; the re-organisation necessitated by union; and the preoccupation of the Department of Evangelism and Social Service with prohibition and the defence of existing prohibition legislation.¹⁶⁹

Adding to the effects of a social program that was not clearly defined, and low in priority, was the diminishing influence of the Social Service Council of Canada. First

¹⁶⁷ Stewart Crysdale and L.Wheatcroft, eds, Religion in Canadian Society, MacMillan of Canada, Maclean-Hunter Press, 1975, p.4.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Allen, "The Crest and Crisis of the Social Gospel in Canada, 1916 - 1927", PhD Dissertation, 1966, p. 351.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 373.

organised in 1907 as the Moral and Social Reform Council of Canada, this "inter-church social movement" brought together participants from The Church of England, the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist Churches, and the Trades and Labour Congress. In 1914 the Council was renamed the Social Service Council of Canada and expanded its membership to include the Congregational Church, the Evangelical Association, the Dominion Grange and Farmer's Association, The Salvation Army, The Canadian Purity Education Association, Christian Men's Federation, The YMCA and YWCA, the WCTU, the Canadian Council of Agriculture, and the National Council of Provincial Sunday School Associations. The Social Service Council initially provided one of the major sources of social reform impetus in Canada. It was actively concerned with temperance, public health, child welfare, housing, amusements and recreation, gambling, education, care of dependents, and immigrants.¹⁷⁰

However, the Social Service Council aided its own demise. It actively lobbied both provincial and federal governments to pass legislation to improve social conditions in Canada and to undertake ameliorative social programs for the benefit of all Canadians. The success of the Council brought church control of social programs to an end. By urging increasing state intervention, it had transferred an

¹⁷⁰ Stewart Crysdale, The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics in Canada: A Survey of Changing Power Structures and Christian Social Ethics, The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1961, pp21/22.

increasing proportion of practical social service work to government agencies. As early as 1913, an attempt occurred, spearheaded by J.S. Woodsworth, to organise social service workers and organisations into a Canadian Welfare League that was outside the purview of both the church and the Social Service Council. Although the League functioned only four years, an attempt by the Social Service Council in 1917 to assume the work of the Bureau failed.¹⁷¹

Church Boards were soon made aware of overlapping work and the increasingly intense competition for social service funds. At the 1920 meeting of the Social Service Council, Church Boards commented on the fact that ten other organisations in Toronto alone were involved in work similar to the Church settlement houses and another ten were involved in work comparable to the Church redemptive home programs.¹⁷² As the responsibilities of secular social work expanded so did the perceived need for organisational apparatus. The Canadian Conference on Public Welfare, the Federation of Community Service, and the Canadian Council on Child Welfare were functioning by 1920. Also by 1920, the Social Service Council's Child Welfare work was established as an independent body, under the guidance of Charlotte Whitton of the Child Welfare Council.¹⁷³ A further

¹⁷¹ "The Crest and the Crisis . . .," p. 341.

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 342.

¹⁷³ The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics in Canada, p. 125.

indication of the loss of influence of the Council was the attendance at the 1924 and '28 Council annual meetings. One hundred people attended the 1924 annual meeting, as well as provincial representatives and representatives from more than thirty national organisations. By 1928, the Social Service Council meeting attracted only thirty-two delegates. By contrast, the All-Canadian Conference of Social Work, which held its first meeting just prior to the Council meeting, attracted over seven hundred people. Also, between 1924 and 1926, the Social Service Council lost the affiliation of five national organisations, all of which were secular groups.¹⁷⁴

The Depression only served to underline the Church's inadequate social service organisation. Lack of funds led to budget and staff cuts. The 1930's witnessed "an explosion of public welfare in Canada."¹⁷⁵ Governments at all levels spent over one billion dollars on needy families. The size of this program irrevocably placed social service in the hands of a government welfare structure. By 1933, the Canadian Welfare Council, a newly-organised umbrella organisation, usurped much of the social service work previously done by the church and the Social Service Council. Five years later the Social Service Council of

¹⁷⁴ "The Crest and The Crisis...", p. 344.

¹⁷⁵ The Canadian Historical Review, 1981, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s", pp. 169-185, James Struthers, p. 169.

Canada severed its official ties with secular social work organisations and became the Christian Social Council of Canada.¹⁷⁶

While social service organisations were removing themselves from the influence of organised religion, the discipline of social work acted to further secularise the social service field. Increasingly, independent studies were attempting to prove that the church's social service programs were "inadequate", Christian theology was "bankrupt" and "Christian ethical judgements [were] the mere reflection of culture and class."¹⁷⁷ The formulation of new social work concepts, especially the move from environmentalism to individual needs, greatly weakened the link between Christian social service concepts and resources and secular social work. While both the Social Service Council and the Deaconess Movement accepted the scientific techniques of social research methods, the gulf between the church and the new social sciences seemed to be the result of differences in ethos. The church was interested in the spiritual transformation of man and the establishment of the Kingdom of God in Canada. As Reverend Ernest Thomas suggested, its workers stressed the "evangelical idea of Christian perfection." On the other hand, the focus of "scientific" social work had shifted to the "development of

¹⁷⁶ The Industrial Struggle and Protestant Ethics, p. 129.

¹⁷⁷ "The Crest and the Crisis", p. 349.

individual needs and the emotional resources of life."¹⁷⁸

As has been shown, the 1920s witnessed the legitimisation of social work as a profession. The Depression only served to enhance the social worker's position; social workers were one of the few groups that maintained nearly one hundred percent employment during the thirties.¹⁷⁹ By the end of the Depression, legislation ensured that social service was now firmly in the hands of professional social workers employed by governments. "Since benevolence, including organized charity, was believed to be a natural female inclination, it was hardly surprising that social work became recognized as a 'women's profession'.¹⁸⁰ Of the 545 graduates of the University of Toronto Department of Social Service from its inception to 1938, 492 were women. Deaconesses had received training in social work in their own training schools and the Presbyterians specified the one year University of Toronto, Queen's or McGill course for its settlement workers. However, the professionally trained church social service deaconess did not appear to share in the developing professional social worker identity that was nurtured by social work agencies and professional associations. Women still in the service of the church must have found it

¹⁷⁸ The Social Passion, p. 292.

¹⁷⁹ The Canadian Historical Review, 1981, p. 169.

¹⁸⁰ Veronica Strong-Boag, The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893 - 1929, National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Ottawa, 1976.

difficult to accept both the harsh criticisms of their church's social outreach programs and the shift in emphasis from environmentalism to 'socialised individualism'. In fact, it appears that the largest numbers of women who left the deaconess order for reasons other than marriage may have been precisely those women who had received training in secular social work institutions.¹⁸¹

The first decades of the century also witnessed the professionalisation of nursing in Canada. The first training schools for nurses in Canada were established in the 1880s. However, it was the affiliation with male-dominated universities that signalled the establishment of nursing as a profession. In 1919 the University of British Columbia established a university degree program for nursing and by 1926 three other universities - Alberta, Western Ontario, and St. Francis Xavier - had established undergraduate degree programmes.¹⁸² The organisation of public health and the training of public health nurses encroached to the greatest degree on the work of the deaconess. The public health nurse quickly established her central position in school health programs. She also expanded her work to include home visits, preventive medicine, teaching, social welfare, and infant health care.

¹⁸¹ Richard Allen, ed, The Social Gospel in Canada, "One Woman's Campaign for Social Purity and Social Reform", B. Brigden National Museum of Man Mercury Series, Ottawa, 1975, p. 111.

¹⁸² The Parliament of Women, p. 17.

Increasingly, the public health nurse became the liaison between the home and the child welfare agency or juvenile court.¹⁸³ By the 1920s, as public health care programs were extended across the country, the community or public health nurse provided the essential link between the family and other, secular, social service agencies. "Nursing was thus gradually prepared for the entry of larger and larger numbers of middle-class girls in search of employment."¹⁸⁴

Teaching continued to attract large numbers of women. As early as 1875, women were the majority of common school teachers. By 1915, eighty-three percent of all Canadian elementary school teachers were women.¹⁸⁵ The enactment of provincial compulsory education acts and the growing involvement of the provinces in the educational process diminished the teaching responsibilities previously undertaken by deaconesses. Schools began to teach domestic science and there was an expansion of Home Economics and Library training at universities in Canada. Both professions were thought to be aptly suited to female capabilities. Larger numbers of women moved into the government sector. The numbers of women employed in civil and municipal governments increased from 767 in 1891 to

¹⁸³ N. Sutherland, Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth Century Consensus, University of Toronto Press, 1976, p. 50.

¹⁸⁴ The Parliament of Women, p. 17.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 17.

12,582 by 1921 in Manitoba alone.¹⁸⁶

Not only were increasing numbers of women choosing to pursue professional work outside the church, but the expansion and increasing professionalisation of such jobs as social work, nursing, and teaching drastically reduced the sphere of work initially undertaken by trained deaconesses. The deaconess order faced more and more competition for a share of available woman power as women entered other fields of work outside the home. Also, the larger numbers of working women challenged the attitudes held about women workers and deaconesses in particular because of the latter's lack of independence and professional status. It appeared there were only two ways United Church deaconesses could gain status and recruit young professional women. The distinctive work the deaconesses performed could gain professional status and recognition within the church. Or, deaconesses themselves could become members of an already established profession and, inevitably, leave the service of the church.

At the time of Union, there were approximately one hundred deaconesses actively employed in the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Canada. Upon amalgamation into The United Church of Canada, some fundamental constitutional changes occurred in the Deaconess Society. The Training

¹⁸⁶ A. Oddson, Employment of Women in Manitoba, Economic Survey Board, Province of Manitoba, 1939, p. 63.

School and the Deaconess Order, previously under the same management, were separated. The training centers were united in The United Church Training School (Woman's School of Religion) and finally placed under the supervision of the Board of Education. The Deaconess Order came under the auspices of The Committee on Employed Women Workers in the Church. The church abandoned the arbitrary stationing of the Methodists and the requirement of compulsory residence in a Deaconess Home. However, on marrying a United Church deaconess still ceased to be a member of the Order. A minimum salary of \$1000 was set, with increases to a maximum of \$1500. Conference Deaconess Boards and Aid Societies were merged with the City Mission Board and deaconess field work was placed under its supervision.

The views of the church regarding lay and professional women were clearly enunciated in official reactions to two 1928 United Church reports: The Report from the Committee on Employed Women Workers and The Report on the Ordination of Women.¹⁸⁷ The Committee on Employed Women Workers, first appointed in 1926, had as its mandate the question of a permanent policy regarding the scope of both the work of the deaconess and of other trained women workers, "a study, in fact, of church work as a vocation for women." The General Council recommendation for establishment of the Committee concluded:

¹⁸⁷ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

That, whereas, there are such far-reaching issues involved, the General Council appoint a Committee to study the whole question of the permanent policy regarding the scope and supervision of the Deaconess Order and of the other trained women workers of The United Church, and to report at the next meeting of the Council.¹⁸⁸

The Committee initially embarked on a survey of all employed women in the church and those ministers and Boards that employed them. It hoped to ascertain exactly how women were employed and by whom, what the nature of their work was, their training, and their remuneration. The committee also made an effort "to understand the attitude of the leading educated young women of our Church towards Church work as a vocation." On the basis of the survey the Committee was to decide the type of women leaders needed in The United Church, their preparation and, most importantly, their status.¹⁸⁹

The Committee on Employed Women Workers submitted its report at the 1928 General Council. The first section of the report indicated that the various kinds of professional and non-professional work done by women in The United Church and its agencies and institutions utilised non-deaconess personnel in far larger numbers than they utilised designated deaconesses. Of the 355 women working under the auspices of the WMS, twenty-nine were deaconesses.

¹⁸⁸ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1925.

¹⁸⁹ Robertson House Papers, United Church Archives, Winnipeg.

Twenty-two of the 135 women working for the Board of Home Missions were deaconesses, as were three of the 50 working for the Board of Evangelism and Social Service. Twenty-four of the 56 women working in self-supporting congregations were deaconesses but the 56 included church secretaries. In all 116 women were members of the Deaconess Order, out of nearly 1000 women who were employed by the Church and its educational and service institutions. The Committee addressed the reasons so few women sought professional identity through designation as deaconesses and laid the blame squarely at the door of the church. The original conception of the Deaconess Order was to train women for a specific service whether in pastoral or relief work. Those women who, like deaconesses, went into other types of work - home and foreign missions, social service or religious education - "have not been urged to seek designation to the Order."¹⁹⁰ The report also stated that a considerable number of women who entered the order resigned to take up other work. It concluded that the major reason the deaconess order did not attract and retain larger numbers of qualified women was the lack of status of the Order:

it would seem that the chief reason for this attitude [not seeking designation] may have been that the Order has not received from the Church as a whole, such recognition as would make membership in it sufficiently significant. While the majority of young women entering the service of the Church to-day are more concerned about finding and training for the special work which they desire to do than they are about status,

¹⁹⁰ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1928.

nevertheless, the status offered them might be of such a nature as to give them a deeper sense of vocation, and an opportunity to render more effective service.¹⁹¹

The second part of the Committee report considered the future of the Deaconess Order itself. The Committee found it necessary to consider the two other proposals "affecting the work and status of women in The United Church" embodied in the 1928 Report on the Ordination of Women. The first proposal was that women be admitted to the full ministry of the Word and the Sacraments, that is that they be ordained as ministers, an issue which will be considered in the next chapter. Or, as an alternative (highly favored by the authors of the Ordination Report), that the diaconate of women be recognised as an order of the ministry. The Committee recognised that either of the above proposals "would open to women a higher status than the one for which in the past they have been asked to qualify, The Deaconess Order." It expressed the belief that if a female diaconate became an integral part of the church ministry it "would mark a real advance, as the present Deaconess Order carries with it no such status." Although it expressed no opinion on the female ordination proposal the Committee acknowledged that some women were capable of preaching. However, it did not want to see the forms of service women could pursue limited only to preaching. They did feel that the authority to preach and to baptise, when necessary, should be granted

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

the diaconate.¹⁹²

The Committee on Women Workers went on to make recommendations based on the possibility that the church would refuse to ordain women or establish a special ministry for women. That is, "if no higher status than that of the Deaconess Order [was] granted." These recommendations, if implemented, would have vastly improved the status of the order. The first recommendation stated that the training of female church workers should be gradually raised "so as to approximate more nearly to that required of candidates for the ministry." The other recommended that deaconesses be made ex-officio members of their congregational official boards, members of the session, and corresponding members of presbytery. This would enable Deaconesses to be eligible for appointment on Committees of Presbytery and to represent their conferences at General Council. This seemed to imply that women workers were more concerned with gaining representation on decision-making bodies as deaconesses or church workers than as women.

The last section of the report dealt with the weaknesses of the present situation, weaknesses that would become more apparent if the other recommendations were not acted upon. The greatest weakness was felt to be the lack of uniformity in training and preparation for church work and the fact that women doing similar work but under different Boards

¹⁹² Ibid.

came under different regulations regarding appointments and salary. The Committee also castigated the church for its lack of support, suggesting that women's work in the church was handicapped "by the lack of assurance of continued employment and by insufficient remuneration." Committee members also criticised the church's discriminatory celibacy regulations for deaconesses by suggesting that another weakness in the Order was that the average term of service given by women was a short one. There is no evidence anywhere in the report of a conscious desire to achieve ecclesiastical equality for women. What the Committee wanted was to bring the deaconess order "into the mainstream of the Church's life and program."¹⁹³

The 1928 General Council did not create a female diaconate; only thirteen presbyteries were favorable to the proposal.¹⁹⁴ It also did not accept any of the recommendations of the Committee. It did establish an Inter-Board Committee on Employed Women Workers and the Deaconess Order. This Board was constituted of representatives from The United Church Training Home, Manitoba College, The WMS, The Deaconess Order, and the Boards of Foreign and Home Missions, Evangelism and Social Service, and Religious Education plus eight members appointed by the General Council. The most important duty

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1930.

of the Board was to formulate a policy that "would place Church work as a vocation for women in an established and dignified position." The Board was also to deal with the recruitment and training of women, particularly to co-ordinate recruitment efforts and present a unified picture of opportunities for women in the Church. The Board was also given the care and direction of the Deaconess Order. The Board's final task was to bring about higher and more uniform work standards.¹⁹⁵

The Inter-Board Committee continued to agitate for recognition of female church workers. It continued to speak out on the need for greater female representation on Boards and General Council levels.¹⁹⁶ It also continued to pressure the church to allow women access to the rights, activities, and responsibilities available to church men. At Union, an important first step in the professionalisation process was taken when the Deaconess Order was separated from the Training School. This move separated the administrative and educational functions of the previous Deaconess Boards of Management. For the first time the Board of Management of The United Church Training School was definitely related to the Board of Education of The United Church.¹⁹⁷ Another important step in the professionalisation of church workers

¹⁹⁵ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1930.

¹⁹⁶ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1934.

¹⁹⁷ Robertson House Papers.

and their growing acceptance as professional women in the church occurred with the affiliation of their Training School with Emmanuel College, The United Church's theological school, in Toronto, in 1930.¹⁹⁸ Admission standards and training were upgraded. To be admitted to the one year course, women required a B.A. or training and experience in a profession such as teaching, nursing, or business. These women received one year of theological training "of a standard similar to that of first year work in theology."¹⁹⁹

It was with the Committee's help that church workers themselves organised to improve their status and create a greater sense of fellowship among women in church service. The Fellowship of Professional Women in The United Church of Canada, established in 1939, helped to heighten the consciousness of professional female church workers, (including missionaries, deaconesses female ministers, and educationists) to develop interest in the professional services of church women and to contribute to the development of church policy and practice.²⁰⁰ It has been suggested that the second wave of 'feminism' in Canada in the 1970s was a direct outgrowth of this type of middle-class female association.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ The United Church Yearbook, 1930.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, 1942.

Women's entry into the world of church reform work did much to persuade critics that women could perform as effectively as men. As one minister wrote in 1934:

My experience has been unique for I was prejudiced against deaconesses for reasons which I need not enumerate. But after seven years association with my deaconess, I am a complete convert. I simply could not have covered anything of the ground I have covered, had it not been for the always ready help and generous co-operation [of the deaconess]....²⁰²

During the post-1925 era The United Church attempted to come to terms with the twentieth century world and the major social reorganisation wrought by bureacratism and professionalisation. The Church came face to face with a crisis whose resolution would determine its role in Canadian society. Church women provided the catalyst for that change. Their attempts to define their position in the church forced the church to define its position in society. As professional female church workers improved their status, women in general moved closer to equality with men. Deaconesses were the first women to receive theological education and the first women to be paid in the service of the church. Their example destroyed one of the crucial arguments utilised by opponents to female ordination.

²⁰¹ Becoming Visible, p. 7.

²⁰² Robertson House Papers.

Chapter V

THE

The struggle to ordain women to the ministry of the word was the first organised effort within the church to achieve full ecclesiastical equality for women. The first recorded attempt to raise the issue in Canadian churches occurred in 1894 and sporadic attempts continued until Union. The new United Church was petitioned to deal with the question of the ordination of women at its first post-union General Council in 1926. However, it would be another ten years before women obtained the right to be ordained. This chapter discusses the changes that occurred in that ten year period.

Between 1928, when female ordination was rejected, and 1936, when it was accepted, there was a concerted media campaign waged by both proponents and opponents of ordination. Public debates and articles in church and women's magazines carried the debate to all active church members - male and female. The General Council finally swung its support behind acceptance of ordination. The crucial difference in wording between the 1928 remit and the 1934 remit to presbyteries helped to clarify support. Most importantly, church women finally rallied to the cause.

They had developed an expertise which gave them the courage to agitate for improvement in their status within the church. Moreover, the frustrations encountered by paid female workers and their WMS counterparts with the Church hierarchy, persuaded these women to throw their full support behind the demand for equality. The realisation that they served the church but had neither recognition nor status gave added weight to the successful campaign for female ordination.

Methodist General Conference received its first memorial regarding the admission of women to the ministry in 1894. It was referred to the Conference Committee on Memorials and there is no record of this Committee reporting back to the General Conference.²⁰³ The second resolution regarding the admission of women to the ministry occurred at the Methodist General Conference in 1918.²⁰⁴ This time a heated debate led to the referral of the matter to the Church's Quarterly Official Boards. On the basis of their replies, the matter was then to be taken up at the next General Conference in 1922. In the four years that the Church Boards debated the question of female ordination, no one seems to have campaigned in favour of the proposal. An editorial comment in The Christian Guardian accurately summed up the position of many in the church:

²⁰³ Conference Journal, Methodist Church of Canada, 1894.

²⁰⁴ Conference Journal, Methodist Church of Canada, 1918.

Probably the whole discussion was largely academic as we have yet to hear of any sister who is desirous of entering the Methodist ministry.²⁰⁵

The summary of results received by the General Conference in 1922 showed that 509 Boards were in favour of ordination for women and 558 were opposed. However, only 54 percent of all Quarterly Official Boards had bothered to respond at all.²⁰⁶ The proposal for the ordination of women was rejected by the General Conference.

This time, however, two female delegates to the Conference, Mrs. Keeton and Louise McKinney, moved that a committee be established to re-examine the question. The debate that followed this suggestion outlined the basic arguments utilised by opponents of the issue for the next fourteen years: women could not cope with the difficulties of the ministerial calling; a woman's first duty was to her family; and ordination of women at that time might interfere with union negotiations with the Presbyterians. This latter proved to be the convincing argument for the majority of Conference delegates. However, a Christian Guardian editorial clearly shows that the Methodists still viewed women as less than equal within the Church:

The debate was interesting but back in the minds of most of the delegates was the unmistakable conviction, that we could not afford to allow our

²⁰⁵ M.E. Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for the Ordination of Women in The United Church of Canada", Atlantis, Vol 4, 2, Spring, 1979, p. 4.

²⁰⁶ Journal of the General Conference, Methodist Church of Canada, 1922.

young women to face the hardships of our ordinary work upon terms of equality with men, and the problem of a married woman preaching while her husband cared for the family and provided the meals, is one that cannot be dismissed with a joke.²⁰⁷

In 1922 the Presbyterian Assembly turned down its first ordination proposal. The next year the church again received an overture, from the Presbytery of Saskatoon, asking that women be ordained to the regular ministry.²⁰⁸ It appears that the desire on the part of Saskatoon Conference stemmed from both the problem Saskatchewan was having filling remote charges and the example of Miss Lydia Gruchy.

Gruchy began acting as a lay minister in 1923, working under the Home Mission Board of the Presbyterian Church.²⁰⁹ Her interest in the ministry stemmed, initially, from her desire to provide a religious education for Canadian immigrants: "I felt there was a need for religious work among the new Canadians." Gruchy saw herself as an educator and felt that theological training would help her fulfill her duties. She received training for religious work among new Canadians when the General Assembly gave St. Andrew's College, Saskatoon permission to train such leaders in 1920. Gruchy, encouraged by Reverend E.H. Oliver, the Principal of

²⁰⁷ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p.8.

²⁰⁸ The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 153.

²⁰⁹ "A Woman's Place", The Observer, January 1975, pp. 32 - 34.

St. Andrew's, continued her studies and received her theology degree in 1923.

The Assembly recommended the question of female ordination be sent down to Presbyteries, accompanied by suggestions from the Assembly's Special Committee on Ordination. This committee recommended that each presbytery address the question of how best to incorporate into the life of the Church "the view-point of women." Of the thirty-three presbyteries that replied only seven approved of ordination for women and six approved of it in special circumstances. Six presbyteries disapproved in principle. The majority of presbyteries voted in favour of postponing the question until union negotiations were completed. Assembly, on the advice of its reporting Committee, decided that "in view of the present situation in Church life which must involve the consideration of many questions in wider relationships [church union]", a decision regarding the ordination of women would be held over.²¹⁰

Having left the question of women's ordination in abeyance until union, it was found that the language of The United Church of Canada Basis of Union contemplated only a male ministry. At the first General Council, Kamsack, Saskatchewan Presbytery petitioned the Council to deal with the question of the ordination of women to the ministry.²¹¹

²¹⁰ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 153.

²¹¹ Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada,

At the same time Reverend Oliver moved that "the General Council grant the request" for Lydia Gruchy's special ordination, and "direct conference to proceed." The Committee on Law and Legislation reported to the General Council that the proposal should first be submitted to presbyteries:

Your Committee, having carefully considered the legal aspects of the motion with reference to the ordination of Miss L.E. Gruchy for the Ministry is of opinion [sic] that serious legal doubts exist regarding the right of The United Church of Canada, either by the General Council, or any Conference, to ordain women for the Ministry without complying with the provisions of the Basis of Union, Section 24, sub-section 2(a), Polity.

After much debate a committee of eleven ministers, three laymen, and one laywoman - Mrs. L.C. McKinney - was struck to consider the Memorial. Only two men on the Committee, Reverends E.H. Oliver and D.L. Ritchie, were on record as approving of female ordination. It was Ritchie who had moved that the whole question of the ordination of women on the same conditions as men be approved and submitted to Presbyteries.²¹² However, the Committee as a whole recommended:

1. That the whole question of Ordination of Women to the Ministry be referred to Presbyteries for their consideration and judgement, and for report to the next General Council.
2. That a Committee consisting of the Moderator, Revs. Geo.C. Pidgeon; Principal E.H. Oliver, C.W. Bishop, Prof. H.A. Kent, T. Albert Moore, W.T. Gunn, Hugh Matheson, E. Thomas, and Prof. J.T.

1926.

²¹² Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1926.

McNeill as Chairman, be appointed to prepare a statement for the information and guidance of the Presbyteries, which shall be submitted to the Executive Committee to be sent down to Presbyteries with the remit on Ordination of Women.

Nellie McClung probably voiced the opinion of many in favour of ordination when she wrote:

Whenever the matter of ordination was raised the answer came back "There is no woman asking for ordination. Hold your tongues. Leave well enough alone. When we get a request for ordination we will deal with it." Now there is an overture from the Saskatchewan Conference requesting ordination for Miss Lydia Gruchy. Here now we have what you have always desired to see, a woman graduate in theology, asking for ordination. She has been two years preaching and carrying on very acceptably. What are you going to do with her? Dear. Dear. This is most embarrassing.²¹³

Gruchy's first appointment was as a lay minister to Verigin, Saskatchewan, a community with a large proportion of Doukhobors and Ukrainians. Initially much of Gruchy's time was spent in giving religious education to children in the public schools. Soon small congregations which required regular Sunday Services were established in the district. Gruchy carried out all the ministerial functions with the exception that she could not perform marriages or conduct the sacraments.²¹⁴

²¹³ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p.8.

²¹⁴ "A Woman's Place", p.33.

In 1927, the Committee on the Ordination of Women reported that it intended to compile a history of the ministry in the Christian Church, to report on the demand for the admission of women to the ministry, on "the implications and probable results" of female ordination, and "on the best means of securing due recognition and the most effective use of the service of women in the Church."²¹⁵ The statement and the dissenting report accompanying it, although only intended to provide information for presbytery consideration, clearly outlined the arguments against the ordination of women.

While lauding the expanding role for women within the Church and accepting the principle of male and female equality, the statement supported the view of equal but separate spheres of endeavor in the Church for men and women. Its second argument cited general social conditions as a bar to women's ordination; society at large was not ready to see women participate in a traditionally male field. A third argument suggested that woman's most important role was that of mother, which precluded participation in such a demanding profession as the ministry.

²¹⁵ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

The first section of the statement dealt with women and the ordained ministry. It suggested that, while men and women were spiritually equal and that the restrictions laid down by Saint Paul were not binding under the conditions of modern society, "equality of status ... admits of diversity of function and this is seen in the recognition of various ministries, both of men and women."²¹⁶ The authors stated that this did not imply superiority or inferiority of status but only that the activities of women within the church should not go "beyond what is seemly, modest, and of good report." Thus the statement suggested the creation of a second order of ministry, the diaconate, which would give "fuller ecclesiastical recognition to certain ministries exercised by women ..."

Your Committee, having considered the proposals that have been presented for the admission of women to the Ministry, and the present situation of women's work in the Church as a whole, and especially in The United Church of Canada, is impressed with the desirability of giving fuller ecclesiastical recognition to certain ministries that are already exercised by women, and of calling forth the fullest service of women for the benefit of the Church.

It is the judgment of the Committee that in view of (a) the character of the Ministry as now constituted, (b) the possibility of controversy within the Church, and (c) the present state of the question in other Churches, no action should be taken at the present time on the proposal to ordain women to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments. Their admission to the ordained diaconate would, we believe, satisfy the need that has inspired the memorial of the Conference of Saskatchewan.

²¹⁶ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

This new female diaconate would hold a regularly authorised position in the ministry of the Church, would have relations to the Church courts, and would have a higher academic standing than required for deaconesses. The recommendation in favour of a diaconate as a second order of ministry ignored the fact that, as a deaconess, Gruchy, and other women to follow, would be unable to do precisely what Saskatchewan Conference wanted Gruchy to do. Women would still have to turn to male clergy to marry and baptise their congregation members. The diaconate would not solve the problems of a shortage of ministers in the West nor would it give women full ecclesiastical equality.

The minority report, by Principal H.A. Kent, merely listed more reasons why women should not be ordained to any ministry. Kent believed that only a handful of women within the church were in favour of such ordination and that there was little demand in society for such a thing. He also suggested that woman's nature precluded her from fulfilling the rigorous challenges of the ministry:

- (2) The sphere of a woman in the ministry must in the nature of the case be limited. Nature being what it is there are things which a woman may not do and places where she may not go without loss of that womanliness which is her greatest possession.
- (3) Such a ministry would need to be confined to unmarried women. If not we should see a minister's home without family life and probably without children, or witness the not very edifying spectacle of the husband keeping house while the wife is engaged in public duties. Are we prepared to demand celibacy of the women ordained to the ministry, or to deprive them of their standing as ministers when they marry?

(4) What the Church needs at the present time is not more femininity but more masculinity. Women's work in the Church is carried on with admirable zeal and faithfulness. What are the men doing? Will the work of the Church be made more attractive to strong virile manhood by the proposed ordination of women to the ministry?

If this statement of information was biased, the question to presbyteries was worded in such a way as to forestall a direct affirmative or negative response. Presbyteries could approve the principle of ordination, for example, but could propose to defer action on the question until the time was right. They could also opt for the ordination of women to a separate female ministry which would continue to exclude women from dispensing the sacraments. It is little wonder that the replies, compiled for the 1928 General Council indicated that although thirty-two Presbyteries were in favour of ordination and thirty-four were not, a full twenty-three Presbyteries suggested that Council defer action. Twenty-three Presbyteries, remarkably, forwarded no report at all.²¹⁷ There also appears to have been a definite east/west split on the issue. Twenty-three of the fifty Western Conferences voted for ordination and only sixteen voted no as against only eleven favourable Eastern responses from sixty-three Conferences.

²¹⁷ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

It is interesting to note that, in this ordination debate, Church Women's organisations that had supported the admission of women to church councils stopped short of asking for ordination for women. Mrs. John MacGillivray, the President of the WMS, appears to have expressed a representative opinion in her address to the 1928 General Council:

Does it not seem a paraodx that it should be the Church (we speak of our own) into which she (woman) has put her best work and thought, where the seeds of training for service were first sown, which should be the last to let down the bars? Is there a danger of so separating the other spheres of life from the Church that the best of our young womanhood brought up in the atmosphere of the Church, now prepared and fitted for service in other walks of life, will grow away from active interest in the Church? ... We are not pleading for women to enter the pulpit (though the public press headlines would understand it so). Our women are conservative on that point, but where the need arises and she is academically prepared, and is actually doing the Church's work under the appointment of the Assembly's boards why should recognition be withheld in the courts of the Church?²¹⁸

The Sessional Committee on the Ordination of Women, without the support of presbyteries and of the women themselves, was left with little choice but to recommend that ordination be deferred. Nellie McClung, as Secretary of the Committee, presented the report to Council that read in part:

While your committee feels that owing to certain misunderstandings on the part of some Presbyteries concerning the question submitted and the indifference toward the matter displayed by others

²¹⁸ J.T. McNeill, The Presbyterian Church in Canada, p. 154.

- the mind of the Church about the ordination of women has not been fully disclosed - nevertheless on the basis of the returns received from Presbyteries, your Committee submits that while a large section of the Church, probably indeed a majority, regards the ordination of women to the full ministry of word and sacraments as an ideal towards which the Church would move, an unmistakable majority, in the existing circumstances of The United Church, is opposed to any such step being taken at the present time.²¹⁹

Reverend Sclater, another member of the Committee and an opponent of the ordination of women, attempted to minimise the significance of the Committee request that Council endorse the ordination of women in principle. He suggested that "there is no bar in religion or reason to republicanism in this country but nobody would think of taking steps to set it up." Sclater also attempted to take the sting out of the debate with a slightly biased attempt at humour; "Once a Scottish preacher could pray, 'Lord we thank thee that God created women to make men comfortable.'" He could not pray that way now."²²⁰ Both McClung and Sclater, however, urged the Council to accept without amendment the Committee recommendation "that the General Council takes no action in the matter of the ordination of women to the ministry, but puts itself on record as holding that there is no bar in religion or reason to such ordination." General Council accepted the recommendation, but once again asserted that the time was not right to alter the status of women in the

²¹⁹ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1928.

²²⁰ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p.20.

Church.

This time the question of the right of women to be ordained did not end when General Council ended. The debate continued in the pages of church magazines and Chatelaine and on the platform. An excerpt from a letter to the editor of The Observer was typical of the debate that continued for eight years:

Dear Sir:

If women were to enter the ministry in great numbers we should have a celibate clergy. For if a woman were to choose the ministry for her life's work she would have to renounce a family. History shows us that the offspring of the manse are among the finest type of citizens, and countries that have a celibate clergy are of a lower moral tone than those where there are sons and daughters of the clergy to mingle with other people.

Many young women who may have, with all sincerity thought they could ignore the mating instinct, which is one of God's greatest gifts to His physical creatures, will find, after spending years of study and much money, that they must after all choose marriage and all its responsibilities. For of course no young woman who had heard the high calling of God in Christ Jesus would be presumptuous enough to say she could do more for the Lord as a minister than as a mother.²²¹

One of the more interesting debates that occurred saw Nellie McClung and Reverend W.A. Lewis address the topic, "Resolved, that The United Church of Canada should grant ordination to women on the same terms as men."²²² 1200 people flocked to the WMS sponsored debate, attracted as

²²¹ "A Woman's Place", p.33.

²²² Ibid.

much by the personalities involved as by the question debated. Reverend Lewis presented the negative; Nellie McClung championed the affirmative. McClung's argument stated, in part:

That the supply of men for the ministry is inadequate, and churches are empty while children are lacking religious training as a result, although women are ready and anxious to fill these places.

Dr. Lewis proposed that women were unable to fulfill the duties of the ministry due to their nature and to social convention. Lewis argued that the question was not one of the basic equality of women but of the suitability of women to undertake the work of the ministry. He contended that the home, with woman as homemaker and mother, was the best recruiting ground for the ministry. Lewis also expressed a fear commonly held by many of the clergy: if the Church was under the administration of women it would become a woman's church.

Dr. Thomas and Nellie McClung also continued their disagreement over the question. Dr. Thomas wrote an article for Chatelaine attacking McClung's speech to General Council.²²³ McClung replied by questioning the authority of Thomas's Committee to suggest qualifications on the ordination question. In a letter to the Observer, McClung stated that the Church membership was not asked for a simple yes or no, as Council had instructed, but "were told very

²²³ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p.11.

plainly that 'no action should be taken at the present time'."

In 1926 Saskatchewan Conference asked for the authority to ordain Lydia Gruchy. The recommendation was accepted by Council that "the whole matter of the ordination of women be referred to the presbyteries for their consideration and judgement." But instead of being asked what they thought, the presbyteries were told very plainly that "no action should be taken at the present time." By whose authority was the definite instruction of General Council set aside?

McClung also disputed the committee's tabulation of results, suggesting that in fact only twelve presbyteries had voted against the ordination of women. Three Council members, McClung pointed out, had found several errors in the submitted ordination report, not least the inclusion of Edmonton Presbytery, which had voted unanimously for ordination, in the unreported column. McClung's letter went on to say:

I would be sorry to impute an evil motive to an official of our Church. I believe the careless tabulating and confused issue came about as a result of Dr. Thomas having made up his mind that nobody wants the ordination of women anyway. Having made up his mind, the replies from presbyteries had no direct bearing on the question.²²⁴

Saskatchewan Conference also kept the issue in front of Council. The Secretary of the Conference was instructed to notify General Council that it intended to ordain Gruchy at the 1935 Annual Conference "unless at its meeting in September, 1934 objection thereto is made by the General

²²⁴ "A Woman's Place", p.34.

Council."²²⁵ At the sixth General Council in 1934, Reverend Oliver once again moved "That the question of the Ordination of Women to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments be remitted to Presbyteries for their consideration and judgement."²²⁶ However, this time each Presbytery would be required to respond either 'yes' or 'no' without qualifications. The remit to Presbyteries also included an endorsement by General Council of the principle of female ordination, after an attempt to delete Council approval was defeated. Thus, the question sent to Presbyteries read merely:

Are you in favour of the following legislation?
That the Basis of Union be amended by adding the following new clause under the general heading "The Ministry":
The ministry shall be open to both men and women.²²⁷

The position of Church women also appears to have changed in the six years since the first remit to presbyteries. The Dominion Board of the WMS, in its annual report to the 34th General Council stated:

That whereas the place of women in the life of the Church is a much discussed and very important matter at the present time,
And whereas, we recognize the wonderful contribution to The United Church made by Miss Lydia Gruchy

²²⁵ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p.14.

²²⁶ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1934.

²²⁷ Ibid.

Dominion Board of the WMS desire to place on record our approval of the ordination of women.²²⁸

The Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers also placed itself on record as viewing "with gratitude the opening of the ministry to women, and rejoices in the growing awareness of our Church, of the resource that resides in its womanhood." This change in attitude may have been in response to the difficulties the WMS was facing in establishing and maintaining a United Church organisation and in response to its loss of power when the national WMS was restructured on a presbyterial basis. It is not impossible to suggest that these women, realising they had lost their power base, believed that they must now demand full equality through ordination. What the WMS was expressing in its endorsement was its own dissatisfaction with the status and role of its organisation in the Church.

The results of the remit to Presbyteries were tabulated at the 1936 General Council. Eighty presbyteries voted in favour of the ordination of women, forty-six from the West and thirty-four from the East while twenty-six voted against, five from the West and twenty-one from the East. The Basis of Union was formally amended to permit the ministry to be open on an equal basis to both men and women.²²⁹

²²⁸ 10th Annual Report, United Church WMS, 1934-35.

²²⁹ Yearbook and Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1936.

The introduction to Lydia Gruchy's ordination service in Moose Jaw on November fourth, 1936, suggests that the event was viewed with mixed emotions:

We have come tonight to mark a step in our Church's history - a development which we owe, not to the intransigent demand and agitation of women, but in the first instance, perhaps to our revered and affectionately esteemed Dr. E.H. Oliver. His knightly and chivalrous attitude and advocacy have finally prevailed.²³⁰

Many church members were convinced that Gruchy was exceptional and not representative of the general population of women, as an editorial from The New Outlook suggested:

There is not the slightest possibility of women ever displacing men in this calling Those who urge this change in our polity do so, no doubt, with the thought that it would only be in most unusual cases, something like Miss Gruchy's, that ordination would ever be asked for or thought of and that the dangers that some people see are never likely to exist anywhere else than in their own imaginations.²³¹

Another article presented the view of those who firmly believed in the principle of female ordination:

The ordination of women into The United Church of Canada has for the past ten years been a much-debated question throughout the entire Church. After receiving the approval of the various courts of the Church, finally enabling legislation was passed by the recent General Council at Ottawa, which made possible in our Church the Ordination of women. This all-important and much anticipated decision found its consummation in St. Andrew's Church, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, on Wednesday evening, November 4, when Miss Lydia Emilie Gruchy, B.A., the first woman to offer herself for the ministry of The United Church was ordained.

²³⁰ "Women and Power in The United Church of Canada", Shelagh Parsons in Women Work and Worship, p. 183.

²³¹ Ibid.

No doubt the step we are taking will hasten the day when we shall really recognize the specialization within the ministry mentioned in the epistle, "Some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." It cannot, however, be pleaded in Miss Gruchy's case that we have to accommodate the functions of the ministry to the feebleness of the flesh sometimes thought to be the inevitable result - or is it punishment - of her sex. She has proved that there is no work too hard, and no duty too exacting for her. She comes after a probation far longer and trials far more testing than have been given the candidates for the ministry of the sterner sex, and she comes having passed the test with, to say the least, equal satisfaction to the Church.²³²

Three years after Gruchy's ordination Olivia Catherine Lindsay, M.A., S.T.M. was ordained. In the following six years thirteen more women entered The United Church ministry. Although these women received full ministerial status, the work they undertook was usually different than their male colleagues. Women found it difficult to obtain preaching positions within the Church. Gruchy, herself, served after ordination as the Secretary of the Standing Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers. Many women appear to have pursued ordination to better prepare themselves for the work of religious education. What Dr. Thomas outlined in his article "Ladies - We Give You the Pulpit", as the sphere of the woman minister, held true.²³³ The female minister would be "the guiding power in training schools for women workers in the Church, in Christian

²³² The Observer, November 18, 1936.

²³³ Hallett, "Nellie McClung and the Fight for Ordination ...", p. 15.

education, mission work or girl's work, home visitations and the care and oversight of children." Women had obtained equal ecclesiastical status but continued to work within the traditional female field of nurturing and teaching.

Chapter VI

Epilogue

In the years before 1928, women were denied access to established church structures and worked within church societies 'for women only'. They were also denied voting participation and membership in church courts - the conferences, synods, councils, and assemblies that officially interpreted and acted upon church social and ecclesiastical issues. In short, women had little influence on policy-making decisions. However, in the years under discussion women lay and professional workers actively sought both equality with men and recognition of the importance of their work. Due to the success and initiative of the WMS and professional women workers, particularly deaconesses, women gained recognition and credibility within the church. Until the 1930s church women sought recognition of their work through the achievement of a social status equal to men. It was only when that recognition was denied, in the reorganisational period following church union, that women came to accept the idea that to have full equality they had to demand ecclesiastical equality. Volunteer and professional women slowly secured a power base and this base affected their achievement of professional status and legal

equality. What has happened in the sixty years under discussion "is the record of a determined long-range effort by many women and their male supporters to secure greater justice grounded in the equality of persons."²³⁴

Women gained equality when they won the right to be ordained in 1936. However, within fifteen years of that date their power base was slowly eroded by the policies pursued by The United Church. As early as the late 1920s attempts were being made to limit the scope of the powerful national WMS. In 1930 the General Council Executive Committee recommended that the WMS should administer and direct its work within the bounds of presbyteries: a move the WMS entirely disapproved.²³⁵ General Council overrode WMS desires and the recommendation of presbytery control was implemented. This was the first step in the process of co-optation that would culminate in the dissolution of the WMS in the 1960s. On December 31, 1961 the Women's Associations and the WMS were disbanded and a new organisation, the United Church Women, was formed. Women lost their national organisation, their independence, and their financial control over monies raised. In 1962, the WMS turned over \$3 million to the pension fund of the church and almost \$2 million to the Stabilization Fund.²³⁶ They

²³⁴ G. Harkness, Women in church and Society: A Historical and Theological Inquiry, Abingdon press, New York, 1972.

²³⁵ Annual Report, WMS of The United Church of Canada, 1930.

²³⁶ Women, Work and Worship, p. 37.

would from now on contribute to the mission work of their church as individuals.

Deaconesses have not fared any better, even though they took "the accepted route" within the church. In 1973 there were 210 deaconesses in The United Church, with 26% of that number retired. Most deaconesses served in only one capacity: as an assistant to the male minister.²³⁷ At the 1962 meeting of General Council the Committee on the Deaconess Order and Women Workers was abolished and its responsibilities were transferred to presbyteries, Conference Settlement Committees, and the Transfer Committee.²³⁸ This policy change came about despite the fact that from 1936 on deaconesses had asked that their Committee be made a Board within the official church hierarchy.

In theory, as of 1936, church polity gave women equal rights to be ordained to the ministry. In reality the controversy over the suitability of women to be ministers has never been fully resolved. In 1962, General Council received a recommendation from its Committee on Ordination that young married women should not be ordained. They also recommended that a married ordained woman who became pregnant or had a young family should be suspended from ministerial duties until her family obligations were

²³⁷ "You haven't made it ...", p. 13, The Observer.

²³⁸ Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1962.

fulfilled. However, Council agreed with a male member of the committee who, in dissenting from the stated opinion, suggested; "[o]ur church doesn't believe that fatherhood impairs a man's ministry. Neither do we believe motherhood impairs a woman's ministry."²³⁹ 1974-75 statistics show only 90 ordained women on church conference rolls compared to 3000 ordained men. In the same year there were only five women among the 36 General Council officers.²⁴⁰ However, from 1975 on there have been an increasing number of women entering both theological education and the ministry. By 1985 the number of women in theological colleges was almost equal to that of men. Women also represented 32% of the number of ministers ordained in 1981- 82 and by 1985 they numbered approximately 10% of all ministers - active or otherwise. As Robert Smith, moderator of The United Church commented: "In ten years the church will be all but unrecognizable. The gifts of women are not going to be trivialized very much longer."²⁴¹

²³⁹ Record of Proceedings, The United Church of Canada, 1936.

²⁴⁰ "You haven't made it ...", p. 13, The Observer.

²⁴¹ The United Church Observer, March, 1986, "After 50 years, still barriers to women in ministry", Gillian Sniatynski, pp. 24-29. Statistics from the 1983 Report of women in ministry overview group of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education.

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